FEBRUARY 4, 1928
VOL. LXXXVIII No. 6

★

THE POPULAR

15 Cents

WEEKLY
FEB. 4, 1928

The Popular ★

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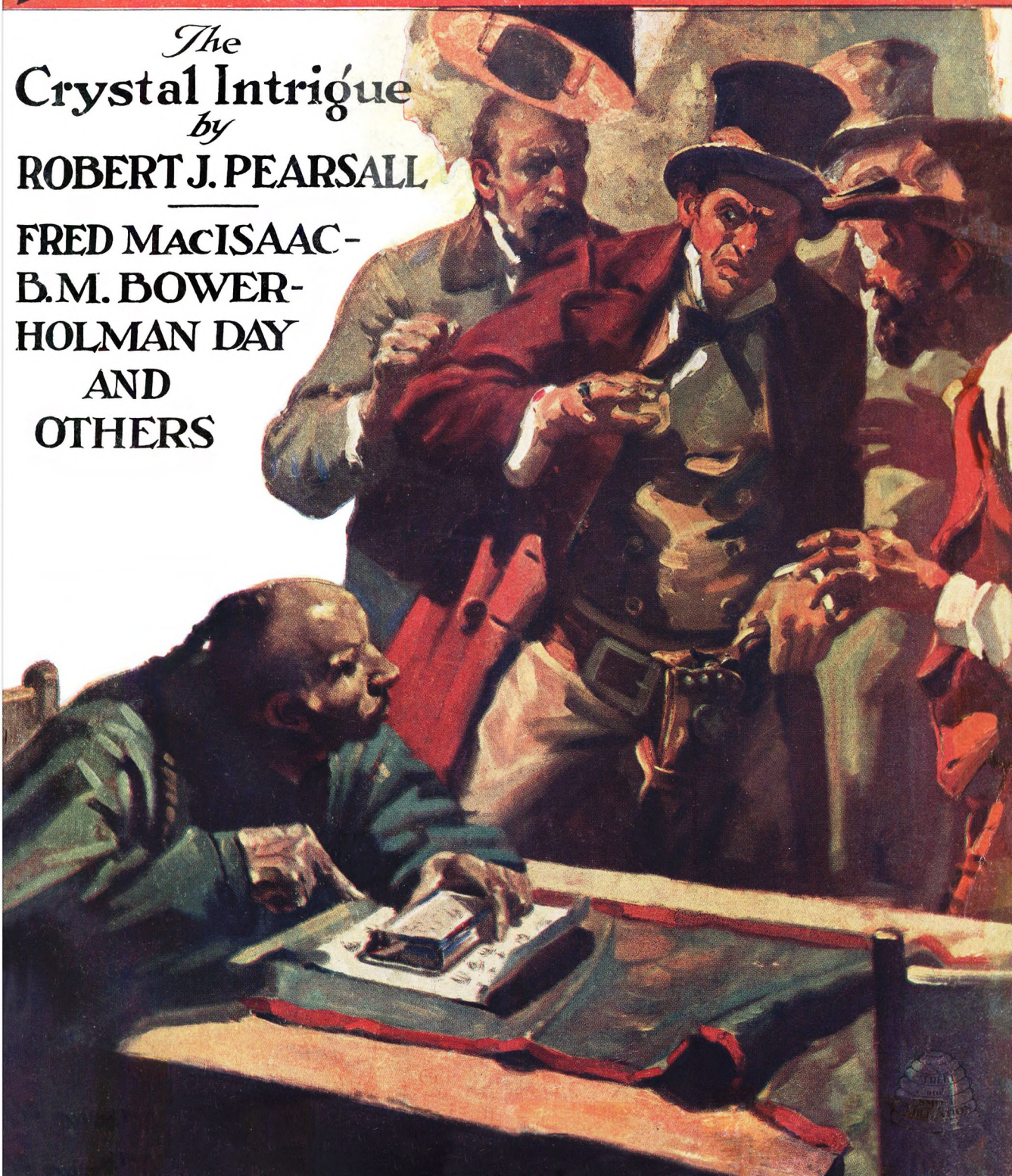

The Crystal Intrigue
by
ROBERT J. PEARSALL

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AND
OTHERS

Its friendly aid to teeth, appetite and digestion will help to keep the glow of health on little cheeks and on yours, too.

Mystery! The inevitable, subtle and deadly modern methods of crime detection—that is what Howard Fielding has brought out in his new novel, "The Dark Policeman," to be published next week in THE POPULAR. Don't miss this absorbing story! Next week—February 11th.

Volume LXXXVIII Number 6

The Popular

PUBLISHED WEEKLY

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CONTENTS FOR FEBRUARY 4, 1928

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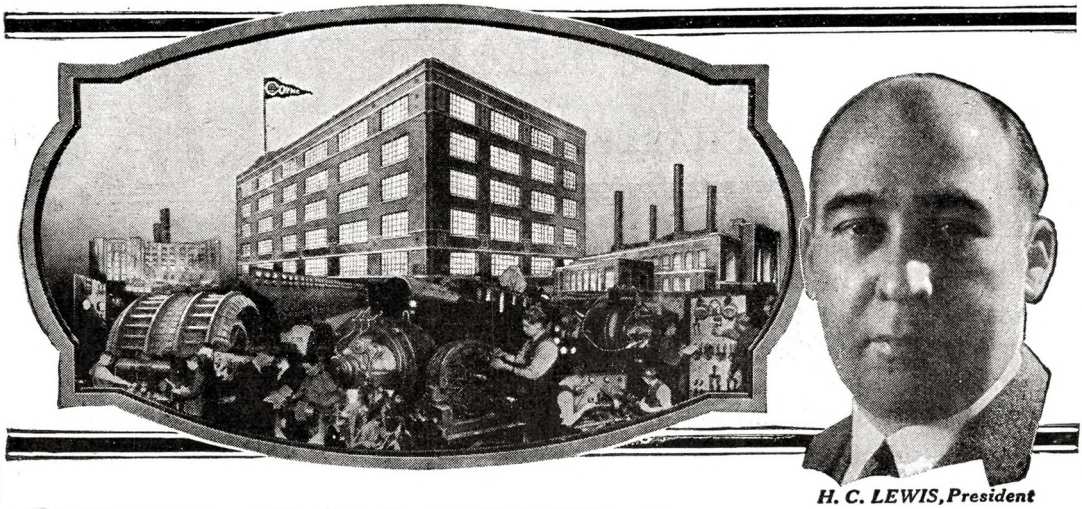

H. C. LEWIS, President

"I Will Train You To Get Into ELECTRICITY In 12 Weeks ~On Actual Electrical Machinery"

Don't Waste Your Life in a Hopeless Job

Don't spend your life waiting for $5 raises in a dull, hopeless job. Let me show you how to qualify for jobs leading to salaries of $50, $60 and up, a week, in Electricity — NOT by correspondence, but by an amazing way to teach, that makes you a practical expert in 90 days! Getting into Electricity is far easier than you imagine!

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Any number of students enter my school knowing no more about electricity than an infant. And yet they graduate and go right out in the field and get electrical jobs leading to big pay.

Advanced Education Not Necesssary

My method of training enables you to catch on instantly even though you have only had a common school education, without the use of dry books. You don't need advanced education to understand electricity the way I train.

Don't Worry About Age

Don't worry about your age. Plenty of men who never succeeded until late in life. This may be just the field you were cut out for.

Earn While You Learn

If you should need part time work, I'll assist you in getting it, if you will just write and tell me your circumstances. Many of my students pay all their living expenses through part time jobs secured by Coyne.

Actual Electrical Machinery

You work on real live electrical machinery, building real batteries, winding real armatures, operating real motors, dynamos and generators, wiring real houses.

Prepare for Jobs Like These—

Armature Expert—$50 a Week and up
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Inventor—Unlimited
Auto Electrician—$60 a Week and up
Maintenance Engineer—$60 a Week and up
Service Station Owner—$60 a Week and up
Radio Expert—$60 a Week and up

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We are now in our new, fireproof, modern school wherein is installed thousands of dollars worth of the newest and most modern electrical equipment of all kinds.

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Electricity is THE FIELD. It is one of the youngest. Every day sees an increase in its use. It holds the greatest future. The young man of today who gets into Electricity lays the cornerstone for lasting success—prosperity.

Thorough Training

My training is so thorough that you will be able to step out and get a job leading to big pay. Hundreds of Coyne graduates testify as to the thoroughness of my course and that if it hadn't been for this thoroughness, they never would've been able to have held their jobs.

Fascinating Method of Learning

Maybe you don't think this method of training isn't fascinating. The instructor shows you how to do job No. 1. Then you do it. Then he shows you how to do job No. 2. Then you do it. After while you're building real batteries that generate real juice; you wind real armatures that actually work and you do complete house wiring jobs.

Every Possible Kind of Assistance

My organization is so thorough that you get every possible kind of assistance. We secure a clean room for you at the lowest rates. The welfare department looks after your comfort.

A Big 56 Page Book FREE!

Coyne is your one great chance to get into electricity. Every obstacle is removed. This school is 28 years old—Coyne training is tested—proven beyond all doubt—endorsed by many large electrical concerns. You can find out everything absolutely free. Simply mail the coupon and let me send you the big, FREE Coyne Book.

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Not a Correspondence School

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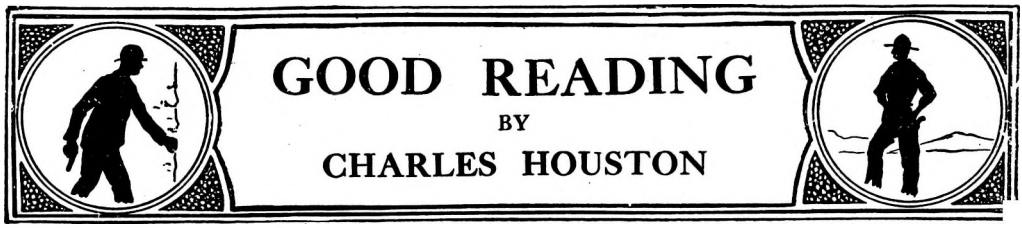

THERE is silence in the room. The man who is reading in the comfortable chair by the fireplace does not lift his head from the book. Through the half-opened window there comes now and then the distant wailing of a train, the sound of some belated automobile on the highroad, neighbors down the street calling good night.

So still and peaceful is this room, so quiet this reader, that one would never dream that in this very place there are wild alarms and excursions, that here indeed is the soul and center of high adventure.

To be sure, the desperate clash of armed men, the headlong pursuit of lovely maidens, ships foundering under heavy seas, horses thundering across the desolations of prairie land—all these exciting events are taking place in the active imagination of the inactive figure in the armchair. But to him, for the moment, they are reality itself. And that is the charm and the abiding lure of good fiction, that it can take a man or woman away from the routine of everyday surroundings and transport him or her to magic realms.

No one, no matter how sophisticated, how apparently unmoved by sentiment or emotion, can withstand this lure. The delights of a well-told story are democratic. They are shared by all sorts and varieties of people, in all walks of life.

Bankers and bricklayers, miners and manufacturers, Mrs. Vanderpoel of Park Avenue and Mrs. Higgins of Peoria, revel alike in the swift-moving stories told them by the masters of American fiction.

In New York, in a large building just beyond the edge of romantic Greenwich Village, is the clearing house for fiction that is typically American. One of the oldest and best-established publishing concerns in the country, Chelsea House, at 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, is recognized from coast to coast as Good Reading Headquarters. Herewith are some of its very latest offers:

STRANGE TIMBER, an Adventure Story, by Joseph Montague. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

"Sam Strong came riding down the tide and yelled his message plain,
'Go to it, boys! No jackstraw pile can best the men of Maine!
'Go to it, boys! No jackstraw pile can best the men of Maine!'"

On this crashing refrain of the deep-chested lumberjacks opens a story whose range swings from the Northland forests and the wind-swept dunes of the little sea village of Truro, down to the heat and clamor of a South American revolution.

Continued on 2nd page following

"Put Wagner on the Job!"

"I've been planning to promote him at the first opportunity. And now it's here. Watson hasn't been showing the interest in this business that I hoped he would and he's got to step down. Wagner, on the other hand, has been studying in spare time, with the International Correspondence Schools. They've been sending me his reports and I want to tell you he's doing fine. I've been watching him and he's ready. Put him in Watson's place and give him full charge of the department. And tell the cashier to see me about his salary."

Great news for Wagner. Too bad about Watson. But what can you expect?

When an executive hires a man or when he promotes a man, he can't afford to take chances. It's to his advantage to stand back of the man he feels sure will make good.

Suppose he has to choose between two men—one who is studying in his spare time and one who is not?

Isn't it natural to suppose that the ambitious man will be given the preference? It surely is! Recent events have proved it.

Our investigations show that the I. C. S. man is the first to be put on and the last to be discharged. Indeed, the thing that held the jobs of many men during the business depression was the fact that they were studying with the I. C. S.

For 35 years, the International Correspondence Schools have been helping men to win promotion and more money—to have happy, prosperous homes—to know the joy of getting ahead in business and in life.

No matter where you live, the I. C. S. will come to you. No matter what your handicaps or how small your means, we have a plan to meet your circumstances. No matter how limited your previous education, the simple, practical, wonderfully-illustrated I. C. S. lessons make it easy for you to learn.

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Just mark and mail the coupon printed below, and without obligation or a penny of cost, let us send you the story of what the International Correspondence Schools can do for you.

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"The Universal University"

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Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, **"Who Wins and Why,"** and full particulars about the subject before which I have marked X in the list below:

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Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada

And, indeed, nothing did best the men of Maine, ashore or on the high seas. Their battles, and the struggle of their leader to success and the winning of the love of a girl of exceptional beauty and vitality, are elements in a story that is one of the best that has come from Mr. Montague's talented pen. Your dealer has "Strange Timber." Ask him for it on your way home to-night if you want to spend one of the most adventurous evenings of your life.

THE THUNDERBOLT'S JEST, a Detective Story, by Johnston McCulley. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

"Alias the Thunderbolt" made a hit with the reading public as sure and direct as the lightning from which its hero took his name. There arose instant demands for further chronicles of the adventures of John Flatchley and his faithful coworker, the ugly but dependable Mr. Saggs. And here, in "The Thunderbolt's Jest," is the thrilling answer to these demands. Once more we follow Flatchley and Saggs through a series of amazing adventures; once more we watch the cultured clubman change into the swift avenger who strikes terror to the hearts of cunning rogues—and then change back again. We can forgive the Thunderbolt his peculiar methods because he steals, not for the love of it, nor is he a criminal at heart. Why this man of means should steal, why he should resort to the ways of the denizens of the underworld, is revealed for those who have not met the Thunderbolt before in this gripping romance. Of course, if you already know the Thunderbolt, you will want to know him even better, and now Mr. McCulley gives you the long-awaited opportunity.

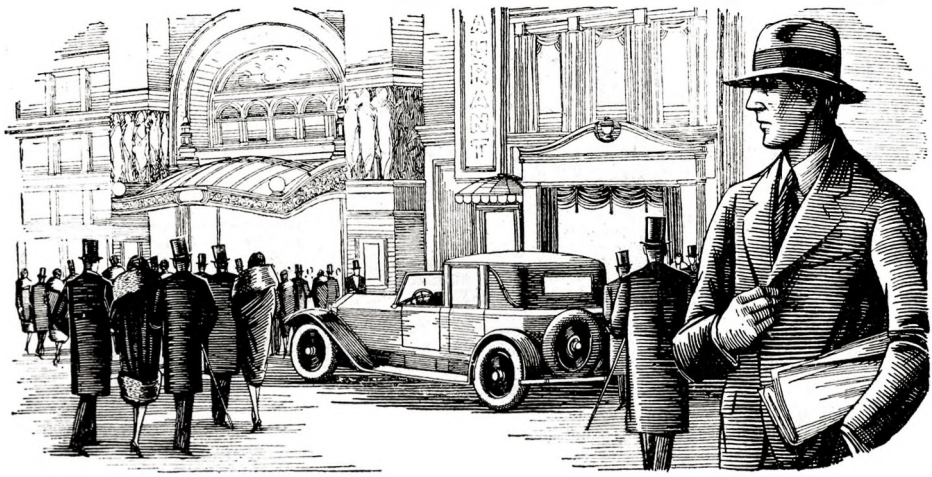
THE FLYING COYOTES, a Western Story, by Raymond S. Spears. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

Strange are the motives which animate the heart of an outlaw! Unexpectedly the good which is in the worst of us comes to the surface, and the bad man becomes an ally to the forces of law and order. Such was the case with "Short Joe" Fitzgammon, a member of the hard-riding, straight-shooting, "Flying Coyotes," a band of outlaws who long had terrorized peaceful citizens. One can well imagine the amazement of the sheriff when Short Joe stepped off his motor cycle and told him that he wanted to join the sheriff in hunting down members of the band of which his father had been a leader. There follows adventure aplenty, and there is a love story, too—one of the sort that is all too rare these days.

"The Flying Coyotes" is a book for men and women who love the West and its people.

ISLAND RANCH, a Western Story, by Thomas K. Holmes. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

When an oil prospector is in the neighborhood, you can bet your best Stetson things will begin to pop. Nothing much had been going on around Island Ranch until Aleck Carter, a man with a nose for oil, showed up. Things popped then, all right. There was a fortune and a girl at stake, and the winning of them both for a brave-hearted man. Believe us or not, once at the Island Ranch, you are in the midst of such adventure as will take you far away from routine cares and worries.



Always outside of things—that's where I was just twelve short months ago. I just didn't have the cash, that was all. No theatres, no parties, no good restaurants. No real enjoyment of life. I was just getting by, just existing. What a difference to-day! I drive my own car, have a good bank account, enjoy all the amusements I please.

I Couldn't Get The Good Things of Life

Then I Quit My Job and "Found" Myself!

HOW does a man go about making more money? If I asked myself that question once, I asked it a hundred times!

I know the answer now—you bet. I know the way good money is made, and I'm making it. Gone forever are the days of cheap shoes, cheap clothes, walking home to save carfare, pinching pennies to make my salary last from one pay-day to the next one. I own one of the finest Radio stores you ever saw, and I get almost all the Radio service and repair work in town. The other Radio dealers send their hard jobs to me, so you can see how I stand in my line.

But—it's just a year ago that I was a poorly-paid clerk. I was struggling along on a starvation salary, until by accident my eyes were opened and I saw just what was the matter with me. Here's the story of just how it happened.

ONE of the big moments of my life had come. I had just popped the fatal question, and Louise said "Yes!"

Louise wanted to go in and tell her father about it right away, so we did. He sort of grunted when we told him the news, and asked Louise to leave us alone. And my heart began to sink as I looked at his face.

"So you and Louise have decided to get married," he said to me when we were alone. "Well, Bill, just listen to me. I've watched you often here at the house with Louise and I think you are a pretty good, upstanding young fellow. I knew your father and mother, and you've always had a good reputation here, too. But just let me ask you just one question—how much do you make?"

"Twenty-eight a week," I told him.

He didn't say a word—just wrote it down on a piece of paper.

"Have you any prospects of a better job or a good raise sometime soon?" he asked.

"No, sir, I can't honestly say that I have," I admitted. "I'm looking for something better all the time, though."

"Looking, eh? How do you go about it?"

Well, that question stopped me.

How did I? I was willing to take a better job if I saw the chance all right, but I certainly had laid no plans to make such a job for myself. When he saw my confusion he grunted. "I thought so," he said, then he held up some figures he'd been scribbling at.

"I've just been figuring out your family budget, Bill, for a salary of twenty-eight a week. I've figured it several ways, so you can take your pick of the one you like best. Here's Budget No. 1. I figure you can afford a very small unfurnished apartment, make your payments on enough plain, inexpensive furniture to fix such an apartment up, pay your electricity, gas and water bills, buy just about one modest outfit of clothes for both of you once a year, and save three dollars a week for sickness, insurance and emergencies. But you can't eat. And you'll have to go without amusements until you can get a good substantial raise in salary."

I began to turn red as fire.

"That budget isn't so good after all," he said, glancing at me, "maybe Budget No. 2 will sound better—"

"That's enough, Mr. Sullivan," I said. "Have a heart. I can see things pretty clearly now, things I was kidding myself about before. Let me go home and think this over." And home I went, my mind in a whirl.

AT HOME I turned the problem over and over in my mind. I'd popped the question at Louise on impulse, without thinking it out. Everything Mr. Sullivan had said was gospel truth. I couldn't see anything to do, any way to turn. But I had to have more money.

I began to thumb the pages of a magazine which lay on the table beside me. Suddenly an advertisement seemed almost to leap out at my eyes, an advertisement telling of big opportunities for trained men to succeed in the great new Radio field. With the advertisement was a coupon offering a big free book full of information. I sent the coupon in, and in a few days received a handsome 64-page book, printed in two colors, telling all about the opportunities in the Radio field and how a man can prepare quickly and easily at home to take advantage of these opportunities. I read the book carefully, and when I finished it I made my decision.

What's happened in the twelve months since that day seems almost like a dream to me now. For ten of those twelve months, I've had a Radio business of my own! At first, of course, I started it as a little proposition on the side, under the guidance of the National Radio Institute, the institution that gave me my Radio training. It wasn't long before I was getting so much to do in the Radio line that I quit my measly little clerical job and devoted my full time to my Radio business.

Since that time I've gone right on up, always under the watchful guidance of my friends at the National Radio Institute. They would have given me just as much help, too, if I had wanted to follow some other line of Radio besides building my own retail business, such as broadcasting, manufacturing, experimenting, sea operating, or any one of the score of lines they prepare you for. And to think that until that day I sent for their eye-opening book, I'd been wailing "I never had a chance!"

Now, I'm making real money. Louise and I have been married six months, and there wasn't any kidding about budgets by Mr. Sullivan when we stepped off, either. I'll bet that today I make more money than the old boy himself.

Here's a real tip. You may not be as bad off as I was. But, think it over—are you satisfied? Are you making enough money, at work that you like? Would you sign a contract to stay where you are now for the next ten years, making the same money? If not, you'd better be doing something about it instead of drifting.

This new Radio game is a live-wire field of golden rewards. The work, in any of the 20 different lines of Radio, is fascinating, absorbing, well paid. The National Radio Institute—oldest and largest Radio home-study school in the world—will train you inexpensively in your own home to know Radio from A to Z and to increase your earnings in the Radio field.

Take another tip—No matter what your plans are, no matter how much or how little you know about Radio—clip the coupon below and look their free book over. It is Radio Institute, Dept. 2-A, Washington, D. C.

Filled with interesting facts, figures, and photos, and the information it will give you is worth a few minutes of anybody's time. You will place yourself under no obligation—the book is free and is gladly sent to anyone who wants to know about Radio. Just address J. E. Smith, President, National

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Dept. 2-A, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith:

Please send me your 64-page free book, printed in two colors, giving all information about the opportunities in Radio and how I can learn quickly and easily at home to take advantage of them. I understand this request places me under no obligation, and that no salesmen will call on me.

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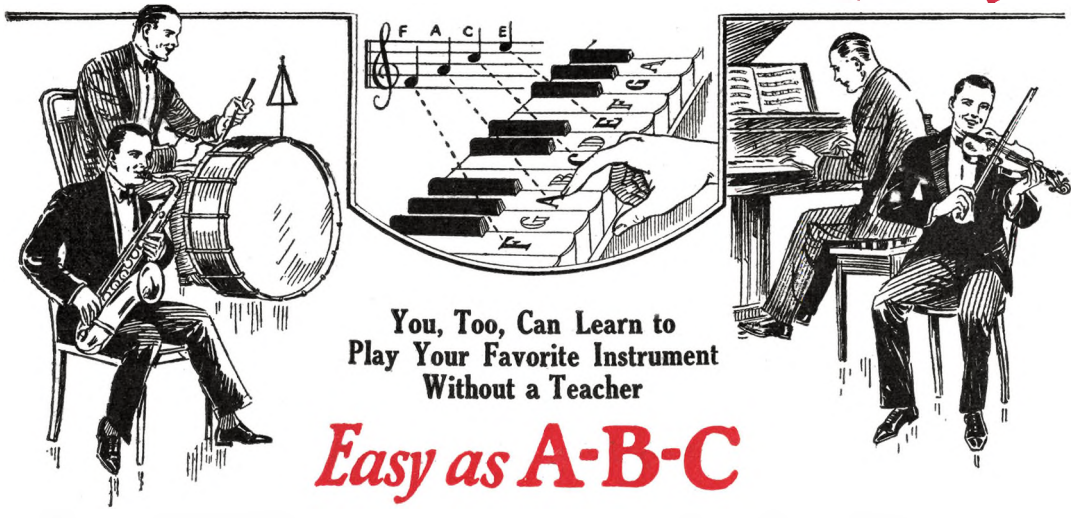
Half a Million People

have learned music this easy way



You, Too, Can Learn to Play Your Favorite Instrument Without a Teacher

Easy as A-B-C

YES, half a million delighted men and women all over the world have learned music this quick, easy way.

Half a million — 500,000 — what a gigantic orchestra they would make! Some are playing on the stage, others in orchestras, and many thousands are daily enjoying the pleasure and popularity of being able to play some instrument.

Surely this is convincing proof of the success of the *new, modern method* perfected by the U. S. School of Music! And what these people have done, YOU, too, can do!

Many of this half million didn't know one note from another—others had never touched an instrument—yet in half the usual time they learned to play their favorite instrument. Best of all, they found learning music *amazingly easy*. No monotonous hours of exercises—no tedious scales—no expensive teachers. This simplified method made learning music as easy as A-B-C!

It is like a fascinating game. From the very start you are playing *real* tunes, perfectly, by *note*. You simply can't go wrong, for every step, from beginning to end, is right before your eyes in print and picture. First you are *told* how to do a thing, then a picture *shows* you how, then you do it yourself and hear it. And almost before you know it, you are playing your favorite pieces—jazz, ballads, classics. No private teacher could make it clearer. Little theory—plenty of accomplishment. That's why students of the U. S. School of Music get ahead *twice as fast—three times as fast* as those who study old-fashioned, plodding methods.

What Instrument for You?

Piano	Hawaiian Steel Guitar
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Guitar	Voice and Speech Culture
Ukulele	Automatic Finger Control
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Piccolo	
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You don't need any special "talent." Many of the half million who have already become accomplished players never dreamed they possessed musical ability. They only wanted to play some instrument—just like you—and they found they could quickly learn how this easy way. Just a little of your spare time each day is needed—and you enjoy every minute of it. The cost is surprisingly low—averaging only a few cents a day—and the price is the same for whatever instrument you choose. And remember you are studying right in your own home —without paying big fees to private teachers.

Don't miss any more good times! Learn now to play your favorite instrument and surprise all your friends. Change from a wallflower to the center of attraction. Music is the best thing to offer at a party —musicians are invited everywhere. Enjoy the popularity you have been missing. Get your share of the musician's pleasure and profit! Start now!

Free Booklet and Demonstration Lesson

If you are in earnest about wanting to join the crowd of entertainers and be a "big hit" at any party —if you really *do* want to play your favorite instrument, to become a performer whose services will be in demand—fill out and mail the convenient coupon asking for our Free Booklet and Demonstration Lesson. These explain our wonderful method fully and show you how easily and quickly you can learn to play at little expense. Instruments are supplied when needed —cash or credit. U. S. School of Music, 3592 Brunswick Bldg., New York City.

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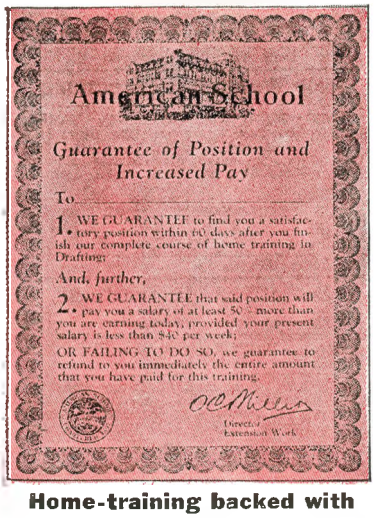

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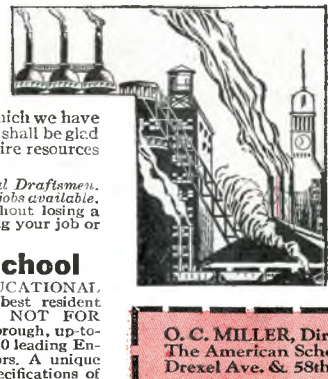

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This agreement proves our training does make *real Draftsmen.* It proves that after you finish, *there are well-paid jobs available.* And you can prepare yourself without losing a day's pay or time, without quitting your job or leaving home!

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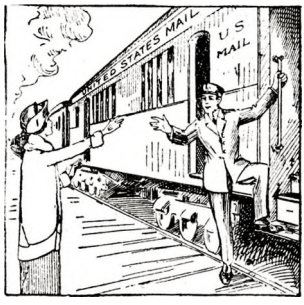

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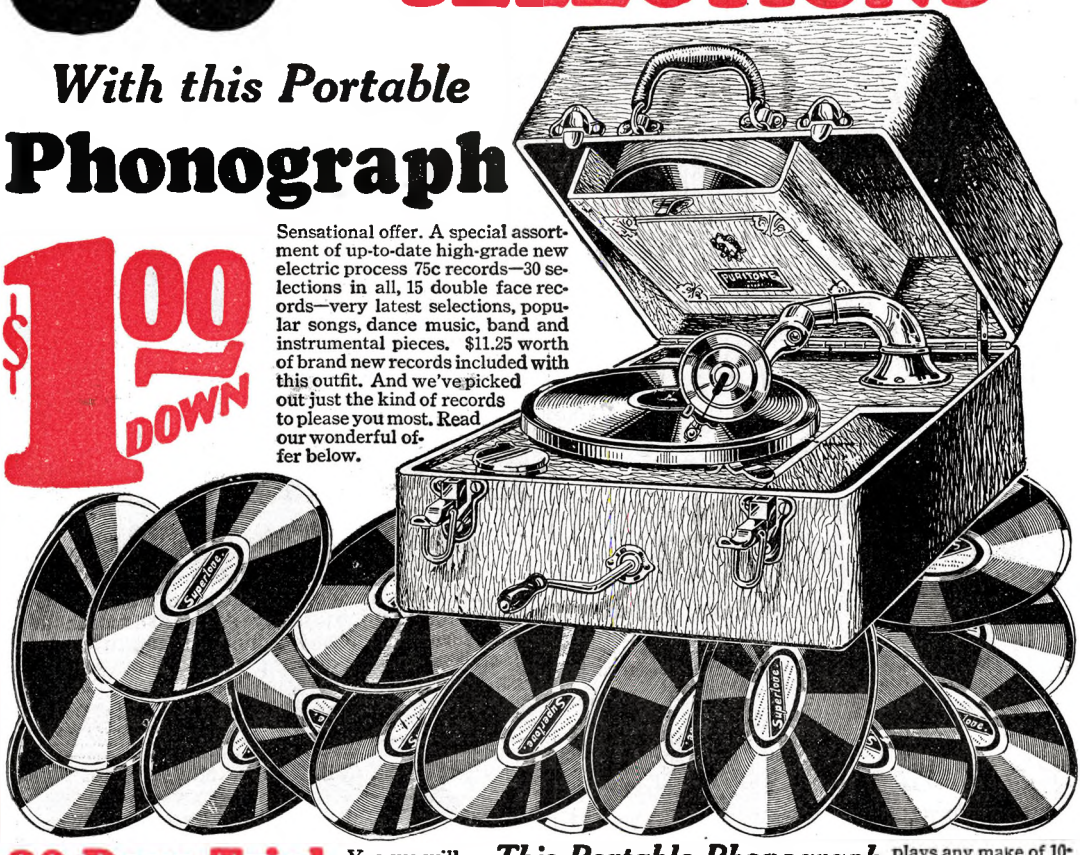

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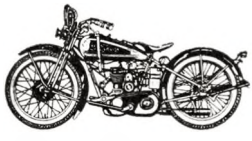

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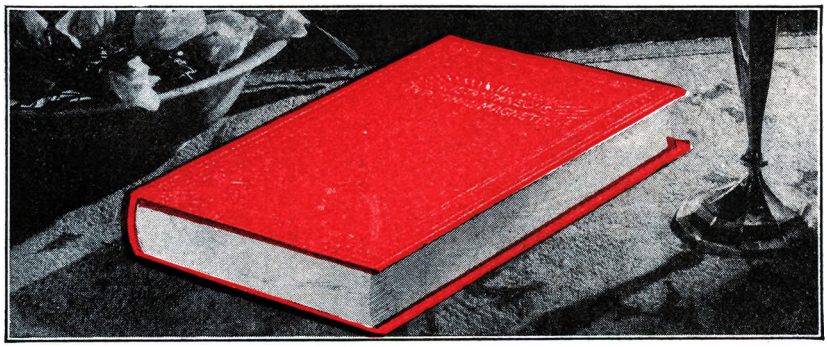

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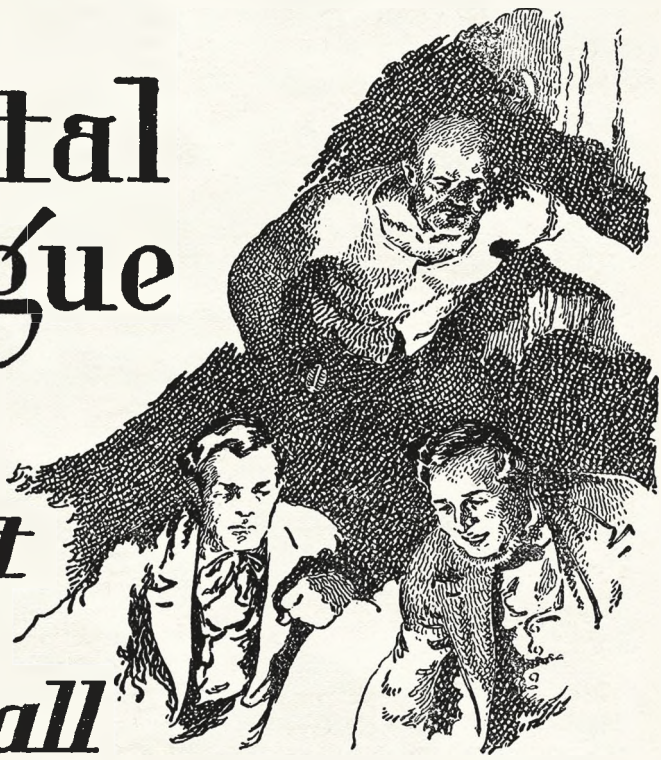
The Crystal Intrigue



By Robert J. Pearsall

Author of "Luck's Fool," "The Past and Old Dan Pettigrew," Etc.

Back in the rowdy California days when there was a movement on foot to separate the State from the Union, a young adventurer chanced on a slip of paper that introduced him to an attractive girl who was not afraid to play a real woman's part, and led into the heart of political intrigue, the boiling caldron of action and romance.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE RUN.

RUSH was making a run for it. Sitting there in the Golden Bear barroom, he told Sheehy so frankly, and maybe a bit too loudly, under the circumstances. He was going to be sensible. Five thousand men, or maybe ten thousand, were altogether too many to buck, he said. Especially when you didn't know who they were, nor where; and when half of them really believed they were patriots and all, and that it was just like war. Why, right here in this barroom, there were probably men who would put a bullet in him if they knew who he was. Well, they'd know soon enough; but he'd be away by then.

Rush's blue eyes flamed virtuously as he made this safety-first proclama-

tion. His trim, lean, muscular body was taut with the fervor of his pronouncement. You could tell surely enough he was on the run by the very shrug of his square, wide shoulders, as he tapped the butt of his holstered revolver.

"It don't carry enough bullets, Tim, to fit this here occasion. Man, I'm off. I'm playin' safe. I'm leavin' California right now. An' what's the matter with me that you don't want me with you?"

Sheehy, a big, red-faced, middle-aged Irishman, scratched his graying head perplexedly. He didn't know what to do about Rush, but he could at least answer that last question.

"Faith, there's nothin' wrong wit' ye, an' ye know Oi know it, lad. Don't Oi remember ye under Walker, an' haven't Oi been hearin' av ye ever since? There isn't a better man in this room—aye, nor in all California!"

Sheehy sincerely believed that, but it was a great deal to say. There were no weaklings visible in the Golden Bear barroom, and there were few in the California of that day.

Other sorts of men were in the Golden Bear in plentiful variety: successful survivors of the twelve mad years since '49; fortune hunters fresh from all the seas of the earth; honest men and rogues; noisy men and quiet, sober men; drunken, wise-eyed and unwise men; lawyers, merchants, miners, grafters—all having won their fortune or busy seeking it in the wildest gold rush and game of empire building and grabbing in history.

"You're better than any of 'em," went on Sheehy, "but 'tis just because av that. Boy, Oi know ye. 'Tis not wit' that bunch av hard nuts, scum av the earth, that ye—'Hurry-up' Rush, 'Nicaragua' Rush, 'Rush av the Durango' —belong. Sure, there's a better way for ye to be escapin' than joinin' wit' us."

Rush threw back his head and laughed at that, but with affection for Sheehy in his still-boyish eyes.

"'Preacher' Sheehy—you've still your good ideas for me. An' I thank you for 'em kindly. But take one look out there. Then tell me, how can you bid me value my life, an' stand in the way of me savin' it?"

Sheehy followed Rush's glance over the room. Truly, it was not the ordinary San Francisco crowd, boisterous with easy good humor, that filled the place to-night.

The men were about the same, of course, and their occupations were the same—lining three deep in places before the mahogany bars, or gathered in low-voiced groups beneath the blazing, many-crystalled chandeliers that threw down more heat than light, or listening to the croupiers' raucous calls at the gaming tables. But the confident goodfellowship was mostly gone. It was eclipsed by too many sidelong, suspicious looks, too many groups that kept apart from others and dissolved as at a glance, too much low talk that tried to conceal itself beneath the clamor of more careless voices, the blaring of the band, and the clatter of coins and glasses on the bars.

"Faith," said Sheehy, "you're roight. The game's afoot, an' pity the man that stands in the way av it. Get out ye must, but phwat's the matter wit' an ordinary ship?"

"They'll all be watched—— But say! Sheehy!" A curious, whimsical light appeared in Rush's eyes, as though he scented a good joke upon himself.

"Sure your expedition ain't part of *that?*"

Sheehy grew more serious, but replied positively:

"Not a bit av it. Filibusterin' in South America, Oi judge it, wit' maybe a bit av piracy thrown in. A good ship, wit' plenty av men, an' plenty av money behind it—an' ahead, too, Oi hope—an' wit' such evidences av law-

lessness that even Oi shouldn't be connected wit' it. But not——"

"Republic-makin', eh?" completed Rush, still with that whimsical, half-wishful look in his eyes. "If it were, an' I joined, wouldn't that be a case? A wasp in a hornet's nest, by George! If only I hadn't made up my mind to play safe! But I have. But tell me, Tim, what makes you so certain?"

"Well, 'tis loike this," returned Sheehy. "Them Bear State men are respectable, in spite av bein' phwat Oi call traitors. An' they're after respectable support. They couldn't afford to be mixed up wit' the bunch av ruffians that's goin' to man that ship. That's the way Oi look at it."

"Your expedition sounds better an' better," said Rush. "Get me in on it, Sheehy, will you? Rememberin' old times, get me in on it."

"Oi suppose so," sighed Sheehy. "But 'tis because I'm rememberin' them old times that Oi'd rather see ye somewhere else."

It had been in Nicaragua under Walker that they had met, and Rush but a high-strung lad in his teens. Much trouble had followed, and finally disaster; but meanwhile Walker had made the alert boy a captain, and the lonely Sheehy had made him almost a son in his heart. After imprisonment and escape, their trails had parted, but every now and then, Sheehy heard of Rush.

How he had shipped at Panama, for instance, with a second-class ticket and a ten-dollar stake, and had arrived at San Francisco with a thousand, gained mostly by repeated speculations in fruit. How he had located two abandoned gulch heads and taken out a fortune, lost in a month in a town-site flyer. How he had gone into Mexico alone, located a mine in the middle of Durango, fought fever, made friends of the bandits, rode the storm of a revolution, and got his gold out. Another fortune. No one knew where that had gone.

Now times had changed in California, no longer so fluid and adventurous; and Sheehy learned with disappointment that Rush had recently become a mere back-country gambler. Not a common gambler, though, Sheehy was sure of that. Rush would be uncommon if only in that he'd gamble fairly; but it was no job for him anyway. And neither was this crazy expedition, which Sheehy had promised to join, the place for a young un that had stuff in him yet. Sheehy was saying something more to that effect, and that it was all right for him because he was through, anyway, when he was interrupted by an incident not so unusual in those days.

It was a sudden fracas at a near-by poker table. "Cheat!" rasped one man, and another: "Liar!" And before the latter word was out, they were both on their feet and shooting.

Two shots and it was over. Fragments of glass showering down from a chandelier told of one man's bullet-spoiled aim. For the other bullet went true. Rush, on his feet, could see nothing for the men standing between; but he heard a body slump to the floor, dragging the table over with it.

"Grab him!" "Get his gun!" "He's killed him, the——" "Watch the doors!"

The old days were surely over, for the victor in the impromptu duel was seized by half a dozen men. Then Rush, for a hunted, fleeing man, made himself very conspicuous: he leaped on his chair to see the better. He glimpsed the face of the imperiled man—an honest face if there was ever one—and swiftly, instinctively, Rush's hand went to his revolver butt.

Sheehy laughed softly, seeing the action. "Begorra, don't forget you're runnin' for it."

Rush, thus reminded, hesitated an instant; and in that time it was oddly

made plain that the other didn't need his help.

The man uttered a cry, a most peculiar one, a signal that Rush had heard once before. Rush relaxed; he knew about what would happen; but he wasn't prepared for Sheehy's action.

Sheehy started instantly to the rescue. All over the barroom other men started, too. But that cry for help was so miraculously potent that most of them weren't needed save for moral support. Among the men around the killer, there was a swirl of movement, followed by a concerted rush of four of them, with the killer in between, toward a rear exit. No one followed as they passed out.

But he wasn't a killer after all. The gambler whom he'd shot still lived—and besides, he *had* cheated. At least, that was the word that was passed as the fallen man was carried out. And the bulk of the crowd glowered and grumbled, but accepted the situation. The rescuers were organized and the crowd was not—that was the explanation. And upon Rush's face there was a look of questing, dubious excitement, as Sheehy returned to their table.

Aloud, and as carelessly as he could voice the question, he asked Sheehy:

"A friend of yours, Tim?"

"No—oh, ye mane that shootin' individual?" Sheehy's voice was troubled and thoughtful. "Yes, he was a friend."

"He had a lot of 'em," said Rush dryly. "Honest, Sheehy, don't you know what that means?"

"That! Phwat?"

"That yell the fellow gave, for one thing."

"Why, yes. That meant he was wan of us; wan of our expedition. But Oi didn't know——"

Sheehy's voice trailed off, and his eyes, which drink had rendered not as keen as they had been, wandered out over the crowd, which was settling down with an increase of tension.

"That you had so much high-grade support, eh? Funny, isn't it?" Rush's own eyes were very bright and dancing with some suppressed desire. "By heavens, Sheehy, if I wasn't—— When's this precious expedition of yours to start?"

"Day after to-morrow."

"Then meet me here to-morrow night, will you, and never mind gettin' me a place in it till then. I'll be thinkin' over what you said, d'ye see? An' now I've gotta get some sleep. I'm all in."

He rose and strode from the barroom, with men glancing appraisingly and mostly approvingly at him as he passed. The rough miner's clothes that he wore didn't seem to quite belong on his supple body, which moved with such effortless ease. Quite in place, however, seemed the revolver that swung at his side. He was smiling a little at the trick which Fate had almost played on him.

Outside, on the high-pillared veranda of the hotel, he stood for a while looking out upon the open, unkempt plaza, unlighted save by the fringe of saloons.

"Now, if I wasn't playin' safe——" he muttered.

If it wasn't for that proud determination of his—proud because new—he felt he would surely join Sheehy's expedition, even though the scene in the barroom had perfectly proved that it was connected with the very movement from which he had run from Sacramento, and must run considerably farther.

It had been the freakiest bit of bad luck and bad judgment, masquerading as good, that had got him into his difficulties. He had played with a man who looked like a miner, and had won heavily. The last of his winnings was a sack of dust wagered by the stranger, who must have been drunker than he looked. For when Rush got back to his hotel and emptied the sack, he found in the bottom of it a paper the mere sight of which checked his breathing.

The names on it were high names in-

deed, but that paper placed in the proper hands might change them into numbers instead. The plans that the paper indicated, Rush didn't stop to read. One glance told him that they outlined a plot for revolt in California against the Federal authority, weakened by the Civil War in the East. It was the old Bear State movement, revived under more hopeful circumstances.

Rush knew something of it already, as nearly every one did. He knew the arguments for the common crowd: that the Bear State flag had flown first and had been taken down by force; that Washington was twelve days away by the fastest mail and could not govern successfully over thousands of miles of wilderness; that California should be for the Californians, and the people's taxes for themselves.

He knew the sort of men that headed the movement. "Knights of the Golden Circle," they called themselves. He knew the stake for which they played; control of the world's greatest reservoir of gold. He knew—quite all that he wanted to know. Particularly he knew that he mustn't be found with this paper. His resolution to play quite safe formed itself as he stood with the paper in his hand. As he touched a match to it, he was making plans for instant departure from Sacramento.

He was packing up, when three men entered his room without stopping to knock. He knew he was in for trouble.

He was, and one of the three was in for death. Rush didn't intend to kill him, but he had to shoot or be shot, when they wouldn't believe he had destroyed the paper. Then he went through the window.

Rush regretted his accidentally fatal shot less the next day, when he learned that a man, who could be hardly other than the Golden Circle messenger, had been found dead in the tule marsh outside Sacramento. He had paid high for his carelessness.

The affair was now forty-eight hours old, and Rush was still alive, contrary to the prophecy of his three visitors. That was because he had traveled a hundred miles swiftly and circuitously, before making for San Francisco, the only open port. He was giving them a run for it. He was playing safe.

But he had to admit, standing there, that the rather unaccustomed rôle was growing a trifle wearisome. Middle-aged prudence was hardly in his line, as yet. But he'd stick it out, no fear.

Hardly like a fugitive did he look, however, as he presently crossed the hotel lobby on his way to his room. Up the uncarpeted stairway his boots rang smartly, and down the ill-lighted hall to his own door. And he perceived as his hand sought the doorknob, a pencil of light streaming through the keyhole from the room which should have been dark.

Who was waiting in there for him? Knights of the Golden Circle?

Rush's reaction was instant, and peculiar for the cautious part he was playing. With a tightening of all his muscles, he flung the door open and leaped in, his revolver extended.

The leaping of that revolver toward its target resembled the striking of a serpent. A hushed cry of alarm had guided Rush's aim to a figure which sprang up from behind the bed at the other side of the room.

For an instant, his finger rested on the trigger. Then, utterly astounded, he replaced his revolver.

"I—I——" he stammered. "What can I do for you, miss?"

CHAPTER II.

RUSH PLAYS INQUISITOR.

RUSH'S first glance showed him merely that the intruder was a girl. Then he saw that her face was growing colorless; her lips were parted with alarm; her eyes were staring at him,

wide with dismay. But she seemed to be struggling hard for composure, and before he would have thought it possible, she partially attained it. Pale-lipped, she managed a smile; and though terror still lurked in her eyes, her voice was almost steady when she replied:

"You might—forgive me my trespass. And let an unwitting burglar escape."

She laughed lightly, almost naturally, and came unhurriedly around the foot of the bed. But Rush, watching her eyes, knew that what she wanted to do was scream and run for the door.

What Rush wanted to do from that moment was to let her go, and he almost did. Then he reminded himself of his own predicament. It seemed impossible she could be a Golden Circle spy, but if not that, what was she?

"Well, if you'll tell me what you're trespassin' for——" he suggested, with amazement growing every moment he looked at her.

For truly she seemed the least likely person in the world to be caught in such a position. Her terrified eyes were modest eyes, too, with dignity in the violet depths of them. Dignity and a fine intelligence were in the fine lines of her slightly irregular features; and her slender, well-poised body was clothed in a street dress of unmistakable taste and value.

But still Rush had to recognize, in her furtive glance at the door behind his back, a fear even greater than seemed natural under the circumstances. And her words didn't ring quite true.

"Of course I'll explain. I had this room last night, and when I left this morning, I forgot some papers." She showed him a fold that looked like letters in her right hand. "So I came back for them. I'd no idea the room was occupied. I'm sorry."

She smiled tremulously, and took a step or two toward the door.

It required an increasing effort of the will for Rush to keep his place in front of her. She was so brave in her terror, so appealing in her slender helplessness, so obviously inexperienced in contriving a lie. But in knowledge there is safety, Rush reminded himself. What was she doing in his room?

"And the clerk sent you right up, of course," said Rush pleasantly. "That wasn't your fault, but I'll just go down with you and tell him next time to get my permission."

The girl faltered at that. Dismay again widened her eyes and broke into her voice.

"But he didn't. He—wasn't in the office. I didn't want to wait, so I came right up."

"Yes. I don't blame you a bit for telling me that, either. But you wouldn't, of course. Some might, but you wouldn't. And you wouldn't have been carrying a pass-key. As I said—well, my original proposition stands."

"What was it?" Her body was rigid with the effort of gripping at her self-control.

"Tell me what you're here for, an' I'll let you go."

She was evidently not accustomed to being disbelieved, for she flashed out angrily.

"If you won't believe me, what's the use of telling you anything?"

"Miss, it's like this," returned Rush easily, "this here thing's too strange for anything but the truth or a most magnificent lie to fit. An' you ain't had experience enough in lyin' to invent one that'll hold water. I'll know the truth when I hear it."

"And if I won't explain?"

"Then I'm afraid I'll have to do my duty an' call the management."

"Oh, your duty!" Suddenly the girl's temper flamed. "Satisfy your impertinent curiosity, or you'll do your duty. Well, do it, then."

Rush turned impassively toward the door. It was a bluff, of course. He

neither wanted to expose the girl, nor to call attention to himself. Behind him, there was a swift movement, a stirring cry, half between a sob and a moan.

"Oh, no! No, I can't let you—he'd be killed! Oh, let me think!"

Rush turned. The girl's right hand was raised, her fingers indenting her cheek. Her face was so nearly convulsed with horror at the threatened exposure that Rush for sheer shame shifted his glance. His eyes fell on the folded letters in her hand, and remained there for a long moment, while his curiosity stirred afresh. For the fold was covered with the oddest characters he had ever seen, more erratically formed than any hieroglyphics—mere jumbles of straight and curved lines crisscrossed in every direction. If they explained the girl's presence here—— But good Lord! she was crying!

"Miss! I'm askin' you—— Let me explain. I didn't mean—— You can go, but I wish—— I don't want you to think——"

Gone was Rush's own self-control, dissolved in the girl's tears. How could he have tortured her so! He wanted to touch her, to take her hand reassuringly; but he didn't dare step nearer. Helplessly he stared at her, until she looked out from moist but brightening eyes.

"You'll let me go!"

"Of course! I didn't intend—— I'm in danger myself, an' I—I thought you might be connected up with it. I'm on the run. An' so I wanted to know if——"

Half-frightened again, the girl looked at him mistily.

"*You're* in danger?"

"Yes. That's why——"

"Oh! I wish—— It's nothing to do with you, I know."

"Of course it hasn't. I should have known that. I'm sorry——"

"I wish I could tell you. Just so you'd know. But I can't. He—it isn't my secret. But I'd rather die myself than——"

"I know. Or rather, I don't know. But it's all right. I wish I could help you."

Queer how small and intimate the room was, all of a sudden; how soft and friendly was the girl's hand, as she took Rush's on her way to the door.

"Oh, I'll be all right," Rush told her —and meant it. Just then, there was nothing in the world could touch him. "I'm playin' safe, as I said—givin' 'em a run for it."

A smile! A really gorgeous, warm smile!

"Good luck! You don't look like a man that would be running much." Her voice was soft, low, teasing.

"Good luck to you and——" Rush began. But the door had closed behind her.

Rush stared at the door for a moment after she had gone, with a look almost of incredulity. It seemed impossible that the thing had actually happened. Yet, as he turned, there stood the bed thrust away from the wall, as evidence. She had moved the bed, knelt behind it, secured the fold of letters, and —Rush had quickly placed himself in approximately her position—— What was this?

A narrow strip of cloth dangled from the bottom of one of the bed slats. Rush touched it, found the free end stiff with glue. Evidently the letters had been secured by this strip of cloth to the bottom of the slat—a first-class hiding place. Few, searching the room, would think of inspecting the under side of the narrow bed slats.

But here was something else, which his entrance had probably caused the girl to miss. It appeared to be a small packet, secured exactly as the letters had been.

Rush started a triumphant smile, then it faded. It gave him short-lived zest

that the packet probably contained a revelation of the girl's hard-kept secret. He actually hesitated before he tore the packet loose, and stood up.

Then he discovered that it wasn't a packet after all. A single sheet of writing paper lay on top of a plate of transparent glass, about an inch thick, and of the same length and width as the paper.

"A readin' glass!" Rush guessed.

He took his finds over to the table which stood under the bracketed oil lamp. He put the crystal down upon the figure cloth—then stared at it with increased perplexity.

"Great Scott! *No* readin' glass, that's sure."

For under the crystal, the colored figures on the cloth assumed the weirdest appearance! Each separate line was twisted and distorted, magnified in places and in other places diminished, until its actual shape was hardly to be guessed at. Nor did any explanation of this effect occur to Rush, until he lifted the glass, and discovered the irregular nodules and depressions on both surfaces.

"Humph! Like a hundred magnifyin' glasses all jumbled together. Only half of 'em are reducin' glasses, instead. A precious lot of work somebody's put in on this. Let's see what's on this paper."

He glanced at it, expecting to find the same grotesque hieroglyphics which he had observed on the papers in the girl's hand. But instead it was half covered with a peculiar but quite legible scrawl in a man's bold writing. Rush read swiftly, with a little chill creeping over him:

——so no connection between Hawk and Deeth has been established as yet, but I have no doubt that one exists. The money being spent by Deeth indicates greater resources than he himself would be able to command. Nor does Hawk by himself possess such resources. But plainly if the Golden Circle is financing the arrangements, it is doing so without knowledge of Deeth's criminal character and history.

I think complete information on these points will be found in the inclosed letters, if they can be interpreted. I am sure they are letters written by Deeth to Hawk, from whom I stole them. But so far, I have been unable to find the key——

The sentence broke off near the bottom of the page. Probably the letter writer had been interrupted at this point, and had hidden the paper and the crystal. Maybe the preceding part of the letter were with the papers the girl had carried off. Maybe the writer had overlooked this page when binding up the others, and had then placed it with the crystal.

But all that didn't matter much. The thing that mattered was that the girl, crystal, letters and all, were somehow connected with the workings of the Golden Circle. That he had told the girl enough of his danger to almost identify him with the Circle. That this room might be entered at any time for what the girl had missed. That his road to safety led out of this room, out of this hotel, and away.

That was his road, yet he lingered. There were many puzzling questions!

Who was the writer of this fragmentary letter? Who was the Deeth who was of such unquestionable "criminal history and character," but who was nevertheless heading the mysterious "arrangements" which the Golden Circle was financing? Hawk was evidently a leader of the Golden Circle—perhaps *the* leader, since he seemed to control the finances. Hawk and Deeth were working together; and the girl—why, she must be working with them, too!

For the thing boiled down to this: The letters in unreadable hieroglyphics had been stolen from the man named Hawk by a previous occupant of this room, who was presumably a Federal agent. And the girl had stolen them back again.

What had become of the government agent, that he hadn't come back to his cache? Was more than one guess needed? Rush wondered. There is only one impassable wall, that between this world and the next.

Rush read the letter again. Another thought came to him. Wasn't it probable that Sheehy's expedition was the one the writer had been investigating. Why, wasn't it almost certain? By Sheehy's words, its membership was ruffianly enough to suit Deeth's "criminal character," and it was certainly connected with the Golden Circle.

What a wonderful tangle to be unraveled! What a wonderful game to sit in! And what a wonderful girl to—well, help. Perhaps!

"If I only wasn't on the run for it!"

Well, he was, and there was an end to that. But what would he do to-night?

She had missed the crystal. What effect, he wondered, would that have on her mission? What result to the unnamed "he" whose life she was trying to save? And what result to herself? They were dangerous men she was working with.

Now, he must leave that room. He must make for the hills, or maybe for the water front. He must get away.

He started for the door and paused strangely irresolute. He told himself he was tired and sleepy, as indeed he was. He postponed flight until the morning, and shoved the bed across the locked door. Under the mattress, he placed the crystal and all of his present wealth, a belt weighty with gold coins. On a chair by the bedside he placed his revolver, and lay down fully clothed.

Woe be to the person who tried to enter the room that night!

But when, at an unknown later hour, the bed began to move ever so slightly, Rush awoke from a dream so vivid that it seemed for the moment reality, of the girl standing before him with fear-smitten face and extended, pleading hands, crying out for the thing Rush had caused her to miss: "Give it to me or he dies." And staring at the slowly widening line of light between the door and the jamb, he saw that the crystal might be pushed through.

"Who's there?" he whispered, fantastically hoping to hear her reply.

A key was withdrawn sharply from the lock. A man's footsteps retreated down the hall. Instantly Rush was on his feet, revolver in hand, and dragging back the bed. He would follow the man, he would force the truth from him about the crystal and the girl, about Hawk and Deeth.

He was out in the hall. It was empty. Somewhere a door closed softly. At the same moment, Rush remembered his part. His was no hunter's rôle now. He was the hunted himself. What an absurdity! How ridiculous to risk a fracas!

With a low laugh at his own foolishness, he returned to his bed.

CHAPTER III.

DOUBLE-DEALING.

"THERE's some one to see you, Mr. Rush."

Rush had come down full of good resolutions; he would show a clean pair of heels to-day. He met the clerk's announcement therefore with impatience—likely it was Sheehy. Or it might be some other acquaintance. So many knew him in San Francisco that he hadn't dared to hide under an assumed name. He turned, and his scalp began to prickle, but not unpleasantly. No one was in the lobby that he knew. That meant one thing—danger!

"The gentleman's coming across," said the clerk.

Rush's eyes narrowed as he followed the clerk's nod. Certainly this was no acquaintance; Rush had never seen the man before. If he had, he would have remembered him.

He was one to be remembered, if only for his height; but his huge shoulders and chest and paunch were even more impressive. Yet, heavy as he was, he walked with such ease and grace that Rush glanced respectfully at the muscles that swelled the sleeves of his black swallowtail, and the legs of his tight pantaloons. But the really unforgetable thing about the man was his face —strong of jaw, nose and forehead; dead-white of complexion; and with deep-set, coal-black, curiously shaped, and certainly unscrupulous eyes.

But in a moment those eyes were warm with friendship, apparently glowing with gratitude.

"Mr. Rush?" He extended his hand. "My name is Hawk, sir—Captain Hawk. May I have the honor of wishing you good morning?"

Hawk! It was lucky that Rush had steeled himself to meet at least an emissary of the Golden Circle. Here was one of its heads, perhaps its very head, and the man, too, from whom the crystal and the letters had been stolen. Rush betrayed no surprise. But he felt a quickening of his heartbeats, a zestful racing of his blood, as his hand was enveloped in the larger one of Captain Hawk. A warning signal, that—his old reaction to peril.

"I'm obliged to you for the wish, Captain Hawkes."

"Hawk, sir, without the plural. The other is more common, sir. My family——" Eloquence was in the pause. "But it's about that I called to see you —the honor of my family, my daughter. I wish to thank you, Mr. Rush, for respecting both last night."

"Your daughter?" Hawk questioned easily. But inwardly he was laughing. That girl, this man's daughter! Impossible, preposterous! But Rush couldn't have said exactly why.

"Yes, sir, my daughter," replied Captain Hawk. "Will you be seated?"

He indicated a chair, and Rush found himself sinking into it without any real volition on his part. Also, he felt himself being compelled to resist a certain insidious liking for the man. Certainly Captain Hawk was a leader, and an opponent fit for any man's steel.

"I have reprimanded my daughter severely," Hawk went on. "It was unfair to herself and to our family name to place herself in a position so open to misconstruction. Fortunately, she had to deal with a gentleman. I think she explained the circumstances."

"She didn't need to," said Rush shortly.

Hawk stirred in his chair.

"The attitude of a gentleman, sir. Of course, my Alice bears her character in her face." Hawk's tone when he mentioned her name was unctuous, but not with a fatherly note, and Rush had to fight no more against liking the man.

"But I thought she told you that she had merely come back to the room for something or hers."

"Oh, maybe she did." Clearly the girl had gone to Hawk; had told him at least part of what had happened in Rush's room.

"Exactly. But the more credit is due you for not requiring the explanation. Have you breakfasted, sir?"

"No, but I breakfast late."

"Then will you join me at the bar?"

Rush would not, with thanks. He never drank before eating. Obviously Hawk was fishing for something. Rush wouldn't help him. Clever as Hawk seemed, however, Rush felt that if his assassination was the object of Hawk's call, he couldn't have kept some hint of it out of his eyes. Perhaps Hawk was so highly placed in the Circle that such a commonplace matter wouldn't have come to his notice. Perhaps Rush was justified in his hope that his circuitous flight had put the Circle off the track, that they weren't looking for him in San Francisco, yet.

"Ah!" For just an instant, Cap-

tain Hawk allowed his annoyance at Rush's refusal to be seen. "Then I'll be taking my departure."

He started to rise, then settled down again.

"But I'd almost forgotten, sir—a trivial matter, such as one does forget. My daughter requested me to ask for something which she overlooked last night."

"She did?" queried Rush unhelpfully.

"Yes, sir. A girl's trinket, Mr. Rush. Really worthless, but—— A sort of magic reading glass, upon which she places great store. You may have noticed its peculiar properties." Hawk smiled indulgently. "Or did you find it at all?"

Rush smiled back innocently.

"Yes, I found it, an' it does seem to have peculiar properties, as you call 'em. The property of attractin' burglars, for one thing. Another party had a try at it last night, after your daughter left. Tried to break into my room for it."

Rush felt that Hawk made a mistake then. He controlled his features too well. Normally, if he hadn't known of the attempted entry, he would at least have expressed surprise. But he only laughed lightly.

"Oh, I assure you, you're mistaken. Nobody else would be interested in it. It's just a womanish fancy. I believe a fortune teller sold it to her, with some nonsensical story. However, since you have it——"

"I'll give it back, of course," said Rush, looking squarely at Hawk. In those curiously shaped, unreadable, almost opaque eyes, a great relief flamed for an instant. Rush's reaction to that relief was unexpected even to himself. Suddenly he wanted to quench it; he was filled with the zest of the mental fencer, too—a desire to match wits with this man; and above all, to see the girl again, to know that she was safe.

"To your daughter herself," he added clearly.

Captain Hawk's eyelids flickered with disappointment. Then he drew himself up proudly.

"But, sir, as her father, surely I——"

"Oh, sure you've the right to it," agreed Rush easily. "An' it isn't worth foolin' about, of course. Only, maybe I want to meet your daughter again. Maybe I take this way of doin' it. Maybe—a whole lot of things." And Rush smiled as stupidly and as stubbornly as he could.

But his eyes were busy all the while. Hawk's active brain was working, too. Very much, Rush wanted to know what quickly conceived plan to handle the situation caused Hawk to relax forgivingly and beam on him.

"I think I understand, sir. You are really too courteous to make your meaning clear. You want to make sure I'm actually her father—that the trinket gets back to its owner. Very good, sir. My opinion of you remains unchanged. I will take you to her."

Hawk started to rise.

"Just a minute, captain," put in Rush. "I'll have to go after it. It's in my room."

Which statement, of course, was untrue. Rush had the crystal in his pocket. Though its value was wholly unknown to him, he wasn't going to risk losing it to another hotel prowler.

But that flicker in Hawk's face of a rapidly formulated plan had warned Rush. Hawk had determined to get the crystal from him by trickery. Well—it would be a keen game.

He got his key from the clerk and returned to his room. And now was the time, if he valued his own safety, to make a backstairs escape. Whatever Hawk's plans, if Rush went with him, he would likely be going straight into a rendezvous of the Golden Circle. And he had killed one of them; he was supposed to have much of their plans, a

roster of their principal members—certainly enough to condemn him to death if he was recognized. Rush reminded himself of all that, and that he was making a run for it; but he knew it was no use.

When he got through with Hawk, he would run!

Now his dream recurred to him, the girl pleading for the crystal. Memories of her parting smile warmed him, and the challenge that Hawk presented rode him hard. So, after a few minutes, he was again in the lobby, and with his key, he turned in a small package to the clerk.

But when a little later he was seated in a two-wheeled calash with Captain Hawk, something of his zest left him, and uneasiness took the place. They were bound for the water front. Captain Hawk's daughter was on his ship, anchored in the bay. And such a ship was a bit too remote from ordinary human affairs—too convenient a place for secret deeds—to suit Rush.

Hawk, too, seemed more and more forbidding. In the silence that ensued, something evil seemed to flow from him, making Rush's spirits droop. Rush would have liked to talk, to draw him out, but the turmoil of the streets was too great. It was the noisiest city in the world.

Wheels rumbled and horses' hoofs drummed on planks and cobblestones; omnibuses and drays creaked and rattled; there was the continual shouting of newsboys, bootblacks and cigar boys, and the rival exhortations of street preachers and thimblerig gamblers. "Steam paddies" roared by, emptying the sand hills into the bay, and everywhere was the racket of hammers, axes, saws, mallets and steam shovels; San Francisco was being built. No use to try conversation.

So Rush studied the crowd itself. Never was so strange a mixture! Gorgeously dressed Spaniards and Mexicans; aloof and lost-looking Kanakas, Moors and Turks; Chinese sidling by like phantoms, hands in flowing sleeves. Of types of the conquering race, there was every variety: sinister "Sydney ducks," swaggering New York "shoulder strikers," long-haired trappers from the Rockies, lean and fever-haunted Southern crackers, hard-fisted lumberjacks from Maine rivers, Indian fighters from the Western plains, shrewd, commercial Yankees.

It wouldn't be hard, thought Rush, to separate such a state from the Union. He had been indifferent to that movement, like many others. It hadn't seemed to touch him at all. But now, riding with the representative of the Golden Circle, Captain Hawk, he felt inclined to take sides. Underneath the man's suavity and unquestionable power, there was something alien and monstrous. Rush couldn't think what it was. He couldn't at all explain his persistent impression that Hawk was different from other men.

They came to Central Wharf. A ship from up the Sacramento had just debarked a load of miners, young, strong, eager-eyed and vociferous; and as they swaggered up the pier, the proprietors of the small shops, fruit stands, shabby saloons and gambling houses that lined the sides, set up a clamor for custom. Through the tumult, the driver made his way; and at the end of the pier, Captain Hawk and Rush got out.

"We'll take a shore boat from here," said Hawk.

One was waiting for them, with the name *Flying Spray* on its bow. Two villainous-looking men laid hold of the oars as Hawk and Rush scrambled down into it. And his feeling of dread returned to Rush. Now he wished he had not come.

Nor did that feeling lessen as they shoved off, and presently laid their course toward a large and handy-looking clipper ship that swung at anchor a little

to the north of Yerba Bueno Island, midway between San Francisco and the Alameda shore.

Still most solicitous of Rush's comfort was Captain Hawk; and most courteous, as when he insisted that Rush, as his guest, should precede him up the ship's ladder. With a steadying hand on Rush's arm, he led him across the slightly swaying, deserted deck; then stepped aside to let Rush precede him again.

Afterward, Rush wondered at himself. Later still, when he discovered how Hawk swayed other men, his wonder diminished. From the first, he must unconsciously have been very much under the influence of Hawk's powerful will.

So now, though something warned Rush of danger, he stepped in front of Hawk and started down the ladder. But as he did so, he listened, with all his faculties alert.

Barely audible was the sound behind him of a swift intaking of breath—such a sound a man makes as he poises himself for a blow. Rush whirled when he heard it; and though he could not escape the descending fist, he did probably escape death by the movement. For Hawk's fist had come lead-weighted from the side pocket of his coat, and he'd struck for the base of Rush's brain. Receiving the blow on his left temple, Rush knew nothing of the bruises he received as he tumbled down the ladder.

But his last thought before oblivion was a mocking one. So the crystal was worth murder! Well, Hawk had disappointment coming.

CHAPTER IV.

HALF CONFIDENCES.

"WELL, what are *you* in for?"

Rush was just struggling back from unconsciousness when he heard that question. Though he was glad to know he was still alive, the jesting tone irritated him. Probably the irritation speeded up his recovery somewhat.

But it was a minute or so yet, before he opened his eyes. He might as well learn what he could, before revealing his returning competence. There was a faint sough of water, a near-by sound of human breathing, a wallowing movement of the hard surface upon which he was lying. He was in the hold of the ship.

"Come! No use playing possum. Nobody here but a friend, I hope. Come out of it, and let's have your company."

Rush, who was lying on his back, looked up at that, and stared straight into the face of a young man sitting cross-legged a few feet away, with his back against a bulkhead. Here was the owner of the merry voice. A good-looking young man he was, dressed in a long-skirted black coat with a salmon-colored satin waistcoat, black pantaloons of the latest mode, and a many-colored cravat fastened with a gleaming pin. Carefully tended whiskers curled under the chin of his round, cherubic face, from which a pair of engaging blue eyes glowed with great good humor.

"That's better," he said. "Solitude likes me not. You're very welcome, sir."

"Thanks," said Rush, with a rather wry smile. He stirred weakly, whereupon the other was instantly on his feet and helping him to sit up, bracing Rush's back against the outer wall of the ship. Then the young man resumed his position, and sat regarding Rush calmly.

"H'm! They banked you up proper," he observed. "And now to the previous question. What *are* you in for?"

The laughing good will in the voice robbed the query of impertinence, but certainly Rush wasn't answering fully.

"Just for impoliteness—lettin' an older man walk behind me—damn him!" Rush felt of the bump on his temple.

"And I'm in for another breach of good form—taking a drink with a stranger—and damn him, too! He was Captain Hawk, whom I suppose you're referring to, also. Come! That mutual damning is good for an introduction, isn't it? I'm Clyde Linsdale, at your service."

"Harry Rush, at yours, if it means gettin' out of here." And Rush looked curiously around at the cell-like compartment.

Linsdale smiled quizzically at the suggestion.

"To get out, with all my heart, if the thing's possible," said he; "but though stone walls do not a prison make, these wooden ones seem a different matter. So failing in getting out, my wish is to endure cheerfully."

Rush studied him doubtfully. This cheerful business might be overdone, and Rush *had* to get out. He had to get out to preserve his self-respect, for one thing. Why, he'd been led like an ox to the poleax! His shame at that was greater than his anger at Hawk—but he had something to do there, too. However, unless he moved quickly, Hawk would do something to him. Rush now discovered that his money belt was still on him. This meant no scruples against thievery on Hawk's part; it meant that Rush had been thrown in there to await further action, probably a quizzing concerning the missing crystal. It wasn't pleasant to think what Hawk would do to him when he refused to tell its whereabouts. Nor, for that matter, when Hawk discovered who he really was.

Yes, he had to get out. But how?

Never did a cell seem more escape proof. By the soughing outside, the deck which formed its floor was well below the water line. The shape of the curve in the outer wall indicated the cell to be well forward in the ship's bow. What little light there was came from a small porthole high up in the side. The bulkheads, which formed three sides of the cell, seemed as solid as the ship's wall itself, and the one wooden door in the forward end seemed as solid as the bulkheads.

But Rush had to get out.

"That's all right, bein' cheerful," said he. " But ain't it a bit previous to talk of failin'?"

"For you, maybe. Just wait till you've beat your head against these walls so long as I have."

"How long's that?"

"About twenty-four hours by the sun, but Methuselah's lifetime by my boredom—till you came in."

"Thanks!" said Rush dryly. "You say Captain Hawk drugged you?"

"Nope. But one of his minions did."

"Any idea why?" asked Rush carelessly.

Linsdale cocked his head sidewise, and grinned a plain warning that he wasn't going to answer *that* question seriously.

"Shanghaied for a trip around the Horn, likely. I've heard good sailors are scarce."

"Like myself." Rush matched Linsdale's tone.

But his own words awakened an idea about Linsdale. Like himself? Why not? Wasn't it very probable that the same cause lay back of both their imprisonments? That Linsdale was connected with the crystal and the letters and the—— By George! He had it! He knew who Linsdale was—almost! But how to make sure?

Rush reflected a moment.

"Have you tried launchin' a message?" he asked suddenly.

"A message?" Linsdale looked blank.

"I mean, through the porthole. Somebody might pick it up."

"Not much chance, but I might've tried it if I'd a bottle to launch it in."

"Say, I think I can fix that. And I know a certain party that'll raise blue blazes——"

Apparently very excited, Rush started his right hand toward the front of his coat. Then he stopped, with a sharp exclamation.

"Lord, my right arm's crippled. They must've twisted it or something. You write a message for me, will you? You got paper an' pencil?"

Linsdale glanced at Rush curiously, but produced a notebook and pencil. Whereupon, Rush dictated an appeal for help to an entirely fictitious party.

"Put it in that the bearer's to be paid ten dollars. That'll help speed it. I think I can manage to sign it." And with seeming carelessness Rush held out his hand for the paper.

One glance told him that luck hadn't entirely deserted him. Grinning broadly, he handed the paper and pencil back to Linsdale.

"Now we're introduced right," he said, "an' we can talk. You're the man of that confounded crystal."

"The crystal!" Gone was Linsdale's lackadaisical manner. He stared at Rush in a mixture of anger, amazement, and alarm. "What do you know——" He checked the question.

"Yes, the crystal. That there letter was a trick. I'm sorry, but I had to get a look at your writin'. My arm's O. K., an' I haven't any way of launchin' that paper."

"I suspected that. But your reasons, sir?"

"Why, I'll tell you my reason," Rush explained amiably. "I wanted your writin' to compare with some other writin' I'd seen. An' it's the same. You won't blame me. Remember what you wrote about them hen-scratchin' letters that you couldn't read? 'Written by Deeth to Hawk, from whom I stole them.' So you see, we all play tricks."

"Tell me," said Linsdale, "has Hawk got 'em back?"

"I ain't sure about the letters, but I guess he has. I do know about the crystal, because—— But I'd better just tell you from the beginnin'."

And Rush started in from the moment he surprised the girl in his room. He even punished himself by suggesting his efforts to force the truth from her. Linsdale glared angrily at him when he told that. But the mounting fear on his face was stronger than his anger.

"It's Alice!" cried Linsdale, in a voice of agony. "It's my—— But that doesn't matter. She's trying to save me. And Hawk——"

"Yes, Hawk called her Alice, too," put in Rush, as Linsdale paused. "Said she was his daughter."

"His daughter! Why, that mongrel wants——" Again Linsdale broke off.

"Say, suppose you tell *me* just a little bit," suggested Rush.

Linsdale checked his own excitement, and glanced at Rush searchingly.

"All right! We've got to work together to get out of here. I'll tell you what I can. And you seem to know a lot already."

His tone suggested that Rush knew too much.

"You've guessed I'm a Federal agent. Hawk's head and organizer of the Golden Circle, I believe. I've been investigating him for a month. I'm convinced he's in a dirty business with that man, Deeth, who is—— Well, if it could be exposed, I think it would go a long way toward wrecking the whole Golden Circle organization. And the letters I stole—they'd expose it, if I could only read them.

"I was trying to puzzle 'em out at the Golden Bear. Hawk wouldn't look for me there, I thought. But I couldn't make anything out of them. The crystal's used, I feel sure, in reading 'em, but even under the crystal, they're just a crazy hotch-potch. But they're from Deeth to Hawk, and they—— Well, never mind. I got woozy, working on 'em all night. Then I started that report you found, but I didn't finish it. I

wanted breakfast and a drink. So I hid everything and went out, and you know what happened to me then. Hawk had trailed me, somehow, and his man did the rest."

"But they didn't find anything on you," suggested Rush.

"No, and that's the devil of it. Hawk must've gone after Alice, then. He guessed she'd know; and she did. She knew where I was staying, and she knows my pet hiding place, too. He probably told her that I'd be killed, if the papers and crystal weren't given up—probably posed as an intermediary trying to save me. He'd make that stick. You see, even Alice doesn't know that I've been investigating him. I've tried to keep her out of it all.

"Anyway, she got the papers and missed the crystal. You got the crystal, and Hawk got you. But, Rush, here's what's worrying me: he's got Alice working with him, and, damn it! he's gone on her."

"I noticed something—when he spoke of her," said Rush.

Linsdale glanced sharply at Rush, as though he resented Rush's understanding.

"Well then—you see," he went on reluctantly, "of course, she can't stand him for a minute. But unless I'm all in the wrong, this boat's scheduled to sail within twenty-four hours on a damnably dangerous voyage, and Hawk intends to be on board. And if he can trap Alice——"

Linsdale's face was actually white with dread. In Rush's strained eyes, Linsdale read a similar emotion; and the resentment Linsdale felt at that was very plain to read. He seemed to gulp it down with an effort.

"So you see——" It was a reluctant appeal for help.

"I've been seein' right along," said Rush.

His eyes were very bright; he was keyed up, tense, almost enjoying himself. Running away had been no fun after all; being sensible wasn't any fun; and now he could conscientiously abandon that line of action. He and Hawk for it; and let Hawk have his five thousand odd, or maybe ten thousand. He was Rush of the Durango, Nicaragua Rush, Hurry-up Rush, and "Fortune's Fool." Being a fool was fun, anyway.

"Don't you worry. We'll get outa here."

"I hope so," Linsdale said doubtfully. "If it was anybody else we were up against—but there's something damnable about Hawk. Damnably clever, I mean. Take that crystal, for instance. I had it safe, and now——"

"There's usually a way," Rush grinned. "Hawk ain't got all the wits in the world corralled an' hog tied. Take that crystal, if you like. You think he's got it. What do you suppose I went to my room for, before leavin' the hotel with him?"

"Your room!" Linsdale groaned. "You left it in your room? He has it by now, all right. Why, he can get anything from the Golden Bear. Searching a room's nothing."

"But he ain't searchin' the United States mail, is he? When I turned in my key, I turned in a letter, too, addressed to A. B. Cedric, general delivery—an easy name to remember. The crystal was in that package. An' there was a mail collection in fifteen minutes."

CHAPTER V.

HEADS, I WIN.

"THERE'S usually a way," Rush had said. "There's got to be a way," he said a little later, as the apparent difficulties of escape increased. They had no arms, no tools to work with; escape through the porthole was impossible, and the heavy door was double-barred on the outside. Though Rush had seen no one when he crossed the deck, every now and then they could hear the voices

of men who would undoubtedly investigate any noise they might make. And at any time, Hawk might appear to attempt to force from Rush information concerning the whereabouts of the crystal.

But hours passed and nothing happened, while for the prisoners the march of time slackened to a crawl, minute after minute dragging on. Mostly, Rush sat quiet on the deck, trying to "think through," as he termed it, while the more nervous Linsdale paced up and down their cell, three steps and a turn and back again, as impatient and worry-ridden as he'd been philosophically at ease before Rush had brought his news.

Rush, too, grew tense and irritable—as much, he decided, from the pangs of hunger as anything else. He'd had no breakfast, and it was now well past noon.

"I've heard of people that think best on an empty stomach, but I'm not one of them," he grumbled finally. "When do we eat, d'ye know?"

"I had breakfast a little before you came, and yesterday they sent a meal down in the middle of the afternoon."

"Praise Heaven we've got some connection with—— Say, who brings it?"

"A big fellow with a face like a devil's nightmare. That's all I know about him."

"Can't we jump him, eh?"

"Could if he'd only come inside the cell; but he doesn't—just opens the door, pokes the food in and goes away, one hand near his gun all the time. This morning, just to see if I could get close to him, I tried to stay near the door, but he ordered me back."

"H'm! He'll be even more careful with the two of us. And yet—he's got to be our chance, 'cause there isn't any other. Some way to get him into the cell—— Say, I've got it. Why the devil didn't I think of that before. Listen, Linsdale!"

Rush talked rapidly for a minute or two, outlining a plan.

"Plain bribery mightn't work," he concluded. "But curiosity killed the cat, and greed has overthrown kings, I've heard. Fear isn't to be sneezed at as a persuader, either. We'll see what a combination of 'em will do to your nightmare of a guard."

And Rush began unbuttoning his clothing, preparatory to removing the money belt next his skin, softly whistling the while, partly in sheer relief at the prospect of action, partly to hide the reluctance with which he prepared to risk that which he might sorely need.

"Two thousand dollars ain't so much, but we can pyramid it a bit with our talk," he said, as he began to empty the belt.

"He's coming," said Linsdale a little later, and both heard slow steps.

The two men retired to the end of their cell farthest from the door, and squatted on their heels facing each other, each with a heap of twenty-dollar gold coins in front of him.

Matching those coins, they sat there as the door opened. Intent on their game, they seemed, so that neither noticed as the guard shoved bread and meat and a pitcher of water through the partially opened door. He looked to see where they were, and his scampish eyes widened. Motionless and silent as a post, he stood there watching them.

"That's two thousand I've lost." Rush's tone was rueful.

"My luck," said Linsdale cheerfully. "I match you. Heads! And heads it is!" He raked over his winnings.

"Matchin' you," said Rush. The two coins clinked together in the air and rang on the floor with music for a miser's ears. "My win," said Rush.

"This is slow," Rush complained. "Make it a hundred a throw. An I O U for eighty more with each twenty-dollar coin. Losin's to be settled when we get off here."

"We'd get mixed up," objected Linsdale. "We started with four thousand each, and that ought to be enough to play with. If I clean you, though, I'll give you revenge on shore."

"On shore—when?"

"Whenever we get there. To-morrow, if the customs seize this ship to-night."

"You think they will."

"To-night or to-morrow morning—— Heads, I win!"

"A bargain!" said Rush. "And if I clean you, I'll do the same. Ah, I got you that time!"

Fast as they could plank down the yellow coins, they played, seemingly as absorbed as ever gamblers were. The guard was inside the door by now, creeping forward like a cat, his fascinated eyes following the hands of the two prisoners, as they flashed from the neatly piled stacks of gold to the deck and back again.

Greed increased on his face when the larger sums were mentioned. Doubt and fear mingled with the greed when the seizure of the ship by the customs was mentioned as a thing assured. All the while his features were hardening with the growth of a murderous resolve.

He moistened his lips. His hand went to his revolver. Stealthily he withdrew it. Rush waited through the prolonged moment of that withdrawal, knowing it was not as a firearm that the guard would use the weapon. He'd want no noise, to bring the rest of the crew. A minute or two would be needed to secrete the gold, before calling for help and telling his tale of attempted escape and its result.

Standing to one side and a little to the rear of Linsdale, the guard started to club his weapon. Rush admired his volatile companion then; for with death preparing behind him, his voice calling winnings and losses altered not a whit. He waited for Rush, for with the slightest flicker of the eye upward, Rush could watch the guard.

Now!

Rush leaped, with a very explosion of muscle. His left hand went to the guard's throat, his right caught the descending revolver and thrust it upward. Linsdale was only an instant behind him. Around the body he caught the guard, and tripped him and threw him down.

"One sound and we kill," whispered Rush, tightening his grip on the guard's sinewy throat.

But somehow the guard, an extremely powerful man, had managed to reverse the revolver again, so that his finger rested on the trigger of it. He could do no physical damage, for Rush controlled its aim; but all the same, everybody's fate was dependent on his index finger, which now slowly began to contract. From this and his starting eyes, Rush caught a warning which seemed to mean: "Let me speak or I'll shoot." Perforce, Rush relaxed his hold a little.

"One yelp or one shot and you're dead yerselves," said the guard. "But I'll make neither. Me buckoes, I want that gold."

"Take it, then," said Rush. "But we're goin' to bind an' gag you."

"You try one move to do it!" threatened the other. "Think I'm goin' to be caught here bound! With the gold on me or off me, it wouldn't matter. It'd be the black bottle for me, I tell you. You gotta leave me free. Now, lissen!

"How are you to know I'll play ye no tricks, yer askin'. Easy. Don't ye see, I want ye to get away. If ye don't ye'll tell yer story, an' I'm finished. Just to prove that, I'll tell ye there's a boat lyin' in the water, aport. There's a guard in it, but you can have him scragged and be shovin' off by the time I get that gold back in yer belt, an' the belt around me. Then I've me own idee for a get-away."

Rush hesitated only an instant.

"That sounds reasonable enough, at that. Come on," he said to Linsdale.

Quickly, they were outside the door, between the narrowing bows of the ship.

A square patch of daylight showed at the top of a ladder. Up the ladder Rush ran, followed closely by Linsdale. At the top he stopped a moment, with his head projecting, staring aft along the deck. It seemed empty save for four men squatting midship, intent on some kind of a card game. He beckoned Linsdale to follow him.

Across the deck to the port rail, creeping serpentwise. A glance down into the water. There, aft a little, at the bottom of the ladder up which Hawk and he had climbed, was a boat, with a man sitting in the stern.

Rush followed the rail around to the top of the ladder. He took another look. The man seemed to be drowsing. His chin was resting on his chest, his body swayed slightly with the cradling motion of the boat. Rush got to his feet —put a leg over the rail.

"Hi! Hey!" Startled cries from the card players sounded behind him. A shot rang out.

But Rush had already leaped, straight down upon the shoulders of the sleeping man.

The boat rocked precariously, The boatman's breath left his lungs with a gasp, and he woke up in the water. The boat reeled again. Linsdale had landed in it—was casting off the rope from the prow.

"An oar!" snapped Rush, seizing one himself.

As the boat was released, Rush thrust out with all his strength against the ship's side. They slipped away. Then Rush and Linsdale were pulling hard on the oars, but with the knowledge that they were still within easy revolver shot, and that their lives depended upon the clemency or prudence of those on the ship. More hope from their prudence. Other ships were anchored near, and in the absence of instructions, they might well hesitate to begin a fusillade which would later have to be explained.

That probably saved them, for all that followed the fugitives were imprecations. When they got out of revolver shot, they squared around for Central Wharf and San Francisco.

"That wasn't so hard," said Rush. "But, gee, I'd hate to be in the shoes of that guard fellow, when Hawk gets him."

"In his shoes? He hasn't any," chuckled Linsdale. "He figured everybody'd be aport, staring after us—figured right, too. Look at him!"

Following Linsdale's eyes, Rush saw a figure clad only in a singlet slip into the water from a rope dropped from the starboard rail, well forward. The man dived and came up at a little distance, dived again, and again came up, and so made progress shoreward.

"And good progress, too," said Rush, "considerin' he's carryin' about thirty pounds of gold around his middle."

Linsdale glanced curiously at Rush. It seemed to surprise him that Rush did not suggest that they could easily retake that gold. It would have surprised him more had he known that in that belt was every dollar that Rush possessed.

Indeed, that gold-laden swimmer presented a temptation to Rush. More than ever, now, he needed whatever help money might give him. Hawk now added to his list of active enemies, on account of the crystal and his escape. Also, Hawk would soon learn that he had been marked for death on other counts, and would speed up the efforts of the Circle to find him. And the murderously minded swimmer, traitor to his trust, deserved no consideration. But Rush's creed did; a bargain was a bargain, and so he rowed on.

But an hour later, Rush was almost repenting his virtue. True, ordinary

square-dealing seemed a rare and costly thing. For Linsdale had seemingly duped and certainly deserted him.

The two men landed at Central Wharf, and Linsdale proposed that they go directly to the post office and recover the crystal. "Then we'll look up Alice," he said. Rush would have sought the girl first, but he had to agree. How did he know where to look for her?

On the way to the post office, they passed the Alaska Exchange. Rush was surprised when Linsdale excused himself, asked Rush to wait, and darted into the office building. His chief was there, Linsdale said, and he wanted to get instructions.

Linsdale was gone long enough for many instructions to have been given him. He was gone long enough for many other things to have happened, such as a trip of a messenger to the post office and back. But Rush never thought of that possibility until, Linsdale having finally returned, they reached the post office, and were told that there was no mail for A. B. Cedric.

Some one had called for it, and got the crystal. Suspicion stirred in Rush, then, but Linsdale lamented the loss with such seeming sincerity that Rush put it aside.

It might easily be, as Linsdale suggested, that Hawk had purchased from the hotel clerk information about the package Rush had mailed, and had secured the crystal himself.

Then Linsdale had a letter to write, instantly. He became busy at a desk, and Rush went to a window, and stood looking out upon the street, filled with hurrying men. Somber and dismal the city now seemed, for the day was passing, and a thick fog was filling the streets like a flood. Rush grew excited, nervous, depressed. Somewhere in that murk, probably in terrible peril, was the girl he couldn't forget. Linsdale, delaying again, had seemingly forgotten her.

What was the meaning of it? Had Linsdale feigned his anxiety on the ship? The girl had risked enough for him, surely! Another suspicion occurred to Rush, based partly on Linsdale's manner since they'd landed. Having used Rush, was he now trying to lose him?

With the thought, Rush turned, and found corroboration. Linsdale was gone from the desk. A minute later, Rush knew he was gone from the post office, too.

Rush grew white with anger. So it was for that he had freed Linsdale and made himself penniless! It was for such a man the girl had hinted she would willingly die! It was her love for him that was enabling Hawk to use her and befool her!

Very appreciative Linsdale would be! Much help she might expect from him! Rush smiled bitterly.

From whom, then, could she expect help? From Rush, himself a fugitive, in danger of his life, empty of pocket, and in absolute ignorance of where to look for her?

"By gum! Am I so ignorant, though?" Rush brightened. A chance!

A chance was all he needed.

After a while, keeping as much as possible in the shadows, that no eye of the Golden Circle might fall on him, Rush made his way to the barroom of the Golden Bear. There he bought one drink, thanked Heaven and the Bear for the unlimited free lunch the purchase entitled him to, and settled himself to wait for Timothy Sheehy, and what he figured was another entrance to the whole affair.

CHAPTER VI.

A LIVING DEAD MAN.

BUT Oi'm not goin' wit' 'em," said Sheehy. "Oi wint over to-day to the gatherin' place. Oi wanted to see, meself, were they Bear Staters or not. They're not, nor nothin' else but scum

av the earth. Not fit for an honest filibusterer to be mixed up wit', nor even a dacint pirate. 'Tis but a few av the best of 'em Oi've seen in town."

"But I want you to go. And you will. Let me tell you——"

In a few minutes, Rush had told him everything that had happened the last twenty-four hours. At the end Sheehy's eyes were glowing.

"By all the saints, the ould Rush! Ye've been wanderin' lost, boy. An' now, if 'tis a good woman—— But Oi'm wit' ye, lad!"

"It's the only chance I see to get back in the game," said Rush. "An' it looks like a good chance to me. Hawk is puttin' up the Golden Circle money for some bunch of cutthroats. His bunch is sailin' to-morrow, accordin' to Linsdale. Well, so's yours. They must be the same. And if Hawk——"

"Whist wit' your nadeless talkin'. Oi can see through a knot hole as well as the next. Join them birds av prey over on Yerba Buena, an' ye'll find your Hawk, all roight."

"Yerba Buena! Better an' better! The *Flyin' Spray's* anchored right near. But can you get me in?"

"Oi can try it. Oi've not yet resigned, an' the word was passed to-day for us all to be gatherin' in. We've not much toime, so come on wit' ye to the water front."

"Just a minute. Hawk got my gun. I've another in my room, an' some ammunition. Wait here."

When Rush returned, Sheehy was emptying a whisky glass. Sheehy, it appeared as he came to his feet, though not drunk, was on the border line. He swayed a little as he walked, and roared out greetings on his way to the door.

The hunted Rush foresaw a dangerously conspicuous progress to the water front. But the way Sheehy led him, down Washington, past Telegraph Hill, through a district where laughter, songs and curses, and the uproar of dancing and fighting poured out from nearly every building, a man would have had to be very boisterous indeed to attract attention.

It was a very whirlpool of life, where all grades of humanity from every quarter of the world met and seethed—only, as they descended toward the water front, the lower grades became more prevalent. The streets grew narrower and muddier, the saloons and gambling houses cheaper and more murderous looking. Then they came to a district of crazy alleys flanked by rickety, sagging tenements and hotels, once the rendezvous of the criminal "Hounds," who had openly sought control of San Francisco. Now it was the spawning place of a more dangerous breed still—"shoulder-strikers," ballot-box stuffers, assassins, thieves, incendiaries. They were as well organized as the Hounds had been; and better protected, some said.

"We'll meet some from here to-night," said the rapidly sobering Sheehy. "Oi haven't seen our leader, but Oi've heard he's the king-pin av this here district. Loikely the Deeth you mentioned.

"Oi've heard something else about him, too," went on Sheehy, after a minute. "Deeth—death—'tis mixed up, but it seems that last should be his name."

"Now, what do you mean by that, Sheehy?"

"How should Oi know?"

Sheehy's apparently maundering words had recalled to Rush a very weird story. There was a man living in the shadows somewhere whose present name might be Deeth but whose name could appropriately be Death—Rush would know him if he saw him. But let that go till then. Now they were approaching the "made" water front.

Here were lots sunk below water level, filled with stagnant water and heaps of rubbish, and now and then a ramshackle house on stilts above the

refuse. A dismal place it was, and Rush was glad when they came out upon the staggered planking of a wharf reaching out into the bay.

"This way," said Sheehy. "Oi've a boat hid here. An' 'tis ho! for the animale isle. Ye'll find it that. Plain beasties they are."

It was not yet quite dark. Through a break in the fog, Rush glimpsed a tall, white clipper slipping into anchorage, canvas full spread, crew and passengers leaning over the taffrail. A minute, and it was lost in the fog bank again. Right past the end of the wharf, a sloop glided silently. In its bow were hunters in fur caps, and armed with slender rifles; its stern was weighted down with deer and bear meat from the Marin Hills.

"The ould bay looks populous to-night," said Sheehy. "'Tis no matter. Wait a minute."

Down a certain pile on the northern side of the wharf, he slid bear-fashion. Rush thought he was going into the water, but with his feet, he caught a rope, and juggled a small rowboat out from under the wharf. Rush followed him into it.

"Shove away, now," Sheehy said.

And in a minute they were at the oars.

"Can you find the island, with the fog an' all?" asked Rush, as the scattered lights of San Francisco diminished and died in the fog.

"Not many min could, but Oi've a since av direction, as ye should know. D'ye remember that toime in Nicaragua when—— 'Ase up! Let me swing her around. There—straight away, now."

Then they went on, in silence broken only by the slightly creaking rowlocks and the gentle sound of their oars in the water. What was ahead of them? Danger. Desperate men. Hidden pitfalls, probably. And the crystal again, Rush hoped; for everything seemed centered on that crystal. Hawk and Deeth and maybe another peep into the workings of the Golden Circle. This time, Rush wouldn't close his eyes. This time he wouldn't run, unless——

A voice on the water! A man's voice, coming from somewhere to the right and a little astern. A ghostly, bodiless voice, it seemed; for the night and the fog hid everything. Instantly both Rush and Sheehy poised their oars.

The voice ceased. The sibilant ripple of water along the sides died into silence as the boat lost momentum. From astern and to the right came the splashing of other oars.

Then the invisible man spoke again. Rush bent his head and checked his own breathing to listen. For he was certainly listening to Hawk's deep-chested voice.

Yet it wasn't so strange, Rush reflected, during the pause that again followed Hawk's speech. To-night was the time for the gathering on Yerba Buena of the birds of prey, as Sheehy called them. To-morrow, according to Linsdale, the *Flying Spray* was to sail. Hawk's presence in the boat on the way to Yerba Buena was a perfectly natural thing; nor would it be at all extraordinary if his companion was she who Rush prayed it would be.

The sound of oars came steadily nearer. Then, indeed, Rush exulted; for he heard the girl's clear voice, pitched to a doubtful, troubled key.

"But if he's not there, I'll not give up the letters."

"Why talk like that?" Hawk returned, with a hint of resentment. "Haven't I promised you he would be?"

Another pause. The boat was now abreast of them, to their right; it was hard to say how far away.

'I don't quite understand." Again that doubtful, discouraged note in the girl's voice. "I did what you asked me to, as well as I could. It wasn't my fault that I lost the—the glass thing—whatever it was. They should be satisfied, whoever they are that had Clyde

imprisoned. And you say they are, that Clyde's released, that he's in your home. Why is that? Why can't he come to me, instead of me going to him? You must be keeping something from me. I've felt so all along."

"Well, to be frank, I have," Hawk replied. "That is, I've been doing it this afternoon. I didn't want to distress you, but Clyde's been injured. On my word! not seriously," Hawk hastened to say, as the girl cried out sharply. "Only slightly, I assure you. That's why I wanted you to see him before I told you."

"Oh, hurry, then. Hurry!"

The cadence of the powerful oar strokes increased, and the invisible boat drew ahead so rapidly that it seemed Hawk must almost have sensed the danger lurking so near him.

Danger indeed, for with the girl's last word, Rush dipped his oar, eager to speed after Hawk. But at the beginning of the stroke he hesitated. Was that the thing to do?

"Give way, lad! Phat ye waitin' for?" Sheehy's voice was impatient, incautiously loud.

"S-sh!" Rush leaned over and whispered. "You understand who they are?"

"Am Oi a fool? Sure I understand. Have after 'em."

"But it ain't so simple. How'll she know who we are? She'll think we're harbor pirates—help him fight us. An' shootin' in this dark—how can we tell her from him? Hadn't we better just follow?"

"Maybe so, but——"

"Listen!"

"To phwat?"

"No—nothin'." For the face of the bay was now as absolutely silent as though it was the world's first night.

Hawk had taken warning, probably from Sheehy's first impatient ejaculation. As they had hidden from him in the impenetrable darkness, he was now hiding from them.

Not two hundred yards away, Hawk rested on his oars, but they could never find him. Though they knew his general direction, if they started rowing they wouldn't know it long, for Hawk would be drifting all the time on the current that flowed out through the Golden Gate. They wouldn't know when to turn to follow him. They might pass within an oar's length, without seeing the other boat. And the drifting fog itself would be no more silent than the drifting boat, unless Rush could somehow prove to the girl that they were friends. How could he do that? He didn't even know her last name. She knew nothing of him. And she was trusting Hawk, or she wouldn't be out here with him.

But after a little, Sheehy eased Rush's mind somewhat by whispering:

" 'Tis me that's to blame, but maybe Oi can made up for it. Oi know where he must be takin' her. Row on a bit an' Oi'll tell ye."

They rowed until they were surely out of earshot of the other boat, and then Sheehy explained:

" 'Tis to the northern ind av Yerba Buena Island that he's headin', sure. There's a gentleman's house on it, big enough for a castle, an' it's the only house on the island, savin' the robbers' roosts that we've started for ourselves. An' beyant, on the Alameda shore, there's just plain nothin' at all."

"Know anything about the house?"

"Save that 'tis there, Oi don't."

"Sounds good. An' if Hawk's head of the Circle, maybe that's their headquarters. Sheehy, we're likely in for ructions. Question is, can you find it?"

"Oi'll try. But wit' all this palaverin' an' driftin' around, Oi'm a bit confused. An' Oi've been steerin' for the other ind, an' our bunch av crooks. But Oi'll try."

For perhaps fifteen minutes more, they rowed on. Then a black bulk loomed up through the darkness, so

close that they had only to ship oars and drift in. The prow of the boat struck sharply against a rock, too high and precipitous to afford a landing place. Sheehy muttered something about having lost his course, and shoved the boat off with his oar.

"Let's try to the roight," he said.

A few more strokes, and they came to a little inlet. At the end of it was a narrow beach, upon which their prow glided and held. They got out and drew the boat a little farther up.

"Faith, we're here—but where are we?"

"Can't we follow around the shore?" asked Rush.

"Whisht!" cautioned Sheehy—too late.

"Who's there?" came a low challenge from the underbrush.

"Two av the ould wolves' breed," Sheehy gave the countersign.

"To dare——" The sentry paused.

"To do, an' to have," completed Sheehy.

"Who are you?"

"Forty-sivin an' a new one."

"But——" The sentry hesitated. "Well, come on."

Sheehy and Rush obeyed. When they got to the edge of the underbrush, they stopped. The sentry stepped into sight from behind a bush.

"You've got a nerve," he grumbled, "to bring a new man now. Take 'em back, Twenty-two," he muttered over his shoulder.

A second man showed himself. Without a word, he started back through the underbrush, very quietly. Rush, with Sheehy trailing, followed. He debated a get-away, but the sentry had closed in behind, and was following Sheehy. And ahead was the low muttering of many men's voices. They must have landed right close to the crooks' rendezvous. He and Sheehy might shoot it out with these two, but the whole bunch would be after them. Even if they escaped, the tumult would be heard to the other end of the island. Hawk would be warned.

From the underbrush, they emerged upon a rock-strewn, barren, level space. Three small wooden shacks were there, standing close together; but it was so dark that Rush did not see them until the leader stopped before the door of the central shack. The formula of the countersign was repeated and the door was opened from within. Evidently the windows were shuttered tight, for the interior was lighted with an oil lamp. And about thirty pairs of eyes stared suspiciously and truculently at Rush, as he passed in.

They were a hard-looking crowd that sprawled about in that shack, and Rush understood why Sheehy had planned to break with them. Sheehy was a reckless enough adventurer, but these men were out of his class—criminal riffraff from Sydney, typical apaches from Paris, fugitive cutthroats from the Eastern cities, with three or four rangy desperadoes, probably from the Western plains. A scurvily, iniquitous crew, but Rush gave them a grin of good-fellowship, and tried to shape his features into an appropriately sinister mask.

Then Rush saw the man he would have to deal with. He was sitting in a rickety chair behind a wooden table at the end of the room. A small, gray man he was—gray as to hair and eyes and clothes, and gray as to complexion, too. Even his voice was thin and passionless—but threatening. He was asking Sheehy what he meant by bringing a recruit without permission.

"Faith, an' Oi wouldn't bring an ordinary recruit." Sheehy thickened his brogue. "But whin ye know who this man is—Rush, who served wit' Walker, Rush av the Durango expedition, Hurry-up Harry Rush, who's seen more foightin' than anny man here—— Ah, Oi see you know av him, an' Oi'm forgiven."

The gray man's eyes shifted to Rush. His glance reminded Rush of a rapier thrust.

"You want to join us?"

"I'm here. That would seem to show I want to join you." Rush in his effort for coolness, spoke with bravado. The gray man smiled wintrily.

"It would have been safer to have sent in your card. What do you know of our plans?"

"Nothing, except what Sheehy's told me. An' that's practically nothing."

"I believe that, because it's exactly what Sheehy knows. Sheehy looked like a man who might be useful if he got along with us. If not——" The gray man made a slight, significant gesture. "You look as though you might be useful, too, with the same qualification. And after to-night, you won't be in a position to do harm. So——"

The gray man negligently waved Rush and Sheehy to a seat on the floor.

Rush sat down, feeling trapped, defeated. He kept glancing at the gray man with actual fear in his eyes. So that was Deeth. Deeth—death! Sardonic humor the man had shown in renaming himself. For when Rush had seen him before, he had been dead.

Justifiably, he had been hung by the neck by the Vigilance Committee of '56, till he was dead, dead, dead. Visibly so. But Rush had later heard a strange tale of inside connivance, of a flesh-colored metal band around his throat, a carefully adjusted rope, an easy drop. He had heard that the man still lived in the shadows—to most of the public a myth, to the crooks of San Francisco a ruler. He was said to be colleagued with some of the officials. He had doubted the story, of course; but now he was the dead man's prisoner.

He had to get away! How to get away! Great Lord! What was happening on the other end of the island? And what were these men waiting for? Rush feigned indifference. He nodded. Presently he seemed to sleep. And he listened most intently.

The men were eager and excited. They were about to make a very great haul and to embark on a great exploit. There was much low talk, and Rush gathered certain explanatory knowledge.

There was talk about the Chief of the Golden Circle. That was Hawk, of course; for it seemed he was their chief, too. Deeth was second in command. Deeth had recruited these men, and paid them with money provided by Hawk from the Golden Circle war chest. Golden Circle money had paid for the *Flying Spray,* too. And they were to loot the Golden Circle to-night of a million in gold, and place it on the *Flying Spray.* They were to arm themselves and the ship from the Golden Circle magazine.

They were to sail in the morning, with Hawk in command. And this was only the beginning. There were the gold-laden Pacific Mail steamers; prizes from Oregon, too; and rich towns north and south ready for the looting. Safe piracies they'd be, with all authority in California paralyzed by the revolt of the Golden Circle. It was a joke over which they chuckled—that all their exploits would be laid to the Bear Staters, whom they were to rob at midnight.

Linsdale, Rush realized, had likely been right when he had said that if Hawk's plot with Deeth could be exposed, it would go far to wreck the Golden Circle. For, as he gathered now, the Golden Circle had been largely organized by Hawk.

And Rush also realized, remembering the names he had seen on that paper he had destroyed, why the government preferred that the Circle be wrecked from within. For the war-embarrassed government was three thousand miles away—and the names on the paper were powerful ones.

There were fifty "Knights," Rush learned now, each of whom had re-

cruited, paid and equipped a hundred men. This was Hawk's hundred. Five thousand armed men would certainly sweep the State.

It was with a very great effort that Rush considered these things. His mind kept darting off to Hawk and the girl —Hawk and the girl! Through a seeming eternity, the slow minutes trailed each other. Rush became like a bound tiger. There was a steady pressure for action, like the pressure of a bent spring. Sitting there, head bowed, seemingly asleep, his nerves were tense, his muscles taut, aching for action.

But at last Deeth looked at his watch and rose. Carelessly he stated that the time for action had come. With his lean forefinger, he indicated two men who were to summon the groups from the other two shacks. His manner was so assured that it seemed almost negligent. Rush recognized a very subtle leadership there, free from doubt, fear or hurry. But it seemed that much vanity lay behind that manner, too. A living dead man would likely be vain, thought Rush. He was unique enough.

Outside, Deeth marshaled the three groups ahead of him. There were about a hundred men, in all. Rush hoped that he and Sheehy would be permitted to select their own positions in the line, from which they might slip away. But Deeth was watching them, and intended to keep on watching. He placed Rush directly in front of him, with Sheehy in front of Rush.

The line started. It crossed the barren space, and moved in nearly absolute silence along the sandy beach which extended around the eastern side of the island.

Now, if ever, Rush must get away. He steadied himself. He tried to relax the muscles of his throat. His voice must sound natural, unafraid. He dropped back alongside Deeth. Thank Heaven he had an interest-compelling thing to say!

"I've got to tell you something," he half whispered swiftly. "Hawk's lost the crystal and the papers."

Deeth's right hand, nearest Rush, had slid into the side pocket of his coat. Rush knew it gripped a weapon. Rush slackened his pace a little. Ahead of him, Sheehy, on the alert, slackened his also.

"You'll make an invaluable lieutenant," said Deeth, sardonically. "If you have information——"

"I'm givin' it to you. The government has your letters to Hawk."

After a barely perceptible pause, Deeth said: "I don't know what you're talking about."

"A man named Linsdale stole 'em," continued Rush, ignoring Deeth's denial. "An' there's some other things I'd ought to tell you, alone. Hawk caught Linsdale, but he got away."

Deeth had dropped still farther back. Rush thought he was going to get him alone. But now Deeth glanced at Sheehy's great form, immediately in front of him, and saw the widening gap between Sheehy and the next in line. Deeth interrupted Rush sharply.

"Tell me later. Take your place in line."

Rush's fist reached Deeth's jaw in a terrific uppercut. At the same instant, with his left hand, he seized the hand inside Deeth's pocket. If he could paralyze that hand before it pulled the trigger. He was not quite in time—but his thumb was caught between the hammer and the firing pin! And Deeth was falling without a sound. Rush caught him and let him down on the sand. Sheehy was standing beside Rush. The moving line passed on into the darkness.

Without speaking, Rush pressed back the hammer of Deeth's revolver and extricated his thumb. Then he stripped off Deeth's coat to use in binding him. A flat, hard object in the inner breast-pocket attracted Rush's attention. He

drew it out, and a paper came with it. One touch of the irregular nodules and depressions on its surface told Rush that he had in his hand the mysterious crystal, or a replica of it. He put both crystal and paper in his pocket, and proceeded to secure Deeth.

A few minutes later, they had left the beach and were making their way across the island to the house on its northern end. Rush's heart beat fast—and not altogether from exertion, for it seemed that a lot must be ahead of him. For Hawk was in that house, and so was Alice. It was headquarters of the Golden Circle that had marked him down for death; and it was the destination of Deeth's now leaderless men, bent upon a very great loot.

"An' Sheehy an' me with that crystal! Well, I'm runnin' for it again; but what the dickens is *'it?'*"

CHAPTER VII.

EAVESDROPPING.

A MOST difficult way that was—through a thicket almost impassable in places, broken here and there by precipices, huge rocks, steep-sided gullies. Thought of the time they had lost forced them on at a dangerous pace, and they stumbled and fell many times. They were spent men, bruised, bleeding and tattered, when they broke out into a clearing and saw through the fog a huge dark pile directly before them.

At that Rush pushed ahead of Sheehy, and stole toward the house, hurriedly but silently.

Now he was at the corner of it—now creeping along its western side with Sheehy close behind, both men listening, listening. A dead house it seemed to be; no window showed a glimmer of light. But Rush saw that heavy curtains might account for that. Midway along its side, he heard, from somewhere within a low murmur of voices, the stirring of men. They were not Deeth's men, he knew. They had not time to get here yet.

Probably some of the Knights, Rush thought. Then he quickened his pace and moved with bated breath, for he heard very interesting sounds—labored breaths, breaths taken in gasps, feet scraping and shuffling on wooden flooring, fists jabbing into flesh. Somewhere two men were battling desperately, yet in as nearly complete silence as they could manage it. That was queer. The other men in the building should be welcome allies for one of them.

The sounds grew plainer. Rush came to a window from which one of the heavy shutters hung awry, having been jimmied from its hinges. The window had been pried open with such force as to break the glass. The curtain permitted only the thinnest line of light to escape, but Rush was able to push it aside and peer within.

The men who were struggling inside that room were Hawk and young Linsdale. But Linsdale was nearly overcome. With his great right arm, Hawk was crushing Linsdale to him, pinioning not only his body but also both of his arms. With his left hand he was twisting a short iron bar from Linsdale's grip. That bar explained the broken shutter and window. A revolver, probably Linsdale's, lay on the floor.

Linsdale's mission, Rush realized, must be the same as Rush's own. He'd traced Hawk and the girl. He'd not forgotten the girl then—in that, at least, Rush had misjudgd him. And Rush would save him again.

Rush was gathering himself for a leap into the room, when from somewhere else in the house, there came the sounds of excited words and hurrying feet. At that, he drew back.

These should be Hawk's colleagues and dupes, Knights of the Golden Circle.

Immediately they burst through the door, Rush knew he was right. There

were perhaps a dozen of them, and he knew the names of three. They were names he had seen on that potent piece of paper. All of them had the look of importance, authority, wealth. With hardly a word, and maintaining, all of them, something of dignity, they crowded around the two men and tore them apart.

Rush kept his position, and watched the scene intently.

Plainly, Hawk didn't welcome the interruption. A shadow of fear crossed his face as the men came in. No wonder, thought Rush, considering Linsdale's errand. But the next instant, Hawk's face was impassive, and his eyes were veiled. He stepped back, daintily dusting his fingers.

Ungentle hands seized Linsdale, and thrust him into a chair, where he slumped weakly. He had almost been out on his feet. Then everybody turned to Hawk.

"I owe you thanks, gentlemen, but I'd hoped not to trouble you. I discovered this spy enterin' that window. I fancied myself able to take care of him alone."

Linsdale protested something which Rush couldn't hear. No one paid the slightest attention to him.

"You proved yourself able to," one of the men replied to Hawk. "But you shouldn't have risked yourself and run the chance of——"

He stopped, his attention attracted, as was that of every one present, by a low sound from somewhere else in the house. Even Rush heard it—a muffled cry or moan or the creaking of a chair —an indefinable but distressing sound. It was especially distressing to Rush, who knew it came from the girl, trying to free herself or attract attention. Again over Hawk's face passed that odd shadow, that curious impassivity, which always puzzled Rush with its faint suggestion of—what?

But the next moment Hawk was going on with renewed assurance.

"I'd already taken care of another spy, who is bound and gagged in the adjoining room. After capturing her, for it was unfortunately a woman, I heard her confederate prowling outside, and waited for him here. I felt it was important he shouldn't be frightened away by any general alarm."

There were murmurs of praise, which Hawk bore modestly; but there were uneasy glances, too.

"I don't like this," said one. "It means——"

"I think it means nothing important, sir," said Hawk. "I've known for some time that my house and myself have been under suspicion. But if anything definite were known of our plans, we'd certainly be made aware of it in a more dangerous fashion."

"Probably so. I'd suggest, though, that we have the other spy out."

"I was about to suggest that myself, sir. I warn you, though," Hawk smiled, "that she will try to explain her presence by some wild accusation against me. I gathered, while binding her, that that was her quite natural intention."

"All right. Lucky we'll soon be fighting in the open. There are too many of these spies. There's that gambler from Sacramento, who killed our man and got away with those papers. He was seen in San Francisco last night. If we can't take care of him, he's likely to give us trouble."

The speaker, with Hawk and two others, had crossed the room until they were beyond Rush's line of vision. As the voice trailed off, Rush smiled a little wryly. He had figured on rescuing the girl by the simple method of entering through the window and telling the members of the Circle what he knew about Hawk's treachery. Proof would lie in the fact that Deeth's men, who were also Hawk's, were right now loot-

ing the Circle's war chest, probably through some secret passage. That would destroy Hawk with the Circle, and make the girl safe from him. though she would still be held prisoner.

Well, he would still do that. But that last speech made it certain that his description had reached San Francisco, and that he would be treated somewhat less gently than the girl.

He heard a door open. The four men had evidently passed into another room. They returned with the girl between them. She walked with the stiffness of one who has been long bound in one position. Freshness was brushed from her by the fear and anxiety of the last twenty-four hours; her face was drawn, almost haggard. But she still held her head high; she seemed to bear pride and bravery with her like a banner. And the look in her eyes and her low cry as she saw Linsdale were both beautiful, though painful and agonizing to Rush.

"Clyde!" She started toward him. "What have they done to you? Are you hurt?"

Rush, though shrinking a little, again improved his opinion of Linsdale. No man could be despicable and hold such a woman's love.

Men interposed courteously but firmly between the two, and Clyde Linsdale straightened himself with an effort.

"Oh, I'm all right. But you, now, Alice——"

"All right, too. But this *friend* tricked me. This fiend, I mean." Her eyes flamed as she looked at Hawk. "He told me you were here hurt—a broken leg. Then he bound and gagged me; told me he was going to take me away——"

"I found you gone from home," broke in Linsdale, "and was afraid this had happened. So I came——"

"May I compliment you, miss, upon your acting?" interrupted Hawk. "And you, too, sir," he added, with a nod at Linsdale.

"Then you deny that you've been lying all through. That you got me to steal those papers, and——"

She stopped with her first sign of confusion, which Rush easily understood. She had suddenly realized that she couldn't explain how Hawk had tricked her without revealing Clyde Linsdale as a spy against Hawk and the Golden Circle. Hawk instantly turned her hesitation to his own advantage.

"You are clearly unused to lying, miss. It's unfortunate that you don't see how useless——"

"You! *You* talk of lying!" the girl cried. "After you have——"

But an elderly man with a white goatee and not unkindly eyes interposed.

"Allow me, miss. My name is Graves. Are you willing to swear that this man isn't a government spy, and that you're not associated with him?"

The girl could not swear that, of course. Anger at her own helplessness envenomed her tongue.

"I'm willing to take oath that this monster tricked me, and that he plans to——"

But there was such a stir at this, and so many angry exclamations, that she stopped. Hawk, turning to the others, raised his hand placatingly.

"May I suggest, gentlemen, that we waste no more time upon this matter, and that we show forbearance. The fact that one of these spies is a woman will——"

"Needn't matter," interrupted the girl. "Whatever punishment he takes, I want to share."

"Then you will be the happier," Hawk turned to her, "at the suggestion I was about to make. It is that you both be imprisoned until such information as you may have obtained can do us no harm. The most merciful possible course, I suggest, gentlemen."

He glanced around for approval, which was instantly given him.

"And of course," he continued, "they must be given reasonable comfort, and at the same time held securely, with the least inconvenience to ourselves. I would suggest our ship, the *Flying Spray,* as the one place combining these requirements."

"The *Flying Spray,* you dog!" burst out Linsdale. "You intend——"

Hawk struck him across the mouth. Before Linsdale could speak again, a gag was forced between his teeth. The girl attempted to interfere, but was thrust back. On the point of leaping through the window, Rush checked himself. Dead, he could tell no tales, and Hawk was facing the window. Hawk would probably shoot as suddenly as he struck.

But now Hawk half turned toward the girl, and spoke as calmly as ever.

"I'm sorry, but there is a limit to patience. Your friend will be gagged until he is on the ship. For your comfort, however, I will tell you the exact situation, which you will have no chance to reveal. To-morrow night, the Bear Republic will be born, and the yoke of the East will be thrown off. These gentlemen and I will be directing the action. The *Flying Spray* will clear from the harbor in the morning, bearing our war chest and certain surplus arms to a place of absolute safety farther south. You will sail on it, and will be perfectly safe. It will be manned by reliable men, all personally selected by me."

The girl was too angry for speech, possibly too angry for fear. She merely glared at him.

"I'd also suggest," Hawk went on, "that they be placed on board immediately, so we may begin our conference. Probably some of my men are still engaged in moving the chests. With your agreement, I will select you, and you"—picking out two of the younger men—"who, with myself, will personally deliver them to the captain of my hundred."

There was no objection to that, and they all trooped out of the room, leaving Rush outside the window with his plans of rescue all tumbled about his head. Swiftly he drew Sheehy away from the window.

"Now, what'll we do?" he questioned. "Sheehy, you know what I *meant* to do. But Hawk's got 'em fooled. They know what's goin' on. He's talked 'em into movin' their money an' munitions, an' what've we got to prove that they'll never see either again? Or that he's goin' on that ship?

"Nothin'," Rush said, answering his own question, as Sheehy scratched his head. "Nothin', unless——"

Suddenly he snatched from his breast pocket the crystal and paper he had taken from Deeth. Drawing Sheehy down, he struck a match in the shelter of their bodies. Eagerly he glanced at the paper, which was covered with the same weird hieroglyphics as were on the papers which the girl had taken from her room. He swore under his breath with disappointment.

"As well try to read hen's scratchin's. Sheehy, what'll we do?"

"Faith, there's only wan thing."

"We could go back to San Francisco an' tell what we know to the proper people. That way, we'd have the island raided an' the *Flyin' Spray* seized. To-morrow, that'd be. And that would be too late."

"Yis, Oi know. 'Tis the girl Oi'm thinkin' av, meself. Oi can't help it."

"Me, either. But—you're willin', Sheehy? What d'ye say?"

"Why, Oi say that where Hawk's min wint in, the girl an' the others'll be comin' out. It shouldn't be hard to foind."

"How about your boat, Sheehy? Do you think you can find that?"

"Oi want but a chance to run for it."

CHAPTER VIII.

HARES AND HOUNDS.

SHEEHY and Rush crept to the corner of the house. The fog had lifted still more, and they could see clear past the southern end of it. To get away with their loot, Deeth's men must pass that way. For perhaps a minute, they waited there, watching, listening. Rush wasn't sure, but it seemed there was a sound of movement along the beach to the south. Maybe the bearers were all gone. He wondered if they would miss Deeth—wondered if they would find him, bound and gagged. If they did, there would be trouble, a search for his assailants. The success of the rescue would be even more improbable.

Then there was a stir directly in front of Sheehy and Rush. Two men rose, it seemed, from the solid earth. Really, Rush decided, there must be a trapdoor there, opening upon a stairway to a cellar. Between them, the men carried a small and very heavy packing case. After them, two more appeared, similarly burdened. The four made toward the beach, veering off to the south.

After that, for a minute or two, nothing happened. Rush decided his and Sheehy's position would be improved if they were on the other side of the trapdoor, facing the way they wanted to run. He touched Sheehy's knee, and the two crept silently forward until they were perhaps six feet to the seaward side of the door. They halted, turned, and poised themselves for a leap—just in time.

The stairs creaked faintly; there was the sound of feet on them. Rush crouched lower, with every muscle tensed. One shadowy figure appeared —another. Neither figure was as bulky as that of Hawk, but their waistcoats showed white. They were the two whom Hawk had chosen to help escort the prisoners.

A skirted figure next—the girl! After her, a man with something white about his mouth—young Linsdale, still gagged. Rush was postured like a sprinter waiting the shot. He leaped, and Sheehy with him.

That part was really nothing. Each took his man, and the men went down, as though hit by battering-rams. They lay quiet. Rush slammed the door shut and stood upon it.

He whirled upon the girl and Linsdale, who could not know whether he and Sheehy were friends or enemies. The girl had cried out frightenedly. They both seemed about to run.

Well, if they would only run in the right direction!

"You know me—I'm Rush!" he cried to Linsdale. Then swiftly, to prove his friendliness, he pulled the gag from Linsdale's mouth. "We're gonna save you. You follow him. Run, Sheehy!"

He pushed Sheehy away, and Sheehy sprinted into the darkness. Then the others were gone, the girl first. Hawk was bellowing below, and the door was heaving under Rush. Rush leaped from it, and darted after the others.

Behind him, he heard the door slam open and Hawk leap out. Hawk's revolver, held low, cracked vindictively, and bullets sang past Rush's middle. Grateful he was for the sheltering darkness, as he plunged into it. Other guns joined Hawk's in the fusillade, but by then, Rush was at the edge of the clearing.

He plunged into the underbrush, close behind Linsdale. The girl was only a little way ahead. Sheehy seemed to be holding himself in to the girl's pace.

The girl was handicapped by her skirts, and probably Linsdale was still weak from the punishment he had received from Hawk. From the moment he observed their lack of speed, Rush despaired of the outcome. But he passed Linsdale and tried to help the girl, half carrying her sometimes.

"Thanks!" she gasped.

But it was desperate business. A dozen or more pursuers were crashing through the brush behind and slowly gaining, while from all along the island to the south came cries and sounds of other running men. Deeth's line of treasure bearers had caught the alarm and were coming. Clearly the fugitives would never reach Sheehy's boat by direct flight. Rush racked his brain for a stunt, a trick, that would give them a chance to escape; but could think of nothing.

They might drop and hide in the underbrush, and maybe escape discovery for a time. But certainly not for long. It would be merely a matter of their pursuers circling the spot where they stopped running, and beating the brush. Indeed, part of the pursuers seemed already engaged in a circling movement to the left. By the way they gained ground, Rush concluded that they must have found a route free from underbrush.

Sheehy may have discovered this movement; anyway, he suddenly swerved to the right. He came out almost immediately upon a stretch of barren ground, surfaced with shale and rocks, and dotted with boulders higher than a man.

They made better speed now, but in turn the pursuit came to the open space, and revolver fire began again, heavily increased in volume. Bullets spattered the rocks ahead of them. The girl stumbled and almost fell. Rush caught her up with a mingled curse and moan, but found she had merely tripped on a rock. Rush's momentary terror for her chilled him, however. What he had thought had happened would soon really happen—she could not escape long. None of them could.

But what could they do? Surrender? Perhaps. The Golden Circle *might* believe his story against Captain Hawk. They might credit it sufficiently to cause them to investigate, anyway. Only it would be told by a man himself discredited by his own supposed acts against the Golden Circle. And with the revolt planned for to-morrow night, they would waste little time or thought on the matter. So Rush debated as he ran; and then saw that they could not run much farther.

Ahead of them a dark bulk loomed—a mass of rock, a cliff, extending to the right and left as far as he could see.

"Sheehy, we can't——" he began.

Then a real disaster happened. Sheehy, running a little to the right and ahead of the others, cursed loudly and went down in a heap. He came up instantly, attempted to run, then went down again.

"Make for that wall and get *down,*" snapped Rush to the girl, pointing to the obstruction in front. Then he ran to Sheehy, who had dragged himself behind a knee-high rock.

"Where'd they get you?"

"Me knee. But here's a bit av shelter, an' it's all Oi ask. Go on wit' the lady, an' Oi'll hold 'em back."

"No use—they're circlin' us—soon be ahead. You'll help more with us. We'll put our backs to that wall. Come, let me help you."

He helped Sheehy up, and the two men ran stumblingly, as in a three-legged race, toward the wall of rock fifty yards ahead of them. Their nearest pursuers were not twice as far behind, but darkness and the intervening boulders made accurate firing impossible. They reached the base of the rock, where Linsdale and the girl were already lying side by side.

"Clyde, dear——" the girl was saying. And something else followed which Rush did not get. He saw her touch Linsdale's hand caressingly.

A peculiar loneliness came to Rush at this sign of an affection which would endure to the very gates of death. He would never know anything like that. But the next instant, as he flung him-

self beside the girl, he forgot everything but trying to scheme a way out of the apparently hopeless situation.

The wall of rock was at least twenty feet high, and so nearly vertical that they could not climb it under fire, even if Sheehy had been uninjured. If they had time, breastworks might be contrived from the loose rocks scattered around, but shots were already pelting the ground in front of them or carrying over their heads. They dare not expose themselves by searching in the darkness for the rocks. However, it seemed to Rush that the fire from in front was singularly ineffective, considering the volume.

The attackers were advancing slowly, with little scurrying movements—rushes from boulder to boulder. They were so nearly invisible, and kept themselves so well under over, that Rush and Sheehy held their fire. Linsdale was of course unarmed; he had got the girl behind him, and was sheltering her with his body. "I can't forgive myself—bringing you into this," Rush heard him say.

And Rush thrilled at the bravery of the girl's tone, in which whimsical humor fought with terror.

"You're here because of me, too—the famous Linsdale devotion. But we mustn't forget Mr. Rush and his friend, who haven't our excuse for foolishness."

Excuse! As though one were needed! But Rush, for the first time, lying there in the shadow of death, thought that if it weren't for Linsdale, and if things had gone differently, he might some time have told her of the greatest of all reasons for any conceivable sacrifice. Not that he could ever have hoped——

But why was the fire of the attackers so very ineffective? True, Rush and his friends were very poor targets, lying there prone and almost indistinguishable in the darkness from the rocks below them and behind. But now only a few of the bullets came even dangerously close, and these were fired by a group of three or four from behind a single boulder. It seemed that the enemy was deliberately sparing them. Rush was debating the reason, when suddenly the fire ceased altogether, and a voice called over to them:

"Do you surrender?"

"Divil a bit av ut!" cried Sheehy.

"We're thinking of the woman. You can't escape."

Rush thought they would have to surrender, but he decided to get in a word of his story about Hawk first.

"You ought to think of the woman," he said. "If it wasn't for her, two of us would be on our way to the Presidio by now, an' your Bear Republic scheme would be shot. But knowin' what we do about Captain Hawk——"

Crash! A revolver spat fire from behind that particular boulder which seemed to hide the only venomous enemies. A bullet kicked particles of rock into Rush's face.

"Knowin' what we do about Captain Hawk," repeated Rush, "who's so afraid of what I've got to tell about him that he's just broken truce——"

"You're mistaken," broke in the other crisply. "Captain Hawk is our leader and a gentleman. He is standing here beside me."

"Then it was Deeth who——" began Rush, but checked himself. Of course, it might have been any of Hawk's men who had tried to silence him.

"Anyway," he went on lamely, "Hawk is a scoundrel and a traitor, who has——"

"Traitor!" The other mistook his meaning. "We hold ourselves patriots. California must be free. But enough of this. We call on you to surrender."

"An' we refuse, unless——"

It was in Rush's mind to bargain that the girl be kept on the island in custody of the Bear Staters. If they made the promise, they would keep it;

nor would Rush probably be mad enough to risk an absolute rupture with them over the girl.

But the proposal and the parley were both cut short by an action for which, as was instantly plain to Rush, the other side had been deliberately holding up the attack. Rush found himself springing up instinctively to meet the dozen or more men who were leaping down from the top of the rock behind them.

One of them landed on his shoulders and carried him over. His revolver was wrenched away, but somehow he managed to squirm out from under the heap and keep on fighting. That was foolish, for the crippled Sheehy had been easily overcome, young Linsdale was done, and a score of men headed by Hawk were running in from in front. But Rush, infuriated by the manhandling and the ease with which he had been tricked, lost his head for the moment; and he writhed, twisted, struck out, and kept half a dozen men busy, until through the tangle around him, he caught sight of the girl standing near, held by two men.

The sight steadied him. If he stayed alive, he might do something yet. He gripped himself with an effort, and let his hands drop.

Then he wished he had gone on fighting, for Hawk was right in front of him, waiting his chance to put the quietus on Rush forever. He could not shoot Rush, because the Bear Staters had evidently agreed that the fugitives would, if possible, be taken alive. But in the struggle he could get in a blow.

His enormous body blocked out everything else from Rush's view. His fist was coming down, probably clutching a rock. Rush, encircled, saw instantly that he could not dodge. He relaxed, dropped like a dead man, below Hawk's descending fist.

"Traitor, eh?" rasped Hawk. "You'll never——"

Rush missed the rest of that. The blow reached him, though with lessened force. Hawk's final words were lost in a world of shock and pain and leaping crimson lights, through which the triumphant, monstrous face of his assailant gibbered and jeered at him. Nothing else was in the picture at all, and by that Rush, snatching at the very fringe of consciousness, knew it for an hallucination, born of defeat, despair, and the shock of the blow.

A dreadful fantasy it was, nothing else, for Rush's eyes were really closed. But Rush then learned the truth that fantasies are sometimes more informing than sober vision. For in that moment while everything in this world was blotted out but Hawk's face, there came to him sure knowledge about Hawk for which he'd groped often before.

That face had a Mongolian twist. Captain Hawk's proud talk of his family tree was accounted for. It was to veil from others and perhaps from himself a fact that would otherwise have been fatal to his leadership, for—*Captain Hawk was a Chinaman!*

Not more that eighth blood, maybe less—that didn't matter. Nor was the fact now so important, save that from it the trail led straight to the solution of another mystery.

When, with strength flowing back to him, he pretended continued unconsciousness, and permitted himself to be carried back to the house, he formed a hopeful plan.

He wondered if there was a Chinese servant in Hawk's house. There would be. There were no servants in California but Chinamen. And Chinamen could read Chinese.

CHAPTER IX.

CRYSTAL CLEAR.

WHEN they got to the house, Rush's eyes were still closed, his body limp; he seemed hardly to breathe. The Bear Staters stretched him on a couch.

By their talk, they recognized him as the man for whom the whole Circle was seeking, but he seemed harmless enough now. Sheehy and Linsdale they placed in chairs, tying their arms behind them, and securing Linsdale's feet, as well. Alice remained unbound, but Hawk appointed three guards to watch her and the others. Then he sent those of Deeth's men who had returned to the house away to finish loading the precious cargo on the *Flying Spray*.

Rush heard all this happening. Then he heard Hawk speaking, as though from the other end of the room.

"An unfortunate incident, but we may congratulate ourselves that there is fraternity even among spies. If the last two hadn't tried to rescue their companions—— But enough of that. I would suggest that our original program stand, that all four of them be confined on the *Flying Spray*. First, of course, we must search the man who stole our papers and killed our agent. Afterward, we can decide on his fate."

As Hawk talked, Rush slowly opened his eyes. As well as he could without moving, he noted everything. Evidently they were in the assembly room of the Golden Circle. Hawk was standing on a low platform at its farther end. The others, except for the guards, were facing him—some standing, some seated. Sheehy, Linsdale and Alice were near the foot of Rush's couch.

"There's hardly need to put the question," some one replied to Hawk. "I think we're all agreed——"

"But—not—informed."

It was a sepulchral interruption. Rush's voice was hoarse as a raven's. The pauses between the words spoke of terrible weakness. After he had finished, there was an instant of shocked silence, as though a dead man had spoken. Then men stirred and looked around. Rush had not stirred a muscle. He lay there with eyes still closed, jaw sagging, hardly seeming to breath.

"Not—informed," he repeated, with another weak sigh and slump of the chest at the end.

Those who were seated came to their feet. In a sort of involuntary fascination, they drew nearer to him. Hawk was silent, staring at him with the others. Then came a thing even more suggestive of life in death than his sepulchral words. Jerkily, with little starts and irregular pauses, Rush's extended right hand began to move upward, toward his chest. There was no sound, save a low cry of pity from Alice, who ran to the head of his couch and knelt there.

Rush's hand, with its feeble, palsied movements, finally reached the inner pocket of his coat. At the same moment, Hawk came down from the platform with an unusual hurry in his movements. But before he could reach the group, Rush, seemingly summoning all his strength, removed his hand from his pocket and thrust into the girl's hand the crystal and the paper he had taken from Deeth.

"Proof," he said a little louder, "that Hawk is a traitor—to his own side—to you."

Then his hand dropped nervelessly, as though the effort had been too much for him. His eyes closed. Perplexed, astonished, angry exclamations followed his accusation. Rush expected that. But he had hardly dared to hope that Alice would grasp the situation as clearly and instantly as she did.

"Here's proof, anyway," she cried almost triumphantly, "that what I've told you gentlemen is true. Here's what Hawk made me steal to save *his* life—Clyde's here, I mean. This crystal, or another just like it, and papers with writing on them, just like this."

Then came Hawk's dignified remonstrance:

"What's this, gentlemen? The rascals are cleverer than I thought. But what's on the paper? Hen's scratch-

ings, eh? Just a trick for gaining time. My advice——"

But Rush broke in, with nothing of him moving but his lips, and in that voice so hollow, so hoarse, so tomblike, that it compelled even Hawk to pause.

"A Chinaman. Bring a Chinaman. He'll read the paper."

A moment of absolute silence followed. Then, with a note of apology, but something of gravity, too, a man said:

"Let's get to the bottom of this. Captain Hawk, you want to get to the bottom of it, of course. How about that Chinese cook of yours?"

Another little pause; then: "Sir, a further waste of time. But I'll go get him." Hawk's voice had lost something of assurance.

"My sincere apologies, Captain Hawk. I didn't mean that you should trouble yourself. Let some one else go. But doesn't that cord there connect with a servant's bell? Surely. Mr. Dukes, will you oblige me by pulling that cord?" Suspicion was beginning to creep into the speaker's voice.

Minutes passed, during which Rush lay silent and motionless. Now and then, Alice touched him gently. He knew she was close to tears; he could actually feel her pity for him. He wanted to whisper to her, to give her a reassuring glance, but he dared not. So much depended upon keeping the others sure of his helplessness! But if he had known it, they were too much mystified and concerned to pay much attention to him. What he was waiting for, they were waiting for, too, and just as anxiously—the opening of the door, the entrance of the Chinaman.

Ah! Here he was—the man who, if Rush were right, would read the riddle and settle many things.

"Wong, come here." It was the voice of the man who had asked that the Chinaman be called. Rush opened his eyes again.

The speaker was standing near Rush's couch, the crystal and the paper in his hand. His eyes were fixed on a wrinkled old Chinaman shuffling across the room. Now he raised his voice imperatively. "No! Keep looking at me. This way." It was plain that he intended preventing any signal from Captain Hawk to his servant.

"Stand here—so!" as the Chinaman came up. "Now, can you read this? Captain Hawk wants you to read it."

The Chinaman's back was to Rush, but he had the paper. It rustled slightly. The Chinaman spoke sadly.

"Me, *buhau!* No savvy. No can do."

Rush put in, even more weakly:

"The crystal! Put the—crystal—over it."

Somewhere in the room, there was a little stir. "Please remain, Captain Hawk," some one said suavely, and quiet followed. Then came the Chinaman's voice, surprised, delighted.

"Now me savvy lots! Old Chinese trick—*he-he!*" he laughed. "I tell how him work. You write um letter in Chinese. You put glass down this way over letter. It make um Chinese letters all twisted, so no can read. You draw um so. You turn glass other side up, it stlaighten um out again. Two men with glasses both alike, they make um letters no one else can read. You like me read this, eh?"

"Please do." The chill and hardness of steel was in the speaker's voice. A tense and dangerous silence came over the room, broken only by the Chinaman's amiable droning.

"This letter, he say, Captain Deeth, all fix for take away gold to-night. Bling hundled men to end of island all same we talkee befo'. He will come on ship befo' sun he come up to-mollow. Golden Circle, he plan stlike to-mollow night. Letter, he signed with name like clow."

The Chinaman, raising his eyes from

the letter, blinked at the effect he had produced. Everybody was staring in amazement and suspicion at Captain Hawk. Rush, feeling that their understanding wasn't complete, started to speak, but was interrupted by Sheehy's voice:

"Now Oi guess you'll begin to belave us, gintlemin. Read 'Hawk' for 'Crow,' an' phwat have ye? Enough to convince ye Hawk's a traitor, aven if ye were numskulls. An' that you're not, Oi know."

"But Deeth—who's Deeth?" questioned some one doubtfully.

A half dozen excited voices started to answer him, but one prevailed.

"The biggest villain in San Francisco. A man who's been hung once and should be again. If Captain Hawk's in collusion with him——"

"As he is." Now it was Linsdale speaking. "It was Hawk and Deeth I was investigating. The government doesn't want trouble with you gentlemen. I was set to try to break up your movement from within. And I soon felt sure that the very man who'd organized the whole thing was planning to betray you with Deeth.

"So when I got a chance to steal some letters from Deeth to Hawk, I did it. I couldn't read 'em, of course. You can all understand why Hawk had to use cipher in communicating with a man like Deeth, and why he couldn't take the chance of being seen talking to him. Well, Hawk got the letters back. But if you could find them, they'd show you unmistakably that Hawk's quota of fighting men, his hundred, were all recruited by Deeth, and that the two of them entered into a conspiracy to rob you, and——"

"But you can find them!" broke in Alice excitedly. "For he has them—Captain Hawk has, I mean. He took them from me after he'd bound and gagged me—the papers I stole for him, and wouldn't turn over to him till I saw my brother free. Search him, and you'll find out."

She was interrupted by the sound of a struggle. Three of the men had seized Captain Hawk as he made a break for a door in the other end of the room. Hawk fought hard, gouging, kicking, striking terrific blows. He would have got away from the three, but others crowded in to help.

It was the moment for which Rush had waited, the chance for which he had played.

But he was slower in taking advantage of it than he should have been. Everything was so nearly all right as it was! Hawk was finished, absolutely. Rush wasn't particularly afraid now that the Golden Circle would do more to him than hold him prisoner. The girl would be safe as prisoner, too, and Sheehy and her brother would be safe. Lord! the tremendous significance of that word, "brother." More than anything, that delayed Rush's action. He stopped to figure out why on earth he hadn't learned the truth before. But of course, Linsdale would refuse to identify his sister to an unknown adventurer, whose tone was probably too fervent in speaking of her. Of course, Linsdale was still trying to keep her out of it all. That was why Linsdale had deserted him at the post office. And, of course, Hawk *had* got the crystal from the mail—not Linsdale.

Linsdale was all right. Everything was all right, except——

Rush didn't want to remain a prisoner of the Circle. He didn't want the girl and the others to remain prisoners, either. Particularly—and he hardly knew why—he didn't want the Bear Staters' plot to be sprung to-morrow night, nor California to be bathed in civil war.

His job was to get to San Francisco to-night. That was why he had feigned helplessness. That was why he was lying now with every muscle tense, head

and shoulders lifted just a little, palms flat on the couch, pressing down a little, ready to propel him. His eyes flickered to the door of the room.

He leaped up and dashed for it.

But the way was obstructed. The three guards remained at their posts. One of them caught at Rush, but missed him; another fired point-blank, but his aim was destroyed by a swift shove from Sheehy's uninjured leg. Some of the men around Hawk ran to intercept him. Rush met the foremost with a full-length left-arm thrust, and with his right hand tore the door open.

He went through the door and slammed it shut behind him.

Darkness! How he thanked Heaven for the darkness now! Running—would he ever do anything else but run? Along the side of the house, guiding himself by the murmur and wash of water. Men were pouring out of the door. Now to put the house between, so they couldn't shoot. Around the end of the house, toward the end of the island—faster, now, faster! Pounding footsteps after him. Ah, here was the water!

In it now, quietly, quietly. Wading, diving, swimming. It was a choppy water now, but it drowned the sobbing of his lungs. And the wind that kicked it up, driving down from the Alameda Hills, would guide him. Not that he'd need much guidance.

His pursuers had reached the shore. He heard them debating what to do. There was no boat near. Those who could swim did not care for a struggle in the water with such a madman. Anyway, they could not find him. Anyway, he would drown.

For it was perfectly plain, they agreed, that in that sea, and with so much strength spent already, no man could swim across the miles that lay between Yerba Buena and the mainland.

Rush smiled when he heard them say that. He had no idea of trying to. Kicking off his boots and swimming easily, he began following around the western shore of the island, toward the boat that he and Sheehy had abandoned.

Across the Sausalito Strait from San Francisco, there is a lonely mountain with a fine reward for those who climb it. On the peak of Tamalpais, Rush and Alice stood one day a little later. To the west lay the luring Pacific, silver and blue under the descending sun; northward, over many green hills and valleys, they could see as far as Mount Shasta; and across nestling Lake Lagunitas and the San Joaquin and Sacramento Rivers rose white shapes which might be clouds and might be the distant Sierras. For a while they rested, breathless from their climb; and then, as the beauty of it grew upon her, Alice murmured softly:

"Our State. I've always loved it. To think what you saved it from!"

"Oh, 'twouldn't have amounted to much. The State was all right. The way the whole thing flickered out proved that."

"Well, maybe. That was funny, wasn't it? Talk about hushing things up! Not a word about it, after you put General Sumner on guard. The *Flying Spray* seized for contraband, and the island raided for harbor pirates, and Deeth and Hawk arrested for various things, but of *course,* not for treason or rebellion. And none of the others arrested at all!"

"We don't know for sure about that," said Rush. "Probably some of them were up on the carpet, all right. Likely had to give their words of honor to quit any more conspirin'. As for arrests, if Washington had been lookin' for a chance to make 'em, there'd have been plenty before all this happened. Like your brother says, it's bad politics to make martyrs."

"Just the same, it was funny," insisted Alice, "for a thing so big to just go flop, like that. And there were a lot of other things that were queer, too. For instance," she laughed lightly, "your talking so much the first time we met about running away. As if that was all you could do."

"Well," said Rush, with a reminiscent grin, "that's about all I did do, isn't it—just run from one thing and another."

"And toward them," said Alice softly. "And I suppose—I suppose you'll be running away again. You have the habit!"

"I—I—Alice! No, I haven't. Not if——" Rush was very much in earnest, but he stammered and stopped, for he was also in some ways a very timid man. The girl leaned toward him a little, and then drew back, for he stood so very stiffly. It would be some little time yet before they would tell each other why the green was suddenly greener, the blue a deeper blue, the whole world more radiantly beautiful than it had ever been before.

"The Dark Policeman," by Howard Fielding, will be the opening novel next week, February 11th. This is a mystery tale with a new idea—a story that carries you swiftly along with its action and perplexities.

THE OUTDOOR LIFE

MANY men who work in offices spent much of their boyhood and early youth in small towns, on farms, and even in the woods. One and all, they are proud of it and, if you catch them in the right moods, they'll tell you enthusiastically all about those formative years.

They'll tell you how, after school was out, they shouldered their small axes and stalked with boyish dignity to the wood lot, where the men of the family were chopping. They'll tell of their days on horseback, riding herd; or of the times when they stood knee-deep in a hay wagon, spreading with a pitchfork. They'll tell of one-room schoolhouses; of night hunts after raccoon—thrilling experiences. They can remember every detail of those hunts—the specially dark nights, the treeing of the coon, the barking of the dog. They'll tell you how to throw an old coat up on a limb, so that the coon will stay up there till daylight.

These and many other things will be told you by men in offices, when they're in the mood. They are fortunate to have had such backgrounds in their lives. The children of future years will be strangers to such events. Their memories will be of airplanes, of tourist camps, and of cities. They will fly—as, indeed, they do now—over the forests in which their elders grew up.

Memories of an outdoor youth are exhilarating ones. There is a never-to-be-forgotten thrill in standing, on a freezing winter day, in a snow-covered wood clearing, warming your hands at the huge brush fire, and listening to the ring of the axes in the woods about you. Now and then you see a commotion in the treetops off in the distance, and in a moment you hear a crash. You look around the clearing, which is stubby with tree stumps, and you select that tall whitewood over there, the one you've been cutting all around for the last few hours. What a chesty task the felling of that tree will be! And you draw on your mittens, pick up your double-bladed ax and start toward it. Oh, boy! No wonder men in offices look back on those days with pleasure. The feeling of physical power, the absence of worry about whether your trousers are retaining their creases, the appetite for good, homely grub—that's the life!

By Fred MacIsaac

Two Seats On The Aisle

Author of "The Last Atlantide," "The Progress of Peter Pratt," Etc.

An interesting little story of the metropolitan theatrical world, showing how a clever press-agent stunt, meant to hoodwink people, turned like a boomerang on itself.

IT is the second night of a theatrical production which tells the tale, for the opening night is mostly "paper," and friendly hands make lots of noise. On the second night of "The Girl From the Moon," the company came to the theater most hopefully, because the criticisms had been more favorable than otherwise; but the rising of the curtain permitted the performers to see that there was less than half a house.

Five weeks of nerve-racking rehearsals, three harrowing weeks on the road, a first night of hysteria as the audience seemed to rise to the show, a stay-up-all-night party afterward which came to a climax when the city editions of the morning papers appeared, carrying pretty good notices—and now, grim reality.

"We've flopped," whispered Dora Gray, the prima donna, to Hans Merchant, the comedian, whom she encountered in the wings after her first exit.

He nodded lugubriously.

"Ain't it awful? After last night I was sure we had a hit."

"It may not be too late to save it," she encouraged, for she knew the fat man had a large family and no money.

Merchant shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"'They either go over or they don't,'" he quoted, then mustered the beaming smile which paid him his salary and lumbered out upon the scene.

In the manager's office, over the

lobby, there was a conference. Lester Frank, the producer, was there; Joe Flinn, the house manager; Peter Jinks, the press agent; and a tall, impressive, well-groomed, and nervous man of fifty, who was called, behind his back, the "angel." Although they had not yet counted up, they needed no statement to be aware that there was but a few hundred dollars in the house.

Of the quartet, the house manager alone was unperturbed. While he was sorry for Lester Frank, the producer, it was mid-season, and theaters were in demand, and already he was considering the successor of the present tenant. Lester Frank was steeped in gloom, and the press agent was doleful, for he would have to hunt for a new job. No member of the trio wasted a regret upon the situation of Archibald Livingstone, who stood to lose seventy-five thousand dollars if the piece went to the storehouse. Why should they? Angels have wings; let him fly away.

"What's the trouble?" demanded Mr. Livingstone. "It's a whale of a show, with a darling of a star."

The producer shrugged expressively. "Show's all right, but Dora has no draft. They're not buying tickets, that's all. Maybe if we had the right kind of publicity——"

"Sure. Blame it on the press agent," growled Pete Jinks. "We got a big play on Sunday. I had a hand-picked audience last night; my friends among the critics gave us a break. That's all a press agent can do. I can't *make* them buy."

"It's this way, Mr. Livingstone," explained Joe Flinn. "Too many musical shows in New York right now. The press work was elegant."

"Humph!" grumbled the producer. "Any advance sale for the rest of the week?"

"Not much."

Silence. All four smoked industriously. Faintly from the auditorium came the voices of the chorus, singing the first big number. The uniformed ticket taker entered, carrying the tin boxes containing the ticket stubs which are the producer's check against the statement of the house treasurer, dropped them with a rattle and bang upon the table, and went back to his post.

"Well, Mr. Livingstone," Lester Frank asked, with a sigh, "do I post a two-week closing notice?"

Livingstone drew a fresh cigar from his pocket, regarded it absently for a few seconds, then bit it fiercely, spat out the end, jammed the cigar into his mouth, and lighted it. He had a square, heavy jaw which jutted pugnaciously.

"Got faith in the show," he said shortly.

The producer made a deprecating gesture.

"So have I. But it needs twelve thousand a week to break even. We're lucky if we get eight thousand this week, and perhaps we'll drop to six thousand next week."

The angel laughed mirthlessly.

"You fellows think I'm a sucker," he stated. "Well, maybe; but I'm a scrapper, too. Having been chump enough to back a show, I don't quit before I'm knocked out. I'll play if I have a chance. Have I got a chance, Mr. Flinn?"

The stocky, round-faced, very hard-boiled house manager considered the question.

"Well," he opined, "it's a bit early to give up the ghost. But there ain't any demand for this show. You're licked unless you do something unusual to attract attention."

"Are there not plenty of instances where pieces which seemed failures have turned into hits?"

"Some. Not plenty."

"What do you think, Mr. Frank?"

"If we increased our advertising, got some live publicity——"

"Say!" exclaimed the press agent. "You can't beat what you got."

Livingstone broke in:

"Results count, Mr. Jinks. Do you know how to save the show?"

"Sure. I got a lot of friends on the papers. I can get pictures if we double the size of the ads."

"Something revolutionary is needed," the angel declared. "What do you suggest?"

Jinks sneered:

"Just like that—a world-beating idea you want."

"Pay Mr. Jinks off. I can see that he is not a revolutionist," said Livingstone quietly.

"Say, look here, Lester——"

"Mr. Livingstone is boss," replied the producer. "What do you want done, Mr. Livingstone?"

The angel deliberated.

"The problem is to sell tickets. Pictures of chorus girls, with stories about their jewels and automobiles, or the fact that they came from strange places, doesn't appear to help at the box office. We need an idea that will create a demand to see our show."

"You don't say!" jeered the discharged press agent. "And such as what, Mr. Livingstone?"

The angel crossed his legs, cleared his throat, and appeared to be ready to elucidate. But what he said was: "I'm sure I don't know."

"That's why you fired me!" chortled Jinks.

"Because it's your job to know. Ordinary publicity methods being futile, we must find the extraordinary. Now suppose I am Mr. Jones of Flatbush, considering where to take my wife upon our monthly theatrical debauch, how would you get me to "The Girl From the Moon," Mr. Jinks? If you give me the answer to-morrow your salary is doubled. Otherwise you are fired."

"Much obliged," said Jinks almost impudently.

"I'm going back stage," said Mr. Livingstone. "Good evening, gentlemen."

When the door had slammed, Joe Flinn leaned over and poked Jinks in the ribs with a fat forefinger.

"The Shuberts want a man to take out a musical show. Go up and get the job, Jinks."

"Nix," replied the press agent. "Now that my salary is doubled, I've got an idea."

Dora Gray, the prima donna of "The Girl From the Moon," sat in her dressing room during her long wait at the opening of the second act, and consoled herself for the evident failure of the piece by reading over her press notices of the morning. She liked this one best:

> Just as it seemed as though we were in for another dull evening, a ray of purest gold, an iridescent flash, a scintillating something darted upon the stage, and we made the acquaintance of Dora Gray. Why have we never seen her before?

Dora, in truth, was like that. She was a wisp of a blond thing, an elf, an exquisite golden feather with an adorable smile and a sweet soprano of little power and slight range, yet with a carrying force that was surprising.

The eminent critic might have seen her before if he had looked very hard, for she had adorned the front row of musical comedies for three or four years, but he was the sort of reviewer who paid no attention to chorus girls. Her appearances as a principal had been upon the road.

The entrance of Mr. Livingstone interrupted her literary labors, and she glanced up at him with something more than the polite smile of a star for her financial backer.

"Hello, Dora. You are gorgeous tonight," he declared warmly. He was a big man, forceful, with the suggestion of a brute in him; but so far as Dora Gray was concerned he was like a black

bear with a ring in his nose and a chain, the other end of which was in her little white hand.

The girl acknowledged the compliment, then grew serious.

"I looked over the house, Archie," she said, "and it looks bad. If it's a failure, I'll never forgive myself for letting you in for it."

"There, there," he soothed. "You play your part; leave the business to me. I'm not worrying, and I don't think we have a flop, no matter what the wise ones say. May I take you home after the show?"

"Yes, thank you, Archie."

He stood in the wings and watched her entrance, nodding in satisfaction at the ripple of applause.

"Something unusual. Something revolutionary. Something to drag in Mr. Jones of Flatbush," he muttered.

The Brooklyn telephone directory contains several pages of people named Jones, of whom at least a third live in Flatbush. There was Jeffrey Conningsworth Jones, for example. He lived with his mother and father in a large, red-brick colonial house for which the elder Jones had refused sixty thousand dollars. Although he was twenty-seven years old and was doing well in the bond business in New York, he was the sort of youth who would live at home instead of taking an apartment within walking distance of Broadway.

There was something very likable about Jeffrey Jones. He gave forth an aroma of wholesomeness, and his pleasant voice and ingratiating smile sold bonds to business men and caused old ladies to pet him with their eyes because he reminded them of what their own boy might have been, had he lived. Young ladies also petted him with their eyes when he wasn't looking.

Jeffrey Jones was not considering a show when he opened his mail three days after the second night of "The Girl From the Moon." His letters numbered only a dozen, all business communications save one. The exception was in a small, square envelope addressed in a feminine hand. Naturally, he opened that one first. As he read, his eyes widened in surprise; he frowned, trying to recall the writer, and jumped to the signature, which did not help him. "Mary." Of course, he had known several girls named Mary. Who has not? There was a Mary in Cambridge whom he had called on during his college days, and a Mary on a boat, crossing to Europe five years before, and Mary Evans, who had married Arthur Hope, and others, too. But he could not remember this one.

He read the letter a second time. It began familiarly:

DEAR JEFFREY: It's quite a while since you heard from me, and perhaps you have forgotten me. It was by accident I learned your present address. I thought you might like to know that I am in New York and am appearing in "The Girl in the Moon" at the Bendix Theater. I wonder if you will recognize me among all the lovely girls on the stage. I wonder if you would like to renew our acquaintance. I wonder a lot of things. Wondering if you will recall my my full name, I sign myself, MARY.

Jeffrey could not recall her last name, and he wondered, too, if he would recognize her on the stage. If she were as nice as her letter, he certainly would like to renew their acquaintance. Which of his Marys would she turn out to be? There were several who might have gone upon the stage. Was she a principal or a member of the chorus? It didn't matter; he was not a snob. To think that she remembered him, had sought him out, and perhaps had gone to some trouble to find his address.

Very carefully he placed the letter in his pocket, then spoke into his telephone.

"Get me Hilton's Ticket Agency," he

directed. When the call was put through he said: "Please get me two on the aisle, down front, for the Bendix Theater to-night. Jeffrey Conningsworth Jones speaking. Third row? That will be splendid. Thank you."

As he made his business calls during the day he wondered more about Mary and recalled three or four others with the mystic name who had made an impression upon his adolescence. Craftily deciding that it might be a mistake to take a girl with him this evening, he called up Bill Flint and issued an invitation.

"The Girl From the Moon?" questioned Bill. "Why are you picking that dead one?"

"They tell me it's a darn-good show," he asserted. "But if you don't want——"

"Oh, I'll go! I don't turn down free tickets. Dine with me at the club. You aren't going to dress?"

"Suit yourself, but I think I shall. I'll meet you at the theater."

"See here. What's up?" demanded Bill Flint. "You got something up your sleeve if you're dressing, so I'll be there with my boiled shirt."

"No, nothing special."

"We'll be *dressed,*" affirmed Bill Flint.

That same afternoon Archibald Livingstone called on Dora Gray in her little apartment between Fifth and Sixth Avenues, nearer Sixth than Fifth.

Mr. Livingstone was a very substantial manufacturer, one of those skillful executives who has trained his lieutenants to shoulder most of the business burdens, whose great, mahogany, glass-topped desks are always unlittered, who dispose of their day's work in a couple of hours. In Livingstone's case, he had so much spare time upon his hands that he had drifted into the theater district in search of amusement. He had met Dora Gray at a party given by Lester Frank in his big apartment on Central Park West, had found her at his left at supper, and had been charmed by the exquisite little ingénue.

That she was placed beside him by design neither the business man nor Dora had a suspicion.

Dora had been playing a "bit" in a piece of Lester Frank's which had closed in Chicago a few weeks before, had been seeking in vain another job in New York, and had accepted Frank's invitation because he had been kind to her in the past and might find a place for her in his next production.

There was something winning about Lester Frank, fat and sly and unprincipled as he was. He had a false geniality, a pleasant absence of dignity, a sense of humor, and a fatherly manner with young girls. Although he was considered to have a gift for digging up angels, not even his competitors realized the depth of his guile.

Having encountered Livingstone, he had seen at once that the man was discontented, bored, in search of distraction, and ripe for exploitation. Of such stuff angels are made, thought the producer, who immediately began to cast around for likely nutriment. As Livingstone was a gentleman, refined to some extent, Lester considered the girls of his acquaintance who combined beauty and talent with respectability, and he had decided upon Dora Gray after slight search.

Being a wise man, he let things take their course, but heard with complacence that Dora had been seen in Livingstone's company at several theaters and at some of the best supper clubs. And, after a few weeks, he had sought the millionaire, script in hand, explained his wish to star Dora Gray, expatiated upon the vehicle secured, and, after several interviews, was assured of the necessary backing.

Dora, who had been in the show business for several years, knew well enough that she had become a star because of the plotting of Lester Frank and the generosity of Archibald Livingstone, and she accepted her chance because she was ambitious and was sure that she would justify the confidence of her producer and backer.

She actually liked Livingstone, and, though she was only a twenty-three-year-old actress without a penny to her name, and he was a millionaire, she was sorry for him. He was very decent, and his infatuation was pathetic, as the love of an elderly man for a young girl almost always is. This angel had insisted upon backing the show, despite her protests, and now he was bearing the apparent failure of the piece like a good sport. And he wanted her to marry him.

When he was announced, Dora was considering the matrimonial prospect. Having experienced the thrill of her name in electric lights, she hated to go back to the weary round of calling on managers, of going on the road in a secondary rôle, or starving, perhaps, before she got another engagement. Like every young girl, she reveled in fine clothes and jewels, and the idea of an established position in New York as the wife of a man who was rich and socially connected was very tempting. She was trying to persuade herself that she loved him.

The angel entered with a box of roses under his arm. He carried his own flowers because he loved to watch her delight when she opened the box and pressed the beauties against her exquisite little face.

"You shouldn't bring me so many expensive flowers, Archie," she protested, as she tore open the box and lifted in her white arms two dozen long-stemmed American beauties.

Livingstone laughed contentedly as he watched the pretty picture, and threw himself into a big chair by the window.

"Flowers are cheap," he replied. "If they cost ten times as much, it's worth it to see you with them. Dora, you are the most exquisite creature who ever breathed."

She smiled at him over the roses.

"If New York thought so, you would not be in danger of losing a terrible lot of money," she said.

"Pshaw! New York will like you. You leave it to me. As a matter of fact, business at the theater is picking up. I read the riot act to the press agent Tuesday night, and the fellow came through with an idea that is getting results. However, I didn't come here to talk business. Dora, have you considered a certain matter?"

"Y-es," she admitted.

"Well?" He leaned forward eagerly.

"I don't know, Archie. Would I have to give up the stage?"

"I wouldn't insist, but I would prefer my wife to myself. You said you didn't like the theater."

Her smooth, white brow furrowed into thought wrinkles.

"I didn't when I was knocking around, living in terrible hotels and playing in miserable theaters on the road. I would have quit long ago if there had been anything else for me to do. But now—well, it's lovely to have the star's dressing room. And I adore dancing and singing."

"My error in making a star of you," he said ruefully.

"You were adorable. You just wanted to make me happy."

"All right. Remain on the stage. You can do anything you like, dear."

The girl laid down her roses and approached his chair. She laid her hand on his shoulder gently.

"I'm not sure I love you, though, Archie," she said slowly.

"I'll be good to you. You'll learn to love me."

"Please, a few more days before I decide."

"I'll give you till to-morrow, then."

She squared her shoulders, threw up her chin.

"All right. I'll tell you to-morrow."

"And it will be 'Yes?' "

"I guess, probably."

Jeffrey Jones met Bill Flint in the lobby of the Bendix Theater at eight thirty. They were both arrayed in braided dinner coats, expensive satin waistcoats, and wore black-satin ties of the latest shape and degree of elegance. A hundred years of drab attire has not entirely ironed out of young males the peacock urge which they indulged until the era of Jeffersonian simplicity, but it is pathetic how little one can do to brighten up evening dress.

The lobby was full and the theater rapidly filling when they entered. Flint cast a rapid glance around.

"Almost like a stag party."

Lester Frank and Pete Jinks, standing inconspicuously in the entrance, were watching the audience assemble.

"It's a sell-out to-night," Frank told the press agent. "The agencies are buying heavily for the balance of this week and next."

"It's a pipe," commented Pete. "Shows what you can do if you have cash to swing a proposition. Of course, it takes brains, too."

"After this I'll always fire the press agent on the second night," said Frank with a grin. "Nothing like a kick in the slats to start the old bean going. Only thing, is there likely to be a comeback?"

"I hope there is," replied the fervent press agent. "It'll make the front pages, hand the public a laugh, and advertise the show. If we get one big week we're set. And the show is there. I saw it the first time Wednesday night."

Meanwhile, the curtain rose on the first act. The set was one of those supergorgeous gardens conceived by the artist, Brini. If in the world there is a land where trees and flowers and grass and sky resemble these, why do so many people live in New York? Standing in the center of the stage was a pert young brunette who observed to an elderly lady:

"It was so good of you, mother, to permit me to invite all my school friends to a garden party. See, here they come."

Although he was in the third row, Mr. Jones drew out opera glasses and aimed them at the stage in time to cover the first young lady of the chorus.

The powerful glasses enlarged the face of the girl like a motion-picture close-up. No. He scrutinized each of the twenty-four beautiful school friends of the young brunette as they entered, then shook his head and lowered his binoculars. Most likely there would be a Mary or two among them, but none who had ever been sufficiently friendly with him to write him a letter. He did not think he had ever set eyes on any of them. As suspicion that he had been victimized grew upon Mr. Jones, the man on his right gave a vexed laugh.

"Stung again," he observed to his companion. "I was pretty sure it was a publicity stunt, but the letter was clever. Anyhow, we're here, and maybe it will be a good show."

Jones shot a side glance at Bill Flint; but that youth had grabbed the opera glasses and was making a profound study of the scene. Apparently he had heard nothing; so Jeffrey had time to grow pink and pale again, wax indignant and wane, and finally decide it was a good joke, even if he had been a victim.

The first fifteen minutes of the piece were rather awful, as one character after another was introduced without making an impression. And then, with a fanfare of trumpets, the "girl from the moon" made her entrance.

Imagine sitting on the shore upon a summer evening, looking out upon the black, sad sea, steeped in melancholy reverie. Then the round, golden July moon, which has risen behind a bank of clouds, suddenly appears to pour a flood of silver light upon the ocean, illuminating gleaming white yachts riding at anchor, revealing the yellow sand of the beach and fondling the tops of the waving palm trees. Foolish birds wake up and begin to sing; from distant cottages is heard the tinkle of guitars and ukuleles; a girl in the distance turns loose a lovely soprano, and melancholy dissolves into warm contentment.

That was like the coming of Dora Gray. An electric shiver passed through the audience; the dead operetta was galvanized into life; immediately the music seemed beautiful, and boredom vanished. The foolish libretto dealt with a girl from the moon who spread joy with both hands.

Her magic made the horrid garden party hum with happiness. As Dora leaned over the footlights and began her opening number, the spotlight fell upon her lovely little face, and Jeffrey Jones thrilled with remembrance.

At the end of his junior year in Harvard he had spent a fortnight at Narragansett Pier, and there on the beach, one lovely afternoon, he had encountered this girl. It was a casual meeting; in fact, they were introduced by a wave, and he had helped her to her feet after the impolite billow had toppled her over.

Like the children they were, they had played together in the sea and then had gone ashore and lain side by side on the warm sand. Jeffrey had told her all about his life, and she had listened eagerly but revealed nothing of her own. At five o'clock, despite his protests, she had departed, but not until she had agreed to meet him on the beach the following afternoon. As she left she told her name. It was Mary Grew.

Others in that audience might have been drawn to the theater by decoy letters, but Jeffrey Jones knew he had not been hoaxed. He peered at his program and found the name of the girl from the moon, Dora Gray. Of course, that was a stage name. It was his Mary and she had not forgotten him.

Yet why should she remember? That night at Narragansett Pier he had gone to dinner with a classmate at the hotel where that individual was residing, and Jeffrey had raved about Mary Grew until he was implored to change the record. Finally they had entered the dining room, very hungry, and told their waitress to bring on the whole bill of fare. Another waitress, carrying a heavily loaded tray, came out of the kitchen, and as she passed their table Jeffrey looked up and their eyes met. With a terrific crash the tray landed on the floor, and the girl fled from the room. She was the goddess of the strand about whom he had been raving. Jeffrey's chum, who saw everything, broke into a rough laugh and razzed him for the rest of the evening.

Most likely Jeffrey would have kept the engagement, waitress or no waitress, had it not been for his critical friend. He dreaded ridicule and, like most young college men, he was a bit of a snob. Next afternoon he played tennis. His chum made inquiries and found that the girl who dropped the tray had thrown up her job immediately afterward, so, most likely, she was not at the beach, anyway. He never saw her again.

Entranced, he sat through the rest of the act with no more notion of what the show was about than if he had been the man in the heavenly orb from which the girl was supposed to have descended. He saw only Mary; he was bewitched by her bright hair, her sweet, pretty face, her twinkling feet, the magic of her cool, clear little soprano voice. When the curtain fell he did

not move until Bill Flint jabbed an elbow into his ribs.

"Snap out of it," commanded Bill. "Let's stretch. The show isn't so bad."

Jeffrey turned angry eyes upon him.

"It's marvelous!" he proclaimed.

He left the astonished Bill in the lobby and pushed into the street, where the cool night air cleared his head. It was most important that he see Mary. But would Mary see him? He had snubbed her. What a fool he had been to slight a girl like that because she was a waitress at a summer hotel, when he knew at the time that she was unique among women.

At the corner of Broadway was an office of the Western Union, and this suggested sending her a message. He scribbled upon a telegraph blank a note which was more eloquent than he could have written if he had been quite himself.

If Dora Gray was Mary Grew, does she remember an afternoon at Narragansett, years ago, and a boy named Jeffrey Jones, and the beach and the ocean and an engagement that was broken? I think you are marvelous. If I could see you for just a minute, perhaps I could make you remember me. JEFFREY JONES.

He thrust it into an envelope and carried it to the stage door, where he demanded that it be delivered at once.

"No telegrams delivered during a performance!" barked the ancient doorkeeper.

"It's not a telegram, just a note, and I'll wait here for an answer," he pleaded as he tucked a five-dollar bill into a horny palm.

In five minutes the doorman returned with a scrap of paper which he handed to the impatient youth. Jeffrey read it outside in the alley by the light of the arc lamp above the stage door:

Mary Grew that used to be will meet Jeffrey Jones for five minutes in the lobby of the Ritz Hotel to see if he can explain the broken engagement. DORA GRAY.

What happened during the remainder of the entertainment Bill Flint knew, but not Jeffrey, who saw everything blurred, like one who has gazed too long at the sun.

"Now where do we go?" demanded Bill, as they worked their way out of the theater.

"You go where you like. I've got a date."

"With a girl in the show? So that's where you went after the first act. Why didn't you get one for me?"

"Go way. Don't bother me. This is darn serious."

"You," retorted the aggrieved Mr. Flint, "may go to the dickens. I'll do a little astute telephoning."

"Good night, Bill."

"Good night."

Jeffrey had a forty-minute wait in the lobby of the Ritz before she came, and then he did not recognize her for a second, because he was expecting the goddess of the moon, resplendent in gauze and gems and effulgent in silver light, while Dora wore a plain, brown tailored suit and a cloche hat which obliterated the glory of her hair as a snuffer smothers the flame of a candle.

"I am waiting for your explanation," she said demurely. Jeffrey goggled and swallowed his Adam's apple, which intruded into his throat for the first time in his life.

"You only have five minutes," warned the little actress.

He recovered in part.

"It will take all my life," he declared, as he thrust out a welcoming hand to her.

Miss Mary Grew placed both her hands behind her back.

"The explanation," she insisted.

He grew very red, but his eyes met hers courageously.

"They razzed me, that friend of mine and some others. I was a nasty young snob and I was ashamed to meet

a waitress. So I didn't go to the beach."

Mary laughed softly.

"Now I'll shake hands with you. If you hadn't spoken the truth I should be already on my way out. Pleased to meet you again, Mr. Jeffrey Jones. You haven't changed much. Do you like the show?"

"You were marvelous. I am still breathless. You said you'd give me five minutes, but—er—I'd love to take you to supper."

"Can you afford it?" she demanded.

"Rather."

"I shouldn't. I am expected home. But I shall."

They found a table in a corner of the grill. Mary ordered bacon and eggs, and Jeffrey, who could not concentrate upon a bill of fare, copied her order—anything to get rid of the waiter.

"Please take off your hat," he pleaded.

"Why?"

"So I may see your hair."

She yanked off the felt abomination and released a shower of gold that dazzled, while her clear-blue eyes sparkled at the effect upon her escort.

"I'm not as pretty as I was at Narragansett," she asserted.

"A thousand times more so."

"That's the glamour of the theater, my friend," she said coldly. "If you had found me waiting in a restaurant to-night you would not have noticed me."

"Don't you fool yourself," he declared, so violently that he made her believe it. Why not, since he believed it himself? "You would be pounced upon even more quickly and dragged to the altar."

"The same old song."

"I know now why I haven't been much interested in girls," he continued. "I have never been in love, Mary, during all these years."

"How interesting! Are you trying to tell me that you have been in love with me?"

He nodded determinedly.

"No question about it."

Her little laugh rang out.

"You are a stupid boy, infatuated with an actress. You don't know anything about me, Jeffrey. What do you know about my life since I ran away from Narragansett. Because I left that night, and you might have kept the engagement for all I knew. I was very young and frightfully humiliated. But what do you know of me?"

"Rubbish!" he retorted. "Why did you meet me to-night? Doubtless you had lots of invitations."

She eyed him speculatively.

"I don't know. An impulse."

"But you remembered me all these years."

"Yes. As a nice boy who might have kept the engagement, even if I didn't. You could have lied to me, Jeffrey."

"I wanted to; I thought I would have to; but somehow I had to confess the truth. I'm not a snob now, anyway."

"Aren't you? After all, it's not disgraceful to be seen with a musical-comedy star."

"That would make no difference."

"I wonder. How did you know I was playing in 'The Girl From the Moon?'"

"I didn't. I came there——" He stammered and flushed. "As a matter of fact, I was tricked into going. I received this letter." He passed over the masterpiece of Mr. Peter Jinks, which the girl read with increasing indignation.

Flushing in her turn, she demanded:

"Do you think I wrote that? That I looked up your address and sent for you?"

He tried to lay his hand on hers, but she snatched it away and frowned at him.

"It's some sort of publicity stunt," he explained. "I suppose half the audi-

ence had copies of that letter, but I'm the only one who found my Mary. It's like fate, isn't it?"

"So they had the impudence to send that letter to thousands!" she exclaimed. "That's why the business jumped to capacity to-night. Archibald said they had a very clever scheme."

"Who the deuce is Archibald?" he asked, with jealous interest.

"Mr. Livingstone, the backer of our show. I suppose you would call him the 'angel.'"

"The angel." His eyes grew hard. "Doesn't that mean a man who is interested in a girl in the show?"

"Yes," she said defiantly.

"Oh, I see." His voice was hollow.

"He's interested in me. He backed the show to make me a star. Mr. Livingstone is in love with me and wants me to marry him. He is responsible for my success; he is very nice, and I am seriously considering accepting him."

"Oh, but you are not going to," he declared.

"Why not? I like him."

"You don't love him, Mary. Please say you don't!"

She frowned.

"Really, what does it matter to you?" she asked coldly.

"You know it matters."

"You met me years ago, snubbed me—yes, you did, since you broke our engagement—forgot all about me for years, and now you are fascinated because you saw me in make-up and a pretty costume."

"No, it isn't that."

"If I had died in the years since Narragansett you would not have missed me, because you had forgotten me. Mr. Livingstone found me a jobless, struggling young actress and lifted me to the top. He has been kind and sweet. Why shouldn't I marry him?"

"You don't love him," he told her doggedly.

"I'm not sure I do not. Yes, I think I do love him."

"No," he persisted, although he was pale. "If you loved him my note would have gone into the wastebasket. You certainly would not have wanted to see me again. If you had come you would have gone away in five minutes. Mary Grew, it all proved that you love me."

The girl was half fascinated, but she shook her head.

"I don't. How can you say such a thing? Why, I never met you but once in my life."

"Once is enough." He was the persuasive salesman now. "It was serious with you on the beach or you would never have been so humiliated at having me find you a waitress. You would not have thrown up your job and left. It was serious with me, only I wouldn't admit it then. We fell in love that afternoon, Mary, and we haven't got over it. That's why you can't marry this man. It's impossible."

"I promised to tell him to-morrow," she said hesitatingly. "This is insanity; you're mad and you're making me mad. I've got to marry him. Think what he risked for me." She seemed pleading with him for permission to say "Yes" to Archibald Livingstone.

"He won't lose his money," stated Jeffrey, breathless because he saw he was influencing her. "Your show will be a big hit. It will give him a profit on his investment. He has no right to demand any more."

"Please, Jeffrey," she began. "Archibald——"

"You couldn't marry a man like that."

"Listen, please. Mr. Livingstone doesn't care anything about the money. He financed the show for my sake. Besides, you can't marry me. Your family would object."

"Hah! This very night I'll marry you. We'll go over to Jersey. Now, while we know our own minds; before

he has a chance to dazzle you with all his coin."

Dora smiled, half attracted, half terrified at his precipitancy.

"You are quite mad, my dear. I couldn't do a thing like that to Mr. Livingstone."

Jeffrey shot a glance about the room. They were now quite alone; the lights were already dimming; the back of the waiter was turned toward them. Incidentally, neither had touched their bacon and eggs.

Without plan, his right arm suddenly wrapped itself about her slender shoulders, drawing her, resisting very slightly, against his solid chest. He swooped and planted a kiss squarely upon her dear crimson lips. At first she pressed her little hands against him, then she relaxed.

"Come," he commanded. Like a girl in a dream she rose. He laid a ten-dollar bill upon the table and led her, a hypnotic subject, from the grill-room.

Next afternoon at four o'clock, Archibald Livingstone, a box of roses under his arm, was ushered into the living room of the little star of "The Girl From the Moon." Dora met him, a trifle pale, a little frightened, yet determined.

The angel was beaming with good news as he laid his gift upon the table.

"Dora, my dear," he declared, "we've won. The show is a hit, and the advance sale for next week is enormous. It's due to a device I forced out of the press agent by threatening to fire him. Instead, I have doubled his salary. You are a made woman, Dora. A fixed luminary. And now I want the answer to my question. You promised to decide to-day."

He moved toward her. She retreated.

"No, please don't try to kiss me," she protested. "Sit down, Archie. I have something to tell you. I know about your publicity device. A letter from a girl named Mary, wasn't it?"

The big man chuckled. "Little Mary saved the show. We sent out ten thousand personal letters and packed the theater. The joke was that not one of them registered a kick—ashamed, I suppose. And you bet they liked the show once they found themselves in the theater. Neat and quick was the way the trick was done."

She stood in front of him, unsmiling.

"Archie, you never knew that my name was Mary, did you?"

"Why, no."

"I never told you that I worked as a restaurant waitress and clerked in a department store before I went on the stage. You were careful not to question me about my past."

"That's over and done with," he said, with a wave of his big hand. "Now you are Dora Gray, a Broadway star and the future Mrs. Archibald Livingstone."

"Archie, your unprincipled device worked out queerly. It drew to the threater a man I hadn't seen for years, who knew me when I was Mary Grew and worked as a waitress in a summer hotel. I went to supper with him. We—we——"

Full of apprehension, Livingstone was on his feet.

"Dora!" he cried sharply. "What are you trying to tell me?"

"It was your fault," she declared, as women will. "Really, it was. You cheated ten thousand people with your letter from Mary. One of your letters brought Mr. Jones. Don't look like that, Archibald!"

"Jones!" he shouted. "Jones! Well, go on."

"We were m-m-married this morning," she managed to stammer.

Livingstone dropped back in his chair, white as a ghost. "Oh, my Lord!" he exclaimed. "Jones! Married! Where does he live?"

She laughed hysterically.

"Really, what a strange question! As a matter of fact, he lives with his parents in Flatbush."

"I knew it!" groaned the angel. "Flatbush! Dora, I told the press agent we must find a way of dragging Mr. Jones of Flatbush to the theater. And we got him. Oh, yes! He came. A boomerang. The trick saved the show and lost you to me. You were going to say 'Yes' to-day. I saw it in your eyes when I left last night."

"I'm sorry, Archie. It seems Mr. Jones and I loved each other all these years. I'm awfully fond of you, but not in that way."

"Jones of Flatbush," he repeated. "Don't bother to talk to me, Dora. I'm done."

"But I want to introduce my husband. He's waiting in the next room."

"I can't see him. I'm going."

"Jeffrey has agreed to allow me to continue on the stage during the New York run of the piece," she said. "I want you to meet him. You'll like him, Archibald."

"Later. Do you know what the press agent's name is?"

"Mr. Jinks."

"'Jinx.' And I hired a man with a name like that! Dora, I'll meet Mr. Jones of Flatbush later. Now I have a duty to perform."

He walked to the door.

Something in his manner alarmed her.

"Archie," she demanded, following him, "what are you going to do?"

"For bringing Jones of Flatbush to the theater I'm going to kill the press agent," he declared. And then the door slammed.

Dora flitted to her chamber door and opened it.

"Come out, Jeffrey," she commanded. "He's gone."

"Darling!" exclaimed the young husband, opening his arms.

"Sweetheart!" she whispered, as she slipped within them.

In two weeks—February 18th—a new serial by Fred MacIsaac will begin in THE POPULAR. *It is called "The Golden Leaf," and the scene of the tale is the Near East. Don't fail to read it—Mr. MacIsaac always tells a compelling story.*

MR. MORGAN ON BEAUTY

FRANKLIN PIERCE MORGAN, man-about-town and silver-haired Beau Brummel of New York, Baltimore, and Washington, was sitting in the lobby of the Waldorf one morning last November when he read Florenz Ziegfeld's announcement that he would turn from skinny to heavier girls in making up the chorus for his new show.

"Great and glorious news!" exclaimed the connoisseur of feminine loveliness. "Ziegfeld has had so many choruses of skinny girls that he has convinced the American flapper that to be emaciated is to be beautiful. Now, by giving the stout maidens a showing, he will change all that. Fine! No longer will the girls of this puissant and productive republic look as if they got their food from the Sahara Desert, their milk from the milkweed, their shape from a third of a hoop and their most effective attitudinizing from a loosely articulated and awkwardly posed skeleton!"

THE *Good Spirit of Uncle Billy*

By A. M. Chisholm

Author of "History in Yellow Horse," "The Mule Kid of Long Ago," Etc.

Uncle Billy, one of the real old-timers, could tell yarns about almost any subject. He was especially full of reminiscences of the old Indian-fighting days, and no man, surely, ever had more vivid adventures. Here he tells of his narrowest escape.

PAST the cabin of "Uncle Billy" Webster on the outskirts of the old-time placer camp of Yellow Horse came a small cavalcade of Indians, bucks and squaws on tough, mountain-bred cayuses. The bucks rode in advance, bareheaded, their long, black hair, braided, falling in front of their shoulders.

They were clad in deerskin leggings and moccasins, with here and there a blanket or a buckskin shirt, for they had not yet adopted white man's apparel. Behind rode the squaws, old and young, with an occasional flash of gay calico. On the back of one young woman, laced in a deerskin pocket on a backboard—the Indian cradle—with merely the face exposed, was a bronze-faced baby, its solemn black eyes staring out upon the changing world of its ancestors. Apparently the company had been on a shopping expedition, for several pack ponies were laden with an assortment of the white man's goods.

Shuffle and pad, shuffle and pad. Dust puffing from beneath the falling hoofs. Boneless, spineless, easy bob and give of bodies, by riders born to the back of a horse. Then they were gone down the trail, vanishing into the still unpeopled immensity of the old West.

Uncle Billy, seated by the door of his cabin, viewed the riders with distinct disapproval in his frosty old eyes which, in a long career on the frontier, had

peered down rifle sights with like bronze bodies as objective. For reasons which were sufficient to him and extremely personal, he was not fond of Indians.

Uncle Billy was the patriarch of the camp; he owned to some seventy snows. All his life had been spent on the frontier; and he possessed a fund of reminiscence which, authentic or otherwise, there was no means of verifying or contradicting, the actors living in his memory or imagination having long since passed from the stage. He was a relic of an earlier and more primitive day, a great, gaunt frame of a man, dried by the years and their suns and winds; which desiccating process, however, he endeavored to modify by moistening his being with alcohol. In his case at least it seemed to have a preservative effect and little or no other. He was still as tough as a pine knot, reasonably active, and regarded himself as one of the boys in whatever was going on.

His companion on this occasion was a gentleman named Hale, a pilgrim of literary proclivities from the Far East, then in Yellow Horse with a view to procuring data for a projected work on the history of American settlement. He was deeply interested in the West, its manners and its inhabitants, and the information he was getting was at times startling.

This was his first close-up of the western Indian. He possessed a slight acquaintance with the basket-weaving, canoe-building, tamed and trousered remnants of once mighty tribes of the East; but these red men were different. They were, in fact, savages. On the frontier of which Yellow Horse was an outpost, the vanguard of civilization and the sullen rear of savagery touched, and still occasionally clashed. Though the old power of the Indian nations had been broken, there were still sporadic uprisings, murders of lone prospectors and small parties in the hills, and occasionally a massacre on a larger scale. He asked the old frontiersman for information as to the men who had passed.

"Them bucks," Uncle Billy replied, "is Shoshones, and likely they belongs to the outfit of old Timber Hoss—the Hoss and his nephew, Diggin' Badger, bein' as exc'lent murderers as you'll find in a month's hunt. Them Injuns, now, had flour, ca'tridges and blankets, for which I s'pose they've traded skins, and so is upholstered to eat, murder and sleep all comfortable."

"Do you mean that those Indians are hostile?" Mr. Hale queried in astonishment.

"These yere Indians," Uncle Billy returned, "is what you-all calls 'opportunists.' They don't make war med'cine and uprise in a body openly, because they figger it's too hard a game right now. Half a dozen white men, armed and keepin' their eyes open, is safe enough. What them Injuns does is to lay for easy prey, like a lone prospector or a few trustful pilgrims, and lift their ha'r. Them Injuns ain't tamed down none; they're merely prudent."

"Perhaps you have had some interesting personal experiences with Indians," Mr. Hale suggested.

"My experiences with Injuns," Uncle Billy responded, "has been a heap pers'nal. They starts early. And back of me thar's the experiences of others of my blood—my ma's old gent havin' been shot and scalped in his cl'arin' in sight of his wife before my ma is born. That grand old lady and my eldest uncle, which is then a boy of twelve, slams-to the cabin door, and with buckshot and bullet stands off them savages till help arrives.

"So it ain't to be wondered at that my ma don't like Injuns much. As I tells you already, she's the best girl Injun shot in Squir'l Run; and her girlhood's collection of scalps—six of them

trophies there is—hangs framed fancy on the wall of my childhood's home beneath a motter worked in wool, readin': 'Love One Another.'

"And even when she assumes the responsibilities of a family, her hand don't forget its girlish cunnin.' My mem'ries goes back to a sunny Saturday mornin' when at the mature age of eight I'm playin' with a popgun made out'n a bored elder rod, a rammer and a plug. My old gent is away pickin' corn to mill to be ground into hom'ny and meal, and ma and us children is alone, the nearest cabin bein' five miles away.

"My childish imagination turns my Brother Sid, aged six, into an Injun chief, and havin' shot him all satisfact'ry with my wooden gun I'm tryin' to lift his ha'r with a wooden knife, a process to which Sid objects. My little Sister Emmy, a yeller-haired tot of four, is foolin' about on the floor, the baby is in his cradle, which is a dug-out log on rockers, and my ma is bendin' over the washtub, all ladylike and serene. All is peaceful as a bird's nest, except for Sid, who emits a yowl at my attempts to scalp him. And at this p'int my ma takes a hand in my childish game, which she's been sorter ridin' herd on.

"'That ain't no way to lift ha'r, Wilyum,' says my ma; 'that ain't the way. You want to learn how to scalp easy and graceful and have some style about you. Jest wind your left hand into the scalp lock like this—hold still, Sid; mammy ain't goin' to hurt you—run the aidge of your knife clean around once and then under, like you was loosenin' a bacon rind, give a twist of your left wrist, and off that scalp comes slick and clean.' And havin' thus p'inted out the better way, bringin' me up proper, ma goes back to the tub and I resumes my play.

"Suddenly the cabin door darkens. Through it, soft-footed, noiseless as an owl's wings and swift as a hawk's shadder, slips two Shawnee bucks, bare to their britchclouts and moccasins. They ain't painted for war, but they're armed for it. They're young men, on the prowl for a pick-up, sech as a cabin with the man away and merely defenseless women and children offers. Like enough they've watched my old gent out of sight on his way to mill. They may just steal, or they may kill, or both, dependin' on how the fancy happens to take 'em.

"Lookin' back to that far mornin', I can see the light shinin' on their copper hides and the play of the muscles beneath, their black eyes, and wide, cruel mouths stretched in grins showin' their teeth like vicious dogs. That scene stands cl'ar-etched in mem'ry.

"At sight of them bucks, sech is the influence of early trainin', I turns my popgun upon 'em and takes aim, though young as I be I realizes the ineffectualness of that weapon. My ma fetches her hands out'n the suds and starts dryin' them on her apron. She ain't discomposed, my ma ain't, not a mite, at least to show it. She takes her time, wipin' her fingers slow and careful as if she aims to take a good dry grip of something.

"'What do you Injuns want?' says my ma.

"'Eat,' says one of the savages, rubbin' his copper stomach to signify hunger.

"'You git out of yere,' says my ma, 'Pull your freight some sudden, or you'll wish you had.'

"But the savage, with a grin, reaches out and seizes little Emmy. Takin' her by her little, fat laigs he swings her round his head. Nach'rally Emmy screams, and I sees my ma's face grow white.

"'If paleface squaw don't give Injun grub, I kill this papoose,' says this buck.

"'You betcha,' says his chum, approvin'.

"Nach'rally they don't say it just like

that, but that's what they mean—and they shorely mean it.

" 'You let that child alone and wait a minute, and I'll git something for you,' says my ma; and the savage sets down Emmy, but holds her gripped by the ha'r.

"My ma fetches down the skillet off'n its peg and rakes the ashes off'n the coals—them days thar ain't no stoves, leastwise not with us—and goes over to the flour bar'l. Above that bar'l is a shelf, high out'n the way of us children, and I know what's kept thar, havin' had my young hide tanned to a frazzle for tryin' to climb up to it. Ma lifts the kiver off'n the flour bar'l with her left hand and reaches up her right to the shelf like she was after a dish or somethin'. Then she drops the kiver on the floor, wheels, and thar she is framed up with a two-bar'l'd pistol about forty caliber in her right hand, and cocked.

" 'Wugh!" says the savage who holds Emmy; and 'Waugh!' says his friend, which maybe has a diff'rent shade of meanin'.

"But them remarks is in the nature of valedict'ries. Smoke pours out of ma's right hand, the roar of the old pistol beats on my youthful ears and fills the cabin; and them two Injuns comes down, one straight ahead on his face like an otter goin' down a slide, and the other doubled up, saggin' at the knees and middle, like they've been struck by jedgment, as likely they be. Them old pistols at twelve-foot range is deadly as a buff'lo gun. Them savages is in the happy huntin' grounds before they can smell the powder.

"My ma then gives me a youthful lesson which I've never forgot. Before she looks at them Injuns she reloads that pistol from powder horn and bullet pouch.

" 'Always remember, Wilyum,' she instructs me, 'and you, too, Sid, to load your gun before you pick up your game.' Then she turns them bucks over and seems a mite put out. 'I was aimin' for that savage's right eye, and yere's the hole away off to the left up in his forward,' she says sorter fretful. 'When I was a girl I'd have done neater work; but a woman with four-children don't git no chance to keep up her studies in the fine arts. However, it does the trick.' And she gives that savage's scalp lock a tug and looks around. 'Wilyum,' she says to me, 'you run out to the smokehouse and fetch me in the bootcher knife.' "

And, having concluded this reminiscence of the stormy days of the old frontier of his childhood, the patriarch refilled his pipe, lighted it and smoked in contemplative silence.

"That experience must have made a profound impression upon your young mind," his auditor commented. "How did it affect you? Were your childish slumbers disturbed by frightful dreams of savages?"

"No, I don't dream about them savages that I remembers of," Uncle Billy replied. "But beholdin' how my ma rakes in that pair, I'm filled with childish ambition to git one or more for myself. So, watchin' my chance, a day or two after I steals down my old gent's rifle from whar it hangs on the wall, equips myself with his powder horn and bullet pouch, and goes out into the primeval forest on a lone hunt for Injuns.

"I don't git no Injuns, but I gits lost for a day and two nights, and why a wolf or somethin' don't pick me up is a myst'ry. When I'm found and fed and rested up, my old gent, who don't overlook much, takes a hick'ry gad and makes an impression which wipes out that mental one you speaks of, complete. I sleeps on my stomach for a week; and while I don't give up the idee of killin' Injuns entire, I sorter defers it for a few years.

"The next episode with Injuns into

it that I recalls is after I comes West; and that time I'm so close to leavin' this vain world behind that it's just a teeter balance. Lookin' back on a long life I regards it as the narrowest shave I ever has, and likewise a tol'able hard play, though it ain't mine. Only for what old Major Calhoun Platt calls my 'good spirit' I'd shore have made the jump into life everlastin' ahead of Hoppin' Crow."

"Tell me about it," the pilgrim requested. "Who was Hopping Crow? But first, what do you mean by your 'good spirit?' "

" 'A good spirit,' " Uncle Billy explained, "is an Injun idee for a sorter pers'nal Providence. Injuns mostly runs to bad spirits and devils; but to offset them ev'ry Injun puts it up that he has a pers'nal good spirit lookin' out his game. This spirit may take the form of a rabbit or a buff'lo bird, in which case, of course, he sees it frequent, or it may be in the wind or in a cloud, or nothin' at all. Long as this spirit is workin' and he don't offend it none, he's all right. It gives him warnin' of enemies and dangers, pulls him through tight places and gen'rally confers luck. But if it quits him he's open and defenseless, and he might as well throw in his hand, for he's outheld by ill fortune and he won't last long. That's the good spirit.

"The events I speaks of takes place after the episode of them rustlers, which I relates of before. I'm still workin' for Major Calhoun Platt, and him and me has a freight outfit consistin' of two eight-mule teams and four wagons, trail and lead, to each team. I'm a lad crowdin' twenty years, but big for my age and strong, and as I savvies mules I'm as good on the job as a man. The major has his faults, like drinkin' too much whisky and bein' sorter absent minded about pay days; but the first is mostly his own business, and as to the last I've lost a bet of three months' mule skinnin' against double wages as to which of us downs that rustler which it turns out neither of us don't down, so this forgetfulness don't matter. The major and me has shook down together, and we're a team. Mostly we gits along all right.

"It's about this time that the major becomes worried about Injuns. Thar's always more or less of 'em, but this is a band under a chief named Hoppin' Crow, which also is a sorter prophet infestin' around, and whether it's the result of their presence or not, thar's various prospectors missin', and some small parties and one wagon train wiped out. The major don't like the idee of them Injuns, and says so to an army captain that's supposed to be sorter representin' the gov'ment and makin' things safe for whites. This captain is from somewhere back East, and he cherishes the delusions about Injuns common whar they've all been shot off long ago.

" 'All them Injuns want is to be let alone to pursue their simple lives,' says this captain. 'Some white miscreants has shot sev'ral of Hoppin' Crow's young men, and nach'rally he don't like it. But he ain't revengeful. I talks with him, tellin' him what's what, and I finds him a peaceful and intelligent savage.'

" 'I ain't aspersin' his intelligence none,' says the major. 'He's right crafty. But if you think he's peaceful it's a reflection on your own sense. He's a murderer, and give him the chance. I'll bet a hundred dollars, if you combs his lodges close enough you'll find fresh white scalps. And I'll tell you what I'll do: You take your long-knives and walk-a-heaps and wipe out Hoppin' Crow and his outfit, and I'll keep you in free whisky for a year.'

" 'Are you tryin' to bribe me to commit murder?' the captain asks, haughty.

" 'Killin' Injuns ain't murder,' the major points out. 'And, if you don't

like whisky, I'm a pore man, but I'll make it champagne.'

"But the captain refuses this plain business proposition and talks of writin' to the gov'ment and havin' the major shoved in the calaboose.

"'All them Injuns wants is a squar' deal from the whites,' he winds up. 'Injuns is good people, treated right. They's human bein's, same as us.'

"'Which remark,' says the major, 'merely shows your abysmal ign'rance of these Injuns. If you don't change your views, some day you'll lose your ha'r.' Which prophecy comes true in less'n a year, that captain and twenty troopers bein' wiped out by Sioux which he deems friendly till too late.

"However, we keeps on freightin', though the major is watchful as a buck whar wolves is runnin' and nigh as nervous. Now and then Injuns appears along our route or strays casual into camp. They don't bother us none, outside of just bein' thar, more'n occasional askin' for grub, tobacker or whisky. They may belong to Hoppin' Crow's band or they may not. But we has an oneasy feelin' that they's sorter stackin' us up with a special eye to our ha'r. We gives 'em about what they asks for, except whisky—the ab'rig'nal stomach not bein' tuned to take in fire water without it producin' a cravin' to murder. It's an odd thing, the more civ'lized a drink you hands a savage, the less civ'lized it makes him.

"We usual has whisky in our wagons, mostly sev'ral bar'ls of it. The contents of them old wagons would s'prise you. We freights everything from feedin' bottles to coffins, thus runnin' the whole scale of human existence, though thar ain't so many of the first as the second. One trip we freights in four wagon loads of them caskets and resembles a wholesale fun'ral. It's true them coffins is filled with goods sech as tobacker, coffee, beans and ca'tridges, as tendin' to save space and cut down freight costs.

"Whisky, ca'tridges and coffins sorter runs together like three of a kind; the first often leadin' to the expenditure of the second, and the second producin' a demand for the third. Coffins is speshul pop'lar after a killin' when a gent who has downed another wishes to create a fav'rable impression and silence criticism by plantin' his victim in style. Under sech circumstances store coffins is regarded as the proper caper. In some camps, whar they's musical talent, it's possible to hire a band.

"But, to come back to them Injuns, we're firm in refusin' them whisky; and now and then they pushes demands for it to the p'int of ins'lence.

"If they's one thing more fatal than another in dealin' with savages, it's to allow 'em to git too braish. And the more Injuns they is to a white man, the more necessary it is for him to put a prompt stop to sech actions. So one day the major busts a biggety-actin' buck over the head with a pick handle.

"It don't hurt the buck, outside of makin' him bleed a lot and peelin' his scalp some. When he comes to, which he does in about ten minutes, he's forgot about his cravin' for whisky, and he pulls his freight, silent and scowlin'.

"The major glances from the retreatin' savage to his rifle. 'I b'lieve I ought to down him for keeps,' he says, thoughtful. 'Like as not he'll lay for us, shootin' from cover.' But he lets him go, though it's rash.

"How rash it is, we sees next trip when, as we're makin' camp for the night on our usual ground near the Little Pine, about twenty bucks appears out of nowhar, and at their head is Hoppin' Crow himself. Ev'ry man of 'em has a rifle or a war bow, and mostly both. In this entoorage we notes the pick-handle savage. Thar ain't a squaw nor papoose in sight, which means they're out for huntin' or war.

"Things looks sorter cloudy, and we gits in between the wagons.

"'Keep cool, lad,' says the major—which thar ain't no difficulty about so far as I'm concerned, the chills havin' begun to chase up and down my back—'and don't shoot till I do. Maybe they're merely out to run a bluff; and, if not, we may stand 'em off.'

"Hoppin' Crow makes the peace sign and, leavin' his followers sittin' on their ponies thirty yards off, rides up to the wagons. He's a fine-lookin' savage with a hard, crafty face that don't belie him none. Him and the major exchanges greetin's, askin' after each other's health polite and dignified—which extra politeness, as every gent of experience knows, is frequent a prelude to war. The major can talk Hoppin' Crow's tongue, and I savvy it some, so I'm in on what follows.

"'Hoppin' Crow's heart is sad,' says the chief, replyin' to the major's inquiry. 'A while ago my white brother busts one of my young men who was hungry and asks him for grub. It hurts his head and makes his heart bad toward my white brother.'

"'Your young man asks for whisky,' the major returns, 'and he puts it up he'll take it, anyway. Sech demands don't go; and, as he insists, I busts him. Your young man is a holdup, and he's lucky I don't let daylight through his system.'

"'All this land,' says Hoppin' Crow, sorter changin' the subject and wavin' his copper-colored paw around, 'is Injun land given to the Injun by the Great Spirit. The white man is ruinin' it, scarin' off the game, cuttin' up the scenery with trails and camps, and otherwise raisin' hell. Things ain't the way they use to be; and the way they use to be is how we want 'em. Also, that's how we're goin' to have 'em.'

"Of course, Hoppin' Crow don't say it just in them words, but that's his meanin', boil it down.

"'Them things you complains of,' the major tells him, 'is progress, and nobody can block her; speshully no Injun. I, myself, sighs for the days when two bits would buy one gallon of good whisky; but they're one with them miracles you've never heard of—gone beyond recall. You and your young men ain't goin' to set back the clock.'

"Hoppin' Crow seems to ponder over the drawbacks of this so-called progress, same as lots of other gents all through hist'ry which dislikes to move with the times. That captain, when he speaks of him as bein' intelligent, don't half cover the case. Hoppin' Crow knows far too much.

"'Does my white brother think us Injuns should learn the white man's ways?' he asks.

"'Well, just some of 'em,' says the major. 'You've got enough bad ones of your own.'

"'I hears a heap about the white man and how he turns his game,' Hoppin' Crow pursues. 'I'm told thar's many tribes of white men, in many lands, sep'rated by big waters, or rivers, or mebbe nothin' at all; but each white tribe has its own land and runs its own show. Is these things so?'

"'They be,' the major nods.

"'Also,' says Hoppin' Crow, 'I hears that when white men of one tribe wishes to freight in goods to the land of some other tribe, they's stopped on the frontiers, and has to pay a rake-off on the value of them goods. Is that c'rect?'

"'In a sorter way,' the major admits.

"'All right, then,' says Hoppin' Crow. 'This yere is Injun land, and I'm chief. You is freightin' goods through it, and accordin'ly I makes a rule, follerin' the white man's custom, that you has to pay me a rake-off for doin' of it. And I wants that rake-off in whisky.'

"'The flaw in them commercial theories you has evolved,' the major returns, 'is that Injuns ain't allowed to make rules. And thar'fore you don't git no rake-off in whisky nor nothin'.'

" 'Then you don't freight no more goods over this trail,' Hoppin' Crow announces a heap positive. 'And thar'll be a good reason why. You won't be on deck to do it.'

"That's puttin' it straight and likewise cold, and the major thinks it over. On the face of it, he can give so much whisky, which won't be missed much, and keep on freightin'. But not so long ago thar's the red example of an outfit which is weak enough to yield to sim'lar demands on the part of Injuns. Them Injuns, when they drinks the whisky, falls upon and scalps the whole kaboodle, and loots and burns their wagons. It ain't known what Injuns pulls off this slaughter, so mebbe it ain't Hoppin' Crow; but then again, mebbe it is.

"Anyway, the gen'ral principle remains unchanged—it don't do to give Injuns whisky. Besides, it's about even chances that this talk of Hoppin' Crow's is all a bluff, and he's out to murder us anyway. That pick-handle savage ain't forgot, not by a danged sight. Them days I carries an exc'lent head of ha'r, and as I fancies I sees Hoppin' Crow eyein' it, it feels sorter pringly around the roots. I'm young, and thar's a heap of things I want to do yet. I hopes the major, who with all his faults is a wise old wolf, will find a trail out. Meanwhile, I notes a spot near one of Hoppin' Crow's top ribs whar I'm goin' to plant a chunk of lead the second diplomacy breaks down. I'm only a boy, and I ain't acquired the calm patience that goes with maturity. The major was wiser.

" 'Well, look yere,' says the major after a minute, speakin' sorter slow like he's feelin' his way and ain't quite shore what he'll do, but as if an idee was glimmerin'. 'Mebbe we can make treaty. Whisky is big med'cine, all right for chiefs and warriors like you and me, but not so good for young men, it leadin' them to think they're as wise as us, which they ain't. Whisky is for chiefs.'

"Hoppin' Crow nods his head and allows that's so. I can see his eyes narrowin' and turn' in a little sorter blank, as he wonders what the major's leadin' up to. And I'm wonderin', myself.

" 'In the cases you alludes to,' the major goes on, 'it's the white man's gov'ment that gits the rake-off on them goods; and in this case you, bein' chief, is the gov'ment. Gov'ments always fools the common run of folks, which is only good to elect 'em to office. It don't do to let them common electors in on everything that's goin'. So, if you gits all the whisky you can drink yourself, you don't care about your young men. It's yours, because you're the big buck with the horns and does the thinkin' and picks out the pastures for the herd and leads the way. Ain't that c'rect?'

"Hoppin' Crow nods, his eyes brightenin.' Like a lot of men which molds public opinion, his views depends a lot on how he's fixed, himself. You never hears a gent whose stack is growin' hollerin' much about the rectitude of the game. So Hoppin' Crow allows these is words of wisdom. The only thing is, can he pull off the play and keep it covered from his young men? It don't do to go on ahigh-lonesome on white man's whisky they don't git in on, and let 'em know it. It would injure his prestige a lot, to put it mild. The major knows this, and tells him how to beat the game.

" 'Still, it's just as well your young men should not know,' he says. 'Besides bein' a chief, you is also a prophet, and to prophesy right you has to have quiet beforehand. Thar's times when you disappears for a couple of days and nights at a stretch, durin' which time you communes with the spirits, and afterward lays out the game for your people accordin' to the steer

they gives you. So, yere's what you do now: You feel one of them times comin' on when you're due to prophesy some, and have your young men build you a wikiup to make med'cine in. You order them to keep plumb away, so's not to disturb your visions, and not to bother us meanwhile. And when it's dark, my young man, yere, will bring you a coffeepot full of whisky, and thar you sets and drinks in comfort till you're tired. If you wants more whisky, you gits it. You gits all you wants for yourself, any time. Also, you tells your young men that we're good people, and your white brothers.'

"Hoppin' Crow, after thinkin' this over, allows it's a good scheme, and he'll work it. But, jest the same, I thinks I sees something cold and snaky in the back of his eyes, and I don't like it. However, he gives orders that seems to cover the play as the major has outlined it, for his young men go to buildin' him a bresh wikiup 'bout fifty rods from our wagons whar'in he can take counsel with them spirits of his.

"As he has a big rep'tation for knowin' a heap of spirits, and as nobody can tell when the signs is right for a prophet to git his tips, them savages don't discern nothin' much wrong about this, more'n maybe it's sorter unhandy, they havin' figgered on gittin' our whisky and likely our scalps, too, without delay. But Hoppin' Crow is boss. Havin' fixed up his tabernacle, they draws off a respectful distance, mebbe another fifty rods, and that much more from our wagons, and makes their own camp.

"Meanwhile, me and the major is peggin' out our teams and keepin' our saddle ponies tethered to the wagons.

"'I ain't trustin' to hobbles to-night,' says the major as he gives me these instructions. 'In fact, I'm shy of trust jest now, all around. Drive them pegs plenty deep, lad. We'll pull out first thing in the mornin'.'

"'Providin' we're let,' I suggests, some doubtful.

"'Exactly,' the major agrees. 'As you say, providin' we're let. But I figger I've found the right system to deal with this Hoppin' Crow. If he drinks that whisky he won't know when we pull out; and his men, without him, won't hinder us much; and they're too scared of them spirits of his to disturb him. At least, that's what I hope. If I'm wrong, we've still got our guns, and a gent only makes the crossin' once; though thar's a heap of things on my back trail I wish wasn't. You're luckier, bein' younger.'

"But it don't seem that way to me. When we're through peggin' out our teams the major searches out a coffeepot. It ain't our reg'lar one, but camp size for a bigger outfit, holdin' more'n a gallon. He gits a gimlet, and goes off to the whisky wagon. I'm busy about camp, and don't notice him much. I'm watchin' the growin' dark and keepin' my rifle handy. When it's dark the major comes to me with the coffeepot.

"'This yere,' he says, 'is Hoppin' Crow's rake-off.'

"'You're shore gen'rous with licker for that savage,' I comments.

"'I want him to have lots,' says the major. 'You take it over to where he's makin' his bluff about interviewin' spirits. This will help him to do it. Go quiet. Don't make no noise, and don't let no one see you. Don't spill none of this whisky; and, in partic'lar, don't drink none, not even a taste. Be shore, now. This ain't a night to tech licker. We ain't out of the woods yet, by a danged sight.'

"I promises ready enough. I ain't studyin' on drinkin' licker, but on savin' my scalp. Nor I don't like that trip over to Hoppin' Crow's wikiup. Rememberin' that bad look in his eye, I regards it as good bettin' that he's up to some game. However, I takes the

coffeepot in my left hand by the wire bail, so's my right hand will be free for my six-shooter, and makes a start.

"You bet I goes careful with no more noise than an owl's wings. I ain't out to advertise my presence outside camp a bit. My nerves bein' on the stretch that a way, fills the night with odd noises, and my heart's actin' up, beatin' like a tom-tom in my ears and jumpin' around up near my throat.

"Now, yere's a thing. The major had warned me against techin' licker that night, and I knows he's right, for we shorely need cool, unfuddled heads. But human nature—and speshully young men's nature—is contrairy as sin; and maybe because of that very warnin', when I've gone about half way I feels I wants a drink. I figgers maybe it'll stiddy my nerves. Jest a swaller or two out'n the spout won't do no harm, and thar'll be lots left for Hoppin' Crow. If he drinks that coffeepot empty he'll be plenty drunk. So I raises the spout to my lips.

"As they touched the metal, something—some little live critter—jumps in the bresh alongside me and skitters across ahead. Mebbe it's a rabbit. But, with my nerves on the stretch like they be, I jumps 'bout 'leven feet and yanks my six-shooter, my back ha'r risin' in fright, but still holdin' the coffeepot, though only for the kiver I'd have spilled half its contents. I stands thar in the dark, breathin' hard, my heart pumpin' up against my throat and ears, tryin' to git back my nerves. And all desire for licker has been jolted out of me. I'm too scared to swaller, that's what. From wantin' a drink, suddenly I don't want one. My stomach feels so weak it rebels at the mere thought of whisky.

"When my knees stops shakin' enough to travel, I goes on to where Hoppin' Crow has his wikiup and a small fire goin'. He comes out'n the shadders. He has his face daubed with paint in bars and dots which likely mean somethin', and his med'cine bag and a few feathers and stones and sech stuff, and gen'rally has his game laid out for the bluff he's makin' if any of his men intrude.

"I hands him the coffeepot, and he lifts the kiver and sees that it's full; and he smells of it, and looks at me and grins, with that something back of his eyes that I like less than ever. He don't say nothin', but merely motions to me to git out, which I'm glad to do.

"When I gits back to the wagons—and you bet I'm thankful to make 'em—the major is sittin' regardin' of the fire as if he was doin' some thinkin' to himself. His face, as he lifts it and looks at me, is lined and drawn and his eyes seem sorter sunk with dark shadders and hollers under 'em. But he don't say nothin—merely looks at me.

" 'I gives Hoppin' Crow that whisky, all right,' I reports. 'When I leaves him he has his nose in it.'

" 'Good boy," says the major. 'I hope you didn't drink none yourself?' And he seems to hang curious on my answer.

" 'Not a smell,' I replies. 'I was goin' to,' I confesses, honest, 'in spite of what you said, feelin' the need of a stiddier; but just as I'm goin' to take a swaller or so out'n the spout, a rabbit or something jumps in the bresh and runs in front of me, and puts me out of the notion.'

"The major stares at me for a moment like I'd related a marvel.

" 'A rabbit!' he says. 'Well, I've heard of sech things. Call it a rabbit. Do you want a drink now? One won't hurt you.'

"But I don't want a drink right then. The major takes two, and they're big ones. With the first one his hand shakes so that the rim of the tin cup clacks against his teeth; but with the second he does better, and seems all right again. Them shakes is no sign

of anything much. Many a gent is shaky settin' around waitin' for something to happen; which when it does he's plumb calm, and stiddy as the hills. It's jest the way you're built. Because a hoss is nervous and fretful at the flag don't say that he ain't a game runner in the stretch.

"For a long time we sets by the fire with our shootin' irons handy. We don't talk much, doin' more listenin'. But all is quiet. Apart from the usual night noises, like owls and a few little wolves tellin' their troubles to the stars, thar ain't a sound. And them noises, though favored by Injuns as signals to each other, seems all natural. Nothin' is to be heard from their camp, and it looks like they've bedded down. And Hoppin' Crow is silent in his communion with spirits.

" 'I figgered mebbe when he got drunk he'd raise the war yell or carry on sim'lar,' I says, a savage bein' prone to them joyous demonstrations.

" 'He won't raise no yell,' the major says, confident. 'For one thing, it'd bring his young men up, and so tip his hand. And thar's other reasons.'

" 'But won't they find him lyin' drunk in the mornin'?" I asks. "If he licks up that coffeepot full of whisky he's due for a long sleep.'

" 'He's due for that, shore enough,' the major agrees, with something in his voice that I don't savvy. It's hard and cold, like iron on iron on a winter's day. 'But a rep'tation is a great thing. Get a rep'tation for something, and it's a wonder what you can git away with. So he won't be drunk; he'll jest be in a trance. Which I've knowed white gents to hang up sim'lar bluffs. Still, it ain't likely his men will go near him for a while, for fear of displeasin' the spirits and bringin' a curse onto themselves. And also for fear of displeasin' Hoppin' Crow, who's apt to resent it.'

" 'The way he looks when you makes the deal with him, I thinks he don't aim to play squar' with us and is holdin' out a card or two,' I says.

" 'And you was right,' the major agrees. 'He was aimin' to wipe us out to-night, whisky or no whisky; but he couldn't resist the temptation to git drunk first, when I gave him the chance. If I know anything, he was goin' to tell his warriors the spirits had commanded him to lift our ha'r.'

" 'Then he may do it yet,' I says, nervous.

" 'That whisky has landed him by now,' the major says, confident. 'It gives quick action, that whisky does. First peep o' day we pulls our freight. Them Injuns won't hinder us without commands from him; and he won't be in shape to give 'em. You go to sleep, lad. I'll stand watch.'

"I'm a heap nervous and scared; but also I'm young; and I has confidence in the major's knowledge of Injuns. I coils down in my blankets, and though I thinks I'm wide awake as a treeful of owls, it ain't no time till I'm sound asleep.

"How long I sleeps I don't know; but while it's still dark I awakes complete. I raised my head and looks around, but I don't see the major standin' watch. He ain't in his blankets, neither. I thinks mebbe he's out scoutin' around in the dark, though sech work is risky. Then I hears somethin' movin', comin' toward the wagons, steppin' slow and careful but heavy. I knows it ain't no Injun treadin' that way, unless it's Hoppin' Crow, and drunk, but I gits hold of my six-shooter and lies low, ready for whatever play comes up. Then I hears heavy breathin', and a cuss which is a fav'rite of the major's, and I'm relieved. He's doin' something out thar in the dark, and as he don't do much without an object, I awaits developments.

"The form of the major looms up before the wagons, and he's packin' something as big as himself throwed

over his shoulder like the carcass of a buck. Against the sky, lyin' low like I am, I sees a moccasined foot danglin'. And then I knows! The major has went and got Hoppin' Crow and packed him sunk in drunken stupor to our wagons, as a sorter hostage. That's why he gives him the whisky. It's a crafty play, and inwardly I applauds it. But I don't move, nor say a word. The major ain't asked for my help, but is playin' a lone hand. He stands still beside the wagon, breathin' hard under his burden.

" 'You awake, lad?' he says, sorter low.

"I don't reply, because if the major has been pullin' off this play alone it's likely because he wants to. If he wants me awake, he'll wake me. But he don't, and moves off to his own lead wagon. I hears him grunt, and a thump, and I knows he's heaved Hoppin' Crow into it. He's strong as a bull, the major is, built wide and from the ground. Then I hears him crawl over the wheel and moves things around some. Likely he's arrangin' a bed for that drunk chief, and hog tyin' him so's he won't give no trouble if he wakes.

"But he don't seem to wake, and after a while the major comes back to whar I be, and sets down. He upends a whisky bottle against the stars and couples his lips to it till I think he's never goin' to let loose. But he does, with a sorter gasp and shiver, and he lights his pipe.

"It's then I thinks it's all right to groan and turn over in my blankets.

" 'All right, lad,' says the major.

" 'I've slept fine,' I says. 'You hit your blankets?'

" 'Sleep some more,' says the major. 'I ain't sleepy, and thar's a couple of hours before day.'

"As he don't confide in me, I don't ask no questions, and pretty soon I'm asleep again. It's gittin' gray when the major wakes me. He has the fire goin' and breakfast cookin'. As we eat, he onbosoms himself some.

" 'While you sleeps,' he says, 'I does some figgerin'; as the result of which I goes over, collects Hoppin' Crow and packs him into camp, and he's now bedded down in my lead wagon. When we pull out, we'll take him along a ways. If them savages takes a notion to look into his wikiup he won't be thar.'

" 'But what will they think when they finds him gone?' I asks.

" 'They'll think he's on a visit to them spirits of his,' the major replies; 'and they won't be so far out, neither. One of his rackets is to disappear mysterious out of his tepee and show up again just as one explained. So that's what they'll think. Or I reckon they will. If not, we shows him to them with a gun against his head, and tells them what's what.'

"In pursuit of this crafty scheme we hitches up our teams as usual in the mornin'. Them Injuns sets around on their ponies, lookin' sorter expectant toward whar they think Hoppin' Crow is, but they don't make no hostile move, nor they don't break in on his meditations. That's what rep'tation does. As we're ready to pull out, they sorter move up on us, but thar's no confidence in the move. And the major halts it by steppin' out with his rifle at the ready.

" 'What does you Injuns want now?' he asks, sharp.

" 'You can't move out of yere without orders from Hoppin' Crow,' says one of the savages in his own tongue.

" 'Which I sh'd say we can!' the major tells him, with a hard face. 'Whar's Hoppin' Crow? You fetch him out from among his devils, and I'll tell him something!'

"And that settles it. Them Injuns ain't intrudin' on devils, nor Hoppin' Crow, neither; and as they're accustomed to have him look out the game

for them, they don't know what to do without him. And as for Hoppin' Crow himself, he don't make no sign when we rumbles and jolts off up the trail; and I figgers that whisky is shore powerful like the major says, or else he's got his jaws tied up, which is more likely.

"All mornin' I keeps a watch out behind, my wagons bein' in the rear, but thar's no sign of them Injuns. It looks like the major's play wins. I wonders what he's goin' to do with his hostage. At noon we pulls up to feed and rest.

" 'Is Hoppin' Crow come round yet?' I asks. 'Mebbe I'd better slice some meat for him.'

" 'You won't need to,' says the major. 'But you might search out a shovel and a tarp.'

" 'Whatever for?' I asks, my eyes widenin' in surprise at this request.

" 'Well,' says the major, 'the fact is, Hoppin' Crow is with them spirits of his. He's dead. And, as his usefulness to us seems to be gone, and there's no use packin' extra weight and the ground is soft yereabouts, we may's well plant him—mostly because it wouldn't be prudent to leave him lyin' round loose.'

"While I'm searchin' out shovel and tarp I does some thinkin'. Mebbe Hoppin' Crow has passed away in his drunken slumber in the major's wagon; but, as I recalls how his legs dangle when he's bein' packed into camp, I begins to have doubts. The more I thinks of it, the more it looks like a hard play. But I don't suspect near how hard.

" 'Catch hold of his laigs,' says the major, 'and I'll take his head. Over yander, behind them cottonwoods, looks like easy diggin', and also is out of sight of the trail.'

"We goes behind the cottonwoods, where as the major says the ground is soft, and he spreads out the tarp.

" 'We don't want to advertise this yere cemetery none,' he says. 'So take up them sods careful and pile the loose dirt on the tarp.'

"I follows instructions, not askin' questions right then, but thinkin' a heap. Hoppin' Crow, while these obsequies is preparin', is lyin' wropped in a bit of canvas, so I can't tell much, and of course he don't enlighten me, and neither does the major. When I've dug deep enough we lower him in, and the major takes the shovel and fills up, shakin' in all the loose dirt, replacin' the sods careful and pattin' them down.

" 'Thar!' he says, 'Hoppin' Crow won't stop no more wagons.'

" 'What's the hock card to this, major?' I asks. 'How does Hoppin' Crow come to make the trip. The fact is, I ain't asleep when you packs him into camp, but merely playin' possum. Is he alive then? It looks like a sorter hard play to me.'

" 'Which it is some hard,' the major admits, wipin' his brow; 'and I needs a drink. Come on back to the wagons, and I'll tell you.'

"At the wagons the major soothes his nerves with a tin cup plumb full of whisky.

" 'I holds out on you a little, lad,' he says; 'you bein' young, and not yet casehardened to the maxim that thar's no limit in a life-and-death game. That whisky you packs over to Hoppin' Crow contains enough poison to kill a pack of wolves!'

"I've suspected something, but not this. It's shore a hard play!

" 'Hoppin' Crow,' the major goes on, 'massacres that wagon train over on the Crooked Knee. I hears it round about from that half blood they calls Charlie Smoke, which gits the news off'n some Injun. In that wagon train is a friend of mine named Lee Williams, and I then makes up my mind to kill Hoppin' Crow if ever I gits the chance, and to kill him hard. If I could have killed him slow I'd have been better pleased. Only I didn't see how I was goin' to do it at first. His intentions was to wipe us out, and his demand for tribute

was merely the cat playin' with the mouse. However, them demands gave me an idee, and bein' unable to resist the inducements of whisky a few hours ahead of time, he falls in with it.'

"'I reckon it's lucky for us he did,' I admits.

"'Plumb lucky.' The major nods, his face grim as the day of jedgment. 'He's a dead Injun in no time. And the beauty of it is, he can't holler to his young men because the p'ison locks his jaws and he can't make a sound. It twists him up and he dies hard, tortured like the damned inside, sim'lar to the tortures he inflicts on others. Which the same was comin' to him.'

"I recalls what I hears about the remains of folks found by what's left of them wagons, and I allows mebbe the major's right. Still, it's a mighty indurated play. And after makin' it the major goes over and packs him into camp! I reckons after all he needs them drinks of whisky.

"'What's them young men of his goin' to think when he don't appear?' I asks. 'Sooner or later they're due to go lookin' for him.'

"'They're due also,' says the major—as I says, he's shore hardened concernin' them Injuns—'they're due also to find that coffeepot settin' thar almost full of whisky. Hoppin' Crow don't upset it in his struggles; and I leaves it. What happens to them savages then depends on how much they likes whisky.'

"And that puts me in mind! When I recalls how close I comes to takin' a drink of that licker myself, I gits weak in the stomach.

"'My sinful soul! Major,' I says, 'it's jest the tender mercy that that rabbit jumps in the bresh when it does. Only for that, I'd have taken a swig out'n that coffeepot myself!'

"The major looks at me a heap serious.

"'I know, lad,' he says, gentle. 'That was what shook up my nerves. But it wasn't no rabbit that jumped.'

"'What was it, then?' I asks.

"'That,' says the major, mighty grave, 'was your good spirit!'

"And, thinkin' it over, though I don't hold with Injun superstitions much, it looks like about even bettin' that the major was right."

Watch for more stories by A. M. Chisholm in THE POPULAR.

THE CHAMPION HARPOON THROWER

A GROUP of Washington correspondents in the lounge of the National Press Club was discussing the art of throwing the harpoon of sarcasm.

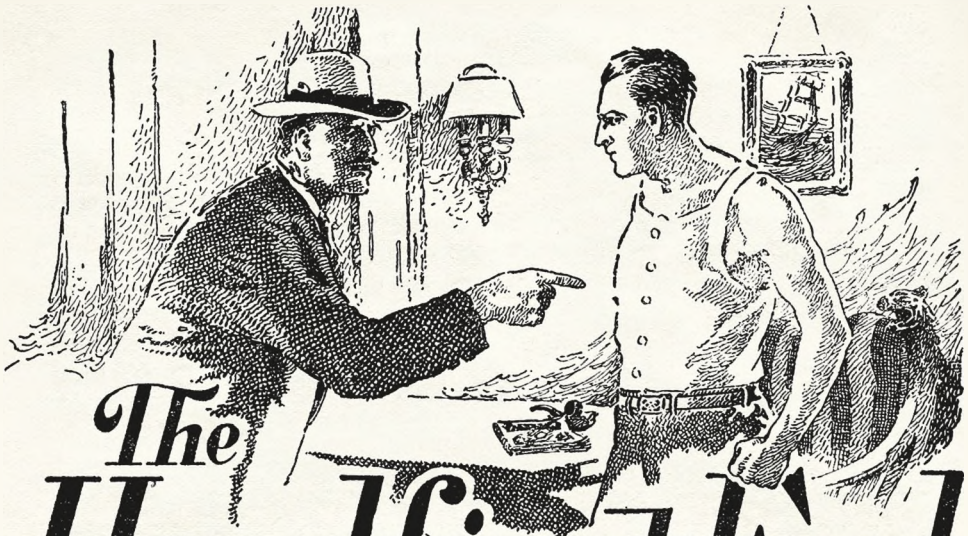
"What," asked one, "is the most effective bit of sarcasm you have ever heard in Congress?"

"The remark to which I award the blue ribbon," replied Frederic J. Haskin, writer of syndicated articles, "was made years ago by John Sharp Williams of Mississippi. He was opposing the creation of a certain Federal commission.

"A young Congressman from the West, serving his first term, got up to argue for the bill. He was full of sound and fury. He shouted and whispered, denounced and pleaded, defied and explained, spouted adjectives six syllables long, dragged in similes and metaphors, reviewed two wars and sat down only after he had spoken for three long, dreary, boring hours.

"Williams stood up, surveyed the few members who had remained in the House chamber, smiled broadly and said in his charming, Southern drawl:

"'Mr. Speaker, I shall follow the example of my young friend, and submit the question to the House without making an argument.'"



The Headfirst Fool

By Holman Day

In Four Parts—Part II

Author of "In the Tall Timber," "North-woods Stuff," Etc.

United States Marshal Ware had his troubles. His three deputies had been sent up to the border to investigate the smuggling, and had failed. On top of that, his son "Sandy," who was also a deputy, was cutting up as usual. Sandy, who was called "the headfirst fool," was a devil-may-care, joshing cuss. Lately he had become a lightweight boxer, which infuriated his father. Sandy offered to give up the ring if his dad would send him to the border, but Marshal Ware refused. Then Ware ordered his son out on a post-office-robbery case in Cross Harbor—and Sandy accompanied Inspector Snow thither with joy, for this meant action. There Snow arrested Lovelace Watts, a darky ex-convict. Sure that he had picked the criminal, Snow relaxed on the case, and put Sandy on guard over Watts. Now Sandy had known Watts when the latter was in prison, and they had become good friends. Convinced of Watts' innocence in the present case, Sandy promised to help him. Then the darky offered information about the border affair—and Sandy began to see that fate had chosen him, Sandy, to solve not only the robbery mystery, but, in some unforeseen way, the tangle of the border.

CHAPTER V.

PUTTING OVER A HOT ONE.

IN the hotel office Sandy located the service push button behind the desk, using his flash light. After a time the disgruntled servitor came shuffling again in slippers. He held up the light and glared at the deputy marshal.

"What sort of owls are you Federal fellows, anyway?"

"Uncle Sam never sleeps on the job," returned Sandy, exaggerating his importance for effect. "I'm taking my prisoner out to run down a clew he has given me. And I've got to rout out Postmaster Jeffers. Where's his house?"

"Two streets farther on from the post office—on the same side—corner

house. You can tell it by the porch that runs all way round." He squinted at the officer. "Guess it's so, the rumor about the office being robbed. Else you wouldn't be here in town, you government chaps."

"I'll let your guess go for what it's worth. Thanks for getting up and posting me."

When the man unlocked the outer door he handed a duplicate key to the deputy.

"Reckon it's safe with an Uncle Sammer. And less bell-hopping for *me!* Traipse in and out the rest of the night to suit yourself."

"That's the talk, old-timer!" indorsed the young man. "Hope you have your nap out, next trip to bed."

The man locked the door behind the two, who quietly and quickly faded away into the night.

At the postmaster's house Sandy dealt with his business in summary fashion. He pulled the bell knob beside the front door with all the assurance of an expected guest.

Figuring that he would get a response from an upstairs window, he hurried from under the shelter of the porch roof and took his stand in the yard not far from where Watts was waiting.

Jeffers was not long in replying; huskily, apprehensively, he queried from his bedroom window.

The officer flashed his light on his own upturned visage and on the glinting badge.

"As you can see, sir, I'm Deputy Marshal Ware. Something special has come up, and I've got to see you about it. Come down to the door, please."

After a few moments the postmaster opened the door. He had a blanket draped around him to keep out of the nip of the autumn night.

The officer was alone on the porch.

"I was hoping you'd take time to put on some clothes, Mr. Jeffers. I must ask you to come to the post office with me."

"Can't the business keep till morning?"

"No!"

Jeffers was surly. He demanded: "Well, what *is* the business, anyway?"

"I'll tell you at the office."

"You'll have to give me a hint of it before I'll agree to go."

Sandy pressed the button of his flash light and lighted for his close scrutiny the countenance of the objector, saying, with a rush of speech: "I'm going to produce the man who took that registered mail, and you and I, between us, are going to make him dig up! That's business important enough, hey?" The officer was counting points in this set-to, having made up his mind to make shrewd estimate as he went along.

Jeffers stepped back, pulling up the edge of the blanket against the trying spotlight. "You've got your nerve with you, all right!" he muttered.

"Plenty of it!" agreed the young man serenely. "It goes with my job." He was cheerful, tallying his first triumph for his cause as he inspected Jeffers' expression under the light.

Feeling a quick sense of advantage and determined to rush matters without leaving a gap for tension to sag, he snapped: "With that blanket and your moccasins you'll be warm enough! Come now."

"I'll be hanged if I'll go outdoors in this rig—not even for the president!"

"The president is the boss of the two of us, and as his deputy marshal I stand a few notches closer to him than you do, Mister Postmaster. So I say 'Come'—and my say goes!"

Sandy advanced and Jeffers stepped back quickly, treading on the dragging blanket. The deputy caught the man as he was falling and pulled him out through the doorway. "Hist, there, Lovelace!"

The big darky came on the rush.

"Over your shoulder with him—lug him!"

To Jeffers the deputy said in tones cautious but tense: "If you make a holler you'll be starting something without brakes on it!"

The admonition was effective. For a few moments the captive struggled and kicked, then lopped across the sturdy should of the toter. He kept his mouth shut, however.

Marching behind, Sandy noted a second triumph on his check list of advantages.

Any man snatched out of his house, without the rig to fit his appearance in the open, is knocked off his poise to start with—finds it almost impossible to cope with circumstances or men.

The demeanor of the black unknown who had flung himself out of the night had been terrifying—Watts had assumed an expression of ferocity, having been coached in his rôle before arriving at the house.

A sense of helplessness overwhelmed the man who was sacked along on the tossing shoulder. There had been malignity in the black's visage. Only the presence of the deputy marshal saved Jeffers from hysteria of terror. But, on the other hand, a United States officer, dealing in this fashion with an employee of the government, was conveying a suggestion of ominous purport.

Sandy, surveying Watts' burden, was having hard work to suppress his natural sense of the ludicrous in order to deal with his personal worry; but he managed to remain serious, for he was at a high pitch of tense anxiety at this moment. He was only guessing at the validity of the two items of advantage he had chalked for himself.

They were nearly at the store before he bethought himself regarding an oversight, natural enough in a hurried, unrehearsed affair where action must needs tumble along as events presented themselves. He commanded the burden bearer to halt.

"Jeffers, I suppose we'll have to go back to your house to get your store key—and that's too bad, unless you're enjoying the ride."

"I carry an extra key on a strap around my neck, so's to be sure it's always with me," choked the captive. "And you let me down onto my feet and I'll walk. This is all foolishness."

"We'll keep on as we've started," said Sandy with decision.

Watts plodded along and set the postmaster on the platform of the store.

Jeffers wasted no time in opening the door and getting inside.

Within, the kidnaped man was not able to get his mixed emotions under control, even though he was at last standing on his feet in this familiar environment. He gabbled vague remonstrances, leaving sentences unfinished. He whined, he yapped oaths while he went fumbling around in the dark.

"Needn't hunt for a lamp. We don't want light." The deputy's tone was low and tense. "My flasher will show up enough of what's going to be shown."

"But the dark makes me feel awful nervous."

Sandy refrained from the frank declaration that this was just how he wanted Jeffers to feel. He did remark, however: "No man ought to be afraid in the dark unless he has a guilty conscience. Now, Postmaster Jeffers, come right over here to your safe." Sandy penciled the path with a beam from his electric torch.

When Jeffers came, the deputy pushed him down on his knees and knelt beside him.

"Take that key out of the lock."

The postmaster worked the old-fashioned key back and forth, twisted and pulled. But without avail! The key could not be extricated.

"How do you account for that?" the officer demanded sharply. "You ought to know how to get the key out of your own safe door!" He was purposely hard, curt, domineering, copying the third-degree style of attack.

"I don't know what the trouble is," faltered Jeffers. "Guess the feller who picked this lock, night afore last, must have done something to the lock guards."

Sandy was not at all sure about the inside details of a lock's mechanism, but he took a chance on the assumption of complete knowledge.

"How'n the devil did you get that key in, then, the morning after, if the guards had been bent out of order?"

"I dunno; but it seemed to go in all right." Jeffers was trying hard to get back his poise and to assume a convincing tone and manner.

"Damrat it, man!" yelped the deputy, beginning to pound hard while the iron was soft. "You know well enough you never took out that key the night of the robbery—calling it a 'robbery' for the time being. You didn't take it out, I say! You've been lugging your own money back and forth, nights, to your house because this key didn't work. You told the inspector and myself you hadn't left your money in the safe." He banged his fist on Jeffers' shoulder. Wtih the blow he was jarring the man's slack command of himself, at the same time jabbing with speech. "And you told us you most always carried the key with you to your house. You told us so, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did tell you that. Of course, I carried the key away nights."

"How?"

"In my pants pocket."

"The hell—you've been carrying that key in any pocket right along!" jeered the deputy roughly. "It's all covered with rust. It would be smooth and shiny if you had carried it regularly in your pocket. And when the inspector and I open up that lock in the morning, before witnesses, we'll be able to tell the world that the key couldn't be taken out. Now, Jeffers, you're going to be shown up in a rotten light, leaving ten thousand dollars in a safe like this. Criminal negligence, anyway." Then Sandy jumped figuratively with both feet. "Now make the whole thing short and sweet, man! Show me where you hid that registered mail!"

In quick panic Jeffers tried to struggle to his feet.

The officer set clutch on the back of the man's neck and held him down, pushing the head forward till the postmaster's nose almost touched the condemnatory key. "We've got you, Jeffers! Got you foul! Save some of your pelt by coming across clean!"

"You ain't got the gall, have ye, to accuse *me* of taking that money?"

"It isn't gall. It's horse sense. Of course you took it! You know you took it. Fell for what looked like an easy thing. You took it." Sandy drummed hard with the inexorable accusation. He held firm clutch on the twisting neck. "I'm arresting you for criminal negligence in your position as postmaster, Jeffers. I arrest you, I say! In the name of the United States! The bigger charge will be lodged against you to-morrow before the nearest justice. Pick this man up, Lovelace. Over your shoulder with him. We'll lock him up."

"You're wrecking me in my home place!" bleated the captive when Lovelace laid hands on him, swinging him aloft with terrifying vigor.

"Wreck or no wreck, you can't sneer at Uncle Sam and expect to get away with it," declared the deputy relentlessly. "Don't for a minute think I'm going on guesswork in this arrest." Desperately resolved to carry the man completely off his mental feet, even as the darky had swept him off the physical pedals, the officer snapped, bluffing:

"We've got you well sized up since we've been in town, Jeffers! It's our regular business. We know how to dig for facts."

The prisoner was under the disadvantage of trying to conduct a defense from the queer rostrum of a man's shoulder. However, he did what he could. "The tattlers lay it against me because I've got a new car. But it ain't been paid for, I tell ye."

"Soon would be paid for if your theft of registered mail could have been put over by you." Sandy was triumphant and cocksure now. The man had let drop an excuse for the need of easy money. "I'm giving you one more and your last chance to come across to me, Jeffers. Dig up the cash."

"Let me get onto my feet."

"Will you dig up th cash?"

Sandy opened his flash light and bored the beam into the blinking eyes of the captive, holding the steady glare. There was a species of hypnotic effect in the maneuver.

Jeffers broke a prolonged silence: "If you get the money, can the thing be fixed up for me?"

"We can't do business till the 'if' has been cleaned up—and I get the money."

Jeffers, helpless, hopeless, came across with a rush. "I guess it ain't no use to buck against Uncle Sam. Ought to have known it. Let me onto my feet and I'll hand over."

Standing, wavering to and fro, he explained that he would have to go to his hardware stock for a chisel. Sandy gave him the flash light to use for a light. He shuffled to the rear of the store.

Watts took advantage of Jeffers' departure.

"Mah sakes and goodness, Mas' Sandy!" he whispered. "For deteckiting, yo' suah done got 'em all stuck on de fly paper."

"You're all off on that," was the confession, muted along with a rather hysterical chuckle. "Bum detective. But as a bluffer I'm not so bad. Look a-here, Lovelace; this seems to be developing into a more or less crazy night. I'm going to keep on and play it through on the bughouse plan—and you've got to be crazy along with me. I'm doing fast thinking. I want to make a record in crazy stuff, now that this thing has gone as far as it has. Something the steady office pluggers will never forget. I'm depending on you, old pal, remember that."

The darky choked. "Mah soul and body! Ah never spec' or hope to be called dat—called 'pal,' Mas' Sandy, by yo'. Ah can't say nuffin'. But"—in the gloom he reached and touched the young man's hand, gently, reverentially —"Ah racken Ah don't have to say nuffin'."

"I'll say you don't, Lovelace! Now we'll go to the rest of it. Some trick! Some kick!"

CHAPTER VI.

ONE PRISONER: SPECIAL DELIVERY.

COWED, shaken, abject, Jeffers came back from his quest. carrying a chisel.

"Cussed if I know what come over me all of a sudden, to make me own up like I've done," he grumbled. He handed the flash light to the officer. "But it ain't much wonder you got my goat—being jumped out o' bed and sacked round in the night like a bag o' potaters."

"True. Not much to be wondered at," agreed Sandy complacently. He had his own interpretation for the psychology of the conquest of Jeffers. The attacker had used ring tactics, dizzying his man at the start, following up the advantage with accusations like rapid short-arm jabs. But he smoothed the case for the postmaster by adding: "However, you're showing mighty good sense, man trying to square matters

before the government is called on to put the screws to you in court."

"What can I say to explain?" whined the culprit.

"The excuse of a sudden brainstorm has been considerably overworked, to be sure, but it may give you some little boost out of the hole," Sandy suggested dryly.

"Well, my head was in a whirl, having all that cash in hand and thinking I could see a good way to put the job over," affirmed Jeffers earnestly. "Business has been awful slack with me, and I was being pushed like blazes for money and——"

"Tell me the story later!" broke in Sandy impatiently. "First of all, dig up."

Jeffers knelt in front of the safe and pried up a floor board.

"At any rate, you can see and bear witness as how I didn't lug it much of any ways."

He groped in a recess under the floor, lifted out the fat packet, and placed it in the officer's eager hands.

"I'll say this much, Jeffers: You did put it in a safer place than your old tin can of a strong box."

"By thunder! There's an idea you've give me!" cried the other excitedly. "I can say I hid it for sake-keeping, and in the morning woke up and forgot I hadn't left it in the safe. Got all rattled and reported a robbery. Help me out in it, won't ye?"

"You can hardly expect a United States deputy marshal to help you in compounding a felony," stated the officer with severity. "You've still got Inspector Snow to deal with, you know. And I'm warning you that you couldn't open your way to his heart with an electric drill."

Jeffers squatted down on his haunches and lifted his voice in a wail: "It means me for Atlanta!"

"Keep your head, man," Sandy admonished. In his exaltation of spirits, he was hankering to go the limit in freak performance, assuring himself, however, that his flyer in novelty was not exactly a fool idea, after all.

Most of the spice in this Cross Harbor affair had now been licked off. Sandy was looking ahead to something with real cayenne in it. What Watts had said about the border had torched zeal in the young man to white heat. He was on fire to follow the Jeffers affair with a feat by which he could wind up his career on the force in a blaze of glory that would fairly scorch the office records. All these fire metaphors were flaming in his quick thoughts.

"Red-hot hound pup!" he told himself. "I see a way. And I'm ditched if I run any chance of getting back into dad's clutches. Here's how I stay away from headquarters."

Again he went at the prisoner.

"Jeffers, I'm not promising you anything," he blurted, rushing affairs according to the system he had adopted; "but you may be able to do something for yourself. You have a new car, you say. I'm advising you to give it some special exercise. Rush to your house, pull on your duds, and whoop it across the State to Federal headquarters. Start now!"

"I won't do it!" gasped Jeffers.

"Don't you see it will be better than to be lugged in by officers? Tell the Federal district attorney the story about losing your mind—or forgetting —or what have you? My father is the United States marshal for this district. Maybe you'd better go to him first and tell him I sent you in. I'd go with you, but—but I've got another case to tend to. Come, now. Hustle!" He grabbed the man's arms and yanked him to his feet.

"But it'll be only jumping into the fire with both feet."

"Better than being heaved in by Inspector Snow. It'll be different, any-

way. Never can tell how a different system from the cut-and-dried one will work out." He added soulfully: "I find that it often turns the trick for *me*. Come, I say. Jump to it. By the same token, you'll be jumping the district attorney. You have a clerk or somebody who can tend post office and store, haven't you?"

"My wife looks after things when I'm away. But, darn it, I ain't *going* away—honking acrost this State in the night like a wild goose! I'm coopered, anyway."

"But you can get in the first word, and it'll help you a lot," insisted the deputy.

However, Jeffers was frightened; more than all else, he shifted into bull-headed revolt and settled firmly into stubbornness.

"That story about a brain storm and forgetting may sound pretty fair here in the dark, while we're having a nightmare, more or less, anyway. But I've got some common sense still left in me, and I know how it will sound, standing up in broad daylight and telling a fish-eyed lawyer about forgetting where I had tucked ten thousand dollars, registered mail. I won't go, I tell you. I'm coopered, I say. I ain't got nothing to live for, anyway, owing the money I do. I can't stand any more!"

He huddled the blanket about his body and began to weave to and fro like an animal in a cage. He was flogging his thoughts into a frenzy of fright and despair. "Keep your hands offn me, both of you. I'm going to jump into the dock." He started on the run for the door—escaped into the night.

"Do your stuff again, Lovelace," commanded the officer.

The darky plunged in pursuit of the fugitive, Sandy flashing the light. Jeffers was captured outside. The officer took the key from the wattled neck and locked the door of the store.

Once more the captive was looped over a sturdy shoulder, kicking and struggling ineffectually.

"He's fair off his bean—no use arguing with him—and we haven't the time to waste," said the deputy to his helper. "Lug him back to his house. We'll keep on being half crazy along with him. Can you drive a car?"

"Suah can, Mas' Sandy! Been handling a truck, off and on." Watts trudged with his burden.

"You're going to drive this man to Federal headquarters and hand him to my father. I'll call dad in the early morning and tell him you're on the way and what it's all about. Don't be afraid, Lovelace. I'll clean you where Snow's concerned. And you'll be bringing in the proof that the inspector was all wrong in grabbing you."

"Dat make it what yo' call binding, Mas' Sandy." He rumbled a deep chuckle. "Ah's suah bound to do dis job A-1 and top-notch, 'cause it done pull me out of de hole."

"Exactly. A fifty-fifty chore for both of us," commented Sandy briskly, more than ever convinced that, though the handcuffs were taken from Watts' wrists, firmer fetters had been put on. In his thoughts he was indulging in a bit of back-patting for himself. "More of the headfirst-fool stuff, as they'll look at it from the outside. But, zowie! Ain't it working slick Some tie-up, I'll announce to the wall-eyed world!"

Leading the way, Sandy perceived that there was a light in the postmaster's house. He surmised that the man's wife was stirring and worried.

When he ran up the steps of the porch he found her standing in the doorway.

As soon as she gasped questions he gave her a glimpse of his badge under the light from his flash light.

"I'm one of the officers here from headquarters. Your husband must have told you we're here." He called

into the darkness: "Step along, Mr. Jeffers. We haven't any time to waste."

Watts caught the hint in that command. He had lugged the man to one side of the house, out of sight from the doorway. He set Jeffers on his feet, gave him a push, and sent him running.

"Your husband has been helping us all he can in the matter, Mrs. Jeffers," the officer was continuing when the postmaster arrived on the porch. "We have been able to grab onto something definite, and Mr. Jeffers has agreed to take his car and go with one of our men on some skirmish work."

"Where are you going, Ben?" she quavered.

Sandy set his palm against Jeffers' back and hurried him into the hallway. Going along with his man, he called back to the woman:

"It's skirmish work, as I told you. He'll be with a safe man—no call to be worrying about him." In Jeffers' ear he muttered: "On your way with me to your bedroom! Get on your clothes—or I'll holler for Lovelace. You don't want to scare her to death, do you?"

The threat operated. The husband climbed the stairs ahead of the deputy.

From the upper landing Sandy called down:

"No need for you to come up, Mrs. Jeffers. Your husband and I want to have a little private talk while he is dressing."

In the bedroom the captor demanded:

"Has she any idea you took that money?"

"Good heavens, no!"

"Don't stand there, whining! Get your clothes onto yourself. Jeffers, you heard me tell Lovelace I'd call my father on the phone. I'll put in the best word for you I can. I can't tell you what'll be done in your case, of course. But your coming in on the dead run and making a clean breast is going to help you a lot. You ought to see that much. And you're going, anyway. Understand that? Going out all smooth and not scaring your wife to death—or else you're going in red fire and with a 'Hoorah!' under that big darky's arm. Pick your own style. But hurry!"

He held the beam of the flash light on Jeffers while the latter pulled on his clothes. The involvement of his wife in the situation had effectively knocked out of him all his balkiness.

"Pull yourself together, now, and make a smooth get-away," counseled Sandy when Jeffers was clothed and ready to descend.

The usual New England restraint marked the parting of husband and wife beneath the eye of the stranger. And Jeffers had himself under control now and desperately strove to suppress all indication that this separation was anything except a short absence on Uncle Sam's business.

The woman closed the door behind the pair; her visage revealed placid acceptance of the situation.

Jeffers had said, giving her the key of the store in a matter-of-fact manner:

"Tend out on everything till I come back."

The garage was at the rear of the house. Jeffers unlocked the door and disclosed a sturdy car, touring model.

Lovelace promptly sat in at the wheel; the passenger mounted beside the chauffeur.

"Now, Jeffers," the officer advised sympathetically, "brace up to this thing the best you know how. Give me your hand, old top, and say you will."

With his left hand Sandy had pulled out the handcuffs.

He held a tight grip on Jeffers' right and slipped a link of the cuffs on the man's wrist, then snapped the other link around a spreader of the top.

The captive squawked hoarsely.

"Oh, no, you're not exactly a pris-

oner, man. But you've had one brain storm to-night, talking about suicide, and I'm taking no chances on your having another. I don't want Lovelace to have anything on his mind except running this car—and running it like the blue Tophet, and he can't be using one hand for you."

"Much obleeged, Mas' Sandy. Ah was worryin'. Ah suah done hate to think of losin' dis gent who can watch signboa'ds fo' me."

"That's what you do, Jeffers. Show your driver the short cuts to the paved turnpike, and then it'll be easy sailing."

Lovelace snapped on the car lights.

"Gee ding it!" grunted Sandy. "Something must be the matter with my mind. I can't seem to think of but one thing at a time. Lovelace, I was forgetting something mighty important."

"Mas' Sandy, seems like you done hab enough to t'ink about, in dis one thing."

"But not to the extent of putting a bigger matter out of my mind. Get out and come along with me."

While the big chap was working his way out from under the steering wheel, the deputy remarked to Jeffers:

"This new thing hasn't any hitch-up with your case, postmaster. Another matter entirely. You'll excuse us, I know, if we make it private."

Out of earshot of Jeffers, Sandy said:

"My talk with dad over the phone will fix everything all O. K. for you, Lovelace. But, for the love o' Pete, don't let a word drop to him about your having been on the border. I'll tell him you were on the wharf, waiting to be set off to your vessel—just a sailor, you know. I'll tell him Snow went blooey over the post-office thing. And that's a good one on Snow, seeing you're bringing in the thief and the stuff. And speaking of that, here's the packet." He pulled it from where it was buttoned under his coat. "I'll be cussed if I wasn't almost forgetting that ten thousand, too. Headfirst fool, all right. But it sure has been my busy evening."

He lowered his voice.

"Lovelace, I'm going to the border—starting after I phone dad and do a little—er—business with Inspector Snow. You know the lay of the land and some of the people up there. I'm going to need you."

"Mah soul, Mas' Sandy," declared Lovelace gratefully, "it's suah good to heard yo' say dat!"

"Shoot yourself up there as soon as you can, on the sly. Where's the best place to meet, old top?"

"Ah racken Potash, Mas' Sandy. Close to de line, on this side."

"Do you mean Portage? I've heard of that place."

"Yassuh, yassuh! Potash, dat's de place."

"Then I'll hang up for you at—Potash," promised Sandy, "or you do the same for me. We'll start in and be crazy some more. *Some* kick in it, hey?"

Lovelace doubled over in silent mirth. He gurgled:

"Suah some better kind o' kick dan Ah got las' time Ah was on de border."

"Now listen to me, Lovelace. You just got a kick, and a mean one, sneaking around corners down here at Cross, in the dark, making yourself a suspicious character. While you're waiting for me at Portage, don't sneak. Keep right in the open—the more open the better. Make your bigness. Make the excuse of some kind of business. You'll have to think up a plan in that line for yourself. I'm too rushed right now to do any thinking for you. But swagger around as if you belonged. Get me?"

"Yas—yassuh!"

"Even the hick constables don't think twice about a man who is evidently

minding his business without giving a hoot. And I won't have to dodge around corners, hunting you up."

"Nossuh. I done suah show maself, Mas' Sandy."

"O. K. All set. Hotfoot it is."

Stumbling along after a vigorous push by the young man, Lovelace lunged toward the car, climbed in, and backed out.

"Best of luck, Jeffers," encouraged the officer. "You're doing something different, as I've said—and the different things count."

He stood in the road and watched the car gather speed, driving its fan of light in front of it. He dusted his hands slowly.

"One little pancake has been well browned," he said aloud. "Now for a hotter fire and a bigger cake."

CHAPTER VII.

TYING UP LOOSE ENDS.

SANDY used the loaned key and let himself into the hotel. When he was in his room he was reassured by the steady snoring of the inspector.

Shucking himself out of his coat, pulling off his shoes, the young man took thought on Snow's relation to the situation. A glance at the radium dial of his wrist watch revealed the hour. He wound the watch and hummed softly:

"'Tis three o'clock in the morning, after a pleasant night,
And I'm wishing Snow would forget to wake, now that he's sleeping tight."

Sandy was apprehensive regarding the hue and cry that the inspector would be starting on awaking. However, he found comfort in the reflection that, of all places in the world, Snow would be least likely to fix upon Federal headquarters as the intended destination of a black suspect arrested for a post-office robbery.

"I have a mighty good mind to tell Snow that's where Watts has gone," he mused, chuckling. "Coming from me, it would everlastingly clinch the idea in Snow's mind that Watts has done something exactly opposite. And as for Jeffers—well, Snow won't expect the postmaster to show up before eight o'clock. Oh, I'll take my chances on the two getting well on their way before Snow can block 'em by fool telephoning to sheriffs and police along the turnpike."

Partly dressed, he pulled a blanket over himself and went to sleep with the relish of weary youth.

He was waked by the snap of a spring shade banging to its limit up against the lintel of a window.

He opened his eyes, yawned, and looked innocently up into the half-maniacal glare from under the inspector's twisted brows.

"Where the hell's that darky?"

Sandy, unperturbed, glanced around the room. "Why, isn't he here?"

"Bat-eared, bald-headed Zeke! You—you—you asking *me* a question like that!" Froth gathered in the corners of Snow's mouth. "He ain't here! Can't you see it? Don't you know it?"

Sandy sat up, took another survey of the room, rolled on the bed to the edge, and peered below the frame.

"Well, inspector, he really ought to be here. He's supposed to be here, of course. You arrested him."

"Yes, and left him in your charge. What the devil has happened?"

Sandy clapped his palm to his forehead.

Snow showed a flash of solicitude.

"Did he knock you out?"

"No, inspector. I can't lie to you. And, besides, I haven't any bump to show for proof."

Again he set his palm against his brow, shading a dawning grin.

"I'm not nursing a bump. I'm thinking."

The inspector, a figure of almost insensate fury, threw his arms above his head; then he lowered them slowly, emitting a long squeal, as relief.

"Sounds like trying out air brakes," observed Sandy amiably.

"By the blue gods, there you go with that everlasting josh of yours! You've tried it on me for the last time. You're soft on the prisoner—you've let him get away. This is where I punch your face!" He doubled his fists.

Sandy slid off the bed and stood up. His eyes narrowed slowly, his chin jutted, the amiability faded out of a paling visage on which he put the mask of his ring expression.

"Snow, we'll get right to cases on this hammer-and-hit business! Just a word of warning before you punch me. Have you heard that I've fought my way up almost to the lightweight championship?"

"I know you've been sparring."

"I happen to be the chap of the red mask. The fool newspapers have printed quite a bit about him. With the warning—if you're bound to try the punch, go ahead."

"I'm no cheap prize fighter," growled Snow, lowering his hands.

"I'm honestly afraid you'd be in for a polishing if you tried me with fists," said Sandy earnestly. "And after this keep your tongue off me, too. We'll be calm and talk sense. My thinking has reminded me of something. Now I remember. Watts isn't here because I sent him off on an errand."

"Talk sense! Sense! You're josh-ing——"

Sandy squared his elbows and advanced, with a quick and suggestive twist of his lithe body to one side.

"Maybe we'll have to get down to tacks in a set-to, after all. Stick 'em up, Snow!" There was menace in pose and expression.

The inspector stepped back, sawing his flattened hand to and fro in front of his face. "I won't fight; but I can't see where you're talking sense."

"Well, how about this, then? I sent Postmaster Jeffers along with Watts, and the two of 'em are running down a sure clew, Money and man, both, will be in Uncle Sam's hands before night. Pretty good, eh?"

Snow dropped onto the bed with a force which nearly unjointed the frame.

"I pass! My hand's on the table. Going to show me the hand you're bluffing with?"

Sandy opened his eyes, registering mild rebuke.

"I'm not bluffing in this, Snow, honestly. But I don't mean to show you my cards—not now."

"You're not showing proper respect for a post-office inspector on a case with you. If you were putting a deal across, why didn't you wake me up and let me know?"

"You were sleeping too sweetly," purred Sandy. Then he hastened to forestall the outburst that was threatened by Snow's demeanor. The deputy's face grew hard; he barked his words: "You went ahead last night, playing a lone hand! I offered to make some suggestions. You turned me down. I took the same course, dealing with you, Snow. I have played my hand lone. I'm an officer of the government, and I had a perfect right to do my level best, according to my own notions. I've made good, and be damned to you!"

"Queering me at the same time, hey?"

"You won't be queered if you keep your mouth shut. But if you throw your gab, I'll throw mine along with yours—and then you'll be queered all right, and asking for it!" The situation would continue to be touchy until Watts and his man reached headquarters, Sandy was reflecting, and he was cheered by the inspector's sagging expression, indicating surrender to the

amazing circumstances. "I'll keep mum if you will," Sandy pledged.

"Money and the man in the hands of Uncle Sam before night, hey? And not giving me a flash of it!"

"I'll give you one flash, Snow. Watts had nothing to do with the robbery. I'm saving you from a bad break in that one point."

"Who did do it, then?" demanded the inspector, agog. "Flash again, if you're so sure you have put it over."

"No more flashes. The rest of it is my own business."

"Some more of that headfirst stuff of yours," Snow grumbled. "But bull luck can't run with you all the time. This trip you've turned a criminal loose, slipped him off on some hair-oil talk he gave you. Good-by, man and money, unless I can do some quick grabbing in."

Sandy took prompt action against any such possibility; it was charged with too much danger for his own scheme.

"Snow, if you butt in you'll be dishing the case—and I'll lay charges against you for doing the same. Keep still and I'll let you pick up credit for yourself. 'Good-by, man and money,' says you?" He pulled a roll of bills from his pocket and peeled off a series of tens. "By the way, this isn't that money you took off Watts. I picked your pocket while you were asleep," he stated, with a grin of impudence, "and I gave it back. It was honest money. He has it. Now I'm betting you one hundred dollars that Uncle Sam will have that registered package and the man within—well, say twenty-four hours." He was making allowance for the hazards of automobile travel and was calculatingly adding more to the mystification of the inspector. "Put up your money after you have kissed it good-by."

Snow welched under this cocksureness. "I can see you're playing safe with odds you know better than I do. It's your own game—I won't bet against it."

"All right." Sandy put away the money. "Glad you're admitting it's my own game. Kindly keep out of it, Inspector Snow."

Sandy laced his shoes, pulled on his coat, and walked out of the room.

He was first into the dining room as soon as the door was swung open at six o'clock.

The inspector tramped in a bit later and "plunked" himself down at a table as far removed from where Sandy sat as the limits of the room permitted.

The deputy was of a mind to keep Snow at a distance and continuing in the mood of mute hostility as long as possible. Therefore, Sandy again flicked his lash of teasing; he made a rather elaborate gesture of distress under the inspector's scowl and shifted his seat to the other side of the table, exposing only a mane of tousled red hair to the malignant stare.

After breakfast Sandy set himself promptly and with art to dodge the espionage which Snow was plainly determined to keep, in order to get an insight into what the deputy had put over, according to the latter's claim.

Using nimble footwork, the young man gave Snow an exhausting half hour of chase into all quarters of the village and finally turned abruptly on his tracks, popped around the corner of a building and confronted the inspector, who came up panting.

Sandy's smile was a study in ingenuous approbation.

"Great stuff, inspector, brisk exercise after breakfast! Glad to see you believe like I do. But you're a little overweight and I wouldn't go at it too strong, if I were you. Oh, no! This isn't more joshing," he declared, breaking on certain stutterings. "I'm giving you advice free—I've paid good money for it to physical directors. Or, if

you're not really exercising, but are trying to keep tabs on me, I'll tell you what! I'm nigh all in for want of sleep. You woke me up too soon. I'm going to my room for a nap. Sit in the hotel office and wait for me—and maybe I'll see how I can let you in on something."

He trotted blithely away, giving Snow no time to extricate comment from his heaving chest.

The man in the lead slowed up when he neared the hotel, allowing the inspector opportunity to make sure that the quarry had been holed. From the stairway Sandy called to the hotel man, when Snow was coming into the office from the street: "Please give me a call at nine, landlord. I'm feeling the need of a nap."

"Should think you would," grumbled the boniface. "So do I, but I can't leave my job."

The deputy locked his door on the inside, turned the key in the door communicating with Snow's room to guard against any move of suspicion by the inspector, then stepped out on the roof of the porch, made his way around to the rear of the building and slid down a supporting post. An alley gave him exit to a side street. He hurried directly to the local telephone exchange, the location of which he knew.

The hour was not quite seven. So from the public booth he called his home, the residence of the United States marshal.

"Yes?" The query from the other ened, when connection had been made was impatient and husky—the voice of one newly stirred from slumber.

"Why, good morning, dad. Sorry to wake you. This is your alert and wide-awake scion speaking. What's that? I repeat, I'm Sandy—efficient son of an equally efficient United States marshal. Top o' the morning, sir. What's that? Better whoof once or twice and blow out the fogs of slumber. Oh, yes, I'm fine and dandy! Can't help being. Have personally made a perfect clean-up of the post-office case here. Not wise to explain full details over the phone.

"Listen. I'm sending in a man who'll explain it all to you. He's Lovelace Watts. Remember him? He's a very dark brunet—No. 2323 when you were warden. Easy number to hold in mind, I find it. Fine chap. What's that? Oh, I say now, dad! Don't slam Watts, poor fellow, like you're doing. He was framed on that job. But I can't go into details now. Too busy. He's bringing in the money—the whole ten thousand.

"What's that? Say, look a-here, dad. Now you're slamming *me*—my judgment. And they'll sure cut us off if you swear like that over the phone. Remember the dignity of your office. Lovelace is also bringing in the man who took the money—they're coming over the road in a car—the man's car. What's that? Can't understand what I'm driving at? I'm not driving. Lovelace is driving—driving the man's car for him. Corking driver. Ought to be there in good season this p. m., if he doesn't get pulled for speeding.

"I'm crazy, you say? Come, come, dad. Calm down. I tell you, you mustn't swear over a telephone like you're doing. Where's Snow, say you? Call him to the phone, you say? Can't. The case is all cleared up, and he's grabbed the chance to catch a few smelts down the reach. Won't be back till night. I'll ask him to bring you a mess. They say the fall run o' smelts is fine.

"But we mustn't waste long-distance money talking about smelts. I'm reversing the charge, by the way, and you'd better listen, not talk. All the important talk belongs at this end. And I guess that's all, anyway. Your man and the money will show up to-day. I can trust Lovelace. Oh, my gorry and

goodness, dad! You simply must not curse that way. Whadda you say? I'm fired? Not on your life! Not by word o' mouth. Remember, don't you? So we're now fifty-fifty. I won't accept your firing of me. Now lemme tell you something, Marshal Ware, and it's official and mighty important. You use Lovelace Watts square. A lot depends on it. Let him go as soon as he reports. Don't pump him with any questions except about this case he comes in on. You're listening, hey? Good! Something has come up where I need him awful bad. My life may depend on my having him with me. No matter what! I can't tell you over the phone.

"Now please keep still and let it sink in. You don't want my life risked, do you? Your own dear son's life! No, I can't run in to see you now. Can't be done, I tell you. I'll be all right if you let Lovelace do as he knows he's to do by my orders—and no questions to be asked by you. Confound it, dad! It's official, I tell you. I'm on the job as a deputy. Big things ahead.

"Border, you say? Good gracious, aren't you ever going to get it out of your mind that the only thing I have on my own mind is that border stuff? Why, I wouldn't mention it to you again. No, sirree! Not after the call-down you gave me. Now that's being dutiful, isn't it? It sure is. Just remember that I refused to mention the subject of the border to you again.

"And say, go to the Federal district attorney with that man Lovelace is bringing in. See if some allowance can't be made in the man's case. He jumped more than halfway with me, dad, in trying to square the thing. Hurrying to square the rest, in his own car. Let's not stir a lot of scandal about another government man gone wrong. It hurts the service.

"Say, listen. Don't try to call me here. I'm leaving town in two minutes. So long, dad. No, I can't wait to talk any more. Isn't this nice autumn weather? Well, good-by. You'll hear from me soon."

Clack! Sandy hung up with a short, sharp snap.

When he entered the hotel, perfectly willing to give Inspector Snow another mental hoist with the petard of surprise, he beheld that gentleman in a retired corner of the office, at peace with the world, with a newspaper laid over his face.

The deputy went to the desk and asked for his bill.

The hotel man, busy with accounts, had not noticed from what direction the guest had come. The clock—given a quick glance by the landlord—registered the lapse of a scant half hour since Sandy had left an order to be called.

"Couldn't get to sleep," the guest announced curtly.

"I believe you said to me last night that Uncle Sam never bats an eye," commented the other dryly. "Guess your friend over there does your sleeping for you. By the way, he told me to let him know when I called you at nine."

"Oh, yes! He's going to the railroad on the stage with me. No need to wake him till stage time. Tell him I'll drop aboard with him," he advised carelessly, wanting to add a bit more to the worry and mystification of the inspector, who would be looking all ways for a traveling companion. "May take a hike and hail the stage a few miles up the road."

He paid the score and hurried out.

Having previously posted himself, he went to the wharf and took passage on a small passenger packet bound across the bay for a port in the province. He had decided to approach the border from the Canadian side in order to avoid a meeting-up with Deputies Arbo, Stickney, and Worthing.

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE MACPHERSON, VOYAGEUR.

DURING the first hour of his boat passage, Sandy puffed his pipe in a corner of the smoking room on the main deck and methodically made up a list of the articles he purposed to buy as soon as he landed in the New Brunswick city. He strove to foresee all the contingencies that might arise, and he did his best to cover the ground in listing what he would be needing.

He was making no definite plans for action, realizing how instantly his action must take advantage of circumstances. However, he had decided to conceal his identity under various rôles. It would be storybook stuff, as the cynical Holson had sneered. But Sandy was feeling youthful zest in this new adventure—was hankering for all the trimmings that would add to his relish in the affair. It was more of his headfirst bravado with a vengeance.

To him, after he had tucked away his list and was meditating, came a tall fellow in corduroy and puttees—an outdoor type of man, not young. He grinned amiably at the stranger.

"I've been watching ye—and was not minded to meddle while ye was taking notes."

"Good day to you, 'Mister Scotchy!'" Sandy came more than halfway in cordial contact.

"Aye! Of the Bluenose Scots, a New Brunswicker, lad. I buttered the burr a bit thick, thinking your sandy tint hinted of Scotch, too."

Sandy's gaze was wide-eyed, ingenuous.

"Not so far off—though I'm like most Scotch in the States—considerably tampered with. But my name is O. K.—Alex MacPherson."

The other put out his hand.

"Verra gude! Shake with Angus Macdougal." After the handclasp he sat beside Sandy on the bench and gave him a sidewise glance, estimating him shrewdly.

"Well, Angus!" coating the provocative familiarity with a broad smile —"what about it?"

"Verra gude again, Alex! The hunting season is opening and it was in my thought ye might be going after big game."

"That's exactly what I'm going after," blurted Sandy, getting a great kick out of the query and responding after his usual headfirst manner under the thrust of any kick. "How do you happen to be interested in big game?"

"In the season I guide in the Mirimichi region, lad. Summers I go offshore, fishing—first tackling the mackerel run, then the sworders. Now I'm on my way to the woods. I want a guiding job with a hunter and I've been canvassing the likely prospects on this boat."

"Any luck?"

Macdougal shook his head.

"All of 'em bound to the eastward with sample cases. Thinking only of trade and barter. What's your line, if I may ask?"

"Sporting writer," stated Sandy, ready with a fabrication to fit the case. "Write about sports for newspapers and magazines. Was sent down this way to write up the race between the Gloucesterman and the Bluenose fishing schooner."

"But the race is off." Angus was telling Sandy only what the young man had recently read for himself in the newspapers.

"Exactly. And that's why I'm heading for the woods. The boss wired me that I may as well get a New Brunswick game story, now that I'm in the region," he lied placidly but effectively.

Macdougal clapped a palm on the young man's knee.

"Never a meeting contrived better

by Lassie Goodluck! Ye shall get antlers that'll make the city men goggle like lobsters; and ye may put in the paper a bit o' praise for Guide Macdougal such as will send others from the city to hire him. Eh? And I'll cut price from my wages for the praise ye print."

"You won't do any such thing, either," Sandy was prudently refusing to accept goods he could not pay for. "The wages go on my expense account, you know. Now listen, Angus. I lugged yachting duds down from the city. Have shipped 'em back. I'd be a howl in the woods with canvas shoes and white pants, eh?" He slapped the guide's back and helped in the duet of hilarity. "So I'll have to outfit in the city over yon for everything—guns and all."

Angus rejoined with stout insistence: "If I canna pay ye in wage cut for the bit o' praise ye'll sure be giving me"—he winked at Sandy—"I'll do it in another way by lending ye the gun and the bullets. No sense o' buying a rifle ye'll not be needing outside the woods. As for your duds, ye can outfit as ye're minding."

After that happy compromise, Sandy harkened complacently to the story of Angus Macdougal's life in the woods and on the sea.

Having matters of his own outfitting to manage, Angus went his way in the city, when he had seen Alex installed in modest quarters in a small hotel.

Before he slept that night, Sandy had packed a whopping big duffel bag with an assortment which certainly would have amazed Guide Macdougal, had that veteran of the forest been on hand to tot up on what manner of equipment the client was taking with him on a hunting trip.

In the way of togs for daily wear Angus had set a sartorial example; Sandy copied the woodsman's corduroy and puttees.

The guide came for him early in the morning and surveyed the trip rig out approvingly, but cocked his eye at the size of the duffel bag.

"My sakes, lad! Ye're lading like a lass going to show off at the seashore!"

Sandy swung the bag off the floor and poised it easily above his head. "But it's light—no special weight for the canoe, Angus."

"Are ye that citified ye'll be taking along a featherbed for the woods?" was the caustic inquiry.

Sandy winked. "I ran across some trades in dress goods, do ye mind. Something to please my best girl. I'll be going home from the woods across the north border, and I wouldn't have another chance for such trades."

"Aye! Verra gude," commented Angus, satisfied and approving. "Ye'll smuggle 'em, of course. It's easy doing it. The guards and the deputy marshals are blind bats, mony of 'em."

"So I've heard."

"Oh, not all fools, of course! And try to be honest. But the boys of the smuggling gangs are all the time thinking up new sly ways."

"I suppose you bump against the gangs once in a while, eh?"

Angus did some winking of his own. "There's fishing in the summer, there's guiding in the fall; then an ambeetious man must be doing something else than whittle shavings behind the stove, the while o' the slack time till the fleet starts offshore. Aye! I've rolled mony a barrel o' nutmegs to and fro on the floor; then a dusting o' flour—and the barrel's ready for the custom man's O. K. as mere grist o' the mill."

"Well, that's sure a good one!" commended the United States deputy marshal, surprise making him appear especially sincere; he had heard of that trick for the first time. "But it must be slow business, making money with nutmegs."

"Aye! And why roll a barrel when there's plenty of contraband with two legs to run in across the border of itself when it's rightly steered?"

"Sure thing. The quota immigration laws must have made the trade in aliens good."

"Made it fine!" Angus smacked his lips. "I'd be doing naught else if it wasn't for me being an honest man and needing the excuse and prod o' slack times to make me do something besides fish and guide. But ye'll not be writing any yarns about smuggling, eh?"

"My only interest up North is in big game—and I'm sure going after that," declared the deputy, with convincing earnestness.

"Then we'll be making our start; we can shoot no moose in this tavern office."

Sandy shouldered his pack and followed Angus to a hired car.

They rode to a hamlet where the river was navigable above the falls. Discussing the trip, Sandy had chosen to make the journey by canoe, avoiding any risks of meeting on railroad trains men who might recognize him.

On the shore was the boat house in which Macdougal stored one of his canoes.

They loaded, trimming the craft's balance with care.

Sandy took the bow paddle in matter-of-fact way, telling Angus of experiences in canoe contests in college.

"Oh, I've tried almost everything at least once. But I have never tackled the kind of big game I expect to get on this trip." He was relishing his frequent reference to big game, with the comfort of keeping his secret while he talked out.

They made easy work of it on the broad river, with two paddles worked by stout arms.

Angus whiled the time agreeably by telling how the Acadian refugees fled by that same route, escaping from the English who seized upon less venturesome families and transported them to the Louisiana country.

"Ye'd think by reading the grand poem, lad, as how all of 'em was taken along with the lass Evangeline. But the 'old sirs' do tell that more got away and went north than were carried off on the English ships. And a tough time of it they must have had, rafting up this river, getting along wi' 'em their goods, their stock. If ye ever go into the Madawaska country, north, or the New Acadia, as some folks call it, ye'll be seeing the pure strain of Jersey cows—the little, shaggy Norman horses, the breed kept as it used to be. Bold boys, they must have been in the old days! I mind me that some of that strain has come down straight, just as it has in the cows and the horses.

"If ye should ever run up against a chap named Hartin Duplisse, up this way, and be knowing to his doings and his style, ye'd think, as I do, that he sure came down from specially bold stock of the old days. Bold and cussed. They're good folks mostly, but there's a devil among 'em here and there for the spice o' the race. Duplisse is some pepper!"

"Smuggler, I'll bet."

"Aye! Smuggler."

"Boss of the gang, eh, seeing you've cut him out of the herd by name?"

"He's the boss. But it's not for your story stuff, mind ye."

Sandy swung a convincing stare of candor over his shoulder.

"Up this way my only interest is in big game, man. Do you need my bounden word that I'll not write anything for the papers about smuggling?" He added in his thoughts: "Nor about anything else, either."

"Oh, I know ye'll not! Ye have shown leeberal notions about smuggling —you with your fancy bits for the lass —and I think she'll like them the more

when she knows how they came to her. It may chance that we'll meet up with Hartin Duplisse. We'll be asking of him his latest trick in the ways and means o' smuggling—and over the border will go your bundle, well greased. It's only on this side o' the border he'll be met."

"Takes no chance by stepping on Uncle Sam's soil, eh?"

"No taste in that fox for the race and chase in front of the pack over there. He isn't afeared for his hide—that's not Duplisse, who handles a tough gang. But he's not taking the risks of putting into a trap the head that does the thinking for that gang."

"Probably a rather interesting fellow," agreed Sandy carelessly. "If we happen to run into him, all right. But don't put yourself out, Angus."

"If it wouldna be putting *you* out," suggested Macdougal, after a few moments for canvassing a situation in his thoughts, "I'd like to have a word with Duplisse on my own account. Getting in touch with him early to know his plans for jobs and men."

"Finding out well in advance of that slack time with you, eh?" laughed the passenger. "Go to it, Angus! The boss didn't set any time limit on my stay in the woods."

"He has his places not far off the river," the guide explained. "Between the river and the border, up where the stream sweeps in to make the border. In the narrow V he moves about, keeping in touch with the river because his goods come by this way. Keeping in touch with the border, too, over which his goods go. So we shouldna be long in locating him."

"Take your time, Angus," was the serene content. "I'm out to have a good time and see all I can. The big game can take its turn," he added, dwelling on that subject with gusto. "A regular husky, this Duplisse? Heavyweight?"

"You don't know much about the Acadian breed, asking that. He's short, stocky. Quick as a cat. Fights fists, head, and with the *coup de pied.* You know anything about that style? Jumping high and kicking a man in the side of the head with the foot?"

"I've heard of it. Sounds like your friend might be a hard chap to lick."

"I'd like to see the lad who could do it, giving Duplisse a chance to fight his own way. It would certainly take *some* rooster!"

"By gorry, I'd like to put a friend of mine against Duplisse!" cried Sandy with warmth. "I'm reminded of him by your speaking of a rooster. My friend is called the 'Red Rooster.'"

"Makes no difference what he is called," declared Angus, with lofty contempt. "He couldn't lick the 'Black Bantam.'"

Sandy laid his paddle on the thwarts and lighted his tobacco, sedulously keeping the pipe going in order to hold his tongue off the subject of the Red Rooster's prowess.

CHAPTER IX.

BLACK BANTAM.

IT was a glorious excursion for men with an understanding zest in outdoor life, with muscles toughened so that paddling was the same unconscious effort as breathing.

It was the season of the autumn slack water in the river. The current was no especial handicap.

First they traversed the broad reaches of the lower river, past cozy hamlets, with here and there a town or city with pretensions and populace.

For their stopping place of the night they chose a village and were harbored in a farmhouse where the host was a Macdougal, a cousin of Angus. Sandy never forgot the apple pie, loaded with cream.

Before the next night came upon

them they had arrived in the reaches of the narrowing upper stream, past shores of farmland and forest, into waters which revealed in flow of lazy momentum the thrust of the drop at the great falls above.

They had overtaken and passed bateaus that were rowed in midstream by long sweeps or were poled along the slow eddies that lapped the shore line.

Many ostensible cargoes were vegetables displayed innocently open or sacked. In other boats were various commodities.

"But rum is hidden in all of 'em," stated Angus. "Of course there's rum. They wouldn't be fooling with old-fashioned boats on this river, unless it was rum that gives 'em the profit. Somebody, of course, could meddle a whole lot. But nobody does—and you can use your own judgment in the matter."

"Why should anybody meddle on this side of the line?" queried Sandy. "United States marshals, for instance, aren't allowed to come moseying around over here." He reached into his trousers pocket for a match and fumbled with his marshal's badge while sifting out a light for his pipe.

Stated Angus: "They don't have to come snooping over here to know that rum is sailing up the river right along. The two-legged stuff comes through in the night. Tucked in hang-outs well out of sight at day—and the lads who run the tucking places make a fine clean-up. Beats all, hey, how laws furnish side lines for so many rabs? I'm a rab, too, I s'pose, in the slack time; but I may's well get mine while the others are grabbing."

"Sure thing!" the deputy indorsed. "While the big sieve is leaking, hold your porringer under."

In the dusk they skirted the shores lined with trees.

Finally, ahead of them, they beheld a bateau entering the mouth of a logan, or narrow backwater off the river.

Angus commanded his bow paddler to bend to for a spurt, and they overtook the bateau.

The man in the stern of the boat laid down his pole and swung a sawed-off shotgun to his hip.

"Lay off, Donald!" called Macdougal. "Look sharper and you'll see I'm an all righter."

"Oh, aye, Mac! But after your six months o' summering on the salt, you're new to me every fall."

"D'ye ken the Bantam's perch for the night?"

"We're just here, fresh from down the wet trail. You'll have to ask one o' the lads who come for the load."

A half hour later a squad with lanterns came to the head of the logan where the bateau was pulled up under the gloom cast by overhanging boughs.

These men were brawny, bovine characters—human oxen, not much else. A brisk little French Canadian captained them. He knew Macdougal, called him *"Bon ami!"* and shook hands cordially.

"Ah, *oui!* Sure t'ing!" he chirped in reply to a question. "Boss, he say only todder day eet ban not so ver' long now before 'Snow-runner Mac' he show up to be r'ady for to make tracks to steer by. So yo' come along o' me when de mules get on the loads. I lend you lantern where de trail splits off." Then he slanted a look at the stranger, jerked his chin significantly, and walked away, Angus following.

Sandy waited patiently while the men talked, the Canuck looking at the young man all the time. The lanterns revealed the latter. He showed not the least interest in the business of the men, who were hoisting sacked bottles onto their backs, affixing carrier straps; he was, to all appearances, perfectly familiar with such operations.

When Macdougal returned alone he complimented Sandy.

"You are sure a wise one, lad. Your style of paying no attention to the business, while I was telling him it was an old story to you, fixed everything solid. I had to do some lying to protect you and me both. Said you're my cousin, going up guiding along o' me, and that you'll come back here in the slack time and take a hand with me in this business."

"Depend on me to back you, old top. That is, in all except the coming back."

"Of course, I know you're all safe to trust, even if you are a city hunter, up here for big game. But the gang sure does hate outsiders of any stripe. For me it was lie or leave you here waiting in the dark while I gab to the boss."

Sandy was conscious of some honest compunction when he thanked Macdougal for this friendliness. He was in a way to betray the confidence placed in him, he realized.

His feelings were helped a bit by what Angus proceeded to say:

"So we'll be able to drop in, all sociable, on the Black Bantam, Alex. Now get me right as to him! He's no chum of mine, you understand. He puts me in a way of getting some extra coin that I'm a bit ashamed of when it's in my mitt. But I don't like his cocky style nor relish the nasty twist he gives his mug. But now there's naught else for me and you but to be twa cousins and fair and friendly to him, dropping in for a bit o' chat."

"Nothing could be sweeter," declared the young man with enthusiasm. "I won't even mention that I think the Red Rooster can lick him."

"We'll paddle the canoe out of the lantern light, over to the far side of the logan," said the guide. "We'll cache it and the duffel so we can walk light to where we're going."

With woodsman's craft, Macdougal hid and camouflaged craft and belongings in a thicket of stunted spruce. Then he and Sandy walked around the end of the logan, helped by a straggle of moonlight and the beacons of the lanterns.

Angus introduced his mate with a "Meet Jules Lafronnier," and Sandy was made one of the party that set off up the woodland aisles. Two of the bateau men went ahead, each with a shotgun. Two, similarly armed, closed in the line of the march of the carriers.

Jules followed with his companions of the moment, keeping a sharp eye on the parade from his post behind.

"Eef yo' please, don't theenk, Monsieu' MacPherson, we go to fight because de four men carry guns." He was reassuring a possible recruit. "But we tak' moch pains so one of de mules don't scoot off into de brush wit' he stoff on hees back he can sal for de hunder dollaire!"

"The juice sure gets to be worth good money when it's across the line," Sandy remarked. "Quite a temptation."

"Ah, *oui*. So easy monee!" Jules shrugged his shoulders. "So we all be tempted up here. Me, de boss, Macdougal een hees slack time—p'rap' yo', too, eh, monsieur, be tempted, eh?"

"Shouldn't wonder a mite. It sure does look easy."

"So ver' easee! So manee holes! And plontee help from folks who leeve along de border and ask no pay—only like to have a bottle on de cupboard shelf. We see to it dey have de bottle!" he declared cheerfully. "Den dey pass de word to custom mans and depity marshals. Slippery word! And de Oncle Sammies run hard one way—and we breeng in de stoff anodder way. See? So ver' easee!"

"Slick!" Sandy agreed.

"We need spry fellaires to be *capitaine* like I am. Macdougal, he's *capitaine* for snow work. Yo' could be ver' light on de snowshoe, Monsieur

MacPherson. To scout—to be *capitaine!*"

"I'm certainly looking ahead to the slack time, Angus," stated Sandy.

After that Jules shook off the suspicion which caution engendered. He chattered on about the enterprise engineered by the brains of the boss.

Sandy found especially enlightening the aid's disclosures of the methods used in handling the aliens. He learned that the smuggled men were divided into small squads and secreted here and there in woods on the American side. There were little camps in remote ravines, brushwood shelters which could be discovered only by accident or painstaking search; there were caves; there were even carefully contrived eyries built above ground in dense thickets of black growth. These squads were slid along their way and scattered whenever the spies reported a clear field for operations.

Sandy remembered his father's melancholy conviction that the government would not assign an army corps to the work on the border. The deputy was getting a sharper understanding of what Messrs. Arbo, Stickney, and Worthing were up against, and he was entertaining mellowed opinions regarding their failure up to date. He began to wonder by what system or strategem those hidden, scattered nests could be located and cleaned out. He pondered, while he walked on; then he set the puzzle back on a shelf in his mental cupboard and could only hope that his subconscious mind would be doing a little work on the problem while he was attending to matters more nearly at hand.

He reflected that this meeting-up with Duplisse, now particularly at hand, would be requiring all his active, of-the-moment intelligence.

After a while they came to a place where a trail split off.

Jules lighted an extra lantern and gave it into Macdougal's hand.

" 'Bout half an acre—I mean, your talk, half a mile—den yo' come onto steep climb. But yo' don't make de climb. No. Yo' spleet off straight to de right and go up gully, an yo' come onto log house. Dat's heem."

The two parted from Jules with cordial handshakes and went trailing ahead into the forest, Angus ahead with the lantern.

When they turned at last from the trail at the foot of the steep bluff and were well along the gulch, Angus drew attention to a gleam of light. "We're a-nigh, lad!"

When they neared the cabin the door was flung open and a small but sturdy figure was silhouetted there.

The newcomers hurried out of the night, Angus with the ring of the lantern over his forearm.

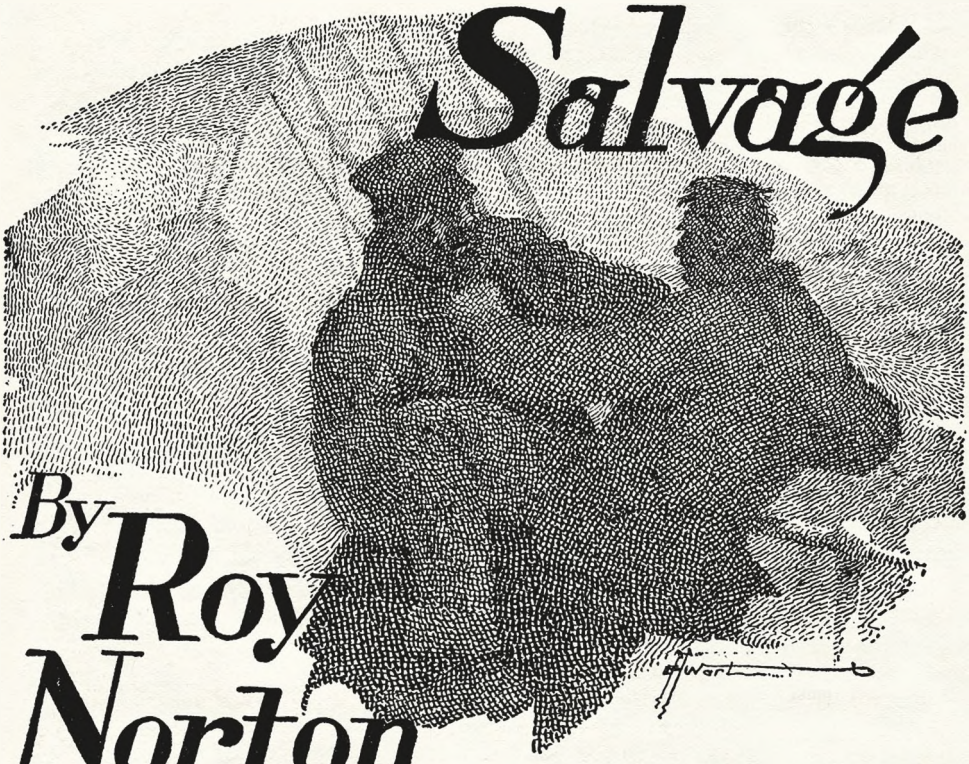
Angus pushed his companion to the front, within reach of the host's extended hand. "This is my cousin, Alex —Alex MacPherson, Hartin Duplisse. And maybe he'll be having a slack time along o' me," he added, with significance which was understood by the Bantam.

"Jolly news to hear!" declared the chief, holding to Sandy's hand and pulling him into the camp. "Nevaire did a stranger come with so ver' fine introduction!"

Sandy was insatiably in quest of kicks for his soul of adventure. Fillips for his equally insatiable sense of humor. Here he was in the very stronghold of the Bantam!

To be continued next week.

Salvage



By Roy Norton

Author of "Mr. Catlin's Weakness," "Widders Come First," Etc.

Captain Drake again proves, and this time most brilliantly, his right to the title: "The Opportunist." With remarkable sagacity he scents an opportunity on the wind.

PIRÆUS, that historical port of Greece, lay drenched and sweltering in sunshine. Its great water front, whence galleys had sailed bravely forth in ancient days, was packed with shipping, most of it idle; for trade was in the doldrums. Docked between two big "smoke boats" lay the very trim and neat steam schooner, *Malabart,* Captain Eli Drake, owner and commander; and there was nothing in the *Malabart's* physical appearance to indicate that she, too, was yawning for a cargo of any sort, or to any port, though the charter rate might be so low as to barely pay expenses.

Captain Drake, whose sobriquet of "The Old Hyena" had survived the days of sail, was ashore, harassed by cares. He had been eating into capital to keep his ship in commission, and his crew, which he had gathered in the course of many years, from being disbanded. He prized his crew. and, after his ship, they came first in his affections. In quest of cargo—any cargo—he had scoured the port, made daily trips over the short drive to Athens, and spent liberal sums on cablegrams to many agents, without avail. He felt like cursing the big steamship companies, which, with their army of organized runners, were rapidly driving the independent owners and tramps off the seas.

In a mood of sullen obstinacy he had tramped almost the length of the docks when, unexpectedly, he heard the clatter of a cargo winch; and the sound

was so unusual that, like a magnet, it drew him in its direction. He found a rusty tramp that was lading.

"Now what—how did I miss getting that cargo?" he reflected. "The *Rhodialim,* eh?" And after a moment's thought he muttered: "Oh, yes. Belongs to that firm of Hakim & Letin. Got her and one other schooner, doing mostly Levantine and East African coast trade. Wish I could have got that cargo. My luck's out."

Without thinking, or observing that at the dock gates there was a watchman, who, at the moment, had his back turned and was in voluble altercation with one of his countrymen, Captain Eli strolled inward. He finally halted, and with hands in pockets stared, suddenly discovering something else that made him curious.

"That's blamed funny!" he thought. "Big cases marked 'Mining machinery,' but a couple of stevedores chuck 'em into the slings as if they were empty. Also cases of merchandise put up like heavy prints that seem just as light, and as—— Good Lord! Up there on the bridge! If that ain't Bill Morris, I'm dotty. So he's got a ship out here, eh, after it got too hot for him about everywhere else on salt water! Lost two ships in the Pacific trade, under mighty suspicious circumstances, and had his ticket taken away, last I heard of him. Ummh! Ten or twelve years ago, that was. So he's skipperin' this craft, eh? If him and me hadn't locked spars two or three times, I'd go over and rile him up with a leetle light, airy banter. I guess he's——"

"Hey you! Got any business here? How'd you get past me at the gate?" a voice disturbed him. And although the fellow spoke bastard Greek, Drake, who, with a sailor's facility, had picked up considerable of the tongue, understood, and turned to see the watchman glowering at him.

"Why?" he asked. "Can't anybody come onto your dock? Nothing secret about it, is there?"

The watchman sputtered something about none without a pass from Hakim & Letin being allowed in, and somewhat peremptorily ordered Drake to clear out. Not being accustomed to such treatment, disgruntled, affronted, but recognizing the weakness of his position and the futility of retort, Drake turned and, swearing under his breath, obeyed.

It is possible that the episode might have passed from his mind entirely, but for an encounter that followed some hours later, when, just as he was turning toward the *Malabart,* a man whose face bore the almost indelible stamp of the engine rooms of ships, with grease worked deeply into the pores of the skin, respectfully touched his cap peak and accosted him in fairly good, though accented, English.

"Captain Drake," he said. "Excuse me, sir, for stopping you, but I am a good man out of work, and want a job on your ship, sir."

"Sorry, my man, but we're full up," Captain Eli replied. "Too full," he added, and would have proceeded on his way, had not the applicant insisted.

"I am good man, sir. First-class engineer; but I would take anything in your engine room. Because me, I have big family, and ships are all full now, it seems to me, sir. I lose job when not my fault. Not at all. When I took engines of ship *Rhodialim* anybody tell you they scrap heap. I make 'em good. And now, without word, since that Captain Bill Morris come, I am fired. He say have his own engineer and——"

"Huh? What's that?" Captain Eli, who had been slowly moving forward with the insistent one at his side, stopped and stared at the man. "Do you happen to know the name of the new engineer?"

"It is Simmons, or Simons, or something like that."

Drake's mouth pursed itself as if to whistle an exclamation, and for a moment he stood absent-mindedly staring at the stones beneath his feet. But his thought ran: "Simmons! Simmons! That was the engineer of the ship that Bill lost last, and he was one of the chief witnesses at the insurance investigation. Something funny about this business!"

He abruptly started away, saying as he did so: "You come on board with me, and I'll learn if there's anything can be done. Let me see your ticket." And then, a moment later: "Beltramo —Giuseppe Beltramo is your name, eh? And your ticket shows a long, clean record. No wonder they didn't want you on that boat. Never mind the questions, now. I'll ask all the questions myself."

As a rule the relations between Captain Eli Drake and his chief mate, William Catlin, were of two separate characters, inasmuch as afloat they observed the distinctions in station and Drake brooked no interference; but it was well known that ashore they were more intimate than brothers usually are, and confidants in nearly everything. Hence, when the commander sent for Catlin upon his arrival aboard, and on his entry into the cabin addressed him as "Bill," Catlin thought: "Something's turned up." Aloud he said:

"Landed something, skipper?"

"Landed enough to set me to a heap of thinking, Bill," Drake said. And then he bent forward and in a confidential tone told of his experiences, ending with: "It seems to me there's some sort of a job being put up by Hakim & Letin; and—well, there might be some way for us to make something out of it."

"Sort of an opportunity, eh?" Catlin grinned, remembering that the Cape Cod man had earned the reputation of being an opportunist. "Maybe you can see one, but I can't. Don't mind my thick-headedness. I can get anything when it's explained, all right."

But Drake seemed to have become absorbed in some thought of his own. He stared absently through the cloud of pipe smoke; and finally chuckled, as if he had reached a solution of some problem.

"I think I sort of grab an idea," he said at last, getting to his feet. "You're a hell of a good friend, Bill, but as a helper in working out a puzzle you don't amount to much. Never mind. Think I got it, myself. So just talking it over with you did have some use, after all. You go down and keep that feller I brought aboard interested, while I slip below and see the chief. Most likely be in his cabin, I expect."

They went out together and Drake sought the engineer.

"Forbes," he said to that gray-haired veteran. "Can you find something for an engineer out of a job to do for a few days?"

"Can't find enough to do myself, let alone make work for a new man. If this keeps up—— Hold on. While I think of it, that chap Flint, my third, asked me to-day if I thought there was a chance for him in the navy. Now if he got a month off to go to the nearest place he could pass his examinations and file his application——"

"The sure-enough right thing! Let him take a month, and put this feller on until Flint comes back. Come on up topside and talk to him."

The result of the conversation was that two men, at least, were made happy that evening—Flint, who had got unexpected leave for a month, and Beltramo, who had got a temporary billet.

But Drake was not on the ship when the shift was made. In the roughest suit of clothes he could muster he had gone ashore and made his way to a not-too-clean bar, where he knew that pilots were wont to gather. There he patiently waited for the arrival of one he

knew. The man came at last, and Captain Eli drew him into a little private room at the rear.

"Christophe," Captain Eli said, "I have done you a favor once or twice, and you're the kind of man that likes to repay. Well, the time has come when you may be of use. Now first, you've got to keep your mouth shut—not one word—not one word to anybody, not even your wife, of what we say here in this room."

The pilot, whose face was seamed with years and sea service, promptly lifted his hand and swore an oath that would have satisfied any band of conspirators that ever existed.

"First, you know this sea as well as any one, I take it?"

"By Heaven! Better than all save one or two. Was I not a fisherman in these waters when old enough to float? I know every foot of it and every reef, and every island and——"

"Good!" Captain Eli interrupted. He leaned across the little table between them and lowered his voice. "Christophe, if you were going to sink a ship that was supposed to be bound eastward —say for Jaffa—where would you do it?"

For a moment the pilot's mouth hung open and his eyes were wide, as if he feared for Drake's sanity.

"But, sir, captain—you—you are not going to sink—— You don't mean that——"

"No, of course not! I sink nothing. But you think it over carefully and answer my questions," Drake continued. And the pilot, still wondering, slowly lowered his eyes, shut them as if to ponder such a case, and then asked: "What time of year, captain?"

"This time of year," Drake replied.

And again the weather-beaten old pilot shut his eyes and thought.

"Listen, sir," he said in his quaint but adequate English. "Many things one must think of. If mens want to sink ship, but not drown anybody, they must be not too far from land for open boat, eh? Must be some place where not too much danger big seas for small boats, eh? Must also be some place where nobody see—away from fishermen's boats, or cargo boats, or bigger ships—some place lonely this time year. Plenty places man could scuttle ship, but few where get all these things what want, eh? Well, about now most fishin' boats work"—he got up and walked to a rough map that was tacked on the wall and that was almost solidly smeared with the trails of many fingers across its surface—"works up about here mostly. In some months, here; some months, there; but now, about here. So no good up there." His finger moved as he talked. "No good through here, because big ships go there. No good there, because small ships what do island trade work in and out. So, here best place for all things. Almost only place which fit all I speak between here and Island of Rhodes. Not too far out of the way. Very good place. Deep water—plenty water and not much chance boat ever drift when hit bottom. Yes, captain, sir, that best place anybody can think of—right about there."

His gnarled finger ceased to move—pointed at open water off Nauplia.

They sat down again and, while Christophe eyed him with perplexed looks, the captain reflected.

"That, you think, is a place a man who knew these waters well would select?" he said. "But a man who didn't know them?"

"God knows where!" the pilot exclaimed, lifting his hands and letting them fall to the table again. "It is the place—the place I say—where one who knew would choose in, say—seven times out of ten. As you, sir, know, there are some thousands of islands."

For half an hour Drake continued to catechize, but without stirring the old pilot from his conclusions.

"Well, Christophe," he said at last, arising to go, "I'm going to hire you for a cruise that may never take place; but I'm taking a little gamble on certain things. You begin work to-morrow, always with your mouth shut. Here's what you are to find out: First, when the *Rhodialim* sails. Second, if she's taking a pilot aboard, and if so, who and what he is. And third, you're to report to me aboard the *Malabart* each evening just after dark. I don't care to have too many notice that you come there. Is it understood? Going wages, of course," he concluded, with Yankee thrift.

"Yes, sir, captain. Very well I understood it, and do what you ask. Maybe some time you tell me why all this, eh?"

"Maybe," said Drake laconically, as he thumped upon the table to pay for his bill. And he left behind him one who was still wondering a little if a certain Captain Drake was all there.

Catlin had a surprise on the following morning, when told that they were going to take on some supplies. And he was still more astonished when Drake asked him to muster the crew and learn whether there was any man aboard who had ever had any experience in diving. Catlin found a stoker who admitted that years before he had worked for a salvage company. Drake told the man to get on shore-going clothes and come with him, and the twain disappeared. The man returned that afternoon accompanied by a truck, which duly unloaded and brought aboard a collection of stuff that made even Catlin scratch his head, and caused conjectures for'ard as to whether The Old Hyena was going into the wrecking business. It consisted of a complete diving outfit—air pumps and all—as well as huge collision mats and handling gear. Drake did not appear until evening, and seemed unusually speechless, and he dined and waited for Christophe.

The latter came at last, grinning with self-satisfaction, and was at once closeted with Drake, who asked: "Well, what did you learn?"

"That *Rhodialim,* she sail day after to-morrow. She got most her cargo aboard now. But it's funny, captain, sir, she got one man who knew this sea same as me. Long time ago he fisherman, then go away, and been down Smyrna where not got too good name. Good man, when sober, but too much drink, so never get good job. That man I see in saloon. He most full and—— You owe me thirty drachmas, I spend on him get him fuller, so he talk. Bymeby he borrow fifty drachmas from me, which also you owes me. He brag some and say pretty soon he pay back. Pretty soon, maybe two weeks, he come back with plenty money in pockets. But he shut up like oyster when I ask how make this so much money, and he say nobody but him ever goin' know that. Now what you wish me make?"

"You go home and keep on keeping your mouth shut. Come aboard at noon to-morrow. We sail to-morrow afternoon." Drake was suddenly decided in his movements.

"How long be gone from my old woman?" Christophe asked.

"Can't tell. Maybe one week, maybe two. Not likely to be longer, I think. But all you've got to do is to come aboard and I'll tell you then where we're bound. I'm going to clear for Smyrna. There will be no secret about that."

On the following morning when Captain Eli went ashore he took with him the chief engineer. The latter returned with two big machine cases and armored, high-pressure hose, together with a case of fittings. Late that afternoon the *Malabart* slipped out and away, so palpably light that other sea captains who observed her shook their heads with understanding. A ship putting to sea in ballast in dull times evokes the sympathy of the seawise. Aboard

the *Malabart* there was an air of gloom among the crew.

The captain and owner, walking the bridge, said to Catlin:

"Well, Bill, I'm taking a gamble—thousand to one shot, that's all."

When dusk fell the island of Thermia lay close in to starboard, and the man at the wheel stood ready to port his helm and bring her over from the sou'-east-by-east to an easterly course to round the island, that being the route toward Smyrna; but old Christophe, standing behind him, took the wheel, rang for slow speed and groped in toward the island. It loomed up about them, a rocky point, before he said over his shoulder to Captain Eli:

"Here's where we can lay to, sir. Good anchorage here in this cove, and no risk of wind."

All that night she rocked there, gently, on a sea that was almost without a swell. And when morning came, to the crew's further curiosity, she brought in her hook, swung about, and headed due west, plodding along at slow speed and apparently purposeless. A liner came out of the north and gave her a passing hoot. Christophe, eying the other boat, said to Captain Eli:

"She be for Messina way, and now not likely be another ship along here for ten days. That's what those mens know. If I make good guess, that's why they clear Piræus to-day, after big ship go, sir."

"And when will we make that Island of Hydra?" Drake asked, staring to the westward.

"Just about sunset, captain, sir. Then we slip round it and there are small islands between it and mainland, and entrance into Nauplia which so long and so big it is like long gulf. We lay behind them islands, sir, and—see what shall see about midnight, I think, sir."

Drake caught his dry, knowing grin, but did not entirely share his confidence as to the outcome of their strange voyage.

The pilot's prediction as to progress was fulfilled; just as a hazy sunset colored the tips of the high, bleak mountains behind which the day disappeared, they passed the isle with its abandoned and obsolete fortifications, and hove to in waters that seemed to have been deserted since the time of ancient wars. Night fell with a thin, low-lying fog that seemed to sweep down from the great bastions of Nauplia and rest on the still waters. The stars were obscured and a new depression engulfed Drake.

"The weather's against us," he said gloomily, to the storm-beaten old pilot. "They could pass us at a couple of cable lengths and we'd never know it."

"Not if we were out in a small boat, listening," Christophe said. "In small boat hear everything. On ship, no—not so quite well. We must put out boat and get out maybe two three miles and wait. Yes, maybe fog too bad, one way, but very good, other. When they pass we get course then slip quiet, very quiet, same way, with *Malabart,* eh?"

Drake pondered. There seemed no other method. He cursed the fog, but ordered a boat away with Catlin and the pilot aboard, the latter assuring him that he could find his way back to the ship if the night were as black as the pits of Satan. A long wait followed after the boat had disappeared. The gloom of the darkened *Malabart,* the lack of the bell striking the hour, the absolute stillness of the ship, were all upsetting. The very lifelessness of the protected water where she lay was annoying, for there was not the slightest lapping whisper of a wave against her hull. Down in the engine room even the stokers who kept up steam had been cautioned against the clanging of a furnace door or the ring of a shovel. Had one passed the *Malabart* within ten

yards he might have thought her the ghost of some long-abandoned ship. Drake listened from the outer wing of the bridge, bending over, sometimes with a hand cupped to his ear, until he was tired. He had about decided that his voyage and expenditure had been born of folly, when he heard a faint creak, followed a minute later by another. Then Catlin's voice below hailed softly, and the boat pulled around to the side ladder, which had been lowered and swung barely above the water.

"All right, sir. She passed so close that she almost ran us down. She had doused her lights and was not doing more than five or six knots. Christophe says there could be no mistake. She was the *Rhodialim,* all right."

The pilot joined in with: "About a mile and a half out. Long row back."

"It won't do for us to follow too closely on their heels, anyway," Captain Eli said. "But are you certain that you can pick her up again, Christophe, in all this murk?"

"I know the course she will take. I think so, with luck," the pilot said. "They not alter course again. Too much else business think of, I expect. Just keep straight on about five, six miles; then stop. They not want go much farther. Might meet small fishin' boats out of Nauplia. Not take chance of that, eh?"

Captain Eli stood blockily, a dim figure in the darkness, and seemed making mental calculations.

"I don't think we'd best be in too much of a hurry," he said at last. "We've got to take the chances of being too late. If the crew are in on it with the commander, mate and engineer, there'll be no time wasted. If they're not, the boats won't be ready to lower, and besides he'll have to put up a bluff at saving the ship, to fool the crew. We'd best give them at least an hour and a half."

"That crew, captain, sir, are the scum of the water front," Christophe put in.

"But just the same, we don't know that they're in on it," Drake replied. "Bill Morris don't like to cut too many in on his crooked work. Seems to me more likely that he'll try to stampede 'em into the boats after putting up a great show to save the ship. He'll call on his engineer for steam and announce that they must beach her. The engineer will either pretend to start the engines, or swear that he can't turn 'em over. That would stampede the crew, if they're the sort one picks up in these parts. I think we've got to risk it, and give 'em an hour and a half, certain. After that it depends on how quickly we can pick her up. Beltramo tells me that she's fitted with two sea cocks only into her main hold, because her engines are set well aft. So she's not likely to fill within some hours after they're opened, and I've got it doped out from what I know of Morris' work that's the way he'll put her under, if that's what he intends to do; but its only little things that are queer which makes me think that's what he's up to. Big gamble, but——"

"Must be. If not, why he not go on to east'ard?" the pilot asked. "I'm sure of it, captain, sir."

But Drake was still doubtful when, still in blackness and running at slow speed, the *Malabart* nosed out into the sea with the pilot himself at the wheel and keeping an eye on both time and compass as he took up the trail. To the commander's ears it seemed that with the ship so light that her blades were barely under water the thrash of the slow-turning screw must be audible for miles. He saw the wheel slowly revolving under Christophe's hands and sensed that the pilot was now where he thought they might find the sinking ship.

Captain Eli knew that both Catlin,

and the second mate, Giles, and nearly all the crew were forward peering into the dimness ahead, but it seemed impossible to see anything on such a night. It was a matter of luck, and he felt a dawning apprehension that his luck was out. Watching the compass over the pilot's shoulder he saw that the ship had made one complete circle and was now holding dead ahead. The wheel again whirled, and they began another circle, a mile deeper in that huge bay surrounded by high and forbidding mountains, when there came a soft whistle from forward and a pattering of bare feet. Catlin's muffled voice came from below:

"Hold her, sir, hold her. I think we've sighted the *Rhodialim* about two points off the port quarter."

Drake jumped to the engine tube—it having been arranged that a man was to stand by to obviate the use of bells, inasmuch as the sound of an engine bell might carry far in such stillness—and now the *Malabart* lost way and came to a stop. The boat, which was swinging barely above the water, was lowered, and Drake, Catlin, and two men tumbled in and fell to the oars. They rowed quietly.

"There she is, sir," Catlin whispered.

Exercising still more caution, they drew down on the dim shape that lay inert and heavy on the water. They came alongside and listened for voices, but caught no sound. They found the boat davits hanging idly over the water, and went up the falls noiselessly, and stood on the deck. Together they ran here and there, making a search for any human being. Not until then were they confident that she had been abandoned. Listening down the main cargo hatch they could hear the swirling and gurgling of water and the soft bumping of empty cases and crates.

"Get back to the ship, Bill, and rush across all the men that can be spared; so that if that gang are standing by waiting for the *Rhodialim* to sink, we can knock 'em overboard. Tell Christophe to bring the *Malabart* alongside twenty minutes after you've gone. That'll give you time to be back here ahead of her; so if we have to repel boarders, we'll have the men to do it. Be as quiet as you can and get a move on."

Catlin slipped away and over the side like a ghost. After he had gone Drake listened attentively for a few minutes, then went back and again bent over the open hatch. Afterward he tried, by leaning far over the rail, to estimate how deeply the scuttled ship had already sunk. It seemed to him that she couldn't last very much longer. Taking an electric torch from his pocket, he went below. She was a fairly deep ship, of good draft, and he was pleased to observe that the cabin floors were not yet damp. He decided that if the sea cocks were of the diameter given by Giuseppe, the former engineer, she had at least an hour and a half longer to float. He knew that her fires must have been drawn, because Morris would not run the risk of the sound of a boiler explosion drawing attention to the spot, if there chanced to be any boat within hearing.

"He knows this business of scuttling ships better than any one I ever heard of," Drake soliloquized. "But if he cleared off this time, without waiting to see her under, he made one hell of a mistake."

He looked at his watch in the light of his torch and meditated: "If Bill moves lively and doesn't lose his way, he should be back here in half an hour from now. If he loses his way in this blamed fog—I'm afraid we cut it pretty short!"

He climbed back to the deck, went to the port side, from which the boat had put off, and listened, prepared to an-

swer a hail, if Catlin returned groping and had to shout to learn his bearings. Then from the opposite side of the ship, he heard a single telltale thump, as if an oar in clumsy hands had slipped from an oarlock and brought up with a bang.

Drake ran across to the starboard rail just in time to hear a muttered imprecation, in colloquial Greek:

"Quiet there, you lubber! If the skipper and those two pets of his are hanging around, we've a fine chance of getting away with anything."

Drake pursed his lips into a silent whistle, and through his mind ran the thought: "It's the crew of this craft come back. Probably suspected something and are trying somehow to double-cross Morris, Simmons and whoever they've let in on it with 'em. I'm a fool. Should have kept at least one man with me for such an emergency."

Quick as was his thought, his action was quicker. He jerked off his boots and threw off his jacket. He ran aft in the direction that he was certain the boat must take to board, and leaned over the rail just as a man started to climb upward.

"Get back into that boat and sheer off," he called down. "This ship is abandoned and is salvage."

The man hesitated, and a voice from below ordered:

"Go on up! We'll talk this over on deck."

"Like hell you will!" Captain Eli declared. "And if any man tries to come on this ship, he's looking for trouble. Sheer off, if you want a talk. If you want a fight, come ahead."

The man holding the boat fall climbed up and got a foothold on the strake. He threw a hand inward and caught a rail stanchion and swung upward, encouraged by muttered comments.

"All right! If you will have it——" Drake growled.

And leaned far over, and struck. In the gloom and darkness he had not struck well, and instead of knocking his man overboard into the boat below, he merely shifted him outward just beyond reach of a second blow. Drake threw himself over the rail and hanging by one hand struck again with the other. It was a body blow, but the man was tenacious, clung to the rope, swayed like a pendulum, and, as he swung back, kicked at Drake with his heavy sea boot. But this time Drake's fist smashed home, and the boarder grunted, loosened his grip on the boat fall, and went slithering down among his companions. Drake climbed back over the rail just in time to feel a stunning smash on the back of his head, and was not until then aware that while he had engaged one assailant, another had climbed up the opposite boat fall with a monkey-like agility, and had come behind him.

Infuriated by the attack, he whirled, seized the man, lifted him as if he were a bundle of waste, and, with a giant's heave, threw him far outward. The man shouted as he fell, but Drake did not hear the splash; for now he found himself fighting desperately with two other dark shapes who charged silently. Even as Drake fought, he recalled what he had overheard, which convinced him that these men also had no wish to recall Morris and his fellow conspirators. Drake grinned at the humor of that situation—a scalawag crew trying to steal aboard the ship they had abandoned, Morris and his fellows somewhere out there in the dark, himself battling for the salvage like a dog for a bone, and all the time, down there in the hold, the sea cocks flooding the sinking ship.

The number of his assailants increased. They were urged on by the leader in a hoarse mutter:

"He's alone. He must be alone, because no one else comes. Down him!

Down him, because he's probably got a boat coming!"

Drake fought desperately. Two of his assailants went to the deck and lay there struggling, as they tried to recover their senses. Veteran fighter that he was, the participator in events which had earned for him the sobriquet of The Old Hyena, he used his head coolly, his fists heavily, and as he moved here and there slipped out of the dangers of being cornered and fought for time.

Then came the accident. Retreating, his heels caught over a coil of rope that had been carelessly left on the deck. He struggled vainly to recover his balance, but they were on him like a pack of wolves. And in a fighting, struggling group came to the deck, where they twisted and turned as he tried to regain his feet, was pulled down, tried again, was struck heavily over his eyes, saw stars, shook his head like an enraged bull, and felt himself pinioned to the deck while one of the men he had previously knocked down arrived in time to kick him in the ribs. He was now roaring with fury, heedless of all alarms and thinking of nothing but revenge.

He did not hear the angry shout of Catlin and his men coming on deck. The hold on him suddenly relaxed. He sat up, rubbing his bruised side and clearing the blood from his eyes, heard Bill Catlin's fighting oaths and got to his feet. Both forward and aft shadowy forms of men in flight flitted across the decks. He heard Catlin's shout:

"Don't let 'em get back to their boat! Knock 'em out and hold 'em. They've probably killed the skipper. If Drake is dead, we'll drown the whole damn lot!"

"Yes, don't let 'em get away, Bill," Drake shouted, climbing to his feet and regaining his full senses. "I want 'em. Particularly that fleabitten rat who gave me the boots. Lash 'em up and get 'em together. Quick! The ship may sink under us at any time."

Both he and Catlin ran here and there to bring matters to a conclusion, and within a few minutes there were seven somewhat bruised and battered ruffians thrown into the nearest cabins and, despite their protestations and appeals, locked in. Their leader, who time and again shouted that he was the second mate of the *Rhodialim,* was the first to whine for mercy. He cried, in comprehensible English:

"You hell of an Ingleeshmans tie us up and put us here to drown. You let us go we make no more of the fights. We go quiet. But *capitano,* please, sir, not drown us."

"Drown nothing!" Drake growled. "If we see that we can't save the ship, we'll bring you up and turn you loose in your boat, you damn pirates! And listen here! You keep quiet now. We've got no more time to waste on you." He turned to Catlin and said: "Lock 'em in. We've got to fall to, if we want to keep this craft afloat."

They hastily ran out to the deck just in time to hear Giles, the second mate, calling;

"Ship's coming, sir. Shall I flash a light for 'em, or hail?"

Drake himself cupped his hands and called: *"Malabart,* ahoy! This way!" When he got a response, he ran back to where he had fallen, struck a match, found his electric torch that had fallen from his pocket, and with it as a beacon, directed the *Malabart* to come alongside.

He called for Beltramo to come aboard to point out the location of the sea cocks, and for the collision mats to be put across. He set lookouts to guard against the possibility of other boarders, and himself took a hand at the work.

"If the others haven't heard the row, it's not likely they'll come back," he

said. "But we'll take no chances; we'll keep as quiet as possible, just to avoid any more risks of interference. Move lively now!"

The men of the *Malabart* ran here and there, their bare feet pattering, and pulled and hauled a huge, unwieldy mat to the outward side. Then they ran its looped lines forward and under the ship's hull. The *Malabart* sheered off to give play, and the men fell to the lines, heaving and tugging, as the mat went over the side and submerged itself at the point indicated by Beltramo. Throughout their work, running, and pulling, and hauling, that same air of noiselessness, of low-spoken orders, was maintained. In the same muffled silence, filled only with sounds of movement, the other mat was fixed on the starboard side and drawn taut, and the officers, listening intently down the hatchway, were encouraged when the sounds of swirling and gurgling were no longer audible.

A huge cable was brought across from the *Malabart,* fixed through the for'ard bits. The *Malabart's* screw turned, and she slowly moved ahead until she took the strain of the tow and headed back for the shelter of the islands where she had lain in wait. Down on the engine-room steps Captain Eli held his torchlight against a water mark and slowly his face lost its grimness. His eyes twinkled when he saw the ship was no longer taking in an appreciable or dangerous quantity of water. He mentally estimated the time, and muttered: "We'll make it, sure, unless she springs another leak, or the mats fail!"

Neither accident came, and in the dawn the *Malabart* towed her salvage into the sheltered waters, slacked off and came alongside as the *Rhodialim's* anchors splashed into the sea. Drake, going across to his own ship, where the cook was serving out hot mugs of coffee, gulped one, and eyed the remnants of the two packing cases that Forbes had opened on the *Malabart's* deck. Two centrifugal pumps, stocky and powerful, squatted there in the midst of the confusion, and the engineer was directing the fitting of the steam lines.

"We'll lash the ships alongside. It's safe, I think, and it's so still in these waters they'll not chafe," Drake said to Catlin and the engineer. And that maneuver was quickly effected. The pump suckers were hauled across and splashed into the half-drowned hull of the salvaged ship and a few minutes later two great streams of water were pouring steadily into the sea. When daylight came the diving apparatus was planted on the *Rhodialim's* deck, and, guided by a water torch, the man who had abandoned diving made a descent, found the sea cocks and closed them. And now the salvage was practically assured.

It was nearly noon when Drake said to Catlin:

"Now we'll go below and get at the bottom of this business. We'll have a little chat with that second mate we've got trussed up."

They brought the man up to the deck. He was sullen, cowed, and palpably frightened. Drake regarded him coldly for a full minute, frowning before he said:

"We brought you up to get at the truth of this. Why did you come back to the ship? Did Morris send you?"

The man started to evade, to stammer, to make palpably false statements; until Drake threatened with:

"Stow that guff! The only chance you've got is to come across with a clean yarn. If you do that, you'll get away clean. Now quit your waving the hook, or back below you go, until I can hand you over to the shore police in Piræus. If it suits you better to talk Greek—— Christophe, come here and tell me what

this man says. I want to get it straight."

Christophe came, added his own urgings to overcome the man's reluctance, and then listened with a dry grin to a voluble confession. Now and then he interrupted with a question, and although Drake understood the gist of the mate's words, Christophe finally turned and in his own way told what he had learned.

"Thees man, he think maybe he and these other mens can maybe get lots of little things like chronometers and glasses and such what left behind; so after lost Captain Morris boat in fog, they row back see if she still afloat, and come aboard. He swear he not know anything about how she sink on purpose. Engineer what Morris frien' run on deck, yell she sprung big leak, and Morris make fuss, and then say no hope and mus' take to boats. When these man come aboard and find you, they thinks maybe ship not sink after all, and if they can get her back they make lot of money for save her. So, fight like hell. He swear that all he know. Maybe he spik truth, I think so."

Drake stared at the man for a moment. Then, with apparent irrelevance, he asked Christophe:

"How do people go by land from Nauplia to Piræus, and how long does it take?"

"Road over the mountains, sir. Easy go. But take maybe two, three days."

"Telephone, I suppose?"

"Sure, captain, sir. Nauplia fine city. One time capital of Greece and——"

"Good! You tell this man we're going to keep 'em aboard the *Malabart* until we get ready to make it to Piræus, and that nothing will happen to them, unless they try to leave before we get ready for them to go."

The mate of the *Rhodialim* understood, and broke into profuse promises; but to make certain that they could not escape, Drake had all the boats of the *Malabart* brought around to the salvaged ship, moored, and the oars taken away, before he liberated his battered prisoners and told the cook to feed them.

Catlin was still wondering what Drake had in mind when, a few days later, the *Rhodialim* was ready to put to sea under her own steam. Then Drake said to his mate:

"Mr. Catlin, you take Beltramo and whatever scratch crew you need for the engine room and ship, and go aboard the *Rhodialim* and follow us to Piræus; but first have the boat that scum came in brought around, chuck in grub and water enough to take them to Nauplia, then chuck them in after it and tell 'em to go and be damned to 'em."

The mate's wonder ceased on the day when the two ships came to the crowded docks of the Greek seaport, amid the babbling exclamations of those who recognized the salvaged ship. Drake called to Catlin to accompany him, and they walked from the docks to make their official reports.

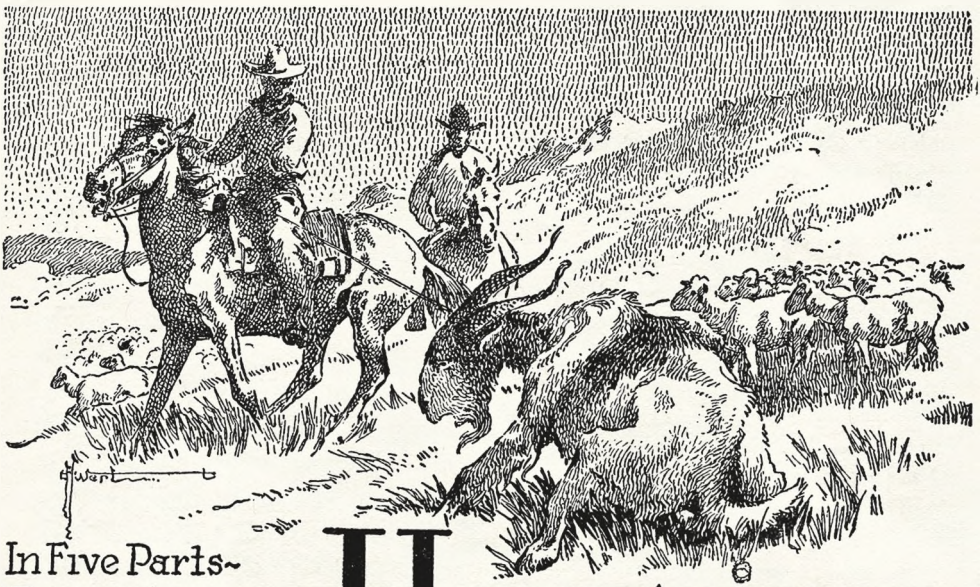
"We ought to get a neat bit of salvage money out of this trip," Catlin said.

"We'll get that all right. And I'm going to cut it up—half of it, anyhow, among every man that was with us. Christophe ought to get a good chunk, and so should Beltramo."

"But what I can't get is why you held that gang of beach combers until we were ready to come here," Catlin said, observing that The Old Hyena was in high good humor.

"I waited to give Bill Morris and his pals time to get back and swear to their story of how the ship was lost," he said. "It's about time they, as well as Hakim & Letin, were put out of business."

Another story about The Opportunist will appear in an early issue.



In Five Parts—
Part IV

Haywire

By B. M. Bower

Author of "You Get What You Give," "Points West," Etc.

Lynn Hayward, son of invalided, grouchy old Joel Hayward, whose run-down ranch is know as the "Haywire outfit," learns that an old miner, Heinie, has a fortune of almost a hundred thousand. Heinie is found murdered, and Lynn finds the money and hides it, feeling that he has as much right to it as anybody else. He suspects one Hank of the murder. Returning to the cabin in the hope of cathing the murderer, Lynn is jumped by Jack Peterson, the sheriff, but persuades Jack of his good motive. Lynn returns two stray horses to Trueman, big cattleman, and gets a twenty-dollar reward. He leaves a horse for the use of the new school-teacher, Miss MacIvor, and makes her promise to attend a dance to which he is planning to take his sister, Rose. He buys, with his reward money, presents for all the folks, and returns to the ranch, determined to guard his secret hoard and improve the outfit. He is tired of being a "Haywire."

CHAPTER XV.

IT'S WHAT YOU'VE GOT THAT COUNTS.

AS the days passed, so passed Lynn's new consciousness of wealth. He reasoned with himself, argued down his growing depression again and again; and found it cropping up at unexpected times, just when he most needed that buoyancy of spirits which had carried him into pleasant acquaintance with John Trueman and the good graces of Janet MacIvor. He couldn't understand it. He fought it with all the weapons he knew, but it was of no use. He was in for a severe attack of the blues and he could not account for them.

While Rose sewed early and late and her new dress grew ruffly and wholly

entrancing, Lynn's dread of the dance increased. Jingling his eight dollars in his pocket did no good—they were simply eight dollars and no more; and not even eight dollars, when he had paid the boys the two dollars he had promised them for cleaning up the yards. It was a haywire outfit, no matter what you did to it—and what was the good of having ninety-two thousand dollars hidden away, if you couldn't use the money? It was just so much paper, in that case. He might as well not have it.

He did not know anything about nervous reaction; but he did know the blues when he had them. And although he had sense enough to realize that the mood would pass, just like toothache, that did not help to lift him out of the slough of despond into which he had fallen. And get out of it he must, if he were to regain the self-assurance necessary to carry him through the dance. As he felt on Labor Day morning, he would be able to do nothing but skulk outside in the shadows and watch the dancers through the windows. He would rather not go, if he had to feel haywire. Yet he would have to go through with it somehow, for Rose would be heartbroken if she couldn't go and wear her new dress and slippers. Now that she had the dress finished it was even prettier than any of them had anticipated. The little schoolteacher, too—after his talk to her about going, he simply couldn't back down.

But he felt all haywire, with the full stigma that was couched in the name. He was conscious of his old suit, bought three years ago and kept presentable only because he scarcely ever put it on. He told himself miserably that his new tie would look terrible, and he could polish his shoes till he was blue in the face and they would still look exactly what they were—a pair of old shoes that had been half soled twice and needed that service again. He couldn't even whistle "Little Brown Jug," without feeling like a great big chump—which shows the depths to which he had fallen.

Something had to be done. Rose's eyes were growing big and anxious, though she told him that if he didn't feel like going, he mustn't mind her at all, because she didn't want to go if he had a headache.

Mom had watched her chance when Joel took his afternoon nap and turned the clock an hour ahead, so that supper could be early and he would think Rose had gone to bed when the dishes were washed. Lynn, with his quarters in the bunk house, had more freedom, as a matter of course; though he had taken the precaution of dragging the buggy away down past the gate, so that old Joel could not hear the wheels when they drove off. Rose was going to dress in the bunk house, because she was afraid to climb out of her window in the lawn dress. She might tear it.

Truly, something must be done about this haywire mood of his. Maybe it was because he didn't quite believe he had all that money hidden in the well. For three nights now he had dreamed of finding two-gallon jugs in all sorts of ungodly places, and they were all empty. Maybe that was what ailed him. He had lost the comfortable assurance that his fortune was safe. Had the term been invented then, he would have realized that he had a poverty complex; as it was he told himself—with profane trimmings—that he felt like a whipped dog trying to find a barn to crawl under.

This being his condition, he saddled his horse after dinner and galloped off to the upper ranch—and he did not sing as he rode. He hated himself for being so weak-minded that he must go and feel that money again and make sure that it was there, but since he was a blamed fool, he decided that he might as well act like one and be done with it.

It was not until he was down in the well, sitting astraddle a crosspiece, with the cork out of the jug, that the revulsion of feeling came and almost made him dizzy. It was the feel of the money that did it. When he drew out the top package and saw that they were actually one-thousand-dollar notes, ten of them right there in his hand, a tingle went down to his toes and he could feel a beating in his throat. He was rich—rich—*rich!*

He did not take out the other packages; there was no need. The money was there, safe as in a bank. Safer, because banks did sometimes fail, and fortunes were swept away with the stroke of a pen. But this was where nothing like that could happen. Real, tangible wealth that he could hold in his hands; wealth that he could use, some day.

"And they can't read my mind," he whispered exultantly. "They'd have to, if they were going to find out anything. I guess I'm about the biggest chump in the State of Wyoming, all right. Me going around with my jaw hanging down, when I've got all this money of my own! Why, I—I *can't* be haywire with all this where I can lay my hands on it. Why, damn it, a man doesn't have to *spend* a million dollars to be a millionaire; if he's got it he's one, whether he ever spends a dime or not.

"I've got to remember this from now on: It ain't what a man spends that makes him rich, it's what he owns. It ain't the clothes on his back nor the size of his hat that makes a man; it's something inside of him. Napoleon was a little runt of a fellow, and there wasn't a man in his army, I don't suppose, that couldn't 've licked the tar out of him if they'd tried. But they never *tried,* yuh notice! They licked his boots, instead.

"And he wasn't born in a palace, either. I expect folks thought Napoleon was pretty much haywire himself, when he lived on a farm. But did that stop him? Not on your life! He walked all over a lot of men that thought they were some punkins. He didn't have any ninety-two thousand dollars to carry him along, either. He started out with just what he packed on the inside of his head.

"Well, I don't *have* to spend this money right off the bat. I guess," he added sardonically, "it ain't going to go outa style; not these thousand-dollar bills; not this year, anyway. They'll be just as spendable a year from now, or five years from now, as they are this week.

"I guess the thing for me to do is wake up and use what's on the inside of my head, and never mind what's inside the jug. This'll keep. But your brains and that something else that works your brains—they can go to seed pretty damn fast, if you don't use 'em. Look at Dad; used to be one of the leading stockmen of the county—and now look at him! Whining like a baby if he ain't fed on time; bellering like a kid over a stick of candy if you pry a dollar or two away from him to buy grub to feed him with! I guess Dad's to be pitied, all right, instead of blamed. He's just set there and gone haywire.

"Why, gosh! I've been letting an old man that can't stir a foot put the haywire sign on the whole damn ranch! I could have kept things going, I guess, if I'd had the nerve of Napoleon. No, by gosh!—if I'd just used what I've got myself! It's Dad that's haywire—not me. I've just let him run a whizzer on me and the whole family. We been singin' everything to his tune, and we didn't have to, if we didn't want to."

Lynn's eyes, staring down at the money without actually seeing it, grew deep with introspection.

"We didn't have to. We could have helped him hold himself together, maybe —or, anyway, we could have dominated him, paid no attention to his bellering,

any more than I would to a cross old bull penned into a corral. Same thing exactly. I've been letting Dad's beller run the ranch. But no more! No more a-tall! From now on I use what *I've* got.

"Money, you go back in your jug and stay put till I get a place to use you. Sorry, Mr. George Clinton and Mr. James Madison, but I'm afraid I haven't got a job for you just yet. Soon as I put on a full crew, though, I'll be glad to put you on the pay roll. But don't ever get the idea you'll work up to be boss! Not a chance in the world. There's only one boss of this outfit, and that's George Lynnhurst Hayward."

He got out of the well with one leg numbed from sitting so long on the crosspiece, but once more happy. Man, the thinker, was sitting at center again, ordering his thoughts and his actions in harmony with his desires. But he did not sing in the exuberance that had marked his earlier realization of his wealth. He rode rather slowly, since there was plenty of time, and his head was bent in deep, thoughtful planning. The want of what he now called "loose" money—money which he could use in any way he saw fit—was going to be something of a handicap. But not too great a one, if he used his brains. He must consider ways and means.

Preoccupied with his plans, he paid no attention to the trail, since all were alike familiar and there was little to choose between the road that kept to the higher, less rocky ground, and the one that followed the creek down past Heinie's claim and cabin. It was not until he neared the abandoned placer claim, with the grave just beyond, that he awoke to the fact that Blackie, having come this way twice in the last week or so, had chosen the creek path again. Had he thought of it when they left the upper ranch, he would probably have chosen the other way. But it didn't greatly matter. Even thought he had given up trying his hand at detective work, there was no reason why he should not drop by occasionally and take a look.

Peterson had said he was going to keep an eye on the cabin. Thus relieved of any sense of obligation in the matter, Lynn had been busy hunting stray horses on the range, for sake of the reward money. Other men did it occasionally; it was legitimate enough, though too precarious to be looked upon seriously as a job for any man with ambition to get on in the world. To Lynn, hunting advertised strays was no more than a stop-gap, until he could think of some other way to earn money.

So thinking, he reached Heinie's grave and rode on down the path to the cabin. The sudden sound of a shot and the whine of a bullet that fanned his cheek in passing woke him with a jolt from his cogitations. Blackie squatted, ducked, and whirled backward in the trail, and so a second bullet missed Lynn completely, though it tore the leather on his saddle horn. He heard where it struck a rock beyond him and went whining over the grave.

In all his life Lynn had never before been shot at. He had often wondered how it would feel; and now he found out in one flash of emotion. It made him mad, just as though a man had walked up and slapped him on the jaw. He wanted to hit back at the fellow. But he did not want his horse to get shot, so he rode pounding up the path to where he could tie Blackie behind sheltering rocks, and dismounted. Then, with his six-shooter in his hand, he hurried back toward the cabin, slipping from rock to tree and from tree to bush, exactly as he used to do when he and Rose played Injun.

The shots had come from the end of the cabin toward the creek, where the willows grew thick among the rocks. Before he was near the spot where he had been riding he turned off and made

his way stealthily down to the creek, crept down over the bank, and so approached the cabin from the side. Almost at once he saw boot tracks in the sandy spaces between rocks—tracks going and coming, as if some one had been searching along the creek. But he had no time, then, to stop and try to identify them. The shooter up there in the thicket would probably move as swiftly and as stealthily as he; and there was no telling in which direction he would go.

With the thought, Lynn straightened his bent back and peered cautiously over the bank just in time to see a pair of legs moving directly away from him beyond the bushes, the leafy branches of which hid the man's body. Without waiting to see more, and with no compunction whatever, Lynn shoved forward his gun and fired at the legs. He saw them leap as though a hornet had stung the owner of them, and there was a crashing and a swaying in the thicket. Lynn fired again toward the sound, and began looking for a place to climb the bank.

Just where he had stopped, the water had gouged under in time of spring freshets until there was a distinct overhang for several rods. Lynn tried to pull himself up, and found himself merely clawing dirt down. So he ran back to where Heinie had made a path to get water. And by that time the fellow was gone. The clatter of hoofbeats was all that remained to tell of the encounter. Lynn ran back to where he had left his horse, but although he mounted and rode hard for a half mile or more, he knew the chase was hopeless.

"I'll bet I stung him good, anyway," he comforted himself, as he went on home. "I wonder if it wasn't Hank? Or maybe it was that other fellow, that dug up the hearth while Hank was in town. Seems to me there must be several of them after Heinie's stake." And then he grinned. "They can hunt and be darned to 'em, for all me," he added. "If Heinie could know what's going on around here it would sure tickle him to see 'em smellin' around here after that money!"

He rode happily homeward, and told Rose to hurry up and get ready so they could start early, because he had business in town before the dance. He wanted to see Peterson.

CHAPTER XVI.

MONEY GOSSIP AGAIN.

PETERSON was out of town on business, and there was no one else in town to whom Lynn cared to go with his story. He did ask one man if Hank Miller was around anywhere; but the man began to preach to Lynn about forgetting his grudges and keeping himself out of trouble, so Lynn let it go at that. The town was filled with strangers waiting for the dance to begin; and they were celebrating Labor Day to the full extent of their capacity, some of them. There were those who came to dance, but would remain sprawled in some frowzy back room to sober up; and until they reached the sprawling stage, they were likely to become boisterous just where and when they shouldn't. Lynn therefore returned to where Rose sat in the parlor of the hotel, looking very sweet and very shy. And he remained with her, just as a good brother should when his sister doesn't know any of the women chattering around her.

"We might go and buy the groceries while we have time, Lynn," she suggested, after a dragging quarter of an hour. "The store's all lit up yet, so they must be open. I'll go with you. I hate sitting here to be stared at."

Since she couldn't possibly hate it more than Lynn—in spite of his newfound dignity—they went out into the soft starlight of early evening. The dance would not be in full swing before nine, and the two were secretly resolved

not to be the lonesome first ones in the hall. Anything but that.

"Miss MacIvor said she lives with Mrs. Ben Moore," Rose said, when they were outside. "Which is her house, Lynn?"

"That little green one up the street. We'll have to pass by it. Maybe," he added artfully, "it wouldn't be a bad idea to drop in and see her, Rose. You could stay there, while I went on and got the stuff."

"Pretty time to make calls, when every one's getting ready for the dance!" Rose reproved him pertly. "I may be a hayseed, but I know better than that!"

But as it turned out, the little school-teacher was looking out upon the street when they came by. She tapped on the window, nodded and beckoned with a crooked finger, and met them at the door.

"Don't tell me you were going right by without looking this way!" she reproached. "I saw you drive into town, and I've been calling you everything I could think of for not stopping. I want to walk over to the hall with you, Miss Hayward, when it's time. I suppose your brother has some one in mind he'd like to take——"

"I sure have," Lynn assented, showing his teeth in a smile. "You guessed it first time. But I wouldn't have the nerve to ask her, so I might as well walk over with you girls. Maybe I'll see her at the dance."

"Lynn Hayward, you never told *me* you were sweet on a girl," cried Rose, looking up at him with round, shocked eyes.

"Well, I never told the girl yet, either. I'd better go on to the store. I can come back here and get you." His face was turned toward Rose as he spoke, but his eyes went to the one he had in his mind.

"No, let's all go to the store," Miss MacIvor suggested. "I walk alone in this town so much that I'd like to see how it would seem to be sandwiched in between the two of you. Come on, I don't want a hat on such a night as this."

Lynn turned and looked down at her, silently reminding her of his warning on the road that day. But she only laughed and shook her head at him as she took Rose by the arm and started on.

"I don't see why you need to walk alone," Rose remarked, her face brightened with the friendliness of this town girl. "Goodness knows, there's plenty of escorts scattered around."

"Not for me. A schoolma'am can't be too careful, or she will shock the natives and start tongues wagging." Though she did not glance at Lynn, he recognized his own words, and bit his lip. She was calmly letting him know that she remembered, and was challenging the town and him, also. He wanted to ask her what she meant by it, but with Rose along, he didn't dare. It would be cruel to spoil Rose's pleasure that night by calling to her attention the town's supercilious attitude toward the Haywards. Perhaps, he thought, Miss MacIvor was merely being kind to Rose, who had served her so generously. He was glad of that, and he decided that after all it was Miss MacIvor's affair.

Men looked at them as they passed, watched them as they went on. Presumably they also expressed themselves in speech, but they kept their voices down and gave no offense. The crowd around the door of the store parted to let them through, and several men lifted their hats to the girls and nodded casually to Lynn. If their eyes betrayed curiosity, who can blame them? The uppish new school-teacher throwing in with the Haywire outfit after turning down the Elk Basin eligibles was enough to jar the onlookers.

But Lynn did not mind, now that his first qualms had passed. He might not

—he would have said he could not—be good enough for the little school-teacher; but at least he was as good as any one in town, and a good deal better than some he might name.

He was diverted from that train of thought by the abrupt awakening of memory. He had stood just here by the counter not two weeks ago, and the school-teacher had stood over by the ribbon counter, where she and Rose were twittering together now, and he had wished suddenly and rather poignantly that he might get acquainted with her, be friends with her. The wish had seemed an impossible one then; but already it was fulfilled.

If Lynn had not been quite convinced of the magic that lay within his fortunes, his faith would have flowered at that moment into full knowledge that it was so.

But that thought passed swiftly, for here came Hank Miller from the back of the store, scowling under his hat brim as he recognized Lynn. The package he carried in his hand, and now slid unobtrusively into his pocket, looked to Lynn like a bottle of medicine. And did he walk with a limp? Lynn almost imagined that he did. The legs he had seen in the thicket had not been incased in chaps, but——

"I don't suppose those dollar chaps are grown fast to his legs," Lynn thought. "I guess he *could* go without 'em, if he wanted to. And that off leg of his sure has got a kind of a hitch to it."

But when he turned to watch Hank walk to the door, he was not so sure. Hank was swaggering a little—almost a stagger, it could be called. Lynn shook his head in doubt. He had to be fair. Hank's peculiar gait might be caused by whisky, instead of a bullet scratch. It wouldn't do to jump to conclusions, just on the strength of his dislike of the man.

A thinning of the group in the store and the movement of the crowd outside warned him to hurry his purchasing even before the girls came over to where he stood. Some one had said the musicians had gone over to the hall, Rose told him.

Presently they were going down the street with their arms full of packages that must be stowed safely in Miss MacIvor's room until after the dance.

Lynn was a busy and a happy young man for the next hour or two. Like a good brother he danced twice with Rose and introduced a few of the decentest fellows he could find in the crowd, but he managed, for all that, to have the dances he craved with the little school-teacher, and to extract the promise of more. It thrilled him to catch the glances of the men standing around the door, and to guess at what they were thinking as he whirled by in a waltz with the prettiest girl and the nicest girl—Rose excepted—in the room dancing within his embrace, her brown head just reaching the top button on his coat. Let 'em look and be darned! They'd look a lot harder if they knew what secret he had locked away behind his cool, appraising glances. Looking was cheap—let 'em look! Only, they'd better be careful of the expression in their eyes, when they looked at the little school-teacher.

It was nearly midnight when he thought he saw Jack Peterson just outside the door. Both girls being busy dancing with worthy and estimable young men, he went out to find the deputy sheriff and draw him away from the crowd for a few minutes' talk. He wanted to know whether Peterson had been out to Heinie's place within the last few days, and if so, whether he had seen any signs of prowlers. He meant to go back to-morrow and look around; but it might be well to let Peterson know some one was still sneaking out there, and to tell him about the shooting.

But when he was outside he did not

see Peterson. Instead, one Bill Witherspoon took him by the arm and swung him over toward the fence, where a line of teams and saddle horses stood tied. By the aroma of his breath, Bill had been imbibing rather freely of the popular drink that night; and by his mysterious manner and silence he had things of importance to discuss. Lynn did not know what it was all about, but he humored Bill to the extent of walking out of earshot of the crowd.

"They'll think we snuck out here to have a little drink," Bill said heavily when finally they brought up alongside the fence. "But me, I've had about enough for to-night. Couldn't dance if I took another drink. What I wanted to say was, I just wanta ask you about old Heinie Deitrich. Did he leave any money laying around? Did you ever hear of him being rich?"

Having been warned by Bill's beginning, Lynn laughed with real amusement.

"Neither one, Bill. I never heard of his being anything but broke. Why? What on earth put that idea into your head?"

"Well," said Bill, with the mumbling tone of a man who has just taken a chew of tobacco, "it's got around that he had a gob of money cached somewhere. Fellow that was in Cheyenne told me and some others that he seen old Heinie with a thousand dollars all in one bill! A one-thousand-dollar bill, mind yuh! He said——"

"Is there such a thing in the world as a one-thousand-dollar bill, for gosh sake?"

"Oh, yes!" Bill solemnly assured him. "Banks have 'em. Ain't no bigger'n five dollars, either. Fold it up and stick it in your vest pocket, if yuh want to—but it's worth a thousand dollars. Oh, yes! They make 'em, all right."

"Jiminy Christmas!" marveled Lynn. And then he laughed. "Did you swallow that yarn?" he challenged. "Heinie with a one-thousand-dollar bill, eh? Now, wouldn't that jar yuh?"

"Well, he swears he seen it. He said there was more, but he couldn't see how big the figures was on 'em; he kinda thought they was the same as the one on top. How he come to see it, he says he was in a roomin' house and he heard somebody laughin' in the next room, and it sounded kinda like somebody he knowed. There was a door, but it was locked. So he peeked through the keyhole and it was Heinie Deitrich, setting on the side of the bed right close by the door, countin' this money and lookin' at it."

"Sounds like a pipe dream to me," scoffed Lynn, though his nerves had a flurry up and down his spinal column.

"Well, yes, it did at the time he told it," Bill admitted. "But right after Heinie got back he was killed, and the way things was throwed around, there'd been a big fight over something. So it kinda looks——"

"Yeah, it kinda looks as though the fellow that saw all that——"

"No, it wasn't him. He was sick in bed. He come on up ahead of Heinie, and he'd et something that give him ptomaine. No, it wasn't him."

"Some one he told that yarn to, then. Look here, Bill. I knew Heinie all my life. Us folks all liked him and kinda made him like one of the family when he come to the ranch. I'd give a good deal to find the dirty rat that killed him. Who-all heard that story?"

Mentally if not actually Bill Witherspoon backed away from Lynn.

"Well, I dunno as I remember who-all," he evaded. "Quite a bunch of us. It was over in the Elkhorn. A bunch of us was standin' by the bar talkin' and——"

"Was Hank Miller one of them?"

"Hank? He might have been. He hangs out there a good deal. Why? You think Hank done it?"

"I wouldn't put it past him," Lynn

hinted darkly. And then a sudden idea struck him. "Say, Bill, who was it went out there and hunted around——"

Bill laid a trembling hand on Lynn's arm, and leaned forward so that the stench of stale whisky nearly asphyxiated Lynn.

"I never meant no harm in the world. I was asleep when word come in of the murder—I'd been setting up all night with the ptomaine feller. So I got to thinkin'; if Heinie *did* have all that money, somebody was sure to find it and keep it—see? Him not havin' no heirs, the money'd belong to the feller that found it—see? It kinda preyed on m' mind, Lynn. Mebby I done wrong, but I did go out and take a look."

"Was it you that dug up the hearth?"

"We-ell—yes, I did pry up a few stones, but I put 'em back again, just as I found 'em. I never found a thing; I'll swear to that on a stack of Bibles a mile high!"

"Well, I'll take your word for it, Bill." Lynn smiled to himself in the darkness. "When was it you went out?"

"Same afternoon. I started out thinkin' mebby I could git there in time for the funeral, mebby. I always liked old Heinie. But I wasn't outside of town, hardly—I was passin' by the schoolhouse—when I met the posse comin' back. I didn't hunt a great deal. I felt kinda funny, lookin' around a dead man's place. Course, it's finders, keepers, in a case like that. No use handin' it over to the State, seein' it wasn't property that had to be sold and looked after. But I felt funny, just the same. I didn't stay long. Place didn't feel right to me."

"Did you go back, Bill? About daylight, for instance?"

"No, I ain't ever been back sence then." Bill's voice was urgent for belief.

"I wouldn't go, either, if I were you. If anybody caught you there they might think you had something to do with the murder I would have, myself, if you hadn't come right out and told me the truth. I'm riding up and down the creek past there pretty often, Bill. We've got a ranch up above, you know. If I'd seen you digging around there, I'd sure as the world have waltzed you in to Jack Peterson."

"You won't see *me* around there again," Bill solemnly assured him. "I heard groanin' just outside the cabin that evenin'. You can laugh if you want to, but I heard it, sure as hell. No, sir, I ain't lost anything around old Heinie Deitrich's place, and I ain't lookin' fer anything. I wouldn't go there at night, not for *five* one-thousand-dollar bills!"

"Do you know of any one else that's been out there snooping around?"

Bill considered a moment, shook his head, and spat tobacco juice.

"Nope, nary a soul. They'd keep mum about it, if they did go. It ain't a thing a feller's goin' to blabber about, do yuh think?"

"Well, no. But it seems funny to me," said Lynn, "that any one would swallow a yarn that sounds as fishy as that one about Heinie. I'd have to see the money myself, before I'd believe it, Bill." And he added after a pause: "But it cost Heinie his life, I guess. Did you tell Peterson? You ought to. One of the men that heard the story in the saloon must have gone out there and jumped Heinie for the money he was supposed to have. Probably he wouldn't take Heinie's word that he was broke, but started in on him pretty rough. Heinie'd fight back, naturally, and the fellow hit him on the head with a club. A stick of wood, most likely.

"That friend of yours," he finished harshly, "may not have meant any harm by shooting off his mouth the way he did, but he sure as hell sent out Heinie's death warrant. There's men in this crowd here to-night that would murder

a man for a whole lot less than a thousand dollars, Bill."

"Yeah, you're damn right," Bill hastily assented. "Well, I just thought I'd ask yuh what you thought about the yarn. Ain't anything in it, you say. Mebby you're right. Mebby it was a ten he seen, and thought it was a thousand. He was drinkin' some, I guess."

"Well, you tell him to keep his mouth shut. He's the cause of Heinie's death, and he's liable to send somebody to jail for the murder that was caught snooping around looking for money that ain't there. It's useless to hunt for a fortune at Heinie's place, Bill. I'd take a bet on that, if I could."

"Yeah, I guess you're right," Bill sighed. "You wouldn't catch *me* there again, Lynn. Them groans—— No, I don't want no thousand dollars that bad!"

"Well, let me know if you hear anything more, will you, Bill? And thanks for telling me."

As he hurried back to take Rose and the little school-teacher over to the hotel for refreshments, before the crowd surged that way, Lynn pondered the story Bill had told him. The man who had dug up Heinie's hearth stones was accounted for, but whose was the face that looked in at the window at dawn? And who owned the legs in the bushes by the creek, and the gun that sent bullets humming up the path at Lynn?

"Well, anyway, I side-stepped the money question without coming right out and telling a lie," Lynn remembered with satisfaction.

CHAPTER XVII.

LYNN BUYS SHEEP.

THERE is a saying in the ancient writings that, when Opportunity knocks at the door, the card he leaves reads: "Responsibility." Lynn had probably never heard the wisdom of the ancients put in just that form, but he was beginning to prove within himself the truth of it.

This was mid-September and he had been rich in his own consciousness for a month. For thirty days, almost, the brown jug had remained in the well, the repository of such wealth as he had never dreamed of possessing. For just that number of days the thought of its actuality had been germinating within his soul; and, like Jack and his beanstalk in the old nursery tale, the seed had taken root and was sending up a strong plant to flower in the sun. The name of the plant was "ambition;" and it was growing apace and crowding out the little fears, the little discouragements that had filled his mind a month ago.

Now, he was not content with knowing what he knew and with waiting until such time as he might safely use that knowledge and the fortune it concerned. He wanted to get out and do something, make something of the ranch and himself, without waiting for another turn of the wheel of fortune. And his impatience held him silent on the trail to Green River—silent and thoughtful, without being exactly moody. Hunting strays was pretty small business for him now, even though he had found them after two weeks of riding and could justly count the results as the equivalent of earning sixty dollars a month, while living at home and looking after the family as usual. But, what was sixty dollars a month to a man worth ninety-two thousand, even supposing he were lucky enough to keep up that average in reward money? A month ago it would have been good enough; now it didn't amount to anything at all.

Sheep—that was John Trueman's idea, and it was a good one. But there were difficulties, of course. If he used part of their land for pasturing sheep, he could not take cattle to winter—at least not so many. That would cut down the pasture money; and his fa-

ther would want to know why, and would accuse Lynn of holding out a part of it—of stealing it, in so many words. And every dollar of the pasture money was needed to feed the family and pay the taxes. Old Joel would never, so long as he lived, consent to having sheep on the ranch.

"There'd be the devil to pay all around," Lynn sighed, as he gave up the notion for perhaps the fiftieth time in the past two weeks. "I guess I can't do it. I might just as well forget it and do something else. But *what?*"

Have you ever had the experience of wanting very much to do a certain thing, casting about for ways of doing it, finding too many obstacles and giving up all hope, only to have the thing almost thrust itself upon your notice again and demand attention once and for all? It was so with Lynn.

A mile farther down the road, just before he came within sight of Green River, he met a harassed-looking man on a livery horse. Lynn nodded, range fashion, and would have ridden on, but the man signaled him to stop a minute.

"Say, do you know where I can buy feed for a bunch of sheep for a couple of days?" he asked, reining alongside Lynn.

"No," said Lynn, while his nerves tightened and relaxed again, at the way in which the subject came at him. "I can't say I do. You mean hay, or grass?"

"I mean anything a sheep can eat. I've got a trainload of sheep back here in the stockyards, and not a spear of hay or grass in sight to feed 'em. And feed 'em I've got to, before I can go on. I don't know what in thunder to do!"

"Tough luck," Lynn observed. And he did not limit his sympathy to the man or to the hungry sheep, but included himself. "If you had 'em out closer to our ranch—— But that's a forty-mile drive, and it wouldn't do, of course."

"No," the man gloomily agreed, "that wouldn't do. Time they trailed back they'd be hungry and have to be fed again, before we loaded out. It sure is the devil's own luck. These cowmen around here would be tickled to death to see the whole band starve to death, I s'pose. Damn shame, too. Three thousand head of as fine a bunch of merino ewes as you ever laid eyes on. I'm taking 'em back into Nebraska to winter. Found myself overstocked, and the range is pretty short in Idaho this year. Don't yuh know of any ranch around here that would sell me four or five ton of hay?"

"No, I don't," said Lynn. "Not unless it was John Trueman. Did you ask him?"

"I guess it was his foreman I talked to. Nothin' doin'. Said they didn't have any hay to spare."

"I know Trueman, and I'm going there now with these horses. I can see him about it myself, if you like. I don't believe he'd let a band of sheep starve, no matter how short he is of hay."

"He's a cowman, ain't he?" The man's tone was skeptical, but he started back with Lynn, just as they say a drowning man will clutch at a straw.

Since the road passed by the stockyards, they stopped and rode over close to the pens that contained the sheep—plaintive little animals that huddled together and stared up at the horsemen with anxious amber eyes. Their voices mingled in a strident *"Ba-a-a, ba-a-a—ba-a-a."*

"That's my herder over there with the dogs," the man volunteered, pointing to a man sauntering aimlessly across the prairie with two black-and-white shepherds at heel. "I brought 'em along in case I could buy grazing, but it looks like I won't have much use for 'em."

"Three thousand head of merinos, did you say?"

"Three thousand head of as fine

merino ewes as you ever saw. You seen 'em at their worst."

"Uh-huh." Lynn stared off to the farther hills, twisted his body in the saddle and looked back toward the yards, where a low dust cloud told of the restless milling of the sheep. He rolled and lighted a cigarette. Poverty complex was having one last and losing argument with prosperity consciousness, though the man beside him guessed nothing of that. It came to the climax of speech, however, when they reached the first scattering shacks of the town.

"Say, Mr.——"

"Brown's my name—James M. Brown."

"Mr. Brown, if I can't get you any hay, what'll you do?"

"Run 'em into the river, I guess," said Mr. Brown with gloomy brevity.

"What'll you take for the herd—I mean the band?"

"Huh? Well, they're worth two dollars a head, if they're worth a cent. That is, they'd be worth that back home. If I could get thirty-five hundred dollars spot cash, I'd sell 'em, and hit the next train going west!"

"Three thousand head, you say?"

"Three thousand head and maybe two or three over. Two got down and smothered—but I left a little margin for loss. Yes, they'd tally all of three thousand."

"Uh-huh." Lynn sent one more glance back toward the stockyards. "Cheap enough, I guess."

"Cheap? They're a give-away at that price! But what's a man goin' to do?"

They had reached the Trueman store; and Lynn went straight back to the railed-in office. By good luck, John Trueman was sitting with his feet cocked up on his desk and a cigar in his mouth. Your old-time cowman calls that luxurious idleness, and perhaps it is.

"Howdy, Mr. Trueman," Lynn greeted with his best smile, pushing his hat to the back of his head. "There's a man out here wants to buy four or five tons of hay to feed a train of sheep."

"Tell him my foreman takes care of all that. But I've sold myself short on hay, and I gave Pete orders not to let any more go. Better tell him no, and be done with it."

"Well, in that case there's a band of merino ewes going dirt cheap. If you can see your way clear to lending me the money, Mr. Trueman, I'll take your advice and go into the sheep business?"

John Trueman's feet came down off his desk and he lifted the cigar from the corner of his mouth and laid it very carefully down, with the burning end extending just far enough to save the wood from scorching. For a minute Lynn was scared, but in the next breath he pulled his courage forward to stand beside his ambition. He need not have worried, however. Trueman would have explained that he was merely getting set to talk business.

"How much you going to need, Lynn?" he asked.

"I'll want five thousand," Lynn said, in what appeared to be a perfectly calm and businesslike tone—but then, John Trueman didn't have a finger on Lynn's pulse to see how it jumped. "The sheep won't cost that much. I can get them for thirty-five hundred. But I'll have to carry them along to shearing time, and that will take a little money, of course. As I told you, Dad won't back me on sheep. He hates the smell of 'em."

Trueman grunted at that, and Lynn's pulse slowed alarmingly. But it raced again when Trueman said dryly:

"Sheep ain't the sweetest-smellin' flower that grows, I admit. But they mean money; and Joel Hayward never used to hate that so very bad. Seemed as though he could smell a dollar ten miles off and in the next coulee. Well, how'd yuh want it? Notes secured by

the sheep, I s'pose. How'd you want it split up?"

"Well, I hadn't thought that far yet," Lynn confessed with a boyish flush that won the old man completely. "The chance just came to me. How'd you think it ought to be arranged, Mr. Trueman? I'd want to pay it off as fast as possible, to save interest and get the sheep clear. What do you think would be about right?"

"We-ell——" Trueman pulled a sheet of paper toward him and took up a pencil. "Let's do a little figgerin' here. Three thousand merinos, eh? I'd advise you to get about sixty head of good Cotswold rams. That'd stand you —say, another three hundred. Your wool next spring ought to net you somewhere in the neighborhood of six thousand dollars. But you'll want to keep a working capital, of course. Then you ought to have close to fifteen hundred wethers next fall to sell; and you ought to clear three thousand off them. Then the next spring you've got your yearlin's to shear—we-ell, say we make one note of two thousand, due one year from date, and another for three thousand, due two years from date. You shouldn't have any trouble meeting them, do you think?"

"I sure wouldn't, Mr. Trueman. That's away better than I ever expected to do. I think I could pay them both off by a year from next spring; or after shearing time, anyway."

"Pay 'em off any time you want to and have the money," Trueman gruffly told him. "You've got to leave a margin for bad luck, remember. Storms—you might lose half your band next winter, for all you know——"

"Not much danger of that, I guess. I'm going to winter them at the upper ranch. There's plenty of shelter and good sheds there. I'll have to buy hay this winter, I expect. I didn't put up as much as I might. Didn't think I'd need it, so I didn't put it up."

"Got any dogs?" Trueman looked up from the scattered figures.

"I'm going to try and buy the two with the sheep."

"That's all right, then. How soon do you want the money?"

"Well," said Lynn slowly, "I'll have to pay this man his thirty-five hundred and let him go on home. That's what he wants to do. And seeing you're going to take a mortgage on the sheep, Mr. Trueman, I guess you'd better look over his papers and see that everything's all straight. The sooner we get the deal closed, the sooner those poor little devils can be turned out where they can get a bite of grass once in a while. I can graze 'em out toward the ranch. I don't know where he fed 'em last time, but they're hollering their heads off for something to eat."

"All right, go bring your man here and we'll fix it up right now," said Trueman, picking up his cigar again. And he chuckled to himself at the long steps Lynn took out of the store.

Rangemen ride fast when they know just where they are going and are in a hurry to get there. They transact their business in the same way. Wherefore, in less than an hour Lynn found himself the sole owner of three thousand hungry sheep, two trained dogs, and a sizable bank account. Incidentally, he found himself in debt to the tune of five thousand dollars; but that did not impress him at all—for hadn't he a year in which to meet the first note? And a year is a long, long time, when one is twenty-two.

With the herder, a phlegmatic Swede whom he hired for a month, Lynn stood by the stockyard wing fence, while the dogs went in and harried the sheep out of the corral. His heart rose in his throat and stuck there, held by some emotion he did not try to name, as the woolly band came streaming past him, a goat in the lead, their sharp little hoofs cutting the baked soil and sending

up dust that stung the nostrils. Loney snorted and fought the bit, wanting to cut and run for it, but Lynn held him with a firm hand.

"You've got to get used to 'em," he admonished the horse in a voice too husky to sound as careless as he wished. "They're ours, and you might as well make the best of it. Time you've trailed 'em forty miles you'll get used to the smell!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

RESPONSIBILITY.

SLOWLY, across the prairie that lay between Green River and the Wind River Range, a small gray cloud drifted, the pattering as of rain upon the earth coming from the sharp-pointed little hoofs of the band. The Swede walked stolidly along behind them. Now and then he would lift his tough staff of peeled willow to point toward the wayward ones of the fleck, who sought sweeter morsels of grass out away from the rest; then a dog would go scurrying that way, his shrill, staccato bark sounding faintly above the blatting of the sheep. And the stragglers would halt and stand gazing, their vacant amber eyes fixed upon the black ball rolling swiftly down upon them; then they would leap into sudden flight, in fear of those nipping teeth at their heels.

The square cloud would bend inward as the dog passed, the hindmost sheep rushing forward upon those before. Then, with the wanderers once more walking with the rest, the dog would jog back to his master, red tongue lapped down over his teeth, as he panted after the run.

Riding slowly behind, with Loney fretting nervously with his bit, impatient of the pace they must keep and itching for the long, free lope at which his master usually rode, Lynn felt himself at last a man of substance in the land. Money hidden away in a well was stuff of dreams, but this was something the world could look upon and envy him. Three thousand sheep—something to watch over, to care for, to see grow into many bands. Next spring, when the lambs came, he should have—well, John Trueman and the herder agreed that he should count on ninety-five per cent increase, if the flock had proper care. But with more modest expectations, he would have five thousand sheep, all told, next fall. Two bands to carry over to spring, another lamb crop, another wool crop—Lynn grew dizzy as he looked into the future and saw himself the owner of many flocks.

And then a sudden thought pierced the dream in a blinding flash of perception. Why hadn't he done this before? He could have, just as easily as he had done it now. Last fall and the fall before there had been trainloads of sheep unloaded in Green River to feed; and they could have been bought for a song because hay was scarce and grazing scarcer and the sheepmen, disgusted with conditions, went hunting some one to take their sheep off their hands at almost any price.

Why hadn't he borrowed money and bought sheep last fall? He'd be independent of any secret hoard of wealth now, if he had done it. John Trueman would have lent him the money just as cheerfully. He didn't know Lynn had a two-gallon jug full of one-thousand-dollar notes.

"Far as he knows, I haven't got a dime," Lynn mused; "so it isn't the money that made my credit good with him. I guess"—he stared out over the flock, trying to formulate the thought in words—"I guess the money helped, though. He didn't know I've got it, but *I* knew it, and it gave me the nerve to ask him for a loan. That's all the difference it makes, far as I can see. But that's a whole heap, if anybody should ask you!"

That night they bedded the sheep

down beside a little stream that emptied into the Big Sandy a few miles farther on. At the rate they were traveling, they would be six more days getting home. Lynn knew his mother and Rose would be worried about him; but he didn't see what he could do about it, unless he made a night ride home and told them.

But there he stuck. He couldn't tell his mother he had bought a bunch of sheep. It would shock her and worry her, and the thought of his debt would haunt her, waking and sleeping. So far had she come under the influence of old Joel that she feared debt even more than she feared his frequent rages, and a nickel looked like dollars to her. She had fretted over the improvidence Lynn had shown with his twenty dollars, and had quizzed and counted, in fear that he had gone into debt for some of the things and was afraid to tell her. No, he certainly could not let his mother know about the sheep. Even if she approved, she might let slip a word to rouse Joel's suspicions, and if that ever happened life would be impossible for the whole family.

He might ride home and tell them he had a short job of riding. Then he could bring back a roll of blankets—a pack outfit, even. Six days and nights in the open, without so much as an extra coat, wasn't going to be any joke, for the nights were growing nippy with the hint of coming frost. He hated to lie to his mother, but it wouldn't really be a false statement. He did have a job of riding, he assured himself.

That night Lynn watched the sun go down upon the tired flock, while the dogs wolfed the meat scraps he had begged from the butcher in town for them, and the herder worked his way steadily through a huge ham-and-egg sandwich, Lynn decided that he would rather ride all night than sit there on the prairie. So he watered Loney and struck out.

Such was his riding that he reached the ranch a little after midnight and got his outfit together before he slept, prowling here and there with a lantern to find what he wanted. At the break of day he went tiptoeing around the kitchen, getting his own breakfast. He was eating it when Rose came in, yawning and rubbing the sleep from her eyes.

"Good land!" she whispered, with a glance toward the living-room door, which Lynn had softly closed. "What's the matter, Lynn? What kept you? I stayed awake till almost midnight——"

With a cup of coffee in one hand and a large slice of bread and butter in the other, Lynn tilted his head toward the door, beckoning her outside. They went stealthily, and Lynn told his story. Could she look after things for a week or so? The boys could be made to stay home and do the chores. He'd see to that. He'd offer them another dollar apiece to look after the ranch, but he simply had to go; he had a chance to make some money.

"Yes, that's all right to tell Mom," Rose said while she eyed him. "But you've got something up your sleeve, Lynn. Why don't you tell me?"

"Maybe, when I come back, Sis. It's all right—I really have got a job. John Trueman staked me to it. But I'll only be gone a few days—a week at most. I'm taking a pack outfit—have to camp out."

"Well, there's *something*. You can't fool me."

But Lynn only laughed and hurried off. Presently Rose saw him leave the corral, leading old Patrick with a full-sized pack on him, and from the pace he took down the road she judged that his job, whatever it might be, was urgent. It was—more urgent than Lynn knew.

He arrived at the grazing band a little before noon, and the herder greeted him with something akin to relief.

"Some faller comes this morning and

makes mean talk for me," he drawled. "He tal me I shall not stay on this country with sheep. I tal him he shall go for hell and my boss is come pretty quick. So I points my gun and them faller go away."

"Who was it, I wonder? Did you tell them anything? Say where you were headed for?"

"Val," said the Swede, looking mildly reproachful, "I don't tal. I don't know." Then, with his stick, he drew a symbol in the dust of a bare spot between grass tufts. "Brand like that is on the horse," he said.

"The Dollar outfit, eh? We've got to trail across a corner of their range, too, in order to get water. But we've done favors enough for them, and I guess we can cross, all right. They thought you were some strange outfit. Then I tell them the sheep are mine and——"

"Val, I tal them it's Haywire is owner, and they give soch a look, and they laugh."

"Haywire?" Lynn bit his lip. "Where'd you get that?"

"Val, in town I go for one gude big drink of beer and some mans is talking by the bar, and saying Haywire is turn sheep-herder already. They say Haywire is bought sheep from Idaho man and the fun is begin now. I tank this fun is maybe shooting and I buy shells to go in my gun." The herder dropped a hand into his sagging coat pocket and drew up two boxes of cartridges. "Nobody is goin' to lay me out on prairie with bullet holes in my skin," he added grimly.

Lynn laughed, but his eyes had a hard glitter that had not been there when he rode up to the flock.

"Say, what's your name?" he bethought him to inquire.

"Helge Halvorsen, and in Idaho some cattlemens call me 'Hell' Halvorsen because they don't monkey with my sheeps or I kill somebody." For the first time since Lynn first met him, the herder smiled.

"So the fun begins now, does it?" And Lynn smiled back at Helge, appraising him now as a man and a comrade, rather than just as a sheep-herder and no more. Now he saw that Helge's drooping shoulders were very broad and muscular and that his slouching walk belied the long, sturdy legs. Helge's eyes were very blue and as clear as a lake unfretted by any breeze. Some spirit within Lynn responded now to the placid, straightforward look, as it had not done before. What he had mistaken for stupidity he now read as that strength of purpose which nothing can daunt.

"I don't suppose you know whether it was a Dollar man said that or not," he said thoughtfully. "It doesn't matter, though. I brought my rifle and shotgun along to shoot game for us and the dogs, and pick off any wolves that might come prowling around the band. But if anybody tries to stop us from getting these sheep home——"

"You betcha my life! I tank ve don't vorry ourselfs," Helge grinned.

Then, suddenly, he lifted his stick and pointed toward a ragged fringe of the gray patch moving slowly down into a shallow basin. "You, Shep! Way round 'em!"

Shep, the dog with white collar and the tuft of white on his tail, went streaking off around the flock, while Helge, the other dog at his heels, turned and walked loiteringly in the other direction, leaving Lynn to his own reflections. Helge at least was not worrying, and his calm attitude served to steady Lynn's nerves and mood. He did not want to have trouble with the Dollar outfit, whose range adjoined the Hayward fences and whose cattle fed on Hayward grass during the winter. It was not that he liked or trusted Saunders, who owned the Dollar brand; he did neither. But quarreling with his

neighbors held no place in Lynn's plans. All he wanted of them was to be let alone.

All day he watched the prairie behind him, and saw no riders bob into sight over a hill, as he half expected. That night they bedded the sheep in a hollow around Willow Spring, where the feed was good and the water abundant—and where their camp would not be seen from a distance. But although he and Helge divided the night into two-hour watches they were not molested, and the sheep, full-fed and satisfied to follow their leader, the goat which Helge called Hans, started off briskly in the cool of sunrise, pattering toward the hills and their new home.

Step by step, rod by rod, they drew farther into the hills—farther in upon the Dollar Range, too; but Lynn could not help that. Those ewes were precious now in his sight and he would not risk the life and well-being of one of them by forcing them across the high, dry upland, where there was no water. One sheep lost now meant one lamb the less next spring, one clipping the less of wool; and he would not even consider taking the risk. For a young man who had heretofore counted all his money in the palm of one hand, so to speak, Lynn was developing a canny regard for future profits—worthy the respect even of his father, had old Joel known of it.

The warm hours loitered through the day, and still no horsemen bore down upon them from any direction to question their right of passage. The Swede plodded here and there behind the grazing flock, the coat he had worn in the chill morning tied round his middle, a generous pinch of snuff tucked inside his lip. Not a glance did he cast behind him, so far as Lynn could discover. Either he did not care whether the two riders ever returned, or he placed implicit confidence in his new boss and gave no thought to anything beyond his sheep. His stolid aloofness threw Lynn back upon himself in a way that began to rasp his nerves. And all at once, in early afternoon, he made up his mind what he must do.

They were on high ground, the land sloping gently away for miles behind them. The smoke of a train, lying like a droopy black feather against the sky in the south, showed where Green River lay drowsing under the lazy September sun. For some minutes Lynn studied the country over which they had traveled. Then he turned and rode over to Helge, holding out the lead rope of the pack horse as he approached.

"I'm going to ride over to the Dollar Ranch and see the old man," he announced curtly. "If any one comes while I'm gone, just kid 'em along till I get back. I won't be more than a couple of hours. And hang onto Patrick—and hang on tight. He'll want to follow, and he might jerk loose, if you don't watch out."

"He don't yerk loose by me," Helge promised.

And when Lynn returned, well within the stipulated time and with Loney wet to the ears to show how fast he had traveled, Helge returned Patrick's lead rope and went on about his business, without so much as a question in his eyes.

A lone juniper standing out where it apparently had no business to be, but nevertheless making a valiant, bushy growth there on the prairie, tempted Lynn after his ride. He rode over to it, saw that the sheep had not grazed that far up the hill, unbridled the two horses and hobbled them. Then, crawling under the lower branches where the sun could not find him, he lay down with his head pillowed upon his folded arms. As he closed his eyes, immediately an endless river of gray woolly backs seemed to flow away and away to the sky line, and upon that wavering current his thoughts drifted into

dreaming and then into deep, untroubled slumber.

Loney's loud, challenging whinny woke him suddenly. By the length of the tree shadow on the grass he knew that he had slept two hours or more, and he crawled out, looking first to see how far the sheep had gone during his little siesta. Loney's head was up and he was staring off in the direction the band had taken, and as Lynn got upon his feet he saw what had attracted the horse's attention. With an oath he snatched the bridle from where it hung over the saddle horn, slipped the bit between Loney's teeth and with the next motion slid the headstall in place and stooped to the hobbles. In ten more seconds he was tearing down the slope, the pack horse whinnying after him and making little awkward jumps forward with his hobbled forefeet, trying his best to keep up.

CHAPTER XIX.

HELL HALVORSEN GETS ACTION.

AS he raced along the trampled zone where the sheep had passed, Lynn's fingers were busy with the saddle strings. He pulled his rifle from beneath his thigh and pumped a shell into the chamber as he went, but his eyes were focused upon what was taking place down below.

Three horsemen, having very evidently circled the band, while keeping themselves well out of sight, had ridden up in front of the sheep and roped Hans, the goat. Now they were half leading, half dragging him straight away from the course toward a point half a mile distant where Pacific Creek cut through high banks. The sheep were following hesitatingly, half inclined to doubt the wisdom of following their old leader when he acted so queerly; half afraid, too, of the horsemen, though these were wise enough in their deviltry to go quietly about their plan of destruction. For you simply cannot stampede a band of sheep as cattle are stampeded. You must get the leader to start in a certain direction, and where the leader goes the sheep will follow—and once started they will follow blindly, even to their own certain death.

Around the worried band Helge Halvorsen was running with great strides, his dogs racing silently before, and where they passed the sheep rushed in upon the middle of the flock. But still they were swinging to follow Hans, even though they might doubt the propriety of his behavior, skating along with braced feet at the end of a rope. He was their leader. You may equal but you cannot surpass the unquestioning loyalty of a sheep. If Hans went over the high bank, then his sheep would go over the high bank and pile up below and die there, and it would take sharp work to prevent it.

Lynn saw it all; saw the whole devilish plan, saw how he might in the next half hour loose half his band if the fiends were not stopped. His rifle went to his shoulder, but at that distance he couldn't be sure of his aim, with Loney at a run; so he waited to come close, and in the moment of hesitation the Swede stopped still in his tracks, took careful aim across his bent left arm, and fired.

The man dragging the goat jerked, clawed for the horn, and toppled sidewise from his horse, which stopped. That stopped the goat, naturally, and the sheep stopped also and huddled close, heads up and staring. Helge fired again, but the other two horsemen had veered off, and were out of six-shooter range before the herder could do further damage., Lynn threw dust at their heels with a bullet or two, but Loney was not much used to gunfire and Lynn had all he could do to hold him. So he came charging down upon the scene just as Helge reached the

wounded man, who was now struggling to get upon his feet.

"Come on back here, you yellow dogs, and help your pardner!" Lynn shouted after the other two. He would have added more to his command, but his glance had fallen upon the injured man, and astonishment held him dumb for a minute. The man was Hank Miller.

"Since when did *you* get to be a Dollar man?" he demanded contemptuously, dismounting beside Hank.

"Same time you turned sheep-herder, I guess!" Hank snarled back, his right palm pressed hard against his left collar bone. "Git your sheep to hell outa here! This is Dollar land. I'll have you in the pen for this."

"Oh, no you won't!" Lynn retorted, with the same contemptuousness in his tone. "I could have you in the pen if I wanted to, for trying to kill my sheep."

"*Your* sheep!" Venom seemed almost to seep visibly between Hank Miller's clenched teeth.

"Yes, *my* sheep. Bought and paid for, if that's any business of yours. And since you're riding a Dollar horse, I'll just kindly inform you that I've got a right to drive *my* sheep across Dollar land."

"You're a damn liar!" Hank charged viciously, adding more to the statement.

"And you've got a busted shoulder, or I'd lick seven kinds of tar outa you for that remark," Lynn said.

He turned to the two others, who were riding up slowly under the watchful eyes of the herder, whose gun silently warned them against any offensive word or action. "Here, you two! Put your friend on his horse and get outa here!"

"You're pretty blame sure of yourself, seems to me," the older of the two, Pete Wilder, growled uneasily. Pete had been wagon boss for the Dollar outfit for the last four or five years, and Lynn knew him well, since it was usually Pete who had charge of the cattle pastured on Hayward land.

"Yes, I'm pretty sure of myself. I've got a perfect right to be sure." Lynn gave him a hard smile.

"Where's your authority for grazing sheep on our land? Or shooting our man? That's carrying things with a mighty high hand—for one of the Haywire bunch!"

"All right, get used to it, Pete. You'll have to, some time. Of course, when it comes to authority for crossing my sheep here, you might ride up and take a look at this. You know old Saunders' writing, I guess; you ought to, anyway."

Under Helge's unyielding blue eyes Wilder edged close and bent to read the paper Lynn held open before him, its corners flapping with a faint slapping sound in the breeze. In Saunders' bold, straggling hand it undoubtedly was written, and it said:

To Whom It May Concern:

Lin Haywood has got my permission to take his sheep acrost my land onto his own ranch. J. L. Saunders.

"*Your* sheep! Seems to me you're comin' up in the world all of a sudden! You must've fell heir to a fortune, to be buyin' a bunch of sheep the size of this one. Took 'em on shares, I guess yuh mean, don't yuh?"

"No," said Lynn evenly, "I mean just exactly what I say, as a rule. If it's any interest to you, here's the bill of sale, with the Two-link brand, which I sent in to have recorded in my name. I own every hoof of them; every blat you hear around you comes from *my* sheep. Let that soak in, will you? Because there's going to be more of 'em some day, and you might as well get used to the idea."

"Where'd *you* git the money to buy sheep? You never had two dimes to rub together in your pants pocket—not since I've knowed yuh," Pete blurted.

"I got it, all right. Where, is none of your damned business. Now, take Hank and hit the breeze, you two." Lynn folded his precious document of ownership—that is, the copy which he had asked for, since the original was being recorded—and stowed it safely in an inside pocket of his coat.

"Don't need to ask where he got it," Hank Miller sneered, an evil glance going to Lynn. "I guess if old Heinie could talk——"

"You don't wish he could, do you?" Lynn flashed back. "So you're another one that thought Heinie had money! Glad you let that particular cat outa the bag, Hank. I've been wondering a good deal about you!"

"You'll wonder once too many if you ain't careful!" Hank snarled. He sent a look toward the big herder, whose gun still covered the three of them and whose eyes never wavered in their calm, cold stare. Now the Swede spoke to Lynn.

"I tank you should take avay the guns," he said. "It be yust like some faller for laying behind rocks for shooting in the back."

"I guess you're right," Lynn agreed, and forthwith relieved them of their guns. "You'll find them at the Dollar Ranch," he said, "about next Sunday. Guess you can do without them till then. Here, Hank, is your rope. Don't be so free piling it on other folks' property, or you might lose it. So long—and if I never see you again, that'll be soon enough!"

"You wait!" cried Hank through set teeth, almost beside himself with pain and anger. "Soon as I can handle myself again I'll sure fix you for this!"

"You shod opp!" Helge advised dispassionately. "For one-half penny I fix you gude right now!"

"Aw, come on!" Mose Weldon, the other rider, now spoke up. "We got off wrong, that's all. If Saunders says they can cross, that's no skin off my nose. Let 'em alone!"

"Saunders is crazy with the heat, that's all," Pete Wilder grumbled, while he helped Hank up on his horse. "Now we've got to take this bird back to Green River, to a doctor." He turned to Lynn with a smile that betokened neither friendliness nor mirth.

"All right, Haywire, if you think you're going to have any luck raisin' sheep, fly at it!" he sneered. "You got my permission to try!"

"Thanks!" Lynn retorted dryly, and waved them a mocking adieu as they rode away.

When they were gone and the herder was somewhat regretfully putting away his gun before he turned his expert attention upon the sheep, Lynn turned and eyed him thoughtfully for a moment.

"Helge, I guess you've let yourself in for a permanent job, if you want to stay," he said. "How about it?"

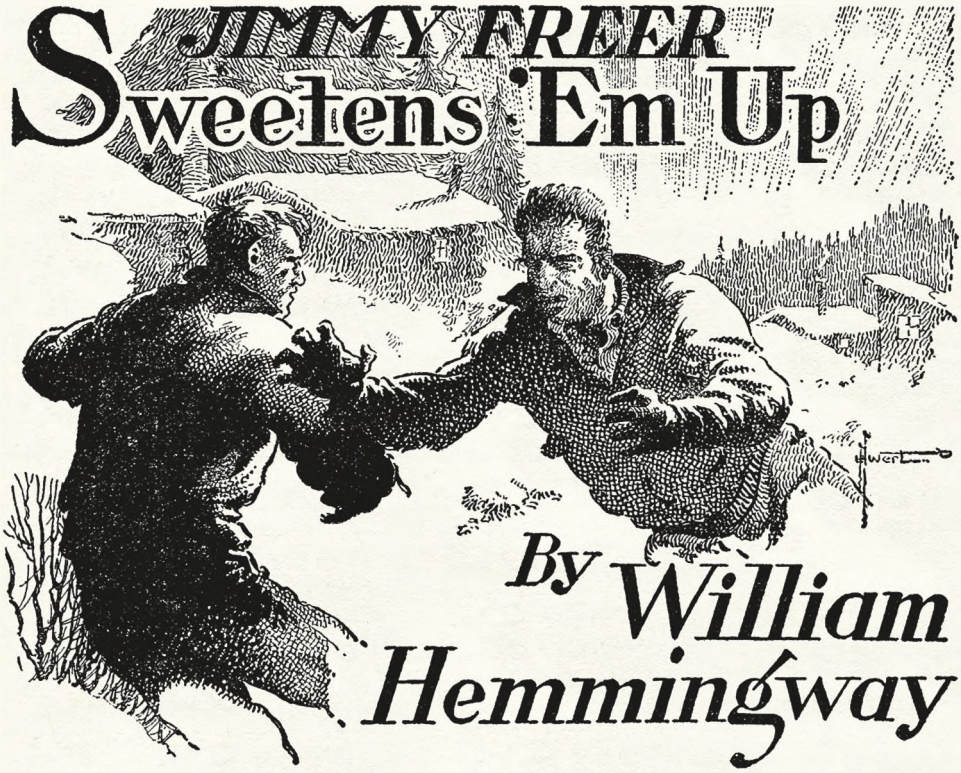
"I yust vas going to ask for yob," Helge grinned up at him. "Hey, Shep! Yonnie, 'way round 'em! Hans! Git a viggle on you! Ve lose some time already! Hey-y!"

The dogs sprang into their work, the goat shook his horns, to see, perhaps, if they were on solid, and started the nipping walk forward that, slow as it was, yet left the creeping miles behind them.

By the time Lynn had old Patrick free of his hobbles and was riding to overtake his woolly treasure, the band was grazing along after Hans as serenely as if no little drama had been played that day before their foolish amber eyes. But Lynn's blood was slow to cool, and he rode thoughtfully, his eyes fixed frowningly upon the hills before him.

To be concluded next week.

JIMMY FREER Sweetens 'Em Up



By William Hemmingway

Aathor of "The Champion Grows Reckless," "Thumbs Down," Etc.

Jimmy, when he went up to that lumber camp, gloried in the new, broad, exhilarating life. Yet he found that an evil spirit could spread corruption there as well as any other place. And Jimmy, because he was the man he was, took steps to wipe it out.

JIMMY," said the Freer Lumber Co. to his son and namesake, "do you really mean that you're coming into the business with me for keeps?"

"Yes, dad," James replied, looking as serious as a senator receiving a nomination. "It took me a long time to make up my mind, but, if you'll take me, I'm here to stick."

Father and son lounged at ease in deep wicker chairs on the broad porch of their old-fashioned home in Lake Street. The chairs were not only big but built to carry weight and endure strains. They had to be. Father was all of six feet and heavily built, while Jimmy was three inches above that height and weighed all of two hundred and twenty net. Moreover, he was so sudden and strenuous in his movements that the only fear in his young life was the constant fear of wrecking the flimsy furniture of his ordinary-sized friends. Just now, however, the Freers were so placid after a good home dinner that neither chair so much as creaked.

"I'm glad you're coming in," said the senior; "glad you're in. Now that you've made up your mind, I'm worrying a little—whether I haven't pushed you a mite too hard along the way I wanted you to go. I know you had a great ambition to teach, and you——"

"That's all right, dad," Jim interrupted. "You haven't driven me against my judgment. I did want to teach, and I do want to teach, but your argument swung me after I thought it all out—

that if I do as well as you expect in business, I shall be able within a few years to provide half a dozen teachers in my place. That's sound horse sense, dad, if you'll excuse my sitting in judgment on your proposal, and I guess the profession of teaching needs horse sense about as much as any. Yes; I made up my mind last fall."

"Last fall?" Mr. Freer remarked in a casual tone, yet scrutinizing his son keenly. "That reminds me. I read in Edgren's column about a wonderful big football player in some college down your way who knocked out a heavyweight pugilist with ease in a private try-out, and then broke the heart of the promoter who wanted to take him out of the team and make him the champion of the world. 'Kid' Slavin, or some such name. He was red-hot about it; said the youngster had turned down a cold million dollars. You know anything about it?"

"Why—er—yes," Jimmy replied, flushing pink, then deep red, from his collar to the shaggy brown cowlick above his brow. "I believe—er—something like that. I mean, it was substantially true."

" 'Twas you, wasn't it?'

"Why—er—well, yes, dad," Jimmy confessed. "But Slavin promised not to give me away. Nobody knows I did it, and I'm keeping it quiet. Fact is, if fellows think you can punch, they're always trying to put you up against some good man, and it's a blamed nuisance. Don't let mother know. No use worrying her."

"Not a word will I say, Jimmy. But, tell me, was the big fellow you knocked over any good?"

"Pretty speedy," the big boy answered. "Could hit some, too." And he absent-mindedly rubbed the left side of his chin, where "Right-cross" Oakes had crashed a hot one on him and downed him.

"Look here, I don't want to separate you from a million dollars, son," said the senior. "If you really can clean up like that in two years, as Slavin said you could, it might be worth your while. Lumber can wait. Took me twenty years to make my first million. And boxing is a decent business nowadays. Look at Gene Tunney, rich and respected; deserves it, too. Don't let me stand in your light."

"Nothing doing, dad," Jim chuckled. "I might win out and I mightn't. Old 'Jimmy the Gray,' one of our football rubbers, used to be welter champion years ago. I asked him about it one day, and he said something I'll never forget: 'There ain't nothin' in fightin', and even them that lives by it don't lay by the money.' I've made up my mind: I don't want to be either a champ or a Ph.D. I'm committed to lumber."

The Freer Lumber Co. reached over, grasped his son's hard right hand and shook it heartily.

"You'll never regret it, far as I can help," he said. "And the hardest fighter in the world can get all the battle he wants in the lumber business—fighting accidents and floods and snows and freezes and thaws that come at the wrong time. Say, Jim, do you know what a lumber man has to do? The lumberman is the fellow who goes up against nature every time he tackles a job, and he either wins a big stake or he gets knocked flatter than a cull shingle. Fighting's hard; football's harder; but lumbering's hell. Think you'll be happy?"

"Try to stick around, sir," said Jimmy soberly. He had spent two winter vacations in the woods, worked hard and enjoyed every moment, so he knew little or nothing about the dark side of the picture. Of course, he had swung his ax for hours in a temperature of twenty below zero, but that was at a time when the cold was no drawback but fitted in with the work program and really kept things going briskly. He

had never seen the carefully frozen lumber roads wiped out by a treacherous thaw, or a whole camp grouch itself into inefficiency because the cook served them with dishes he liked instead of dishes they liked. And temperament! Take a mixture of prima donnas, tenors, baseball stars and movie marvels, multiply it by ten, and you'll have something like a lumber crew, although not quite so sensitive. Too much praise or too little handling—any one of these, and your outfit is wrecked, and instead of getting out your twelve million feet of lumber you'll be lucky to get six.

The worst of it is that if things go wrong in a lumber camp they are pretty apt to stay wrong; for you are away off in the woods, beyond the reach of civilization, in a trackless forest where the hand of man has never set foot, as the fellow says. If for any reason—yes, or for any whim—your woods outfits turns sour, there is nothing to do but try to save what you can from the ruins—for ruined you'll surely be unless some miracle sets things right.

Ship out the mutinous crew and ship in a new crew, do you suggest? Think for a moment. If you were cutting, say, six miles back of Lake Pemadunqueecook and found that your apples had gone bad, you couldn't fetch in good ones, with snow ten feet deep all around and the nearest railroad blockaded. Much less could you ship in new men. The human mechanism of a lumber camp is like the steel mechanism of an airship—a structure of the highest known power, unchangeable once it's started, that speeds to its destination without a fault, or, through some slight mishap, plunges to destruction.

So it was a new Jimmy Freer who started for camp that September. On his winter vacation trips he had arrived in mid-season, a big, happy boy, bubbling over with good health and good humor, swinging the well-hung ax with joy as a sort of outdoor gymnasium stunt, easily making friends with the hearty lumberjacks and relishing the old woods jokes, the endless yarns about "ha'nts" and the long doleful ballads as he lounged on the deacon seat before the roaring wood stove, after a dinner that would burst an ordinary man. Now he was going in at the beginning of the season, to see it through, to take his place as a man among men, keenly alive to the perils and uncertainties of lumbering, the black background that lurked behind the shining white days and enchanted starry nights he had known.

His first job. Would he make good? Could he make good? He was too young and healthy to have developed a conscious philosophy, yet no philosopher could have given him a better motto than came to him at the end of long pondering: "Well, I'll see what I can do."

At Keewanoosuc Junction the entire Freer crew of more than one hundred men climbed off the main line train and piled into two smoking cars of a branch train that was to carry them twenty miles north. They looked like delegations to a league of nations—Italians, Slavs, Norsemen and French Canadians mixed among the crowd that was mostly American. There were few giants among them, but they were well-set-up, loose-limbed lads, all glowing with youth, wiry, compact, keen eyed, only a few veteran teamsters showing so much as a touch of gray at the temples.

"They look to me like a bunch of football players," Jimmy observed to Tom McCalmont, the woods boss, who sat beside him in the first smoking car.

"Guess they'd show up right in any kind of a shindig," McCalmont answered. "They've got more pep and speed to the inch than any other gang of men in the world, and as for taking chances—well, wait till you see a real, genuine river hog prance out with his

cant dog in his hand, when he climbs in to pry out a jill poke that's slued around ag'inst the bank and piled up the logs in a jam when the drive's on its way! He'll gamble with his life, 's if 'twa'n't more than a dirty white chip in a big game."

"I shouldn't think there's enough in it to make a man risk his like like that," Jimmy mused.

"There ain't," said Tom. "That's it, there ain't money enough to make him. But money's nothing to a lumberjack. He's not out for money. It's the game that gets him: going up against big odds—biggest in the world—and beating the game with his own hands and his good eye and his quick thinking, when he's got to think right or get smashed into a red smear. There's only one thing he's afraid of—quitting."

"Must be pretty square," Jimmy mused.

"Squarest bunch in the world," said Tom warmly. "You couldn't ask better. Most of our crowd are fellows who've been with us five-six-seven years or more. I know 'em. There's a couple dozen new ones, though, and some of 'em I'm a mite uncertain about. Say, don't you get a whiff o' booze now and then?"

Before Jimmy could answer, a big, red-cheeked fellow from South Boston came lurching down the aisle, his boots slung around his neck by their lacings; for the law forbids the wearing of the sharp steel calks on railroad trains. As he laboriously clawed his way along, hanging onto the backs of the seats, he seemed to be floating on a tide of pungent, sickish-sweet aroma, the aroma of many deep and powerful drinks. He stopped in front of Jimmy, hung on for dear life, smiled ingratiatingly and breathed down on him a reek strong and piercing as raw ammonia.

" 'Scuse me, Mishter 'Boss' Son,' " he began genially; "but you're wise to thish football dope, an' I wanna—wanna—wanna know what makes Yale 'n' Ha'v'd football teams boo-oo-oo-oo-oo?" The last syllables piped out of him in a thin, wavering falsetto whine, and as he made that wailing sound he shut his eyes and seemed about to fall asleep. Then he opened his eyes and asked his question all over again. This time Jimmy broke in on the third syllable of the "boo-oo-oo-oo-oo," and, smiling, made answer:

"Because they have the men and can do it."

"Jush's I tho't! Jush's I tho't!" said the big fellow, settling himself carefully and slowly down in the aisle and falling fast asleep. Two friends lugged him up into a front seat, where he snored peacefully and with some novel variations all the way to the end of the road.

"There you are," said McCalmont, as they carried the drunken man away. "That's what liquor'll do to a lumberjack. The boys are bone dry while they're in the woods, of course, though lots of 'em drink and spree away most of their pay as soon as they come out in the spring. That big fellow, Heenan, is straight as a string while he's on the job—couldn't do his work if he was drinking—but he always celebrates the day he goes in as well as the day he comes out. He'll be all right soon."

"No chance for him to get any booze on Lower Keewanoosuc, is there?" young Freer inquired.

"Not a chance in the world!" McCalmont exclaimed. "Good thing for us that there ain't. Booze'll ruin a lumber camp quicker than poor grub, or a nagging boss, or anything else you can think of."

When the jerk-water train at last slowed to a stop at Keewanoosuc, the men tumbled out in rollicking humor, some of them chanting:

"Oh, here I come from the Kennebec,
With my old calk boots slung round my neck!"

And a lot more to the same effect, with a whoop at the end of each verse. Their short, double-breasted coats blazed in checks and stripes of gay color so that they looked like horse blankets on a jamboree; their caps and soft hats were of wool, and so were their thick socks and leggings. They knelt in groups, fastening the latchets of their spike-soled shoes; then, each carrying his duffel bag, climbed into a fleet of stagecoaches that carried them half a dozen miles toward their destination. A short walk along the trail from the end of the rough road led to a broad clearing occupied by four buildings, in which Jimmy recognized the main camp, the meal camp, the horse hovels and the wangan—or storehouse for food, clothing and supplies.

A truck was already half unloaded before the meal camp, and "Roly-poly" Rowan, said to be the best cook this side of the Bay of Fundy, had a fire roaring in his enormous stove, from which came fascinating odors of roasting meat. "Only roast beef and spuds in their jackets to-night," said Roly as Jim walked past the door; "but we'll soon hit our stride, an you'll see these empty nail kegs of ours stow away enough grub to sink a schooner."

The youngster was amazed at the promptness with which the camp found itself, slipped into its regular routine. At dusk all hands swarmed into the meal camp within a minute after Roly yelled: "Whoo-ee-ee! Grub on ta-a-able!" He had seen good men and true do fine work at the football training table, and he wielded a nifty knife and fork himself; but he had to admit that these huskies outdid the gorgingest trencherwork he had ever heard of. Even the exploits of famished rowing men were lost in comparison. Tight waisted and happy, the lads strolled back to the main camp, well lighted with bracket lamps and with a brisk fire in the stove to take the chill off the sharp night air. He looked around the vast, clean, orderly room and saw the fellows settle down at ease with their pipes, swapping yarns about the jobs they had worked at during the summer, or joining in the chorus as "Happy" Holmes led them with voice and accordion singing:

"O-o-o-oh, I left my Lize behind me;
O-o-o-oh, she won't know what to do!
O-o-o-oh, I left my Lize for the wise-town guys—
And I left my watch there, too!"

Then he remembered what he had often heard his father say: "Keep the boys comfortable, and they'll work till they drop—every day."

Jimmy could hardly believe his ears when McCalmont suddenly broke into the racket with: "Nine o'clock! 'Turn in!" He undressed as fast as he could, but he was nearly the last man in when he climbed into his snug bunk, aromatic of spruce, on the upper tier and pretty far from the stove—proper quarters for a greenhorn. Eight hours later—or was it eight minutes?—he dreamed he was in the deep woods, facing a panther that crouched and howled at him. No; it could not be a dream. It wakened him. He sat up, confused, and, peering toward the door, discovered "Dink" Dermody, the cookee, who was doing the howling. When Dink had stirred up a chorus of growls from the gang, he yelled, "Come on! It's waiting for you!" and artfully slid out before any one of a shower of boots could hit him.

Men soon were crowded around rows of tin washbasins on a long shelf outside the log wall of the camp. They splashed, parted and smoothed their hair with stout combs, and legged it into the meal camp. There they heaped their tin plates with pork and beans still steaming from the long night's simmering in the bean hole; then settled down to the serious business with them and big slabs of brown bread half floating

in molasses, and washed it all down with tin pint cups of coffee so strong and delicious that it would lure an Arab sheik from his happy home.

Thus stoked up, they were good for five hours of lively work at swamping the twitch roads—chopping all clear and smoothing the roads over which the season's lumber was to be dragged down to be yarded on the main roads, whence it would be hauled to the landings on the bank of the Lower Keewanoosuc in good time for the spring drive. Thence it would be floated down that tributary and discharged into the great River St. James, bound for the port of St. James at the sea.

Jim came back to camp, after his first day's work at swamping, so tired that he could not eat. When he rolled out of his bunk at dawn, his arms, back and legs were so stiff that he tottered as he walked. Trained athlete though he was. the hard labor had strained his muscles he had never called on before, and he moved around like a rickety old clothes horse.

He felt better after breaking his fast on four heaping plates of steaming pork and beans, a loaf of brown bread and three big cups of coffee. That night he was not quite so dead and managed to eat a little supper; and within a week, thanks to his stout young heart and intelligent training, he was himself again. Not only that, but he felt as if he had never really lived before.

When he strode toward breakfast on the ninth day he felt so good that he was tempted to inhale as deeply as he could, set his muscles and watch the buttons pop off his shirt. Before he knew what he was doing, he was skipping about on tiptoe, lunging with the left fist and shooting the right hot after it, dodging, ducking, side-stepping and hitting again.

"Havin' a conniption fit, be ye?" asked Roly-poly, grinning, at the door.

"No. Just shadow boxing," Jim replied. "You get feeling so good up here that you just want to wade into something."

"By Cephas, you'll find a plenty to wade into!" said the cook. "You're going into two thousand acres of solid black growth, every tree standing with its arms around its brothers. That's a chore'll keep us all pretty busy all winter."

With all the roads cleared and smoothed, awaiting only the sequence of snow, rain and frost that would make them easy highways for lumber, the crew began the actual work of chopping down the burly spruce trees, whose heads seemed to brush the sky. They fell so thick and fast that they seemed like some gigantic caricature of grain that was being spread in long, orderly swaths. Jim Freer never ceased to wonder at the skill of the choppers. Seeming to take no particular aim, they managed so that every gigantic tree should drop in the clearest space beside it. The first ax scarf bitten into the rugged bark pointed to exactly where the tree presently would fall, with the sound of a world crashing to its doom. The speed and deadly accuracy with which these men plied their axes appeared almost supernatural.

Jim learned, to his amazement, that there were as many theories of what constitutes a first-class ax as there are about the fourth dimension; that the shape, size and weight of the head and the way it was "hung," or balanced on the helve, had much to do with its effectiveness. Evening after evening around the roaring stove, experts argued and wrangled over the fine points of ax lore. No one of them seemed to bring any other one around to his way of thinking; but the amount of ax wisdom and ax technique they brought to light would have filled volumes.

A crackling as of myriads of live wires called all hands out of doors at eight o'clock on a hard, windless, frosty

evening, and as the men ran to a clear space and gazed they saw the whole northern sky suffused in a glow of pale, greenish pink, shaded with gold. Across this glorious canopy flashed blinding beams like the rays of high-powered searchlights.

"Cal'late that's the north Atlantic fleet practicin' signals?" asked a raw youngster from Portland, in camp for his first winter.

"Not 'nless some one's tugger-lugged th' battleship a few hundred miles in from the shore," answered Rod McMahon. "Them's the northern lights, sonny: finest movin' picture show on earth, special run-off for us lumberjacks. No one else ever sees it half so pretty nor so much."

Yet in a few minutes the men began to break away in small groups and lounge back to camp. Jimmy Freer was still gazing, fascinated, at the swift, kaleidoscopic rush and change of color, when something jogged his elbow, and he looked around and saw the woods boss at his shoulder.

"Great picture, isn't it, Mac?" he exclaimed.

"Wonderful," answered McCalmont dully. "You don't see any of our people waiting for it, though."

"What's the matter?" Jimmy asked, looking around, surprised to see that all were gone but themselves.

"There's a lot the matter," McCalmont replied. "You haven't heard any more arguments lately about the proper way to hang an ax, have you—nor about anything else? No; you haven't. And why? The same reason why they're not waiting to enjoy this miracle in the sky. Our gang's turning sour."

"Sour?" Jimmy repeated, incredulous.

"Yes, and we'll be on the rocks in no time at all unless we sweeten 'em up," warned McCalmont. "It's been getting worse the last few days—good men like Heenan and Ruddy missing strokes and slashing trunks when they're cleaning up, gashing lumber and ruining it and not caring a hoot. Speed's all gone, too. I see it all around. What's more, I've smelled what's hurting us. It's booze; that's what it is."

"But you told me on the way in that booze couldn't get in here," protested Jimmy, puzzled.

"So I did," McCalmont admitted; "and that's why I didn't believe my own nose at first, even after I'd smelled it. You see, they never brought it in by train; would have been spotted and dumped in the ditch. But now that the law is on, the booze fetches fancy prices, and the bootleggers who bring it across the River St. James into this State can easily send a few dozen cases up this way—and ruin the finest prospects we've had for many a year."

"Can't we head 'em off?' asked Jimmy.

"Head em off?" McCalmont groaned. "Do you suppose the government would send agents away up here to the end of the world on a small job like this? Or, if they came, that they'd find anything? We might put a crimp in 'em ourselves if we could catch 'em; but our men would get sore at anything that looked like snooping. Beside, the rum runner's got the whole left bank of the Keewanoosuc to hide his launch in. What chance have we? We're cooked, I tell you! And just to make a few dirty dollars for a fellow that never did a decent day's work in his life!"

As the woods boss and Jimmy Freer walked slowly toward the camp, a big man came in from the river trail and swung past them at a lively walk. In the greenish light from the northern sky the gay colors of his mackinaw jacket shone out in a jazzy jangle of inharmonious greens, blues and reds. His shoulders swaggered from side to side as he went by, giving him an air as of boasting or threatening, perhaps a good deal of both.

"Well, of all the gall I ever heard

of!" McCalmont exclaimed, when the stranger had marched out of earshot. "What do you know about that for nerve? 'Bat' Commaghan, the biggest bootlegger on the River St. James, coming into our camp! What do you suppose he's after?"

"Money, I guess," said Jimmy. "They tell me he's got more than he can count now, yet he'd jump into a burning house on the off chance of picking up another dollar. I've got a hunch, Mac! Will you let me handle him in my own way?"

"Why, yes, I guess so—if you'll keep your shirt on and not get red-headed," the boss agreed.

By this time they had come up to the open door of the main camp. Commaghan was standing in the middle of the floor, shaking his red-freckled fist at a group of men who faced him in sullen silence.

"You'll come across with that coin, and you'll come across now!" he snarled. "Because I'm gentleman enough to trust you for three cases of the finest Scotch that ever crossed the ocean, you think you can gimme the run-around. But you can't. Where's that three hundred dollars you promised me last week, eh? Said you were going to get advances on your pay to send home. I mean you, Heenan, and you, Ruddy, and the rest of you. Put the dough in my hand this minute, or I'll turn you into the company, and they'll give you the bum's rush. Come on! Be good, now!"

"No, they won't!" exclaimed Jimmy Freer, stepping across the threshold and going close to the big man. "The Freer Lumber Co. isn't a collecting agency for any bootlegger, especially one who has been trying to put our camp on the blink. Out you go, Mister Commaghan!"

"You go roll your hoop!" the big man sneered. "How do you cut in on this, anyway?"

"I'm talking for Mr. McCalmont, the boss here," said Jimmy politely.

"Now, listen," the big man snarled. "You go out and take the air, or else keep your trap shut—or I'll push in your face! Get me?" He looked about as big as two ordinary six-footers, a trifle overweight, perhaps, but with plenty of power. From end to end of the River St. James he was noted for two things: his pride in his strength and the fact that he never touched a drop of the poisonous stuff he sold. He was not yet past the late thirties. "You're through," he growled at Jimmy. "Make a move or say a word, and I bust you, Understand?"

"Why, yes, I understand," Jimmy replied, smiling down on him reassuringly. "But don't let's have it in here, because we'd muss things up so—might upset the stove, too. Dangerous. Let's do it outside."

"Do it?" snarled Commaghan. "Do what?"

"Why all that face bending, or pushing, or whatever you're going to do to me."

"H'rah!" yelled a score of voices. "That's the ticket: out on the level ground, man to man, good woods style."

"Come on," Jimmy invited the puzzled blusterer. "The boys like a little excitement, and they're looking to us for it. Just shuck your coat and waistcoat—excuse me, your vest. You'll need 'em on the way home. Now I suppose you're going to be real savage and brutal, eh?"

"I'll break your fresh face!" snarled the big fellow, rolling up his sleeves and displaying a pair of arms like hairy hams, decorated with freckles like ginger snaps. As they faced each other in the clear, weird light from the northern sky, every detail of face and figure stood out as if etched against the glowing background. The bulky and scowling bootlegger looked every ounce of two

hundred and fifty pounds, a good thirty more than Jimmy scaled; but the youngster was nearly three inches taller, had a longer reach, and had the great advantage of not scowling. Indeed, he looked like a keen student intent upon solving a problem which either would bring success or smash the laboratory down on his head.

Commaghan stepped forward lightly, then, both arms extended, made a sudden jump for his victim. Jimmy leaped aside like a shadow, and hooked his right fist into the big fellow's ribs as he plunged past, to sprawl on all fours.

He got up, roaring curses, made another plunge, caught and threw Jimmy back heavily to the ground; but Jim's years of football experience stood him in good stead, and he rolled with the tackle, kept rolling, spun out of Commaghan's grasp and was up on his feet again within two seconds.

The big bootlegger had set so fast a pace—to say nothing of the rib-roaster and the two falls—that he was beginning to puff; but he was too mad to notice it. He plunged in again, and missed. On the next plunge he lowered his head and tried to butt his victim in the stomach. Jimmy broke ground for just one step backward, and set himself. As the heavy man dove forward, he met him with a clean hook blow of the right fist on the lower edge of the jaw. It sounded as sharp and hot as the crack of a bullet on a stone wall. Commaghan's plunge went right on, though he was unconscious. He slid six or eight feet ahead, then lay perfectly still.

Jimmy gathered up the big man's coat and waistcoat, rolled him over and spread them over him before he put on his own. He called to Dink Dermody, who brought out a blanket from camp and spread it over him. When Commaghan's eyes began to blink, Jimmy got a dipper of water, dipped his fingers in it and sprinkled his face. At last the big fellow seemed to understand what had happened to him. He rose to a sitting position.

"Had enough?" asked Jimmy as pleasantly as a man offering a third cup of coffee.

"Oorgh!" was the nearest anybody could come to reporting Commaghan's answer, what with the thickness of his tongue just recovering from paralysis, to say nothing of the lump on his jaw. But it was evident that his answer meant "Yes;" so Jimmy and McCalmont raised him to his feet, took each an arm of him over their shoulders, and carefully supported him on the long march down the trail to where he had fastened his launch under some bushes on the left bank of the Lower Keewanoosuc. In the last half mile he picked up his feet quite cleanly, without one stumble, and appeared to have most of his senses back.

"He's had a bad fall," Jimmy explained to the bootlegger's crew of two wormy-looking individuals, who stared open mouthed at their powerful boss being loaded over the side and into a seat like a sick child. Jim took the blanket from Dink and wrapped it around the big man, who had begun to shiver a little.

"You'd better keep away from this neighborhood, Commaghan," Jimmy warned, as the launch began to move. "If you ever show around here again, something serious might happen to you. You understand?"

Again that mysterious syllable "Oorgh!" rumbled out of the big man's throat. This time it meant "Yes," more than ever.

Another contribution from Mr. Hemmingway will appear in an early issue.

Bunches of Lilies

By Mark Reed

Author of "A Carnival of Crooks," "The Sculping Kid." Etc.

The Kettlety crowd believed that all was fair in prize fighting, so they set out to win the fight in advance by plaguing the opposing side—composed of Pete Dugan and his manager and trainer. Pete, after every means had been taken to preserve him from the harrowing annoyances, took things into his own hands—and turned the tables!

THE perspiration trickled down Dan Stringer's face. Every once in a while he had to dodge out of the way. An old-time fighter himself, his arms jabbed and his head ducked in sympathy with the boy he was managing.

"That's the idea, Pete!" he shouted. "A left to the face. Now feint. Another left. And keep circling!"

It was secret training. In four days Pete Dugan was fighting Harry Kettlety for the middleweight championship of the world. The big gym at the top of the Garden was deserted except for the three figures in the ring, and several young huskies who were shadow-boxing vigorously on a platform to the rear.

Each man, except Dugan himself, wore a white jersey with the words "Pete Dugan, the Mississippi Menace" stitched on the front in green. The gym lay hot with the July sun on its roof, the air had a baked quality, and, as though to emphasize the secrecy of the proceedings, the face had been removed from the clock on the wall.

"Come on there, 'Rocky,' weave in like Kettlety! Now, Pete, left-hand him!"

Rocky, a long, lean, big-nosed chap with one ear cauliflower, wove in, his gloves and body undulating. Dugan, his heavy chest glistening with perspiration and red from blows, moved in at a tangent to meet him. His right glove feinted, then the left shot out with a terrific arching hook. All the time he was circling.

"Another!" yelled Stringer, swinging his own left excitedly. "Your left is your fortune!"

The second hook landed obediently.

Rocky's head jerked back, and even though he had expected the blow, the mocking grin on his face was replaced by a look of pained surprise. His weaving stopped, and he went suddenly limp as though suspended loosely from the ceiling by a string. One wondered would the string be strong enough to keep him from toppling backwards.

"That's enough now, Rocky," said Stringer, then he turned in the direction of the shadow-boxing huskies. "Hey, 'Sailor' Morris," he called, "come show us a couple of rounds!"

Rocky climbed down out of the ring, and while the new sparring partner was arriving Dugan took out his red-rubber mouthpiece to rest his jaws. He was breathing easily, and looked good; the heaviness of his chest, shoulders and neck giving him an exceptionally dynamic appearance for a middleweight. As he leaned against the ropes he scowled good-naturedly at his manager and fanned himself playfully with one glove. This was Tuesday. With the big fight of his life coming on Friday he had not a worry in the world.

The door opened and a man with a stepladder entered.

"Hey there, my friend," yelled Stringer. "This gym's not open. You're in the wrong pew."

The intruder came on unabashed.

"They sent me up," he said, "to fix yuh clock."

Stringer cast a glance at the speaker. He was a wrinkled old customer with a hard-boiled expression. Then Stringer looked up at the faceless clock.

"All right," he said. "Go to it."

Without further ado the newcomer adjusted the ladder and climbed to a position of eminence. Dugan and Sailor Morris began to mix it up in the ring below.

"Now then, Pete," said Stringer, returning to his post as master tactician, "let's see you get going. Remember the idea is to right-hand that bird Kettlety to death. He don't suspect what a right wallop you've developed this winter. Come on. What's holding you up?"

Dugan had turned, confused by the change of tactics.

"Gee, Dan," he said, "I don't get you——"

Stringer made a gesture of mild impatience.

"Where's your brains — in your shoes?" he yelled, and at the same time he gave Dugan a long, meaningful wink.

"You mean I'm to right-hand him?"

"You bet! Bore straight in. Smash straight through his guard, and slug him till he's dizzy. That's the dope that'll fetch Kettlety. You can't outbox him."

For three rounds Dugan bored in and Sailor Morris tried to stop him, while Stringer poured into their ears a torrent of unfamiliar instructions. Then the latter called it off for the day and sent them to the bags. In a few minutes the man on the stepladder climbed down, leaving behind him a bright, new face on the clock. Stringer made sure the clock repairer was well out the door and into the elevator before he returned to the gym himself.

"Oh, Pete!" he called. "Let's see you go through a couple more rounds. We'll go back to the original dope."

Dugan glared at his manager angrily.

"Say, what's the notion?" he demanded. "Want to ball me all up?"

The worried look in Stringer's eyes gave way to a twinkle.

"Not *you,* Pete," he said, "that guy stalling around up there with the clock. He was a spy from Harry Kettlety's camp."

"Yeah? How do you know?

"Why, that bird used to box preliminaries around here about twenty years ago. But the foaming tankards got him before he ever got far. I imagine Kettlety and Johnny Plaistow thought I'd never seen him."

Dugan suddenly became less carefree.

"You mean they been spyin' on my trainin'?"

Stringer forced a hearty laugh.

"No, no; I mean they been trying to. Now you and Sailor hop into the ring and forget it. That Kettlety bunch won't slip anything over on us."

Before Stringer could follow his fighters up over the ropes he was joined by a lean, gangling young man, with a shock of yellow hair tumbling down into his eyes. In one hand he carried some towels, in the other a bottle of alcohol. He wore his white jersey reversed so that his back read "Pete Dugan, the Mississippi Menace," rather than his chest.

"What bane the row?" he demanded.

"Kettlety just had a spy in here," said Stringer in an undertone.

"Did he learn much?"

"Sure, he learned a lot. But it was all wrong."

Dugan had completed his workout with Sailor Morris and Ole was unlacing his gloves for him when the clank of the elevator was heard outside again and the door opened. Stringer and Ole turned, half expecting to find the clock repairer had returned, but it was only a messenger boy.

"Box for Mr. Dugan," the lad announced.

Dugan started forward.

"Lay off that!" said Stringer, stopping him. "Don't take any chances. You don't know what's in that box."

"It's flowers!" piped up the boy.

"Flowers?" Ole set down his alcohol bottle agitatedly. "I ban't ordered flowers sent up here."

"Some admirer, I guess."

"Yeah?" Dugan's face brightened with sudden interest. Stringer eyed him sharply.

"Pete," he said, "have you disobeyed my orders and got mixed up with some jane?"

"Aw, what janes do I know?"

"Open the fool thing up, Ole."

Gingerly, as though he expected some infernal machine might be within, Ole untied the strings and loosened the paper. A sweet, sickening odor issued forth. He took off the cover, and there, beautifully wrapped in tissue paper, were a dozen magnificent Madonna lilies. Instantly, their strong funereal odor seemed to pervade the entire gymnasium. Dugan eyed the bunch of white waxy blossoms soberly.

"Who they from?" he demanded

Stringer picked up the card and read it.

"Nobody you know." he said carelessly. "Go take your shower!"

Dugan snatched the card from him. It read:

DEAR MISSISSIPPI MENACE: Keep these lilies in water. Your friends can use them after you pass out next Friday night.

HARRY KETTLETY.

Dugan looked perplexedly from his manager to his trainer.

"What's the idea?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know," said Stringer hurriedly. "Kettlety's crazy anyway, you know. Don't pay any attention to him. Go take your shower."

After Dugan had disappeared, Stringer shook his head ruefully.

"Well, Ole," he said, "it looks like a tough four days ahead of us."

"You tank maybe they try get Pete's goat?"

Stringer waved an indignant hand at the offending lilies.

"Don't that look like it? And I'm not so sure they'll stop at goat getting. I've been fearing something like this. Pete's the only boy that stands in the way of Kettlety's holding the title a couple years longer. To win this fight's worth a quarter of a million. And anybody who knows Harry Kettlety—not to mention that Johnny Plaistow, who is managing him—knows they aren't

going to lose a quarter of a million until they have pulled every trick in the bag!"

"A bunch of lilies ban't so much of a trick."

"No, but it'll do for a starter. It gets under the skin. It starts us guessing, and it starts Dugan guessing. It's got him guessing in there right now while he's taking his shower."

Ole's eyes widened anxiously. He had shared Pete Dugan's pugilistic destinies from the nights when they were glad to fight on the Mississippi water front two plates of chile con carne and a five-dollar bill. They had dug gold, sheared sheep, slung hash, always with the championship in the back of their minds. And now they weren't going to get a fair chance at it.

"Yah!' he exclaimed disgusted. "That Kettlety bane dirty dog!"

"Sure. He's about ready to take the toboggan, and he knows it. But he still has one big advantage. That's coolness. He don't rattle. While Pete might. It's his first New York fight. That's why I wanted him to train in the Garden here and get used to the place. And that's why I had the inscriptions put on the jerseys. We're going to need all the morale we can get."

As he talked Stringer was thinking ahead. He wondered if the Kettlety crowd knew the hotel where Dugan was stopping. This was no time to have an all-night poker game started next door to a nervous fighter.

"By the way, Ole," he said, "I think I'll slip Pete over to the Seymour this evening and make sure he gets a quiet night."

Soon Dugan, looking cool and comfortable after his shower, sauntered in. He had his white-flannel coat thrown over his arm, and his sport shirt, open at the throat, revealed his huge bull-like neck. He was ruddy with health and seemed as vibrant with energy as an electric coil.

"Where am I eating?" he demanded.

"Oh," said Stringer, "some nice quiet place uptown."

"What's the matter with the Astor?"

"Nothing, except you ain't going there."

Dugan's eyes darkened.

"If I thought Kettlety'd be there, you couldn't stop me. That guy and his lilies! He ain't got me dead and buried yet!"

Stringer and Ole exchanged covert glances. Kettlety's floral donation *had* got Dugan guessing.

"Look here, man," said Stringer carelessly. "You're not thinking about those flowers, are you? They didn't mean anything. That's a regular stunt when you get to fighting in New York."

"Sure," grunted Dugan, "and so's bein' spied on."

They had dinner and sat around a while. Then, about ten, Dugan and Ole went up to their rooms. A few minutes later they slipped down the service stairs to a back alley where they were met by Stringer who conducted them to a waiting taxi. When they reached the Seymour, a big skyscraper hotel on the other side of town, they did not enter by the main entrance but went directly to the elevators and thence to a suite of three rooms that had been reserved in the name of "MacGuire."

After the bell boy had left Stringer went to the window and peered out. Thirty-three stories below him trolleys and motor cars were running along as though in some Lilliputian street. To the north spread a vast network of illuminated canyons. A cool breeze was coming off the river. Its murmur about the building made Stringer think of his year at sea and nights of lookout duty in the "crow's nest." He drew in a long, leisurely breath, his first in twenty-four hours.

Dugan was sitting on the bed. He unlaced his shoes, then took off his coat

and methodically hung it on the patent hanger in the closet. Stringer watched him.

"Feel sleepy?" he asked.

"Sure," said Dugan, defiantly. "Why shouldn't I? Nothing's troubling me."

Stringer made certain the door to the corridor was locked, then said "Good night" to Dugan and joined Ole in the next room.

"Gee!" he exclaimed. "Ain't this nice and quiet?"

"It bane perfect."

"Yes, sir. Let Pete get in his three nights' sleep up here among the clouds and Kettlety will find him a hard boy to faze."

It seemed to Stringer that he had hardly dozed off when he was brought to a sitting position by what sounded like a motor car trying to enter his room. Then a roar of explosions circled the building. He could see the window curtains flap from the pulsations of air. Stopping only long enough to note that the illuminated dial of his watch read exactly one o'clock, he dashed into Ole's room. The Swedish trainer was standing in his pajamas in the middle of the carpet, his eyes wide with alarm.

"What bane that?" he demanded.

"Damned if I know. Is Pete all right?"

They pushed the door to the next room open, and there in the half light they could see the middleweight sitting upright in bed. The racket outside died down, then became louder than ever. A shadow flashed by the open window.

"Holy smoke!" yelled Dugan. "It's coming in!"

Stringer rushed to the window and looked out. Against the stars he saw the receding outline of an airplane. He watched the batlike apparition wing its way northward over the city, waiting till the staccato of its motor had diminished to a lazy drone. Then he turned with a laugh.

"All it is, is some air mailman off his course!"

But precisely sixty minutes later the air mailman was back with another cargo of noise. Stringer and Ole exchanged disgusted glances. There was no use to kid themselves this time. Dugan was not going to get any sleep this night, not if Harry Kettlety had anything to say about it.

While the plane droned off to the north, its three victims went into consultation. Undoubtedly, the pest was hired for a full night's work. Ole was all for slipping off to another hotel, but, as Stringer pointed out, if the Kettlety crowd had been able to shadow Dugan to the Seymour at eleven, it would be vastly easier to shadow him at two in the morning when the streets were practically deserted. Finally Dugan himself settled the matter.

"I'll be hanged," he said, "if that bird can drive me out of this hotel. I stick right here till he starts throwing in dynamite!"

At Stringer's suggestion Ole dragged a mattress into the bathroom, and Dugan was finally persuaded to sleep on it. With the door closed it looked as though the small interior compartment would be nearly sound proof.

"Gee, I can't sleep in here," protested Dugan. "I'll smother."

"I'll stay up," said Stringer. "I need sleep less than you two boys do. When I hear the plane coming I'll close your door and the windows. After it's gone I'll open everything up again."

To the man watching by the window, the night dragged on interminably. At three and four he caught the sound of the approaching plane and tiptoed across to close the bathroom door, but each time a grumbling voice within assured him the precaution was unnecessary. Dugan was as awake as an owl. Stringer could hear him tossing and cursing. Finally a faint translucence began to show in the East. He

waited until the translucence was shot through with streaks of crimson and he could see the smoke from two tugboats making their way up the East River, then he rose.

"Hey, Pete!" he called. "You can come back to bed. The plane won't show up again. That pilot won't take any chances of being spotted."

But morning meant the rumble of service elevators and a glare of sunlight through the curtains. At seven o'clock Stringer gave it up as a bad job and went into Ole's room. The trainer had drawn up a table and was sitting on the edge of the bed playing solitaire. His face was gaunt and gray from lack of sleep. Stringer caught a glimpse of his own face in the mirror.

"Tough night," he said.

Ole nodded. "How's Pete?"

"He just dozed off. I'm going to stick around and see nothing happens to him. Nothing more, I mean. You go over to the Garden and tell the boys we won't go up to the park for any road work this morning. When Pete wakes up I'll bring him over for a few rounds."

"I t'ank maybe he better lay off."

Stringer shook his head.

"Better work than sit round and worry."

"Py yingo, we complain to the boxing commission about this airplane!"

Again Stringer shook his head.

"If we put up a squawk to them or to the papers we'll sound like crybabies. That's the dirtiest part of it, and that Johnny Plaistow knows it. He has got us going and coming. If we complain we get the merry ha-ha; if we say nothing it gets our goat worse than ever."

Three hours later Stringer delivered a somewhat gloomy Dugan into Ole's care at the Garden, and then hurried off in a taxi. When he returned Pete was nearly through his ring work. Stringer called Ole to one side.

"I've just located a little inn up in the country," he whispered, as though the walls of the gym itself had ears. "We'll smuggle Pete up there some time this afternoon and lie low till the day of the fight."

Ole brushed his yellow shock of hair back nervously.

"You can't get us away too quick," he said.

"What do you mean? Anything more gone wrong?"

"Pete just got sore at Mr. Morris and knocked him out."

"He has got to cut that."

"He ban't following *any* of your instructions——"

Stringer did not wait to hear more. He strode across the gym and up to the ring where Dugan was lashing into Rocky with more fury than skill.

"Hey there, Pete!" he yelled. "What's the idea?"

Dugan took out his mouthpiece and came to the ropes.

"I've changed my tactics," he announced. "I been thinking. I bet that clock bird knew we were stringing him and doped out our real plan. So I framed up something new."

Stringer looked at the flushed and panting fighter.

"Say," he said, in a tone of deliberate contempt, "it didn't take Kettlety long to fluster you, did it?"

Dugan glared angrily.

"What d'ye mean? I ain't flustered."

"No; but you're next door to it. You're thinking too much. You go back to the old instructions. To-night I'm going to take you out and put you to bed with the chickens, and to-morrow morning you'll feel different about how much that spy found out."

"Yeah?" said Dugan sulkily; but he went back and cut out the slugging.

That evening found three new guests sitting on the veranda of Hillcrest Inn. On leaving the Garden, Ole and Dugan had proceeded to the Times Square

subway. Here they had spent a solid hour underground, dodging in and out of trains, mingling in the crowds, until it seemed the cleverest sleuth in the world must have lost their trail. Then they had taken a train far uptown and hence a taxi to within half a mile of their present headquarters. The rest of the way they had walked. Stringer had followed a similar line of action in another subway.

As the three of them sat and watched a tiny crescent moon trying to shoot its slender supply of beams through the heavy woods in which the inn was located, they should have felt absolutely at ease. There were few guests to disturb them. In fact, the upper floor, as well as several cottages scattered in the woods around the central building, were closed up entirely. Moreover, their dinner had been excellent, and the evening breeze, laden with damp wood odors, was refreshingly grateful after the heat of the city pavements.

But they were not at ease. The very quietness of the porch and the surrounding woods became oppressive. True, Kettlety and his sharpshooters could not possibly know where they were. Yet there was always the uncertainty. They tried to chat, but Stringer had insisted they keep off the fight. At nine o'clock Dugan could stand it no longer.

"Gee," he said, "these crickets get my goat. I'm going up to bed."

Stringer and Ole watched him disappear into the hotel.

"It's been a tough break all along," said Stringer. "We should have fought this scrap last March, anyway."

Ole eyed the tip of his glowing cigar shrewdly.

"I t'ank postponing that fight last March bane another trick. I don't t'ank Kettlety ever cracked his knuckles at all."

"You're wrong there. I took my own doctor over and made Plaistow unbandage his boy's hands. He'd cracked his knuckles all right."

"Lucky for him. Pete could finished him in three rounds. He was goin' yust like a cyclone."

"Yeah, for once Kettlety got a lucky break without having to pull anything low."

"Yep, we'd 'a' licked him last March."

Abruptly Stringer jumped up and shook himself, as though endeavoring to shake off some invisible enemy.

"We gotta snap out of it," he muttered. "This thing is getting us as bad as it is Pete. We're all right now—if we only keep our nerve."

But again Dan Stringer was reckoning without his opponent. He had just turned in after a five-cigar vigil under Dugan's window when he opened his eyes and found the room so bright that he could count the petals on the flowers of his wall paper. Outside some one was yelling fire. At first he thought it was the inn, itself. Then he saw to his relief that it was one of the vacant cottages about fifty yards away. Already flames were shooting from windows on two sides.

As he struggled into his clothes he made out on the ground below two figures tugging at a hose from which a feeble stream of water gurgled. One was easily recognizable as the lithe, effeminate young hotel clerk, now arrayed in a pair of pajamas. The other wore gym pants and a jersey lettered "Pete Dugan, the Mississippi Menace." It was Pete himself. Stringer snorted with rage, and a moment later he was shaking the faithful Ole from a troubled sleep.

"Hey, Ole," he said, "pack up your stuff and meet me at the garage in five minutes."

Then he rushed downstairs and out upon the lawn where Dugan and the pajamas were still struggling with the hose. From the village in the valley below came the sound of a fire siren.

Stringer clapped the figure in white jersey and gym pants on the back.

"Come on, Pete," he said, "we're checking out."

Dugan's jaw set.

"That's a helluva spirit to show when your hotel may burn down."

"You come on," repeated Stringer firmly. "You're job's fighting Harry Kettlety—not fire."

Finally when the local department arrived Dugan consented to withdraw his services. Together fighter and manager picked their way through lines of spurting hose and around to the dark side of the hotel where they met Ole laden with their suit cases. They made their way to the garage, and as they entered they detected a strangely familiar odor.

Dugan sniffed.

"Kettlety hasn't located us, has he?"

"There are fifteen cottages around the inn," said Stringer bitterly. "You didn't think the one directly in front of your room caught fire just by chance, did you?"

"Aw, Dan," said Dugan, "Kettlety wouldn't set a fire. He doesn't want to win that bad."

"Don't he? Iook at that!"

They turned. There, fastened to the steering wheel of Stringer's car, was a bunch of Madonna lilies. In the gloom of the garage the white, waxy blossoms seemed to have an almost malignant glow. With a muttered curse Stringer seized the offending floral tribute and ground it under his heel. Instantly the sweet sickening odor intensified. And each of the three men had the same mental picture. It was Dugan lying knocked out beneath the red plush ropes of the Garden ring with sprays of lilies spread tenderly over his motionless body. Kettlety and Johnny Plaistow were arch-psychologists.

It took half an hour to get the car through the jam of motors and fire apparatus and out upon the main road.

"Did you pay our bill?" asked Dugan.

"I'll mail it to-morrow," said Stringer gruffly.

They drove along several miles. Finally Stringer spoke.

"Pete," he said, "I'm one corking manager if I can't outwit those guys enough to get you a night's sleep."

"They're wise birds."

"Yes. They must have a regular gang shadowing us."

"Gee, it'll cost Kettlety something for all these lilies and detectives."

"He should worry. It's worth a quarter of a million to him to win."

Dugan lapsed into silence. His nature that would have flared up into fury at any outright dishonesty was only overwhelmed by this campaign of sleeplessness and funereal lilies. Kettlety and Plaistow must be darn wise in the tricks of getting at a guy through his mind. And then this uncanny stunt of always knowing where Dugan was. Detectives? Sure. That explained it without a word. But now in the cold, damp darkness of two in the morning, shooting down an unknown road at fifty miles an hour, there seemed something amazing about it, something almost occult. Doughty a spirit as he was, it got him. The nerves of his scantily clad body tightened into knots from the cold and excitement. They seemed to have been ont the road for hours.

"For the love of Heaven, Dan," he muttered, "where you taking us?"

The man at the wheel leaned over: "Back into the city."

They drove across a long bridge into Manhattan just as a string of barges was about to be towed under. Stringer, looking back, saw his car had been the last to pass before the draw was lifted. It was a Heaven-sent opportunity. If by any chance a car was following them it had been left behind. He turned sharply and drove indiscriminately empty side streets. At last he found what he was looking for—a small four-

story hotel with a much-beglazed bar on the first floor, relic of preprohibition days. In the office was a faint glow of light.

As they got out of the car Stringer noticed a streak of smudge on Dugan's face left from his fire fighting. It gave the older man an idea. Telling Ole to take a couple blankets from the suit case, he wrapped Dugan in their crimson folds and led him, limping into the hotel office.

"This gentleman has just been burned out of his apartment," he said to the clerk. "Can you put him and his friend up for a couple of days?"

The clerk rubbed his eyes, took several looks at the figure wrapped in crimson blankets and decided that he would risk it. Five minutes later Stringer was back on upper Broadway, and in a most jubilant frame of mind. Not all the detectives in the world could locate his fighter this time. He found himself a hotel near Times Square, and the next morning strolled nonchalantly into the office at the top of the Garden. As he did so an unctuous voice greeted him. "Hello, there, old pal!"

It was Johnny Plaistow, Kettlety's manager, fat of paunch and fatter of jowl. As he stood there fanning himself with his panama, his thin, black locks artfully plastered over his temples lent him a demure, almost babylike expression. The conversation did not touch upon floral tributes, nor upon detectives. Poker face met poker face. Stringer extended his hand.

"Hello, Johnny," he said; "glad to see you. How's your boy coming along?"

"Oh, fair to middling. How's yours?"

"Never better."

"Where you keeping him, Dan? Up in the country?"

Not a telltale flicker crossed Stringer's face.

"Yep," he said; "up where it's quiet. He's down nice and fine."

They exchanged quarter cigars and an anecdote. Then, after seeing Folgerey, Dugan's manager strolled back to his hotel. It was all so under cover. He and Plaistow had hobnobbed like lodge brothers. Folgerey, promoting the fight, hadn't an inkling of what was going on. Even as he had chatted with Plaistow, the wily mind behind that baby face was probably framing some new trick. Well, there was nothing to do but wait, take it lying down. He had told Ole where he would be, and warned him not to call up except in case of dire necessity.

For hours he sat on the bed, his eyes inevitably traveling to the telephone, as he fought the desire to put in the call which in a few paltry seconds would tell him exactly how things were going at that dingy uptown hotel. Night came on. The incessant honking of the theater taxis came to him from the street below. He ordered another meal sent up. The gray mound of ashes in the tray had to be emptied for the twentieth time. At twelve he began to breath easier.

Then the phone rang.

"Mr. Stringer, Mr. Stringer," inquired an anguished voice, "bane this you?"

"Of course it's me. What's the trouble?"

"Pete, he bane stolen, Mr. Stringer. I yust dozed off, and when I woke up, he bane nowhere in the hotel."

Stringer tried to think fast.

"Stay right where you are. I'll be up."

When Stringer arrived he found Ole pacing the office floor while the clerk looked on with sleepy disinterest. At sight of Stringer, Ole pointed to the clerk.

"This fella say he switch a call on for Pete, and then yust a few minutes later Pete, he come down with suit case and leaves the hotel."

Stringer turned.

"Why didn't you stop him?"

The clerk smiled ingratiatingly.

"And why should I? Didn't he pay his bill?"

"Do you know where the call came from, or what it was about?"

The clerk shook his head. Then his face brightened. At last he could be helpful.

"But listen, gentlemen," he said. "About an hour ago a package came for him. I'd 'a delivered it—only you insisted Mr. Dugan did not want to be disturbed."

As he concluded the speaker reached under the counter and produced a long, rectangular package, neatly wrapped. Stringer took it grimly, shook it, then lifted it to his nose.

"Bane it more lilies?" asked Ole.

Stringer nodded.

"But the fight's to-morrow. What bane they going to do with him?"

The older man's lips tightened grimly.

"Oh, he'll probably show up in time to weigh in, full of bad booze or dope!"

When Harry Kettlety, middleweight champion of the world, got up the next morning, his room with its drawn curtains of heavy brocade was cool and airy. It was after eleven, as for once he had not been obliged to get up for a workout. Feeling singularly blithe of spirit he dawdled for a while before his mirror, smoothing down his flaxen hair, and studying a slight cut on his lantern jaw which a sparring partner had given him two days previous. Then he thought of the swimming pool which his hotel afforded—a magnificent affair of white tile and marble columns—and decided to take a plunge before ringing for his orange juice and soft-boiled eggs. Putting on a dressing gown over his bathing suit, he started for the elevator.

As he did so a door two rooms below his opened, and a figure clad similarly to his own appeared. There was no mistaking that thickset body nor the scowl above it.

"What the devil you doin' here?" he demanded.

"Shure," said Dugan, "I knew there was just one place in the world I could get a night's sleep, and that was in a room next to yours."

Kettlety flushed.

"Next to mine? I don't know what you mean."

"Yeah? The smell of lilies must have destroyed your memory."

The champion had become extremely cool.

"Lilies?" he inquired. "Lilies! Say, buddy, I can't make out what you're driving at."

Dugan's eyes narrowed. As they talked the two fighters had been automatically moving toward the elevator, each watching the other as warily as though already within the ring. Suddenly Kettlety realized that Dugan, also, was on his way to a swim.

"See here, Pete," he said conciliatingly. "This won't do. You and me can't be seen swimming together the morning of our scrap."

"Yeah? Then you better go back to yuhr room."

As he spoke Dugan reached to ring for the elevator. Their hands met, and a look of cold calculating contempt came into the champion's eyes.

"Take your hands off me, you big bum!" he blustered. At the same time he let drive with his left at Dugan's face.

The latter side-stepped and Kettlety's bare fist, with a diamond ring glistening on the third finger, whizzed past his temple. Two inches nearer and the sharp edges of the diamond would have made a cut over Dugan's eye that his opponent could have opened at will that evening.

"Gee, you'd pull anything, wouldn't you?" said Dugan, jerking off his dressing gown belligerently.

"Watch yourself," warned Kettlety coolly. "Don't forget where you are."

Dugan's fists came up and he was about to strike when two strong arms seized him from behind and pulled him back.

"Hold on there, old pal!" cried a genial voice. "What's the big idea?"

"I'm goin' to kill that guy."

Johnny Plaistow chuckled.

"Oh, come now, Pete," he said. "Don't kill Harry before me and a couple of chambermaids. Wait until you can be paid for it before fifty thousand dollars' worth of customers."

With a growl Dugan wrenched himself free, and at the same time Kettlety, dancing on his toes, began to weave in toward Dugan. Plaistow turned upon his own fighter.

"Hold on, Harry. What's the row?"

"I'm goin' to teach this roughneck a lesson he won't forget in a hurry!"

The big-paunched manager became abruptly energetic.

"Harry," he said, "you come with me!"

And, before the startled Kettlety could resist, he found himself being led forcibly back to his room. Dugan heard the lock click, and a moment later Plaistow came back alone.

"What you doin' here, anyway?" he demanded.

"I took a room next to Kettlety to get a night's sleep."

The faintest suspicion of a twinkle came into Plaistow's eyes.

"Well, did yuh get it?"

"Wait till to-night, and you'll see."

Dugan, accompanied by Stringer and Ole, came into the Garden about nine thirty. As they went to the dressing rooms they heard the crowd yelling at the preliminaries already under way. While Dugan was changing into his fighting togs, Stringer took Ole to one side. The manager's face was the color of chalk and he kept rubbing the perspiration from the palms of his hands. He knew what he was facing. He had seen too many fighters come up, just fail to make the grade, and then fade out of the pugilistic picture forever. It was to-night, or never.

Ole, on the contrary, was jubilant

"Py yingo!" he croaked. "Last night's sleep fixed him. And that bunch of lilies he yust find on the rubbing table—I t'ank it get his goat yust enough to make him fight like hell!"

Stringer refused to be impressed.

"Not when they've had his goat four days. Ten minutes before the gong? Perhaps. You never can tell. But four days of being razzed shoots the nerves to blazes. We gotta look out he don't blow up."

'Kettlety was fella to blow up last time."

"Maybe. He won't to-night."

They went back to where Dugan was reading a magazine. He grinned up at them. His confidence was back. He had outwitted that gang of stunt pullers, and the luxurious feel of his eleven hours' sleep was still balm and nectar to his harassed spirit—not to mention the memory of Johnny Plaistow leading Kettlety back to his room and locking him in like a naughty schoolboy.

"I'll win by the sixth, Dan," he said.

In his zeal Stringer knelt down till his face was on a level with Dugan's.

"Listen, Pete," he said hoarsely. "Get this. Keep it pinned right up before your eyes every minute of the fight! There's a lot of square boys in this game, but their name's not Kettlety. He was crooked last time you met him, and he'll be crooked every inch of the way this time. Watch out for fouls. And that he don't thumb your eyes. And if he starts shooting his mouth, don't listen! Get me?"

"Yeah, sure."

But Stringer was not convinced. As they pushed their way down a long,

crowded aisle to the ring, he got in a last word to Ole.

"Give him his layout between each round," he said. "He's too confident. He's goin' to rattle if things don't go right."

When the referee called them into the center of the ring Dugan had his first real chance to size up Kettlety since their meeting two years previous. Now he saw that the champion was as rangy as ever; but he looked good, the muscles of his arms and shoulders rippling smoothly under his heavily tanned skin. As usual he had a slight bend forward, as though peering down at his antagonist. If anything he appeared less melancholy and sour about the eyes than before. He trotted out briskly, amid a storm of applause, and extended his glove in a gesture of hearty good will.

Dugan struck it aside savagely.

"Cut the movie stuff," he said.

The gesture was an unpopular one. The crowd booed, and Dugan glared at them as though amazed that they should expect him to shake hands with a crook.

The gong rang. Instantly the champion revealed that he was still the same master boxer, the same artful dodger and flitting target. Then Dugan got fast, too. He tried circling to the right and left-hooking. It worked. He got in a couple of corkers. But Kettlety came back like a gigantic spring with a wicked jab to the jaw. Dugan scowled, and bored in hard. The stinging uppercuts he received taught him caution, and he danced away.

Rounds two, three and four went by. Then Kettlety began to read invisible handwriting on an invisible wall. This scowling bull-neck had something more than last time, while he, himself, had something less. It was hard to put a finger on exactly what the difference was. A trifle more weight in the punches, perhaps. An ability to be a fraction of an inch out of reach. A tantalizing right jab. Soon Kettlety found himself thinking more of avoiding punishment than giving it. But he was a veteran of too many battles to let this disturb him. His lip curved scornfully, and his steel-gray eyes seemed to be boring into Dugan's very soul, seeking out some abstruse weakness.

At the end of the fifth, Ole was radiant.

"It bane goin' nice, Pete," he whispered, looking up from his work on Dugan's legs. "Yust take your time. You got twelve rounds. Don't try for a kill yet. Wait till he bane yust a little weaker."

As the sixth opened Kettlety came out of his corner with a rush, charging at Dugan with bull-like ferocity. But it was not the blind onslaught of a man who lost his head; it was studied, deliberate, preconceived. With no time to side-step, Dugan braced himself. It was amazing the new energy that the weakening champion had found. Despite himself Dugan was crowded to the ropes. He covered his face and jaw. The crowd shrieked for a knock-out, while Kettlety rained blow upon blow to the head.

It looked as though Dugan would be beaten down by sheer repetition of blows when with a moan Kettlety suddenly danced backward. Dugan, peering through his guard, saw his adversary in the center of the ring, his face twisted with pain. He was shaking his right glove as though he had a wasp in it. Automatically, Dugan moved in.

To protect himself Kettlety went into a clinch. "You big thickhead!" he snarled. I've cracked my knuckles on your skull."

The referee broke them apart.

Kettlety waited, his injured hand lowered helplessly, his left waving valiantly before his face.

"Come on, you dub," he sneered. "*Now* maybe you've got a chance."

Dugan wavered, confused. What a

break! Kettlety's weak knuckles balking him again! For four days he had seethed with a desire to smash, annihilate that bird. But in a fair scrap. A scrap that would show him the better man! He didn't care whether they met with gas pipes down a dark alley, or handcuffed on the roof of a church. He wanted an even fight. Something went hot in his brain. By all the gods, he would have it!

He circled in. "Put your right hand behind yuhr back," he said. "I can left-hand you to death."

It was magnificent, but it was not game. For a moment Kettlety failed to get the significance of Dugan's challenge to battle it out with their lefts. Then he snarled out an acceptance. The crowd, as ever in the dark to the inside workings of a fight, were yelling for action.

Methodically, doggedly, with gritted teeth and heaving chests, the two belligerents settled down. They circled warily, then came in with their outlawed rights on guard, their lefts seeking like brown-headed snakes for some opening that would be fatal. Twice Dugan swung vicious left hooks with "K. O." written on them but each time he missed. Kettlety was equally unsuccessful. They both went to their corners with a slightly heroic air, as though engaged in a business that was above the ken of ordinary men.

The seventh opened in the same vein.

Ole, from his corner, could not hold in. He kept bawling to Dugan to use his right. Kettlety's corner seemed too dazed to yell. The crowd waited. It was unorthodox, but what matter? They saw each man was after a knock-out. As the seventh round merged into the eighth, Dugan's attention became more and more concentrated. He saw nothing but Kettlety's ever-weaving right and the target of his lantern jaw. He began to get an advantage, and pressed in harder for a conclusive swing.

Suddenly Kettlety's injured right shot out like a flash. Once! Again! Three times!

Dugan dropped to the canvas. The referee began to count and as he reached "seven" the crowd began to rise to go. It looked all over.

"Pete! Pete!" pleaded Ole from under the ropes. "Get up!"

As Dugan lay there, across the blankness of his mind was creeping a single disturbing thought. How had Kettlety been able to right-hand him with that bunch of injured kunckles? The pain must have about killed him. Yet he had struck harder the second time. Then suddenly the truth flashed over Dugan. Kettlety had faked the knuckle injury! Played to his squareness! And he had had a rush of blood to the head, and fallen for it. Just one more Kettlety trick! At first his indignation was hardly more than a spark. Then it spread through his veins like a gigantic cocktail. He became conscious of his legs, and that he was lying on one of his gloves. At the count of "ten" he forced himself to his feet.

Kettlety came in with a furious swing, but Dugan ducked under and went into a clinch. "You ain't long to live now," he muttered to Kettlety.

But this was mere whistling to keep his courage up. He was still groggy at the bell. The next round he had all he could do to keep out of Kettley's range. The referee broke him out of clinch after clinch. In the minute rest Ole rubbed the weakness out of his legs.

When the gong sounded for the opening of the eleventh, Dugan was himself again. He marched out from his corner confidently, like an army with bands playing, while Kettlety came out gingerly. The punishment of the first four rounds, plus a half dozen jolts Dugan had landed near the close of the tenth, were telling on the champion. His right eye was closed, but the leer of contempt still hovered around his

mouth. He was still the master boxer of all middleweights. That was his idea. He could hold on till the end for a draw.

Dugan feinted with his left, then his right; apparently decided to circle to the left, abruptly changed to the right, and circled that way. His right flashed. Blow and body moved in the same line of direction—and Kettlety's lean lantern jaw was the objective.

Kettlety went down like a long bag of sand.

The crowd, wiser after seeing Dugan fail to take the count, waited uproariously. Ladies in silk evening wraps stood in their seats. Brokers in white flannels and diplomats with waxed mustaches yelled encouragement to the fallen champion. At the count of "five" he stirred. Johnny Plaistow had half climbed into the ring, his enormous body shaking like jelly from excitement.

"It means yuh title!" he yelled. "It means yuh title!"

"Yuh title!" Kettlety's flickering senses focused on the words. He envisaged dimly the joys of his championship. The adulations of his gang of "yes men." His big car. His luxurious apartment. His real estate. Mahogany staterooms in ocean liners. And, against this, a confusion of debts and his final descent out the pugilistic back door into the gutter.

"Get up!" shrieked a thousand voices.

Kettlety, arising by a terrific effort, started to run. It was as though he would flee, bearing with him his title and all its golden perquisites. Dugan caught up halfway between his own and a neutral corner, and this time Harry Kettlety, master boxer and master trickster, stayed down for the count.

Dugan left the ring in a haze. Ole and a score of admiring fans helped him over the reporters' tables. The crowd with a sudden reversion of loyalty, was now all for Dugan, but the new champion took no interest. He heard Stringer saying, "Some scrap after the four days you've been through!" as though Dan was a stranger.

They went down to the dressing rooms, but even after his shower and rubdown Dugan still did not talk. He looked white and dazed. Ole eyed him anxiously, fearful the three blows of the near-fatal eighth had affected him.

"Well, Pete," he ventured finally, "you bane champion. Yust how does it feel?"

Dugan gave him a far-away look.

"Huh! I don't know. I got something on my mind."

When they came out of the Garden, crowds were still standing on the sidewalk. Ole started to call a taxi. Dugan drew back, pulling his hat down over his eyes.

"I wanta walk," he said.

And, as if to prove it, the newly crowned champion headed with jaw thrust forward in the direction of Broadway. Finally he stopped before a brightly lighted store and entered with Ole at his heels. A sleek young clerk stepped up.

"Here, you," said Dugan; "take this address. 'Harry Kettlety, Room 3708, Hotel McAllister.'"

"Yes, sir, I have it."

Dugan pointed into the show window.

"Send up a dozen of those lilies. A dozen every hour till morning!"

The clerk looked up, perplexed.

"Pardon, are they for a funeral in the hotel?"

"Sure they're for a funeral," growled Dugan. "Kettlety and a guy named Johnny Plaistow are holdin' a wake up there."

More stories by Mark Reed will appear in forthcoming issues of THE POPULAR.

A Chat With You

IT is not a tactful thing to interrupt a good story or to spoil it by giving out anticipatory hints before the author has an opportunity to complete his narrative. We are taking a chance this time; we are taking it for granted that you have read all the stories in this issue before you have arrived at this page. One of the stories in the present number seems to us so remarkable that we want to talk about it. If you have not read it, turn back and read it now before you read another line of this column. We don't want to spoil any of its thrill for you. We can wait till you finish the story, if you have not done so already. The story is "The Good Spirit of Uncle Billy." The author is A. M. Chisholm.

* * * *

CHISHOLM is an outdoor man of sorts who has known all manner and varieties of men and observed their customs. Let him tell you a little about the genesis of the story, "The Good Spirit of Uncle Billy."

"The incident of the coffeepot full of whisky," writes Chisholm, "and whisky, dosed with wolf poison, supplied to a crooked Indian chief, was told me as an incident of the old days in Idaho, by an old-timer, now gone to his reward, for whom I am executor. As he told it, the Indians were Shoshones who were making trouble for a pack outfit. They took this poisoned Indian and made a pack of him, done up on a pack horse, and took him with them when they pulled out and buried him at a safe distance. I have no doubt of the verity of this yarn, because this old bird was one of the most close-mouthed individuals possible when sober. The only time he reminisced was when drunk and then he shook loose merely an occasional phrase. Mostly disjointed at that. The above was pieced together from several such occasions."

* * * *

THE story gave us, when we read it, a genuine thrill. The characters are all so real, the atmosphere and color so clear and true. The truculent, painted redskins with their hard-eyed chief before them, the pawing of the ponies they rode, the smell of the prairie, tinged just a bit with wood smoke from a camp fire. The major, and the boy who afterward grew to be Uncle Billy. Above all, the mysticism touched on by the apparition of the little rabbit, the Good Spirit of Uncle Billy.

* * * *

FOR a change from the old outdoors and the spirit of the pioneers, try, if you have not already done so, "Two Seats on the Aisle," by Fred MacIsaac. This is a story of the town and the folk who live in steam-heated apartments and wear conventional clothes. And yet we think it quite as adventurous as a tale as the one of the blanketed Indians and the hard-boiled American who outwitted them.

* * * *

OTHER stories in this issue—such as those by Roy Norton, B. M. Bower, Holman Day, William Hemmingway and Mark Reed—convey in more convincing fashion than we could the fact that we are giving you the best kind of fiction that has action in it. "The Crystal Intrigue," by Robert J. Pearsall, is quite in a class by itself as a novel.

HOWARD FIELDING opens the next issue with a novel, "The Dark Policeman." Is it a story of mystery? Judge from the title. Is it a thrilling story of action? Judge from the author's name. Also in the next issue, out one week from the present reading, you will find H. H. Knibbs, Roy Norton, Holman Day, B. M. Bower, Robert J. Pearsall, Karl Detzer and William Hemmingway. In later issues you will find stories by Francis Lynde, W. B. M. Ferguson, Bertrand Sinclair and Will McMorrow. These names represent, we think, the very best that is being written to-day in the line of stories of action, of stirring incident, of optimism and endeavor.

* * * *

WE are looking for new ones all the time. We hold to the older favorites and yet we are always trying out new candidates. We have a few to spring on you in the next few issues. We will not mention their names but let them speak for themselves. Remember, we come out every Friday. We publish the best fiction by the best authors. And the price is fifteen cents.

THE POPULAR

In the Next Issue, February 11, 1928

The Dark Policeman — HOWARD FIELDING
Novel.

Noch-Tee's Daughter — HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS

The Amateur Who Slammed John L.
Boxing Article. — WILLIAM HEMMINGWAY

The Headfirst Fool — HOLMAN DAY
A Four-part Story—Part III.

She Looked Like Lois — ROBERT J. PEARSALL

Oil on the Waters — ROY NORTON

Haywire — B. M. BOWER
A Five-part Story—Part V.

The Masterpiece — KARL W. DETZER

A Chat with You — THE EDITOR

Sore throat while you wait

Working in stuffy quarters, sleeping in over-heated homes, mingling with crowds and using appliances that others constantly use, people run an almost constant risk of a cold or sore throat—or worse.

At the first sign of either, use Listerine, the safe antiseptic, full strength. Gargle with it repeatedly. Rinse your mouth with it. Employ it occasionally as a nasal douche.

These simple measures may be the means of sparing you a trying—and possibly—a costly and painful siege of illness. In thousands of homes Listerine has checked colds and sore throats before they had a chance to become serious.

Being antiseptic, Listerine immediately attacks the countless disease-producing bacteria that lodge in the nose, mouth, and throat waiting until body resistance is low to strike.

Remember that while you are thus helping Nature ward off disease, you are also putting yourself on the polite side socially, for Listerine, as you know, ends halitosis (**unpleasant breath**). **Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, Mo., U. S. A.**

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Relief from Curse of CONSTIPATION

A PROMINENT physician, of Battle Creek, Mich., says: "Constipation is a disease of civilization. Wild men and wild animals do not suffer from this malady, which is responsible for more misery than any other single cause."

But immediate relief from the scourge of constipation has been found. The Research Laboratories of the United Drug Company in Boston have developed a tablet which attracts water from the system into the dry, lazy evacuating bowel called the colon. This fluid softens and loosens the sluggish food waste and causes a gentle, complete evacuation.

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Stop suffering from constipation. Chew a pleasant-tasting Rexall Orderly tonight before retiring and feel fine tomorrow. Rexall Orderlies are sold only at Liggett and Rexall Drug Stores. Get a package of 24 tablets for 25 cents.

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YOUR TEETH ARE ONLY AS HEALTHY AS YOUR GUMS

New Liquid Kills Germs That Cause Dandruff And Falling Hair

STOP worrying about hair troubles—dandruff, falling hair, approaching baldness! Here is a new kind of liquid, hermetically sealed in vials, that is ending dandruff and falling hair, and growing new hair for thousands everywhere.

This new treatment, perfected by the Allied Merke Institutes, Inc., Fifth Avenue, New York, is based on countless experiments which prove that in an enormous number of cases hair troubles are caused by tiny parasitical germs.

These germs work down into the roots of the hair and render them dormant—inactive. As a result, with the roots unable to supply their vital nourishment, the hair soon becomes dry, brittle, lifeless—and begins to fall out.

Ordinary treatments fail because they merely treat the surface skin and have little or no effect on the harmful bacteria embedded below the surface. But this new treatment, called Merke Derma Vials, penetrates *beneath* the surface—kills the infecting germs—carries off the unhealthy scaly substances which cause dandruff and falling hair—at the same time promoting a healthy circulation which supplies the dormant hair roots with the life-giving nourishment they so sorely need.

Extensive laboratory tests by one of the world's foremost research laboratories concluded with a report from which we quote: "The results indicate that the tonic *killed* the test organism (bacteria) *in less than three minutes.* The results also indicate that the tonic is capable of penetrating and preventing the growth of the test organism (bacteria)."

FREE—One regular 25-cent vial

Thousands of people from coast to coast are discovering Merke Derma Vials—the secret of new, lustrous, healthy hair. Now we welcome this convincing test. Simply take advantage of our generous free offer explained in the panel above, use Merke Derma Vial liquid yourself and see how remarkably helpful it is in ending dandruff and falling hair. Sign and mail coupon TODAY. Allied Merke Institutes, Inc., Dept. D-422, 512 Fifth Avenue, New York City.

Allied Merke Institutes, Inc.,
Dept. D-422, 512 Fifth Avenue,
New York City

I'm willing to be convinced—without obligation on my part. Please send me one of the regular 25c Merke Derma Vials absolutely FREE and tell me how to use it.

Name .....

Address .....

City .....State .....

Camel

The cigarette that leads by billions

Just to state a great truth in another way—Camel is so exactly what so many smokers want that no other brand is even a close second.

If all cigarettes were as good as Camel you wouldn't hear anything about special treatments to make cigarettes good for the throat. Nothing takes the place of choice tobaccos.