MAY 5, 1928
VOL. XCI No. 1

WEEKLY
MAY 5, 1928

The Popular

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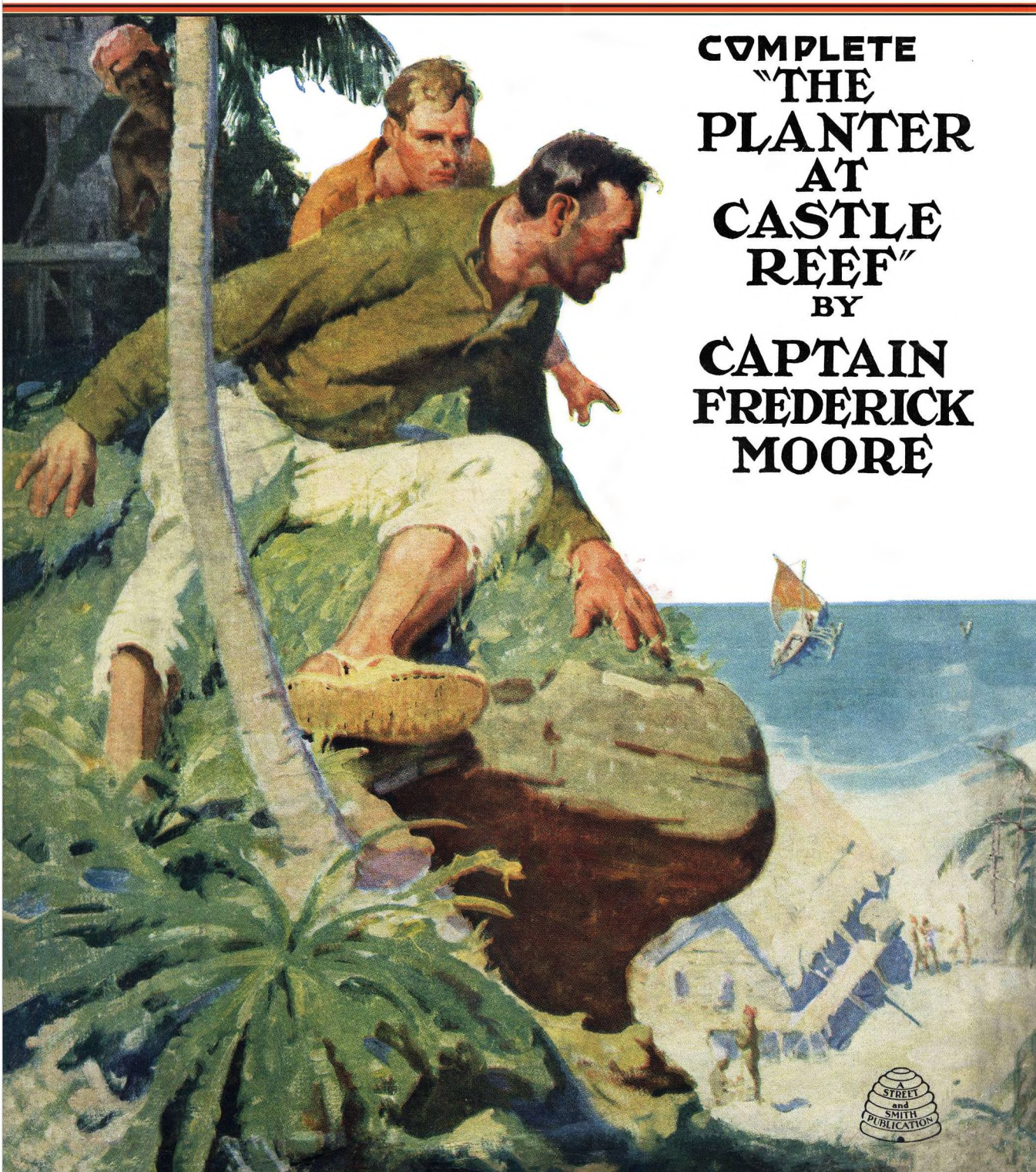

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CAPTAIN FREDERICK MOORE

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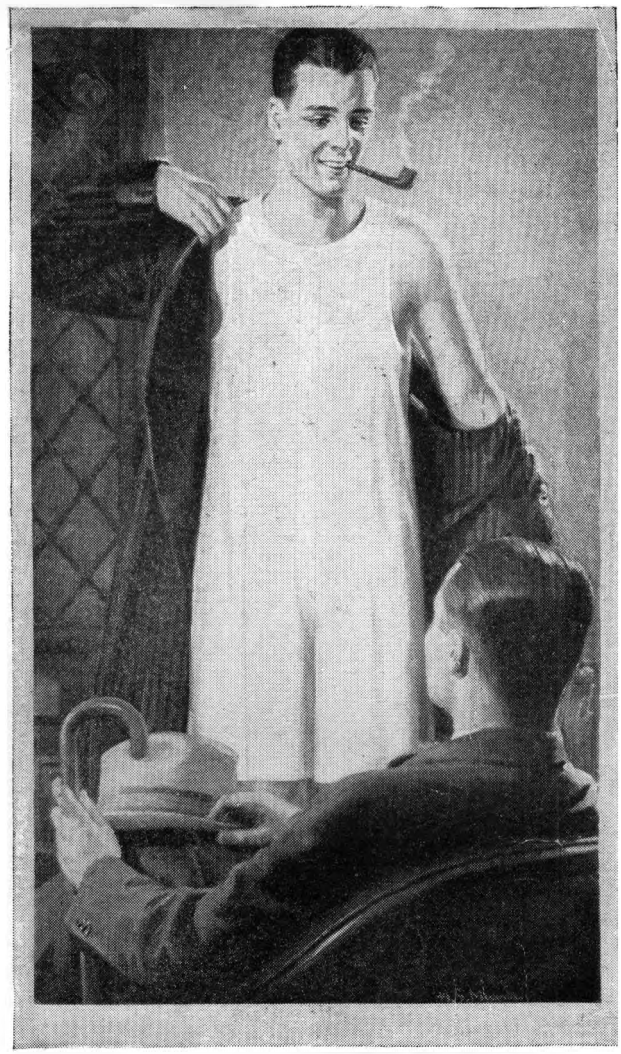

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GOOD READING

By CHARLES HOUSTON

READING a Chelsea House novel is as good as spending a fascinating evening in the theater, and when you think of the price of theater tickets nowadays, you bless the man who first conceived of setting the price of these popular copyrights so low.

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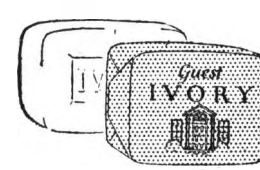


THE POPULAR

VOL. XCI MAY 5, 1928 No. 1

The Planter at Castle Reef

By Captain Frederick Moore

Author of "The Reason Why," Etc.

A tropical island makes one think of green palms and scented breezes and sunshine like warm gold—and Castle Reef was all of that; but, amid the beauty of it, a perilous drama of real life was going on, with five white people, one a woman, as the actors.

A COMPLETE NOVEL

CHAPTER I.

A STOLEN GUN.

THE queer, black, hunched figure in the vague starlight of the palm grove moved slowly from tree to tree, advancing toward the yard of the plantation house. It was not until it passed through a bare space that the figure was revealed for a second as a man.

He stopped to listen, pressed against the gigantic bole of a coconut-palm tree, leaning forward and peering into darkness ahead, mottled with the pale brilliance of the trickle of starlight through the mop heads of the palms.

To the left, the sea was visible as a dark plain with a clear-cut horizon against the light-speckled sky. To the northward there was a long streak of luminosity which was the phosphorescent surf on the coral reef. The dull

boom of the breakers came down the shore of the island in a soothing undertone.

The man strained his eyes into the great pits of velvety blackness where the edge of the jungle, which rose on the hills, marked the end of the sand flats extending to the beach.

Here and there a palm tree that had been whitewashed against insect pests, stood out of the gloom with greater clearness than the untreated trees. These white trees gave the man his bearings to the plantation house. He had fixed their positions in his mind by daylight, preparing for his journey under cover of darkness.

Satisfied that there were no lurkers along his path, the man moved forward. The blade of a knife in his hand caught the glint of starlight as he dodged out of one shadow into another. He made rapid progress until he had reached a point which he knew to be within a hundred yards of the veranda of the big plantation house.

He dropped to his hands and knees and crawled past the house. Then he moved at right angles and approached the building from a side veranda. He waited a few minutes when he had reached the vines which grew over the railing. A dog barked somewhere in the hills.

Suddenly a light flamed behind the house. The man lay still, waiting to see what the brightness that spilled out upon the grass could mean. It came from the screened opening in the side of the bamboo cookhouse. He saw the vague figure of the old Chinese cook filling a long-stemmed iron pipe as he sat up in his cot. The dog had waked the old man, and he was having a smoke.

Without noise, the man near the veranda stood to his feet and, feeling for the stanchion of the railing, drew himself up slowly. He swung his legs inward in the heavy blackness of the wide veranda and lowered his feet until they were upon the matting. He tested his weight on the veranda flooring before each step, and gained the attap wall of the house.

He felt for the rough edge of the *kajang,* or awning of split bamboo which shuttered the big window. He found it but a few feet from the spot where he had pressed against the wall, and thrust his hand gently under the overlapping fibers. He felt softly with the tips of his fingers until they encountered the edge of a web belt hanging down inside.

There was a slight sound inside the house, as if a sleeper had stirred. But the sound proved to be the subdued grunt of a lizard under the house. Five times it coughed, and then there was a faint rattle as the lizard scampered over dried leaves.

The hand inside the house followed the belt downward until the fingers reached the soft surface of polished leather. It was a loose flap. The man drew it toward him, holding it out from the surface of the *kajang,* and pressed his other hand in carefully until he could feel cold metal. He extracted the revolver from the holster and let the belt sway back into position. He slipped the long-barreled weapon into the front of his unbuttoned shirt and thrust the muzzle down under his belt so the pressure of his body would keep it in place.

Slowly the man moved across the veranda. He stopped for a few minutes at the railing and drew the revolver out, dropped the cylinder into the palm of his left hand, and ran his thumb nail over the flanges of the cartridges. There were five of them, one chamber being empty for the hammer when the weapon was closed. He put the revolver under his belt and cautiously lowered himself to the ground.

The light was still burning dimly in the cookhouse. The man swung away for the beach, making a wide detour in front of the house, and, passing up

through the palm grove again, found the bottom of a path which ran up a hill under cover of a heavy undergrowth.

It took half an hour for him to feel his way to the top of the hill, where he emerged into ferns and heavy grass. There was an inkling of morning light on the sea horizon. He was now on a level with the tops of the gigantic palm trees of the flats below. He stood for a minute and gazed out to seaward, then turned and pushed across the clearing toward the dark spot which was a small, square bungalow without any verandas. It stood up from the ground like an ungainly haystack, its low-hanging eaves of thatch clearly marked in the starlight.

Moving straight to the black pit which marked the open doorway of the bungalow, the man climbed the crude steps, and walked into the single room of the building.

"Who's that?" called a voice, and then the creak of somebody sitting up swiftly on a rattan cot.

"Keep your shirt on," said the man with the revolver.

"Well, you give me a jolt when you come pounding in like that," complained the man in the bed. "What time is it, baron?"

"Near daylight. And say—you lay off that name around here. How do you know somebody ain't listenin' in on what's said around this dump?"

"I forgot—I was only coming awake." There was the flash of a match from a mosquito-netted bed, and a thin-faced man lit a cigarette.

The man addressed as "baron" struck a match himself and lit the rag wick of a coconut-oil lamp. The heavy, wavering flame showed that *kajangs* on each of the four sides of the new bungalow were drawn inward and secured with pieces of undried rattan.

Turning his back to the door, he drew out the revolver he had stolen. He was a man with a dark and squarish face, his heavy jaws covered with the bluish tinge of a stubble of beard. His cotton trousers had been hacked off below the knees to make "shorts," and his feet were in slippers. About his lower legs he had wrapped strips of an old khaki shirt to protect his skin against the thorns of creeping vines. His heavy neck, revealed by the loose collar of his khaki shirt, had two white stripes under the left jaw—scars that had been left by the swift, clean slashes of a razor. His black hair was short, and his forehead was crinkled thoughtfully as he bent over the weapon in his hands and examined it with critical eyes.

The man in the cot thrust aside the netting and peered out at the other, something like a look of horror on his long, thin face.

"You damned fool!" he whispered. "You went and got it—and I told you it was the most dangerous thing to monkey with!"

"I guess I don't need you to tell me what to do," said the other, proceeding with his scrutiny of the weapon. He drew out the cartridges one by one and tested their weight in his hand.

"Hassler, I tell you Finlayson'll know, when that gun's found missing, that one of us must've got away with it."

"Aw, it'll maybe take a month before he misses it."

The tall man got out of the cot and moved toward Hassler. He who had been asleep was wearing blue-silk pajamas, and the elegance of the garments were strangely out of place in the crude surroundings of the new native-built bungalow. He was a higher type of man than his companion, who had the appearance of a beach comber. And the sharp contrast between the two accentuated the rough character of Hassler and had the effect of giving the other a more gentlemanly aspect than he might have had otherwise.

"We've got every reason to believe that Finlayson and his wife are beginning to be suspicious of us," went on the

tall one, sucking slowly at his cigarette while he stared at the revolver turning over and over in the dark man's hands. "That's why he built this shack and put us up here. He's afraid of us—and that's bad, when you consider our game. And we've got to be here when Gurnley comes."

Hassler looked up with a belligerent scowl.

"Say, listen, Mr. *Easton,*" he growled, with peculiar emphasis on the name; "you just mind your own business. Gurnley ain't here yet, and I got to depend on myself. We had to have a gun, and I've got it. Now shut your trap." He pulled up the sleeves of his shirt and exposed his hairy wrists. Then he stepped to his cot and put the weapon under the pillow of his cot, lit a cigarette and moved slowly to the door.

Easton went back to his cot and sat a while, smoking in silence. Now and then he looked up at the figure of Hassler filling the doorway, leaning against the frame.

Then, without warning, the sky flashed to crimson, and morning broke upon the island. The land breeze began to drift down from the hills and rattled the tops of the palms. Birds called in the jungle, and the clearing before the bungalow was filled with the shrilling of insects.

Hassler yawned noisily and turned away from the door.

"I guess I'm entitled to a little nap," he remarked. He took a new tin dipper from the wall and drank from a new water bucket in the corner. Then he rolled into his cot, turned his face to the wall, and was soon breathing deeply.

Easton dressed himself in white trousers, low shoes, and a soft shirt of brown silk. He rolled back the collar and, taking soap from a little shelf near his cot, began to lather his face. He shaved quietly, and when he had finished went to the door and looked out over the sea before he washed the soap from his face. He gave a low whistle.

"Say! There's a schooner in sight—and she looks as if she's going to pass us pretty close!"

Hassler leaped from bed and ran to the doorway. He looked in the direction Easton pointed. There was a vessel not three miles away, moving slowly on the port tack. Her canvas made a pretty picture as the sunlight glinted upon it in the salmon-tinted sea as she lifted daintily to meet the long, smooth, heaving swells.

"She ain't comin' in," said Hassler. "And if Gurnley was in her, she'd be headin' to make into the bay." He went back to his cot and threw himself down again.

Easton remained in the doorway watching the vessel. The sound of native voices came up from the flats below, but he could not see the beach there, nor the palm grove, for the bungalow was set too far back from the edge of the hill. But as he was about to leave the door, Easton's eyes caught something moving through the tops of the palms—something on the water in front of the beach just opposite the plantation house.

"Baron! Come here—quick!" Easton's long, thin body was bent forward stiffly and the bare arms hanging out of his rolled sleeves became rigid.

"Aw, what's up?" demanded Hassler crossly, as he turned to look toward the door.

"Finlayson's going out to meet the schooner—in his flying proa!"

Hassler was beside Easton in an instant. The native boat which held the attention of the two men had just cleared the beach and the triangular brown sail was bulging in the land breeze, and driving swiftly to sea toward the distant schooner.

"Now, what's the game?" demanded Hassler. "What's he makin' that sneak jump out for?"

"That's his own business, and we

couldn't've stopped him," said Easton. "But it's a cinch he jumped out before we could get to the beach."

"Say, ain't that his wife with him?" asked Hassler.

Easton squinted against the sun dazzle over the water.

"I'd say so," he agreed. "That white spot—amidships. Yes, that's Mrs. Finlayson. And sick as she's been, he takes her out at this time of the morning to whang around on the swells, which proves that they ain't going out just for a pleasure trip." He chewed at his finger nails, and then turned his soapy face toward Hassler.

"He's a slick bird, that planter," said Hassler soberly. "Never did know just what he thinks about us—he's so damned polite and smooth."

"I know what he's on the way to that schooner for."

"What—if you're so smart?"

"He missed that revolver, first pop, this morning. And he's out to see the skipper and have us collared and shipped away from this island."

"Aw," scoffed Hassler, "that gun's the only thing that makes me feel safe."

"I tell you, you've got Finlayson scared. He couldn't be sure about us—until you swiped that gun."

"How do you know he ain't a friend of that skipper, and has gone out for a visit?" demanded Hassler.

Easton snapped his fingers nervously.

"Maybe you're right—but I wish Gurnley'd come."

The finger snapping annoyed Hassler. He swore under his breath.

"Cut out that frettin', bo. I can handle things until Gurnley comes."

"Sure!" said Easton bitterly. "You always think you can handle anything—with murder."

"You stop talkin' like that!" flared Hassler. "You've got the jumps, that's what's the matter with you. On edge all the time. There was a couple of men killed at the start of this game, so you better look out what you say. You should have kept out of the game we're in, if you're so afraid of bumpin' off a guy that stands in the way."

Easton frowned.

"You go and do things before I know anything about it—like stealing Finlayson's gun."

Hassler rolled into his cot and lay on his back.

"Say, stop crabbin'. Nothin' suits you. And I'm tired of your beefin' mornin' and night. Anybody'd think there was a flock of harness bulls around the nearest pile of lava on this island. And are we the only two on Castle Reef Island who'd snitch a gun? What if the planter thinks some of his Malays swiped it?"

"Why didn't they swipe it in the last few years?" retorted Easton. "No, we show up—strangers with a thin yarn about how we got here—and the next thing the planter knows his gun disappears from where it's hung since the Lord knows when."

Hassler sat up and slapped his hands together, and gave a warning hiss. He had heard something outside the bungalow.

Easton was alert at once. He turned and looked out into the clearing and saw Hebat coming with a tray loaded with breakfast things.

The house boy, supplied as a servant from Finlayson's place on the flats below, was a tall, lithe young man, lean of face, light as to complexion for a Castle Reef native, and self-effacing in manner. His name meant "the handsome one," and its bestowal had been an inspiration. His features were uncommonly fine, yet not womanish. There was something in his face which betrayed a distant strain of shrewd Arab blood. His eyes were soft, large and full. His black hair was straight and long and showed from under a scarlet turban—more of a headband than a

formally tied turban. It matched the color of his *chawat,* or breech cloth.

Hebat halted at the threshold. He laid the tray on a small table just inside the door and then, with the backs of his hands to his forehead, he made a low salaam which revealed the top of his head to the two men. This deferential greeting started a soft tinkling of the double rows of little silver coins that hung as unused buttons down the front of his gay-patterned open cotton waistcoat. The usual ceremony of the morning greeting complete, the Malay picked up the tray and offered it in turn to Hassler and Easton.

Each of the men took from the tray a glass of amber-colored liquid with bits of fruit floating on top. Then, placing the tray back on the table, with flashes of scarlet and a tinkling of the decorative coins, Hebat flitted through the open doorway and moved to the path down the hill. He might have been some brilliant bird that had strayed in from the jungle.

"Well, y' see," laughed Hassler, as he put down his empty glass and reached for the coffeepot, "Finlayson didn't stop our grub comin' up, even if he's as suspicious as you think he is."

"What if it's a gentle hint to stay here while he's out in the boat," suggested Easton.

"You ain't far off the track, at that," said Hassler. "That fancy servant's smarter'n you'd think, even if he can't understand English—and I ain't so sure he can't, either. If I don't miss my guess, he'd like to hear what we've got to say about Finlayson's boat trip this mornin'."

"I wonder how long it'll be before Gurnley comes," fretted Easton.

"Aw, stop your squeal about the big boss. We've got along so far all right, ain't we? And the stuff's buried safe enough, so all we got to do is wait. Finlayson can't do anything, even if he does suspect we're phony. What can one white man do in a place like this—and a sick wife on his hands?"

They moved to the doorway with the coffee cups in their hands and watched the outrigger speeding over the water toward the approaching schooner.

"Then if you've got us in a jam, I'll leave the job to you of squaring things with Finlayson. If you're wise, you'll drop down to the plantation house and leave that gun somewhere so the planter'll find it when he comes in." Easton was speaking.

"That gun stays right here—and damn that schooner, anyhow! It's spoiled my mornin' for me."

The two were silent for a while, observing the leaping proa as it skimmed the crests of the great swells. There was a dark, moving figure in the stem of the boat—a half-naked Malay. There was another native astern with a steering paddle. And two men were on the outrigger body to trim the craft against the wind. The huddle of varied colors midway in the main craft, marked the position of Finlayson, and in front of him, a patch of blue and white revealed the presence of his wife.

Hassler sucked at his coffee noisily and glowered through the door, unappreciative of the tropical beauty lavished on the gently sloping clearing before the bungalow. It was all softly green with short ferns, wiry grass, and heavy, trailing vines from the near-by jungle; farther on was a three-foot border of feathery second growth through which wound the trail beaten into a path; then came the high-swinging, mop-topped palm trees with their heads on a level with the verge of the hill. There were glimpses of glowing sand below, edgings of white coral, a bit of frothing surf, and the wide background of blue water.

"I'll tell you what," began Hassler suddenly. "We're all wrong on this boat trip of his nibs. He's got that boat filled up with coconuts and fruit. The skipper out there's a friend of Finlay-

son—and he's takin' some fresh stuff out to a passin' pal."

Easton shifted his red slippers nervously.

"Maybe you've hit it. Anyway, I hope so. Also, it's likely that the captain of that schooner'll come in here to look us over—or Finlayson and his wife'll sail away with the vessel."

"What would we care if they did sail?"

"Not much," said Easton. "It's an easy question to answer—unless Mr. Finlayson comes back to his island in a coast-guard cutter. Then the gun you've swiped would do us a lot of good."

Hassler snorted in disgust.

"I tell you I've a hunch it's all right. And Gurnley ought to be here any day now. And what could the coast guard do? Finlayson can't prove I've got his gun, and it ain't likely that our police descriptions have got this far by this time—even if they've been sent this way. No, we're safe."

Easton set aside his cup and went inside to wash the dried soap from his face. He was suddenly silent, and every movement he made seemed to reveal the fact that he had made up his mind to a course of action independent of Hassler.

"Looks to me as if that schooner's comin' close enough so Finlayson can speak to the skipper," Hassler reported.

Easton lowered the towel from his face.

"If you're right, that's bad for us," he said quietly. "Maybe Finlayson'll make arrangements to have us shipped away from here. Under his concession, he's got the power of a magistrate. He's the law on Castle Reef."

For the first time Hassler looked worried.

"We'd have to jump for the jungle. We'd stay out long enough so the skipper'd git sick of waitin'. It costs a pile of jack to keep a ship at anchor. And, you ask me, I'm goin' to stick here till Gurnley comes, skipper or no skipper, planter or no planter."

Easton began to loosen a belt which he wore under his shirt. As he drew it off it swung heavily and stiffly, being of leather and stitched so that the pattern suggested the back of a snake.

"What's the big idea?" demanded Hassler.

Easton spread a hand towel on the floor, snapped the fastening at one end of the belt and shook it. There fell out a shower of gold pieces, small and new. They flashed in the sunlight that slanted through the doorway.

"I'm going to bury what's left on me of this stuff," he said firmly.

"You fool, put that out of sight before Hebat drops in here! Quick! You've got to keep a little on you for anything that goes wrong, and——"

"I don't intend to have any schooner skipper search me and find me lined with this stuff—you know what Gurnley said—the dates on these gold pieces'll give us away. And one of these could be dangerous enough to—hang us."

"Say, you shut your trap on that talk!" growled Hassler, with due caution. "That's what I got the gun for—nobody can frisk us and live through it. We can stand our ground on that, bo! One more dead man—or a dozen more—means nothin' now. Put that stuff away!"

Easton hesitated, then began to put the coins back in the belt. Hassler stood in the doorway to make sure no native could enter without warning.

"You're right, baron," admitted Easton. "We can't worry now about who's killed if we find ourselves cornered in this place."

"Planter or skipper, man or woman—I ain't carryin' any insurance on any of 'em. If Finlayson brings that skipper ashore to bother us, I've got five slugs in that gun and when the smoke clears away there'll be only two white men on Castle Reef."

CHAPTER II.

A DESPERATE PLEA.

WITH the sun slanting over the sea, Finlayson was almost blinded by the glare as he watched the schooner the outrigger was racing out to meet. Mrs. Finlayson, however, was seated with her back toward the strange vessel, and propped against some cushions. One of her fragile hands held a hand of her husband's. Now, anxiously, again with a wan smile, her young eyes studied his earnest face.

"I think she'll stop for us, all right," soothed Finlayson. "Didn't look so at first—and it disappointed me to see her keep her sails full. She was steering by the wind, and I was afraid she'd go off on another tack and bear away. Most captains hate to run too close to the island on this side—those shoals to the northward have never been very well charted, they tell me. But she's holding her course, and we'll speak her, sure enough."

She nodded without answering. The tropics had taken its full toll of her, in the way that is known to every white woman. Her color was gone. Even her eyes had paled. Her thin body had the limpness that follows exhaustion.

Finlayson suddenly swung up his free hand as a signal to drop the sail.

"I don't want to run right under her bows," he explained. "The skipper might decide to stand away from us to give us a wide berth—and we're being watched from the quarter-deck."

Now Mrs. Finlayson spoke, her look traveling from his big sun helmet, held on tightly by a chin strap, to his freshly whited shoes. His white shirt and trousers still bore the creases of the smoothing iron.

"They'll know you're dressed for a ship visit," she told him, almost in a whisper. "A man would hardly be out fishing with natives—and all in white, like you."

"Yes, I had to look out for that—they wouldn't stop for just islanders in a proa. So it's all right—no more worry now, dear. And are you sure you feel all right? Motion of the proa doesn't bring back any of the old weakness, does it?"

"No, I find it lulling—and the air seems to strengthen me."

Castle Reef Island was a full two miles behind them now, outlined vividly upon the faintly blue sky. The island lifted from the sea in a series of brilliant green-black turrets based upon white rocks. It was the turrets that gave the lonely scrap of land the aspect of a fortress. They were jungled heavily. And from where Mrs. Finlayson's sick eyes peered back at them, the rich growth studding them resembled thick, green plush. Circling these were the coral beaches with the ocean meeting them in a smokelike spume.

Finlayson stood up and waved an arm toward the schooner. The man studying the outrigger from the quarter-deck made a signal of his own with his arm, but not to the planter. Presently the foresail began to slack.

"Confound the luck!" breathed Finlayson. "Is she easing her foresheet to tack?"

His wife stirred, turning her head to question:

"Is it the *Unicorn?* Or do you know her?"

"She's strange to me," Finlayson told her. "If it was Marstow, he'd stop." He pushed back the helmet and wiped the sweat from his forehead with the back of a hand.

"Take off your helmet—wave it," she suggested.

He did this instantly, and next put on some brown goggles. The shaded glass interfered with his vision, but he endured the handicap while he once more waved the helmet up and down with vigor.

"There we are!" he broke out joy-

fully. "They're not hauling the spanker aft—it's all right. She's going to stop after all. Good!" He sank back to his seat atop the coconuts.

The schooner fell off a couple of points. Presently she was heading straight for the proa, which began to roll in the swells, now that the way was off her. Mrs. Finlayson's straw hat was small. Her husband hastened to open and raise over her a large, faded-green umbrella. The filtered light through the fabric deepened the hollows of her eyes and accented her pallor.

Now the Malays of the crew idled, one in the bow relishing his betel, the others on the outrigger frame, balancing with bare, brown legs in the swaying water. The boat was loaded with coconuts, mangoes, *pisang*, pawpaws, and a basket of huge thimblelike berries, more scarlet than sweet. These were intended as a gift to the vessel they had hailed.

As the schooner swung slowly and got out of the direct sun track, Finlayson could see her better. He took his goggles. She was slowly drawing nearer in the softest of morning breezes. Her mainsail had a wide patch across the head. Her spanker was spotted with squares of glaringly new canvas on the old cloths. Her topsails were all new. She had a white stripe below the line of her bulwarks.

The planter shook his head.

"Nothing familiar about her. Rotten luck!"

"Then we'll have to deal with a stranger!"

"Yes. I've been praying for Captain Harper, or Smithson, or even Ackerley. Any one of them would help us sure. Well, we'll do the best we can. If this skipper sees how weak you are, and knows that you're the only woman on the island—and maybe he's heard of me and——"

Mrs. Finlayson's eyes widened with a look of strain that he knew.

"We *must* have help!" she declared. "Oh, Ned, if you have to carry me up on deck so I can say something to him—or if he's a good-natured man, he might come into the proa."

"Don't worry, dear," he assured her. "He'll understand what we're up against when I tell him all about it."

The schooner, now within a hundred yards of the proa, slowly luffed, swinging a broad stern toward the watchers. "*Amoy Maid,* Hongkong," read Finlayson from the white lettering. Once more he got to his feet.

The man with the glasses was leaning over the port taffrail.

"What'll you be wantin', mister?" he called.

"I've brought you out some fresh fruit, and I'd like to have a word with you, sir. I'm the planter here."

A second man came up from below and idly watched the proa, and said something to the man who held the binoculars. The man who had spoken was evidently the master of the schooner.

"Well, I can use some fresh fruit, but I got to make what I can of this breeze," argued the captain. His tone showed that he was not greatly interested—even hinted at ill temper.

"It's important, or I wouldn't trouble you, sir. I want to send word to the police—or my wife——"

"What you think I am? A gunboat, mister? All right—fill up alongside." His command was more cheerful, but it might have been mere curiosity.

The triangular sail of the proa was snapped into place and she headed for the *Amoy Maid,* whose jibs were flabbing loosely, with her gaffs beginning to swing and slat her sails fretfully.

A sea ladder was dropped with a thumping and slashing, and the dark-skinned crew of the schooner began to chatter. The proa swung close in, and checked her way in the lee of the larger vessel. Finlayson grasped at the ropes and swung up.

By now the captain of the *Amoy*

Maid was standing by the mizzen chains, smoking a long, thin, Sumatran cigar. He studied with pleased eyes the load of fruit in the outrigger, and snapped his fingers at his native crew to make them hustle the gift aboard.

Finlayson went up the lee ladder, and touched his helmet in a respectful greeting. As the skipper nodded in return, the planter saw that he had to deal with a man who was probably overshrewd in everything.

"I'm Finlayson—I've got the copra concession at Castle Reef. My father was here before me, and I inherited the plantation when he died—a year or so back. Maybe you've heard of us? Most schooners in these waters have."

The thin-faced, shrewd-eyed skipper hesitated. Then he spat overside, and shook his head.

"Don't know as I do. My name's Catlett—bound for S'pore. I'd like to be gettin' on, too. Now what do you look for me to do?"

"I'm in rather a serious situation, captain." Finlayson's voice shook with his earnestness. "And I've come to ask a favor."

"I ain't traversin' round and stoppin' to do favors." There was a note of displeasure mixed with reproof in Captain Catlett's voice.

"My wife's been at the plantation for three years," went on Finlayson. He gave a tip of his helmet downward to the proa. "She's been terribly sick. Nerves, mostly—from losing the baby a while back, in the last rains."

Captain Catlett frowned.

"I ain't a doctor, if that's what you're lookin' for. And what's that you said about police?"

"We're alone, sir, except for our Malays. They're a good lot—were with my father. But lately, my wife and I have worried. I had a revolver, and it's been stolen—and we feel helpless without a weapon."

Captain Catlett spat again, and the man standing by the helmsman—without doubt the mate—sniffed scornfully.

"I dunno as I can do anything about *that!*" said the captain.

If it were not for the fruit going over the side, Finlayson felt, the skipper's language would not have been so conservative.

"Will you sell me a gun? My wife's life is in danger, and——"

"No, sir! I ain't goin' to have the law on me." The captain veered his eyes downward to the green umbrella. Finlayson knew now that the skipper was simply killing time until the last of the fruit was aboard.

"You don't know just how badly fixed I am," went on the planter desperately. "It's not the Malays, as you probably think, that worry me. There are a couple of white men who have come to Castle Reef—they call themselves Hassler and Easton, but I believe they are lying about themselves—and I'm not sure of what they'll do. I've an idea they're fugitives from the police, and that's what I really want you to make a report on in Singapore. I believe they took my gun—and that means trouble."

"What'd y' want to let 'em go aboard your island for?" asked Captain Catlett. There was an amused light in the skipper's eyes. "You're runnin' the place, ain't y'? Seems to me, you ought to be able to boss the island."

"I couldn't help myself," explained Finlayson. "They landed in an outrigger from Catabaygan Island, sixty miles to the south, and the outrigger was gone before I could get to the beach. Either the native crew was afraid of 'em, or they had it fixed with the Catabaygan men to skip before I could make a kick."

"Put 'em to work—or p'izon 'em," said Catlett. The mate gave a subdued guffaw in appreciation of the skipper's joke.

"I've offered to send 'em back to Catabaygan in this outrigger," went on Finlayson hurriedly, "but they don't

want to go. Anyway, they stalled and just looked at each other. And now they've got my gun."

"Mister, you'll be in one hell of a pickle if them men don't let you land on your island again. You two better come along with me, and git the coast guard to come back here." Catlett was suddenly sympathetic, as if he now fully understood the plight of the planter and his wife.

"Yes, I took a wide chance—but I thought I'd have a gun on my way back. They may think I've got one, anyway. As to my wife going along with me now, I can't leave the island—the plantation is all I have in the world; but the worst of it is my wife is a very poor sailor and she can't risk the passage, with the monsoon about to break. You'll have a stormy passage. As to the law on giving me a gun—I'm the concession holder here, and I'm entitled to have arms, so there'll be no law broken if——"

"Mister, I only got one gun aboard—a rifle—and if I let that out of my hands, and got into any trouble, I might lose my vessel. Anyhow, the owners'd raise pa'ticular hell, and I'd be ashore without any ship. I never know when I'll have to shoot one of these hellions for'ard—or be ready to, anyhow. So I better pay you for that——"

"No," protested the younger man hastily. "The fruit's for your trouble in stopping."

Catlett looked down to the green umbrella again.

"I hate to refuse," he said with unfeigned sincerity. "But if your wife's too ailin' to come along, and you can't leave——" He made a helpless movement with his hands swung outward.

"I'd like you to meet Mrs. Finlayson, sir." Then, without waiting for the reply which followed the suggestion, "Emily!" he called down toward the gently rocking proa. "Put back the umbrella—Captain Catlett, dear!"

The pale face turned upward, and it was smiling.

"Is it all right, Captain Catlett? You can help us out, can't you?" Her voice quavered.

The skipper touched his cap visor with the hand holding the half-burned cigar.

"I'm sorry, ma'am, but I don't see that I can do much. I'd like to accommodate, but I might lose my license if I had to have a gun myself. But I'll tell you what I'll do"—he turned to Finlayson—"I'll send the mate off in a boat, and you herd that pair into it, and I'll take 'em along with me."

Finlayson laughed ruefully.

"That's mighty kind of you, sir. But I don't intend to waste your time on any wild-goose chase. If they saw a boat—or any of your crew—coming ashore, it'd take a week to catch that pair. They'd head off into the hills, and you can't take any such chance. Besides, that would bring on an open break for me, and I'd be worse off the minute you were hull down. We'd probably be shot promptly, if there's anything in the suspicions I have of those two men."

Mrs. Finlayson's upward-peering eyes suddenly glinted from the sunlight on the tears misting them.

"We'd counted on you, captain," she said. "But, I'm sure you'd help if you could."

"Now, ma'am, don't you fret yourself," urged Catlett, touched by her show of keen disappointment. "Because if I've a chance to speak a ship, I'll git the news out."

"Ships—are—are scarce around here," she said haltingly.

"Yes, they be, ma'am. But I'll git word to the coast guard—quick's I can. You take my word for it, if I sight anything I'll go off my course. Them men won't dare do anything much, if you keep your natives on watch, and before a sheep could wiggle his tail twice, you'll see a cutter." Then, to Finlay-

son: 'If you could let your gents hear how t cutter's comin', they'd mind their Ps and Qs, gun or no gun."

"The trouble with that idea," said Finlayson, "is that first off, before I had any suspicions, I told 'em that it might be six months before a cutter showed up here; and now, if they're the desperate characters I think they are, any hint that a cutter's about to come would only increase our danger. I'll just have to keep up a close watch—but we hoped that you might end my wife's worry."

Catlett nodded. "I guess you'll be smart to play it the way you say, mister." But as Finlayson's expression and gesture said that the situation was grave enough, the skipper went on: "Yes, I know there's some pretty slick customers come down into these lonely islands —on the run, mostly, they be. But they'll be a little cautious, special since they'll know you've been out to talk to a vessel."

Finlayson moved closer to the skipper and kept his voice low so his wife could not hear.

"Yes, cautious—or too bold. I thought of that before I came out. They'll be worried. But I had to take the chance."

As Finlayson turned to the lee ladder, Captain Catlett lifted his binoculars and leveled them on Castle Reef Island. He made out two crouching figures in the doorway of the bungalow on the hill.

"Mr. Finlayson!" he said sharply. Then, quietly: "Them boarders of yours seem to have a likin' for the scenery—to seaward, this mornin'." He proffered the glasses to the planter. "I s'pose it's natural to want to look at a vessel. maybe matters ain't so bad as you make out. You've done a lot of guessin'—but what do you actually *know* on 'em, mister?"

Finlayson looked at the bungalow for a minute.

"I know what I'm talking about, captain," said the planter cautiously, with a glance toward the proa. "I've got a Singapore *baba* among my Malays. Speaks English like a professor, and understands it like his own tongue. But Hassler and Easton think he knows but a word or two of English—they think he's one of the natives of the island. Well, I planted this boy Hebat on my two guests as a kind of house boy, and he——"

Captain Catlett nodded solemnly.

"That's a splice with another twist," he admitted.

"I can't take your whole morning up," said Finlayson, as he handed back the binoculars. "I'll have to be going—and before long I'll be hearing just what they've got to say about my run out to you." He shook hands with Catlett, and moved forward.

"Say, ain't you got *any* weapons—spears, and so on, mister?"

The young planter laughed.

"Sure! But I can hardly kill a pair of white men on suspicion. The real weapons—the only ones—that I can use, are my wits."

CHAPTER III.

"NEURALGY."

FOR a week or more the after guard of the barkentine *Pointer,* Swatow to Tanjong Priok, had been compelled to listen to the deep and tortured lament of a man in agony. Night and day the groaning, mingled with outbursts of gentlemanly profanity at suitable intervals, beset Captain Reeves, his two mates, and the barkentine's cook. Only when the suffering man slept was there any comfort for those aft.

A passenger, Mr. Robertson Stanley, was the man. And this particular night, as he came staggering from his little stateroom off the main cabin, he resembled a large-bodied mummy that had unexpectedly come to life. For his head was wrapped around and around with thready edges of torn sheeting used as bandages. The sheeting formed a white

turban, mottled with the stains of a brown liniment, and covered most of Mr. Stanley's face, leaving slits for mouth and eyes. While he moaned with anguish his well-kept soft and white hands pressed against the sides of his head.

Captain Reeves looked up from a volume of "Sailing Directions," and lifted his steel-framed spectacles to his forehead.

"Your head at it again, eh?" he exclaimed. "I looked for that sleeping dram to quiet you proper."

"I seem to be worse than better, skipper," was the reply. Though it was sifted through the bandages, Mr. Stanley's voice was nicely modulated. "Oh, if I could only *sleep!*"

The captain laid down his book and glanced at the cabin clock.

"None of us can sleep," he commented, but good-humoredly. "It's near midnight, too. Well, sir, I know what the neuralgy is myself." He sighed. "Bilges a man like his head has been carried away by the help of a plank broadside on."

"I don't know how I'm going to stand this pain much longer," continued the passenger, making a slow turn about the room. "It's awful! Awful!" He lowered both hands from the region of his ears to his lower jaws.

Then he dropped wearily to the transom seat, leaned forward, and laid his sheeted head upon his knees. About him hung the pungent odor of the liniment. Soon the cabin reeked with its spreading aura until the captain's eyes grew moist.

The harassed skipper began finger-combing his graying hair.

"Dash the luck! We're helpless as a blind juggler! Dammit, man, I can't get you to where there's a sawbones short of six whole days and night—maybe seven. We've lost that leading wind—and we ain't doing better than four knots now."

The turbaned figure swayed gently with the motion of the vessel.

"Six days and nights to go!" repeated Mr. Stanley dolefully. "And every second torture! Skipper, I'll be wild-eyed crazy by that time."

Captain Reeves leaned back in his chair, spreading his arms.

"Most likely," he agreed, "unless you have a turn for the better. Neuralgy's like fog—it comes and it goes, and no rime nor reason behind it, a man might say." He forbore to add that his opinion was that the entire after guard would also be crazy before they got up to the jetty of Tanjong Priok.

"It's the continual motion," went on Mr. Stanley, still doubled forward as if abased before some idol on the floor. "And there's little motion to-night, too. But when a man's nerves are as raw as mine, and my head moves on the pillow—wow! If I could only get ashore! Somewhere! Anywhere! And lie down on solid ground!"

"It ain't wise of you to be poling around in bare feet that way," admonished the captain. "Also, in pajamas. These waters are warm enough—but the thermometer's nothing to go by. It's in the wind, like—what there *is* of wind.

"Sumatras they call 'em in these latitudes. They rasp on a man's nerves—like them winds in the Mediterranean waters. Why, once——"

Stanley broke out in loud groaning again.

"I start to sleep, and the ship lifts. I come awake with a jolt, and that makes my blood pound in my veins untill it seems they'll burst."

"I know, sir," agreed the skipper in sympathy. "Your whole top hamper strains like loose standing rigging running under bare poles off the Horn."

"If I'd been wise," went on the muffled voice of the passenger, "I'd've gone ashore at Castle Reef Island. Never mind if there was no doctor there. I want quiet. It'd have done, that place."

Abruptly the captain got up.

"Castle Reef? Why, it's not too late to put you ashore at Castle Reef, man!"

The swathed head jerked up from the hands.

"I haven't the least idea that you wouldn't do it for me, Captain Reeves. I'm ashamed to ask you to bear with me—— But six days! It's a pity to ask you to put back to Castle Reef, now that we've passed it."

"No, sir!" exploded the skipper. "We've not passed it!"

"What's that?" Mr. Stanley rose, wavering weakly, his jaws clasped tightly between his hands once more. He leaned forward, seeking the face of the bulkhead clock. "But you said we'd be off the island at ten o'clock, and it's midnight *now!*"

"And we've got Castle Reef Island abeam," declared the skipper, a note of downright joy in his voice. "Yes, sir! Didn't I tell you we'd lost our leading wind. You said before you went to bed you wouldn't get off at Castle Reef—and we ain't logged the distance I looked for then." He took Stanley by the arm and drew him to his little cabin. "Look out your own porthole, sir! That's Castle Reef—big as Gibraltar!"

Eagerly the turbaned head lifted to peer, one well-groomed hand holding aside the tiny curtain. And the passenger saw, surprisingly close, a high island thrust upward from the quiet sea, its domelike hills standing out sharply against the moonlit sky.

"You mean—to say—that's Castle Reef?" asked the tortured man.

"What else? The chart shows, if I mark the course and distance from my last fix. Castle Reef Island, no less—and you could toss a porridge pot ashore."

The little room was unlighted. Clinging to the bunk board to steady him, Stanley continued to stare for a minute.

"See that wide, squarish light down close to the beach?" asked the captain. "Most likely the planter's up and about, or reading in bed—I'd say that light's from a big open *kajang*—it's dimlike, but maybe you don't make it out."

"A plantation!" said Stanley. "So you said yesterday—and that sounds good to me. I'd better go—especially, if we're as near as that. And my pains seem to get worse every hour. I've got to have sleep." He swung round, looking in the gloom of the room like an odd-helmeted figure, or somebody playing at ghost. "I'm such a nuisance to everybody aboard here, captain. I can't stand the sea air and the dampness."

Captain Reeves put his spectacles into their case and snapped the cover.

"You're giving the orders, Mr. Stanley, and you get what you want. I've done all in my power, sir. The medicine chest is played out. Sing out, and I'll have you and your gear on the beach in short order. Sure, now?"

"Ashore, yes, sir!" said Stanley with swift decision. He began to fumble half-blindly among his effects in the drawer under his bunk.

Captain Reeves sprang for a door that opened forward toward the galley and the storeroom. He tapped at another door. "Mr. Cantlow!" he called. Then as a muffled reply issued from within a sleeping cabin: "I'll have to turn you out to put the dinghy over. Mr. Stanley's decided he wants to quit us for the island here."

"Right, sir!" came the willing assent. A match scraped and a gimbal lamp flared, revealing the second mate of the barkentine in an undershirt.

Reeves returned to his passenger.

"Mr. Stanley, if you'll excuse me, you'd better get into your pants—and shoes."

Stanley made a disconsolate figure, kneeling and groaning over a bag standing open on his cabin floor.

"I'll put on a bath robe—that'll do."

"Finlayson, the planter, has his wife with him," the skipper went on. "You

can't expect to drop in where there's womenfolks and not be proper duds."

"That's so—I forgot there was a woman," answered the passenger in a painful mumble, as he began to dress himself. And Captain Reeves routed out the cook, an American colored man from Memphis, to help pack and porter the passenger's dunnage.

In a few minutes Stanley was in the waist of the vessel.

"You've been mighty patient with me, and I hate to go. But you can see I can't sleep aboard here. And I'll keep my face wrapped until I can turn the sun on it in the morning."

The dinghy was drawing up to the ladder over the side, and on the quarter-deck, the first mate, who had the watch, was swearing joyfully but secretly over the fact that the *Pointer* was losing her passenger.

When Stanley had been helped into the dinghy, Captain Reeves drew Mr. Cantlow aside under the bulwarks and remarked:

"Finlayson won't make any kick about our friend, I take it, mister. But if he does, just manage to pass the word to him that it'll be a personal favor to me to let the gentleman land. Your job of work now is to see that Mr. Stanley, and his neuralgy, are beached. Understand?"

"I'd say I do, sir," said Cantlow. "We're more like a blasted hospital—if that's what you mean, sir."

"You read my meaning, mister. We've got to have some comfort—and I'm worn out with this gentleman's bellyachin'. That's all."

Cantlow went over the side swiftly, and with four native seamen at the oars, the dinghy headed away for shore through the white moonlight.

When they were a quarter of a mile from the *Pointer,* which was lying to, Mr. Stanley raised his head and looked back to her. As her bows lifted and dropped with the gentle swells, her port light tinctured her black shadow on the water with tiny flashes of crimson.

"I'm sorry to leave her—and Captain Reeves, and all of you," murmured the passenger. "I regret it very much, Mr. Cantlow."

"Well, mebbe it's all for the best," said Mr. Cantlow.

The low hum of the Castle Reef surf came to them over the crests of the bright swells like the sound of the swarming of hiving bees. All the juts and peaks of the island stood forth against the sky at the end of the moon track like some gigantic piece of spatter-work. But the lower turrets and terraces were in blackness. It was upon this blackness that Mr. Stanley and Mr. Cantlow saw a glowing spark.

This tiny light wavered at irregular intervals. At the same time, it traveled downward windingly, as if the spark were slowly singing in the shadows of the hills. They knew it for a lantern being carried down a hill trail.

Next, closer to the line of the beach, there glowed suddenly three rectangular patches of light in a row. Lamps had been lighted again in the Finlayson bungalow.

"That means the planter's on the know that we're comin', Mr. Stanley," announced the second mate. He spoke an order to the rowers, and pulled at the tiller to steer toward the group with the lantern—those men had reached the beach.

The passenger nodded his bandaged head.

"I hope he won't be afraid that I'm sick of something that's catching," said Mr. Stanley. "Be sure to explain, if he makes any objection, that all I need is sun and quiet."

Cantlow promised. The island loomed higher and blacker as the clicking oars drove the dinghy shoreward. Presently, at a spot where a curving reef formed a tiny bay that gave protection against the breakers, the lantern stopped

its meandering, and was lifted and swung in a signal.

"That's the proper landin' they're at with that light," said the second mate. And when he had the boat abreast of the end of the reef, he swung it into the lee of the natural breakwater. Behind them now, the piling combers were filling the night with a deep, continuous roar as they battered on the jagged barrier of coral. Fast progress was made in still water. Soon they could make out a group about the lantern.

It was Finlayson who hailed first:

"Hello, the boat! What ship are you from?"

Mr. Cantlow checked the rowers and stood. "Barkentine *Pointer,* Swatow for Tanjong Priok; Reeves, master."

"Oh, Captain Reeves, eh?" said Finlayson gladly. "Beach her here."

"We got a passenger that wants to come ashore, sir," the mate explained.

Finlayson made no comment. Easton was standing to his right, Hassler to his left, and some Malays were behind them.

Now the passenger spoke.

"My name's Stanley—Robertson Stanley, sir. I'm suffering from facial neuralgia, sir—and I've got to quit the ship."

"You mean, you intend to stay here?" asked Finlayson. "Why, Captain Reeves knows there's no doctor near—and you may be marooned with us five or six months before there's a ship."

Now Easton touched the planter's arm warningly.

"If you don't know this passenger, you'd better be careful, if you'll let me say a word. It may be something worse than what he says—something that's infectious."

Hassler put in a few words.

"You've got to think of your wife," he whispered to the planter. "She's run down—and weak."

"Oh, Captain Reeves wouldn't do that sort of thing with me," said Finlayson. "You're right, of course—if it was anybody else but Reeves sending him ashore."

Mr. Cantlow, after Finlayson's objection about a doctor, had failed to order the boat ahead, but remained standing in the stern sheets.

Stanley, knowing that there was some delay, half rose, and waved a hand.

"I'm able to pay my way, no matter how long I stay here, sir. I'll be no trouble, Mr. Finlayson. Heat and rest is all I need."

"All right, as long as you know what you're doing," said Finlayson. "Come on, the boat!"

Stanley breathed his relief, the mate gave his order, and the boat went on. A few minutes, and the dinghy grated on the shingle. The Malays leaped overboard and drew it up, to help the sick man step from the stem to the sand.

Instantly Stanley advanced toward the planter. With his left hand holding the bandages in place, he extended his right.

"Mr. Finlayson! I appreciate your kindness. Excuse my appearance—had to wrap up my face. I'm worn out, that's my chief trouble. I couldn't stand the motion of the ship."

Finlayson shook hands.

"I can't assume any responsibility for you, Mr. Stanley. You understand that—but I can put you up, and I'll do what I can."

"Thank you! I'll not be a burden, I assure you."

His luggage was passed ashore. Its extent and quality indicated a man of means and taste.

"I'm a rubber buyer," explained Stanley. "I've been having this trouble off and on for some time, and I'm on a long vacation. Hoped a sea voyage would do me good—but it nearly killed me."

"Mr. Easton—Mr. Hassler," said the planter, with a gesture right and left. "You won't have to depend on my company, wholly." Stanley shook hands

with the two men, while Finlayson went on: "I can have some coffee made, and a little supper."

"All I want to do is to drop down on a cot and sleep," said Stanley. "Sorry I had to come in like this, in the middle of the night. Don't put yourself to trouble."

"We're guests here ourselves," put in Easton. "Mr. Finlayson's been very kind to us since we wished ourselves on him."

"You sure struck a good place, Mr. Stanley," Hassler assured him.

Easton turned to the planter.

"As Mrs. Finlayson isn't very well, suppose we take Mr. Stanley in for the night. You know, we've got a hammock—and this gentleman can have my bed."

"That'll suit me perfectly," declared Stanley with gusto, before Finlayson could reply. "You see, I groan a good deal—even when I'm dozing. And I don't want to disturb Mrs. Finlayson. So I can go along with these gentlemen. He turned toward Easton.

Finlayson seemed a little surprised. His Malays had already picked up the luggage.

"Well," he agreed haltingly, "it'll suit me, Mr. Stanley, if you think it's best." And to Cantlow. "But I'd like to have you go up to the house with me. I've got a jug of coconut toddy that I want to send out to Captain Reeves. I owe your skipper for a favor he did me a few months back—it won't hold you ten minutes."

"No, he won't gibe me if I come back with toddy," said Cantlow, and he sprang ashore.

As the white men drew apart into two groups, Finlayson asked:

"Would a drop of wine help you, Mr. Stanley?"

"Thank you, I've got a flask of brandy with me—in the luggage." He turned to follow Easton and Hassler and the luggage-burdened Malays, and added courteously: "I hope to be more presentable in the morning, and I shall give myself the pleasure of a call to pay my respects."

"Yes, by all means." Finlayson waved his hand affably. "I'll see what can be done to make things more comfortable for you than your temporary lodgings for the night."

"I feel better already," vowed Stanley. "Good-by, Mr. Cantlow!"

"Good-by, sir. I can tell by your voice you're better. And the skipper'll be glad to hear that. He felt awful bad for you." He waved a hand, and then swung away beside the planter, while the lantern started up the hill with the others.

The three white men who were slowly climbing the slope did not speak for some minutes, and followed the Malay porters at a distance that gradually increased, for the natives hurried ahead. The brilliant carpet of light which the moon laid on the sandy flat was crossed quickly. The little party entered the wide, dappled strip of coconut grove. Presently, they gained the beginning of the zigzag path which led them up through low second growth.

Hassler was carrying the lantern. He spoke in an exultant whisper. "You made it slick, big boss!"

Stanley reached out an arm to clap the dark man heartily on the shoulder.

"Stanley's a name a lot easier to remember than Gurnley, eh, baron?"

"Say! We're glad you're here!" said Easton. "When I saw that boat, we knew——"

"Made a perfectly clean get-away, both from land to ship, and from ship to land—here," reported the newcomer, as he paused to catch his breath. "And the *Pointer* was glad to be rid of the man with the neuralgia!"

"The lot of 'em well boggled, afloat and ashore, with none of 'em wise that you wanted to land at this island?" pressed Hassler.

"The ship certainly suspected nothing of the sort," boasted Gurnley. "And I'd say that your planter man feels better to have the company of Mr. Stanley ashore with him."

Easton laughed softly under his breath.

"We both objected to your landing—*after* we knew that Finlayson knew Captain Reeves. And that threw the planter off the track that we knew you, assuming he might have had that dangerous little idea in his head."

"Good work!"

"We didn't know just when you'd blow in, Gurnley," said Hassler. "Oh, boy! I want one sniff of that brandy of yours, big boss! You may have pains in your head, but I'm cock-eyed for a drink. You sure do manage things wonderful!"

As they slowly went on, Gurnley took hold of his bandage and began to unwind it.

"Maybe I won't feel better when I pull off this sheeting! Sweat! These rags are hot! And I'm gassed with my own liniment."

Hassler, now in the lead, half turned his head.

"Bring the gats?"

"An automatic pistol for each of us—small ones, but, you know, I had to smuggle 'em."

"Hassler's picked up a gun since we got here," announced Easton—then checked his desire to tell how indiscreet Hassler had been.

The latter, thus forced, hastened to tell on himself.

"Yes, I took Finlayson's," he confessed boldly. "Stole it day before yesterday."

Again Gurnley halted.

"Baron!" he exclaimed reprovingly. "What'd you do a thing like that for?"

"That's what I told him, too!" cried Easton. "I said——"

"You shut your mouth!" ordered Hassler.

Gurnley took care, then, not to say too much.

"It was running chances," he warned, "of getting suspected."

"All right! All right!" growled Hassler. He went tramping on, kicking the bushes.

They arrived at the edge of the clearing before the new little bungalow. From this point the view of sea and island was gorgeous in the moonlight. Gurnley paused again, drew his breath and gazed with appreciation.

"Land alive, what a place!" he broke out. "Was I right when I picked Castle Reef Island for a good long hide-out? Well, I guess I'm a picker! Here we stick till the hullabaloo behind us blows over and the police back home give up finding us. Boys, some scenery! Look at that sea! Look at that moon! And the *Pointer!* Good old dumb-bell of a skipper! He was glad to get rid of me!"

"And never had any idea of your game!" laughed Easton, who was feeling the extra satisfaction of not having made any blunder like Hassler's.

"And, of course, you've got the stuff safely hidden?" Gurnley asked quietly.

"Planted deep," answered Easton. "Show you the places in the morning."

"It can ride where it is for months, if necessary," said Gurnley. "And no rent to pay on the safe-deposit vault."

He laughed at his own joke and followed on to the house.

CHAPTER IV.

THE KING OF SNAKES.

"AND with those two men here, now you can understand why I need a weapon," Finlayson was saying, his voice lowered, that it might not be heard beyond the circle of his own table.

Cantlow, a glass of toddy in his hand, stared through the lamplight from husband to wife, and back.

"Plain enough, sir," said the mate.

"You've got to have firearms—but me, I'd turn my Malays on 'em and drive 'em off into the sea."

"No, I can't do that," said the planter. "I can't kill a couple of white men just because I believe they're a pair of crooks. They may have a reason for their hiding here that's secret, but it may not warrant a double murder on my part."

"No, I see that," admitted Cantlow, as he sipped at his glass. "But this Mr. Stanley, now—he'll be a help—and I'll leave my revolver with you, sir." He pushed back from the table and his right hand started for a hip pocket. The planter checked him, though the *kajangs* which opened from the large sitting room upon three verandas were carefully shut.

"Don't take it out now," advised Finlayson, still speaking under his breath. "I've got a native stationed on watch at each side of this house, but the news that you passed me your gun might filter up to the bungalow on the hill. You slip it to me outside when you start for the beach."

Cantlow nodded. "And you don't seem scared none about it all," he said to Mrs. Finlayson admiringly.

"The worry's all over now," said the planter's wife. "As you said, we expect this Mr. Stanley to be of help. We'll put him up here in the house."

"Do you think he has a gun with him?" asked Finlayson.

Cantlow shook his head.

"I'd say not. He's a good deal of a swell—a nice, easy-spoken kind of a gent, except when he's swearin' at his misery. We all smoked fancy cigars while he was in the vessel, but we paid for 'em, listenin' at him beef about his nerves and all." He grinned reflectively.

"Well, we'll be two against two now, anyway," said Finlayson with satisfaction. "And with your gun, I'll be loaded for bear."

"If you'll let me put an oar into the business," said the second mate, "I'd never let him gone up with them two, under the circumstances. You should have brung him right to the house here, and give him an earful, just as you did me."

"I wanted Mr. Stanley to have a chance to observe the pair," said Finlayson. "Then, when I take him into the secret to-morrow, he'll know better what I'm driving at. And I want him to tell me what he thinks of 'em before I say anything myself. Being a business man, he'll be a shrewd judge of men."

"I'd say that's good judgment on your part, sir," said Cantlow. "And when we come up from the beach, I could see that this house's pretty well guarded. I kind of had the creeps, when I see that there were men hidin' around in the palm grove, and stickin' in the shadders."

"Yes, but they've got nothing but knives," said Finlayson. "And you know, these islanders are not accustomed enough to guns to stand up against bullets. That's one reason why I only needed one revolver here—which was foolish on my part."

"Well, I'll have to be gittin' along," said Cantlow. He lifted his face to the large, overhead beams of bamboo in the high room, their polished surfaces shining in the glow of the hanging lamp. "It's a beautiful place you got here for a home, and I don't wonder that such troubles stir you up. Bad business to have these scalawags comin' ashore on you like they did. And I ain't sure that Cap'n Reeves won't come in and drop anchor when he hears about this business. He wouldn't want you people to be in any dangerous mix-up."

"No, you tell him not to stop now," said the planter. "But for the fact that your passenger came, I'd probably risk my wife in the new monsoon, and go along with her. We might find the plantation house burned, or some of my

natives killed when we got back, but there's no need to quit now—I can't have Reeves stand any loss on my account, holding the *Pointer* here while we tried to catch and arrest the pair on the hill. The more dangerous they are, the less chance we'd have to get our hands on 'em, once they suspected what we wanted to do."

"I'll give him your letter about the coast guard, anyhow," said Cantlow, as he rose and bowed to Mrs. Finlayson.

"Yes, the authorities may know more about these men than I do—and come hotfoot for 'em, once they've got their descriptions. And the Dutch may drop a gunboat in here, when they get my report from Reeves."

"I'll eat the ribbon off my hat that the police'll want to pick 'em up," agreed the mate. "All you got to do is play for time now—and with Mr. Stanley, them two won't start any monkey business. It's funny how lucky his pains and all come in—you know the sayin' about ill winds, of course, sir. It's almost what you might call fate or somethin' that our passenger come down with a head misery. I suppose your missis here done a little prayin'—and Mr. Stanley's the answer." He smiled back at the planter's wife, moving for the doorway with Finlayson.

Mrs. Finlayson smiled cheerfully. "I did pray," she admitted. "And we're both grateful to you—and you must thank Captain Reeves for us. He'll wonder why you stayed so long, but he won't scold when you tell him the reason."

Cantlow picked up the glass jug with the liquor.

"I'll let this do the talkin' for me," he laughed. "And don't you fret none about me—Captain Reeves always did like this island, and you folks, ma'am."

And just outside the woven door of the house, in the shadows of the vine-embowered veranda, Cantlow turned his revolver over to the planter. Finlayson walked down to the beach to see the dinghy away, and to make sure that his Malays were on the alert in the palm grove and around the house.

And by the time Finlayson had secured the house from the inside to his satisfaction, he saw the *Pointer* hull down on the horizon.

"I'll sit up a while, dear," said the planter to his wife. "You go to sleep—Hebat'll be back pretty soon, but I suppose he thought he ought to listen at the bungalow. He can't be long now, for Mr. Stanley, needing sleep so badly, must have turned in at once."

But it was a good hour later before Finlayson, reading by a shaded lamp, heard the quiet challenges of outside watchers, and presently there was the sound of feet on the veranda. Mrs. Finlayson waked as her husband let in the head of the house servants.

"There was little need for your losing so much of the night from us, Hebat," said Finlayson, in Malay.

"No, Hebat," said Mrs. Finlayson from the screened bed. "We are safe now—with a *senjata* left us by the ship, and a man who will aid us." She spoke in English, using only the word for weapon to explain the revolver Cantlow had left.

The young Malay crossed the floor softly, lifting his hand to his forehead.

"Sir, and the madam," he began in his precise English, "the passenger gentleman perhaps came for aid—but not for *bantu* with this respectable household."

Finlayson stared. The single word which Hebat had put into Malay had a special meaning—to help in *war*. Mrs. Finlayson did not know the language well enough to understand the significance of that word.

The planter laughed lightly to cover his sense of alarm. He saw at once that Hebat was unaccountably grave, and might have misunderstood Mrs. Finlayson's reference to aid.

"Oh, no," said Finlayson, "Mr. Stanley didn't come to *work* here. It is as an ally that we'll use him—and to-morrow he will take residence here with us. We need have no more alarm for those on the hill you have been watching—though you will continue your watch."

"Tuan!" said Hebat. "When I have spoken you will make the decision required, this being your house. But I ask that you have patience—now the thieves be complete on the hill."

Mrs. Finlayson gave a little cry of astonishment and alarm. Her husband did not speak for a minute.

"I don't understand, Hebat," he said, still doubting the import of the Malay's words.

"From all kinds of men I have acquired your tongue, *tuan,"* said Hebat with a slight bow. "Though I use your words, they flow in my own style and the manner of my ancestors. It is this way—like brothers the two already on the hill stroke the new arriver on the breast. They are no strangers, one to the other or the third, but like a family returning from pilgrimage and being reunited with joyful words. The three be one—from their talk, from their laughing, from their drinking out of a silver bottle brought by the new arriver who came out of the boat with a lie, the others knowing he was to come."

"Good heavens, Ned!" cried Mrs. Finlayson from the bed. "Is it possible! Is this new man——"

"Hush, dear!" warned her husband. "It's a lot more than we bargained for, I'll admit. But let us know all we can." He nodded to Hebat to go on, not willing to let his wife be too alarmed, and concealing his own alarm by holding his voice steady.

"But, Ned! If we'd only known this before Mr. Cantlow—before Captain Reeves—were gone!"

"A pity," agreed Finlayson. "But we'll have to handle it ourselves. I'm sorry you heard this now—you should have had your sleep out." He went behind the screen and comforted her, but returned at once to hear Hebat's details.

The Malay, standing by the shaded lamp, bowed.

"That turban, it only was a cover to the face of the stranger. It came off even as he had left the high ferns before the guest bungalow. And his mourning of pain is all silenced. These things I saw and heard myself—and I speak true talk, *tuan."* His earnest look sought the face of his master.

"And what kind of a man is he with the bandages off?" asked Finlayson. "Does he look like a ruffian, or is he of refined face, such as I gathered from his talk?" Finlayson asked the questions now in Malay, so there could be no doubt about the meanings.

The *baba* stuck to his Singapore English, preferring to sound like a scholar rather than a native.

"Of agreeable looks, but fattish about the eyes—and those eyes, though gentle, might be the eyes of the king of snakes."

Finlayson paced the floor a few minutes.

"Don't worry, Ned," soothed his wife. "You're armed now, and after all, it's better for us to know the truth. But for Hebat we might have taken this 'king of snakes' into the house."

"Emily, I'm not worried. I can cut off their supply of food if I have to. And I want to avoid killing anybody here—even a criminal. And as to taking this Mr. Stanley into the house, that's exactly what I intend to do."

"Ned! Don't say such absurd things!"

"In the morning, Hebat," said the planter, "it is my wish that you carry up early from the cookhouse, an excellent breakfast for three men. And at the same time, you will carry the invitation to the newcomer to have lunch with us here at this house. By sending the invitation so early, Mr. Stanley will not come before we are ready for him. In

the meantime, see, Hebat, that no word of what has happened reaches the ears of the workers or servants. The fact that we suspect—or know—Mr. Stanley is a close friend of the other two, must be kept a secret."

Finlayson walked up and down as he talked, and his words were intended for his wife as much as for Hebat—also, they clarified his ideas, for he was planning as he talked.

Hebat bowed—and he would have bowed in assent if his master had given orders to put a kris into the back of Mr. Stanley.

"If you are to break bread with this man, *tuan,* I shall stand near by. There is but one time that I can be loosed from by body, and if that time come in the noon of to-morrow, I am content. There is little in this world for this poor man but to die for those he serves, when the need comes. I am ready."

"You jewel, Hebat!" said Mrs. Finlayson.

The planter laughed.

"You will not die in this case, Hebat, till you have my permission. You are to live—that we of the island shall go on living. When I have finished with Mr. Stanley at luncheon he will not be dangerous."

Hebat allowed himself to smile.

"Rachun!" he whispered. "It is the way!"

"Poison—yes," said Finlayson. "A poison so strong that Mr. Stanley will drink of it, and will be made all the stronger. But he will not die."

"Mixed with *madu*—honey, as you speak it—I know a poison that can be gathered in the jungle, *tuan,* whereby a man drinking of it, he does not die until the moon has waned four times; therefore his death is a mystery and no one is sought for that death. But four moons is too long for a bad man to live here, and there be three bad men on the hill. They will slay unless we hasten their departure from their bodies."

"I shall certainly use honey," said Finlayson with a smile. "Emily, you'll have to make a special effort and help me to-morrow at tiffin."

"I'll—I'll do what I can, Ned," answered his wife, puzzled and somewhat frightened.

"Never mind what it is now, that you'll have to do. We need sleep. Time enough after daylight to work out the details."

"I shall pick the poison leaves before the new day," declared Hebat. "That is the way it must be done, if it is desired to have the man die a little quicker from the juice than four moons."

"Gather no poison," ordered Finlayson, "for the kind of poison I shall use needs no gathering. Heed my words, Hebat."

"Tuan," said the Malay, "I see that you have a better poison than this servant."

CHAPTER V.

AN IMPENDING EXECUTION.

IT was a changed and improved "Mr. Robertson Stanley" who made an appearance at the plantation house for tiffin the next day. He did not wear his bandages, and except for the liniment still showing on temples and jaws, there was nothing about him that hinted of invalidism. His thick, brown hair was carefully combed, his well-rounded cheeks were freshly shaven, though still somewhat crinkled by the strong lotion.

As for the dress of this man who was called "Gurnley" on the hill, it was so well chosen and fresh that he might have come from the bund of any tropical city. His well-cut white suit was immaculate. His shoes were as white as his clothes. His shirt was a cream silk, striped narrowly with blue, the cuffs linked with bits of carved jade. His tie was blue, matching the stripe of the shirt. And a wide, silk cummerbund folded round and round his middle, but slightly loose, covered the belt of his

trousers—and concealed under its folds, at the left side of the coat, a small but most efficient automatic pistol. His soft straw hat, of finest native make, was banded with a plaid ribbon.

Altogether, the tiffin guest was—a first-class passenger.

As he mounted the steps, Stanley saw the tiffin table was set on the front veranda, shielded from the glare of the sun by thick vines growing up trellises between the stanchions. On the gentle slope of the flats below the house were the shadows of the palms. And a soft offshore breeze faintly rustled the tops of the lofty trees.

When the planter and his wife had finished their greetings, Stanley assured them of his appreciation of their invitation.

"I had the first good sleep in a week or more," he declared thankfully. "And I feel like a new man this morning. You know, the *Pointer* was an awfully damp ship. I didn't like to explain fully in the presence of Mr. Cantlow last night, because Captain Reeves is a splendid man, but the quarter-deck leaked and I never had dry bedclothes in my bunk. Another week in her would have killed me."

"No, you probably couldn't have stood it, under such conditions," said Finlayson, as he indicated a seat at the side of the table, Mrs. Finlayson having sat down where she would face her husband, the guest between them, but with his back to the front wall of the house, close to a partly open *kajang*.

Hebat was serving the table, the food being brought from the cookhouse by way of a side veranda by another Malay. And Hebat was dressed specially for the meal. Over his silver-buttoned waistcoat he wore a white steward's jacket with brass buttons; a white breech cloth was about his loins; his pale-brown legs were bare, but his feet shod with sandals made from a fine grass tied on with ribbons. He wore a real turban now, of rich fabric dyed a dull red, and batiked with tiny gilt deer at full run. He stood proudly behind Finlayson when not serving dishes.

The guest found before him a gold-and-green half of a pawpaw.

"Try a few drops of lime juice on it," urged Mrs. Finlayson. And Hebat moved the tiny pitcher before Stanley, at her sign.

"Thanks—I think what I need is plenty of fruit—my nerves are crying for it. And, allow me to say that I was fortunate that the island to which I came was Castle Reef." He bowed to his hostess.

"You still look worn," said the planter. "Your eyes show the strain of pain. Well, this sunlight'll cure you. You're welcome to stay as long as you like. Castle Reef has a limited society, as you'll discover—and we'll enjoy having you here—won't we, dear?"

"There is every reason why Mr. Stanley's coming will only make us the happier," said the planter's wife. "And perhaps you'll find the plantation house more agreeable than the bungalow on the hill."

"We'll leave the decision to Mr. Stanley," said Finlayson.

The guest beamed. "You certainly make me feel at home. I hope that if you ever come to Batavia, you'll let me return this hospitality. Just ask for Stanley, the rubber man. Any driver will know, in case you arrive ahead of a letter."

"Rubber, eh! That's good—I've some trees up in the hills you'll be interested in looking at—I'm not sure what they are. But I'd have taken you for a man interested in financial matters—somehow. Anyway, if you don't mind my saying it, I can see that you're accustomed to doing things on a big scale."

Mr. Stanley showed a modest embarrassment, but he relished the fact that he had made the impression he sought for with the planter.

"And it's so nice to have a gentleman come to Castle Reef, Mr. Stanley," put in Mrs. Finlayson. "It's an infrequent thing, on an island so isolated. Not all those who come here are—well, you understand; we don't open the house to—*everybody*."

Stanley glanced at his hostess, and caught her hesitant meaning, and understood the look she gave her husband.

"I quite understand," said Stanley. "You've got to be—well, 'discriminating' may be the word, but if a person wanted to speak bluntly, 'careful,' would do. You must have to deal with all kinds of—say, shady—characters."

Finlayson and his wife exchanged frank glances. They seemed to be mutually satisfied that Mr. Stanley had formed opinions of his own, but refrained from committing himself too far.

"Why, yes," said Finlayson slowly. "Now and then somebody comes along, and we have to be cautious. And, by the way, did you find Mr. Easton and Mr. Hassler agreeable—companionable?"

Mr. Stanley was carving his pawpaw with his spoon. His hand, white and soft, was embellished with an excellent diamond ring. Now the spoon became immovable, while he gave Finlayson a bland, yet mildly surprised stare. And the guest's eyes twinkled, as the shadow of a smile crossed his face.

"'Agreeable' fits the case, sir—'companionable' is a word that I would prefer to withhold until I have carried my observations a trifle farther."

"Of course, you feel the restraint of a guest," said Finlayson. "We appreciate that—but you are rather a special guest, Mr. Stanley, and the fact that you are here at our table proves it."

"Yes, you belong to the household, Mr. Stanley," said the planter's wife. She attempted a significance deeper than the words in her tone—and she glanced at Stanley.

Stanley bowed again and muttered something appreciative.

"If I can be of any service, why, give me your confidences."

"You felt—thoroughly comfortable?" asked Finlayson. "They did what they could, as fellow guests?" And Finlayson lifted a finger in a signal to Hebat to refill Mr. Stanley's glass from the yellow fruit juice in the glass bowl.

Mr. Stanley did not reply at once, but touched his lips with a polite napkin. He appeared to be thinking for the suitable words that would fit the problem.

"I can't say—that I'd be warranted in making any complaint. I'm quite satisfied—for the time being." He lacked a certain enthusiasm for the guest bungalow. And he drank the fruit juice.

"Perhaps I could put up a first-chop bungalow for you—one with plenty of *kajangs* so the air would be dry and a double roof to avoid excessive heat; also, a little nearer to us than the hilltop." It was the host speaking.

Mrs. Finlayson now leaned toward Mr. Stanley, lowering her voice.

"I'm sure that you don't want to stay on at the bungalow where you'd quartered now," she said.

"Oh, I'll stay where I'm put," said Stanley earnestly. "I don't want to be any bother—I've planted myself on you, and I certainly don't intend to find fault with my quarters—or the men I camped with last night."

Mrs. Finlayson laughed lightly.

"Exactly—'camped' shows how you feel about it. Now, Ned, it's plain enough that Mr. Stanley is being considerate. He wants more privacy than he'll get where he is, but he doesn't want to say so—now frankly, Mr. Stanley?"

"Oh, I never intended last night's quarters for Mr. Stanley as anything but temporary," said the planter. "I can throw up a small bungalow in a day with my workmen, and you can have your own house boys. We'll fix you up—won't we, dear?"

"Ned," began Mrs. Finlayson, suddenly openly serious, "I know that Mr. Stanley is the kind of man you can take into your confidence. I really do —and I wish you would. He's had a chance to—well, observe—those two on the hill. And it's time that you two men compared notes."

Finlayson nodded, his look reflective. Hebat's assistant took away plates with the pawpaw rinds and brought hot dishes for the fish course. The three at the table sat in silence for a minute or two while the soft-shod feet of Malays pattered about on the side veranda.

With the fish served, Finlayson began abruptly:

"I'm going to be frank, Mr. Stanley. Those two men are strangers to us. They are guests, but they arrived without any by-your-leave. I don't like to criticize them, but I feel warranted in asking you what you think of them—and before I tell you too much, so you'll be able to give an unbiased judgment."

Mr. Stanley did not appear to be surprised. He leaned back in his chair a trifle, and his eyes examined critically the edge of the thatch at the overhanging eaves.

"I feel better that you've taken this up with me without delay," said Stanley in a minute. "I happen to have considerable money with me—and some other valuables. And I'd made up my mind to discuss these two gentlemen with you."

"There! You don't like them!" said Mrs. Finlayson, leaning forward.

Stanley turned his head. Hebat had gone inside through the near-by *kajang,* and was coming out again. He took care not to make any unnecessary noise, even in his softly shod feet. And Stanley seemed curious for an instant about the movements of the chief servant.

"So you *have* a decided opinion on them!" said Finlayson, with a look of triumph to his wife. "Didn't I tell you, dear? Mr. Stanley is too shrewd a man to be fooled—by them!"

Stanley straightened, and casting glances to right and left, he said:

"I can report that my impressions of those two men lead me to wonder if you're not taking great risks by having them on the island."

"I agree with you," said Finlayson. "And, your opinion tallies with ours, without our leading you to suspicion." He then gave a brief account of how Easton and Hassler had come to the island.

"It's a queer proposition all around," said Stanley. "And the thing that struck me as important, was that Mr. Easton was out of his class in traveling with this—what's his name?"

"Hassler," supplied the planter.

"Yes, the dark, short man," nodded Stanley. "They did a good deal of whispering after I turned in last night. They didn't realize that I slept fitfully, and that half a dozen times I was aware of a covert conversation. And I imagine that they've kept you on the anxious seat since they came."

"I'm not specially anxious about them," said Finlayson carelessly. "If I'd considered them dangerous to myself and my wife, I could've sent 'em away the other day, when a schooner—the *Amoy Maid*—passed here. Or I could've taken Mrs. Finlayson with me in the schooner—or got some extra firearms from the *Maid's* skipper."

"Oh, then you've been in touch with a schooner since they arrived? And—of course—you gave the skipper an account of them—so the coast guard will drop in to look 'em over."

"No, I only took out some fruit to the skipper. At that time, I hadn't any suspicions about Easton and Hassler, so I said nothing."

Stanley relaxed in his chair. He had taken on some of Finlayson's peace of mind. And Hebat was helping him to fish. "Well, I presume there are coast-

guard cutters going to and fro at regular intervals? You can get help before very long?"

"We don't see a government cutter once in six months," said the planter. "We're off the regular beat of such boats, you know. My father was here a long time, and most of the ship masters know us. So if these men intend any mischief, and were to commit a crime, they'd have a hard time getting away."

"And the Malays? They'd make considerable trouble for anybody who tried to harm you?"

"Oh, the Malays are mild enough here. And I don't keep much cash here—and I doubt that Easton and Hassler has any designs on the plantation, or us."

"We're probably safe enough ourselves," said Mrs. Finlayson. "But it would be an awful shock—and something to shrink from over a long time—if they murdered anybody here."

"Murder!" said Stanley. "Who, then, would they murder?"

"That's just what we don't know," said the planter. "All the same"—he paused, leaning toward his guest a little—"before they leave, there's every evidence that these men are going to make trouble, and serious trouble, for *somebody.*"

Stanley blinked, puzzled by the planter.

"Somebody?" he repeated. "Natives? Or are there other white people on this island?"

"No, not natives—and we're the only whites."

"But we are afraid of a tragedy," said Mrs. Finlayson. "And if something dreadful happens it'll spoil the island for me. I hate to even think of it!" She shuddered slightly.

"I don't—follow you in——" Stanley was now amazed—and not a little worried.

"It's this way," explained Finlayson. "They have a carefully laid plan, and they intend to carry it out here. I don't want 'em to. I'd like to forestall the thing. I might lose all of my workers—you know how these Malays are after somebody had been killed on a place—not to mention the poor devil who's been marked for slaughter. We feel as if we were waiting for an execution which we'll like to stop, but can't, somehow."

Stanley's lips had taken on a swift limpness. And he stared at Finlayson as if struck dumb with horror.

"Why!" he gasped presently. "I'm nervous—my condition, you know—but your language is something I didn't expect. And what do you mean—by execution?"

Finlayson smiled.

"Please don't feel alarmed—none of us at the table is in danger. But Mrs. Finlayson and myself agreed that we'd take you fully into our confidence—and I'll tell you the whole plan."

"You see," put in Mrs. Finlayson, "we knew you could be trusted—with everything. We knew that Captain Reeves would not have sent a man ashore here to us without knowing he was trustworthy."

Stanley bowed to wife and husband in turn.

"I feel complimented—and honored. Certainly, Captain Reeves knows enough about me to feel satisfied on that score—that I'm—a man of some standing in business. And I assure you, I *can* be trusted. Your problems are mine. I shall respect any confidence to the full." He spoke with such intensity of feeling that his voice shook.

"I felt sure of that," the planter answered heartily. "You won't want to stay with that pair another night—you'll get your belongings out of that bungalow at once."

Mr. Stanley sat straight up in his chair, his fork suspended.

"As bad as that!" he gasped.

Finlayson smiled enigmatically. Then he spoke under his breath:

"Their party is not complete."

Stanley was really alarmed now. He saw that the planter really knew something that might seriously interfere with all the carefully laid plans of the trio. The guest's stained forehead wrinkled. "What do you mean—'party?'"

"They're expecting another man."

"Really!" But though his single word was a pretended apprehension, Stanley really relaxed and felt relief. For it was evident that Finlayson could not suspect his guest and tell of a third man who was expected on the island. The planter was duped—and the three were safe.

"No doubt of it," said Finlayson. "And crook No. 3 is *the man they intend to kill.*"

Mr. Stanley's fork clattered to the veranda floor. His sudden and uncontrollable start was only a slight indication of his real emotions.

CHAPTER VI.

COUNTERPLOT.

FINLAYSON did not seem surprised at Stanley's show of alarm. And Hebat picked up the fork and supplied a fresh one, while the guest continued to stare at the planter.

"It's natural enough for you to be a bit startled," said Finlayson quietly, as he continued to put canned butter on a biscuit. "It gave us rather a jolt, I'll admit."

Mrs. Finlayson nodded gravely.

Stanley felt calmer when he realized that his amazement was taken for granted. But he was still unable to control himself. His mouth opened, slowly closed, opened again, his full lips twisting with his thoughts. He grew red over the unstained areas of his face. The perspiration stood out on his nose.

"Now, Mr. Stanley, you see what a terrible thing is before us," said Mrs. Finlayson. "The man who's coming seems to be a friend of theirs—and he probably trusts them."

"You—you didn't learn—the name—of this man coming?" asked Stanley.

"No—that's the trouble," said Finlayson. "But we'll know him when he asks for 'em. Even though he may be a crook, I don't want him killed on this island."

"And you can help us save him—from death, anyhow," said Mrs. Finlayson.

"Oh, yes—count on me. I'll do what I can," said Stanley.

"They may carry out their purpose in spite of us," said the planter. "Men capable of such a damnable piece of double-dealing will be hard to beat if they suspect that their game is to be balked."

"But what do they want to kill him for? Did you learn that?" asked Stanley.

"Yes," said Finlayson. "It appears that the three of them are involved in some big deal—a money deal of some sort. Loot, probably. And I'd say Hassler and Easton don't want to split it three ways."

Stanley was at his ease again. He felt deeply thankful for the way things had turned. He knew now fully just what the planter knew—and felt sure he was aware of just how much the planter did not know. And the guest's thankfulness was based on the fact that the planter and his wife had never for a minute assumed that the man who had come ashore from the *Pointer* was the third man. It was all another triumph for Stanley, and he congratulated himself on his ability to handle people. But Easton and Hassler had been stupid—that was plain enough. It seemed incredible that they had failed to keep such vital secrets away from the planter. But the matter was not past remedy as Stanley saw it. He needed more information.

"'When thieves fall out,'" he began to quote; then angled for more details. "But how can you be *sure* of all this? You may be putting a wrong construction on——"

"I *know!*" broke in Finlayson. "It's all so appalling, so ruthless, that if I hadn't got it just the way I did, I probably wouldn't have believed it myself."

"We're absolutely *sure,*" said Mrs. Finlayson. "We've talked it all out. We hoped at first that we were mistaken."

The guest did not glance her way. His look was fixed upon the planter.

"Then you must have full trust in your informant's story."

"My informant is myself," said Finlayson. "It was this way: They were then staying here at the house, just after they came. They were pretty well done up after the hard trip in the outrigger, exposed to the sun—from Catabaygan. I had begun to build the new house for them, and Mrs. Finlayson and I started across the flats. They stayed in one of these back rooms, where they'd slept the night before. I turned back—I'd forgotten something or other——"

"The small saw, dear," said his wife.

"Oh, yes—it was under the house here. And this building is more or less like a basket. I didn't intend to listen—we had no suspicions of them at that time. But they thought they were alone, and I thought they were asleep, so I was quiet. But when I began to understand what they were saying—well, I was staggered."

"Then you heard—quite a conversation?" said Stanley.

"Yes, but not complete. They were discussing the man they expect when I first got under the house—they referred to him as 'too damned bossy.' That was Easton's expression."

"Easton, eh?" said Stanley, as if that were something important to be kept in mind.

"Also, I take it, they feel they've done the work—the hard work—and the really dangerous part of the business. And Hassler said something about how the third man puts on too much style; and Hassler said something to the effect that the third man would 'give 'em the dish' when everything was cleared away."

Stanley looked keenly alert.

"Oh, there's jealousy involved, eh? And we can be sure of one——" He checked himself. He had been about to say that the third man must be of a higher type than the other two, but that was a thought he knew must be kept from Finlayson's mind. So Stanley used his napkin hastily and took a deep drink from his glass.

"I'd call it more than jealousy," said Finlayson. "They spoke with a sense of deep hatred."

Stanley's eyes wandered to the sea horizon while he thought.

"Did they say—how they'd kill? Have they any arms?"

"It was arms they were discussing at that time," said the planter. "Hassler's idea was that they'd need a weapon by the time this third man arrived. I believe they expect him to have arms. And the argument was that if the third man knew they didn't have arms—which it seems he does know—it would be easy to kill him before he was aware of the fact that they had a gun.

"I'm sure that they did not bring guns from the port they came from—to avoid any trouble with the customs. But the third man is to bring them weapons. And Easton argued that they would not depend upon the weapons the third man would supply. 'There may be no powder in the cartridges,' he said, 'and if we pull a gun on him, to settle his hash, he'll just give us the laugh and kill us both.'"

Stanley smiled. "That sounds as if Mr. Easton's the man with the brains in the pair," he said.

"Oh, Easton handles the other one,

right enough. Hassler listens to him. Easton's idea was that they should steal my revolver. I had an old-style navy —.38, long barreled—in a holster behind a *kajang* in my front room."

Stanley leaned forward.

"You saved it, eh?"

"No. Hassler balked for a minute. But Easton won him over—and I heard somebody—Hassler, I'd say—walk into the front room and back again. They left the holster and the belt, so I'd think when I saw the bend of the belt that the revolver was still there. I had started to come out and run up the veranda—but they'd beaten me to it—and I kept my mouth shut. You see, I didn't know they were going to act so promptly. By the time I got inside the house they'd slipped out the back way. When they came back—well, the revolver was hidden out in the brush. And they were smooth as silk."

"They're a precious pair," said Stanley. "And you were right not to start any trouble about the revolver. Of course, you've got another, so——"

"No, I haven't," said the planter. "I've kept down to a bare minimum with firearms here—natives generally steal 'em. And I thought at first that Easton and Hassler were bunkered, because that gun in the holster was empty. I went on that assumption for several days, feeling pretty safe. Then I found that a jacket which had cartridges in a special pocket had been raided—and ten cartridges missing. So—they've got ammunition."

"But you've never hinted that you've missed the revolver?"

"Not a word. I've kept on a good friendly basis with 'em. So we'll have to hold that confidence with 'em, and not get 'em nervous."

"I suppose you sent some word of all this to Captain Reeves?" Stanley's voice was curiously soft.

"No, I didn't. If I had, he'd've come in and anchored. And a delay to the *Pointer* would've meant heavy expense to Reeves. I don't like to load my troubles on my friends. Besides, the minute I knew you intended to stay, I saw you'd be some help. However, I'd have warned you if I'd had any chance, but they made it their business to be on the beach. They didn't want you to come ashore—they advised against it."

"By George, I wouldn't have come if I'd known it—not alone," said Stanley. "Their whispering last night was probably a discussion of what they ought to do about me—kill me—so I'd be out of the way. They certainly didn't want me here."

"More likely," said Finlayson, "they wondered if you had any arms—and if there are any in our luggage—gone by now!" He waved his hands in a gesture of disgust. "It's my fault. You should have come up to the house last night with me—I should have insisted upon it."

"It's all right," said Stanley. "I've got no arms to steal, except this little pistol under my belt here. As to my sleeping here, they might have got in a panic last night if they'd thought I was to be given any information against 'em. You worked it better as it was—you demonstrated a lack of suspicion."

"They may feel that this invitation to tiffin—alone—is something to be suspicious about," said Mrs. Finlayson.

"I'll send the servants up for your luggage," said the planter.

Stanley nodded. "You've done right to keep them in the dark about what you know, Mr. Finlayson. Just as long as they feel safe, we're all safe."

"But we ought to make up our minds on what to do in case we can get word away to some port. Maybe you'll agree with me that it will be wise to send out the proa to speak the first sail or smoke that's sighted—some precaution."

"I'm sure it would be dangerous," said Stanley. "They'd know it meant an alarm."

"That's what I've told Ned," said Mrs. Finlayson. "I'm glad you agree with me, Mr. Stanley."

"All right," agreed Finlayson. "I'm outvoted. But won't they also be suspicious if you, Mr. Stanley, leave the bungalow?"

Stanley considered.

"We'll make that separation gradually. I'll find some excuse—and apparently leave against my will."

"That's it!" said Finlayson. "You must fool them utterly. They must feel absolutely secure, and you must be friendly with them. And probably it'll be a mistake to move too abruptly, if you can stick it out another night or two. Then—the jungle is damp—any reason that seems to fit. We've discovered mutual friends, or something like that. They don't suspect for one minute that I'm *on*—and you must reflect that frame of mind."

"Oh, right up to the hilt, sure!" said Stanley earnestly.

"We must avoid anything that would bring on a break," went on Finlayson. "We must wait for that other man, and we must be able to warn him of his danger. Then we'll be three men against two, and I'll fix it so the two will be glad enough to take my proa and go back where they came from with a native crew from here."

"Say, that's the smartest idea yet!" said Stanley. "When they see their game is beaten, they'll get out of their own accord—and Castle Reef Island hasn't got any murder!"

"Exactly! But what're you going to do about this afternoon? And tonight?"

Stanley pondered for a minute. He saw that the time had come for him to leave. There was a humorous twinkle in his eyes as he lit the cigar Finlayson offered.

"I'll tell you what, Finlayson," said the guest, as he put the charred match in a shell tray with careful fingers. "I'd better not stay any longer now—and don't send a servant for my luggage. It'll be more natural and aboveboard if I just drift up there, and casually pass the word that you've spoken highly of 'em."

"Fine!" said Finlayson admiringly.

"That's the best possible thing you could say," agreed the planter's wife.

"And," went on Stanley, in his expansively important way, now that he was primed with information and was sure of a satisfactory outcome, "I'll drop a word or two about how you showed me a fine repeating rifle, and some paper targets showing what a good marksman you are at long ranges. That'll give 'em something to whisper about, eh?" His shoulders shook with convulsive and deep laughter which he restrained otherwise—an internal chuckling over his huge joke.

Both the planter and his wife laughed openly and appreciatively.

"That's a masterly stroke!" declared Finlayson.

Stanley got to his feet, took the gay hat which Hebat handed him, and walked to the stoop. The departing guest held the hat gallantly a few inches above his head, and went down. He turned and bowed.

"We'll be so eager to hear about it all," said Mrs. Finlayson.

"I'll let you know all about it, be sure of that. I must thank you both for a most delightful tiffin—I've enjoyed myself immensely."

The guest smiled, nodded, put on his hat, took his cigar between his teeth with a firm grip, and sauntered away into the palm grove.

CHAPTER VII.

DOUBLE MURDER!

FOR half an hour or more Stanley strolled by the beach and wandered through the palm grove of the flats, gradually making his way to the trail.

As he walked, he laughed now and then. Some of the planter's Malays, busy among the trees, stared curiously at the new white man who wandered about by himself and found cause for hilarity over nothing at all.

But Stanley—or Gurnley—was highly elated with himself.

"I've got the thing by the tail!" he boasted. "And it's lucky I got here when I did, or the whole thing might have been messed up beyond my ability to straighten it."

He paused, and allowed himself a minute of scenery. The sea was a clear, deep blue. The sunlight filtered down upon him through the palms in a way that he savored. He enjoyed the lacy whiteness of the gentlest surfs, soapily washing the sand and coral, and making a long, graceful, wavering line on the shingle with shells and bits of flotsam.

The roar from the reef, farther out, had a soothing effect upon his mind. It was the sort of sound that could lull a man to long, delicious periods of sleep through many a month of waiting in peaceful security.

By the time he reached the trail he was whistling softly. And the smile that constantly hovered about his mouth interrupted his tune. To any observer, he was a man without worries. He had told the truth when he said he had enjoyed the tiffin; and there was satisfaction in having gained to full measure the thing he had sought for at the plantation house. Finlayson had supplied all the information needed to insure success on the island.

Tunefully he mounted the slopes, in no hurry. For while Stanley had loitered on beach and grove, Hebat had carried up the lunch tray to Easton and Hassler, and had come down again to disappear in the plantation house. The two in the bungalow would have finished their tiffin by this time, and would be eagerly awaiting the news about Finlayson's attitude toward them.

And when he gained the last upper bench of ground, Gurnley could see the two men seated on a mound of lava in front of the bungalow, watching the trail. They were smoking at their ease.

Gurnley took off his hat and swung it at them, conveying what he could of the idea that his visit to the planter had been satisfactory. They waved to him in reply, but remained where they were.

When he had arrived within ten yards of the two, Gurnley bared his head again, wiped at his face, and grinned broadly. He did a little jig step in the trail and laughed.

"Wine with the lunch, eh?" called Easton with a laugh. "The sick man comes back with a snootful!"

Gurnley walked up to them, cast a wary eye about to make sure there were no straggling natives observing them, and said gleefully:

"And both ears full! The both of 'em are thoroughly boobed!"

"What'd I say?" demanded Hassler triumphantly. "We're all right!"

"Well, break the glad news to us, big boss," said Easton happily. "Certainly, things went well."

"Couldn't have been better!" Gurnley assured them, his voice raised. "That planter's a fine chap! And his wife—charming! I enjoyed every second!"

Hassler gave Easton a playful poke in the ribs.

Gurnley dropped his voice now.

"Boys," he began, "the goose hangs high. No reason to lose any sleep around this beautiful island. Why, you confounded ninnies, what'd you want to give me that scare for? Those people below are safe as a church!"

"Come inside," said Easton. "The Malay's gone, and we're all by our lonesome, but it's just as well that we're not too chummy out in the open."

"Sure, everything out of sight," agreed Gurnley. "But not one of us is under suspicion. Finlayson's got no message away to the police or coast

guard.. I managed to find out everything. The last thing in his mind is that I came here to meet you."

"You're the goods!" declared the baron.

The three went into the bungalow, took chairs and sat.

"At first, I felt that the planter had something under his hat," resumed Gurnley. "But that was because I felt I was on thin ice with him. But I could tell before long by his wife's talk that there was nothing worrying 'em. And by the time I left, I was standing ace high with 'em."

"An educated guy like you can always swing it with these uppish kind," commended Hassler.

"And," went on Gurnley, "if they did have any sneaking fears about you two, I cured 'em. I certainly put on strong—how I enjoyed myself last night, how you did everything to make me comfortable, and so on." He loosed his tie and soft collar, and worked himself out of his coat without getting up, letting the garment fall over the back of the bamboo chair. He let both his feet slide out in front of him, stretching his big legs. His face was still wet with perspiration after his climb up the hill—and overred. The stained and unstained areas of it almost blended in color. He pushed his damp hair away from his forehead so that it stuck straight up. He hooked his thumbs in the sides of his cummerbund. He was the picture of a thoroughly pleased man who is ready for well-merited praise after closing a difficult deal.

Hassler also felt that he had triumphed.

"Well, I guess I didn't crab the party so much, at that, when I lifted that gun! Did he say anything about it?"

Gurnley took his time to answer.

"Yes, he did—and he was worried about it, too. But the fool thinks it was a Malay who lifted it. Say, he's simple, that fellow!" He laughed softly.

Easton and Hassler joined in the joke on the planter.

"And you know what he told me? Now that he's got three white men on the island with him, he's got no reason to worry even if the natives have pinched his revolver! Can you beat it?" He leaned back and rocked himself on the rear legs of the chair.

"And all the beefin' I've heard about that gun!" said Hassler, with a look at Easton. The dark man made a grimace of disgust, and spat on the floor.

"Yes, we razzed you plenty," admitted Gurnley. "As a matter of fact, the gun was just what we needed to work things out right." He nodded his head soberly.

"How's that?" asked Hassler, a little puzzled that condemnation had turned to commendation so suddenly.

Gurnley hunted a fresh cigar out of his coat pocket behind him, bit the end of it, and struck a match.

"This way," he said between puffs. "If things fall so we have to kill Finlayson, it'll be better to do it with his own gun." He met their eyes with a frank stare.

"You're right!" declared Easton. "I see it. Baron, I'm glad you stole it—now."

Gurnley continued:

"We'll have to rig the thing so the natives and his wife'll be fooled. As for her, the shock'll probably kill her anyway—but we'll be in the clear. We'll avoid any funerals as long as we can—but if he should get wise—*blam!* Only for emergency, mind! Only if he's about to spill the beans to some ship or coast guard after he blunders into something. We can't be sure some ship won't drop in here and leave a police warning with our descriptions. If that happens—we've got to protect ourselves and put him out proper."

"But when we have to kill him, we've got the scheme all set and ready to shoot! You always keep three jumps

ahead of the game, big boss," said Easton admiringly.

"I always try to be ready," said Gurnley with modesty. "I may not be right all the time, but——"

"You got us here—and the stuff here—all safe enough," said Hassler. "You done the thinkin'—and you been right so far."

"We know we can always depend on your decisions," said Easton. "And I certainly needed you before this. When Finlayson took his wife out to the schooner, right after the baron lifted the gun, I had reason to worry. She was sick—and she hates to get into a boat. Well, that had my goat!"

"You had every reason to be pessimistic," agreed Gurnley ponderously, puffing his cigar. "I'd have been worried myself. But it turned out all right. Cut the worry now. We're safe. We can take our time. You see, the very fact that the baron here got the gun before I was on the island, made Finlayson willing to tell me about it. Otherwise, he might have had doubts about us."

Hassler laughed hoarsely.

"The early bird snitches the gun!" he laughed.

"Well," said Gurnley, "I'm going to make it my business to stay thick with the planter and his wife. I want to know what they're thinking about—just for safety. Now, Mrs. Finlayson happened to say she's out of reading. *That's* what they went out to the schooner for—to swap fruit for books. The schooner didn't have any. But I've got a couple of novels with me."

Hassler slapped his knees and roared with laughter.

"So it was books they wanted! And I git ripped up the back proper!"

"Oh, shut up!" said Easton. "Drop that damned schooner stuff!"

Gurnley rose.

"I told Mrs. Finlayson I'd send 'em down." He turned to Easton with a smile. "Here's a chance to make yourself solid down there. You take the books—I'm supposed to be tired after my walk, see? It gives you an excuse for making a call and asking about her health."

"You mean—right away?" Easton smoothed his hair with both hands.

"Sure!" Gurnley began to unfasten the straps around a steamer rug. "Say I'll be down a little later. It shows 'em that we're all on a friendly basis—and you can say a word or two about how you like me. We'll all work together on this business—and keep solid with the house down on the flats." He chuckled.

Easton put on a fresh shirt, buttoned a white coat, and by the time his tie was ready, Gurnley had the books out of the rug roll.

"You'll notice that I've got 'R. Stanley' written in the volumes," he pointed out to both of the men.

"Say, you think of everything!" said Hassler, with a shake of his head that was a tribute to the ability of the leader.

"No, not everything—but I do my best. I have to study things out. Now, Mr. Easton, I want you to wear your best manners. You've been neglecting your social duties!"

"Oh, he's a swell, all right!" jeered Hassler.

Easton took the books and went out without any delay, waving an assuring hand to Gurnley.

Gurnley sat down again, resuming his cigar thoughtfully. Hassler got his pipe going well, and their eyes followed the tall figure departing into the lower levels of second growth. Then they saw Easton leave the great ferns for the open trail leading down to Finlayson's house.

"Everything jake at last, eh, big boss?" said Hassler contentedly.

"Everything nice and tidy," agreed Gurnley. "All we've got to do is sit tight—and wait."

"You said it!"

"Would you mind handing me a drink of water, baron?"

Hassler rose promptly, crossed the room to the rear and reached for the dipper on a hook. "That Hebat boy brought in some fresh," he remarked. He brought the dipper in his right hand, the left supporting the cup carefully against spilling as he walked.

Gurnley was still sprawled backward, legs thrust out, his arms crossed on his cummerbund, his right toward his left hip.

As Hassler drew near, directly in front of him, Gurnley did not reach to take the dipper. But his right hand lifted in a swift, jerky motion—his automatic glinted in the sunlight from the doorway, and at the same instant he fired.

The bullet, at such close range, fairly blasted Hassler off his feet. He lifted from the floor in a grotesque, stiff-legged jump, uttering a gurgling cry that was like a cough. His right hand flew high, tossing the dipper into the rafters. His dark head snapped backward, and his face upraised, the eyes bulging with shock and pained surprise. His feet struck the floor again, and he took a couple of limp and shuffling steps backward, then bent forward and fell face down. The water he had thrown upward came down upon him, and the dipper rattled near by.

"That'll teach you to steal guns—to kill me with," growled Gurnley.

The man with the automatic remained sitting in the chair, watching the prostrate man, who was now coughing stranglingly. His right hand fumbled along his right leg, twitching, and feeling for the stolen weapon in his hip pocket. Then the hand stopped, and the curling fingers fell limp upon the flooring, splayed out wide like the points of a starfish.

Gurnley saw that he did not need to waste another bullet. He was conscious now of the sound of running feet out on the trail. He left his chair and ranged himself alongside the inner wall near the doorway, waiting, automatic in hand.

Easton, just as he had gained the lower level of the first bench of land on the slope below the bungalow, had heard the shot fired by Gurnley. And Easton had stopped in dismay, puzzled at first as to where the report had come from. As he searched the flats below for some sign that would explain the shot, he saw that others were looking about like himself. And they were all looking up to the hills. Among the palms before the planter's place a white figure had come to a tense standstill. Mrs. Finlayson was visible—she was staring across the gentle swale that separated the two buildings. On the sandy flats among the trees, natives at work had suddenly frozen into wooden men—listening. All at once, every moving thing in sight, it seemed to Easton, had become a solid part of the immovable landscape. Only the gulls whirled and dipped and rose again above the line of the shaking coconut mops as the birds ranged over the froth along the beach.

There was a rumbling echo from the hills across the valley beyond Finlayson's house—and then Easton knew that the shot he had heard had come from the bungalow he had just left.

It seemed impossible that anything could have gone wrong at the bungalow, with its general agreement that everything was as it should be with the three men. He dropped the books and nibbled at his nails. The silence which followed the shot only increased his fears that something disastrous had happened. He waited for voices—for another shot—for anything that would give him a key to what had taken place back in the bungalow.

"That crazy fool of a baron!" he whispered. "I'll bet he's fired off that stolen gun—maybe at some lurking native!"

He ran up the trail and approached the bungalow.

Gurnley appeared in the doorway. Easton could detect nothing about him that indicated he was in any way alarmed.

"Oh, I thought you were gone," called the big man carelessly.

"Say, what was that shot?" demanded Easton.

Gurnley gave a grunt of disgust.

"Aw, you might've known that the fool baron would pull something to gum the game for us. He dropped that big —you know the one—and it went off."

Easton moved on toward the bungalow.

"I guessed it right, the first time," he grumbled. "The whole island's on its toes after that blast—and the *kajangs* all open, too. They must have heard it a mile—the planter's wife—the natives down below—all looking up this way when I turned back. Now they'll know we've got a gun, and they'll all suspect it's Finlayson's. What'll the damned fool baron do next?"

Something made Easton stop; he knew that Hassler should be arguing to excuse his carelessness, or moving about. And—Easton had caught a queer look of anger in Gurnley's face which did not fit with the soft carelessness of his voice.

Gurnley, seeing Easton's hesitation, turned to look back into the room, as if at Hassler.

"I tell you, baron, put it away!" he commanded irritably. "Hide it! That Malay'll get his eyes on it if you don't take care! And if you keep on monkeying with it, you'll most likely fire it again."

Easton, from where he was standing on the ground at a lower level than the sill of the door, could not see Hassler lying on the floor. But assured, now, that Gurnley was really talking to the baron as Gurnley pretended, he slowly started up the steps.

But Gurnley, standing athwart the doorway, did not make way for Easton to enter. His body covering the doorway, the big man's right hand was apparently resting on a shelf just inside.

"You know," he observed lightly, as if he were mentioning some unimportant trifle, "Mr. Finlayson told me of a little conversation you had—with the baron. The planter was under his house, but you two didn't know it—and Finlayson heard everything."

Again Easton halted—on the top step. Now he saw that the look on Gurnley's face was accusing. "A—a conversation?" repeated Easton, faltering. "Why—what about?"

"About how you told the baron to steal the revolver," replied Gurnley, "so the two of you could do for me—when I got here." His voice was pleasant. And he smiled.

"I told the baron? When?" repeated Easton. But he divined the bitter enmity in Gurnley's smooth words. So Easton did not finish his question. His eyes roved over Gurnley's shoulder and caught a glimpse of the figure stretched on the bamboo floor. In that fraction of an instant Easton understood the degree of disaster which was upon him. One foot went back, feeling for the step beneath. "That's crazy talk!" he cried. "Don't fall for——"

"No, I ain't crazy," retorted Gurnley. "I've got wise." Now there was a rasp in his tones. "Told you I'd made a hit with the planter, didn't I? That was the truth. And he handed me the low-down on you two birds, but he doesn't know I'm in on the game. So let me tell you something—you've lost out! Because I'm not a man to double cross. Told you that once before, and you didn't believe it. You'll believe it when I'm done with——"

Easton turned swiftly, hoping to break for safety. But Gurnley was too quick for him. The right hand that had been on the shelf came into sight, and

the automatic pistol snapped to within a foot of Easton's side. Gurnley fired twice.

Easton pitched headlong off the stoop. Striking the ground at the foot of the steps, he rolled over a couple of times in the sweet-smelling ferns before the bungalow. Then he lay with one arm under his head, his dying look fixed on the swaying tops of the palms and on the wheeling gulls.

Gurnley hastened down to him, and made sure that he was in his death agony. Easton's lips twitched and he showed his teeth, but he could not speak. Gurnley took from him, and pocketed, the automatic pistol which Gurnley had himself supplied to Easton the night before.

"I guess that'll be about all," said Gurnley. Then he went inside to Hassler. The latter was dead beyond a doubt. From the body Gurnley took both the revolver Hassler had stolen from Finlayson and the automatic brought from the *Pointer*.

Hurriedly pulling off his own white coat, Gurnley held it up before him in his left hand and into its right front near the low pocket, fired the planter's weapon so that a bullet went through the fabric from the inside. Then he fired into the thatch overhead, dropped the revolver near Hassler's right hand, but kept the pistol.

Now Gurnley was ready to leave the bungalow. He put on the perforated coat, ran his fingers through his thick hair to stand it on end and rumple it. Then, holding in his hand the automatic with which he had killed the two men, he bolted out of the house, bareheaded, yelling as he ran:

"Mr. Finlayson! Oh, Mr. Finlayson!"

Down the trail went Gurnley, toward the edge of the hill. When he entered the high brush and ferns, he paused.

"That damned Hebat!" he muttered. "If he's around——"

But there was no sign of anybody either in the clearing or in the near-by jungle. He rushed away again, heading for the flats below. And now, he shouted again and again for Finlayson. putting the utmost of excitement and fear into the summons.

Presently other shouts answered. There were Malays running about wildly in the palm grove. As he neared them, some of the men ran toward him, screeching questions he could not understand. He was still holding the automatic, and seeing the weapon, the Malays suddenly sheered away from him, and fell to gabbling among themselves.

He tried to call them back, then waved an arm in the direction of the hill bungalow.

"Dead!" he shouted, hoping they would understand some English. "Men dead—up there!"

Then Gurnley ran on toward the planter's house.

From where he stood, listening and watching, on his veranda, Finlayson saw the recent tiffin guest approaching; and shifting from a back pocket the revolver which Cantlow had left him. the planter thrust it handily into his right outer coat pocket.

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE AGAINST ONE.

"WHAT'S the trouble?" called Finlayson, as Gurnley came panting up to the stoop of the house. Gurnley slowed to a walk, his face red and streaming with sweat. He was really winded after his run, and he answered the question chokingly.

"Hassler! He—shot—at me!"

"What for? To hold you up?" demanded the planter. He saw that his guest was carrying a pistol in his hand. Finlayson slipped his fingers over his own gun in his coat pocket.

When he was within a few feet of the planter, Gurnley threw his auto-

matic to the ground and staggered on toward the steps. He sat on the lowest board, gasping for breath, and pretending he could not speak.

Finlayson stood near by, waiting. He was also pretending—pretending that he was shocked and amazed at the news. His manner was sympathetic, waiting until "Mr. Robertson Stanley" could get back his normal breath.

"So they were set to rob you, after all," said Finlayson. "*Now*—you see—they are dangerous."

Gurnley shook his head.

"They think—I'm police," he began. Then he began to tell part of his story in pantomime. Leaning back, he held out his coat front and showed the bullet hole, surrounded by pits of powder stains. "Look! Fired at close range! Nearly got me—narrow escape!" Chest heaving, he waved the perforated coat front so Finlayson could see the inside.

The planter whistled.

"And my gun?"

Gurnley nodded, for again he had no breath for speech. He waved a hand toward the trail he had just come down.

"Look out!" he whispered between his gasps. "Easton—he may come down!"

"He chased you?" The planter's face was suitably grave.

"I shot at 'em—both," said Gurnley, now better able to talk. "Guess I got Hassler—anyway, he won't bother us much more, even if he's not dead."

"Then you hit him?"

Gurnley nodded.

"May be dead. About Easton—I'm not sure. Got two shots at him. Hear 'em? But he kept coming for me—and drove me out. He fell off the steps as I hit for the trail here—maybe stumbled, maybe he's hit. Say! Give me a drink—my heart!"

Acting the part of a man on the verge of collapse, Gurnley leaned forward, holding his head between both hands, which rested upon his knees. Finlayson climbed the steps and shouted for a servant.

A Malay boy came on the run from the cook shack in the rear. From somewhere in the back of the bungalow Mrs. Finlayson called a question to her husband.

Finlayson halted on the top step.

"It's all right, dear," he told his wife. "Don't come out—you're too weak. Mr. Stanley's had trouble with the pair on the hill—I'll let you know later." And to Gurnley: "Come up into the shade here, Mr. Stanley, if you can make it—it's too hot there where you are."

Gurnley got to his feet and wearily climbed to the veranda. There he took a chair at the table he had quitted only a short time before. The table was cleared of its dishes now. He leaned an elbow on it, and with the handkerchief he had chosen so carefully for his tiffin with the Finlaysons, he mopped sweat from face and throat.

Finlayson took a bottle and glass from the startled servant and dismissed him. As the boy disappeared, with glances over his shoulder, the planter poured out a stiff drink for his guest, who took it with shaking hand and finished it promptly.

As he set the glass on the polished board, Gurnley was ready to resume the story he had carefully thought out as he was strolling in the grove after tiffin. He felt that it was sound and wholly plausible.

The planter drew up a chair and sat down across the table from Gurnley, in such a position that he could see the trail that led down from the hill bungalow.

"Mr. Finlayson," said Gurnley, his voice conveying the seriousness of the matter, "when I left you and your wife an hour ago, I simply walked into what was intended for a death trap!"

"You never should have gone back

there," said Finlayson. "I felt a bit nervous after you'd gone—but as you were armed, it seemed all right. Especially, as there was not an idea in my mind or yours that they'd think of attacking you."

"That's what made my danger all the greater. I was sure everything'd be all right—and found myself in a shooting match with two ruthless men. I don't see how I got out alive!" He worked up a fairly good shudder.

"Now you know why I was afraid—and why I did my best to warn you," said the planter.

"You had their number, old man! I'm mighty glad I took the battle on myself—now that it's turned out all right. Just fancy what it'd have meant if they'd started spilling lead with Mrs. Finlayson around—and they shoot without warning, believe me!"

"Lucky that you had a gun on you."

"Lucky I was so quick with it. But you'd better send somebody up there to have a look around. Because if we've still got Easton to deal with—we ought to find out what shape he's in, though I'm pretty sure I put one lead pill into him."

Gurnley looked around and observed several workmen gathered in the palm grove not far away, talking quietly.

"I've already sent one of my natives," said Finlayson. "But tell me—what broke the fight open? What'd they pull on you?"

"It was Hassler who made the first move," resumed Gurnley. "I had just got back into the bungalow, and I was starting to take off my coat. Had it down from my right shoulder. He was bringing me a drink of water, just as pleasant as he could be. Dipper in his left hand. As I turned to take it, he shoved your big revolver at me, and says: 'You've come here to spy on us! Put up your mitts!' It was all as quick as that!"

"Must have given you a jolt."

"You bet it did! Your gun looked like a cannon. 'What're you talking about?' I asks him, and just then I leaned a little to one side to pull my coat back on again. I was pretty badly rattled—he had the drop on me. But he never answered me—next I knew, he fired. The bullet went through the coat, as you see—right past my hip. It was the way I leaned that made him miss me.

"Well, I hadn't thought of pulling my gun—you know, I told you at tiffin I had an automatic. And on my way back, I'd loosened it some. Must've had a hunch I'd need it. Not that I really expected trouble, but I was nervous. Mr. Finlayson, I just grabbed for the automatic and fired into the smoke from that big gun of yours. And I dropped him! As he fell, he fired again, but the bullet went over my head!

"I turned to run out through the door. And there was Easton, coming for me, with one hand high up, as if he had a knife! I'm not sure what he had—something ready for me, anyhow. I fired a couple of times, quick, and kept going for that door. He backed out ahead of me, and fell. I just jumped over him—and man! I kept going, I tell you!" He sighed heavily, and fumbled in his pockets for a cigarette.

"You certainly gave 'em a surprise party! By George! They thought they had you—and they got a handful!"

"You see," went on Gurnley, as he puffed rapidly, "they took me for a detective—thought I'd trailed 'em here, and decided they might as well finish me off. That's what they probably whispered about last night. And when you invited me to tiffin, and left 'em out, they got panicked. Figured, probably, that you'd been told what I knew, and they'd be arrested."

"Of course," said Finlayson, "they felt safe enough with only me to deal with, and the chance that I knew noth-

ing about 'em; but with both of us—that was another thing altogether."

Gurnley nodded and glanced nervously toward the trail to the hill.

"And taking you for a police officer," Finlayson went on, "they knew you'd be armed. They'd swiped my gun—and they felt that if they killed you, they'd have yours. They could deal with me then—fully armed, and my gun in their possession. Then they'd murder the third man they're expecting. They felt cornered and ready to shoot their way through anything—beginning with you. My hat! If they'd got you, I'd have been in for it!"

"We're not out of the woods yet. We'd better find out quick about Easton. Anyhow, we're two to one now." Gurnley turned for a glance in the direction of the hill trail.

"And you've got a gun," said the planter.

Gurnley's head snapped up.

"Say! I didn't fetch away your revolver—from where Hassler dropped it. That was a fool trick to pull! Walk off and leave a loaded gun in the bungalow for Easton to get his hands on!"

"Yes, that's bad, if he's able to use it," admitted Finlayson. "I think we'd better go up there and scout around a little. Can't depend too much on what that native'll report. You see, he may be too scared to go inside the house, and unless he finds Easton dead—or moving around—we won't be sure just what we're up against. And we can't wait for sundown, either."

Gurnley assented, but did not rise.

"Sure, we'll take a look at things soon as I feel in shape for a walk—and ready for fight."

"No hurry. You've been considerably shaken up."

"I'll say I'm jarred a trifle. To have to shoot two men—and that run. I was afraid Easton would beat me down here by some short cut and put a bullet into you. Maybe he played dead on me, too, and he'll pop up on us with that big revolver."

Finlayson stood up.

"I'd better have a word with my wife. She heard the firing, and it gave her another fainting spell. I want to tell her everything's quiet—and all right. In the meantime, we'll maybe get some sort of report from the man I sent up the hill to investigate."

The planter entered the house. When he had beckoned Mrs. Finlayson out of a rear bedroom to the back veranda, he recounted Gurnley's story in normally loud tones. He wanted Gurnley to feel sure his story had been believed.

As Finlayson talked, there was a gleeful light in his eyes. And when he had finished Gurnley's yarn, the planter added a cautious, but triumphant whisper:

"Emily, that poison I fed him against Hassler and Easton at tiffin time, has worked like a charm. He just went back to the bungalow and shot 'em up—and we're safe!"

"You think it's possible—that he's killed—both?" whispered Mrs. Finlayson in return. Her face was pale with anxiety and the shock of tragedy so appalling. "Oh, Ned, I can't believe it! There was shooting, but——"

"You mean you believe the bullets went into the air? Well, maybe it's a clever blind, and I'll not trust him, anyhow."

"Don't go up there with him!"

"Not by a long shot! I was simply testing him on how eager he was to get me away from the house. But I'll not chance walking into any trap he may have set. I'll wait until Hebat brings word."

"Even if they're both dead—he's dangerous," she warned.

"Yes—but it's man to man now, in any row, assuming he told the truth about killing the others. And—he doesn't know I've got a gun." He patted his side pocket.

"He'll want to stay here—in the house with us," she said, her face worried at the prospect.

"Yes. But he'll be safe, because I'm sure he's going to take credit for what he's done—that he saved us. He wants to be solid with us. As long as he feels that way, he shouldn't want to try anything with me. He threw his automatic on the ground in our front yard as he came up—sort of a way of disarming himself, so I wouldn't have any suspicion against him."

"But that pistol may be empty—or jammed. Ned, you can't be too careful with that man!"

"Don't worry, dear. I'm well aware of what a tricky bird he is. But he's got sense enough to understand that he's being watched by our Malays in the grove. He'd hardly attack me under the circumstances. No, dear, he'll play as smooth a game as he can, as long as he can."

As he made a turn to go, she caught him by his arm.

"Wait here with me, Ned," she begged, "until Hebat comes! Stay away from Stanley! Oh, do, dear! Find out first whether he's been lying to you about what happened."

"I don't want him to suspect that I've the slightest doubt of his story," argued Finlayson. "You get Hebat's report, and call me in on some other pretext—medicine, or so on."

With a cautioning gesture the planter then passed through his house to the front. Gurnley was leaning back in his chair, smoking a fresh cigarette.

"I'd better gather up that gun of yours," said Finlayson, as he crossed the veranda to the stoop. He went down the steps, but hesitated there, waiting to see what the guest would say.

"Oh, yes, if you'll be so kind," said Gurnley. And, with a laugh and a shake of the head, he added: "Wasn't that another prize trick for me to pull—throwing away the only gun I've got!"

Finlayson picked up the weapon. Some of his workers moved toward him through the grove, but he gestured them back. Then the planter rejoined Gurnley and placed the pistol on the table.

"Vicious little thing, that," remarked Finlayson. "It fits into the palm of a man's hand—but it did the business when you needed it."

Gurnley did not reach for the pistol, but helped himself to another drink.

"There's about three more bullets in it—and what spare ammunition I've got is up in my luggage."

"Let's hope you won't need any more bullets."

Gurnley made a grimace at some thought which pained him. Then:

"I hope I'll not have to kill again—not even a criminal. I had to defend myself, Mr. Finlayson—it was kill or be killed. But—I hope I won't have to use that gun on Easton again."

"Now look here, Mr. Stanley; you were justified in what you did up there," declared Finlayson. "And under my concession on Castle Reef, I've got the powers of a magistrate. So from the legal side you needn't worry. If they're both dead, they got what they deserved—and I hope Easton's dead."

"You make me feel better," returned Gurnley. "And I suppose it is best if the two are dead, taking things all around. You and Mrs. Finlayson won't have to worry about 'em any more."

Here was the attitude which the planter looked for, and he promptly met it with due praise.

"In any event, you've been a great help to my wife and me, Mr. Stanley," said Finlayson solemnly. "Your coming has been a godsend to us. Of course, you can't stay up there in that bungalow after what's happened. We expect you to move in here with us. Too bad you had to go through that duel—your nerves have been in such bad shape with pain so long in the *Pointer*."

Three Malays were approaching the house down the hill from the little bungalow. Finlayson and Gurnley watched them.

"Now, these men'll know something," said Gurnley. "What do you think, just from looking at them? They don't seem to be in fear of anybody behind 'em."

"No," agreed Finlayson, "they're not afraid. They're hurrying, but there's no sign of alarm. One of two things—they know that both men up there are dead, or Easton has got into the jungle. We'll find out mighty soon what——"

A high and excited voice, calling from the rise of hill back of the house, broke in upon Finlayson's comments. He knew then that Hebat was shouting something to Mrs. Finlayson, from a jungle trail which led to the house from the bungalow.

The piping words came clearly to the ears of both men on the front veranda:

"——of the new man, he who came by the ship last night! His words were soft but he deceived with them! He killed the short man who would bring him water to drink! And after that, he laughed in the eyes of the tall one, called him back to the house, and killed him also! Then he fled this way. Beware of him! He is more evil than we thought! Tell the *tuan,* before——"

Hebat, the trusted servant who was supposed to understand only his own Malay, was talking the purest English!

Mrs. Finlayson saw the danger of it, and tried to check his talk by a wild waving of her hands and a warning in Malay.

"Diam! Diam!" she cried, urging him to silence. *"Jangan chakap Inggris!"* which latter meant, "Do not speak English!"

Now there was silence back of the house, and in front. Hebat had clapped his hands over the lower half of his mouth, as if the caution had not come too late.

By the table on the front veranda, Gurnley's face betrayed astonishment, then fear, next rage. But Finlayson held his breath and tensed his muscles, preparing for the trouble which impended. Gurnley could be fooled no longer.

But for several minutes Gurnley did not move even an eyelash. His unkempt head cocked a trifle to one side, he turned over in his mind the thing he had just learned—Hebat understood English, he must have heard Hassler and Easton talking since their arrival on the island, had made reports to Finlayson, and then had heard without a doubt enough conversations since the arrival of the *Pointer* to be fully aware of the fact that the sick passenger was the third man the other two had been waiting for! The planter knew that his guest was a crook—and now would be told of the double murder in the bungalow!

It was Finlayson who spoke first.

"Looks as if Hebat gave the bungalow a careful examination," he said casually. He was not certain that Stanley had heard Hebat's report or caught the significance which lay behind the Malay's English speech. So the planter kept his eyes on Gurnley's hands and at the same time was ready to draw his own revolver.

Gurnley laughed in his throat, shook his head a little, then slowly swung round toward Finlayson.

"Mr. Planter you've played a canny game with me!" The compliment had a genuine ring. "I can see now that your yarn was as phony as it was clever. You see what I did! Hebat's got it. I shot my pals! But young man——"

He grabbed for the automatic.

Finlayson's right hand seized the other's wrist.

Gurnley froze, neither jerking his wrist from the planter's hold nor attempting to take the tabled weapon with his free hand.

Finlayson spoke.

"Don't try any gun play on me!" he advised. He reached with his left hand to snatch the automatic his way.

"What put that idea into your head?" protested Gurnley. Again he was trying to be disarmingly suave. But his voice quavered in spite of him. That slight tremolo told of a murderous wrath.

Inside the house there was a sound of running feet. But neither man glanced away from the other.

"Ned! Ned!" It was Mrs. Finlayson calling in a terrified whisper from the main room behind the partly closed *kajangs.*

Finlayson answered her and there was a strange hollow note in his voice.

"Go away Emily! Go away! Go back—to the veranda!"

He heard her utter words brokenly as if she were in a nightmare. She said something to Hebat in Malay. The workmen loitering and watching in the grove began to move slowly toward the veranda now understanding that their employer was in trouble. Finlayson only waited to see what Gurnley would attempt next.

Gurnley brought the cigarette from his mouth with his free hand and tossed it over the veranda railing. And his hand kept going—to his side and to his cummerbund. He whipped out the automatic he had taken away from Hassler's body.

Finlayson thrust the muzzle of Gurnley's automatic against Gurnley's left arm. The little weapon was askew in the planter's hand and his finger was feeling for the trigger.

Gurnley threw himself backward in an effort to free his right wrist from the planter's grasp and at the same time Gurnley tried to aim his new automatic.

Finlayson fired.

With the sound of the shot there was a scream. It was Mrs. Finlayson. There came excited cries from the natives in the palm grove. Some ran away, others moved toward the house.

Gurnley fell over his chair to the matting of the veranda. He dragged Finlayson along, for the planter clung to the big man's wrist. The table crashed to its side.

The two men struggled, each seeking an advantage. Servants ran from the cook shack and there was a great clamor of voices on the verandas. Mrs. Finlayson came through the door, white and staring, with Hebat at her heels. Finlayson was conscious of the fact that his face was wet with something warm. He supposed that he had been cut in some unaccountable manner. Then he saw that blood was pouring from a small wound in Gurnley's throat—a bullet hole from the automatic. The planter had tried to wound his guest in the arm, and in the tussle the aim had been shifted to a more deadly spot.

Suddenly Gurnley ceased to struggle, and lay limp upon the bleached matting of the veranda. His eyes fixed themselves upon the figure of the red-turbaned Hebat, stooped above him, kris in hand.

"You—and your damned—English!" gasped Gurnley.

"Yes—he knew," said Finlayson. "I didn't want to kill you—but you knocked the gun—— Emily, give me that brandy!"

But Gurnley was past the drinking of anything. The few drops of liquor remaining in the overturned bottle met a froth of blood on the dying man's lips. In a long, strangled sigh he drew his last breath.

"Emily, listen to this!" Finlayson called one morning from his big reclining chair in the living room. He was holding before him a Shanghai newspaper which had come only an hour or so earlier by a schooner which had left mail at Castle Reef Island. "It's an item that'll interest you!"

"I don't know anybody in Shanghai, Ned," answered Mrs. Finlayson from the back of the room.

Finlayson began to read:

"The local police admit that all traces have been lost of Gurnley, Sanders and the man known as 'the baron.' They were trailed to this port, but dropped from sight. It will be remembered that Gurnley was employed by a bank in the States. He was on the verge of being found short in his accounts when he engineered a robbery with the aid of two former convicts, Sanders and the baron. Two bank watchmen were killed. The three escaped with considerable money, a good part of which was in gold coin. Gurnley separated from the other men, but is presumed to have joined them again at Honolulu. The trio reached this city, and disappeared again. It is thought that the three men got away in a sailing vessel which has not yet reached port. All vessels which cleared from this port in the period of time involved are being checked up, and the necessary cables will be sent in the hope of insuring capture of the trio."

"Gold coin!" exclaimed Mrs. Finlayson. "Ned! Does that explain to you why Hebat——"

"Yes—it explains why Hebat left us so unexpectedly," broke in the planter, laughing. "Also, how it was that he came to inherit a fortune from a so-very rich uncle in Singapore."

"Hebat knew where they hid that stolen money!"

"Exactly! And the next time we walk the bund of his beautiful city, there he'll be, riding around in a silk-lined automobile, and diamonds for waistcoat buttons instead of silver coins. Well, that's what all the smartness of that crooked gang came to! All they did was to give us the scare of our lives, start a cemetery at Castle Reef Island, take the best No. 1 boy we ever had from us, and set him up in S'pore like a blooming rajah!"

THE FARTHEST NORTH COLLEGE IN THE WORLD

IN its sixth year, the Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines looks healthy. The little institution came into being by joint acts of Congress and of the Territorial legislature, giving it the funds to build on land situated three miles from Fairbanks in the interior of the Territory.

The last available register of students shows a total of one hundred and fifty seven registered and four persons graduated—one for each academic year from 1923.

But the cosmopolitan quality of the list is surprising. Here are some of the students' homes picked at random: Livland, Latvia; Besal, Switzerland; Cosmopolis, Washington; Hope, Idaho; London, England; Livingston, Montana; and San Francisco, California. The great majority are registered from Fairbanks, although Nome, Seward, Juneau, Ketchikan, and other Alaskan towns are represented. The size of the Territory means that even residents of the Territory must travel thousands of miles to get to the school.

In addition to the regular academic courses, the school wins popularity by offering mining short courses during the winter to prospectors and others interested. No charge is made for tuition.

Work of the United States Bureau of Mines for Alaska also is done at the college, offering additional opportunity for research along those lines. Within access of the college is practically every known method of gold placer mining in operation, and short trips on the Alaska Railroad bring the students to other methods in actual use.

A Debt of Friendship

By

Henry Herbert Knibbs

Author of "Noch-Tee's Daughter," Etc.

Here's a mighty personal sort of story about Billy the Kid—and how he dangerously paid back a good turn.

A COMPLETE STORY

MORA.

BILLY rode a tired horse into the mountain pasture and crossing it, came up to the house from the rear. He whistled. A golden panel of light appeared against the dark wall of the adobe, and vanished as Mora stepped out and closed the door behind her. "It is you! I am alone. No one has ridden past the house today. But I did not know you were coming!" She spoke rapidly, standing slender and straight in the cold starlight. "The gray one is tired." Mora patted the shoulder of the horse. Then, turning, she vanished into the house. Her man had come. She would change her dress, while he stabled the horse in the lean-to, and gave him corn.

As Billy entered the long, low-ceilinged room, she took his short coat, his gloves and his sombrero, and laid them on her bed. He stood with his back to the corner fireplace, his hands clasped behind him. The whitewashed walls were touched with a faint, red glow. His shadow, distorted by the firelight grew or diminished as the wind teased and twisted the flame of the fragrant juniper wood.

Mora touched her sleek, black hair with her fingers as she came over to him. *"Amor mío!"* she whispered, caressing his sleeve. "You are tired."

"No. But it was cold, crossing the range. How about some frijoles?"

"But you would think of frijoles when I would kiss you?"

"Oh, well. Have it your way."

Mora pouted. Billy took her hands,

drew her to him and kissed her pretty red mouth.

"And some *vino,* yes?" he said, as she drew back.

"But you would kill me, and laugh!"

"Not you, Mora."

She shrugged her shoulders, went swiftly to the wall cupboard and fetched a wicker jug of wine and a thick white cup. He poured and drank. "*Gracias!* No more. It was a cold ride, Chula."

Mora hung an iron pot over the fire and laid some goat's meat in a larded skillet. Billy moved away from the fireplace and paced back and forth, noting each familiar detail of the room. Small, well-made, graceful, he appeared even younger than his years. Mora glanced up at him as she knelt by the fire. She smiled to herself. She loved his glossy, dark hair, worn rather long, his small, smooth white hands and tapered fingers. She loved him for the keen life, and love of life in his dark-blue eyes. It always surprised her that his face should be so smooth, unlined and free from the effects of the sun and wind, for he lived much in the open. Above all she loved him for his daring. His life was forfeit to the law a score of times. He had been hunted, waylaid, trapped. Always he had escaped. And always he returned to her.

"Felipe is with the sheep?" he asked.

"Yes. My father is in the mountain camp."

"I'll ride over and see him, in the morning."

Mora rose, the spluttering skillet in her hand. "But it is that you must always be going somewhere! You come here, and you say, 'It is good to see you again, Mora.' You kiss me many times, and you say, 'I love you, my Mora!' Then you go away. Am I to be alone always?"

"But what if I have something for you—a present?"

"Oh! Let me see it!"

"How about the frijoles?"

"But you would think of the frijoles when I would kiss you?"

"So would you, if you hadn't had anything to eat since daylight. It's about nine, now."

Billy took a small gold watch from his pocket and swung it back and forth by its slender chain. Mora set the skillet back on the fire and ran to him. He put his hands behind him. Mora stamped her foot. "But a lady's watch! Some other woman——"

"No. Guess again. I traded a horse for it—a good horse."

"You did not kill?"

"Shucks, no! Didn't have to. There's no blood on it. Here!" He tossed the watch to her.

She held it close to the candle on the table, murmuring soft exclamations of delight. But her man was hungry. And as she waited upon him, she talked —asked him many questions. Where had he been? And were the Lincoln County officers still hunting him? Whom had he seen, recently? Did he know that Pedro Salazar had been killed in a gun fight in Las Vegas? Had not Pedro Salazar been his friend? And had he heard that there was a new sheriff in Lincoln?

Billy listened, nodded, finished his supper. His answers were brief. He trusted her, yet he was naturally reticent about his own affairs. He stood by the fireplace smoking a cigarette while Mora put away the dishes. She sang as she worked. Her man had come back to her. She was happy. Again she picked up the watch, caressed it, held it against her cheek. "But I think you must have stolen the horse you traded for this beautiful watch—no?"

Billy laughed. Mora amused him. And she was pretty. He took a handful of gold from his pocket, counted it on the table and gave her half. "Tell

the old man to feed that extra horse of mine and keep him ready to go. I may need him in a hurry, some day."

"Yes, Billy"—Mora called him 'Beely'—"the pinto is in the little pasture. Every day I give him the good corn. He is fat and strong. One day when I was feeding him, Juan Garcias rode up to the fence and asked me whose horse it was that I fed. I told him it was mine. He said I should not ride such a horse because he was broncho and might throw me off and kill me. I think Juan likes me very much. I think he would marry me."

Billy smiled as he said quietly: "If he does, I'll have to wipe him out. There's nobody going to get you while I am alive."

"Ah! But my man is jealous!"

"Not exactly. But I'm particular about who talks to my girl."

"I was fooling about Juan Garcias."

"Well, I wasn't. How is old man Ruiz?"

"Ah, Dios! I forgot. He will not live. He has the smallpox. Very soon he is to die. Yesterday his son went away. Now there is no one in the house to give him food and water. It is very bad for him."

"You mean young Fernando Ruiz dug out and left the old man to die? Didn't you do anything?"

"Yes. I took food and water and left it at the door. I was afraid to go in."

"You afraid! See here, Mora, old man Ruiz did me a good turn once, down in Lincoln. You say there's nobody here in this valley taking care of him?"

"It is so."

"Get the lantern, and a canteen, and some coffee and bread. I'm going over there."

"But it is the smallpox!"

"I know, but I wouldn't let a sick dog die like that."

"You are going?"

"I said so."

"Then I will go with you."

Mora would have lighted the lantern before they left the house, but Billy forbade her. He wouldn't take chances, even in that isolation. He had her carry the unlighted lantern and walk a few yards ahead as he followed—carrying the canteen and food. The lonely road, bordered by ghostly junipers, glimmered faintly in the starlight. The wind was sharp with cold. Mora clutched her shawl beneath her chin and murmured prayers to the saints as she trudged along, both frightened and elated.

A gaunt sheep dog slunk from out the dooryard shadows, snarling. Billy called out as he approached the door of the Ruiz home. Getting no response, he lighted the lantern. He thrust the door open with his foot and holding the lantern high, stepped into the house. Instantly he set the lantern on the table and backed away from it, his hand at his belt. Always he feared a trap.

The air in the room was foul, the room in filthy disorder. The sick man lay on a low cot, half covered by a tattered blanket. Realizing that some one had come, he asked for water. Billy fetched the canteen and a tin cup. Ruiz was burning with fever, shivering on the brink of delirium. He mumbled and cursed and murmured prayers. Billy spoke to him brusquely, giving his own name. Ruiz, raising himself on his elbow, glared at him from an unshaven face hideous with scarlet spots.

"Pretty bad, amigo?"

"*Si!* But I do not know you."

Again Billy gave his name, the name by which he was known from the Cumbres to Sonora. Ruiz repeated it and seemed to recognize him. Billy called to Mora to get some firewood and leave it at the door. Again he gave the sick man a drink of water.

Then he made a fire in the squat iron stove, and filled the coffeepot.

He told Ruiz he was going to get a doctor. Adjusting the wick of the lantern, he put more wood into the stove.

"You will not leave me alone?" whined Ruiz.

"Not long. I'll be back with the doctor before daylight."

And Billy stepped out into the clean, cold air of the mountain night.

"He is alive?" questioned Mora.

"Yes. But pretty bad. I'm going to Las Vegas to get the doctor."

"You! But in the town they will know you. Always some one is watching. Pedro Salazar was killed because he was your friend."

"I rode over this way looking for the man that got Pedro."

"Then you knew? And you did not come to see me, but to kill a man!"

"I rode round Las Vegas, and came up here to see my girl. If I drift down to Las Vegas, on business, what's the difference?"

"But you will ride to Las Vegas to-night. You will send the doctor, and you will not come back."

"I'll come back. I don't have to lie to you."

They walked briskly along the dark road as they talked. Billy was impatient to be on his way, not through any special feeling of sentiment, but because it was the square thing to do. For years he had owed old man Ruiz a debt of friendship. Here was a chance to pay it.

Mora was loath to let him go, yet she was glad she could not persuade him to stay. That his purpose was unselfish, and his will stronger than hers, made her glad.

"It is a good thing that you do," she said to him. "And for it the saints will forgive you much. But what can I do that you may know I love you? I can but wait—and wait."

"Do? Get some corn. I'll bait that pinto and catch him quick. The gray is leg-weary. And they don't know the pinto in Las Vegas."

The pinto, saddled and bridled, shied as Billy led him up to the doorway.

Mora came out and gave Billy his rifle.

"You will not let them kill you?" In her voice was mingled entreaty and command.

Billy laughed as he shoved the short saddle gun into the scabbard. "Not this journey. But if the pinto should stumble, and I didn't come back——" He leaned toward her and spoke in a low tone.

Mora seemed startled, unable to speak. Finally she whispered tremulously:

"You did this for me?"

"Yes, pretty mouth. No one else knows where I left it."

She would have kissed him, but he warned her to keep away.

"I was too close to old man Ruiz," he said. "No need of you getting it."

He swung into the saddle. The pinto reared. Billy drove the spurs in with a thud.

Mora stood listening to the faint thunder of hoofs. She heard the galloping cease and knew that Billy had steadied his mount down to a trot. Presently the sound ceased altogether. Mora gazed up at the stars, cold-white, brilliant, their dartlings like splinters of fire in the thin, clear air of the mountain solitude. Always her man came back to her. But some day he would ride away with a smile and a wave of his hand, and he would not come back.

For a long time, that evening, she knelt in her tiny, white-washed bedroom, her dark head bowed to the placid image of the Virgin. Shivering with cold, she replenished the fire in the larger room and sat at the table, her chin in her hands, gazing at the little watch Billy had given her. A

few minutes before midnight the watch stopped. When Mora realized that the minute hand was no longer moving, she stood up, her eyes wide with superstition, her lips trembling.

"It is a bad sign," she murmured.

Again she knelt before the peaceful image of the Sorrowful One. Finally, worn with excitement and worry, she undressed and went to bed.

BLAKE.

About midnight Billy dismounted and walked round to the back of a Mexican home on the outskirts of Las Vegas. Serafino Salazar, a short, sturdy, middle-aged Mexican, answered his knock. Undisturbed by Serafino's surprise, Billy asked him who was in town. He meant, "Are any of my enemies in town?" Serafino, brother of the recently murdered Pedro Salazar, mentioned two names. Billy smiled. One of the men was the murderer of Pedro. He had boasted openly that some day he would get Billy. The other was a hired gunman in the pay of one of Billy's bitterest enemies.

"I don't want either of them, this journey," Billy told Serafino, "if they'll let me alone. I want to see Doctor White. Old man Ruiz has got smallpox. He's about all in."

"I will go with you," said Serafino.

"I'm not going. You're going. Try the doctor's house. If he isn't there, he's down to the Silver Saloon. Don't go in. Just find out if he's there, and if those two Texas killers are there."

Serafino dressed and set out to find the doctor. Billy tied his horse and, going into the kitchen, made some coffee and smoked a cigarette. In a few minutes Serafino returned with the information that Doctor White was playing monte in the saloon, and that Blake and Hardy, the gunmen, were there also. Billy gave Serafino a twenty-dollar gold piece, aware that money never discouraged loyalty among his Mexican friends. Serafino insisted upon accompanying him to the saloon.

"No," said Billy. "You're too slow with a gun. You'd get bumped off, sure. You can come along and hold my horse, if you like."

So Serafino went with his young friend as far as the first cross-street east of the Silver Saloon. There, out of sight round the corner, he held Billy's horse. In his free hand he held a cocked .45 Colt that had belonged to his murdered brother.

Billy entered the saloon as casually as though he were going into a store to buy a can of tomatoes. Five or six Pecos Valley cow-punchers were drinking and talking at the bar. A poker game was going on at the first table beyond the doorway. Farther down the room there was a group around the monte layout. Interest in monte and poker evaporated as Billy sauntered toward the monte layout and said:

"Hello, doc! Do you need a new dealer?"

Doctor White knew Billy well, but for some strange reason he did not acknowledge his salutation. Blake, the man who had killed Pedro Salazar, was standing near the doctor, watching the game. On the other side of Blake stood Hardy, the Texas killer. The monte game stopped. Men glanced at one another. The Pecos Valley cow-punchers had turned away from the bar and were watching Billy.

Hardy had never seen Billy, and, wondering what had caused the sudden silence, said:

"Who is that hombre?"

A citizen of Las Vegas answered: "'That's Billy the Kid.'" And turning, the citizen offered to shake hands with him.

Billy smiled and nodded but ignored the proffered hand.

"I want to talk to Doc White," he said.

Doctor White had no reason to fear Billy, but he was puzzled and nervous because of his unexpected appearance in the saloon.

"Just a minute," said the doctor, and he turned back and said something to the dealer. He surmised that one of Billy's gang had been wounded and needed his services.

Meanwhile Billy did not take his eyes off Blake and Hardy, knowing that if he relaxed his vigilance for a single instant, one or both of them would try to kill him.

When the doctor came from the monte table, Billy told him to step outside. Doctor White had been drinking heavily, but he was not so drunk that he did not know what would happen if he made a mistake. So he walked quietly out of the room.

"Who's hurt?" called a drunken Pecos Valley puncher.

"Nobody—yet," replied Billy crisply.

The room could hear the bartender cautioning the puncher—telling him to shut up.

Billy dropped back a step. "I'm not looking for trouble," he said, gazing pointedly at Blake and Hardy. "But if any one here is, just help yourself." He dropped back another step.

Blake, who had boasted that he would shoot Billy on sight, seemed hypnotized. And Hardy, the desperado, could hardly believe that this smooth-faced young fellow, with the easy smile, was the notorious gunman. But the silence, the attitudes of those in the room told him the truth. The short, slender figure backed through the doorway and was gone.

Some one sighed heavily. A Pecos Valley man cursed and asked for whisky. The poker game began again. A man took Doctor White's place at the monte table. But the succeeding conversation was subdued. The drunken cow-puncher expressed the sentiments of all when he said:

"Billy sure put a hush on the house!"

Blake seemed to take the remark to himself. "Hell! So that's Billy the Kid, eh? I thought it was a sheep-herder."

No one took up the statement. The hum of subdued conversation ceased. The silence seemed to condemn Blake as a coward. He had said he would shoot Billy on sight. Blake felt that his reputation was at stake. "If he's so damn fast with a gun, why didn't he draw?" he asked.

"Mebbe because he didn't want to kill you—to-night," replied the monte dealer.

Not a man in the room had the slightest idea that Billy would return. He had said he was not looking for trouble, but it was apparent he would not run from it. His action in challenging Blake and Hardy, and then leaving the room, had seemed conclusive.

Around the corner, Billy argued with the doctor. His argument was backed by a generous amount of money. Finally the doctor agreed to attend the sick man if Billy would furnish a saddle horse. Serafino immediately volunteered to do that, and the doctor went to his home for his bag.

Presently Serafino returned and told Billy that the doctor was on his way up the valley, riding slowly.

Billy handed the reins of the pinto to Serafino. "I'll be back right soon," he told him. "Just you wait right here for me."

This time Billy entered the saloon from the rear. He moved quietly up to the bar. He asked for a drink of whisky—an unusual thing for him to do. He swung round, his back to the long bar, the whisky glass in his right hand. The Pecos Valley cow-punchers began to move away on either side. They knew he hadn't returned simply for a drink. The monte dealer, across the room, looked up and saw him. He

wanted to warn Blake, but he was afraid to move, or speak.

"Blake!" Billy's voice was like the snapping of a dry stick.

Blake whirled. His hand went to his hip. Billy didn't move a muscle until Blake's gun was out. Those near Billy saw the flash of his white hand, heard the blunt bark of the double action gun. Blake sank to his knees and fell forward on his face, shot through the forehead.

"Has he got any friends here?" queried Billy, smiling. "No? Well, he killed a friend of mine. And he bragged he'd get me next. He made two mistakes."

Billy set his untouched glass of whisky on the bar and walked out of the saloon.

Hardy knew better than to chance a shot at the Kid. The Pecos Valley cow-punchers were watching him. If he tried to shoot Billy in the back they would have blown him to pieces—proof of which was not long in coming.

"Why don't you bury your friend, seein' you're too yellow to fight for him?" said the drunken cow-puncher.

His companions laughed. "Yes. Go ahead. Start anything you like," they said, variously.

About a mile out of Las Vegas, Billy overtook Doctor White. The cold night air had cleared the doctor's brain. Since leaving the saloon he had done some thinking. For a while they rode side by side in silence. The doctor had on a cavalryman's overcoat, and a heavy woolen muffler was wound round his neck. His surgeon's bag was tied behind the cantle of the big Mexican saddle. Presently he spoke to Billy, without turning his head.

"Old Fernando Ruiz, you said?"

"Yes, Fernando."

"Much of a friend of yours?"

"Not so much. He did me a good turn once."

"Smallpox, eh? Aren't you afraid of it?"

"Me? No. That isn't what's going to get me."

Doctor White glanced quickly at Billy's shadowy figure. "Just what do you think is going to get you?"

"It won't be the smallpox, or a rope. It'll be a bullet."

"Well—I suppose so. That man Blake, maybe."

"No, doc, not Blake. He's done."

"What do you mean?"

"What I said—he's done."

Doctor White glanced sideways at Billy as though expecting to hear more about Blake—some comment, some explanation of the naked and somber statement: "He's done." White knew what Billy meant, and he was somewhat surprised by his indifference, his naturalness of tone and manner. Within the past hour Blake had been very much alive, a deadly menace to any individual daring enough to cross him in any way. And now he was through, and nonchalant young Billy Bonney had another notch in his gun.

"Billy, how do you feel after you have killed a man?" The doctor's question came after they had ridden perhaps ten minutes in silence.

"Why the same as I do now. It doesn't bother me any."

"Do you get any thrill out of that game? Do you like to kill?"

"No. But sometimes I have to."

"I believe you. But I can't understand you. I have my own theory——"

"Doc, you're drunk."

"No. I'm as sober as you are. I don't believe you could get drunk."

"Sure I could! But I don't monkey with liquor."

"Afraid of it? Afraid it would get your nerve?"

"No. But I'd be afraid of it if I liked it as much as you do."

"That's straight talk. And you're right. This smallpox case is a god-

send. If I had stayed in town, I'd have been drunk for a week. Now I wouldn't dare to get drunk, and I wouldn't have the stuff to drink."

"Most doctors I've seen were drinking men," declared Billy. "Not that I've seen so many. I've been lucky."

"Yes, I know you have. I remember the night you took Mora away from Juan Garcias, at the dance in Las Vegas. You told me just before that that you had never seen her before but you liked her looks. There wasn't a thing to hinder Garcias from killing you, that night."

"I know—I turned my back on him, two or three times. But it wasn't all luck, doc. Once I gave him his chance, and I watched Mora's face. The second time, I was talking to you and I watched your eye. The third time was at the bar when I was talking to Tom. Tom would have got him, over my shoulder, if Garcias had tried to get me."

"You mean you deliberately gave him three chances to kill you?"

"Not to kill me, doc—to try."

"You meant to kill him?"

"Not unless he tried for me. I wanted to find out if he was good enough to have Mora. He wasn't, so I took her."

The doctor was about to make some comment when Billy suggested that they ride.

"I have an idea we were riding," said the doctor.

"No. But we're over the ridge now." And he spurred the pinto into a gallop.

As the riders swept up the long, easy graze, Doctor White realized that never again would he get as close to the real Billy Bonney as he had during the first stage of their journey. Only on rare occasions did Billy talk about himself.

Lope, walk, trot and lope, they wore down the long miles, and drew up at the adobe of Fernando Ruiz just as the chill dawn trembled on the crest of the eastern ranges. The doctor got stiffly from his horse and, taking a small flask of brandy from his overcoat, drank a good half of it. "It will keep me awake," he explained, his face haggard, his eyes heavy and bloodshot.

"Some day it will put you to sleep," said Billy, laughing. "I'll take care of the horses. Go on in and see if the old man is alive. If he is, I'll double the fifty I gave you for coming up here."

"I'll see him through. You don't have to bribe me."

Doctor White's tone carried the faintest hint of a rebuke. If he had smiled, or had ended his declaration with an understandable curse, Billy would have laughed at him. But the little needle-pointed rebuke stung Billy into sudden anger.

"Why, damn you, White!" he said in a quick, high-pitched voice, "if you had a gun on you, I'd kill you!"

"I have," said White quietly—"in the pocket of this overcoat. Go ahead —if that's what you brought me up here for."

Billy's anger faded instantly. "Hell, no! Say, doc"—Billy's tone was jovial, boyish—"let's look at that little flask a minute." And he put his hand on the doctor's shoulder—a gesture of affection as spontaneous and sincere as had been his sudden anger.

"Of course." And the doctor produced the flask.

Billy held it up to the light a second or two. "Here's to a friend that ain't afraid to die!" he said. He took a quick drink, laughed, and returned the flask. "Mora's got some stuff better than that, over at her house. If you get out of liquor, just let me know, doc."

Riding the pinto, Billy led the doctor's horse out of the dooryard and down the road. The doctor turned, entered the evil-smelling, ill-lighted

room where Ruiz lay, helpless and alone in squalor and filth. His only son had deserted him, had fled in a panic. His nearest neighbor, Mora, had left food and water at his door but had been afraid to enter the house. And it had remained for Billy Bonney, whom the country knew as a killer, a desperado, horse thief and highwayman, to give the sick man water and food, ride many miles for a doctor, and to pay that doctor royally for his services.

All of which traversed the doctor's mind as he examined Ruiz and cheered him with a few words in Spanish. He took the sick man's pulse and his temperature. He made a fire in the stove, boiled a large quantity of water. He searched for an extra blanket and finding none, added his own army overcoat to the meager covering on the bed, and then opened the door and the windows and ventilated the room. He became nurse, interne, physician, hewer of wood and drawer of water, cook, laundryman, general roustabout. In three hours he had the house cleared of disorder and filth and fit to live in. He made a fire in the dooryard and burned most of the clothing, old papers, and rags about the place.

Toward noon the effects of the brandy began to die out. He had consumed all that was left in the flask. He fought off the attendant despondency until he found some clean straw in an outbuilding, and there he laid down and was instantly asleep.

GARCIAS.

When Billy came from pasturing the horses, he carried his saddle gun and a canteen. He intended to sleep out in the brush, since all Las Vegas would know he was in that section of the country. It was an open secret that he visited Mora occasionally. But heretofore the news had crept about *after* he had been visiting his Mexican friends in the hills. No one had known when he would come or when he would vanish. This time he had advertised his presence beyond all question of rumor.

He crossed the road and entered the dooryard of Mora's place. He asked her to get him a blanket.

"But is it that you shall sleep in the brush, like a wolf?" she argued. "Is this not your home? Will I not watch the road while you sleep? All day and all night you have been riding. Your eyes hunger for sleep. This is your home, *amor mio!*"

"It's about all the home I can use, pretty mouth. But this journey I'll sleep in the cave in the Largo canyon. I'll be down here again before sunset. If any strangers ride up and ask questions, or ride past and don't ask any, hang Felipes red saddle blanket on the back fence. I can see it from the rim of the canyon."

"Yes. But is it that you were seen in Las Vegas, last night?"

"Considerable. I had to get your good friend, Doctor White. He's going to take care of old man Ruiz for a few days. You'll have to take some food over there, say, about noon. But don't go into the house!"

"Always you tell me what I must do and what I must not do!"

"And as long as you're my girl, you're going to do what I say. How about that blanket, Chula?"

"I'm not beautiful. I am an ugly old woman, and I hate you!"

"Have it your own way, Chiquita. But I'm damn near dead for sleep."

"But my poor Billy! You shall sleep. And I will pray for you." And she fetched a thick, gray woolen blanket, which Billy swung across his shoulder.

She watched him cross the north pasture and disappear amid the hillside junipers. A few minutes later her

former lover, Juan Garcias, rode past the house, looking neither to the right nor to the left. Mora, always watchful, saw him and hailed him from the doorway. He swung his horse round—reluctantly, she thought—and rode back, a handsome, sullen mountain vaquero.

"Of a truth, I have not seen you for many days!" exclaimed Mora, intent upon finding out why he was sullen. "Are we not good friends?"

"I think you have other friends."

"But yes! Though they are not often on this lonely road. Must a girl have but one friend in the world?"

"I know what I know."

"If I did—I might love you."

Juan Garcias frowned. "You cannot fool me again."

"I have never tried, señor."

Juan seemed in haste to be gone, in spite of the half-veiled promise in Mora's alluring eyes. In fact, Juan was more than a little afraid to stay longer. He had noticed a sweat-marked pinto horse in the little pasture—and, more significant still, the half-thoroughbred gray which belonged to Billy. Garcias knew the horse and suspected that Billy was not far away.

Mora, because she had failed to learn her former lover's mission on the road, became suspicious. Hitherto, he had always been very frank with her about his plans. "But if you are going to Las Vegas, Juanito, would you bring me a spool of black thread? Wait, and I will get the money for it."

"I do not go to Las Vegas. I ride to Encinitas, to meet a friend."

"Ai! But then I may not mend my father's coat. Adios, Juanito! She must be a pretty one. I see you have put on your good clothes."

Never before had Juan showed a disposition to hurry away when talking with her. His haste betrayed him. So, when he had disappeared round the first bend in the road, Mora crossed the pasture and climbed the steep ridge west of the ranch. Presently she discerned Juan on his buckskin pony, far down the mountain highway. She saw horse and rider leave the highway and take the road to Encinitas.

"Fool that I am!" she said. "He rides to Encinitas. He told me the truth. Yet I do not believe him."

Juan Garcias had told Mora but part of the truth. He did have a message for the patron of the Encinitas rancho. But that was incidental to his real purpose, which was to inform the authorities in Las Vegas that Billy Bonney's gray horse was in the little pasture of the Moreno Ranch. Juan Garcias had waited many months for this opportunity to revenge himself on the man who had taken his girl away from him.

In Las Vegas, that afternoon, Garcias felt less inclined to betray his rival, when he learned what had happened to the gunman Blake. However, Garcias got drunk in the Silver Saloon and, while conversing with a fellow countryman, boasted that he knew where Billy the Kid was hiding. A loafer carried the news to Hardy. Accosted by the deputy, Garcias said he had seen the gray horse, but had not seen Billy. Knowing that Doctor White had left town, Hardy asked Garcias if he had happened to see him anywhere on the road. Garcias regretting having said anything at all about Billy or his horse, thought he saw an easy way out of the controversy. He said he had seen the doctor in the dooryard of the Ruiz place, making a bonfire. He said that Fernando Ruiz had the smallpox and was going to die.

Because Billy had called for the doctor the night before, Hardy began to believe that Garcias was telling a straight story. Moreover, it was known that Billy had taken Juan's girl from him. Hardy was inclined to believe

that Billy was in hiding somewhere near the head of the valley.

That evening, Hardy and three deputies rode out of Las Vegas with Juan Garcias as guide and hostage. They told Juan they would shoot him down the instant they suspected him of treachery. Juan protested that he was an honest man, and that Billy Bonney was his bitterest enemy.

"Well, you'll get your chance at him," said Hardy. "We'll keep you right up in front so you can get to him quick."

THE POSSE.

As there was no red saddle blanket on the dooryard fence when Billy climbed to the rim of Largo canyon that afternoon, he came on down through the pasture, pausing only behind the last clump of junipers to make sure that Mora was in the house before he showed himself in the open. He whistled. Mora signaled to him from the doorway.

He asked her to get him something to eat. Meanwhile, he caught up the gray horse and saddled him. Mora was not pleased when Billy told her he was going over to her father's sheep camp, and she told him so.

Billy laughed. "I got a kind of feeling it would be good luck to go," he said. "Anyhow, I want to see the old man."

"But you will come back?"

"Yes. Or—what do you say to digging up that cash I told you about and making a run for the line? Down in Sonora I could quit this game and we could live comfortable. Just say the word, and I'll saddle the pinto."

Mora's bright face grew wistful. "But it is that you will never change," she said finally. "And could I leave my father, who would then have no one to make the home for him? And he is your good friend. Would you take me from your friend?"

"From anybody. But maybe you're right. I guess I'm in too deep to quit now. How about some frijoles, Chula?"

"Always the frijoles! I do not think of food when you are here. I think of something else."

"That's too bad. Now, *you* don't spoil *my* appetite any."

"And you will eat here on the doorstep, like a beggar?"

"Yes. And you can watch the road. Anybody ride by to-day?"

"Only Juan Garcias. He said he was going to Encinitas." Mora shrugged her shoulders. "I did not believe him. His eye was like the eye of the coyote. He did not smile. When he had gone, I watched from the little hill. He rode to Encinitas."

"What time was it?"

"But a little while after you went."

"What kind of a horse did he ride?"

"The *palomino*. Juan was wearing a new suit and a new hat."

"He was headed for Las Vegas. Well, fetch out the coffee and the frijoles, Chula. I want to get over the hill before dark."

Billy seemed to be in high spirits. He laughed away Mora's fear that Juan Garcias might have gone to Las Vegas for no good purpose. He ate hurriedly, made a cigarette, and smoked. He told Mora to take some peach brandy over to Doctor White when she went with his supper. He said he would stop and find out how Ruiz was getting on. He asked her if she had any message for her father, and when she said she had none, Billy declared that he had. He was going to tell her father to get a new housekeeper—that his daughter was going to Mexico to live. Billy gave Mora no chance to interrupt him. He flicked away his half-smoked cigarette, mounted his horse, and glanced up and down the road.

"I'll be back about noon, to-morrow,"

he said. With a glance and a gesture of farewell, he was gone.

Long after he had disappeared up the mountain road, Mora sat pondering. Rumor whispered that Billy had another woman, over in Fort Sumner. But rumor whispered many strange things. Of this she was certain; her man had asked her to go to Mexico with him. When he returned to the house, to-morrow, she would tell him she was ready to go.

Hardy and his posse camped at the Encinitas ranch that night. About three in the morning they had breakfast and immediately set out for the head of the valley. Hardy rode beside Garcias, who had been instructed to lead them to the home of Fernando Ruiz.

They arrived there shortly before daybreak. Placing his men so they could command both entrances to the house, Hardy made Garcias walk in front of him as he approached the back door. When they reached it, Hardy stepped to one side and told Garcias to knock. There came no response. Garcias called Ruiz's name.

Finally an answer came, not from the house but from the lean-to in the yard. Hardy recognized Doctor White's voice, asking what was wanted. Hardy told the doctor he was wanted, and to come with his hands in the air. White pulled on his shoes and his overcoat and stalked up to Hardy. The doctor had his hands in his overcoat pockets.

"What do you want me for?" queried White brusquely. In the dim light he could recognize the Texas gunman, but he feigned ignorance of his identity.

"Has Ruiz got the smallpox, or is it a bluff?" asked Hardy.

"Speaking professionally, he has. Personally, I can't see that it's any of your business."

"I'm making it my business, as deputy sheriff. My name is Hardy."

"Well, I'm White, of Las Vegas—Doctor White. I'm in charge of this case."

"Is it smallpox?"

"I told you. But if you're curious, step into the house and satisfy yourself."

"Who's in there, besides Ruiz?"

Doctor White shrugged. "Why, an old gentleman with a long white beard and a scythe. In the picture books he is called 'Death.' Short and sweet, like that. Ever meet him, Hardy?"

"White, you're drunk!"

"Your information is gratuitous. But my head is clear, nevertheless. I know what I'm doing. I've kept that old man with the scythe from getting our friend Ruiz. But I won't guarantee to keep him from getting you if you go in there."

"White, where's the Kid? We want him."

White allowed himself the dangerous luxury of a smile. "The Kid? You say 'we' want him. Do you want him too, Garcias? He's ever so popular, isn't he? And do you really want to meet him *again,* Hardy?"

Enraged by the taunt, Hardy whipped out his gun and struck White on the head. White swayed and crumpled down, his hands still in his overcoat pockets. Hardy told Garcias to open the door. Over the Mexican's shoulder Hardy surveyed the dim room. He saw old man Ruiz on the cot, and was satisfied that he was an exceedingly sick man. There was no one else in the room.

"You can step out," said Hardy.

Garcias was trembling. His sallow face was beaded with sweat. White lay huddled on the ground. A raw, red gash showed above his left ear. Hardy cursed and kicked the prostrate form as he went past.

The posse assembled and rode over to the little pasture on the Moreno Ranch. They found the pinto and the

doctor's buckskin horse, but Billy's gray was missing. Hardy, who had been working himself up to the pitch of killing, threatened to shoot Garcias for lying to him. But the other members of the posse interfered. Garcias would be of no use to them dead. And they had further use for him.

When they had surrounded Mora's house—two deputies concealed in the junipers of the north pasture, and Hardy and the other in an arroyo south of the road—Garcias was instructed to ride up to the house and deliver a message to Mora. And with more hatred in his heart for Hardy and the posse than for Billy, Garcias obeyed.

Answering his hail, Mora appeared in the doorway. She knew at once that there was something wrong. Juan's eyes were glazed with a kind of sullen desperation. Something terrible had happened or was about to happen.

"I am to tell you that your man was arrested in Las Vegas," Juan said. "He would have me say you were to come to him, now."

Mora had every reason to believe Billy had ridden to her father's camp in the hills. Yet Juan had come to her with this message. Did he think he could lure her away from her home with such a lie?

"When was my man arrested?" she asked.

"Last night," replied Garcias, "for the killing of the Americano, Blake."

Mora laughed. Now she knew that Juan was lying to her. "Of a truth, you bring me strange news! Even now, my man is here, asleep. Shall I waken him and tell him what you have told me?"

Mora expected Juan to show fear. But no fear showed in his face, only a sullen desperation.

"I know what I know," said Juan. "I have given you his message." Then with his lips scarcely moving he whispered: "*Cuidado!*—They watch!"

Mora had half suspected that Juan Garcias had informed against Billy. Now she was sure of it. Yet she was puzzled that he should warn her. And, fearing that Juan might employ some further treachery, she told him that enough had been said, and closed the door.

At first she thought of taking some food over to Ruiz's place, and imploring Doctor White to warn Billy when he returned from the sheep camp. But fearing that those who watched the house might intercept her and hold her prisoner while Billy rode into the trap they had set for him, she gave up this idea.

Through the window she had watched Juan Garcias ride up the road toward the Ruiz place. But she could not know that beyond the bend he turned into the brush and reported to a member of the posse who had followed his every movement with a vigilant rifle.

Nor could she know that when Hardy heard Juan's report of his conversation with her, he believed that Billy was actually in the house asleep, and, after ordering Juan handcuffed to a stout juniper tree, he had sent Juan's guard the two deputies north of the house with orders to watch the rear entrance and if Billy appeared to shoot him down the minute they recognized him.

Mora reasoned that Juan Garcias' message had been dictated by some one else. And she was glad that her answer, originally intended for Juan alone, would most probably be the means of keeping the officers' attention centered on the house, with a chance that Billy might be warned by some one or something, in time to save himself. And in order to carry out the deception, Mora got breakfast, fed the chickens, and later washed two of Billy's shirts and hung them out to dry, although they had already been washed

and ironed and put away against a possible need of them.

Convinced that they had Billy cornered at last, Hardy and his men settled down to watch until sundown, if necessary. Against the possibility of Garcias' message putting Billy on his guard, Hardy reasoned that Billy would be more inclined to take the message as a joke. Billy was used to hearing all sorts of strange rumors about himself. And when he heard that Garcias, unaccompanied, had delivered such a message, he would be inclined to attribute it to spite, or consider it an attempt to lure Mora away from home and kidnap her.

Hour after hour the deputies lay and watched the house. And hour after hour, through the morning, Mora tried to evolve a plan by which she might warn Billy of his danger. He had said he would return about noon. Shortly after eleven o'clock, Mora thought of a very simple method of warning him. She took an old and disused saddle and bridle from the shed back of the house, and the red saddle blanket which her father used when he rode to town, and carried them out to the fence at the east end of the yard. She put the saddle on the top rail of the fence and threw the red blanket over it. Any one riding down the road from Ruiz's homestead would see the blanket long before he arrived at her home. And when Billy saw it, he would know at once what it meant.

And had he seen it, Billy would have heeded the warning. But it happened that Hardy saw Mora throw the red blanket over the saddle, and he surmised at once that it was some sort of signal.

"A Mexican ain't so damn particular about keeping the sun off a saddle, or airing a blanket," he said to the deputy who watched with him in the arroyo. "And I noticed when she heaved the saddle onto the fence, one of the stirrups was missing. You stay here and watch, and I'll go round and get Bodie and Warren. We'll go over to the Ruiz place and get a drink from the spring and fetch a canteen back to you."

DOCTOR WHITE.

When Doctor White recovered consciousness, he did not at first know where he was or what had happened. The sun was high, the warm air fragrant with the tang of pines. Warned by a dull throbbing in his head that if he moved suddenly he would regret it, the doctor cautiously raised on his elbow and gazed about.

The familiar, littered yard, the adobe, the spring, helped him to seize upon a fact: he was at Ruiz's place, in the hills. Ruiz had the smallpox. White remembered coming to the sick man's home with Billy Bonney. He recalled having slept in the lean-to in the yard. He knew he had not been drunk when he went to sleep.

He sat up. The left side of his head felt queer. He wondered if he had walked in his sleep, had stumbled and fallen and injured himself. He got up, fighting a dizziness that all but overpowered him. At the overflow below the spring he bathed his face and head, conscious of a wound above his ear.

Billy Bonney had fetched him up to Ruiz's place. Billy Bonney had killed Blake in the Silver Saloon—and Hardy had let him get away with it. Hardy?

Doctor White staggered over to the lean-to, took a small, round mirror, some surgeon's tape and scissors from his bag. Hardy had hit him on the head. Must have been early in the morning. And Garcias was with Hardy. They had been looking for the Kid.

The doctor dried his hair, taped and bandaged the wound. Billy had said he was going to Felipe's camp across

the range. Billy had said he would be back about noon. The doctor walked unsteadily out to the road and glanced up and down it. He wondered if the Texas gunman and Garcias had trailed Billy up into the hills, or if they were watching Mora's house that they might kill him from ambush. Billy had said he would return about noon.

White looked at his watch. Fifteen minutes past eleven. He realized that if their positions were reversed, Billy would do all he could to warn him of his danger. Sentiment aside, moral quibbling aside, a man had a right to pay a debt of friendship.

Once, in another locality, he had dressed the wound of a young outlaw who had paid him ten times more than the service was worth. Doctor White had been desperately in need of money —in fact he was literally starving. When he had remonstrated with his patient about overpaying him, the patient had replied: "Take the extra as a loan, then. You seem to need it."

But that was Billy's way. If he had anything to say, he said it. If their positions had been reversed——

Doctor White knew only too well all there was to know about the recent cattle war—the crookedness, the killings, the murders, the tremendous provocations that set men to killing each other. You either wore a deputy's badge and killed or you didn't wear one and you killed. It depended largely on who was sheriff.

"But it isn't moral support I need. It's whisky. But first, I'll try my legs."

White began to walk up the winding mountain road, hoping that he would not give out before he could meet Billy and tell him to ride the other way. Less than a quarter of a mile east of the Ruiz homestead he met Billy, who rode out from a clump of piñons alongside the highway, having seen the doctor coming, but not sure of his identity at first.

"Hardy and Garcias are looking for you," said White. "Hardy got ugly—and I got this." The doctor indicated his bandaged head.

"When?"

"Don't know how early. It was early this morning."

"Have you seen Mora?"

"No. I must have been unconscious several hours."

"Who's with Hardy, beside Garcias?"

"I can't say. Only saw those two."

"All right. Go ahead. I'll follow along, later."

"You had better ride the other way, Billy."

"No. I want Hardy. Then I'll ride."

Doctor White shrugged his shoulders. He knew Billy. And then, Billy was too clever to be caught, now that he knew his enemies were in the locality.

The doctor reached the house about five minutes before Billy appeared. Billy came on foot, carrying his saddle gun. As he entered, he spoke to Ruiz, quickly, in Spanish. Then he walked to the high window which fronted the south. He was watching Hardy and his companions Warren and Bodie as they crossed the clearing between the wooded pasture and the spring. The spring was not over fifteen yards south of the house. To reach it they would have to enter the dooryard. Billy surmised that they were coming for water. He had seen Hardy stop and gesture toward the corner of the yard where the spring was located.

Doctor White sat down on a bench as soon as he entered the room. He held his hands over his eyes. The intense light on the road had dazed him.

"You got company," said Billy, stepping back from the window. "Better step out and see what they want."

"I'm about blind," said White. "Who is it?"

"Your friend Hardy, and a couple of Las Vegas warriors."

When Hardy and his companions entered the yard they saw White standing in the doorway, shading his eyes with his hand.

"Find the Kid, yet?" asked White, in a politely conversational tone.

"No. But I expect to get a look at him before sundown," replied Hardy.

"You do? Why, Billy told me, last night, he was going over to Felipe's sheep camp."

"White, that's a damned lie!"

"Thanks, Hardy. Of course you mean I am lying, not Billy. Well, we won't quarrel about that. But I'd advise you to ride back to Las Vegas with your men. If you don't——"

Doctor White was sincere in trying to warn Hardy, and it is barely possible that Hardy might have suspected the hidden danger in another second or two. But the doctor was interrupted by Billy, who jerked him back from the doorway, and stood in his place—stood motionless just long enough for Hardy to recognize him. Then, "Want me?" cried Billy, and with each word came the sharp crash of a shot. Hardy had been quick. He whipped up his gun and fired. But there was never a man who could draw and shoot with Billy the Kid. Hardy went down with two bullets through his chest. His shot splintered the door casing just above Billy's head. The deputy, Bodie, threw his carbine to his shoulder, but spun round and dropped as Billy fired again. The third member of the posse, Warren, jumped the low fence and started to run. Billy fired again and Warren lunged forward and fell to the ground with a bullet between his shoulders.

Old man Ruiz was sitting up in bed, staring and muttering. Billy backed into the room, punched the empty shells from his gun and reloaded it. "Thanks, doc," he said in his natural, easy way. "Wonder if I got all of them? I didn't see Garcias."

Doctor White, dazed by Billy's rough handling, and the sharp bark and crash of shots, leaned against the table staring out through the sunlit doorway. "I wonder——" he began, and brushed his forehead with a trembling hand.

"You needn't," said Billy, who anticipated the doctor's thought. "I know just where each of them is hit. They won't get up."

The doctor turned back toward Billy, who was standing near the front door. "You'll be going, in a minute," he said. "I asked you, once, how it feels——"

Billy thrust out his left arm.

"How did you know I meant that?" queried White.

"That you want to take my pulse? Why, you're easy to figure, doc. You'd never be any good with a gun; you can't cover up what you're thinking about."

The doctor took Billy's pulse, snapped his watch shut. He shook his head. "Pulse absolutely normal. Pupils normal. Billy, you're not quite human."

"Maybe so. But now what would you call Hardy?"

But the doctor made no reply. Ruiz, excited and jabbering, claimed his attention. Not until Billy had assured the Mexican that he was in no immediate danger of getting killed, and that the doctor would answer any question asked by any officers who might come to investigate the killing of Hardy and his deputies, did the sick man quiet down.

Billy fetched his horse from across the road where he had concealed it. He mounted and called the doctor to the doorway.

"I'm going back over the hill," he said. "No use crowding my luck too hard. Tell Mora I'll be back when the sheriff gets tired of looking for me up this way. I'd like to see her, but

there's no use making more trouble for her."

"All right, Billy. If I can get hold of Garcias I'll send him to Las Vegas. Somebody will have to take care of those poor fellows out there."

"Why, that'll be all right. And one thing more, doc: If somebody gets me, I wish you'd go with Mora and her old man over to Roswell. I left some money for her with a friend over there —enough to keep her the rest of her life, if she uses it right. She's Mexican, and if you didn't go along she might not get a square deal. There's just two more hombres I'd like to get before I cash in. So long. And don't forget, Mora's got some peach brandy for you, down to her house."

And Doctor White found himself gazing up the road where a gray shadow had vanished amid the green of the mountainside.

Juan Garcias had heard the sound of firing, and presently he saw a figure slinking among the junipers south of the road. He recognized one of the deputies, saw him untie a horse and mount and ride across the pasture at a gallop. Fearful that he would be left manacled to the tree and there starve, Juan called for help. He knew there had been a gun fight somewhere in the vicinity of Ruiz's place.

Finally Doctor White heard the shouting, and making his way through the junipers discovered Garcias and told him he would get a file and free him if he would carry a message to Las Vegas. Garcias agreed to do anything the doctor wished. After filing through the link that connected the handcuffs, the doctor told Garcias what had happened and cautioned him to leave the message with some Mexican friend and return to his home, else he might be arrested in town.

When Garcias had caught up his horse and had started for Las Vegas, the doctor walked down the road toward the Moreno Ranch, and hailed the silent house. Mora came to the doorway. Doctor White told her briefly what had happened and cautioned her to say that she knew nothing about it, if questioned. Mora asked him where Billy had gone. The doctor said he didn't know, but that he had promised to return, some day.

"Yes, he will come back," said Mora. But she knew, when she said it, that she would never see him again.

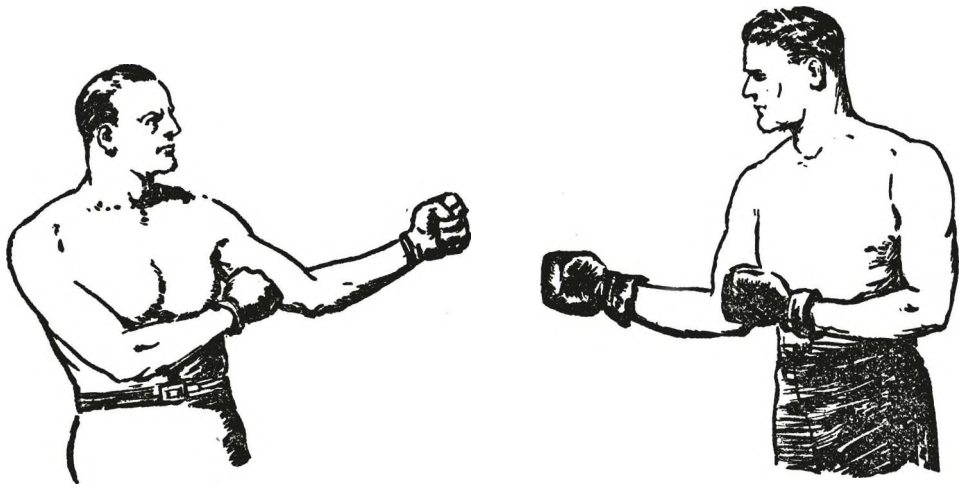
Another Henry Herbert Knibbs story will appear in an early issue.

RANCHING IN THE NORTH

FINDING the task of feeding visitors to Mount McKinley National Park in Alaska a difficult one, the transportation company which operates there is considering establishing a ranch. The country is suitable for raising produce of various kinds, adaptable as feed for the live stock and food for the traveler.

Many men are employed in the park during the summer, and the task of importing produce becomes difficult, especially with the numbers of travelers increasing annually.

Alaska has been found suitable for raising almost every kind of vegetable, in addition to various berries. Strawberries thrive in all sections. The United States Department of Agriculture maintains experiment stations in various sections. It is hoped that in time the Territory will be able to supply its own agricultural demands.



The Passing of Jack Dempsey—Maybe!

By William Hemmingway

Author of "Old Mike and the Nonpareil," Etc.

Mr. Hemmingway discusses, amusingly and authoritatively, the possibility of Dempsey's fighting again. Gene Tunney, and the heavyweight situation in general.

A COMPLETE ARTICLE

AS far as mortal eye can see, we boxing fans are going to enjoy this year the finest crop of big contests ever shown to the world. Champion Gene Tunney will go into the ring twice, under the wise supervision of that master showman, "Tex" Rickard, and his second appearance—for the big money—will be with the idol of the fans, Jack Dempsey, who has more wild-eyed worshipers than any other fighting man since the illustrious John L. Sullivan. If we take a look at the developments since the "Battle of Chicago," we shall see the whole program growing and flourishing like the green bay tree.

But what about poor Jack's injured eyes, does some one ask? They're not so bad, if we listen to those who really know. But aren't they out of commission, and won't their weakness keep him from ever fighting again? Let us wait a moment before weeping too hard over them and him; wait and consider all the facts. Maybe, instead of keeping him out of the ring, those much-talked-about eyes are really ballyhooing the next grand slam. Bernard Shaw says any one can write a novel—just tell about a dying child, and pathosticate all through the chapter. That wins the sympathy and cash. Perhaps the eyes are just pathosticating; perhaps not. But if they are, how they will build up the gate! And they have nearly half a year to get right.

When Tunney bested Dempsey for the second time, at Chicago, more men

wanted to see them fight again than have ever wanted any other battle. Those who believed the referee and the timekeeper were right, declared that Champion Tunney beat his man without a question; but the million or more Dempsey partisans insisted, and still insist, that Jack was deprived of his rightful victory by the extra seconds of time given to Tunney when he was down in the fateful seventh round. These objectors would begin to take their places before the ticket window, eager to buy their seats, the moment they learned that these great men were to meet for the third time.

Pretty soft for Rickard, what? He declared at the outset that he would bring them together next September, and for more millions of dollars than ever flowed into a box office before. He was all set for the big show. But in a few days something crashed into that dream: Tunney declared that one fight a year was not enough to keep him in the best trim—as I long ago pointed out in these pages—and remarked that he would fight twice in 1928. Immediately loud cries of "No! No!" from Mr. Rickard, who vowed that he had tied up Tunney to a contract by which he must fight for him once before October 1, 1928—once and no more. A few days elapse. Then Mr. Tunney calmly tells the reporters that his learned counsel have analyzed the contract, and that, while he is obliged to box for "Tex" once before October first, he is free to box for anybody before that date. Loud cries of "Pooh! Pooh!" from Mr. Rickard, followed by a long and discreet silence. Heavy thinking all along the lines.

Meantime, contenders and would-be contenders for the title came along in greater numbers and of higher class than ever before. What men who challenged Sullivan or Corbett are to be compared with Jack Sharkey, Jack Delaney, Tom Heeney, or Johnny Risko? And besides these there are what may be called the second string of challengers, all pretty good men—especially Tommy Loughran, the light-heavyweight, a performer of high class, character, courage and intelligence. He lacks only weight and the finishing punch, and he is still young enough to develop both. He certainly seems a comer.

The battles of last winter produced nothing conclusive. Jack Sharkey had a long lay-off with a broken bone in his left hand; and when at last he came down from Boston to meet Tom Heeney, the big New Zealander, he was expected to prove his right to challenge Tunney by knocking Tom cold. But for some reason Sharkey wasn't able to get going at anything like his best pace. Mr. Muldoon thinks it was because he had been so long out of the ring; and he is probably right, for the fighting man gets something from actual battle that he can't get from ages of mere training bouts. At all events, the ponderous Heeney and the listless Sharkey went through to an uninteresting draw.

Jack Delaney, otherwise Monsieur Ovila Chapdelaine, of Canada, lit up the whole fighting landscape like a lightning bolt by knocking out the gigantic Sully Montgomery in twenty seconds after the first gong—one hundred and seventy-nine pounds beating two hundred and ten! What a lad that Delaney is! What a shock he shoots with that deadly right of his! He proves the poet wrong who chanted that the sweetest thing in life is love's young dream. The sweetest thing in sporting life is that swift sock in Delaney's young fist.

Wise Rickard next matched Sharkey with Johnny Risko, the indestructible rubber man of Cleveland, who might borrow the song of the "Miller of the Dee" and sing, "I wallop nobody, no, not I; but nobody wallops me." Somehow the big boys can't put him down. But for all that, he does not provide exciting entertainment in the ring. Tex

also matched the superb Delaney with the plodding Heeney, with results which are ancient history now. The point is that not one of these four good men appears to be quite the class to challenge the champion—and draw a crowd to the box office! There's the rub. If Delaney had the stamina, the ruggedness, to take as hard a punch as he gives and then fight on, he would be the peer of the best; but there is always the fatal doubt about his ability to take such wallops, for example, as Dempsey gave Tunney in that famous seventh round in Chicago, and then come back not only to fight but to win. That doubt about Delaney's stamina kills off the million-dollar gate. So the thinking grows fast and furious, although still silent; for, while the manly art of self-defense is a fine thing, no promoter can turn his back on good gate money.

There comes a rift in the clouds when Tunney, after enough dinners, speeches, testimonials, et cetera, packs his trunks in the new year and goes to Florida. "To sleep, perchance to dream," as his favorite author says? Not at all; he goes to golf and swim and fish and shoot, to live the healthy outdoor life and keep himself fit to defend the most valuable title in the world. Two weeks later Tex Rickard wearies of the dust and clamor of Madison Square Garden, squabbles over percentage of the gate and sordid haggling over mere money, and he goes to Florida to golf and invite his soul. The champion has been offish with the box-office wizard for months, has talked of fighting for some other promoter, et cetera; but nothing serious has happened.

Presently the waiting world thrills to learn, through trustworthy press dispatches, that all's well along the East coast; that the champ and the magician have golfed together as friendly as a pair of playmates should ever be. Later, a similar trustworthy dispatch: Tex will put on Tunney and Dempsey in June, in an arena to be discovered in good gold-bearing country. Look for an important announcement on February first!

Now, what? Rumors spring up from the Pacific to the Atlantic coast, as thick as mushrooms on the Deal golf course in September. Fearsome rumors!—the mighty Dempsey has gone wrong and can never fight again. Telephones buzz; reporters scamper. "Say it ain't so, Jack! Say it ain't so!" But Jack, being a truthful man, can't say anything of the kind. On the last Monday in January he tells the reporters that he does not know whether he is ever going to fight again; his eyes are troubling him. He says:

"My left eye has been weak. There's every reason to believe it will be all right the doctors say; but we can't tell for a while. You can't hurry nature. I've telegraphed Rickard I can't fight in June. You needn't be surprised if everything turns out all right and I pack away another battle or so before I quit."

At the same time, Doctor Frank H. Russell in New York declares that he took a few stitches in Dempsey's brows after the Chicago battle; that the wounds healed perfectly, and there was no injury to the eyeball, muscles or nerve centers. And Tex Rickard, interviewed in Miami, denies he has received any message from Dempsey. "It's an old story," he adds, "and there's nothing in it. I'm going ahead with plans to promote the championship fight."

The fans—that is, the good folks who give up their money—heaved sighs of relief.

But now who is this pale courier of woe that comes galloping up the hard-packed Florida sands, his face a picture of distress? Why, this is none other than Mr. Steve Hannagan, described in the press dispatches as "an intimate associate of Tunney, who has been closely in touch with Rickard during the promoter's visit here." Steve declares that

Jack Dempsey "is through—will never enter the ring again," and that the best Tex Rickard will be able to offer the fight fans in June is Tunney meeting the ablest man discovered by the Risko-Sharkey and Delaney-Heeney bouts. The reporters hasten to Mr. Rickard, hoping against hope. Alas! for withered hopes!

"If Hannagan is giving out that statement," says Mr. Rickard, very solemnlike, "I would carry it pretty much as he gives it."

Back they go to Mr. Hannagan. He declines to give the source of his information, but says it is reliable and that he himself is convinced beyond doubt. "Skeptics here," writes the local historian, "regard the report of Dempsey's withdrawal as merely a method of saving the former champion for the September match, as originally planned." O, cruel skeptics here! How very hard-boiled and cynical of you! And there is no further word from the well-informed Mr. Hannagan to dispel the gloom.

Champion Tunney is not perturbed. While the rumor hunters are gathering their bag of reports, he is out running on the beach before breakfast, and on the first day of February begins actual training: ten minutes of rope skipping, ten minutes drilling the light, fast punching bag, and ten minutes socking the heavy bag. You can imagine him also humming to himself the old song, "All challengers look alike to me." Incidentally, he weighs one hundred and ninety-two pounds, as compared with one hundred and seventy-four when he won the championship, and he stands six feet one and a half inches, which they say is one inch taller than he was on that important day. That detail about one inch of added height sounds odd, but so it stands in the record. Certainly Gene fears no foe in shining armor—nor in five-ounce gloves, either.

Mr. Rickard is sorry and full of sympathy when the reporters call. "I regret," he says, "that Dempsey thinks it inadvisable to again compete for the heavyweight championship. I am sure the followers of boxing throughout the world also will regret his passing."

In spite of this disappointment, Mr. Rickard seemed resigned to the situation, and not as one without hope, saying he expected to find a worthy opponent for Tunney in June in the winner of the last bout of the series among Sharkey, Risko, Delaney, and Heeney. He was undecided where he should hold the June battle. He did not even mention little old New York as a possibility, but spoke of enthusiastic offers from Philadelphia and Chicago and from the leading citizens of a prominent city in Canada. Dempsey, interviewed in Los Angeles, declared he was content to wait for what time would bring, and renewed to the boxing fans the assurance of his most distinguished consideration. Whether he would return to the ring or not depended on his eyes. Perhaps he was tempted to say, or sing, "It's all in my eye;" but if he was so tempted, he manfully put the temptation aside and behaved himself like a good man struggling with adversity. (O, you September gate money!)

From every quarter waves of sympathy with the former "Manassa Mauler" began to roll in great volume, constantly increasing. (Your sympathy is a great filler of box-office treasuries, my masters.) It is to the credit of the hearts of many commentators on sport that they sang the praises of poor Jack to the skies, even while they sadly spoke of him as one whose achievements are all in the past. One critic went so far as to declare that Dempsey's eyes were not all that had gone back on him, and that he was worn out in every way; that he was still suffering from the awful blows on the head administered by Tunney in their two hard battles, and that his nervous system was sadly depleted

by the long, weary grind of much training and many contests. He did not see how Jack, at the advanced age of thirty-four, could ever hope to come back. Selah!

The gem of the ocean of sorrow was a cartoon which depicted Dempsey in the rôle of a shattered Ajax defying the lightning. Jack was not dressed in metal armor like Ajax, but wore regulation boxing trunks and five-ounce gloves. A lightning bolt, starting from the northwest corner, zigzagged across the ring and hit poor Jack full in the eyes. He was pictured as falling back, dazed—perhaps with blasted sight. The cartoon would have aroused the sympathy of Jack's bitterest enemy—if there is such a person; but it proved chiefly that a warm heart can beat beneath an artist's velvet coat. Of course, the effect of the picture did not seem to agree with Doctor Russell's statement: "The hurts would not leave him susceptible to further injury if he were to fight again, and would in no way prevent his fighting again. Dempsey's sight was at no time affected." Possibly the doctor, who treated Jack's eyes, knew what he was talking about.

Nor can the picture of ruin be reconciled with Dempsey's statement: "You needn't be surprised if everything turns out all right and I pack away another battle or so before I quit." Against the words of Dempsey, who owns the eyes, and Doctor Russell, who took care of them and treated them and examined them, we have only the word of the remote Mr. Steve Hannagan on the Florida beach, who says, "Dempsey is through. He will never enter the ring again." Gentlemen of the jury, it is for you to say on which side lies the preponderance of evidence. The present deponent saith nothing, reserving only your leave to think.

But, whichever way the truth shall develop, can any one doubt that Dempsey is out of the ring, to stay out until after the first big Tunney battle, in June? Can any human power force him in there before September? A question! Of course, if by any chance our Jack can be brought back into fighting trim some time in September, he alone will draw at least five hundred thousand dollars to the arena, no matter who opposes him. And if, in September, he is again to meet Gene Tunney to settle the much-disputed question of their superiority —— Wow! that will be a fight! And the gate? You might begin at two million dollars and figure it up—very far up, too.

All of this has been lost to sight of late in the preparations for the great contest in June. Mr. Rickard, interviewed on the golden sands of Florida, told the reporters, after a brief but eloquent tribute to the passing of Dempsey, that Tunney's struggle in June with the survivor of the big four mentioned above, will be a wonderful battle. It will, too. "I regret the passing of Dempsey," Mr. Rickard added, with an air of sad finality, "and I am sure the followers of boxing throughout the world also will regret his passing." Yea, yea!

But in the next breath hope revived. "I am undecided where I shall hold the next championship," said the king of fight promoters. "People of prominence in Chicago, Philadelphia, and a great Canadian city have made me flattering offers; and a group of sportsmen in London have made me the most amazing proposition I ever have received, to take the contest there."

Champion Tunney bore up bravely, observing that Dempsey's retirement was of more consequence to Mr. Rickard than to him. He was ready for anybody; first come, first served. What really concerned him was how he could polish his golf score down to the low eighties. This much off his mind, he started for New York, where he "attended to some private business" and added to his statements the following:

"Rickard has me signed for one fight. I haven't changed my mind about having two fights this year. If I have two, it is probable that Rickard will promote both matches. You are sure of your money when you fight for Rickard. I don't believe he is trying to save Dempsey for a bout in the fall, because I don't see why a bout then should be any more important than one in June."

Quite right, too. The most important thing for all concerned, including the customers, will be to have two bouts grow where only one grew before; and, with all the good men in sight, we may depend on it that there will be two. Just to keep us all up on our toes, Rickard ordered his faithful lieutenant, John Chapman, to hasten to London, where the most amazing proposition came from. More details of this offer will come to light if, as, and when, necessary; and in the meantime it is interesting to remember that the stadium at Wembley will comfortably accommodate two hundred thousand spectators.

The English have never been educated up to paying half as much as Americans put out for boxing—fifty-dollar tops would set the Thames and the *Times* blazing in protest; but if a crowd of that size should pay the modest average price of ten dollars apiece to come in, that would yield a gate of two million dollars. A tidy bit.

If Tom Heeney should, as it now seems reasonable to suppose, make the grade and become Tunney's challenger in June, then Rickard could charge whatever he liked in London—and get it, packed down and running over. What would not honest old John Bull pay to see his New Zealand son, Tom, exchange wallops with Uncle Sam's boy, Gene, in a ring pitched at the edge of dear old Lunnon? And stranger things have happened. Heeney is big enough, strong enough, and game enough, to do the job. All he lacks is speed and skill. A big lack—and yet, with his stamina and courage and the prospect of getting into the greatest single combat ever known of men, Tom may surprise the critics by making a marvelous improvement in the next few months.

So, whether Dempsey comes back in September or not, it is sure that we shall enjoy a great pugilistic spectacle then—in that happy season when the customers come back from mountain and seaside, refreshed, and eager to see a good scrap. And, if any one is disposed to cavil at all the parade of mystery about Dempsey's condition, let him reflect that it takes a great deal of artistic ballyhoo to build up a two-million-dollar gate. And why not? If our great bankers are going to float a vast loan, do they not first inform and stimulate the buying public with propaganda and publicity, and then float their Argentine, or Belgian, or Japanese bonds? Well, boxing is big business in the highest degree, and it is entitled to its ballyhoo, even to the point of pathostication.

And now—as the world's most eminent business man said to me a while ago—and now, what about Gene Tunney? Will he be ready for the hardest tests he has yet faced? Has he lived so as to take into the ring next time all the old skill and speed and stamina that he has shown since he fought his way to the top? The answer is yes.

Looking back over the history of the ring from the days of Figg, who founded it, down through the times of Jack Slack, Tom Cribb, "Gentleman" Jackson, Gully, "The Parliament Man," Jem Mace, and all the other British worthies, and viewing our own champions from John C. Heenan to the mighty Sullivan, Jim Corbett, old Fitz, Jeffries, and Dempsey, I can find none among them to be compared with Tunney in the vital matter of that careful living which alone can preserve fighting ability at its prime. Jim Jeffries, with his many hunting trips in the mountains of California, came nearest to the perfect program Tunney

has laid out and followed. But Jeff spent months on the stage—the only way he could get good money, since he had licked all the best challengers twice; and when he gave that up, he spent many months as proprietor of a bar. Both of these enterprises are fatal to good condition.

Tunney has not wasted his energies on any of these things. He'd rather be shot than have anything to do with a barroom; and the few months' experience he had in vaudeville after winning the championship at Philadelphia convinced him that the life of the theater, with its frequent changes from one city to another, the crowds, the excitement, the irregular meals in hotels and on trains, were too much of a drain on vitality to show a profit in the money earned that way.

Champions of ten, or even five, years ago, had to resort to these enterprises. Tunney, sure of five hundred thousand dollars to one million dollars every time he enters the ring, needs only to keep himself fit to fight once or twice a year —preferably twice—to get his money that way. He has not been on the stage since winning the Chicago battle, but has spent most of his time out of doors —not a hard, conditioning work, which is apt to be wearing, but in a pleasant and varied program of fishing, shooting, hiking in the woods of the North in the warm weather, and in fishing, shooting, and golf in Florida during the winter. And all the time he is far from the madding crowd, saving his strength and nerve force, and enjoying life to the utmost. When he goes into serious training, a month or two before defending his title, he will be already in better condition than the old-style champion would have achieved after two months of training-camp work.

This is not mere theory, but proven fact. Jim Corbett beat Charley Mitchell in January, 1894, and did not fight again until March, 1897, when he was beaten by Bob Fitzsimmons. In the meantime he had been constantly on the stage, traveling about the country, but exercising regularly every day and leading a temperate life. For six weeks before he met Fitz he worked with such furious energy that he exhausted his training partners day after day. That six weeks of "training" at frantic speed used up what energy the stage life had left in him. Old Fitz, meanwhile, having lived the simple life of a village blacksmith, took all the punishment Corbett could give for fourteen rounds, and then, thanks to his superior vitality, knocked him out.

Before challenging Champion Jeffries two years later, Corbett took a cottage at Lakewood, New Jersey, and lived out of doors for six months, often having his meals served on the porch. He did not train, but strolled through the pines with his friends, played leapfrog, or threw stones at a tomato can on a fence post, or engaged in any other schoolboy sport. He boxed Gus Ruhlin only for the last four weeks—and went into the ring in the best condition of his life. He came within a hair of beating the giant Jeff; and if he had been in that same condition at Carson City, he would have knocked out Fitz in six rounds. It was not the four weeks of hard training that made him so fit, but the six months of life in the open.

Wise Tunney has taken a leaf from Corbett's book—and improved on it: he lives in the open air and sunshine at least five-sixths of his time. He knows the value of it, appreciates the excellent condition he is in. No wonder he remarked the other day:

"I intend to fight as champion for four more years."

And, barring accident, it looks as if he will carry out his intention.

Other articles and stories by Mr. Hemmingway will appear from time to time.

Flying Hoofs

In Five Parts
Part III

By Charles Neville Buck

Author of "Fool's Paradise," Etc.

Shannon Wiley abandoned the traditions of a fine old Kentucky family to become a bookmaker. Later he owned his own racing stable, and his best rider was young Joe Bonnie, his adopted son. Wiley sells his wonderful colt, Hazardous, prospective Derby winner, to Jerry Ferris, multimillionaire aristocrat, for two hundred thousand dollars, planning to give the money to Joe on his fast-approaching twenty-first birthday. Joe wants to leave the track and become a writer. He is in love with Ferris' daughter, Leslie, who is so far only his good friend, and against Ferris' opposition. With the Derby only a few days off, Clay, negro attendant of Hazardous, is fired by Goodman, Ferris' trainer. For revenge Clay steals Soon, a cat, whose absence from the stable always makes the temperamental and affectionate Hazardous fall down in a race. Clay goes to a big crooked bookmaker and offers, for five thousand dollars, to keep the cat hidden, so that the bookmaker can win by betting against Hazardous, the overwhelming favorite, at long odds. In the Derby, Hazardous sulks and loses, despite Joe's best efforts. Ferris is furious, and says he has been tricked.

CHAPTER IX.

ONE WHO HAD FAITH.

IN all the rocking pandemonium that slowly spent itself when the camera batteries had fired and fallen back, there was one human being who wanted to outyell the multitude—yet who dared not even chuckle aloud.

It is said that "Pittsburgh" Phil, one of the turf's most spectacular and wooden-faced plungers, died of suppressed emotions. Now Mose Clay, colored, standing in the infield, began to think that unless he could open the sluice gates of his emotions, and open them speedily, he, too, would succumb to the pressure locked in his breast.

More money than he had ever seen before was shortly to be his to handle and spend. He, a black man, who had been given the "bum's rush" out of the Ferris stable, had played the rôle of a god dealing out punishment to the

mighty of the earth. Moreover, the power with which he had played still lay in his hands for further use. Each time this colt started and lost, the odds about him would grow longer and when they became long enough to suit his fancy, Mose need only work a little razzle-dazzle with a cat and bring the deflated value of the gray "stud-hoss" back again to its fullness.

As to the cat, Mose must take mighty good care of him. Good old Soon! In the empty feed box of its imprisonment, Mose had placed rich cream. He had made several visits to assure himself that the captive was still there.

Shortly he would go back to town and collect his five thousand; and tonight he would dazzle "Darktown" with the effulgence of his wealth. He would be a figure of consequence in the night life around Twelfth and Liberty Streets.

There would be plenty of "moon," perhaps a crap game, and certainly there would be girls. Yet just now he dared neither bellow his delight nor trumpet his triumph. He had too recently been an attendant on the colt which had been so surprisingly disgraced, and until a few days ago he had been outspoken in his declarations that this colt was unbeatable.

Nonetheless there must be some immediate outlet of emotion, otherwise he would "jest natcherly bust wide open." He knew of a place right here on the track where for a price he could get him a pint of something that compensated in its kick for its deplorable lack of flavor. Yes, sir! that was the ticket! He'd celebrate a little in advance, right now, since the white man who was to pay him off would not go back to town until after the last race and must be seen in the privacy of his own office.

Mose turned and started toward the back stretch and the village of barns beyond it; and as he went another colored boy, attached to the stable that had sent "Hard Boot" to the races, halted him and flapped his arms after the fashion of a crowing rooster.

"Hi dar, darky," accosted this one boisterously. "Who's eatin' crow now? Flapped yo' jaw mighty loos an' loud 'bout dat gray stud hoss, didn't yo'? Mighty scornful 'bout our colt, wasn't yo'? What yo' got ter say now, black boy?"

Mose concealed his true emotions under a mantle of irony.

"W'at yo' shootin' off yo' baboon face about, 'Liver Lip?' " he demanded. "Ain't yo' heered tell dat me an' Jake Goodman, we had a fallin' out an' I quit an' lef' dat stable flat? Don' yo' know dat gray stud hoss wouldn't run a lick without me bein' round about?"

The response was a derisive guffaw; and Mose went on his way.

It was just as the starters in the last event of the day were being called to the post that Mose, his eyes now reddened and his voice thickened, returned to the infield by the stretch head, and was inadvertently jostled by another stablehand. Instantly Mose, whose ego was for the moment dangerously inflated, wheeled on the unintentional offender and broke into bellicose profanity.

That was a tactical error of time and place, since a mounted policeman chanced to be sitting his horse within easy earshot. The officer swung from his saddle and took Mose Clay by the collar. A plain-clothes man sauntered up, and as the two hustled their prisoner to the patrol wagon, Mose made the further mistake of struggling violently for liberty—there were things to be done that could not be done in jail. And in the mêlée of his subduing, a flask in his pocket broke and Mose took on an unequivocal richness of alcoholic odor.

The wagon guard sniffed and grinned. "And that won't help you, either," he volunteered.

It was as he waited in the mixed company of the police court cage the next morning that a shyster lawyer who looked only a little more reputable than his client, came up to the door to speak to him.

"The man you sent me to see," the lawyer gave curt information, "says you must be full of coke or mighty bad liquor. Says he doesn't owe you any money and doesn't know what stall you're trying to pull."

The dark face of the prisoner went almost ashen, as the lawyer added as an afterthought:

"And the colored man you told me to see says that he's looked in every empty feed box at the track—and he can't find any cat in any of them."

The special car of Jerry Ferris was waiting on a siding at Union Station. It had been the intention of the multi-millionaire turfman to tarry in Louisville for a day or two and savor the nectar of triumph. Now he was fretting to have his car coupled to the first fast train going east, but that he could hardly do—especially after the mortifying moment there at the Downs when he had seen red and lashed out under the sting of defeat. He must be present at the dinner to-night where the victorious owner would be toasted and the losers would demonstrate their sportsmanship in defeat. But that is getting ahead of the narrative.

After the clamor of the Derby finish had abated, Ferris and Leslie had been making their way to the parked motor which was to take them back to their Pullman.

"It's too bad, dad," said the girl in a low voice, watching his drawn face. She had never seen him take any turf loss so hard before. Never before had she seen the placidity of his sportsmanship so shaken; and it frightened her a little. Until now there had been scant opportunity for talk between them, and the girl herself had been somewhat dazed.

"It's too bad," she went on, though he did not at first seem to hear her. "I know how you must feel, because I feel it too."

The sound of her voice and the purport of her words had at last penetrated his consciousness, and he turned with a forced smile.

"Yes, it was disappointing," he answered, "but that's horse racing."

"I'd like"—Leslie had stopped on the gravel parking space and her voice faltered a little as an embarrassed flush stole into her cheeks—"before we go, to tell Joe that I'm sorry on his account, too. In one way it's even harder on him than on you because——"

Again she broke off, and it required some temerity to finish, as she saw the jets of wrath that leaped in her father's eyes; but she had the stuff of courage in her, and she stanchly went on to the end of her sentence: "——because he gave the best he had—and there'll be lots of people who will blame him."

Ferris opened his lips, then closed them, and their line was straight and tight.

"We'll talk about that later," he said shortly, holding his tone level despite the grating edge on his voice. "Bonnie isn't in my employ any longer. It's my belief that he sold me out to-day."

"Sold you out!"

The girl's eyes blazed indignantly, and the embarrassment which had colored her face died to a pallor of incredulous protest.

"You can't mean that, dad."

Her father's eyes remained hard and narrow.

"Unfortunately, I do mean it; but we can hardly discuss it here. There are a good many eyes on us. This will have to wait for a more suitable time."

Leslie had made an appointment for

a country-club dance that evening, while her father was to be away at what had been planned as a celebration in his honor. She could not face the prospect of an evening spent alone in the private car, so she went to the dance, but before that she had been through an unhappy half hour. It was a half hour which came nearer being a scene than anything she remembered in her family life, and it had left her rather ill.

"I had occasion to point out once before, Leslie," her father had begun, "that I didn't think a professional jockey of unknown origin was precisely the boy for you to make a companion of. If I didn't pursue the topic, it was chiefly because that would have exaggerated its importance—and his. Now we may pass that by. The social status of this young man—dubious as it may be—becomes academic. I base my present objection to him on another ground—dishonesty and betrayal."

"To me that's unbelievable," said the girl evenly, though the pulses were beating feverishly in her temples.

"It's unbelievable only to your immature and romantic fashion of thought," rejoined the man. "I am, perhaps, a better judge of that than you. This boy may not be so much to blame as if he had been free of the domination of Shannon Wiley; but Wiley has molded him and Wiley is a crook. Probably his upbringing rather than his own viciousness made young Bonnie play traitor to the man whose pay he was taking. I'm willing to concede that, but I am not willing to pass the matter by and take my betrayal lying down."

Ferris had always prided himself on his self-containment, and now, in his effort to bridle his rage, he spoke with a callous heightening of assumed deliberation and coldness.

"I bought this horse from a man who had been all his life a professional gambler and whose protégé this boy has always been. Wiley at first categorically refused to sell, then changed his mind and stung me for a fortune. He could not bet against his own horse and lose the race without being ruled off the turf; but when the colt ran in my silks, it was quite different. So he unloaded on me. The boy knew the horse as well as Wiley. He became an accomplice. In retrospect, it's all simple enough."

There was frosty indignation in both expression and voice as the sportsman summarized:

"Probably Wiley made another fortune in the betting shed to-day on what was to him a sure thing—a sure thing because he had persuaded my jockey to throw the race."

The girl shook her head in distressed but dogged contradiction.

"As to Joe Bonnie," she declared, "I'm sure that's monstrous and untrue; and as for Mr. Wiley, it doesn't seem to me to make sense. He raised the colt and trained him. Wouldn't he rather have won money on his victory than on his defeat?"

"No, not Shannon Wiley. To a highbinder of his breed and ilk, race horses are only racing tools. He sees in them nothing more personal than cards in a greasy poker deck. Those were his own words to me. He could win thousands on an upset like that of to-day, where he could only have won hundreds on a true-to-form result. Moreover, he could punish me, to boot. Well, I can't get at him; I can prove nothing tangible, but perhaps I can reach him through his cat's-paw. Perhaps I can have the boy ruled off the turf for life—and certainly I mean to try."

"I believe"—Leslie hesitated and gulped—"I believe Joe Bonnie is as straight as a string, and"—for an instant, though her tone was fainter, it was defiant—"and I mean to tell him so."

In spite of his resolve at self-command, Ferris' anger leaped hotly out.

"I forbid you to see him!" he exclaimed tempestuously. "I absolutely forbid it! Do you understand?"

The girl shook her head.

"I shan't hunt him up, if that's what you mean, father," she replied with a dogged sort of weariness; "but I shall write him a note."

The man had regained the slipped curb on his temper. Possibly it was he, himself, who was injecting the greatest element of danger into the situation he thought. And now he spoke again, more quietly. He even managed to shrug his shoulders.

"You are acting sentimentally and foolishly, Leslie," he offered reminder. "I must manage my own business affairs, and no good can come of your putting yourself on record as opposing me. This boy knows how he rode the race. He will only realize how easily duped you are."

"I can't help whatever you may do," she told him. "I only mean that I think Joe Bonnie is being falsely accused and persecuted, and I want him to know that I believe in him. It seems little enough."

Since the laws of some States, by legalizing certain forms of betting, saved racing from that anæmia which threatened it with extinction, the other and unlegalized forms have slunk furtively along side lines, like snakes scotched but not killed. The process has logically enough winnowed into the ranks of the "hand-booker," the slyest, most unlovely and predatory element of those who live by chance. And this element the authorized and honorable racing associations ignore.

Yet there is an arc at which the two circles of racing activity, lawful and unlawful, overlap, and this converging segment of the matter concerns the "comeback money."

The pari-mutuel machines, known in vernacular as the "iron men," and recognized by Kentucky and Maryland law, record their business with the precision of cash registers, make their odds by a just apportionment, and pay their tax to the State treasury.

But these unemotional machines do not question the source of the grist that is fed into their maws, and some of this grist is comeback money. The gentry who slip about taking the surreptitious bets of the man on the street, the bootleggers of race gambling, often find themselves overloaded with wagers on a favorite, and so face a disconcerting loss on their pay-off if that favorite should win. In the contemplation of the "talent," all bets made contrary to "form" are sucker bets; hence no bookmaker cares to be overloaded with wagers on any horse which stands near the "top of the form," or on one which private advices lead him to consider "out of line." A horse is "out of line" when his past performances stamp him as better than the current betting odds indicate.

For these technical reasons, a considerable portion of the money already wagered with the hand-bookers finds its way back to the pari-mutuel machines for reinvestment, to be bet over again by the professionals; and these twice-wagered funds are called the comeback money. The system is one of dual advantage—for the gentlemen who manipulate that game. It constitutes a sort of insurance against loss by throwing onto other shoulders any excess of wagering on one choice. Also, since the iron men make the odds by mathematical apportionment, the throwing of a bulky sum into the ring during the last moments of betting, "knocks down" the odds that the hand-bookers must pay, should the public choice prove victorious.

An esoteric familiarity with this high finance—or low finance—of the game had been so useful to the bookmaker

whose factotum Mose Clay had approached, that the fee of five thousand dollars had been agreed upon for the negro's tip to Dapper Joe Merrick, alias "the Spider."

Dapper Joe had communicated the negotiation to his employer and had collected from him the sizable sum with which to meet that payment.

But from that point on it seemed wise to Mr. Merrick to act independently. He would pay the darky after, and not before, the race, and meanwhile the five grand might as well ride along with the comeback money—but as his own private investment. That was the ticket!

Then, when the settlement was made, the winnings from the informally borrowed fund would stand to his own profit. The fashion of utilizing money to the best advantage is that of the quick profit and the rapid turnover.

But when Mr. Merrick learned that Mose had been providentially locked up and would doubtlessly repine for a period in the workhouse or the jail, it seemed simpler and more profitable to repudiate him altogether and pocket not only the winnings but the capital. Having a direct mind, Mr. Merrick acted accordingly and found himself pleasurably enriched.

To properly appraise a man's advancement in the world, one should consider his starting point. So judged, the slender young man who looked like a cabaret dancer had climbed upward from his beginnings.

It would not make a nice story to detail the earlier youth of this individual. His contacts had been with men who prey on society and women who cater to men's less spiritual impulses. He had known the environment of the reformatory, but now he could appear on Broadway wearing his evening clothes with nonchalant, even insolent, ease, and at present—except for his engaging in illegal games of chance—the police of the various cities through which he drifted "had nothing on him."

Mr. Merrick had learned to be careful, and from a snarling gutter rat subsisting nefariously from day to day, he had risen to an outward presentability.

On that Derby day his ticket had been one which admitted him to the clubhouse inclosure. And if Captain Kinnarney's men, constituting the track's private police force, eyed him shrewdly and made a point of speaking to him, it was only to indicate that they recognized him, and their salutations were no more hostile than a "Hello Spider. How's tricks?" or an amiable, "We know you, boy. Watch your step."

And that evening there was no one to halt Dapper Joe when he sauntered among the festive crowds that thronged the lobbies and mezzanines of Louisville's best hotels. House detectives perhaps paid him more attention than they gave to other casuals, but found no overt act of which to complain.

Joe was looking for some one and eventually he found her. She was sitting in the mezzanine of one of these hotels, and she was possessed of a certain flashing, if not too delicate, beauty. Her costume was striking, and there was about her no shrinking shyness; but that same observation might have been made with equal emphasis of other ladies who had come to the Derby.

When Dapper Joe dropped down on the divan by her side and gave casual greeting, "Hello, Cherry," the lady looked up and a shadow crossed her eyes. But that was momentary; the poise of her response was characterized by an excellent composure.

"Why, it's Joe! You look more prosperous than I've seen you at times."

"The same to you and many of them," smiled the young man. "Say, kid, the movie queens haven't anything

on you for the doggy regalia, have they? Fewer and better clothes—eh, what? What are you doing so far west?"

"I came on for the Derby."

"Yeah." He nodded understandingly and his grin was provocative. "But who brought you?"

The lady straightened with a trace of offended dignity.

"What do you think I am?" she inquired. "A scrapped flivver? Can't I travel on my own power?"

"Maybe—but if I remember right, you didn't often do it. At least, not so well."

"Why this sudden and touching interest in me, anyhow, Joe?" The mockery of the question was possibly a little flawed by anxiety; and the man grinned again.

"Perhaps, old dear," he offered impudent suggestion, "it's my faithful heart; perhaps it's the old love—or perhaps it's just that I'm glad to see an old pal riding high. But since you came on all alone, it's lucky we've met. I know the town, see?"

"Thank you. I'm all right."

"Still," he suggested, "you did look lonesome at the race track this afternoon."

She shot a quick glance at him.

"You saw me there?" she asked.

"Yeah—on your own power, having a wad of tickets as thick as a brick slipped to you by that poor mendicant, Jerry Ferris. Honest, Cherry, you ought to be ashamed to let a charity patient like that buy you tickets on a loser."

The young woman's eyes flared and subsided. She controlled her anger and laughed brightly for the benefit of any eyes that might be observing this tête-à-tête.

"May I ask," she made careless inquiry, "just what concern it is of yours who I talked to or what we talked about?"

"My business," he told her with a veiled significance, "is usually anything that I make my business. I have a memory, haven't I? Why wouldn't I be interested when I see an old girl of mine getting on in the world? Honest, kid, I'm glad to see you've hooked a live one; only you oughtn't to get too upstage about it. You see my memory goes back." He waved a slender hand as he added solemnly, "Goes back—goes back."

The lady was by no means Victorian, yet she now had recourse to the quotation of a song of other years:

"'It isn't what you used to be,'" she commented dryly, "'it's what you are to-day.'"

"Yeah," he nodded gravely. "And that's all right, too, old dear, only don't high-hat yours truly. Not that you would; you aren't as dumb as that."

CHAPTER X.

FERRIS' GIRL FRIEND.

WHEN Jake Goodman had seen the great value and prestige of a cup horse which had grown to almost mythical popularity deflated at a breath, his had not been the chagrin of an owner, yet in a sense it had been a more intimate sorrow. Success or failure was more directly chargeable to the conditioner than to the owner, and Jake was stung by a deep personal mortification. Yet his hard-headed reasoning worked along different lines from those followed by the rich man who paid his salary, and it was with a jaw set for argument that he presented himself at the vestibule of Ferris' car on Sunday morning before Ferris had finished his breakfast.

Leslie had wakened with a headache and was still in her stateroom as the two men talked over their cigars.

"Well," the Easterner began dismally, "we thought we had a chance to win the three biggest stakes, and we

broke down on the second lap. Not that I blame the colt."

"Who do you blame, Mr. Ferris?"

"The boy that crooked me."

"The boy didn't crook you, Mr. Ferris. Yesterday's race pretty near cleaned me, but I'd bet what I have left on the straightness of Joe Bonnie. You're off on the wrong foot there, sir, as sure as you're born."

Ferris bristled but he satisfied himself with a skeptical smile.

"Show me your reasons for such a touching faith, Goodman," he replied. "What's the answer, if it isn't that the colt was throttled down all the way to the stretch head, then batted all over the track?"

"The answer is that the colt refused to run—just as he did once before." For an instant the steady eyes of the trainer flashed as he added heatedly, "The holy saints couldn't have made him run yesterday."

"It wasn't their job."

"I don't need to tell you what you know, Mr. Ferris," suggested Jake quietly. "A horse that can—and will—run just a little mite faster than other horses is worth whatever he costs. A thoroughbred that can't—or won't—run quite fast enough is good for nothing else on earth. In most of his outs Hazardous has looked like the first proposition. In two of them he's seemed to be the second."

"The first time he ran for a gambler of unsavory repute," Ferris made reminder. "We can't be sure what was intended."

"I feel pretty sure what was intended," rejoined Goodman; "but let that pass. I know what I intended yesterday, and I know that the colt fooled me. Now we've got to see how he develops. Horses have off days—the best of 'em; and they can't warn us in advance."

Ferris glumly contemplated the ash on his cigar, and after an interval of silence he raised his eyes to the face of the man whose judgment he placed full reliance. Reluctantly he had reached a decision.

"I know what brought you here in particular, Jake," he said. "You wanted to talk me out of trying to punish this boy. All right, you've done it. I don't amend my opinion in the slightest degree. I believe I fell among thieves and got what thieves have to give. We'll charge all that up to profit and loss. When I put you at the head of my racing establishment, it was because I wanted a man whose judgment and experience in turf affairs were dependable. I'd be a fool to overrule you."

Goodman smoked in silence. No answer seemed called for, and the other man continued:

"I won't make any official complaint about young Bonnie; but on one point I am insistent—I don't want him to ride my horses again."

Jake shrugged.

"I think that's a mistake, too; but it's up to you. As a matter of fact, I don't believe you could ever get him again, Mr. Ferris. He's pretty sore about your public accusation yesterday."

Ferris flushed wrathfully.

"Let him be sore, then!" he exclaimed. "I'm no longer interested in him or his sentiments." Abruptly he changed the topic, and his voice became brisk: "I'm having this car hooked onto the first train out. Ship Hazardous and the rest that we are taking to Belmont Park as soon as possible. Can you put them on the train to-day?"

The trainer's eyes became thoughtful and he spoke hesitantly:

"The horses are ready to ship," he answered. "In fact, everything's mobilized except for one detail. There's a cat missing."

"A cat? The same damn cat that Wiley so generously offered to throw in?

Goodman nodded.

"I've a suspicion, Mr. Ferris, that the cat was gone yesterday, though I hadn't noticed it at the time. It had been about until recently. It may be that the colt missed his mascot; and before he starts on his journey east, I'd like to have that cat in the horse car—if it can be found."

"You take such trifles seriously, Goodman?"

"Perhaps I haven't taken them seriously enough, Mr. Ferris. I do know, though, that Cleophus, one of the grandest mares that ever trod on racing plates, lavished her heart on an alley cat and wouldn't be comforted without him. I know that old Hawthorne had to have a no-account crowbait called Blue Jay in the next stall—or he wouldn't touch his food. Perhaps I'm foolish, but if I can find that cat before I leave, I certainly want to do it."

Ferris tossed away his cigar and rose from his seat.

"Have it your own way," he made impatient concession.

As Jerry Ferris looked about the rococco gaudiness of the night club where the jazz blared and the air was thick with tobacco fumes, he reflected that for the most part the humanity represented here was deeply offensive to his fastidious taste.

He drew out a chair for the woman with whom he had just been dancing, and took his seat across the table from her. He had to keep looking on her flashy beauty in order to repress his own irritation for the uncongeniality of the scene in general.

Strange, he made morose reflection, what mad chances a man will take when he is infatuated with a woman, even so mature and sophisticated a man as himself. He realized without illusion that such a woman as Cherry Bostock cared genuinely for nothing about him except his millions. It would seem that one need not be blind to be a fool.

Intellectually and culturally there was no bond between them; yet, whenever she acknowledged the familiar greeting of one of the habitués of this place, demons of jealousy stirred him to savage impulses of anger.

Perhaps, he told himself with sardonic resentment, some of these human parasites drove around in the expensive car which had been his gift to her. As likely as not they ridiculed and flouted him for a gilded sucker, when he was elsewhere. And if they did, he made dogged admission, they were not far wrong.

Ferris smoked moodily and resolved, as he had resolved frequently in the past few months, to break an association which had begun lightly and casually enough but which now threatened to crystallize into a more foolish and dangerous permanence; yet so perverse are the cross currents of human emotionalism that while he determined to cut himself free from all meshes of lasting entanglement, he yet admitted a fatuous dread that Cherry herself might throw him over.

Certainly he was playing the fool.

The young woman reached her hand across the table and laid it playfully on his own.

"You look about as merry as a crutch," she challenged, and her eyes, trained in the game of making men forget their dangerously thoughtful moods, teased him with the flash to which he had capitulated.

"This place bores me," he answered sulkily. "Let's leave."

She laughed persuasively.

"It's early yet. Let's dance a little longer. You're still in mourning over the Derby, and you need something like this to pep you up."

The man gave a short ejaculation of disgust; but before he had framed an answer, a shadow fell on the table, and

he looked up to recognize an old, but by no means intimate acquaintance.

In the racing world Bill Rush was widely known, though he moved in a sphere distinct from that of Jerry Ferris. He operated one of the larger of the winter books with headquarters in St. Louis. Now, as he still paused by the table, he inquired amiably:

"How's your gray colt training, Mr. Ferris? Has he come back to form?"

The millionaire's first impulse was to make his response uninvitingly curt; then he reflected that to such a man as this came many of the underground rumors of the turf. It might be illuminating to hear what was being said by the gentry who talk out of the sides of their faces about the race he had lost.

"Sit down, Mr. Rush," he invited. Then he went on cautiously, "We're going slow with Hazardous; but we hope to have him ready for Saratoga."

As the gambler drew out a chair and spoke casually to Cherry, and as she responded with an indifferent nod, Ferris recognized irritably that they had required no introduction.

"Has your cat come back?" asked Rush, with a quiet twinkle in his eyes. And Ferris found that question irritating too.

"Cat," he echoed. Then he shrugged his shoulder. "Oh, I see. You mean the mascot that disappeared at the Downs. No, that cat's still A. W. O. L., I believe."

"You don't seem to care much."

"I'm not much interested in cats."

The bookmaker bent forward and grinned.

"According to the story that's going round, your colt is interested in that one. They say that you paid Wiley two hundred grand for the horse, and he offered to throw the cat in."

"Yes, that's true enough. What of it?"

"That's where you seem to have made your mistake," announced Rush. "From what the boys tell me, you ought to have paid the two hundred grand for the cat—and had the horse thrown in."

Ferris flushed testily, but before he could pursue the topic, another uninvited visitor stood by his table. That, he supposed, was the penalty of coming to such a place as this.

This arrival was a young man of a stamp that filled Jerry Ferris with repugnance. His face was not unhandsome but it wore the sly look that dwells in the eyes of a rat, and as a human rat the millionaire turfman promptly classified him.

To this life of the underworld, though the gilded fringe of the underworld, he seemed native born—and now he spoke with an easy familiarity, not to Ferris, but to the woman who was his companion.

"Hello, Cherry, old dear. Where you been keeping yourself?"

Her eyes clouded to a momentary uneasiness, but she only shrugged her white shoulder and met the rather amused insolence of his questioning gaze with an indifference which denied his assumption of intimacy.

"Oh, I've been about," she said, and rather pointedly offered no introduction to Ferris.

That omission failed to dismay the new arrival, who turned to the turfman and addressed him by name.

"Just stopped to say cheerio to Cherry, Mr. Ferris," he explained. "You see, we're old friends. I knew her when——"

"When what?" Ferris made stiff inquiry.

The woman shifted her position uneasily; but the young man laughed.

"Oh, that's just an expression. It means old acquaintance. It's like saying, 'I used to be a newspaper man, myself.' Well, good night, old thing"—to Cherry—and the casual one wafted himself away with an easy flippancy.

"How did he know my name?" demanded Ferris.

It was Rush who volunteered response.

"Oh, I reckon everybody knows you by sight, Mr. Ferris; and I expect this lad has seen you on a good many tracks. He follows the races himself. Used to work for me at the future-book game. He's called Dapper Joe Merrick. You see him here and there along Broadway."

The millionaire turned his eyes on the young woman, and though he pitched his voice to commonplace indifference, he did not quite banish from it the touch of suspicion.

"Where did you know him, Cherry? He seemed an old acquaintance."

The girl laughed with studied carelessness.

"Oh, as far as that goes," she answered, "everybody he's ever met is an old acquaintance. He's a breezy lad, and I met him just about the way you did—along Broadway."

The equine apple of Jerry Ferris' eye had turned to dead sea fruit; and now, when he visited his barn at Belmont Park, the glances that he turned inward at the gray colt's stall were glances of smoldering resentment. The horse stabled there had become useless, because while he was concededly the fastest and stanchest three-year-old of the season, he would neither train nor race. Hazardous had turned chronically sour. He was as undeniably a rogue as an elephant which had "gone bad."

"No chance of bringing him to hand for Saratoga?" asked Ferris almost wistfully.

Goodman wagged a dubious head.

"I haven't absolutely given him up yet," he answered; "but I haven't much hope. From being one of the sweetest-tempered horses I ever handled, he's developed a pig-headed and savage streak. Some of the boys are afraid to go into his stall. As for work it's a plain case of nothing doing. Even as a stock horse he seems to have done for himself. Nobody wants to breed their mares to rotten-tempered stallions."

"It's not just that a horse has disappointed me," groaned Ferris; "I've been through that before. This is absolutely a superhorse. Since he learned what it was all about, he had never been extended by anything on four feet—except when he didn't want to try."

"You can go farther than that," agreed Goodman. "It's my conviction that neither Sysonby nor Man o' War were as great. That loafer that stands there could have broken every distance record on the American turf—from three quarters to two miles and a half. All the prizes were his for the taking—and he won't take them. He fails only when he won't try—and that's all the time."

Maple Court lies with an outlook on the Sound, and around it the grounds have both dignity and beauty. The estate was established by old General Ferris, Jerry's grandfather. It had been beautified and enlarged by Jerry's father, but it was Jerry himself who had added polo fields where the sod was plush green and where ponies of tournament caliber and players with high-goal handicaps, had raced on the ball in practice games for national tournaments.

Now each forenoon at Maple Court hard-hitting, tanned men in boots and breeches rode "hell for leather" between the side boards of that field. One heard constantly the light crack of mallet on willow ball, the strain of stirrup leathers, and shouts of "I have it!" "Ride off your man," and "take him out."

At other times it would have been the afternoon instead of the morning that the green turf between the goal

posts resounded to such activity. But now, because many of the men who played were also deeply interested in racing on the flat and over the jumps, the latter part of the day was left free for Belmont Park.

There was considerable noise at those times between the trees and shrubbery that inclosed the natural ampitheater around the space of the pole area, what with automatic horns honking and motors starting and the shouting on field and side lines.

Though these practice games were not public affairs, it was Ferris' custom to open the gates of his estate to such sight-seers and devotees of the game as cared to come; and about the space stood onlookers both of the sporting set, which could afford to play the rich man's game, and of the neighboring farmer folk, who took a keen and native pride in their local champions. There was, of course, also a little multitude of grooms, hostlers, and even of shrewd-eyed horse traders and pony trainers.

At one end of the polo field, in the privacy of a hedged area, stood a small building which Jerry Ferris used as an office for conducting affairs connected with the estate; and shortly before noon, as the master of Maple Court swung himself from his saddle at the end of a strenuous chukker and turned his pony over to a groom at the side lines, a man stepped out of the small gathering of onlookers and said quietly:

"Mr. Ferris, I wish you'd give me a few minutes. I want to talk to you."

Jerry stiffened as he recognized Shannon Wiley, and recognized that his face wore the set gravity of determination.

"I had thought, Mr. Wiley," he made reply with unconcealed curtness, "that our business had been concluded—and to your satisfaction."

Wiley shook his head.

"You thought wrong, then. I don't reckon I'll detain you long, but it's important."

Two or three of the players standing not far away and resting in the short intermission between periods remembered afterward that the manner of their host as he spoke to some stranger was plainly that of a man who is annoyed, and that there was something in the attitude of both men distinctly suggestive of two dogs bristling with a mutual hostility. Later that recollection assumed retrospective importance; but just now no one who saw the heavy-set man accost the master of Maple Court recognized him as Shannon Wiley.

"You know where Mr. Goodman, my trainer, can be found, Mr. Wiley," continued Ferris protestingly. "He is fully authorized to take care of all business relating to racing—and I don't know of any other matter that could arise between us."

Wiley's features were quiet but resolutely grim.

"This is a personal matter. Mr. Goodman won't do."

Ferris flushed at his temples with an anger long stored.

"Are you seeking to force a quarrel with me?" he inquired.

The former bookmaker shook his head as he answered in a low voice:

"That's the last thing I'm seeking; but we can't talk here and we've got to talk."

Ferris stood scowling impatiently. At any time an interview with this fellow was distasteful to him, and just now he was keenly enjoying his game. This afternoon he was riding and hitting better than usual, and to be interrupted with the match unfinished did not suit his fancy. But he looked at the soberly inflexible eyes of Shannon Wiley, and decided that when an enemy confronted him and demanded speech, he could hardly refuse. He knew, too, that if he forced Wiley to wait till the

referee's whistle had blown for the end of the final chukker, he would be off his form for what remained of the playing. His mind would be shadowed by a disagreeable interview postponed. A distraction of irritability would mar the coördination between mind and mallet arm.

Van Barron, who was captaining the White four, stood smoking a cigarette a few yards distant; and Ferris called to him:

"Van, I've got to drop out of the next chukker," he said. "A matter of business. Can you put Plenton in my place?"

"Sorry to lose you," he said; "you're riding on the top of your form to-day. But Plenton is keen to get into it for a while."

With a curt nod to Wiley, Ferris turned and led the way to the single-roomed building beyond the lilac hedge.

CHAPTER XI.

QUARREL AND TRAGEDY.

SHANNON WILEY stood for a moment looking about the room into which he had been led. It was a place reflecting the interests of the man who used it, decorated with sporting trophies of a catholic variety. Mounted moose and elk heads looked down from the walls. There was even a mountain sheep. Guns, horse-show ribbons, trophy cups, and polo mallets bore testimony to past activities.

The desk at which Ferris did his work and before which he now seated himself stood against a wall, and over it were several portraits of horses from the brush of a talented animal painter.

There also hung above the desk an old weapon, and this Wiley noted with the mild curiosity of a man for unimportant things, when his brain is focussed on something vital. It was a unique tomahawk, shaped much like those which the Indians of many generations past made of stone, yet fashioned in a slender shapeliness of machined steel. At the opposite side of the head from the blade was a wickedly pointed offset fashioned like a spear head; and perhaps it was the oddity of a thing so savage of design and purpose, and so skillfully forged and wrought of detail, which caused the elderly gambler to let his eyes dwell on it.

Perhaps it was an impulse of breaking the ice of what promised to be an embarrassing interview which prompted Ferris to laugh and say somewhat indifferently:

"A pleasant-looking toy, isn't it? I picked it up out West. It seems the English cutlery concern whose stamp it bears used to manufacture those things and sell them to the Indians when Indians still used tomahawks."

"Yeah," answered Wiley as he took a chair, "it's a nice little thing for a murder. But I didn't come to chat socially, Mr. Ferris; and I guess you want to get back to your game."

"To be frank, I do."

Wiley nodded gravely.

"Sometimes I wonder, Mr. Ferris," he began, "if it wouldn't have been better if you and me had mixed it, there at the track. You handed me a raw insult and I gave you the lie—and yet it was just that we were both hot in the collar. If each of us had busted the other a good crack or two that afternoon, it might have ended there."

"I sent you an apology—through Goodman," Ferris made answer with a voice and manner of chilling formality.

"Yes, and I told Jake to pass back my message that so far as I was concerned, that ended it; but ever since then, Mr. Ferris, you've been talking to people about us—me and the boy. As for me, I'm thick-skinned enough to stand it; but I've got a strong kick to make against the boy being slandered."

Ferris started to speak, then checked

himself, and exercised his utmost of self-command in making a fresh start.

"Mr. Wiley," he declared with an even tone that was whetted razor-sharp, "there isn't any use in beating about the bush. Whatever I have said to others, I am ready to say to you—and I am not seeking to escape any consequences. I did believe at first that Joe Bonnie pulled Hazardous to lose the Derby, and that he did so at your instigation. It was my first intention to take the matter to the stewards; but Jake Goodman dissauded me."

"You ain't telling me anything new yet. I know all that."

"Then when the colt went absolutely bad, turned vicious rogue, I amended that first opinion. I acquitted the boy of having deliberately thrown that race; but I saw also that you had swindled me by selling a horse that you knew was utterly unreliable, and that the boy was, in effect at least, your accomplice. I still believe that, and I have said so. My formal apology was for public conduct of which I was ashamed, but that is as far as I can go. I am by no means prepared to retract my belief that I was victimized by the precious pair of you."

Had Wiley come as the unbiased messenger of another man, his features could scarcely have remained more immobile; and at each point of Ferris' statement he nodded his head, as if in punctuation.

Now he responded, and his voice was devoid of heat.

"I expect you know that I don't give a damn as to your opinion of me. As to the boy, it's different. He's got a reputation at stake. He's clean and he's capable. He has a right to resent malicious lies——"

"I advise you to choose your words carefully, Mr. Wiley."

"I'm choosin' them carefully, and I said malicious lies."

Ferris rose impulsively from his seat and towered above the uninvited guest. In his polo togs, Jerry looked the athlete—fit, hard-muscled, and far from timid; and as he stepped forward his expression hinted at physical attack. But Wiley remained seated, and there was no flicker in the moss-agate coldness of his eyes.

"Wait a minute, Mr. Ferris," he suggested indifferently. "If you're going to crown me, you might as well do it for the whole business; I ain't quite through yet."

The millionaire thought of ordering this impertinent trespasser from his place, then flushed a little at the realization that the gambler was giving him a lesson in poise and self-command. Whatever he might think of Wiley, he did not make the mistake of accusing him of cowardice. He sat down.

"Go on," he said; "but please make it brief."

"You haven't made your comments about us brief," came the pointed reminder. "I said you'd told scandalous lies about Joe Bonnie, and I was going on to add that I didn't accuse you of intentional lying. I'm ready to admit that you believe what you said. If that is true, I take it you'd rather know what the exact facts are—and I'm here to tell you."

"I hardly expect you to admit what I believe to be true."

Wiley laughed briefly.

"You are more of a fool than I give you credit for, if you think I'm here to lie to you. I lost twenty thousand on the Derby—twenty thousand bet on your colt to win."

"Do you mean you didn't know he had turned rogue?"

"If I'd known that I wouldn't have thrown away that much money. To you, twenty grand may not mean much. To most people, it does."

"Didn't you decide to sell because you'd discovered the streak in the colt?"

"Sure. That streak was public property from the day of the Futurity; but only once, and that in training, had I ever seen it crop out again. I told you when you bought him that any horse might turn sour. You took your chance, and when it turned out a losing chance, you put up an awful holler."

"What about this story of a cat? Didn't you know that?"

"I suspected it. Joe put more weight in that theory than I did; but the cat business was an indication. I stood ready to tell you all I knew when you led the horse away. But when I spilled a wise-crack about putting you next for ten thousand, you chose to freeze up like a cake of ice and to high-hat me—so I shut my face and let you have it your own way."

"Your whole manner had been offensive to me from the first," said Ferris shortly. "When our business was done, I saw no reason to invite it further."

"The bad blood between us was of your making," Wiley returned. "You'd seen fit to speak of Joe as if he's been a low-down stable swipe, because your own daughter chose to ride horseback with him at the farm, and because, apparently, you didn't carry enough weight in your own family to make your kick to her. Because you'd gotten a hate on Joe, you jumped to the other conclusion. I warned Joe off, since you considered him a trespasser; and he took my advice. That was your business, as I told you at the time. It gave me a pain in the neck, because this aristocracy stuff doesn't go any more. It's as out of date as duels and hoop skirts. The answer to it is 'Blah!' But if you don't know that, it ain't my affair to educate you. So that's that."

"Possibly it's not to be expected," observed the man in polo togs, "that you and I should see these purely personal matters in the same light." Now there was an amused smile, a smile of almost pitying condescension. His next words seemed to dispose of that phase of the conversation summarily and beyond appeal. "We don't speak the same language, Mr. Wiley—and I have no ambition to learn yours."

Shannon Wiley leaned back in his chair, and after a brief pause, he continued:

"Now, Joe doesn't have to ride races and he doesn't want to go on riding. When he comes of age, he'll be independently rich——"

"Thanks to what I paid for a horse that might as well be a dead dog."

"Thanks to the fact," Wiley corrected him quietly, "that I've chosen to settle money on him. Joe has pride, too; and he doesn't feel that he can quit under fire. He's got to go on booting 'em home until he can hang up his tack and silks with a clean bill of health. He can't unsaddle for keeps until he's lived down the name you tried to give him."

"What have I to do with that?"

"You can set it straight without saying a word; but before I come to that I want to tell you something about Joe."

"I'm not interested in hearing about young Bonnie."

"Maybe not, but you were interested in broadcasting lies about him, and you can't well refuse to hear the truth."

"I object to your constant use of that word, lies, even with the qualifications you have made."

"I haven't liked the constant use of the lies themselves, Mr. Ferris. Did you ever hear of General Preston Popeworth?"

"Naturally—every one has. My Kentucky place used to belong to that family. The general was on Lee's staff in the Confederate army, I believe. Like many other Southern aristocrats, he was ruined by the war."

"Yeah. His son never staged a finan-

cial comeback; and his widow was a lady of right stiff-necked pride. She lived out her last years in seclusion, trying to hide her poverty and coming pretty damn close to starvation. She had a grandson. Once she came to me when I was making book at Churchill Downs. She had one hundred dollars and she had gotten desperate enough to gamble. I took her money and—well, I had a lucky day and ran it up for her to considerably more than she started with. But that didn't last. When she died, the boy was going to be sent to a public institution. People had forgotten the great names of the old South."

Wiley sat gazing absently at the tomahawk which hung on the wall. Finally he continued:

"I may have been a fool to think I could raise a boy around stables and have him turn out a gentleman. Anyhow, I tried it; and I called him Joe Bonnie instead of Joseph Preston Popeworth. The blood of Robert E. Lee's staff officer and friend may not be good enough for your daughter to associate with, Mr. Ferris; but it doesn't throw races or betray its employers any more than it betrayed the Confederate flag."

"What was your idea, Mr. Wiley," came the ironic query, "in concealing from this boy his own name and his own origin?"

"I believed in blood lines," answered the gambler simply. "I wanted the boy to make good on his own. I wasn't afraid, as you seem to be, that good stuff would go bad by rubbing shoulders with common folk. I guess I just had more confidence in breeding than you have."

Ferris flushed.

"What do you want me to do—accept this boy socially?"

"Hell, no!" The response was suddenly explosive. "If Joe wanted to make a plea like that he'd have to make it for himself. But I've got a strong notion he'd be more likely to wait until he's of age, and then make it to your girl direct. Besides, Joe doesn't know yet who he is."

"Then what do you want me to do?"

Wiley rose, and spoke standing.

"I want you to set right an injustice to this boy in a fashion that will to your own profit. I haven't mentioned it to Joe. I don't know whether Hazardous will stake a comeback or not, but you still have Leg o' Mutton for the big stakes. There's not a better race rider in the world than Joe, as you damn well know. I want you to put him up in the big stakes. That will show what you think of him, and it will win handicaps for you—if your horse can win them."

For a moment the master of Maple Court looked dumfounded; then slowly he rose to his feet, and the two men stood eye to eye.

"Mr. Wiley," he said, "you make it necessary for me to speak very plainly, or stand convicted as a man who squeals under punishment. What you tell me about expecting Hazardous to win the Derby, I accept as true. What you tell me about the boy's origin is interesting—and I admit that there is no better blood. But certain facts remain and they must be faced. The boy may have been a veritable prince in rags to begin with, but he has known only one preceptor—and that has been yourself. You are a man whose background has been professional gambling, and all that I have seen of you fits that background. What this boy is to-day reflects your teaching, and what he got from his ancestors has been submerged in that. I believe that when you sold me your colt after realizing that, for all his amazing speed, he was no good, you were deliberately swindling me. I believe the boy knew it, too. And before I would give him a leg-up in my colors, I would retire all my horses and abandon racing. You have forced me

to painful straightforwardness—and now you have it. I think, Mr. Wiley, you are a swindler and that the boy has, whatever his origin, been modeled to your own pattern."

Shannon Wiley's rugged face went stonily hard but his voice held even.

"So that's that," he said. "I came to ask you to set right an honest lad you'd put in a false light. You refuse, as I might have known you would. Now I'm going to make you do it."

"Try to make me," invited Ferris, and his own face was white and twitching with passion.

Charlie Plenton had played out the last two chukkers of the match at number three for the Whites in Ferris' stead, and he was rather well pleased with the account he had given of himself. Now the parked cars had backed and turned, and there was a chorus of starting motors and a hooting of horns.

The crowd was scattering and dissolving, and along the roadside went dancing lines of blanketed ponies led by grooms. The place which had been crowded and animated was emptying, and Leslie who had come to the field only a few minutes before the match ended, looked about for her father and did not see him.

She had come on foot from the house, and as she turned to start back again, Van Barron crossed over to her, his face flushed from the strenuous galloping of eight hot periods.

"Hello, Leslie," he accosted her. "Your father dropped out at the end of the sixth chukker to talk with some fellow. I'd like a word with him about to-morrow's practice, before I go. Have you any idea where I'd be apt to find him?"

The girl shook her head.

"Do you know who it was that he left the field with or whether they went in a car?"

"I didn't know the man. He was elderly, sort of, and thick-set—and they walked in that direction." The polo player waved his hand toward the massed shrubbery to the north.

"Oh," laughed Leslie, "then they must have gone to the office. It's just beyond the lilacs."

"Right-o and thanks. May I just pop over there and knock on the door?"

"Of course, Van; but I'll show you the way. I want to see dad myself."

The man and the girl turned and walked together along the side boards of the field, past the goal posts at one end, and through a gatelike gap to the front of the building, which was masked by shrubbery and tall trees.

It was Leslie who knocked lightly and who, receiving no reply, opened the door and stepped in; but the man was at her elbow.

For an instant neither spoke, but the delicate face of the girl, which had held a blossom glow of color, blanched abruptly; and the man stiffened as if he had taken an electric shock.

The room was empty save for Ferris himself, and Ferris sat before his desk with an alarming quietness. He did not sit upright, but was slumped over with his face resting on one elbow among the papers and accessories that littered the desk top, while the other arm hung limp at his side.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Barron, speaking quickly and mendaciously as he stepped in front of the girl, "he's napping."

But Leslie had stiffened and her hands had come slowly to her breast and clenched themselves there.

"He doesn't nap—in his chair," she said in a voice that was deadly low, "while polo's being played outside."

"I'm afraid, then—he's ill." The man had moved again. His eye had caught something which he hoped she had not seen and which, by his new movement, he sought to screen from her. On the floor just beyond the chair

in which the master of Maple Court sat slumped, a sloping ray of light glinted from bright metal—from something shaped like a curious hatchet.

Barron went on talking rapidly. He must get this child away until he learned more of whatever ghastly thing was happening here—or had happened.

"Doctor Gleason was still on the field when we left," he said, and his voice became crisp with command. "Step on it, and call him in. Jerry has had some sort of stroke. He's unconscious."

Leslie was wraith-white, and when she turned to obey that order she faltered as though her knees would buckle under her, and one hand went gropingly toward the wall; but she steadied herself as the man caught at her elbow.

"Hold on to your nerve, girl," he exhorted. "It's not apt to be very serious—overexertion, I expect. But hurry!"

He was lying. He had seen figures with that strangely immobile attitude before. He had seen them in France; and he was sure that it spelled death.

But when he had gotten her away, sustained for the moment by the need of action and haste, he went over and lifted the sagging shoulders of his friend. He lifted them only a little, and his lips set themselves taut as he found confirmation of his fears in a spreading spot of crimson on the white breast of a polo shirt.

"Murdered!" he told himself. "It wasn't done with the hatchet, either. It was a pistol bullet, fired close enough to powder-burn."

Barron stood looking about the place and fighting down a nauseating shock of bewilderment and horror.

Instinctively, he started to lift and straighten the body into a greater dignity of posture, then he drew back his hand. Instinctively, it reached out again—for the tomahawk; and again he restrained his impulse.

"Better leave things just as they are," he cautioned himself. "This isn't a matter for tyros to meddle with. Strange no one heard it. No, not strange, either—there was a lot of noise out there."

Barron straightened and drew a long breath.

"I must remember," he reflected. "I must remember precisely what that fellow looked like—the fellow he went away with. Strange, I hardly noticed him at all."

He heard voices outside—and leaped for the door, holding its knob as though it were a place to defend. Looking out, he recognized the anxious face of Doctor Gleason, and spoke in a tense undertone:

"Don't let her come in!" he commanded. "See to her in some fashion. It's too late to help Jerry. He's done in."

To be continued next week.

HE COULD NOT BLOW HIS OWN HORN

THE inventor of the steam foghorn, which for a century has warned mariners all over the world and saved innumerable lives, died in poverty in St. John, New Brunswick, without having received compensation for his invention. He was a Scotsman and an engineer and surveyor, and his chemical and mechanical knowledge brought him high place in the Canadian lighthouse service, during which period he designed the foghorn and put it into use along that rocky coast. He failed to patent his idea, and the governments adopted it without compensating him in any way.

Crossroads in Jericho

In Two Parts
Part I

By Will McMorrow

Author of "The Sky Buccaneers," Etc.

A young man regains consciousness on a country road, remembering nothing but his name. Enter the lady.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN IN THE ROAD.

HE lay partly over on his side, his lithe, youthful body awkwardly twisted about as he had fallen, his head and shoulders partly hidden by the tall grass that grew rankly by the side of the quiet, country road, his clothing—well cut and neatly pressed—powdered with the gray dust shaken from the roadside weeds, one arm flung across the rutted wheel track.

On a stone wall that bordered the deserted road, a red squirrel sat with twitching, bushy tail and alert, little eyes, and scolded shrilly, giving his opinion of this quiet but menacing intruder in a peaceful May world, devoted to sunshine and birds and industrious squirrels. And, like, most valueless opinions, it was given again and again, more loudly and shrilly, to an audience of three robins and a sober, thoughtful crow—until the man by the roadside moved groaningly and rolled over on his elbow.

Not an ill-looking young man in one sense—a bit too prominent of chin, perhaps, and tousled of hair, with a clean line of jaw and forehead, steady eyes, and a decent breadth of shoulders, but a decidedly ill-looking young man in another sense. Which might be explained by a nasty cut over the right eye, that had bled and threaded its meandering way across his cheek and dried there.

He blinked at the stretch of dusty road winding its silent, sunny way between the stone walls and stopping blankly at a hilltop, like a road painted on a stage back drop.

His head hurt frightfully—throbbingly, with the measured cadence of steel hammers beating ceaselessly inside his skull; and for the moment he thought only of that.

He struggled to a sitting position, felt the cut on his forehead with gingerly exploring fingers, while the red squirrel forgot the rest of his speech and fled with a flirt of bushy tail, his audience fluttering upward to a branch. The man blinked again dully at the stretch of road, his lips compressed in an agony of thought.

This place—a country road—fields on either side—never saw this place before. What in the world had happened? Automobile accident? Motor cycle? Somewhere—some time ago—all rather hazy—he had driven a motor cycle—or what was it? Anyway, there was no automobile or motor cycle in evidence here. Had he been hit by a speeder?

He frowned and winced at the resultant stab of pain from his wound.

But what was he doing here? He hadn't been driving or walking——

Funny! He couldn't remember just what he had been doing. It would all come back to him presently, of course—how all this had happened and everything; but it was darned uncomfortable—like being lost, or being born again in a new world—here in this dusty road in a strange place. He would get his wits back in a minute—remember everything.

A new throbbing arose—not inside his head this time—grew louder with jerky suddenness, and became an old-fashioned Ford radiator and two wheels that wabbled slightly as they rose over the hill in a little aura of dust, a crank handle swinging lazily between. Above them a cracked wind shield flashed as it caught the sun.

The wheels waggled unevenly in the ruts, bumped toward the man and stopped. A girl's head—blond-gold, brilliant in the sunlight—emerged from under the dilapidated flivver top, and looked down at the man. Dark-blue eyes widened in surprise, perfect lips rounded in sympathy.

"Oh! You're hurt! Wait; I'll help you——"

She tugged at the stubborn catch of the rusty door; but he got to his feet unaided and held to the side of the car, swaying a little to hold his balance, wrinkling his brows and staring down at the girl's capable little hand, still tugging at the door catch. He was like a man struggling with the clouds of a powerful drug, fighting his way back to consciousness.

The door opened at last and she jumped lightly out into the road, a slight figure in tan-jersey dress, beside this tall stranger.

"My goodness!" She threw open the rear door of the car, trying with her small strength to assist him inside. "What on earth could have happened?" She pointed to the cut on his forehead. "It hurts terribly?"

He nodded, slumped in the tonneau that sagged with his weight, let his head rest back against the worn upholstery.

"It'll go away by and by," he said. "Just a bad cut—looks worse than it is, I guess. Kinda knocked me cuckoo for a while."

Commiseration, not unmixed with feminine curiosity, was in her frankly appraising glance.

"I can take you to a doctor," she ventured, "or—home, if you live near here. Was it an automobile?"

"I don't know—exactly."

"I see. It was dark, perhaps, and you were walking——"

"I don't know—that—either." He shook his head slowly, and again he seemed to peer through a fog. "What—what road is that?"

"The way I'm headed," she answered, with a puzzled frown creasing her smooth forehead, "is the road to Jericho

—the village I live in. That way is New York—fifty miles."

"New York." He passed his hand over his eyes. "Jericho. I don't seem to remember. Funny thing." He held to the back of the seat, tightly, as if holding to some substantial thing in a world of phantoms. "I'm sort of mixed up—I seem to have forgotten something —something——"

Her eyes widened. "You mean—you don't know how you got here, in Jericho? You've forgotten where you came from?"

"I remember—nothing." His face was drawn in lines of tragic earnestness, oddly at variance with his gray eyes that seemed to plead with her for help. "I have forgotten why I am here, where I live! It's like a blank page. Even my name—— Wait!"

He crushed her hand under his, staring fixedly along the still and sleeping road.

"Ty—Ty—it is something like that—Tyrone! Tyrone is the name!"

"And that is all you can remember?" She broke the silence finally.

"That is all." He managed a twisted smile. "Ridiculous, isn't it? I must be somebody from somewhere—with another name, an address, friends, and so forth. But it's all wiped out—maybe by this."

He touched the edge of the swelling above his eye. It was still painful, but for the moment he had forgotten the pain in the magnitude of this other disaster.

"How terrible!" she breathed. "What in the world are you going——"

"Wait!" He straightened up suddenly, plunged his hands into the side pockets of his tweed suit. "There must be something—some identification."

She watched him while he searched his pockets with hopeful, eager fingers; and when the search was ended, together they gazed blankly at the articles laid out upon the leather seat—a handful of silver, a pack of popular-priced cigarettes, a pencil, a plain metal pocket-knife, and a folded handkerchief of white linen, innocent of initial. There was absolutely no proof of his identity —nothing that could tell him who he was, where he came from, or shed light on his past life.

It was as if he, a grown man, a substantial one hundred and seventy pounds of athletic flesh and blood, had been created out of thin air on this deserted country road at dawn, and left to shift for himself, with a mind swept clear of everything but that word, "Tyrone"—and he didn't know whether it was his first name or his last.

"What are you going to do?" she asked, and caught her under lip in her teeth. "You must have friends, relatives somewhere."

"I don't know what to do," he confessed miserably. "I've heard of this thing—'amnesia,' I think they call it. I don't want to go to a hospital or a nut factory and be shoved into a strait-jacket, or whatever they do with wandering lunatics. I'm not a nut. I have a feeling I'm going to remember everything any minute. It seems to be just out of my grasp—like some lesson I've forgotten."

"I know." She nodded understandingly. "Father—he was a doctor—told me of a case like yours—a friend of his who had been in an accident. His memory came back suddenly when he fell off a bridge one night."

He grinned in spite of himself. "I don't know whether I ought to try that, exactly. But I don't think this was an accident. It looks as if some one knocked me on the head and robbed me. Even a hit-and-run driver doesn't stop to take his victim's hat and coat. If you will run me to the nearest police station or constable, I'll turn myself in like a lost-and-found article."

"The nearest constable is in Jericho, and that's six miles." She brightened

suddenly, with a smile that matched the dazzling gleam of her hair. "I know what we'll do first. We'll talk to Aunt Hattie."

"Aunt Hattie?"

"She's my aunt. I live with her on the farm; and she has more sense than all the constables in Putnam County. It's right up the road a bit."

She settled herself in the front seat, pressing one small toe on the self-starter.

He leaned forward.

"It's darned decent of you," he blurted, "to take the trouble——"

She shook her head, grasped the wheel with the prim determination of the feminine driver wary of mere man's mechanical inventions, and they jerked forward bumpily along the rutted and blossom-scented road to Jericho. And he—coatless, hatless, penniless, with a blank past and an uncertain future—found occasion to wonder—so does the mind of youth function even in chaos—whether his past included a wife.

He discovered himself hoping that it didn't.

CHAPTER II.

FRIENDS IN JERICHO.

A QUARTER of a mile or so over the uneven dirt road, washed out at intervals by the late-spring rains, and they came to an intersection of the dirt road with a new, concrete highway. The girl swung the wheel over and they turned into a grass-grown driveway that led upward to a white, shingled farmhouse topping a little hill that was pinnacled with a tall grove of ancient locusts.

Beyond the low-lying, comfortable house, a hoary gray barn leaned despondently against a background of sky and rolling meadows. Some care had been taken to border the driveway with whitewashed stones, the stone wall along the road had been mended, and on a rustic pole by the road a sign swung, artistically and neatly lettered in Gothic:

Cossroads Tea Room — Rooms — Chicken Dinner—Drive In.

Some one's chicken dinner, still quick with the divine spark, raced in a feathery flurry across the driveway and dodged under the wheels, whereupon the flivver executed some startling maneuvers that sent two whitewashed stones rolling, removed the outer bark from a sapling, and ended with a scrape and a triumphant shiver beside the porch steps.

A large, pleasant-faced, spectacled woman hurried to the edge of the porch, her plump arms raised in protest.

"Meryl Taylor!" She shook a floury finger at the girl. "My dear child, you must be more careful. I know you'll be hurt in that——"

She caught sight of the man who called himself Tyrone—that pale and dazed young man with the bruise on his forehead—and her good-humored face lengthened.

"You—you ran into him, Meryl?" she gasped. "I've been afraid——"

"I didn't, Aunt Hattie." The girl jumped out and held the door open for Tyrone. "But I'm afraid some one else did—some awful person that left him right in the road. Can I help you out?"

"Thanks," he declined, "but I can navigate all right, I think. My head feels kind of rotten, but my legs are working. I'll—I'll just sit here for a minute."

He dropped into a porch rocker, leaned his aching head on his hand, while the girl explained for him. Aunt Hattie took command of the situation at once, with vigorous good nature.

"Amnesia," she nodded. "He's lost his memory—and no wonder, with that bump on the head. Looks to me as if he'd been held up and robbed. First thing to do, of course, is to let old Doctor Schoenberg look him over. He's ancient and all that, but he ought to be

able to diagnose this. See if he's in his room, Meryl."

"But, listen," Tyrone protested as the girl disappeared. "I'm a poor patient for a doctor. I haven't a dollar to my name and——"

"Nonsense, young man," Aunt Hattie answered sharply. "You're an invalid here, and I'm running this. Besides, Doctor Schoenberg is a boarder here and he knows better than to charge me anything—unless he wants his toast burned to a cinder and chickory in his coffee."

"Chigory in der covvee alreaty I haf found," a jovial bass voice interrupted from the doorway, "mit other strange things. But ve vill say nothing of that, Mrs. Hanley. Iss diss der young man? H'm-m! Der frontal convolution. So!"

He stroked his white beard, peered at the wound on Tyrone's head, and grunted to himself—a little, gnomelike old man, hidden behind thick lenses and thicker whiskers, and carrying with him a rumbling, huge voice, as much too large for him as was his antique frock coat.

He roared questions at the patient, listened to his halting answers with head askew and forefinger dangling the thick-lensed glasses, and finally gave his opinion.

"Dose smart men vot makes the big worts call it traumatic psychosis, so that ven you get der bill you know you haf your money's worth." He glared upward at Mrs. Hanley. "Like der hash vot you gifs fancy names. Der head injury on der outside iss nudding. A bump on der knob. Ve leaf dot to nature."

He enumerated symptoms on pudgy fingers. "Dere is the dazed state—loss of memory, amnesia—for facts surrounding der time of injury. In your case it iss retrograde—amnesia for the ancient facts. Dere iss loss of identity. Der orientation iss gone. He vill go to bed and rest, mitout noises and rackets, and sleep. I will fix a wet compress on der head for der wound."

"But"—Meryl's eyes were soft with compassion—"can't you help him remember his name and past and all that?"

The old man patted her on the arm. "Dot iss something else again. Maybe it comes back mit a rush. Ve know nudding of those things in der inner psyche—only lots of smart vorts to conceal our ignorances—vorts for der smart-Alecks to juggle mit. Pah! Ve know nuddings. Der goddess Psyche, she has treated him not vell."

He pulled his sanguine nose thoughtfully, with a mischievous glance upward at her blond loveliness.

"Maybe der goddess Venus, she vill not treat him—— Vell! Nefer mind dot, now," he went on quickly, as he flushed warmly beneath the olive tan. "After he has rested blenty you vill look for his friends—mit der police maybe—and they can come and wake up der sleeping memory. I go now to study der flowers of der fields vot haf no past and future."

Tyrone smiled at the rotund figure in rusty black toddling away toward the dappled meadows.

"Funny little cuss," the patient commented; "but he seems to know his stuff. Retired, I suppose."

Meryl nodded. "I don't think so much of his opinion," she said disdainfully; "and I think he should show more interest than wandering off on his weird botany tours. Well, I've got to get back to the village to do my shopping. That's where I was headed when I met you."

Tyrone got unsteadily to his feet.

"It's—it's been mighty kind of you folks," he began, "to help me; but would you mind giving me a lift to the village? I've got to notify the police or something so they can start a search. And if there's a public hospital, where they'll give me bed for a few days——"

"You will do nothing of the kind!" Aunt Hattie's motherly bulk interposed

commandingly between them. "You're under my care, young man. I'd be a nice one to let you go traipsin' around the country in that condition. You're going to be sent right upstairs to bed, as Doctor Schoenberg ordered—and not another word about it!"

"But, look here, I can't impose on your good——"

"Ridiculous! I've a good mind to give you a sound spanking. The very idea! Like as not you're starved for sleep, after lying on that road half the night. I'll attend to locating your relations later. Follow me now, and mind that bottom step."

And follow he did—protesting feebly and ineffectually in the wake of this dominant person—into a neat and pleasant room under the eaves, where she left him with a promise to call him for supper and a threat to keep him in bed for a week if he made another mention of his inability to pay board.

It was almost dusk when he awoke in the silent, breeze-swept room; and for a while he lay quietly listening to the clatter of dishpans in the kitchen below, the contented clucking of a hen beneath the window.

He felt better, stronger in body, clearer in mind—clear as to the present and the events of the morning, but still shut off from all things before that, as if a steel curtain had dropped into place between to-day and twenty-odd years that had gone before.

Twenty—twenty—twenty-eight! That was it! He was twenty-eight years old. He felt a wave of relief to think that even that minor detail had come back to him. If he could only remember other things.

He sat up, swung his legs over the side to the floor, frowned at the colorful, braided rag rug beneath his feet. There was something else he was conscious of—a buried memory, urgent, demanding recognition, sounding faintly like a warning bell behind that steel curtain.

He gave it up, finally, and began to dress. His head no longer ached, except for a slight sore place that he carefully avoided as he washed in the basin on the old-fashioned wooden stand and dried himself with the rough towel.

Descending the narrow stairs, he met the old German doctor coming up, burs on his seedy coat and a bunch of ferns in his hand.

"Better?" he rumbled.

Tyrone assured him there had been an improvement. "Feel fine, but I'm still queer on past performances. I remember my age, though. Maybe I'll get the rest back gradually."

"It vill come. Rest and no worry. It comes back mit a rush. Do not be impatient. You haf no memories. Maybe it iss better so."

He puffed upward to his bedroom, bearing his precious ferns as tenderly as if they were orchids. Tyrone continued down to the porch, stood with his back to the road, filling his lungs with the cool, sweet air that blew from across the meadows.

Perhaps the eccentric old doctor was right, Tyrone thought. Who could tell what that forgotten past held—pain, tragedy, evil? Disjointed memories came to him—scattered leaves from a torn book, picked up at random—his mother's face, a street fight with a boy twice his size, a motor cycle on which he rode, bent over the handlebars through a black and flashing night—or was it an automobile?

He wondered about the tiny, round scar he had discovered on his left forearm while washing upstairs. That might identify him eventually, however and wherever he got it.

Stealthy footfalls sounded behind him, and, before he could turn, a hand fastened on the back of his shirt collar in a muscular grip that almost throttled him.

"I got him, Mrs. Hanley!" a nasal voice intoned triumphantly. "I got ye covered, feller, so don't move!"

CHAPTER III.

CONSTABLE SIMPSON DOES HIS STUFF.

TYRONE did move, and promptly, wrenching his collar free from the grasp and whirling around angrily to face a lean, leathery person who waved an antique six-shooter threateningly.

"What's the big idea?"

"Don't go cuttin' up now," the newcomer warned through a ragged and discouraged mustache. He screwed up one eye and glared with the other along a hairy nose, with an appearance of great intensity and shrewdness. "Runnin' likker, I suppose, or gettin' ready to hold up these defenseless wimmen here, hey? Just you come along with me——"

A thin scream from Mrs. Hanley in the doorway interrupted his hasty analysis.

"Put that pistol away, this minute, Eb Simpson, and don't be a bigger fool than nature intended. You weren't elected constable to go around threatening decent people. Holding up, indeed! This young man is more law-abiding than you are——"

"Well, you telephoned me to come right up on account of him," Simpson pointed out defensively, "and I supposed he were up to somethin'. As fur as my bein' elected is consarned, it weren't any Democratic votes give me my majority of twenty-odd. What's he been doin', then?"

"He hasn't been doing anything," she insisted firmly, "except to be hit by some drunken driver that we'd ought to be protected from if our peace officers were any good. He's got amnesia—kinda bad, too."

"Amnesia," Simpson grunted suspiciously. "What's that?"

"He's lost his memory. Got hit on the head and now he can't remember anything. My niece found him lying on the Jericho dirt road, back there a piece. What I want you for is to find out who he is and all about him—his folks. Maybe there's been an alarm sent out for him."

Simpson put away his weapon in an elaborately tooled leather holster, very new and clean, and buttoned his coat carefully over it.

"It don't sound right to me," he snorted. "D'ye mean to tell me, young feller, you don't know yer own name?"

"Not all of it," Tyrone confessed.

"You look smarter than that to me," Simpson vouchsafed, wetting a pencil stub and poising it in readiness over a dog-eared pad; "but I'll take yer word for it. Have you ever been arrested?"

Tyrone reddened. "I hope not. But I can't swear I haven't. You see everything that happened before last——"

"Maybe you hev been arrested, then," Simpson persisted. "I'll put it down that way. Convicted? Remember what they give you fer it?"

"I don't know anything about——"

"Don't remember his sentence." Simpson nodded sagely to Mrs. Hanley and worked the pencil. "It ain't every one likes to remember them things. Now we git down to cases. What was you doin' on that road that time o' night?"

"I have no knowledge of how I got there. I was lying there stunned. Everything was blank."

"No address or occupation, I suppose?" Simpson pointed the pencil at the culprit accusingly. "They never do have. I s'pose you'll tell me you've forgotten that, too, along with yer name."

Tyrone kept his temper with an effort. "I told you I don't remember any of those things. You're wasting a lot of valuable detective talent that ought to be in a comic strip."

The constable's bony face glowed redly. "Don't go pokin' fun, now, be-

cause I outsmarted you. Maybe you thought you could pull the wool——"

"He's not doing anything of the sort," Mrs. Hanley snapped. "Now, do you intend to help him or not? All I want you to do is to use what little brains God gave you and, if an alarm is sent out that fits him, see that his folks are notified where he is."

Simpson put up his notebook and pencil. "All right," he agreed sourly. "No need fer you to git all het up. I was only tryin' to perteck you from sharpers. I'll keep my eyes open for notices, all right."

He ducked his head in gruff farewell, stamped down the steps, and started his car—an open car of cheap make and ancient vintage, but adorned with new "Police Department" tin signs on the front and rear bumpers.

"That," said Mrs. Hanley, watching the dust settle after the scurrying car, "shows how much charity some people have in their hearts for the unfortunate. As if a body couldn't see with half an eye you're not that kind of a boy. I know decent upbringing when I see it, even if Eb Simpson don't."

"He does make some hasty appraisals," Tyrone frowned. "I don't expect much help from him. I wonder what I should do now."

Aunt Hattie rocked comfortably, filling the chair with her ample person, watching with unhurried calm the cars that rolled by along the State road at the foot of the hill.

"I've always found," she said philosophically, "that when folks are in doubt what to do, the best thing is to sit tight, don't get excited, and just wait for things to develop of themselves."

"But I can't stay on here indefinitely," Tyrone said, shaking his head. "If I were crippled—in the body, I mean—it would be different. But to sit down here on your hospitality instead of trying to earn a living somehow—and I must have had some trade or profession——"

"As far as that's concerned," she said, "you needn't feel you're putting us out any. This place needs a man around. We'll be busier from now on, as the summer season comes along. We'll have tourists to put up overnight, and the place to be kept in repair. And that gas pump out near the road—it's been layin' idle since I fired a no-account handy man, and Meryl can't attend to that very well. Besides, she'll have to commute to the city every day when the summer school opens."

"She is taking a course?" Tyrone asked. Meryl interested him.

"Interior decorating," Aunt Hattie averred proudly. "It isn't every girl of nineteen has the sense to go in for something substantial like that and not have her head turned by offers to model hats and go into movies and such nonsense. As far as doing the chores around here, I don't mean that you should work for nothing, either. I can pay a little something——"

"I wasn't thinking of that end of it at all." Tyrone waved the suggestion aside, watching blond, disordered hair, that seemed to have caught the light of the sunset, flutter over the steering wheel as the flivver swept up the driveway. "I'm mighty lucky to find friends like this——"

"Good! That's settled, then. We'll arrange our terms later. Goodness! I'd almost forgotten the supper. That girl in the kitchen will never in the world prepare Doctor Schoenberg's knuckles and sauerkraut the way he wants it."

Meryl dropped into the vacated rocker, crossed her silk-clad knees comfortably, and shied the little felt hat she seemed always to carry and never wear, across the porch onto the couch-hammock, with a precision that bespoke training on the basket-ball courts.

"You look lots better," she smiled at Tyrone frankly and approvingly. "Crossroads Tea Room seems to agree with you."

"It sure does. Your aunt wants me to stay on here until—until I get straightened out." Awkwardly he tried to express the thing that was in his mind. "You know—there are some darned decent folks in this world. I—I meant your Aunt Hattie, for instance—taking me in this way when I'm absolutely lost—just like as if I were her own son."

"Maybe"—she was looking toward the darkening road, her profile drawn in clean, delicate curves against the blazing sunset—"it's because you're about the same age as her boy, Cousin Harry. He was shot down in flames—in France."

Tyrone nodded his head soberly, understandingly. They sat wordlessly together for a while in the hush of the creeping evening, and presently went in to supper.

Later, Tyrone stood by the open window in his darkened room under the eaves and gazed out at the luminous road showing against the soft shadows of trees and darkened fields, winding over the hill, vanishing into blackness beyond which lay his forgotten life—the Limbo of his past.

The road to Jericho! The sonorous phrase seemed to flip open a blurred page of memory on which was written in deathless words the story of another Jericho—of how another man went down to Jericho, and fell among thieves, and how a certain good Samaritan took care of the stranger——

Tyrone ground his cigarette out thoughtfully in the ash tray on the bureau. Funny, how things like that would stick in a man's head when all else was wiped out. He must have learned it some time when he was a kid. Anyway, the world didn't seem to have changed much in two thousand years, as far as good Samaritans and Aunt Hatties were concerned.

But it was Meryl he was thinking of when he drifted off to sleep.

CHAPTER IV.

TYRONE ASKS A QUESTION.

DAY followed day, uneventfully serene as the blue sky of early summer at Crossroads Tea Toom—full busy days to Tyrone, who mowed the lawn, weeded the garden, drove the flivver to Jericho village for supplies, managed the gas pump that fed the interminable caravan of cars that rolled by going north and south and nowhere in particular, with the concentration and fury of the American tourist.

Between times, he presided over the guest book behind the little desk in the lobby, soothed impatient chicken diners while their chickens were being broiled, evicted an occasional quarrelsome drunk who wandered in under the impression that all road houses were speak-easies. And, occasionally, when the day's work was over and neither radio, gas station, nor tourists required attention, Tyrone sat on the porch and talked with Meryl.

Mostly they discussed him—she seemed to direct the talk that way—speculating on the past, contemplating the future. And sometimes the conversation was on trivial things—the color of a dress, the shade of blond hair most becoming to blue eyes that were almost black in the twilight—well, trivial things like that. And if Aunt Hattie had some speculative thoughts, herself, as she looked over her spectacles at the two young people on the far end of the porch, she did not appear startled in the least.

But these things do not go on forever, like the cars that rolled unendingly along the State road; so, on a certain June evening—it was the same day that Tyrone had searched fruitlessly in the back files of newspapers in the Jericho library for hint of his identity—he leaned over and placed a large and trembling hand over hers.

"Meryl," he plunged awkwardly ahead, "I suppose a fellow in my posi-

tion—I haven't any right to talk to you about things—love, for instance—not knowing anything about myself."

She smiled uncertainly, but her hand did not move and her face flamed into color quickly.

"Don't you think, Ty, a girl can tell whether a man's all right or not?"

"I've got to start again," he said. His hand tightened. "Start all over—get a job and all that. It doesn't look as if I have any relatives. Meryl, if you're willing to wait until I make the grade and get on my feet——"

"Hey, there!" some one shouted raucously from the direction of the gas pump. "Snap out of it, buddy, an' let's have some service here!"

Meryl drew away in confusion, turned and walked into the house. Tyrone walked frowningly down the steps and to the edge of the road, where, beside the gas pump, a low, underslung, racy roadster of expensive make, was drawn up.

It was growing dark, the cowl lights of the car were lit, and Tyrone could not make out the face of the impatient customer who had not left his seat behind the wheel—only a thick arm in colorful silk shirt, a cap, and a glowing cigarette being visible.

"Fill the whole can, Mac." The stranger bit the words out without removing his cigarette. "An' give a look at the oil. Make it snappy!"

Tyrone neither liked the voice nor the snarling command to make it snappy. Both were objectionable. But a month's catering to the whims of the traveling public had taught Tyrone the value of patience. Moreover, he was friends with all the world, and he was thinking of other things—of dark blue eyes that held an answer to an unfinished question.

He unhooked the gas hose, and took the cap off the tank of the car.

"How much does the tank hold?" he asked.

"Now I'll ask one," the silk-shirted party countered. "D'ye want me to give you a set of plans wid the order? How do I know how much it'll take? It ain't my car. I—er—borrowed it from a friend. Let's have the gas, now, widout the argument. Fill 'er up, an' when she flows over, stop."

Tyrone did as directed without further discussion, and managed to waste very little gas on the ground. Walking around to the front of the car, he lifted the side of the hood to see the oil gauge, bending over in the glare of the cowl lamps.

"Well, I'll be damned!"

The surly customer flicked his cigarette into the road and lurched out of the car, appearing in the light as a short, swarthy, blue-shaven person with a gross, misshapen nose, narrow and alert eyes, and a width of shoulders beneath the silk shirt that belied the paunchy waistline.

He shoved a large, soft hand at Tyrone, and grinned.

"'Slim' Tyrone—the guy himself! What are you doin' up here wid the apple knockers? An' me an' the rest of the bunch wonderin' what happened to you! Shove me yer mitt, kid! What's the matter—you got a stroke, or somethin'?"

Tyrone shook his head, slowly straightening up, looking at this unprepossessing stranger with the beady eyes and unhealthy paunch who had appeared from nowhere to claim him as his own.

"You—you know me?" he asked hoarsely.

"Know you? You're askin' yer old side-kick, 'Gyppy' Feroni, if he knows you? Didja think you was wearin' a disguise or somethin'? Course I knows you. But you don't need to get so scared; I ain't tellin' the whole world about it. Dey won't pinch you if I can help it. But if you want to beat this rap you gotta play along wid the rest

of the guys. No hidin' off this way. They's gotta be a cut. See? Three ways—an' fall money——"

"I don't know what you're talking about." Tyrone passed his hand across his forehead. "You see—I've kind of lost my memory—I don't understand what it's all about—hiding out and all."

From the direction of the house Tyrone could hear the sputtering music of the radio being tuned in by Meryl, old Doctor Schoenberg's roaring voice declaiming some pet theory in a rumbling accompaniment, the pleasant kitchen sounds from the rear, the rustling of hens in the near-by coop settling for the night—all the peaceful, kindly sounds that he had been used to for the past month.

But the face that scowled at him in the light of the cowl lamp was evil—evil and startlingly, menacingly familiar in contour and expression. Tyrone knew that he had met this man before.

"Quit kiddin' me, Slim." It was a rasping undertone. "It's a dumb play fer a guy as clever as you. That boloney goes fer these hicks; but it don't suit little Gyppy, yer boy friend. Be nice, now."

"I'm not kidding you," Tyrone said desperately. "I tell you I've lost my memory for everything in the past. I don't know who I am. I may be the man you say. There was some kind of an accident—a blow on the head. It's all——"

"You mean to say you don't know you're Slim Tyrone, an' you don't recognize me?"

"Your face is familiar," Tyrone admitted, "but I don't seem to remember the name."

He felt a foreboding of disaster. What revelations was he about to get of the past?

Gyppy leered ironically and clapped Tyrone on the shoulder.

"It's all right about the name, Slim. I ain't used to it all the time myself, seein' as I got a couple more, same as you. But you oughta remember this map of mine. Forgot all about that fifteen months in the big stir when we worked in the broom factory together? An' the six grand you got out of yer boss when you juggled the books fer him back there in Philly? Come on, now, Slim. I always figgered you were a high-hat worker, but I didn't think you'd try to turn down yer pals."

Tyrone leaned heavily on the fender, his hand gripping the metal, his eyes searching the heavy face before him. His pulses throbbed, as if he had been running. But his voice was reasonably steady as he put the question, even though he dreaded the answer:

"Who am I supposed to be? Suppose—suppose you go into details."

"Sure." Gyppy reached for a cigarette, rolled it between his thick fingers thoughtfully, lit it—all without taking his alert eyes from the pale young man beside the gas pump. "I'll give you the dope. Maybe you ain't kiddin' me, after all. A guy might go cuckoo wid a bump on the dome like you got. Not keepin' nothin' back, you're Slim Tyrone, a guy what done time in State's prison wid me fer forgery, three years ago. You got a police record in two towns, you're wanted now fer breakin' jail under the name of Jim Tyrrel, an' you're also wanted fer embezzlin' thirty-five grand in negotiable bonds from the Strand Trust Company, where you was a trusted employee——"

"Wait a minute!" Tyrone forced a laugh that was unconvincing even to himself. "You've got the wrong man, by a long shot. I don't know my past career, but I'm sure that flattering description does not fit me."

"Think so?" Gyppy grinned again. "I guess I know you all right. You're Slim Tyrone, all right, take it from me. Strip that sleeve back from yer arm an' if you haven't got a bullet scar there that you got when you broke loose from

the stir that time, I'll go back to grabbin' leather an' rollin' drunks in the subway stations. You're it, all right.

"Now," he continued, "I'll refresh yer memory some more. When the bunch got you that job wid the Strand Trust —an' it was a lotta trouble, too, to fix up them references—we was figurin' on a split when you made the haul. Instead of that we get shut out, you hide the stuff somewheres, an' a couple of dicks from the surety company nab you. I don't know what happens then, but I guess you got away from them an' got beaned in the fight somehow——"

"See here," Tyrone held himself in restraint but there was a fighting pitch to the angle of his chin. "You claim to know me and you come along with a story that I'm a—a criminal. You seem to know me, all right—partly; but you're going to have to prove what you say."

"Take it easy," Gyppy soothed. "We're not lettin' the town bulls in on this. I ain't sayin' nothin' I can't prove. Maybe you're cuckoo an' maybe you're playin' deep."

He stepped back, pulled his coat from the car seat, and fished a paper from the inside pocket.

"We been lookin' fer you so's you could split square wid us. Take a look at that an' maybe you'll go to the cops to let them tell you who you are. I got it from a guy I know in the law game. Read it."

Tyrone held it under the light.

It was a short, printed document with the name of a world-famous detective bureau attached. Tyrone's picture stared at him from the top of the sheet, there was a list of bonds at the bottom, and in capital letters the words:

JOHN HALFORD TYRONE
WANTED FOR THEFT

Securities valued at thirty-four thousand dollars, stolen from Strand Trust Company, Broad and Center Streets, New York City. Height five feet eleven, weight one hundred and sixty-four pounds, brown eyes, brown hair, well-educated, bullet scar on left forearm, athletic build——

John Halford Tyrone! Strand Trust Company!

Again he seemed to hear it, like a faint voice from behind that steel curtain—a voice that shouted incomprehensible words of utmost urgency, trying to carry a message to him—a warning bell in a vacant house, ringing—ringing——

Meryl's voice came from the porch steps, calling him to dinner.

CHAPTER V.

GHOSTS.

GYPPY reached out and plucked the paper from Tyrone's listless fingers.

"Don't worry none about this rap, Slim. You play along wid the bunch an' they'll see you through. But they want to know what you done with the bonds. You'll have to kick in nice an' regular, like you always done, or—well, you know what they'll hand your fer that job if 'Chalky Dan' Leamer sets the dogs on you. I'm talkin' like a friend. They got Baumes laws now, an' that means a natural fer you——"

Tyrone jerked his arm away from the soft, clinging hand.

"I don't know anything about bonds! I think you're lying—even if I can't contradict a word you say. You're trying your best to make me out a criminal——"

"I ain't." Gyppy's voice was pitched in low, conversational tones. "You been one fer a long time—only you don't know it. All we want from you is a split on them bonds—three ways. We won't butt into yer game here. If you've took religion an' want to stand right wid them hicks here, that's your lookout. We won't tell them who you are. You can sit pretty here wid your share an' hand a sweet line of bull to that frail when——"

"Keep her out of this!" Tyrone blazed out suddenly.

Gyppy was apparently a man who combined discretion with violence in equal parts. He stepped back deftly enough for so corpulent a man, and clambered into the driver's seat of the roadster.

"Maybe I'd keep her outa this," he opined, stepping on the self-starter, "but Chalky Dan won't. You know how much use he's got fer a woman. You'll never stall him off by tellin' him she ain't in on yer double-crossin' game. He'll get them bonds if he has to burn matches under her fingers like he done to that dame in the West End Avenue stick-up. Watch it!"

Tyrone pulled himself up from his lunge forward, in time to miss the sweep of the heavy fender as the car leaped forward into the road.

He stood with clenched fists watching the red tail light top the hill and disappear. He turned heavily toward the house and made out Meryl's white dress —a slim outline in the dusk—on the porch steps. She hurried toward him.

"What was it, Ty?" she asked. "I was waiting and I thought I heard voices, as if you were quarreling with him. Who was it?"

Tyrone hesitated on the brink of a frank avowal of that damning identification—hesitated and was lost. After all, it might not be true.

"Nothing much," he muttered. "Just a crooked customer—that beat it away without paying for his gas."

"Heavens! The man must be a real thief. You were lucky he didn't hold you up or something. We'll call up Simpson, the constable——"

"No," Tyrone interposed, "it's only a dollar or so. I'll pay it myself out of my wages—when they're due. Simpson wouldn't be able to do anything."

"He's not very bright," she laughed. "Aunt Hattie told me he seemed to think you were masquerading here for some ulterior purpose. But I mustn't stand chattering here. Your supper will be ice cold. And I've experimented with my first cake. You're to be one of the victims."

He looked beyond her, avoiding the gleaming hair and laughing red lips just discernible in the dim light from the doorway.

"I don't think I'll go in right now," he murmured. "I—I don't feel so hungry to-night. Later, maybe—that fellow rather upset me. I'll just—walk up the road a bit, maybe, and back."

She was silent. He felt that, in some elusive, feminine way, she was hurt.

He wanted to reach out his arms and claim this loveliness for his own and hold it in defiance of Gyppy and Leamer and any other evil ghost that might float out from darkness of forgetfulness into day—but he wanted to think this thing over first.

"I'll be all right by and by, Meryl. Don't worry about me."

"All right." She turned away slowly toward the house. "I'll tell Aunt Hattie to put your supper in the oven for you."

Tyrone strode down the driveway, the gravel crunching under his plodding feet, his head bent forward as if he carried a heavy pack. Turning into the road, he almost collided with a shadowy figure that broke from the shelter of the bushes.

"Ah! I haf made myself late for supper," it puffed. "I haf been much interested in a veed vich is not yet due. To-night, if dere iss the clear moon, I shall investigate furder."

"Doctor Schoenberg," Tyrone intercepted the amateur botanist, "do you suppose I could—I could have a criminal career in back of me and not know of it—I mean not feel like a crook"

"Ha!" The little man raised a stubby finger. "It is as I thought. The past it hass come back und it is *not* welcome, hey?"

"No. I was just wondering. If a

fellow, for instance, had been a tough egg in his time, in jail and all that, I suppose he wouldn't have it in him to—well, take falling in—er—love with a decent girl—a real girl. Now, a crook wouldn't have that kind of a feeling and——"

"Vot vas it I said?" Schoenberg chuckled. "Der goddess Venus will replace der Psyche vot has jilted. Good! But vot you ask is something else again and it iss not easy to giff answer. Sometimes in der retrograde amnesia dere is a gomplete loss. A change may take place—especially ven the man has been bad from environment—and der wicked may become goot. No, I do not think because of love vun is certain of der past. Later ve vill discuss it."

Tyrone walked along the dust-padded road to the top of the hill. Below were the scattered lights and smooth surface of the State road, with automobile lights sweeping past; but it was quieter here and a man could think things out, leaning on the top bar of a gate and gazing across the starred obscurity of a meadow.

What lay beyond the barrier that had dropped across the road of his memory on that May night a month ago? Was he, Tyrone, a thief, a convicted felon, wanted by the police, as that gangster had said? If he was not, then why the picture—taken in clothes that he had no recollection of and in some former surroundings—and the notice from the detective agency and the bullet wound? Gyppy had known of all those things, claimed Tyrone as an intimate and confederate. And Tyrone knew Gyppy's face to be a familiar one—had known him, somehow, in that other life.

The paper might be a clever forgery manufactured by Gyppy. In that case it would be a simple matter for Tyrone to go to the police and establish his identity through the detective agency.

Down on the State road the headlights drifted, one by one, blazing out whitely as they topped the crest, vanishing in a red spark around the turn.

Tyrone watched them disappear into the blackness. A man could step into that road, beg a ride, disappear into the labyrinthian jungle of the great city to the south, start life anew, evade the ghosts of the past, forget the tranquil happiness of the present, as he had forgotten the evils that went before—forget Meryl——

He retraced his steps toward that road, but he did not reach it. He turned in at the driveway entrance instead, walking more quickly, like a man whose mind is made up. There was, after all, only one thing to do, and he had determined to do it.

He did not see the car that was drawn up by the roadside, for he was looking straight ahead at the light that glowed in Meryl's room. He was thankful she was not on the porch nor near the telephone that he wanted to use. If the worst came to the worst, and that phone call he was going to put through to the nearest police should verify his fears, he intended to give himself up and drop out of her life as abruptly as he had entered it that May morning on the Jericho road.

He looked through the directory under the dim light in the lobby, located the number of a neighboring town sufficiently large to support a police force, and detached the receiver from the hook.

He waited, jiggled the hook, waited some more—without result. Overhead he could hear Meryl's light steps about her room, and from the kitchen the murmur of Aunt Hattie's voice in conversation with the woman-of-all-work.

Some one laughed in Tyrone's ear.

"No use, Slim. I cut the wires ten minutes ago. I been waitin' to have a talk with you."

To be concluded next week.

Mr. Brannigan Stubs His Toe

By **Stewart Robertson**

Author of "Soft Money," Etc.

The smoothly told story of a smooth confidence man who wasn't quite as smooth as he thought.

A COMPLETE STORY

ADJUSTING his monocle, Mr. Charles "One-eye" Brannigan stared glassily around the lobby of the Hotel Colossal and then sank languidly into a chair shielded by a cluster of palms. From behind an ultra-smart magazine known colloquially as "The Snob's Bible," he watched the passing parade with all the alertness of a beneficiary at the reading of a will. Mr. Brannigan was a dealer in human nature and large hotels were his favorite marts.

He was a tall, aristocratically thin man with graying temples, sensitive hands, and cheeks spurred to a faint glow by energetic massage. He wore inconspicuous clothes of expensive material, the correct collar and tie, and a disarming expression. The blasé ladies of New York hoteldom, both scraggy flappers and obese matrons, usually succumbed without a struggle, much to their subsequent sorrow. Yet a close observer would have thought his mouth a trifle too traplike, his manner too smoothly tense, his eyes too cold and waxen as the gardenia in his buttonhole, to be all that he seemed. The observer would have won, for Mr. Brannigan was as real as the decoy half dollar on a check-room plate.

Two men slouched heavily on a lounge directly behind him and commenced a conversation.

"When I was in Hollywood——" began one.

Mr. Brannigan stirred irritably. The movies, he had been known to remark, gave him a pain in the neck. He never

went to them, never read the ballyhoo put forth by the press agents, preferring to spend his leisure hours over a few hundreds at balk line. And now, in all probability, he'd have to listen to a lot of gush about Gish. He rustled his magazine, coughed menacingly, and then stiffened into attention as the voice continued:

"All you need out there is a good front and a superior look. Most of the stars came from small towns and are easily impressed. I sold ten third-rate Spanish paintings by working on their vanity. First of all, I'd get an interview with some woman star and stress the point that she had been chosen because of her well-known artistic tendencies. Then I'd mention the rarity of the painting and drop a hint that some deadly rival of hers was anxious to own it. And that closed the deal. I'd set a figure three times its worth and they'd write me a check, smirking like a cat with a saucer of cream. We art dealers have our tricks, you know."

A second voice chimed in, but Mr. Brannigan took no interest in it; his mind was busy mulling over what he had heard. His features quirked with a sketchy smile as he gazed absently into space, failing to notice that a bulky figure had anchored itself beside him. A few minutes passed, during which Mr. Brannigan's thoughts continued to amuse him; and then the sentinel trod hard, but unobtrusively, on one of Mr. Brannigan's shining patent leathers. Mr. Brannigan did a little pianissimo cursing and looked up sharply. His eyes flickered strangely.

"Well, well," he exclaimed, rising and shaking hands with a heavy gentleman, blue of jowl and dull of countenance, "how are you, Huntingdon? Just down from your place on Long Island, I suppose?"

The heavy one gaped uncomprehendingly, then linked arms and strolled with Mr. Brannigan out through the revolving doors into the May sunshine. Once there, he glared accusingly at his debonair companion.

"What's the idea of givin' me a fancy name when you know I'm Tom Casey?" he inquired. "Now, listen, One-eye, keep out of that lobby or I'll take you over to the Irish clubhouse and leave you talk with the sergeant. What's your racket now—oil stock or fake mortgages?"

"My good man," said Mr. Brannigan, still in character, "I have retired from the brokerage business. As for your hotel, it's too gaudy for my liking, anyway."

"Then do your retirin' somewhere else," ordered the house detective, shooting words in the direction of his left ear. "It's gettin' so a guy can't turn round without trippin' over one o' you sharpshooters."

Mr. Brannigan unlimbered his monocle, stowed it in his vest pocket, and lowered a shoulder threateningly. Something of a Tenth Avenue genesis glinted metallically through the veneer.

"Go fly your kite, you fallen-arched carpet crusher," he advised. "I was in that dump just long enough to get wised up on a new lead, and I'm leaving to-morrow for California."

"For your healt', I suppose," leered the other, "or maybe to crash the movies?"

"What do you care?" asked Mr. Brannigan. "You can catch up on your sleep after I'm gone." He replaced the tiny circle of glass and nodded cordially to a world-famous banker about to enter the hotel. The magnate hesitated slightly and then returned the greeting, whereupon Mr. Brannigan beamed and the detective's jaw hung slack. The confidence man patted him condescendingly on the shoulder.

"Quite all right, Casey," he said

airily, back in his favorite rôle. "You're rather a worthy person, after all. Here, buy yourself a clean collar." A quarter tinkled on the pavement, Mr. Brannigan laughed insultingly, crooked his cane over an arm, and sauntered carelessly away.

His afternoon stroll down Park Avenue was his method of turning up fresh soil for cultivation; but to-day he walked along scowling thoughtfully, now and then glancing at a well-filled stocking. His pockets had been nicely lined by his latest coup and he was always careful to select a prospect who would emit no more than a faint squeal. In the past he had severe relations with the public for a term or two, but most of the time he flitted merrily through life, a step ahead of an exasperated, though legally impotent, police. He had so far confined his operations solely to the Atlantic coast; but a man should see something of his country—absolutely.

He deployed through Forty-seventh Street into Fifth Avenue and ambled southward for ten blocks to the imposing jewelry establishment of Boreham & Co. That sacred firm, which disdains to identify itself by even the most chaste sign and restricts its window displays to something in bronze or bilious cloisonné, was another of the things that pained Mr. Brannigan in the region of his collar. Un-American and snobbish, he called them; nevertheless, they were indispensable to his present plan. He walked inside, glanced haughtily at a staff detective made up as a clerk, and halted at a counter in the rear.

"I want a necklace of seed pearls," he declared, naming the cheapest thing he could think of. "Nothing expensive; it's just for my small niece."

Ten minutes later he had found the exact thing, for forty dollars; and he chuckled, as became a generous uncle.

"And I want a particularly nice box," he reminded the salesman. "You know how young girls are about show."

The salesman smiled sympathetically and produced a slim case of dark-blue leather with a top stamped in gold. Inside the cover was the magic name: "Boreham—New York," and the pearls lay modestly on a bed of velvet.

Mr. Brannigan emerged humming a tune and carried on to the ticket bureau opposite the Waldorf, where he bought transportation to Los Angeles, after discovering, to his surprise, that Hollywood had no railroad station. He acquired a couple of folders issued by an enthusiastic chamber of commerce and walked down the avenue to the next stop, a book and stationery store near Madison Square.

"I'm going to California," he told a regimentally severe young woman, "and I want some books that won't give a man a headache. I'll leave the selection to you, and you may as well throw in all the motion-picture publications."

"Very well," said the young woman disapprovingly. "Anything else?"

"No," said Mr. Brannigan slowly, "I don't think so. That will—— Oh, by the way," he remarked, as if he had just thought of it, "I should have some more cards, I suppose. Could you have them ready to-morrow?"

"Not under two days," she assured him.

"Most annoying," said Mr. Brannigan, skimming the folders. "Well, send them to me by air mail at—at the Embassy in Los Angeles." He handed over an extra five-dollar bill. "You'll attend to the matter yourself, please," he requested. "Has any one told you that you look very much like—er—like Pola Shearer?"

The young woman negotiated a blush. "No," she simpered, "but do you mean Pola Negri or Norma Shearer?"

"Either one," said Mr. Brannigan carelessly. "Now, then, I want the cards like this." He outlined something on the back of an envelope, passed it to her, and she read aloud:

R. BOYLSTON TREMONT
BOREHAM & CO. NEW YORK

"Precisely," admitted Mr. Brannigan, and he smiled reminiscently at his latest alias. The name, he thought, reeked of Massachusetts conservatism, aloofness, and piqué-bordered waistcoats. "Boylston Tremont" was positively Union Leagueish. Once in his career he had been arrested in Boston at the junction of those famous thoroughfares, and their titles always had appealed to him. The young woman, wavering between coyness and mistrust at his compliment, handed him his parcel of books, whereupon he hurried outside and boarded a cruising taxi.

He was driven to a small antique shop situated on Lexington in the middle sixties, run by a desiccated-looking foreigner of flowery manners. This adroit gentleman sold almost incredibly perfect "diamonds" fashioned from an excellent quality of French paste, and made no bones about it. A modest sign announced that M. Vionnet would take pleasure in duplicating any jewel brought to him, and one suspected that the proximity of his shop to the millionaire apartment-house belt was more by design than by accident.

For an hour Mr. Brannigan hovered over various samples of the Frenchman's art and finally chose a square-cut necklace with a pear-shaped drop in the center, while M. Vionnet assisted with shrugs, winks, and gasps of astonishment at the beauty of his own handiwork.

"They look more like diamonds than the real thing," said the discriminating One-eye. "How much is this worth?"

"Two hundred dollars," replied the dealer, prepared to haggle in true Continental style.

"Fair enough," said his customer, riffling a few bills from a pulpy roll. "And now, supposing these were real, what would they cost?"

M. Vionnet pursed his lips and rolled his eyes ceilingward.

"Twenty thousand for the true value," he said at length; "and then, because the square cut is the fashion, *la belle mode,* five thousand more."

"Much obliged," said Mr. Brannigan, pocketing the necklace. "That's all I want to know." He tilted his hat to a more raffish angle, smacked himself with his cane, and marched jauntily to the taxi.

En route to his quiet hotel he took the seed pearls from the blue-leather case and replaced them with the string of lambent bluish-white. Then he lit a pipeful of aromatic tobacco, warbled a snatch or two of song, and reached his destination in the pleasant state known as high good humor. An idea filtered through his mind as he paid the driver.

"Have you got a little girl?" he asked him.

"Sure; but she ain't so little," answered the other. "One fifty-two and gainin' fast."

"You don't follow me," smiled his fare, producing the seed pearls. "However, here's a tip that may square things next time you have a quarrel."

The chauffeur stared wonderingly, then tried out a seldom-practiced bow.

"Gee, mister," he mumbled, "you certainly are a swell guy."

"All but my head, I sincerely hope," said Mr. Brannigan, as he entered the hotel.

Five days later Mr. Boylston Tremont registered at the Embassy and stalked theatrically through the lobby. By the time the elevator door had

clanged shut, the armchair fleet was in a pleasant buzz as to his identity. Once in his room, the brazen One-eye executed a neat buck and wing, and grinned at himself in a mirror.

"Got them guessing already," he informed his image, as he dressed for dinner.

His entrance and subsequent pilgrimage through the dining room would have done credit to a stage director. In Los Angeles every one thinks every one else must be a person of importance; consequently Mr. Brannigan was regarded with much curiosity. He ate his food in splendid isolation; never had the monocle been more gleamingly rigid, never had its owner been more blandly oblivious to what went on around him. And yet, for all his blasé air, he missed very little. A close perusal of the movie magazines during the trip had helped him to memorize the names and faces of most of the stars; and he recognized several at near-by tables. By necessity a close student of expression, Mr. Brannigan chuckled amiably as he noticed that, under a thick layer of complacent vanity and self-assurance, none of the ladies seemed any too sure of themselves. Nothing to be afraid of here.

While he was making a dignified exit, a bald-headed little man left his party and followed him down to the billiard room. He was at Mr. Brannigan's elbow as that worthy reached for a cue.

"Like to have a partner for fifty points?" he asked.

"Glad to," said One-eye, wondering what was coming.

"My name's Demar," announced the little man with finality.

"Oh," said Mr. Brannigan politely.

"The director-general," supplemented the other, showing faint signs of irritation. "You know me—'Eve's Bathtub,' 'Wrecks of Sex,' and all the rest."

Mr. Brannigan counterfeited recognition, introduced himself, and they rolled for the break.

"You'll pardon me," said Demar, after a few shots, "but are you here to try the movies? I can see you're the real thing and no actor, because none of those stiffs could wear a monocle like that. You have an interesting face and I could use you in my next picture. I'm always on the lookout for new types, you see."

Mr. Brannigan protested that he and the movies were strangers and would remain as such.

"Hope I didn't hurt your feelings," remarked the director, "but I meant it as a compliment. There are plenty of wealthy people who'd be tickled to bribe their way into the smallest part; and here I am offering you a job. Believe me, it's an honor."

"Thanks all the same," said Mr. Brannigan, "but I'm a silent partner in a rather well-known jewelry house and I'm here to dispose of a diamond necklace that belonged to Olga of Russia. I imagine that any of the stars would be glad to own it." He paused tentatively and glanced at his companion.

"Not much chance, I'm afraid," answered Demar. "You'd stand a better show if you had a green wolfhound or an automobile siren that played 'The Rosary.'"

"What do you mean?" asked One-eye, instantly alert.

"Well," said the director, "screen people are afflicted by sudden crazes, the same as the rest of the world. Each one wants to be the first to buy some senseless thing in order to make the others stare; but they tire of it when the novelty wears off. They load up with jewelry when they first become famous, and all the established stars have been through the diamond-necklace phase. I don't believe you could interest them, Mr. Tremont."

The gentleman with the Bostonian name smothered a desire to break into Tenth Avenuese, and finished with a run of sixteen.

"My firm is too prominent to indulge in mere vulgar chasing of customers," he asserted; "nevertheless, as a matter of pride, I have the fullest intention of selling that necklace in Hollywood. I will give one person the opportunity of purchasing it. Surely there must be one woman who appreciates the unusual."

"Of course," said Demar reflectively, "there's always Diana Fairchild. She's the famous recluse of the films; no one sees her after working hours. She's highbrow and artistic and all that sort of stuff—has her house jammed full of *objects d'art,* but refuses to wear jewelry. Surely you've read some of her publicity along that line? No? Well, she drags down seven thousand a week and could buy that chain of yours without missing the change. You might gamble on her."

"I will," stated Mr. Brannigan, "and I'll make a little bet with you that I make the sale."

"You're on," agreed the other, "but not in money. If you win, you can pick your own reward; but if you lose, you'll have to take that part I offered you."

They shook hands and Demar trotted away to rejoin his friends, leaving his late opponent smiling dreamily and shooting the balls at aimless angles. As he chalked his cue preparatory to a massé, a perky little man hailed him from the depths of a near-by chair. The stranger, creased and pressed to a painful exactitude, regarded One-eye with the air of a hopeful sparrow.

"I couldn't help overhearing your talk with Demar," he chirped. "If you really want to see Fairchild, I can fix things for you. I'm her publicity man —Baker's my name—and I can smell a great story if you put over this sale. 'The nunlike Diana in the jewels of a queen.' Great stuff!"

Mr. Brannigan stared incredulously. Softer and softer! Everything sliding his way with scarcely an effort. What a sap town! He smiled cordially, racked his cue and went into an earnest huddle with the cherubic Mr. Baker as to ways and means of arousing the Fairchild interest.

An hour later he returned to his room and rummaged through his magazines until he found a picture of the fair Diana. He looked long and searchingly at the lady's features. She seemed to be on the verge of bursting into tears; but Mr. Brannigan grinned and wafted her a kiss.

"Cheer up, kid," said the flippant One-eye. "I'm going to do you good —and how!"

For several days Mr. Brannigan loitered majestically about Hollywood with the patronizing air of a visitor at the zoo. He called on the omnipotent Demar at his Culver City studios and was slightly bewildered by the rush and wrangle of picture making. Privately he considered the denizens of the movie world to be slightly less than half witted.

Mr. Baker had advised that it would take a little time to get Fairchild's consent to an interview, and meanwhile One-eye had salvaged scraps of information about the star. He learned of her exclusiveness, her wealth, her artistic possessions, and her avowed intention of entering a convent when her career was ended. And then, one sunny morning, the press agent's voice breezed over the wire.

"It's all fixed," he announced. "She'll see you at four this afternoon. Her home is out on Canyon Drive in Beverly Hills. I won't be there. In fact, I've never been inside the place, so you can see you're in luck. Remember, she's temperamental, so go easy."

Mr. Brannigan suddenly became aware that four o'clock was after banking hours.

"I'll see you to-morrow—and by the way, where does she keep her money?" he asked.

"Integrity Trust," replied Mr. Baker promptly.

"Thanks," said One-eye and hung up. Then he called the trust company and spoke to a vice president.

"Certainly Miss Fairchild is good for twenty-five thousand," said the executive in answer to his question. "I only wish we had more like her."

At two thirty Mr. Brannigan arrayed himself in an impeccable cutaway and other suitable accouterments, then practiced a few winning mannerisms with the aid of a mirror. Swinging a gold-handled cane and wearing a glossy top hat he descended to an imposing limousine hired for the occasion. Promptly at four o'clock he arrived at an Elizabethan-timbered mansion, partly hidden by a massive iron fence and a row of Lombardy poplars. The car curved along the semicircle of driveway; and Mr. Brannigan stood at the door of opportunity—in this instance an intricate filigree of bronze.

A suspiciously moviesque butler piloted him through a tapestry-hung hall and turned him over to a sprightly maid, who took him up a circular staircase. She indicated a door standing half open, and he entered the promised land, gazing approvingly at the Hepplewhite furniture and the delicately framed etchings. A small figure in lavender was curled on a lounge; and Mr. Brannigan, advancing with great distinction, found himself looking down into the face of a lachrymose angel.

"I'm very tired," said the vision in a fragile voice. "Please be brief. Are your diamonds really lovely?"

The opening salvo of Mr. Brannigan's high-pressure argument died on his lips. It wouldn't go here; this child couldn't be ribbed up by the jealousy gag. For answer he whipped out the blue-leather case, removed the necklace, and clasped it around her throat.

"Look," he suggested.

The girl jumped up, ran to a mirror, and looked rapturously at the picture she made. Mr. Brannigan, watching the feminine reaction with furtive glee, noted with some surprise that her skin was rather coarse and her hands unexpectedly capable. She turned and faced him.

"They *are* beautiful," she cooed. "Until now I always thought diamonds vulgar and never intended to buy any."

"It isn't a question of buying and selling," reminded Mr. Brannigan, reciting a remark he had overheard at an art gallery. "Such things never can be owned by any one person; they belong to the world. You are merely the custodian; but it stamps you forever as a lady of discrimination."

The angel did not appear to be listening. She sat down at a rosewood desk, retrieved a check book, and turned her tragic eyes on the speaker.

"No more, please," she requested. "My work is a great strain and I am very tired. I like your diamonds. How much are they?"

Mr. Brannigan informed her and she wrote a check, her slim shoulders drooping with fatigue. She handed it to him, smiled pathetically, and relaxed upon the lounge.

A minute later Mr. Brannigan discovered himself climbing dazedly into his rented car, the crisp oblong of paper held tightly in one hand. He leaned back against the cushions and pinched himself several times.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he murmured. "Is all California full of saps? They're as thick as veal in a chicken croquette. That Fairchild dame must be one of the smartest, too, or she

wouldn't be at the top. And she," concluded the jubilant One-eye, "hasn't enough brains to have a decent headache."

The Integrity Trust opened its doors at ten o'clock; and at one minute past Mr. Brannigan paced smartly across the tiled floor to the teller's window.

At ten-five he was sitting in the vice-president's office, more than a little upset.

"Don't get gay with me," he advised, the monocle popping loose as he hammered the desk. "Didn't you tell me yesterday noon that Miss Fairchild was good for it?"

"My dear sir," soothed the banker, "she is; but this is not Miss Fairchild's signature. Nothing whatever like it."

"Listen," exploded the outraged One-eye, "don't you suppose I know what she looks like—just about ready to burst out crying. I tell you she gave me this in her own home at four o'clock."

"Very sorry," said the banker stiffly. "The thing is all wrong somewhere. Was Miss Fairchild quite herself? In the last resort, there is always the police, you know."

Mr. Brannigan recoiled at the suggestion, then walked hastily to the street and jumped into a taxi. On the way to Beverly Hills he pondered on the why and wherefore of the trust company's action. Probably that mournful girl had been too tired to write very well. There couldn't be anything dishonest about her—the poor little come-on. The house, the servants, everything bona fide. Well, he'd explain politely and get another check. There was still time for a safe getaway.

As he ran up the steps, a brisk young man was being shown out by the butler. Mr. Brannigan eyed him closely, and the young man seemed pleased at his interest.

"Have you come to look at the house, sir?" he asked.

"To hell with it," said Mr. Brannigan rudely. "I want to see Miss Fairchild."

"I'm afraid that's impossible," said the other, "because she left for Europe two days ago."

"Applesauce," husked the irate One-eye. "I saw her right here yesterday."

The young man's eyes crinkled with amusement.

"You're wrong, mister," he laughed. "Listen, I'm Miss Fairchild's agent, and I've the right to lease this house for the next six months. Naturally, I thought you wanted to have a look at it; but I guess you're the bird that Lizzie Stokes wanted to string along."

Mr. Brannigan recovered some of the old *élan* and stuck his monocle in place. The hopelessness of despair sat gallantly upon him.

"And who," he inquired throatily, "is this Stokes person?"

"She's Fairchild's double for the dangerous scenes," said the realtor. "Looks something like her and has got lots of nerve. I just let her have the house yesterday to play a joke on some fall guy. Said she wanted to have some fun with one of Fairchild's admirers—she and her husband, Sam Baker."

Mr. Brannigan froze into studied unconcern, dismissed his driver, and strode away. His pride was hurt and he wanted to think. Taken for a ride by a couple of small-town sharpshooters! Well, he'd like to see their faces when they tried to hock the necklace. It was even up, at that. He walked moodily up Canyon Drive; but the warm sunshine helped to mellow him and soon he was grinning wryly at his blunder. Three blocks farther along a large touring car swung alongside, and Demar hailed him with:

"Did you put it over?"

One-eye shook his head.

"You win," he admitted.

"Get in here," ordered the director excitedly. "Now, look here: I've been scouting around for a new type, and no luck at all. That part is yours, Mr. Tremont, and you'll be a knock-out as the heavy.

"Remember how the story goes? You're supposed to be a blue-blood—one of the upper crust, see? And because of your superior qualities you look with a sort of kindly scorn on others less fortunate. Then along comes this poor girl in whom you become interested in a fatherly way.

"But she is not as innocent as she seems—far from it. This orchid from the slime of the slums repays you—you, the soul of honor—by stealing your jewels.

"Fade out—you, with a forgiving smile on your lips and no malice in your heart—only hoping that you get a chance to see her some day in the distant future.

"Do you think you can do it?"

"Without the slightest trouble," said Mr. Brannigan. "Why, old chap, believe me or not, I've been practicing it all morning."

Another story by Stewart Robertson will appear in an early issue.

THE PASSING OF A WAR HERO

MR. COLLIER, representative from Mississippi, declared on the floor of the House recently that "the horse's usefulness in modern warfare is over," explaining that the fact is due to the impossibility of protecting horses from enemy gas attacks.

If this is true, a hero quits the stage after having carried five thousand years of history on his back. The horse first took his place as the supremely dramatic figure in the tragedy of war when Assyrians and Egyptians harnessed him to their scythed and thundering chariots. He was first mounted for battle by the giant Nubians who marshaled the famous Dongola breed for the galloping charge.

He was the deciding factor on the field when Gustavus Adolphus, Tornado of the North, crushed the Germans at Breitenfeld. With Prince Rupert on one side and Cromwell on the other, the fate of a government, a religion, and a nation rode on his pommel at Naseby and Marston Moor. He ruled the day when one thousand five hundred Bayreuth dragoons, under the banner of Frederick, King of Prussia, defeated twenty Austrian battalions, and, with a loss of only twenty-eight killed in their own ranks, took two thousand five hundred prisoners—and so performed one of the most superb feats in the annals of war.

It was he who carried "Corporal John" Marlborough to triumph at Blenheim. At Zorndorf, in a series of charges that were thunderbolts iron-shod, he broke the Russian right flank and center and saved the day for Von Seydlitz, one of the cavalry geniuses of all time. At the Pyramids, Marengo, Jena, and Austerlitz he swept the dashing Murat, Greek god on horseback, to astounding victories, fame, and a kingdom's throne. And in America, under men riding like centaurs and charging like chained lightning mounted, he has turned the tide of battles and carried armies to deathless glory.

Twice before, the "experts" have said cavalry was doomed: first, in the fifteenth century when footmen armed with eighteen-foot pikes made horsemen useless; and again after the Napoleonic Wars, when it was thought the invention of long-range artillery left mounted troops helpless. Both times they were wrong. They may be wrong again.

The Gilded Weakling

By Will Beale

In Five Parts—Part V

Author of "Seed of Glory," Etc.

A man's mighty struggle with himself and the elements of Nature.

CHAPTER II.

THE "ENCHANTRESS" PASSES.

IT was that night that the call came. Wayne, evidently from a dreamless sleep, leaped out of bed and stood rigid and listening in the dark. He felt that he had been summoned as though to join a great eternally marching army. He seemed held in the midst of a mighty *rushing*—as if wind or sea or something wholly ungraspable, save that he felt about to be swept onward. But as he listened he grew conscious that there *was* no sound of any sort, no sound, no motion, no echo of any mighty calling; that the night, in fact, was intensely, weirdly still; that he was standing, half clad, in a dead, black room of icy cold.

He went back to bed and went to sleep. But he carried with him into dim unconsciousness the certainty that a change impended—in the map of his life.

Two days later Dave Calder came seeking Wayne. Wayne was down on the shore and, seeing Dave in the distance, he knew, with a certainty that was past explanation, that Dave was looking for him, himself.

"I thought I'd come tell ye, sir," began Dave without preliminary. "Things are main bad with the womenfolks up at de big house."

"How do you mean?" Already a sort of tightening up was beginning within Wayne—a time for which some vague part of him had been waiting was at hand.

"It seems now dat Miss Marg'ret has been plain set dat de comin' market before Lent is de big time she's been waitin' for. She's been fightin' wid ahl dat's in her. Meanwhile, old Jethro tells me dey're tryin' to break Mendeth

Company, dat de bank down at Gannet Bay has been fightin' wid 'em for some time, but de women had held 'em until dey could carry out money plans o' deir own. Jethro says it's been fair desperate, and now——"

"Go on, Dave." There was almost a sharpness in it.

"Miss Marg'ret let de store run low 'cause she was too proud to haggle wid de dealers long de coast, and because she had plans for clearin' de money matters up slick come New Year. Hagar Doone told Jethro a fortnit ago dat Miss Marg'ret had had an offer for dey timber lands from up Pulp Works—an offer dat, as t'ings were, she finally made up her mind to take. Jethro says dat come New Year ahl de big men from St. John's and from de Canadian government were to be dere and she was going to have de sale put troo den. But," a soft little pause, "Miss Marg'ret is main sick, sir. She can't go."

The tenseness in Wayne now had become a physical thing. He was seeing much that Dave could not know, that there was evidently an annual meeting, or some meeting of directors at Pulp Works within a week or more; that Margaret Mendeth as a final resort had recently decided to accept some tentative offer that had been made and was to have the purchase of her pulp holdings voted on and taken over at that time.

There had been no way to communicate with Pulp Works; the uncertainty of mails along the coast at this season barred them from consideration even if the coast steamer were on; the girl had evidently been waiting for the ice to be favorable to start, herself, and now was sick.

He roused from his absorption.

"What's the matter with Miss Mendeth, Dave?" he asked.

"Seems like de flu, sir. Dey's several down wid it. Jethro says she's fair turrible sick." Dave's face fell to solemn concern. "And dat ain't de worst, sir. For about de first time since Carlos Mendeth died de men o' de village are main set against de Mendeth women. Ye see, sir, when hardship, probably starvation, looms ahead for deir women and children, de men git sore, sir, git dissatisfied. Dey all sayin' dat Miss Marg'ret has mismanaged de season and dey, demselves, are de ones to pay for it. Now, wid sickness in de village, and no prospect of t'ings changing, dey's fair mutiny among some of 'em."

There followed a little silence. To some vague sense in Wayne the whole present incident seemed so intimately familiar. Somewhere in this thing was embodied the call that had already enlisted him in the dark, as it were. With a strange feeling of appreciation he allowed himself to look slowly about him. The scene, the time, the surroundings, Dave the messenger even, seemed all to be a repetition of something that had already happened somewhere deep within his mind, although, of course, his material eyes could never have visualized it before. The spirit army of Newfoundland's men was challenging him.

And now Wayne accepted.

"Dave," he said quietly, "I am going to make that trip to Pulp Works and put the deal through for the women." In his mind along with this lay the determination, once in Pulp Works, to negotiate his own resources, if necessary, for the relief of Harbour le Grand.

He never forgot the sudden glow of deep affection in Dave's face.

"Ah, sir. I doubt if it can be done—de way t'ings are. But—but I was hopin', sir, ye'd say somethin' like o' dat."

In his boyish confusion Dave reached shyly and gripped the other's hand.

Already Wayne's forces had begun to assemble, to rally to the passing moment as with a great triumphant cry.

"But it *can* be done! It's got to be done! Aside from the Mendeth Com-

pany proposition, the only source from which Harbour le Grand is sure of relief is from the towns on the East coast, and the only sure way of reaching the East coast is by communication from Pulp Works." Wayne's mind was working fast. "Get Jethro to broach it to Mrs. Mendeth. Then I'll see her and induce her to authorize me to act for them. The ice seems well offshore the last few days. You and I can get the *Enchantress* into commission and make along coast to Port aux Basques. If the train is running up through the interior I can make Pulp Works in time to do business. Only we've got to work fast."

He watched Dave hurrying away. Again he knew that vague sense of rushing, as of mighty onrushing force. It struck the silent Wayne that he was enlisted in the swift-speeding army of the strong—at last.

Three days later Jerry Wayne, *flaneur,* stripped to his own bare resources, found himself at close grips with the mighty forces of Newfoundland. In the *Enchantress,* menaced by forbidding shores on one hand and by peering, lonely, ice-laden seas on the other, he was skirting the South coast—*alone.*

Involved as he was in a situation of unbelievable strangeness, it had yet all been simple enough. Dave Calder and he had put the *Enchantress* into commission that first day. The next morning had found Dave in bed, feverish, glassy eyed, wandering pitifully in the malady that was epidemic. There were many new cases that morning involving many families. The village was badly frightened, despairing. There was not a man in the entire place that Wayne could induce to go with him. Under the circumstances, mention of the affairs of the Mendeths met only rancor, a feeling extended now to Wayne himself. In the minds of the townsmen he had been partly responsible for the badly planned season. In fact, it was recalled that his very coming among them had inaugurated a series of real misfortunes, and this was now brought forward to accuse him. It hurt him deeply to think of it.

As to his own course there had been absolutely no hesitation. He had looked at the situation squarely, face to face. First, came Margaret Mendeth. Since the episode of the dance, his love seemed springing anew. To know that she was ill and helpless and her world of dependents turned against her, stirred such a tide of love and compassion in Wayne as to make him ready almost to brave everything and go to her. Added to that, there was now no doubt but the village was in really desperate straits, and some one must take hold and manage in the girl's stead. Without the supervision of the fish companies the people of the village were helpless. Of actual money there was but very little in circulation throughout the entire year, a circumstance of but little importance with the fish companies operating well-stocked supply stores on both sides of the harbor. But Mendeth Company fed the bulk of the village. Without them the supply had not served. Finally, to know the village felt him to blame settled Wayne in his own course conclusively.

In silence he had sat with Mrs. Dave at the final meal—a meal of the interminable fish, a little weak tea, no sugar, no bread.

And now this third day it seemed as though the situation had resolved itself into a thing of actual combat between himself and the country. To-day, he was becoming grimly conscious of the ice. He knew little of it—the ice. He had been in Newfoundland long enough to learn that the ice of its winters wields a stern hand in its destinies, but he knew nothing of its campaign, its movements, its attack. So far he had progressed

very well. Running the *Enchantress* alone and successfully, had given him a certain confidence, courage, hope. He had learned much of sailing craft in his months in Newfoundland, and, a past master at motors, his engines came easy to him. Up to to-day he had safely escaped the shores on the one hand and the ice ever menacing off seaward. But now——

The world of wintry sea was changing like slow magic. Wayne was finding himself to leeward of a field of ice extending for miles offshore and to which he could see no end. He did not know what action to take so he was running on.

The sky was a bleak, gray desert. And it was bitter cold. Slowly Wayne became conscious of sinister design in things. He knew the vast field of ice to be considerably nearer shore. And the wind was breezing up. Cold and powerful it came upon him from off the ice field. And for a certainty, now, the world of ice was moving in upon the coast with ghastly deliberation. Alone, Wayne dared not think of making about and attempting to pass out to sea around it. Instead, he hugged close to the formidable coast, searching always for a harbor.

No harbor appeared. Hour after hour, Wayne watched that grim, white line crawling closer and closer. The wind picked up. Half a gale it blew now. About him the seas began to break frantically in their fugitive eagerness to make the coast. And always offshore followed that endless white field of ghostly stillness, a flat, white world desolately dead in wind and seas that lived excitedly.

On it came, imperturbable, inexorable, deadly.

Sorrowfulness, hardship, loneliness of weeks, blew up in the man on the vessel and went out from him. A great challenging exhilaration took its place, the one thing of all emotion stuff possible only to youth. His blood had begun to chill with the cold, but now he forgot that cold in a big shivering excitement. Ahead, now, he could see the terrible white line sweeping closer to shore on an angle. He was driving on into veritable paws. And his excitement grew. Before him lay bold headlands. If he could but round these headlands he might find sanctuary.

He was racing with death!

His mad ecstasy grew. The excitement of it was swinging him up above life, as it were, like a man jerked skyward on the cable of a lofty crane. For two miles he raced on—and in spirit poised and toppled madly, just beneath the sky. The narrow margin of sea between ice and headland was closing fast. Wayne now was feeling its malevolence as of something living, knowing it as the one eternal enemy rife in the northern seas.

Now it seemed he was driving sheer upon it. His body grew terribly tense. He was steering for inches almost. Weirdly exalted, he rounded outlying rocks, was crowded into clear water, dashed on, passed another jut of land, was around the headland—and his ecstasy fell to ashes——

There *was* a shallow cove, but entirely open to the sea, with no protecting inlet, with no way out. The ice closed in behind him. He was trapped.

He ran in close to the shore and anchored. He got a dory overboard, loaded some supplies and clothing into it and rowed ashore. He sat on the beach alone. Puny and helpless, he watched one of the most awe-inspiring manifestations of terrible might of all material forces on earth.

The ice came moving in from the sea relentlessly, with never a tremor of hesitation. Blandly, it reached the *Enchantress*. It swung her around officiously. Her anchor held. Contemptuously, it snapped off her chain and nosed her shoreward.

She grounded. Her death agonies were as horrible as of something living, torn remorselessly apart. Wayne watched, stunned and sickened before the appalling power of it. The ice itself grounded—but did not halt. In a thundering, splintering uproar it came straight on. It trampled the *Enchantress* deep into the rocks of the shore, wedging her tight. It sliced off her upper works clean and sheer, walked calmly over her, and—came on.

In horror Wayne sprang up. Emerging frightfully upon him, a huge, white frontier of ice stalked on up out of the sea, coming, crunching, full up upon the land, desolate, ghastly, greenly white and dripping——

Wayne turned and ran.

At nightfall following along the shore, he saw the lights of human habitation twinkling elfinly far along ahead in the black world of coast.

CHAPTER III.

ON TO THE STRONGHOLD.

MORNING came, sane, white, cold. Wayne faced it in kind—sane, white, cold. He knew that the country had him in its power, that the thing of his man's prowess was being held like in the grip of a gigantic finger and thumb. It seemed now that the whole trend of his stay in Newfoundland had been working toward this situation with bland simplicity—like a child's hero tale of the ancient North. And the proving of the tale was now to come, for Wayne was going to fight it out.

The tiny settlement he had stumbled upon the night before was White Cove, a mere handful of fishermen's huts lost among the rocks of the South coast. These had afforded him shelter, and from the fishermen themselves he had learned something of where he was. The information had been blankly disheartening. White Cove was about a hundred miles from the point at which the railroad made down to the coast. The only way he could get there would be on foot, and, even if possible to make it, he would not then be able to get to Pulp Works up in the interior in time to complete his mission, especially if the railroad should happen to be blocked. As a possibility the railroad, now, was hopeless.

Pulp Works lay considerably over a hundred miles across country through the wilderness. The situation was inconceivably grim in its simplicity: there was absolutely no method of conveyance in all that country—if he was to get to Pulp Works he must walk. He was not going to give up. And he was going to get to Pulp Works.

There had been an old man in the hut where Wayne spent the night—a venerable old patriarch with the ruins of a gigantic manhood notably upon him—and this man Wayne knew he would never forget. From the dim remoteness of almost a century did the spirit of the old man travel back to fraternize with the spirit of youth. He kindled at Wayne. In the old days he would have regarded such a trail as sheerest adventure. He made a crude plan of the country as he remembered it. With the meticulous precision of a mariner he laid out a course. He simplified it with landmarks; he described the immediate interior; designated the lake chain that would get Wayne through the mountains, described the Humber River course, and the region that would bring him to Pulp Works. And he found Wayne snowshoes, and a hand sled, and set the women of the household to packing him dried salmon, flour and tea. And, following the eternal hospitality of the country, he would take no money.

The morning was clear and sharply cold. A breakfast at dawn, and the simple outporters came out into the snow to bid Wayne good-by. He climbed to the heights running up back from the shore and stood a moment

looking away. Far back somewhere along the margin of ice-covered sea to the eastward, lay Harbour le Grand. And Harbour le Grand held about everything to which his heart warmed in all the world. He made a whimsical salute in that direction, faced about and took up his course northwest.

By nightfall of that day Jerry Wayne might have been existing in a new and unguessed world. Alone, in such vastness and solitude as he had never dreamed, he was piercing straight into the heart of an uncharted wilderness waste under snow.

The day had been cold but the country had been fairly propitious from the start. Getting away from the rough, treeless region of the coast he had come into a fairly level country beginning to be diversified by scrub growth, stunted spruce and fir. From rises, however, traveling by his compass always, he could lay out his course and keep to it fairly exact. The snow of the coast, frozen into crust, had not been difficult.

He had rested at noon, and had eaten. Then on again. And in the afternoon the country had changed. It became a country of somewhat prodigious roughness, and the traveling became much more difficult. And now, with every hour that he progressed, Wayne seemed penetrating deeper and deeper into the very primitive stronghold of the spirit of the country itself.

As the day went on his idea of the last few days that he was come to actual combat with the country was amplified by the sense of his terrible aloneness; by the idea that he was stripped to the stark thing of life itself which was pitted against this country's most formidable *lifelessness,* in its most forbidding solitudes.

Deliberately he shook himself free from reflections which had begun to take on a tiny chill. They stole back—ran across the course of his thought like little icy drafts of air issuing in upon him he knew not whence.

Now, he seemed coming into a more broken country still, seemed entering a wooded valley. All day he had not seen a living creature, but now he found himself noting faint marks on the gleaming-white crust that upon inspection looked like dog tracks, large dog tracks. He stood a long time studying these tracks. They seemed headed up the valley.

And now the sun was going down. Wayne sought a sheltered place in the lee, made in behind a thicket well out of the wind and camped. He built a fire, melted snow and made tea from his little stores on the sled. With this and biscuits and dried salmon he made a meal. He was brutally tired and the food comforted him enormously. He found one cigarette.

Those tracks, like dog tracks—what was their meaning in things?

Wayne's cigarette became but a scrap. He burrowed into a hillock of snow back of his fire, wrapped himself in his fur and lost himself.

It was strange, that night. He rolled out several times to replenish the fire. But the hours of the night seemed confused. His mind seemed engaged much with those dog tracks. He dreamed of dogs, at times of quarreling, snarling dogs. So realistic it was that once, rolling out to replenish the fire, he seemed powerfully conscious of green, blazing eyes set steadfastly in the blackness across the line of coals.

Morning.

Standing over his smoldering fire, Wayne felt that he was being dropped from a great height. Still, rigid, cold, he knew that he and his opponent, the country, were come to the final struggle. Grim recognition followed upon his first glance. His vagaries of the night had *not* been dreams—entirely. There *had* been visitants about his camp fire. His little stores had been plundered, the sal-

mon was gone completely, and most of the biscuits. The flour was one substance with the snow. A tin that had contained tea, now contemptuously rifled and pawed, still contained a few grains. Even the snowshoes were chewed to a few dangling strings.

Wayne stood still. For a single moment it was as though something in him gave vent to a great cry of hollow fear, and he wheeled southward toward the coast with a terrific impulse to run—back.

Then, he gripped himself. He was fighting not for himself alone. He was fighting Newfoundland for one of its settlements. Unless he could retrace his steps accurately over the flinty crust there was no certainty of his relocating White Cove and days might be lost. He was already well along the trail. He had part of one day's supplies. Clear in his mind came Big Alf as he had seen him that last day on the hilltop. And it stiffened him. He would go on, would carry on to the bitter end. He would win through, or his bones went to—Newfoundland. He gathered together the paltry residue of his outfit and strode away, swiftly, northward—farther into the hostile stronghold of snow.

CHAPTER IV.

THE JESTER.

WEEK after week in imperial dominion had the grim spirit of Newfoundland held sway in the interior, wielding relentlessly its mightiest factor—winter. Day and night had it been waging eternally at its motif of death: ghastly, smothering days of shrouding white storm; deadly black, scintillating nights brooding cringing wastes and frozen solitudes. And now into that kingdom, alone, defenseless, helpless, Jerry Wayne was penetrating, every force within him steeled to avoid being drawn into that relentless motif and disintegrated into a mere incident in its sinister pattern.

That first day, with his forces little impaired, Wayne strove with all that was in him to cover every possible inch of the trail, forcing himself to lay out his course with every advantage of traveling and landmark that he could figure out. The going became terribly laborious in the jumble of the wilderness. Under his clothing he sweated a good deal and he suffered almost constant thirst; in halts he would chill quickly. As for the rest he kept his mind off it. He kept on up to the very last moment that he could establish a direction mark. He camped that night in the scrub timber of a draw in the hills. He ate the biscuits with a little of the tea.

The second day—was the second day. His body, with its falling forces, obtruded constantly, fight as he would. His mind became involved endlessly in a struggle to avoid yielding to weakness, to fear. The day turned cold with bitter heartlessness. And the going turned to killing drudgery in the powdery snow. He was working toward the mountain country described by the old man of White Cove, and constantly he referred to his crude charts in order to avoid even the least miscalculation.

And, in order to escape his mind, he forced himself to regard the country. And that served until the country itself smote him worse than his inner fears. In the weakened state of his body, his mind for a time seemed to hold a ravenous quality, seizing upon and devouring, and about him the frozen wilderness outdid the frozen circle of Dante's "Hell." The very soul of ghastly desolation, it yet became peopled. To Wayne, the interminable snow-masked boulders became the ice-fast lost ones of Dante; frozen drip on gaunt rocks became hoary glistening beards on faces hopelessly tortured; stunted growth, inexpressibly gnarled and distorted, beckoned to him weirdly from all sides.

And here he would drag his mind away, would force himself to think of Margaret Mendeth, and of a hamlet in desperate straits far behind. And he would fasten to another direction mark and go on.

That day wore out the physical man, Wayne. The splendid bodily forces he had built up in this land dwindled to defeat; hour after hour he could feel them go, could feel them slipping out from the stronghold of his body like slinking, deserting warriors. And, more and more frequently now, with his defenses down, did terror swoop upon him, battle with him, and he would see anew the endless white wilderness, feel anew the cold that was wasting him, would fight despairingly with a never-increasing hunger and consciousness of hunger, and it would be harder still to drag back that girl of the South coast and that settlement that was facing starvation.

After noon that day Wayne crossed a wide, frozen river that he knew from his chart must be a part of Victoria Lake, and kept on and on, up and up now into hills skirting mountains east. Darkness found him on the far side. The sky seemed leaden and full of snow.

Wayne camped on the wooded shore of a frozen pond. Life was flagging slow.

The next day began hazily, filled with phantasm from the start. The night had been a long nightmare of fighting off sleep, a night of fancies, visions. In the gray light of dawn, Wayne forcibly held himself still, pulled himself together, and saturated himself with consciousness of his mission to his utmost fiber. He forced himself to fix a landmark and impressed himself to remember it through everything. Far against the horizon to the north lay a line of mountains. Wayne impressed himself that it might mark the Humber country. He made for it.

It had begun to snow—thin, malicious, swirling snow that distorted outline, distance, direction with sinister persistence. It assailed the wanderer sharply with a waspish asperity. At times it swooped down upon the entire drear, helpless wilderness in vast, stinging whirlwinds as of powdered flint. Wayne's eyes bothered him. His feet were strange. His body was a vast burden of weakness.

And taking trail in his tortured exhaustion, a thin, puny resentment struggled out from his mental weariness and he saw himself a—fool. Who was he, Jerry Wayne, apostle of the bright lights and merry places, to be here, in the frozen heart of the Newfoundland wilderness, on the errand of a—a boy? He sank after that, and his spirit flagged lower than before.

From then, as the hours wore on, his mind took on an odd fashion of eluding his control, of wandering afar into oddest vagary. That idea of the fool persisted. Before all this rugged desolation he *was* a fool. Always in the eyes of this country had he been a laughingstock. And now he was come into the very fastnesses of the country's might, into the very court of its sovereignty and—in his wandering mind the figure persisted—in this court he appeared but a jester, a fool. That was it—a sovereign's fool! His mind fastened to this.

Toward noon something dragged him out of his lethargy. He knew himself quickened by the stirring of deep-rooted instincts that in his weakness confused him. Across his course in the snow ran a half-obliterated trail. He wavered to his knees. The trail seemed made by a legion of tiny hoof marks. Into Wayne's mind like thin, penetrating smoke came dim recollection of Newfoundland's horde of migrating caribou.

In a moment he found himself plunging along off his own course, to follow on the caribou trail, filled with an animallike ravening urge, and with no

forces left to consider its hopelessness. In a little ravine among the rocks an area of beaten, trampled snow stopped him, revealing, along with the caribou tracks, traces of the dog tracks he had encountered before, marauders that even then must have been on the trail of big kill. In the center of the trampled area he pawed out some well-gnawed bones and frozen tufts of hair. With a sudden guilty, ferocious instinct Wayne snatched at a slender shank and stuffed it into his garments, looking all about him—sharply, furtively.

Lethargy descended. Like a man animated now by a motive only, the wanderer took the trail.

The sun had come forth on a world of diamond whiteness, swept by a fierce, roving cold that it was powerless to temper. Wayne wandered freely now—in his head. That notion—of the jester —— As time went on something in him began yielding to the beguiling logic of it. He dismissed it; dragged his mind to momentary clearness. Shuddered. Relaxed.

The terrible burden that was his body he kept moving toward those hills, for underneath all his vague wanderings strove the one deathless idea: he was to keep moving—on and on—and never stop—toward that line of high hills. His feet, which seemed to end abruptly somewhere about his ankles, set themselves toward it without apparent guidance.

And with the passing of the hours the grim hold on reason—let go.

The wanderer's body might have passed out of existence. For a space he lived only in the things of mind—fancies. And in these fancies elemental instincts lived largely; for instance, the impulse toward beauty broke free, and spent itself. The idea of a court, of a court of sovereign power, of regal magnificence, although somber, somehow, possessed the man, and in it he became —happy! A jester! A fool!

And all the splendid white court, empty up to now, he equipped with fantastic structures that, in reality, might have been snow-swept rock; with gleaming tower and turret that, in reality, might have been snow-bedecked firs. And he was noting color. First, the hills in the distance intrigued him with their blue shadows; then he noted that the shadows throughout all the vast white court were blue—some of them deeply blue—purple in fact—royal purple. A thing that fussed him at first with its annoying resemblance to a bared, ice-coated boulder, brassy in the sunlight, became a couch of regal brocade, piled high with black and sapphire and jade green with a single smashing cushion of orange.

Tired, he seated himself a moment on his couch, and fumbled in his garments. He was—jester.

And straight he began to people the splendid whiteness. Varlets passed him with huge, steaming trenches of boar's head—and brewis. The jester acclaimed them rapturously. And the things of his mind became busy creating a marvelous court pageantry. Swift, filmy whorls, that began as flinty, powdered snow spinning up from the face of things, became white-clad dancing maidens. All about him they rose, their filmy drapings silver and iridescent in the sun, and went swaying and undulating away in peerless grace and beauty. Strangely, there was no music. So the jester made music—chin music—cupped his chin in one hand, the little finger of this hand being vibrated, tremolo, by the thumb of the other, while he lilted shrilly through his teeth. More and more vividly danced the maidens, on—on, until they died dancing and were dissipated up to the sun in wraiths of ethereal diamond dust—very lovely!

The jester clapped his hands wildly.

Clapping his hands, the man on the rock came out from his madness and stared about. He was *not*—jester. He

was Wayne. And he was weak and drowsy. In panting, drained terror he dragged himself up, set himself to those hills.

A great distinction came upon the fool late that afternoon. He held in his hand now the scepter of his office, the actual bauble of the court fool, which he brandished to great effect. He could not dance so well as he wished because of his feet. But he evoked astonishing laughter, more and more. And soon everything about him was ringing with that strangely familiar—laughter. All about, the great white kingdom laughed at him with big, raucous, uncouth merriment, laughed on and on and never let up. As jester, never before had he been so madly amusing——

Wayne staggered to a halt. For the space of a breath he had a flashing moment clear of the soft, fagging delirium that held him, and he shuddered, faintly. It was himself that had been laughing. And he was knowing it clearly. And with terror. He looked around and saw the vast, white void that was the frozen wilderness, and at the yellow ball hanging somewhere just ahead of his eyes that was the sun—regarded wonderingly the ice-coated snow that turned to inlaid brass in the yellow light.

The hills. He wavered toward them —he no longer knew why—but he knew he was drawing closer to them. And he saw the sun vanish and he knew that. And he saw, also, a yellow glow that had come in the dusk low above the hills —and he knew that and made for it.

And soon—he was laughing——

Somber wintry night.

A deep-running chasm of shadows lay the valley of the Humber, with a tiny electrically lighted town holding brilliantly in its still, dusky heart. High into the darkness above the hills, Pulp Works flashed its challenge to the deathly white desolation all about. And in a little square down by the frozen river a curious, wondering throng, jostled and pushed about a mad creature of a man that had stumbled down into town from the mystery of the night-set hills.

"Hola! Hola!"

Fearfully, they hemmed him close. But obviously he did not see, did not know. And now, wedging through the throng came a keen-faced young man from the pulp-plant offices. He broke through the circle, and he burst forth with a single loud cry: "Great Lord! Jerry Wayne!"

In a frenzy of concern the young man gathered the wanderer in. He was gaunt and quite terrible. His eyes were red-rimmed horrors. His feet were frozen. In one stiffened hand he carried a packet addressed to the management of the Pulp Works. Clutched in the other—a jester's bauble of superb significance—was the polished shank of a caribou, decorated with two sorry tufts of frozen hair.

CHAPTER V.

THE CAVERN OF FORGETFULNESS.

TO the man on the bed existence was a patient wandering through an eerie blue cavern, a place of waiting like a state between, like a grotto of forgetfulness. Here, existence was tranquil, was gentle, not uncontent—a patient seeking for an exit that would surely be found, for a guide to conduct one hence, that, somewhere, stood in wait.

In intervals of seeking, a little baffled, a little weary, the man would become hazily conscious of a different existence, almost equally new and strange, an existence of perplexing difficulty, an existence of *things*, and these his consciousness regarded with slow wonder: a room, a bed beneath him; his own body.

He found himself keenly conscious of all these things without opening his eyes, seeing them all flawlessly as though

from within: his hands—gray, dead-looking claws; his body, oddly long on the bed, with great bandaged bunches at the other end—which were his feet. Things had been done to his feet. He could even see his feet, see them clearly under their bandages. They had a gnawed look, like a seaman on a ship.

He took up again the patient wandering through that blue, phantom-lit grotto that was like an anteroom, an anteroom to that other existence he was to come upon; but again the exit eluded him, again he failed to find the guardian in wait. And now, the man on the bed once more, he became conscious of other people around him—*not* in the blue luminous cavern, but in the room.

And in the room some one spoke a name.

Carhart sat down on the far side of the bed and took one of the dead-looking hands in his. And again he spoke.

"Jerry, old man! Jerry Wayne! It's Carhart—Jimmy Carhart! Can't you hear me?"

So far as he could see there was no response in the tranquil figure on the bed. The man was breathing, quite heavily in fact, but he was far along. Carhart raised his face, grievously concerned, to the doctor by his side. "What's next, doc? He's *got* to come back!"

The doctor shook his head.

"He's badly battered, of course. His is a finely assembled organization and he must have made a rock crusher of it. At that, even, it seems possible that he could rally all right. Physically, he may be more completely demoralized than I seem to find, but, all through, I've had the feeling that he doesn't want to come back. If there could be something to rouse him——"

"He *is* coming back!" Carhart's voice was almost surly in its determination. "He's going out under a great error all the way through. I'm going to fight him back, or fight him—out!"

The slow wanderer drifting at large about that palely luminous blue cavern, seemed to feel himself quickened, agitated, in his patient search for the way out. He seemed dragged back from his peaceful tranquillity; something seemed dragging him determinedly back to that broken shell on the bed.

Carhart was saying, tensely, distinctly, as though to a hypnotic subject:

"Listen, Jerry Wayne. You must live!" He patted the hand in his, quickly, distractingly. "You've won through from the South coast. We got your papers. The Mendeth proposition has been put through."

Carhart thought he detected a change in the breathing almost as though the man on the bed were listening, and he hurried on, his voice authoritative, level, direct:

"We wired credit to the Mendeth bankers through St. John's on the East coast. We learned of an ice breaker about to make along the South coast. We had her take on supplies for Harbour le Grand."

There was little to justify it but Carhart, feeling keenly, somehow, that the man on the bed understood, looked up at the doctor who smiled back encouragingly.

Carhart gripped himself and went on:

"On the South coast it's been hell. Since you've been sick communication has been shut off all over. The railroad is blocked. There's not a boat out on any coast. But before all that happened we learned back from Harbour le Grand that your supplies prevented actual starvation, and that the doctor and nurse sent along with them were saving the place from being wiped out!"

A steely cold thrill stopped Carhart. The eyelids of the man were twitching quiveringly, like a man tearing himself loose from sleep. And Carhart drove on:

"You've saved a townful of people. Few men alive could have tramped

across this country in the shape you were in. You *must* come back!"

The man on the bed turned his head in infinite weariness, sighed deeply, and then. as though sliding down a smooth declivity into unconsciousness, lapsed again, far—breathing heavily, raucously.

Carhart gathered himself. When the breathing became gentler he drove at the sick man almost fiercely:

"Wayne! Pull yourself together! You've got to! You've got everything ahead of you. You've got youth and friends and manhood! You've got Margaret Mendeth! And she loves you."

From some vague realm the man on the bed was listening. There was no doubt about it now. A moment and from his throat came hollowly:

"She can't—love me. I'm—*weakling!*"

Again he was gone.

"Wayne!" It was called loudly as though to a man vanishing in the distance. Carhart began again. The sweat stood on his face. Behind him the doctor paced in the background. Carhart's voice rose to a pitch desperately imperative. "And you can marry the girl. do you hear? I tell you you're free from Floss LaRue, if you ever were really married to her!"

The man on the bed stirred, drearily:

"Ah—don't," he said thickly. His eyes came open. For the moment he was fully conscious.

Carhart's voice slid on swiftly.

"Listen to this letter from New York, Jerry. It can't but bring you back.

"Floss is marrying some one with more money than discrimination in the picture game. I'm sending a clipping that mentions divorce. Nobody on the inside believes there's been any intensive divorce activities. In fact, there's a good many who doubt Floss was ever legitimately married to Wayne!"

And, with a swift glance at the panting man on the bed.

"Here's the clipping. Listen:

"Mrs. Jeffrey Wayne, formerly Floss LaRue of the Superba Pictures Corporation, recently reported as having secured a divorce from Wayne on the grounds of desertion, ventures into matrimony again this week. A man prominent in motion-picture enterprises succeeds Wayne, the marriage taking place yesterday as the inauguration of new screen activities in which Miss LaRue is to star."

Wayne was himself for one tortured moment. His head turned weakly, side to side, in terrible exhaustion. And his voice:

"It's too late. I'm beaten—I've lost love—— The country's got my life—I've tried—and I can't come back!" His body fell to stillness.

Carhart was on his knees.

"Wayne! Wayne, listen, you *must* make it!"

The head rolled over again. "Ah-h-h!"—in halting agony. "Let me—let me go!"

There came a long, hoarse sigh and he was gone again—hopelessly, now.

Carhart got up. He wheeled to the doctor.

"I can't fight him longer! I haven't the heart. It's like pawing a dying dog! But," in sudden desperation, "do something—keep him going—yet!"

The man on the bed was back in that limpid, blue cavern that held about him so luminously. And he was seeking definitely, now, with added confidence, with certainty. Soon he should find that all-important exit, and the unknown guide who was to conduct him hence.

Late that night Carhart was outside the house, a fur coat loosely upon him, pacing in the snow in desperate restlessness. There was a brilliant moon; the winter world was vast, clean cut, flawless.

In desperation was Carhart's mind wrestling with itself—a grim proceeding with flashes of poignancy. He was going over the manner of youth that had been Jerry Wayne—brilliant, generous, lovably weak, a man who stirred life to

brightness with his every passing. They had been closest pals, through college and long after, and Wayne's gay, heedless qualities held the steadier Carhart's affection unceasingly through all the years. And now—Carhart groaned—he couldn't see the Jerry Wayne he knew in that terribly worn, broken man back there—in the bed.

Something halted Carhart.

From his house well up the hillside he could see much of the surrounding valley, and straight across, far up under the brilliant moonlight, he thought he saw a speck that seemed to move in an open among the spruces. He watched it. The speck did move—swiftly—became an undulating little scrap that wound and twisted down through the opens, swiftly on down to the level of the frozen river.

Watching it, Carhart's heart began to beat heavily, excitedly, he knew not why. Long before it struck the river and came flying across, he knew the visitant for a dog team, and marveled. There were no dogs in that section of Newfoundland. Dogs were used on many of the coast sections, but chiefly for getting out firewood from the timber country from the coast.

Expertly driven, the team sped across the river, and drew into the lower town. And suddenly some great thing of breathless speculation burst in Carhart, he made out into the little street and ran—down toward the river.

He met the dog team padding along uncertainly in the deserted street along the river. It pulled up deftly, and a voice, a woman's voice, spoke.

Carhart scarcely heard her question. The mighty speculation had become certainty.

"Great Heaven, Miss Mendeth, the gods of Newfoundland have surely sent you! I'm Carhart. I've got Wayne up with me. Come, but hurry!"

The man on the bed had been summoned back from the blue cavern, peremptorily. A voice, a new voice, had spoken to him. He was starkly conscious, on the bed. And life, the life of his body, had turned about, was flooding on through him again, strangely, with swiftly endowed strength.

The doctor did something to his arm. The life that had turned about fled on through his veins more powerfully still. He opened his eyes.

A young woman was in the half light by the bed, a young woman of splendid fineness and distinction, slipping off a richness of furs with liquid grace, and bending upon him a face holding tenderness, and great earnestness, and all the compassion in the world.

And he knew her and a terribly poignant saturation as of hot tears got into his eyes. And he could not help it. And that multiplied his terrible weakness and distress a hundredfold.

The young woman was down on the floor beside the bed now, pressing his two lean, gray hands to her face, talking to him.

And the man squeezed weak and helplessly at his dribbing eyelids, his head turning feebly back and forth on the pillow. And speech stammered forth from the unutterable weariness, the sick hopeless appeal of a little boy:

"Do—do you mind if—if I cry a little? I—I'm sorry but I can't seem to help it. You see—I'm—I'm weakling still!"

Margaret Mendeth herself cried then, the sole such outburst of a lifetime.

"Oh, my dear, my dear!"—gaspingly, helplessly. "To-day you're one of the biggest men in all Newfoundland!"

There was a long moment of packed silence. The girl raised her head.

"As soon as they told me what you had done, I came. For I have loved you so! No matter what other claims hold you I cannot help loving you. At Christmas I danced with you. It *killed* me! Just now, knowing even that I

have no right, I'm—I'm loving you so. It's—it's agony!"

The man on the bed straightened out and lay quiet; a long time he lay quiet, lay very still.

Down on the bedclothes the girl's face was pressed to his breast. Falteringly, one hand found her hair—and rested there.

"Find Carhart," Wayne quavered weakly. "Ask him to tell you—what he told me."

CHAPTER VI.

ACCOLADE.

AT daybreak, a week later, two dog teams emerged briskly from the timber on the heights above Pulp Works and took up a trail out from the Humber country straight into the southeast. In the lead, trail picking with unerring efficiency, was Margaret Mendeth, and beside her, packed in furs absurdly plentiful was Jerry Wayne. Behind, came a second team a later arrival, drawn also by Mendeth dogs, and driven in a sort of deep-sea fashion by Dave Calder. And in this sled were bounteous grub supplies of a very high class, and much dried fish and seal for the dogs.

The weather was fine and clear, and still with the soft brooding stillness as of rest after especial rigors. They made the Victoria Lake country that first night and Wayne, protesting vigorously, was put to bed in a huge bundle of furs although the night was blandly mild.

The next night found them camped in a thicket in timber country halfway on the last leg of the journey to Harbour le Grand.

The night was inconceivable in its still radiance and beauty. There was a huge fire—in country of endless timber Dave Calder seemed determined to burn all the wood he could to make up for the meager fuel of the coast—and Wayne and the girl sat on skins in an ingenious shelter of the canvas flies so devised as to deflect heat comfortably about them. The dogs had dug in indifferently; such luxury of travel was new to them all. And there was a moon. Great, golden, opulent, it rolled up from the horizon, to glide slowly from spruce to spruce as the two watched. And the trees lay down a design of fanciful shadows of sheerest blue. Still—so still it was——

Under the furs the girl's hand was clutched in Wayne's, his own closing upon it almost fiercely. And he began, impulsively:

"Ah, little girl, how many, many men miss out! How many men that might have been true warriors of the world never find *themselves!*" A little silence. "I have learned that a man can't stand still; that the weakling goes on dwindling until he dwindles out, while the strong are permitted to get their shoulders right behind the thing of eternal growth and—push *on!* But the beginning of all strength lies first in a man's conquest of himself. Your mother made me see that—and I'm knowing now it must be so." The hand under the robe gripped tighter yet. "Meanwhile, I'm all lit up over my chance to help push on. I want mightily now to lay hands on some little scrap of life and do something with it." And then, on a sudden warm inspiration: "How are we going to plan it—the future?"

Down beneath the furs, the hand returned his pressure.

Then she said;

"I've been thinking about that a day." A still little reflective moment of staring into the fire. "So many things are decided for us that I am sure we'll know. Meanwhile, from mails reaching us on the ice breaker, I know that things are already beginning to turn for Mendeth Company; that they will work out as I planned. We shall take a year—see the world together. Then"—in the firelight, a soft little smile came on the

girl's lips—"there is much you can do for Newfoundland here within its borders; there is much I can do for it out in the world. It will be decided when the time comes."

Morning.

And divine wonder craft had laid upon the world a shimmering robe of loveliness unspeakable. Bridal it was—a radiant, glittering robe of white and silver and pearls. A dampness almost of rain had come upon the land in the night. In the silken world of white it had wrought creations of silver filigree upon every shrub and bush, had crusted tamarack and spruce with glimmering pearls in endless array. And high in air where the treetops caught the sun hung glittering, resplendent frost jewels, shooting fiery splinters of ruby, of sapphire, of emerald and flame, back and forth, and in and out, in peerlessly dazzling splendor.

And through all this nuptial beauty the little procession moved for one enchanted hour.

They came at nightfall to Harbour le Grand, a town waiting for them to its last man.

And now Wayne, seated rather shyly in the sled, came in upon a new world like entering through an open door. The men of the hamlet stood on both sides of the way. Big and rugged and reverent, they had a biblical look. In deep silence they stood, respectfully holding their hats in their hands in response to an instinct they scarce understood.

And, wabbling a bit from bodily weakness, Wayne felt yet a great uplift as from the bestowal of strength unspeakable—the solemn accolade of a mighty land.

THE END.

HUMOROUS TO THE LAST

A UNITED STATES deputy marshal was taking a gang of prisoners in a special car to the Federal penitentiary at Atlanta. When the train stopped at Richmond, Virginia, a man with an immense tray of sandwiches came up to the car windows. Between the slices of bread, each an inch thick, was a slab of ham that would have satisfied a giant's appetite, however great and noble he might have been as a gormandizer.

A tall, rangy prisoner from the mountains of West Virginia leaned out of a window and inquired:

"Haow much is them thar?"

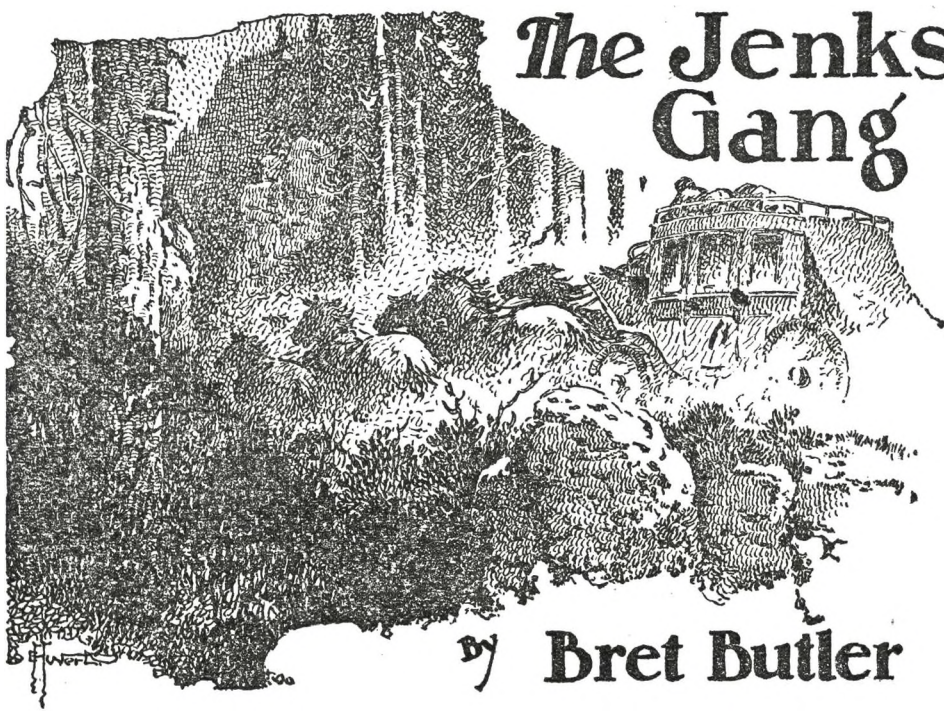
"Fifteen cents," the salesman informed him.

"Gimme two!"

Reaching for the food, the mountaineer wolfed them with prodigious bites and in swallows that made his Adam's apple strain against the neckband of his shirt. Just then the whistle blew and the train began to pick up speed.

"Hey, mister!" cried the sandwich man. "Gimme my money. Thirty cents!" He was trotting along beside the car.

"Brothah," the lanky prisoner replied, leaning far out the window to make himself heard, "I'm goin' to Georgyeh on what yew call official business. Jes' charge that thar thirty cents to the Depawtment of Jestice. Uncle Sam's payin' all my expenses."



The Jenks Gang

by Bret Butler

The very human, warm-hearted story of the extermination of a famous old Western bandit gang.

A COMPLETE STORY

ABOUT twenty miles from Placerville, the smooth Lake Tahoe highway ventures cautiously out into the mighty gorge of the American River, now creeping fearfully around a bald knob a thousand and a half feet above the white torrent below, now scurrying back against the timbered and less precipitous slopes.

Many who read these words have driven over this road. The more timid have breathed sighs of relief when the highway swept back against the slopes where there were at least a few trees to cut off the sight of the chasm below, with its narrow white ribbon of tumbling river.

Many who read this have stopped their cars at various places along the road, their curiosity stirred by the bronze plates that, every few miles, tell of some famous stagecoach robbery, or of some battle between the Vigilantes and the lawless bands that once terrorized the gold mines.

For this is historic ground—the American River country. It was the branches of this stream, with their many tributaries, that for untold centuries washed down the yellow metal discovered by the Forty-niners.

Yes, many who read these words have traveled over this modern highway, high up on the gorge of the American River, and have stopped, perhaps, before one particular bronze plate. It is set in a small stone monument at a point where the smooth highway curves sharply back into a deeply timbered ravine. At the bottom of this ravine a

small stream tumbles and sprays down to the river far below.

The letters on the plate are small. One must drive his car very close to read the short, simple paragraph.

It was an hour before sunset, and the battered stagecoach was lurching along the single-track road that dipped and climbed and twisted down the side of the gorge far above the boiling river. At places the road crept over such a narrow ledge that the six horses crowded close to the mountain wall, in fear, much to the profane disgust of the tobacco-chewing driver.

They had made bad time that day and were late. It would take fully three more hours of hard going to reach the first of the mining camps that stretched up the river from the Placerville field. But of the four roughly dressed miners in the stagecoach, only one seemed at all disturbed. Two of them talked desultorily and tried to play a game of stud poker, in spite of the bouncing, jerking vehicle. Another, a clean-shaven fellow with close-set black eyes, dozed in the corner. The fourth was alert and uneasy, as the shadows grew deep in the gorge below.

He was a young man, not more than twenty-four, and his brown face was gaunt and lined from hard work. Across his knees lay a heavy pistol. On the floor of the stagecoach was a rough but strongly made box. Its extreme weight was shown by the fact that all the lurching and bouncing of the coach failed to stir it.

"Don't worry, kid," sneered he of the close-set eyes, now wide awake. "Your gold will be safe in a few hours. We'll hit the night stop in a little while; from then on to Placerville you're as safe as you'd be on Main Street back home."

Scarcely had he spoken when the driver shouted. The four men inside heard the whip lash out. As the horses leaped forward, the occupants were thrown into a scrambling heap.

The next moment a fusillade of shots came from directly ahead, and the driver screamed in anguish. The stage slowed down. Evidently the attackers had seized the lead span.

The three older men saw their companion shove his pistol through the door to fire. But just as he pulled the trigger the man with the close-set eyes stumbled against him, and the shot went wild. A second fusillade of shots from ahead riddled the stage. Then a horseman dashed up and discharged a gun directly in the open door. Without a sound, the young man with the pistol collapsed, falling half out of the door and dragging, until the bandits had fully stopped the horses.

Their hands upraised, the three climbed out. Five mounted and armed men were drawn up in the narrow road.

No one spoke. Then one, evidently the leader, dismounted. He was tall, rawboned, and lazily deliberative in action. As he approached the stage, the wounded boy, hanging half out of the open door, moaned. Calmly the tall bandit raised his gun and fired.

At the gasp of horror from the other three passengers, the other five masked men raised their guns significantly.

In a few moments the captain of the gang had tumbled the limp form of the boy out on the ground, and was struggling with the heavy box on the floor of the stage.

The tearing off of the lid revealed a dozen heavy canvas sacks. Calmly distributing the sacks to his men, the rawboned bandit mounted, swept off his hat mockingly, and spurred his horse back up the narrow road.

The stage driver was dead—definitely so. But when the three survivors drove the bullet-riddled stage into the next camp, the boy, strangely enough, was still breathing. The first bullet had

merely creased his skull and stunned him. The second—that fired deliberately by the leader of the gang—had drilled completely through his left lung, miraculously missing his heart.

All this is a matter of history, as is, indeed, the close of this story—history you can read to-day, if somewhat scantily, on the little bronze plate. But only a few people know what happened between these two chronicled events.

Young David Gordner lay for many days between life and death, in the rough mining camp a dozen miles up from Placerville. While half a dozen posses were combing the country in a desperate effort to wipe out of existence, once for all time, the notorious Jenks gang, Nancy Potter, tried to nurse her charge back to life.

Nancy Potter was the eighteen-year-old daughter of Isaac Potter, the only doctor Placerville at that time boasted. It was said that Isaac Potter had come to the gold fields, five years before, to drown his grief over the loss of his wife. He had left thirteen-year-old Nancy back in Illinois with an aunt. Doc Potter had found little gold but much need of his skill, so he had stayed. When his daughter was seventeen, he had sent for her.

Unable to remain with his dangerously wounded patient day after day, yet unwilling to trust young David Gordner to the care of the men in the rough mining camp, Potter had sent back to Placerville for Nancy, knowing that the girl would be as safe in the camp as in his own home.

David Gordner got well slowly. It was a long month before they could take him to Placerville. No one ever had a better nurse, nor a prettier one; but young David lay, day after day, staring at the ceiling in Isaac Potter's house.

"Isn't there—isn't there anything I can do for you?" said Nancy to him one day. "Father says there must be something troubling you, something that is keeping you from getting well. He says you don't care—you don't want to get better."

"I don't," he said dully. "I'm sorry to bother you, particularly when I can never pay you for the care you've given me. Can't you just let me die?"

"No, no," said Nancy, sick misery in her eyes. "You must get well, Mr. Gordner—David. If you'd only tell me what is wrong. I know it's something more than just losing the gold. Is—is it a—a girl?"

For a long time he lay very still. Then:

"Yes. I may as well tell you. She's—she's better than I. Her father is a judge, the big man back there. I—I just worked on his farm. I always loved her, but of course she could not—well, you know—I worked on her father's farm."

His fingers plucked the covers.

"Then I made up my mind to come out here and find a fortune. It was the only way I could get her. When I told her what I was going to do, she did not laugh. She let me—kiss—kiss her, and said she would wait.

"It was hard. I starved sometimes. Two long years, then I struck it rich up the river. I wrote to her I was coming home, keeping quiet about my luck. I—I wanted to surprise her. But I got a letter saying she was to be married in three months. I sold out my claim at once, and was hurrying down to San Francisco to take a ship back when—when——"

He faltered. Since he was looking at the ceiling, he could not see the tears in Nancy's eyes, nor the pitiful quiver to her lips.

"It's too late now," he went on helplessly; "she is to be married next month. And even if she would wait, I might never strike it rich again. My

find was just fool luck. You know how few men find anything."

"Yes she will," cried Nancy, choking back her tears and smiling gayly. "She'll wait. I know she will. I'll write and tell her all about it. I'll write to-day. The Pony Express will get the letter back in time. She loves you and she'll wait. Now you hurry and get well, so you can find another rich strike. You can; I know you can."

In spite of himself the contagion of her courage caught him. Though he protested, she wrote the letter, read it to him, and sent it by the first express rider.

For two weeks he improved steadily. Then fate dealt the second blow—pneumonia. In his weakened condition it was a miracle that the good Doctor Isaac and Nancy were able to pull him through. More weeks passed while he hovered on the border line between life and death.

He was far from being out of danger when the answer from Indiana arrived. The letter was very thin and wrinkled. With her father's sanction, Nancy steamed it open. With her father's sanction, she hid away the short, frank note, and wrote another—not a note, but a long letter. It was hard to copy the even, meticulous, back-hand writing; but the expression of incredulous joy that spread over David Gordner's face as he read the letter, testified very satisfactorily as to her skill.

New life seemed at once to flood into him. It took the combined force of Doctor Isaac and Nancy to keep him in bed until all danger of a relapse was past.

"But you don't understand," he would cry at them. "She's waiting. I must hurry. I'm going back up the river. There's a gulch, far back, that nobody has ever prospected. Jenks and his gang got me this time, but they won't do it again. This new express company has put guards on the stage-coaches."

He had been wounded late in the fall. Early the next spring he started out up the river, grubstaked by Doctor Isaac. It was a bright, sunny day that he bade good-by to Nancy and her father. In Nancy's hands he left a letter—a bulky one—with directions to send it out by the first rider. It was addressed to the girl back in Indiana, the girl he thought was waiting.

He was in high spirits. Several rich strikes had been made up the river. There was another cause for hope, too. The express company had set a price of ten thousand dollars on the head of the leader of the Jenks gang. Stung into action by the lawless robberies and murders of the desperadoes, and encouraged by the offered reward, a dozen parties of miners were on the lookout.

It was rumored that the gang had cached its loot back in the hills. Capture meant possible recovery of much of it. What wonder David Gordner's face, lean and white now, was bright with hope as he shook the hand of Doctor Isaac and impulsively kissed the cheek of the strangely quiet Nancy.

"I'm going to make another strike," he cried. "I feel it—here. I simply can't fail. She's waiting for me, you see. She turned this other fellow down to wait for me—me who worked on her father's farm. Why, they're likely to catch the Jenks gang any day now, and if they do I won't have to make a strike."

He pointed to the carbine in the crook of his arm.

"I'm going to keep a sharp watch myself. A carbine will carry farther than a pistol, and if I get a chance—— They say the gang was seen a few days ago along the river road. They're probably waiting for a big shipment of dust from the camps above."

His face turned suddenly bitter.

"How I'd like to see them once more,

the dirty murderers. If it had not been for them, Alice and I would have been married last fall."

"Better keep out of their way, David," said Doctor Isaac, his keen eyes detecting the sudden fear in his daughter's face. "Let the express company's posses get them."

"Don't worry," said David, suddenly gloomy, "I'll not be lucky enough to get a chance at them."

He said good-by again, shaking Nancy's hand gravely this time, and climbed into the stage.

Long after that battered vehicle had disappeared up the winding main street of Placerville, Nancy stood there staring after it, her eyes full of unshed tears, her lips trembling pitifully. Her father, his face troubled, took David's letter from her hand, carried it back to his office and burned it. It would never do for that letter to reach Indiana.

The next day at noon the upriver stage pulled into a small camp, forty miles from Placerville, to change horses. A few minutes later the downriver stage arrived from the other direction.

Anxious to pick up the latest news from the mining camps above, David Gordner was waiting when it lumbered to a stop. Two guards with carbines across their knees were riding outside with the driver. As the five passengers tumbled out, David questioned them eagerly.

"Ask Winter and Hughes," said one, pointing at two grizzled old miners. "They've just made the biggest strike in six months. A cool quarter million, they've cleaned up. That's why we have two guards this trip, instead of one."

Something in the speaker's voice sounded strangely familiar to David, and he looked at the man sharply. The stranger was of average height, with close-set black eyes and a heavy beard.

But when the other walked away, David dismissed the matter from his mind and turned to the two lucky miners. They were more than willing to talk about their strike. They had sold their claim and were on their way to San Francisco with their gold. That is, the express company had taken charge of the precious shipment, and they were going along in the same stagecoach.

Due to a cracked tongue that had to be repaired on the upriver stage, the downriver team pulled out first. The two newly rich miners got in first, the heavily bearded man last. As he swung up, he flung some remark to the two guards on top of the stagecoach and laughed.

Again David had the baffled feeling that he had seen this man before. Again he looked sharply at the other's face.

Just as the driver cracked his long whip, light dawned upon David. He *had* seen this man before. The face that was now heavily bearded had been clean shaven, but the close-set eyes and sneering voice were the same. This was the fellow who had clumsily stumbled against him, the fall before, as he had shot through the stagecoach door at the rawboned leader of the Jenks gang.

Was it a coincidence that this chap was again going downriver on a stage laden with gold? If so, why had he let his beard grow? Had it been an accident, last fall, when this man had stumbled against him? Again, why, last fall, had the narrow-eyed fellow dozed most of the trip, but waked up just before the attack of the six desperadoes?

An absurd idea flashed into David's mind. He tried to laugh it down as the driver of his own stage called to him to climb in; but, with his foot on the step, he suddenly determined to follow his wild hunch.

When the upriver stage pulled out, David Gordner was walking, carbine in

hand, over to the primitive stable where the relay teams were kept.

Twenty minutes later he was riding *downriver* on a spare horse. The man in charge of the horses had driven a thrifty bargain with him. Out of his slender grubstake funds, David had paid two hundred dollars for the horse. If he returned it within several days, unhurt, he was to get a hundred and fifty dollars back.

In an hour he had nearly caught up to the downriver stage. The road was so narrow, it wound and twisted, dipped and rose so much, that he was easily able to travel but a quarter of a mile behind the stage, yet keep out of sight. Now and then, at those spots where the rough trail came out on the bald side of the canyon, he was forced to drop farther behind; but for the most part he dogged the very wheels.

One hour, two hours, three hours, went by, and still he was following the groaning stage downriver. To his right the canyon got deeper and deeper, the foaming river at last lying so far below the narrow road that its roar had sunk to a distant, sullen whisper.

The sun began to sink behind the tumbling foothills to the west, and, in the canyon below, blue shadows dimmed everything but the twisting white ribbon of foaming torrent. Still David trailed doggedly the stagecoach ahead, but the hope in his heart was dimming.

When, with a final burst of glory, the sun dropped behind the blue-and-purple hills, stagecoach and trailing horseman were within twenty miles of Placerville. Dusk began to creep up the shadow-field gorge: No longer could David see the narrow, white ribbon of river below; only its faint, sullen murmur reached him from the shadow-choked depths.

Suddenly he pulled up his horse sharply. It was yet light on the road, for it had been built high up on the western side of the gorge. He noticed at once, then, the hoofmarks in the short stretch of road made muddy by springs seeping down from above.

There was something unusual about those hoofprints. He studied them for a moment, then rode on. At the end of the muddy stretch they disappeared, for the road here was rough and rocky. He rode back and again inspected the hoofprints.

Now the stage horses were shod in front. This was to save their hoofs from wearing tender on the crumbling rock. They should have been shod behind, even though hind feet do not wear tender as quickly, but a horse shod behind is too dangerous to turn out into a corral with other horses. A kick from an unshod animal very seldom injures another horse, but a kick from an iron-shod hoof may do much damage.

The thing that attracted David's attention was the fact that the prints in the muddy stretch of road were made by horses that were shod *neither in front nor behind*.

For a full minute he sat on his horse and stared at the tracks. He had not noticed such tracks before, though the road all afternoon had been spotted with muddy stretches. He looked ahead. In fifteen minutes the dusk would be thickening.

With an exclamation, he dug his heels in the ribs of his tired horse. The next instant he was dashing down the road, urging his mount faster and faster in an attempt to catch up with the stagecoach ahead. As he rode he unlimbered his carbine.

With the reins in one hand and his weapon in the other, he tore on. The heavy breathing of the horse and the thud of its hoofs made it impossible to hear the stage, but he knew he was gaining rapidly on it.

Then, hardly an eighth of a mile ahead, he saw it creep around the narrow track that clung to a bald cliff above the gorge. Like a flash, recogni-

tion came to him. Directly ahead of that bald cliff, the road swept back into the timbered ravine where, the fall before, the Jenks gang had held up his party.

Before he could shout, the stage had disappeared around the hill. Throwing caution to the winds he spurred his horse frantically.

Just as he reached the bald spot a single shot rang out ahead. Then came a sudden burst of firing, with the sound of distant shouting. The Jenks gang had struck again.

A moment before his lunging horse reached the final turn, directly ahead of which lay the ravine, the firing suddenly stopped.

In the next breath David jerked backward against the reins. The tender-mouthed horse, flung upon his haunches, came to a sliding, skidding halt. Fifty feet ahead lay the bend in the rocky wall.

Suddenly cold and steady, David ran stealthily forward. He reached the turn, sank to his knees and looked.

Seventy-five yards ahead stood the stagecoach. About it was drawn a semicircle of armed horsemen. One of the two guards lay motionless across the top of the stage; the other dangled half out over the edge.

As David looked, one of the horsemen, a tall, rawboned man, dismounted and strode up to the stagecoach door. In his hand was a pistol. Flinging open the door, he shouted a profane command. In answer, the first of the passengers slowly stepped out. It was one of the two newly rich miners, and though he was evidently wounded, he cursed the rawboned outlaw bitterly.

Even as he cursed, the big outlaw lifted his pistol.

But that pistol never spoke. Before the notorious Dave Jenks could tighten his finger on the trigger, a carbine cracked, and he stumbled forward on his face.

For one throbbing second not a man moved. Like actors in some fantastic tableau, outlaws and passengers stood frozen with surprise.

Then one of the remaining five bandits screamed a command, leaned low over his horse, and rode furiously for that bend in the road. He had covered a bare third of the distance when the carbine cracked again. With a grunt of agony his horse lunged into the air and fell headlong. The next instant horse and rider plunged over the side of the road. The rider's cry of horror was smothered in a muffled crash below.

With one accord, the four surviving outlaws dug spurs into their mounts. But a third shot cracked out, this time from the top of the stage, where one of the express company's guards had fought back to consciousness. The shot told, and a third outlaw slid, wounded, from the saddle.

Covered now by David, the guard, and two passengers, the other three masked men sullenly raised their hands.

"All right, stranger," called one of the passengers exultingly, "show yourself around that corner. We got 'em, all right."

"Be careful," cried David in warning. "That passenger in the stage is one of the gang. Watch——"

Even as he spoke, the heavily bearded man leaped from the other door of the coach—the door next to the gorge side of the road. Before David could fire, the wretch had flung himself over the brink.

Whether the last outlaw escaped alive or not, it has never been discovered. David's first bullet had killed Dave Jenks; his second had sent a horse and outlaw number two to their deaths on the rocks below. The man wounded by the guard died a few hours later. A few days later the other three died—each at the end of a rope.

It was noon the next day when Doc-

tor Isaac rushed up to the little shack in Placerville that he and Nancy called home. Nancy, who had not seen her father run for years, met him at the door.

"Why, father!" she gasped. "What in the——"

Her father interrupted.

"David!" shouted Doctor Isaac. "He's here. Killed 'em single-handed —the Jenks gang! Ten thousand reward, and he says he'll get most of the gold they robbed him of.

"Hurry," he puffed. "He'll be here in a minute. Just saw him when the stage pulled in. One guard shot, one dying. Ten thousand reward. He's going back right to-day. Told me so. Says he's going back to marry—— My Lord! What'll we do? Here—here he comes."

When the hurrying David reached the Potter home, a few moments later, Doctor Isaac met him at the door.

"Where's Nancy?" asked David happily. "I want to tell her all about it. Isn't it wonderful? She was right, after all. I owe it all to her. When I tell Alice——"

"Nancy—er——" faltered Doctor Isaac gravely, "Nancy isn't—isn't here."

"What?" asked David incredulously. "I thought you said——"

"I forgot," stumbled the good doctor, turning his head away. "She—she went up to one of the mining camps to —to visit a sick patient. She—she won't be home until to-morrow. She gave me two letters for you. One came for you when you were sick, and we decided it would not be best to—in fact, we—we—— But the other letter—the one Nancy has written you—will explain. You are not to open them until you get to Indiana. Maybe it won't be too late, after all. You see, we——"

"No!" shouted David. "Do you mean I won't see her? Why, I can't leave this afternoon without seeing her. What mining camp did she go to? Can I go there and back?"

"No," said Doctor Isaac firmly, "it's too far."

"Then I'll wait till to-morrow." David's voice was decisive.

"No, David," said the other gently; "you'd better go—this afternoon. You see Nancy—Nancy——"

He faltered, unwilling, or unskilled enough, to tell a bigger lie.

His words had an odd effect upon David, whose face suddenly went white and ghastly.

"Doctor Isaac!" he shouted, seizing the other's arm and shaking him. "Something has happened to Nancy. She's—she's—don't tell me she's dead. Quick! Tell me—tell me! Do you hear?"

He flung aside the good doctor and ran into the house. No one in the tiny sitting room. Perhaps they had laid her corpse—— Wild eyed he dashed into Nancy's tiny bedroom.

There, flung across the bed, her head buried miserably in her arms, lay the sobbing form of the girl he was hunting. With a strangled cry of joy, David swept her up in his arms.

Rocking her back and forth in ecstasy, he kissed her lips, her eyes, her small nose, her lips again.

"But David," sobbed Nancy, trying vainly to push him away, "you don't love me; you love——"

"You!" shouted David. "I never realized it till your father acted as if something had happened to you. Why, Nancy I loved you all the time. That other girl"—he laughed—"that was nothing but ambition, I guess. How could I love any one else, Nancy?"

He kissed her again, and this time Nancy did not even try to push him away.

His hand clutching feebly at his brow, Doctor Isaac staggered out of the doorway. Out in the kitchen he pulled two letters from his pocket, threw them

upon the floor and began to dance up and down upon them.

Oh, yes! The thin letter from Indiana that Nancy did not give to David was a cruel little note saying that Alice had been married two months, and, anyway, could hardly marry a former humble employee on her father's farm.

Oh, yes! The bronze plate out on the smooth highway up the American River Gorge, at the point where the road curves sharply back into a deeply timbered ravine—it tells that here, one spring day of long ago, David Gordner—the Gordner who afterward represented his State three terms in Congress—alone and unaided broke up the infamous Jenks gang, killing two, one of which was the outlaw chief himself.

Watch these pages for a new series of short stories by Bret Butler, beginning soon.

HOT SPRINGS TURN COLD

THROUGH the length and breadth of Alaska are scattered hot mineral springs that give many residents cause to believe the Territory some day will draw those seeking health—in these modern-day fountains of youth.

And so these same residents feel that they have cause to voice alarm when a submarine earthquake disturbs the ocean bottom to such an extent that its effects are transmitted to Porcupine Harbor, near the capital city of Juneau, and there turn hot springs cold.

For such is the case. Travelers arriving in the capital city reported that the springs continued to spout and that the water seemed to contain its mineral contents. The change was noted shortly after the earthquake had been recorded. Several others of minor intensity followed the original disturbance. All the towns in southeastern Alaska were shaken slightly.

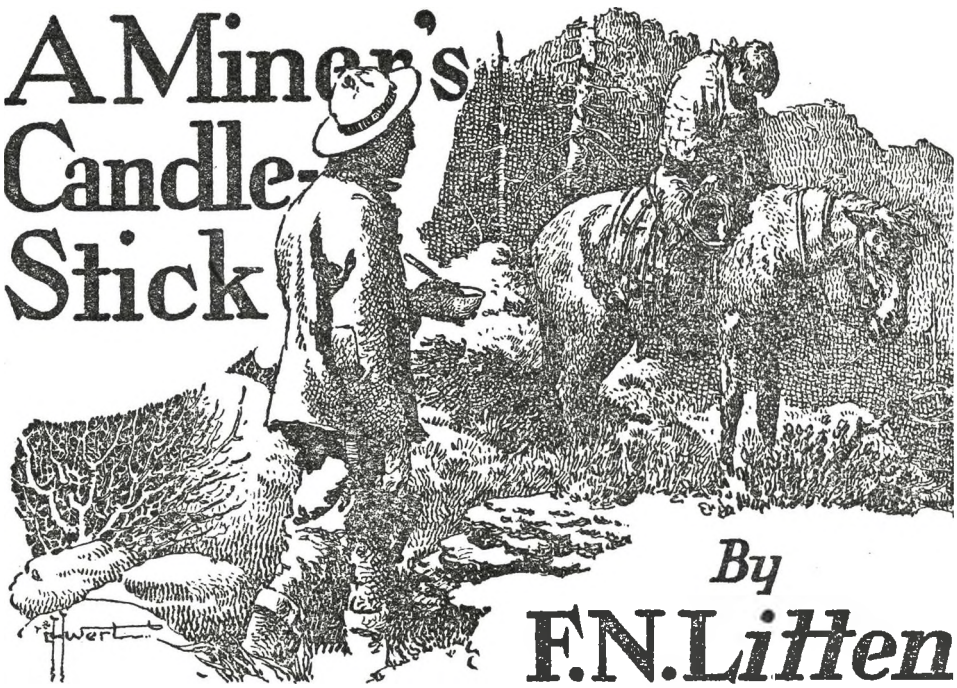
THE CHRISTENING OF CALAMITY JANE

MARTHA JANE CANARY, when Miner's Delight, in Fremont County, was a wild mining town, was a waif who did not know right from wrong, and whose associates were the rough men of that rough country. She was taken East, it is said, by a woman of that section to be educated and civilized, but on arrival in New York was dressed in a buckskin suit and paraded in the night resorts.

After several years her education was complete and she returned to the West. It is stated that she entered the services of the government as an Indian scout and won recognition for her deadly skill with a gun and her ability as a rider. Buffalo Bill said that she was given the name "Calamity" in 1872 by Captain Egan whose life she saved. Egan had been shot by Indians and was in danger of death when the female scout came to his rescue, shot the Indians who had attacked him, and carried him to the fort where she nursed him back to health. When the captain learned of his rescue he said to her:

"You are a good person to have around in time of calamity, and I now christen you 'Calamity Jane,' the heroine of the plains."

A Miner's Candle-Stick



By F.N.Litten

After twenty-five years, he returned to the mine to finish an incompleted crime —confident of success because he had a talisman, a miner's candlestick.

A COMPLETE STORY

ALLOWING for differences in Eastern and Mountain Time, Charles Holden, Jr., first trod the uncertain boards of this stage we call "Life," not long before his father made the final exit.

The moon, shining in the nursery window of a Boston suburb, struck, too, against the head frame of the Fortune Teller Mine, perched on Smoky Signal Mountain, and drew a shadow down across the rock dump on the hillside. In this shadow, Holden, E.M.. Boston Tech, class of '95, seated on an empty powder box, looked out the desert; watched the Limited, a broken strand of brilliants trailed across the night, draw closer to the sleeping town of Oresburg.

At his side the sump pump discharged a steady stream of copper-bearing water through a pipe that rose up from the shaft depths. The crude-oil burner roared beneath the boiler in the tool shed; the vein was showing silver values with the copper; Boston did not seem so far away to-night.

He jumped to his feet!

Out there on the desert, moonlight paled before a sudden, greater radiance; a ball of white fire burst from that creeping chain of brilliants, flared and died, and with it the bright trail of the Limited vanished. Holden stared, crossed quickly to the edge of the waste dump and for a long time watched, waiting for the lights to glow again. He watched with keen desire. Somehow the night Eastbound had become a link between this lonely spot and the world he knew. He strained to catch some signal from the desert, but except for

tiny pin points that might be his imaginings, no light appeared. At last, with a sense of bewildered foreboding, he made his way back to the shaft house; shook out his bed roll for the night.

But, though tired muscles ached in protest, sleep would not come. He lay, wide eyed, watching the play of moonlight on the polished levers of the hoist, the metamorphic, eerie shapes of the machinery within the shaft house. His mind attacked its image of the strange scene he had witnessed—the vanished Limited, that white burst of flame that had engulfed it. Wild theories played in and out the chambers of his reason. A wreck, a bursting locomotive boiler, an Apache raid, road agents. The treadmill of conjecture revolved ceaselessly. Hours toiled past.

Then he heard a faint click of float rock on the mountainside; a horse coughed. He sat up. Instinct made him reach up for the Colt revolver hooked through its trigger guard to a spike above. Stepping out again into the shadow of the head frame, he waited.

Chill air currents of the desert night swept shivering about him. The clink of the rock fragments sounded again—closer—wheezy equine breathing; there emerged upon the nilltop a mounted rider who approached the shaft house. White froth rimmed the saddle blanket. The horseman leaned against a square box roped to the saddle horn, his chin sagging on his breast, almost as though he slept. But when the horse, with spread hoofs, halted suddenly, simultaneous with the slap of the loose reins to the ground, the figure left the saddle, pitched face up in a scrubby clump of greasewood.

As he started cautiously from out the darkness, Holden glimpsed the face, whiter than the moonlight; saw the empty holster at the rider's thigh. The man groaned. His eyelids quivered. The oil burner choked; its roar broke off quickly; and, stirred by the sudden quiet, the stranger with an effort frightful in its agony, pulled himself up to his feet.

"Water!" he croaked; weaved, and staggered to the drooping horse.

Holden, thrusting a tin dipper in the olla underneath the shaft-house eaves, saw the stranger's fingers lace themselves determinedly about the roped box on the saddle as though to support its weight. The engineer approached, water sloshing from the dipper in his left hand, the revolver dangling awkward from his right.

A miner's candlestick, hooked through the pocket of his hastily donned jumper, disengaged itself and, falling, tangled in the laces of his boot. Sheathing the gun, he stooped, unthinking, to retrieve it. The wounded man caught the movement; his lined face reflected desperate hope. Subordinating pain to iron dominance, he ridged his neck muscles, strained. His face dampened with the sweat of tremendous effort. Suddenly he wrenched free the box, its heavy weight hurled downward from his hands and, falling, crushed the unguarded skull of the stooping man.

From the moonlit hilltop there went speeding to the Great Assayer the soul of Holden, Sr., mining engineer, as the same moon, shining in the nursery window of a Boston suburb, first touched the form of Holden, Jr., and the white trundle bed in which he lay.

The box turned, cleared the body. The murderer bent down, once more summoning indomitable will to augment his waning strength. Groaning with the effort, he rolled the body over, but collapsed beside it. Again he roused, unclasped fast-stiffening fingers from the engineer's revolver and weakly sheathed the weapon in his empty holster. He crawled to the olla, cut free a section of his heavy shirt and bathed a bullet wound above his groin. Through the half-open shaft-house door he descried

the empty blanket roll, and moved on toward it. Hope trilled above throbbing torture as his eye caught the flask in a rude wall cabinet. Whisky! It revived him. He tore a cotton blanket into strips and bound his middle tightly, though his lips drained white with the pain. He filled his canteen with the liquor, then stepped outside once more; watered the spent horse, halting often as pain twisted tight the thumb screws.

Finally he sank exhausted on the shaft curbing, gazed with speculative, fever-sunken eyes first at the box beside the still form, then at the distant lights of Oresburg. Moonlight was fading into chill desert dawn when he rose again. He picked up a pebble, wincing as he drew erect at the stab of agony, tossed the rock fragment down the shaft, and listened. A faint splash rewarded him. He moved to the box, knelt down and rolled it over toward the shaft. The effort made the world spin dizzily. His jaw tightened. Half unconscious, racked by pain, his will drove him on. A final wrench that sapped the dregs of strength, the box rose to the shaft curb, balanced on the timbers, disappeared. Consciousness narrowed like a funnel; at its end he heard once more the splash of disturbed water, once more drew back from the border of oblivion and forced himself upright.

Out in the desert where the thread of steel, the right of way, was just emerging from the half light of early dawn, a dotting of black figures moved. The sight poured strength, the desperate courage of a trapped wolf, into his flaccid muscles. He glanced again at Holden's body and narrowed his eyes. They shifted, searching, rested on the tool house, and the boiler stack protruding through the roof. Swiftly, contemptuous of his agony, he stepped to the drowsing pony, snubbed his lariat round the saddle horn and made the free end fast about the inert body. He pulled himself to the saddle by the pony mane, croaked a chirrup, and dragged his burden to the tool-house door.

Again dismounting, he rolled the corpse inside. The last tenuous strand of strength was parting; he longed to yield, to sink back in an anæsthesia of suffering. Instead he jammed his burden stubbornly against the ash pit, laughed harshly at his own blood soaking the dead engineer's shirt, and, with a quick glimpse at the red-hot lining of the furnace, spun the feed valve. It freed instantly, a jet of crude oil struck the back wall and burst into flame. Steadily he opened the valve wider until red, angry fire forked through the stack. Gritting his teeth, fighting back the pain, he climbed the ladder to the safety valve, wedged it shut, and closed the steam line to the sump pump.

He started down the ladder but his legs caved, and he slid helplessly, struck his head against a projection of the skids on which the boiler rested. He gained his feet, lurched grimly on to the injector, closed it, too. Then, half blinded by the blood flowing from his forehead, he sought the outside.

Now the fringe of sunrise touched the hills, and westward by the railroad the mounted men approached the smoldering coaches of the wrecked Limited. All this the man caught in a single glance. With no slackening of purpose, he swung his gaze southeastward to the hills, and with deliberate appraisal swept the naked desert in between. He approached his horse to coil the trailing rope. Its last twist caught up from the rocky floor the hooked, dagger-pointed miner's candlestick. Dully, the man stared at it; his flagging senses failed to associate its presence, to index it among the turmoils of the night. Then his thoughts cleared; he *knew*. He smiled, triumph in his face transcending pain. The candlestick, which by its fall had sealed his victim's fate; the chance, which in the taking had opened up the way. His hand fumbled for the saddle

holster, he sheathed the candlestick beside his carbine, muttering as he climbed to saddle:

"A luck piece. I got a chance——"

The sheriff of Caburre County sat down heavily on the porch beside the shuttered window of the bedroom. He fanned his fat face and watched moodily a horned toad bathing in the Arizona sun. He carried too much weight to enjoy a jolting, all-night ride; his wounded captive was an added irritation. As Doctor Wade stepped out upon the porch, he turned ponderously, his little eyes above the fat, cushiony face, eager.

"Well?" he asked, pursing his lips.

The doctor nodded.

"Oh, yes; I found the ball—just above the pelvic bone." He thumbed his vest pocket, laid a lead slug on the sheriff's fat knee. "A .45, isn't it, Hammel?"

Sheriff Hammel watched him closely for a moment.

"Doc, would you say a feller could shoot hisself and that there bone stop the lead? At short range with a .45—an' leave no powder burns? A bum alibi." He shook his head. "He'll hang, just about."

"If he dynamited that train, he ought to hang," confirmed the doctor. "His name's Connery, you say? He won't talk to me."

"Name was on a monte layout in his blanket roll. Gambler, mebbe. When we sighted him his horse was standin' spraddle-legged, done. An' he was humped over in the saddle. Took near an hour to reach him, an' all that time he never moved. When we drawed down on him he fell out the saddle. On the trail in, I tried to git his pedigree, but he laid doggo in the buckboard, his mouth clamped like a turtle's. Only when I says point-blank, 'You're one o' the gang dynamited No. 92; you got a express guard's bullet for a label,' he looks at me hard and croaks—yeh, that's the word—he croaks: 'Shot myself clearin' my Colt; she was jammed.' That's why I ast you, could it be done like he said?"

As if waiting for the sheriff's peroration, a voice called, a feeble voice, but with a deep, rasping timbre that identified it for Doctor Wade as the voice of the wounded Connery. He looked at Hammel who, beckoning him to follow, stepped to the room beyond. From the bed on which he lay, the man drew up and as they entered turned his drawn face to the doctor.

"This bullet gonna be my finish?" he asked, but with no emotion in the harsh voice.

Wade shook his head, but Hammel thrust himself into the line of vision.

"Better come clean, Connery. This is a hangin' matter, anyway. You was with this outfit that dynamited No. 92. Your pals is dead. Where's the bullion cached?"

"Bullion?" echoed Connery.

"Yeh Nine bars, from the Oro Grande Mill. Only thing gone out the express car. Was it you 'at shot the guard after you blew in the door? Connery, where's that box of bullion?"

His voice had risen, at his conclusion filled the room threateningly. Connery sank back upon the bed. His eyes, though, met the sheriff's. The latter, visioning a confession, seeing the express company's posted bounty as already in his pocket, bent down, eager. The words came, a husky croak again:

"In the gun boot of my saddle——"

The sheriff leaned closer.

"What?" he whispered.

"Get it—the candlestick—my luck piece." Then unconsciousness claimed Connery again, and the doctor drew Hammel, sputtering indignation, from out the room.

"Candlestick!" the sheriff wound up, mopping his red face. "A damn gambler's superstition. It won't save him

from thirty feet of rope." To the question mirrored in the face of Doctor Wade, he added: "A miner's iron candlestick—it was in his saddle holster, like he said. Hell, that reminds me ——" He shifted with a grunt, reached across his fat paunch and withdrew from his breast pocket a small leather book. "What we goin' to do about this here?"

"Holden's diary, eh? Write the next of kin," replied the doctor.

"That'll be the widow. Boston's where she lives. Letter from her fer Holden in his box at the post office now." He shook his head. "Looks like everything broke loose last night. But this notifying women that their husbands blowed themselves up ain't in *my* line. You write her, Wade."

The doctor shook his head.

"Get the coroner from Silver City. She'll want the remains sent East; there are none. The poor devil's body is scattered over half of Smoky Signal Mountain. How do you suppose it happened?"

"Why, that's what comes o' tryin' to crowd in twenty-four hours work a day. His Mex foreman says that Holden worked the shift alongside them, poundin' with a single jack, then tended the sump pump at night, to keep the mine water down. He went to sleep, the steam got away from him, and she blew up. Safety valve stuck, I reckon."

"The end of the Fortune Teller," said the doctor. "Low-grade ore, wasn't it?"

The sheriff shrugged.

"Some good specimens, but too much water. Holden struck a gusher at level No. 4. He was figgerin' to drive a tunnel from the hillside, tap his crosscut down five hundred feet, and drain her." He touched the notebook. "This here diary's got his field notes. Risky job, the ground's bad, cavey, and a *lot* of water. Why, it was standing in the shaft a hundred feet deep when we got there. Havin' this half-dead road agent in the wagon I didn't stop to nose around much—but the hombre that opens up the Fortune Teller will have to work, doc—damned heavy work, I mean." He looked up as a rusty bed spring creaked. "That road agent's awake ag'in," he said.

A man with close-cropped white hair set his canvas grip on the S. P. platform, watched the heavy train recede along the bright, heat-shimmering rails to where the dry skeleton of earth, the desert, beckoned. Oresburg. His gaze swung, crossed the right of way. Yes, the old boarding house was there, unchanged, as though he had left it only yesterday. A smile crossed the grim, bleached face. An omen. Luck was beside him. He glanced down at the grip, recalled the comment of the prison clerk. His belongings. Junk, the box with its deck of forty Spanish cards, a monte layout—and a miner's candlestick, rust red to its point. Twenty-five years; pardoned out. And the Fortune Teller. Did the water still stand in an idle shaft, or had some wise fool drained it, found the—— He shivered; a torrent of emotion shook his body, and bright spots appeared beneath his sunken eyes. Twenty-five years of repressed desire, of hope, clamored for fulfillment. The thought that, perhaps, *it was gone,* lurked in the shadows. He coughed, and again a fit of shivering took him.

A heavy auto stage rolled up, stopped at the platform. He stared at it, wonderingly. New to him. In his lifetime he had never seen but one gas-driven vehicle, the warden's car. Passengers ascended He spoke to the driver, his voice harsh, croaking:

"Is there any mining hereabouts nowadays?"

The young man glanced curiously at him. Looked like a lunger, down from the sanitarium in Silver City, this old

bird. Didn't he know Oresburg was a ghost camp for twenty years?

"Why; yeh," he answered, flicking a puttee with his gauntlet; "we got *one* mine in the old camp. The Fortune Teller. A man named Holden's opening her up." He laughed. "From Boston. He'll be goin' back though, soon, I reckon"

Then, answering the question in the man's eyes, he explained:

"She's a gusher; been closed twenty-five years. He's tryin' to unwater her —— Say, you're sick, ain't you, mister?"

His auditor was trembling uncontrollably. His knuckles turned white with the grip of his clenched fingers. Fighting for control, the stranger answered hoarsely:

"It's nothing. Where is this mine?" Conscious of the other's stare, he leveled his voice. "I need a job."

The other made a quick appraisal. Broke and a lunger. He pointed to the driving seat.

"Bus trail goes within a mile of Smoky Signal Mountain, where the mine is. Don't know if Holden's hirin', but if you want, you can ride with me. Hop up there."

An hour later he slipped out his clutch, jammed the foot brake, pointed upward.

"There you are," he said; "Smoky Signal. And that head frame's the Fortune Teller."

The man beside him leaned out following the pointing finger. Again that thrill of recognition. The familiar float rock on the hillside, the steel-clad shacks capping the high summit. He dropped his grip upon the desert and stepped down. His hand trembled eagerly as he fumbled in his pocket. The driver waved.

"No charge, mister; this ain't a stop. If you don't locate, I come back just 'fore dusk. Pick you up." The gears growled. He waved and called out, "Good luck, mister," as the heavy motor gathered speed.

From the mule corral on the slope of Smoky Signal Mountain, Charles Holden II., mining engineer, watched the figure moving in across the desert. He saw that Josef, too, was watching.

"Who is it, Vidal?" he asked.

"A stranger. He is old—perhaps a treasure hunter," replied the foreman, and with indifference returned to harnessing the mules. After a time he finished. "Many loads of timbers are required to make safe the tunnel, señor."

"We'll use square sets, like in a stope. I'll go with you this trip and make the deal, then we'll have the men haul the remaining loads while you help me frame the sets." He fell silent, thinking of his father who had labored on the Fortune Teller twenty-five long years ago, had surveyed this very tunnel, laid out to tap the crosscut five hundred feet below ground and drain the flooded workings. This father he had never seen, had died here alone on Smoky Signal, torn to fragments by a bursting boiler on the heights above.

He looked up. The mountaintop loomed formidable, menacing. He felt alone, too. Then he touched an object buttoned in the breast pocket of his khaki shirt. The touch was like a talisman. His shoulders lifted. His was the right to carry on. He drew out his father's notebook, leafed through the formal lettering to the last written words:

Sept. 2, 1901. This day set stakes for adit. B. S. on center Crown Block to Sta. No. 101. True Bearing N. 88° 10′ E. Distance 792.4, Vert. Angle—43° 31′. Note: Stake is roof center. Estimated distance of bore 262.5. Will strike crosscut within thirty days.

Here the lettering faded. Dimly there appeared a scrawled line:

Dorothy and perhaps my son——

It stopped abruptly; an erasure followed. The man who had inscribed it

feared lest he might show the world his heart. Holden studied the book. Two hundred and sixty-two and five tenths feet to tap the shaft. He roused.

"What did yesterday's chain measure, Josef?"

"Two hundred and sixty feet, señor. And the roof caved, a slab, so——" He spread his arms. "Immense. My men, they cry for us to timber then." He looked past young Holden sharply, but the young engineer continued in absorption.

"So close, it's a pity. One shot might break through and free the flooded level. The tunnel breast is soft, a sharp pick would dig a powder hole."

A voice, a worn, croaking voice, behind him, said:

"I'll dig it if them greasers are afraid."

Holden turned.

Then the man before him saw his face. He blenched suddenly as though fire seared him. His eyes showed white in terror.

The foreman crossed himself. "He has a demon."

But as the man swayed Holden slipped an arm about him, eased his shaking body to the long pole of the wagon gear. With senses reeling, Connery fought back the terror that assailed him. Here in the flesh stood the man whom he had murdered two decades ago. His eyes closed, the years fell away, he was again standing in the moonlight on the mountaintop above the crushed body of his victim. Slowly it faded out—the gruesome phantasy. He opened his eyes, muttered in his hoarse voice:

"Sun touched me—— A hard climb."

Holden nodded. The foreman muttered prayers in liquid Spanish, his black eyes kindling with suspicious dread.

Connery's jaw tightened.

"I heard you talkin'—— I want a job. Any job. You're the boss?" Again Holden nodded silently, looked at the spare frame, the white, close-cropped hair. Reading his silence, Connery went on: "I can use a single jack, handle powder—a fair timberman——"

The engineer broke in:

"If you can do mine carpentering, I've got two hundred feet of tunnel sets—shaky ground. I'm driving an adit." He pointed to a waste dump farther down the hill. "Expect to tap a crosscut and unwater this mine." A pause, then, "What's your name?" he asked.

Connery met the sudden question deftly.

"Wade," he answered, his eyes fixed on the other's face. The name registered; the young engineer followed Connery's lead.

"Related to Doctor Wade who used to practice down in Oresburg?"

"Used to." That was what he hoped for. Dead or gone. Luck again. He shook his head, essayed another shot:

"Only feller I knew there was Hammel."

"He's dead, too," Holden answered gently. "You see, I knew them both. They helped my mother get the patent papers on this mine. My father was killed working it."

"Killed?" repeated Connery. He gazed steadily into Holden's face.

"An explosion—the mine boiler. Where are you from, Wade? You look sick."

"Me, I'm from up Prescott way. Working underground for years. Thought I'd find Hammel here," the man lied easily. "I'm broke; he'd 'a' staked me. Work, I want work; I'm no bum."

Holden hesitated. This old man had been a friend of Hammel's, who had been their friend. Still, none knew so well as he, how ill he could afford to hire more labor, the expense of timbering this tunnel, the dead outgo of funds and the low balance in his Boston bank.

The thought of Boston brought his mother's face before him. She seemed to smile as if approving of his choice. He said with decision:

"I've laid off the crew. But you can help frame the timbering. We'll be gone, though, until to-morrow night, hauling from a saw mill in the Sacredos. Just leaving now."

"Let me bed down somewheres," pleaded Connery. The blind goddess favored him again. He could not mask the avid pull of his desire. "I'll pay you for some grub and blankets."

The foreman, Vidal, stepped to Holden's side to whisper a quick protest, born of some mysterious intuition; but the engineer turned from him.

"Stay here, Wade," he said impulsively. "I don't know you, but in this country I find a man's word generally is good. I take yours, that you're honest. A lonesome place, unless some of these treasure hunters make their camp here."

"Treasure hunters?" Connery repeated the words in his harsh, forbidding voice.

The young engineer smiled.

"Out there on the right of way is a monument. To mark the last of the road agents. Twenty-five years ago three desperadoes dynamited a train there. Two were killed, the third killed the express guard, escaped with a sealed box of bullion, bars of rough gold routed East. This third man was captured somewhere in the desert basin, but he'd cached the gold. A hundred pounds, too heavy to pack far. Besides, he was wounded. The express company posted a reward—a big sum. So for years the hopeful have scoured the desert for this treasure. We thought you were one."

Connery spoke casually:

"The third man, he died?"

"No, a life sentence. He may have died in prison." Then Holden pointed to the shaft house. "Blankets and grub up there. Don't wander in the tunnel; ground's treacherous."

Vidal lashed the camp roll to the wagon; the two mounted. Holden waved a farewell to his new hand; they were gone.

Alone! Connery mounted to the shaft house, his heart pumping wildly. He was suffocated with a fever of exultation. The mad hope locked in his breast for twenty-five long years had become real. Luck! He had kept his luck. He glanced down at the grip. Within it lay the *luck piece*. At the shaft-house door he paused The wagon crawled below him down the trail. In his ears, the singing of desert insects. He saw the steel tape of polished rails glinting on the ocher desert far away. Twenty-five years. The son of Holden. He had not known his victim's name before. The son to unlock the treasure that required the father's death to seal! Connery laughed, and the iron shaft-house walls returned the sound—harsh, mirthless.

Trembling again, he opened the grip, withdrew the candlestick, laid it on the rough table top. His luck piece! He picked it up, fondled it. He loved this bit of pointed iron. His luck piece. He found an open box of miners' candles, cut one in two, fitted it into the rust-eaten clip. Then, still grasping tight his luck piece, he sat down to formulate his plans. A faint smile lit the pallid face. Treacherous ground. Not for him! He glanced again at the iron talisman. One shot to blow the breast in, and the shaft would drain. He saw hand drills and a single jack heaped in a corner, waiting. And a box of gelatin, sixty per cent. Stout stuff. Where were the caps and fuse? He rose, located them hanging from a rafter, out of reach of trade rats. With the reassurance of these things, his nerves fell into line. He completed preparations deftly, sure fingered. Through a window he saw two ponies loose in the corral, a moun-

tain wagon with heavy brake shoes just outside. Harness, hanging on a peg above his head. Everything! He stretched a blanket on the floor to rest and wait for sunset.

Sunset. As the last flat rays were painted out by darkness, he crept down the mountain, the drills clinking faintly in the sack he held. Hooked to his hatband was the candlestick. The tunnel mouth, black, ghostly as a tomb, confronted him. Stillness wrapped the hillside in a solemn shroud. He paused, awed by the pressure of the heavy silence. A chill air current like Death's clammy fingers stroked his face. He shivered, then, summoning the iron of his will, stepped into the shelter of the cave, lit his candle, and pressed forward. The flickering candlelight made strange shapes, long, phantom shadows on the converging walls. Visions crowded for admittance; ugly, dreadful faces leered in through the windows of his mind. He turned them back defeated by the sharp sword of his purpose.

Then the tunnel breast—the end of his journey! He reached out, touched the damp rock face, stumbling over the muck rock at his feet. The end of his journey—the last barrier! Twenty-five years, a quarter of a century of pent-up hope was suddenly unleashed. He stripped to the waist, laid the oiled sticks of dynamite, the caps and fuse, a dozen paces to his rear, shook the tools free, and attacked the tunnel breast. Sweat poured down his body, streamed into his eyes. The air was stagnant, humid, reeking sweet with fumes of powder exhaled from the spongy, damp rock walls about him.

The candlestick, thrust by its point deep into the rotten porphyry, had tapped a tiny water pocket; on the looped handle beads of moisture formed. The flame of the candle guttered, smoked, throwing weirdly changing shadows on the glistening walls. The drill was sunk in the soft rock nearly to its head. He freed it, and began another inclined hole above, which he would shoot, in synchronism with the first, thus breaking out a wedge, and freeing the sullen flood that lay above his treasure.

As he released the hex bar from the second hole, he saw with satisfaction a rill of water trickle from it down the breast. Just the proper depth. He brought the dynamite, and with his teeth crimped copper caps on each of two unequal lengths of fuse. One greasy stick in each hole, wedged with a wooden tamp; a second stick above from which the stiff, white fuses hung in coils like writhing snakes. He dropped the tools, slimy with rock cuttings, in the sack, carried it back down the tunnel, and returned.

He was ready, waiting the fulfillment which two-score years of dreams had pictured. He hesitated, lingering on the moment, then reached up to the candlestick. It was firmly lodged; he tugged, twisted, until he felt the point bend, and a slab of rock crashed down. Suddenly the candlestick came strangely free. He staggered back, shielding the flame with his cupped hand. His luck piece! Again he paused. The cold touch of the bit of twisted iron in his palm brought a sense of strength, invincibility. In a fleeting span of time he reviewed the years, the passage of events that now were culminating. The candlestick. Luck from the first touch of the iron that night long ago on Smoky Signal Mountain. Luck, from first to last.

Another, larger fragment of the wall about the crevice where the candlestick had hung, fell. It shattered on the floor, its echoes booming through the cavern. He did not heed it. Luck, from first to last. A few disintegrated granules tinkled down. He brushed one from his shoulder, stooped and lit the fuses. Behind him, a huge rock segment quivered fatefully. The crevice slowly widened.

One face, a mass of porphyry, moved, swung, as a door stirs in a gentle summer breeze. The fuses sputtered. Points of white light scintillated from them, painting deep the shadows on the rough walls, lighting the pallid face of Connery. He turned; his task was done. Luck, from first to last. Tomorrow, he would be working toward the border, a box of gold between his feet.

The sudden grind of rock surfaces that slipped—a dull, thunderous roar—a whip of disturbed air snuffed his candle. Rock splinters stung him. He stood inert, robbed of the will to move. The rock dust settled—a mighty stone had made this place his sepulcher. The sputtering fuses vanished in the drill holes. The candlestick fell from his hand——

Overdue, the wagon with its heavy burden creaked up the side of Smoky Signal. The foreman, Vidal, suddenly checked the mules.

"Look, señor," he said.

The road ahead, where it crossed below the tunnel mouth, was washed away. Holden sprang off the load and ran to where mine water flowed across the wagon trail.

"The breast's caved!" he cried, and climbed on up the mountain to the shaft, Vidal close behind him, panting. A quick glance through the shaft house, at the open grip upon the floor.

"Wade!" he called, but only Vidal's breathing sounded hoarsely.

He snatched a carbide lamp up from the table, lit it, and stepping out of the doorway, prepared to descend the shaft. He dropped a pebble, heard its brittle clink below, and, heedless of the foreman's protests, followed down the ladder. Vidal, praying loudly to his saints, trailed.

At the shaft bottom, resting on the platform built above the sump, the foreman's lamp outlined a square box. Holden's light was bobbing in the darkness of the crosscut. Vidal waited. Surely duty did not call him farther. The light returned, and Holden's figure halted by the dripping timbers of the station. Thoughtfully, he kicked the box.

"The road agent's treasure," he said dully. His face was solemn. "Poor Wade! Tried to help us, and the rock fall caught him I found this at the break. We never use them, so it must be his."

He dropped the object. Its point fastened quivering in the box—a miner's candlestick.

Don't miss the next issue of THE POPULAR. *A new serial, "War Paint," by Dane Coolidge, will start—and it is a knock-out!*

TWO-OCEAN PASS

HIGH up in the Rockies is the only spot in America that is neither on the Atlantic or the Pacific slope. The trail to this spot follows along the Continental Divide, "on the top o' the world," and is through a country as untrodden as when the fur traders explored in the early years of the last century, for there is nowhere any road or any human habitation and the big game roam unmolested. Mountain lakes supply clear, cold water in abundance and they are all filled with trout. At Two-ocean Plateau a stream heads and flows to the pass where it divides into two streams, one flowing to the Atlantic Ocean through the Yellowstone River, and the other into the Pacific Ocean through the mighty Snake River.

A Chat With You

IT is hard to describe a good story. To describe anything new and original is difficult. To describe a beautiful sunset to a man who had never seen one would be quite impossible so far as making him understand what you meant. To describe New York or London and the habits of those who live there to an Indian of the plains would be also a hopeless task. We are aided a little in talking about the next number by the fact that lots of you have read good stories in this publication in the past and know what we mean when we say a good story.

* * * *

THOSE who write advertising copy study the thing which has to be sold for talking points. This tobacco is toasted before it is made into a cigarette, therefore its flavor is more delicious. This tobacco is so carefully blended that it will not hurt your throat or give you a cough. This shaving soap has such an affinity for water that it makes bubbles so small as to make the razor slide more easily. These shoes are made out of the outer hide, well tanned so that they will keep out water and wear a long time. These are all talking points and sound ones. It must be said for the big advertisers that they tell the truth.

* * * *

WE have a good novel to open the next issue. If we used all the good talking points about it we would spoil the story. You may smoke two or three cigarettes and get as much kick out of the last as the first. You may shave innumerable times with the one shaving soap and each time it will be as well. But for a story, it is the first time that counts. So we say that the Western novel, complete in the next number, "The Vanishing Prospector," is a good story, and we pause at that. Please take our word for it.

* * * *

J. H. GREENE, who wrote the story, would be a good man to write a story about. Australian born, partly of Irish ancestry, a natural lover of the outdoor life, he was prospector for gold mines and an actor after that before he thought of becoming an author. Then he found himself.

* * * *

THE other feature that comes to our mind in the next issue is "War Paint," by Dane Coolidge. You say a story has action in it. It may have physical action in it. A man may be shot or knocked down in every page but it may mean nothing. When Coolidge writes a story that has action in it, it is a story that makes the mind and emotions of the reader act. This is a tale of Texas. Did any of you who hail from the West ever hear of the Lincoln County war? If so, speak up. Did any of you ever hear of a gallant, reckless and utterly unfortunate man named Billy, the Kid? He had both friends and enemies and they were both strong on their side. Read "War Paint," if you please, and see if you know any one in the cast of characters.

* * * *

BACK to the East for a moment and you will find just as much action and adventure. "Crossroads At Jericho," by Will McMorrow, is about a young fellow who got a bump on the head and forgot who he was. Then some crook persuaded him he was a

bank robber. Have we told too much about the story? That's the trouble about talking of a really good story. You are apt to give too much away and so spoil it just a little for the reader.

* * * *

ROY NORTON is an author most people know, and if they don't, allow us to make the introductions now. There is no time like the present for a good deed and so, we say, watch the issue of this magazine out next Friday for "The Long Score," a good long story complete in the one issue, by Roy Norton.

In the same issue of THE POPULAR you will meet William Hemmingway who writes a little better about sports than any one we know. Also Robert J. Pearsall with a corking aviation story. Charles Neville Buck will give you the thrill of the great contests of thoroughbreds in Kentucky.

We have often been assured by you that this is a good magazine. There must be something in it, for the writers who make it are certainly good.

THE POPULAR

In the Next Issue, May 12, 1928

The Vanishing Prospector	J. H. GREENE
The Long Score	ROY NORTON
War Paint A Five-part Story—Part I.	DANE COOLIDGE
Forced Down	ROBERT J. PEARSALL
Crossroads at Jericho A Two-part Story—Part II.	WILL McMORROW
Flying Hoofs A Five-part Story—Part IV.	CHARLES NEVILLE BUCK
Jimmy Freer Tackles Goliath	WILLIAM HEMMINGWAY
A Chat with You	THE EDITOR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SPEARMINT
LASTS
THE PERFECT GUM
MINT LEAF FLAVOR
The flavor of fresh mint leaves adds to your Springtime joys.
"After Every meal"
1-37

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DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY. Great demand. Excellent opportunity. Experience unnecessary. Particulars free. Write, George Wagner, 2190 Broadway, New York.

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RAILWAY POSTAL CLERKS. $158.00 month. 25 men, 18 up coached free. Write immediately, Franklin Institute, Dept. C2, Rochester, N. Y.

FOREST RANGER POSITIONS pay $125-$200 month; nice cabin. Hunt, trap, patrol. Get free list Nat'l Forests immediately. Rayson Inst., Dept. A-10, Denver, Colo.

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Male Help—Instructions

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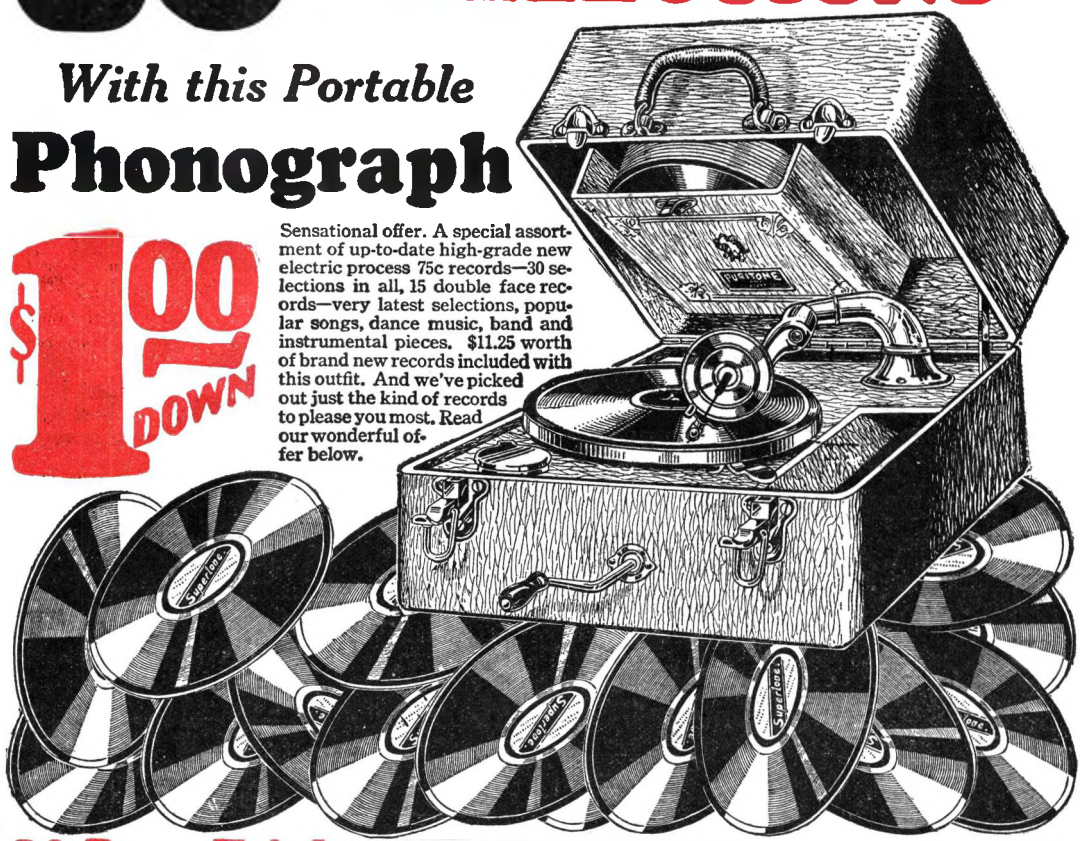

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Sensational offer. A special assortment of up-to-date high-grade new electric process 75c records—30 selections in all, 15 double face records—very latest selections, popular songs, dance music, band and instrumental pieces. $11.25 worth of brand new records included with this outfit. And we've picked out just the kind of records to please you most. Read our wonderful offer below.

30 Days Trial Yes, we will send this Puritone portable phonograph outfit, with 30 high grade selections, 15 double face 75c records to your home on 30 days trial for only $1.00 with the coupon. Use it as your own and see what a wonderful convenience it is to have a phonograph that you can carry from room to room. Use the outfit on 30 days trial. If within 30 days you decide not to keep the outfit, send it back and we'll refund your $1.00 plus all transportation charges.

$2.60 a month If you keep it, pay only $2.60 a month until you have paid—only $26.85. Think of it, a first-class high grade phonograph, and 15 high grade up-to-date double face records—(30 selections) a complete outfit, ready to play, only $26.85.

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31x4	3.25	1.40	BALLOONS		
32x4	3.25	1.50	29x4.40	$2.75	$1.60
33x4	3.75	1.80	30x4.95	3.10	1.75
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