THE SECRET OF No. 1 by Alan Sullivan

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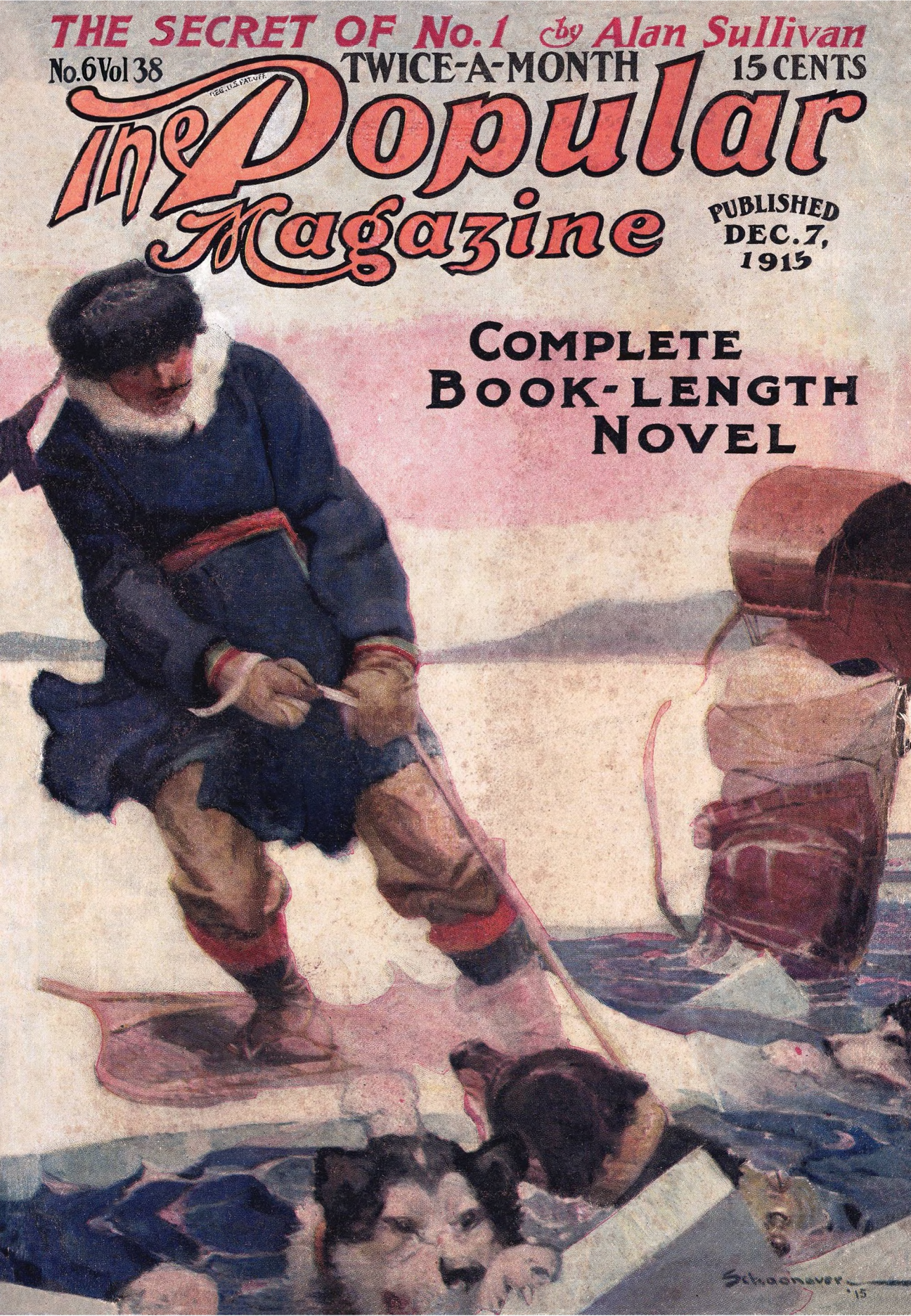
COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL



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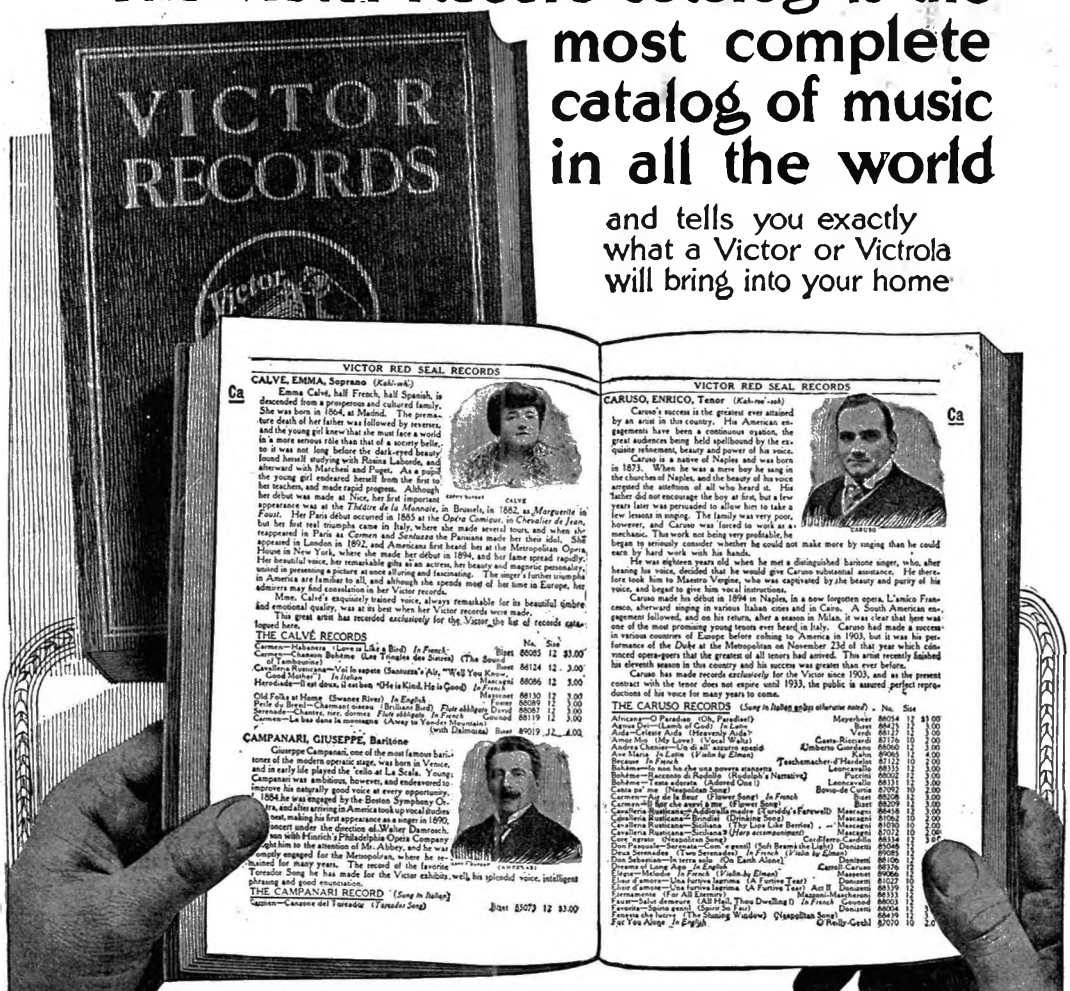

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VOLUME XXXVIII NUMBER 6

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

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DECEMBER 7, 1915

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THE CHRISTMAS POPULAR ON SALE DECEMBER 20th

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XXXVIII. DECEMBER 7, 1915. No. 6.

The Secret of Number One

By Alan Sullivan

Author of "Consecrated Ground," "Special Service," Etc.

Some of you have asked for a mystery novel, "the kind that keeps you guessing." Here is the novel; the narrative of a man who accepts a strange offer, starts on a strange quest, with strange companions, meeting strange adventures and strange men—the strangest of all a mysterious Unknown who is referred to as Number One. You *may* solve the riddle of the secret quest, but if you do you should be *writing* novels, not *reading* them.

(*A Complete Novel*)

CHAPTER I.

ON an evening in May a tall, broad-shouldered young man stood staring into a window of a well-known foreign restaurant. This restaurant nestles modestly in the basement of an old building off Broadway and well below Forty-second Street. It is known to New York epicures and to a very few of the army of travelers that yearly flows in and out through the sea gates of Sandy Hook.

The young man stood quite motionless. He was extremely well dressed in clothes of expensive fabric and cut. To look casually at him, one would, without hesitation, put him down as a well-to-do and wandering Saxon, who paused in his journey to contemplate this unique altar of gastronomy.

But if one should look a little closer, it would have become quite evident that there was something tense in the thin face with its high bones, hollow cheeks, and bright, restless eyes. His well-cut clothes hung loosely round a frame which would have been that of a Hercules had it not been so gaunt. Youth was there. It was evident in the spring of the shoulders, the straight, erect figure, and the suggestion of supple activity. But it was, for all of this, youth that battled with hunger and had visibly dwindled in the conflict.

His eyes roved from end to end, then back and across the dining room. He saw a double row of dainty tables, each with an electric candle glowing softly beneath the small silk pyramid. Between the tables was a central aisle, along which black-coated, white-shirted waiters moved noiselessly and laid down their burdens with that touch of

reverence which every waiter displays in such a restaurant as Florio's.

The tables were mostly occupied. On the right and in the middle of the row, the eyes of the gaunt young man were held by the sight of a remarkable pair. With his back to the wall, so that the profile was sharply visible, sat a huge man with massive shoulders and an enormous black beard. The softened light fell directly on his face, making his beard appear doubly black and glossy. His eyes were brilliant, his hair was thick and bushy, his face peculiarly white. The frame of the man was vast and heavy. There was something which struck the watcher as impenetrable and mystifying about him. He seemed remote and alien. On his right, facing the window, was a girl. Her darkness matched that of her companion, her eyes were luminous, and the sheer loveliness of her face made the watcher stare. She seemed distrait, and listened to the big man with palpable diffidence. She was perhaps twenty. He might have been forty-five. They were curiously alike.

The watcher peered intently. A waiter presented a dish. She looked at it and shook her head.

The young man's lips twitched and a grim smile wrinkled his face. Then, with a curious impassiveness, he searched his pockets. His manner was that of a man who knows exactly what he will find. There appeared a gold cigarette case with an inlaid crest, a pocketknife, an empty sovereign case, a handkerchief, and a small leather purse. He tilted the latter, smiled again at its unresponsiveness, then stared for a moment at the cigarette case. It lay in his hand, its dull yellow glow suggesting a value which to such a man must have seemed a fortune. He shook his head, slid it back into his pocket, and peered again through the window. Then, with a sudden straightening of his shoulders, he strode to the door.

"Now for it," he chuckled. "It has to come some time, and I may as well do it in style."

The head waiter slipped forward, and, with a quick glance, bowed obsequiously. He recognized a gentleman inside the old clothes.

"One, sir?"

The stranger nodded and followed down the aisle. The head waiter stopped at a table. It was immediately opposite the black-bearded man. "Will this do, sir?"

The young man dropped into a chair, then, slowly, and with extreme minuteness, began to order such a dinner as is seldom ordered even in Florio's.

The waiter listened, scribbled, and, as the list proceeded, became doubly reverential. This patron was an artist, one who knew the difference between a dinner and a meal. So he finished with a flourish and beckoned to his most deft assistant.

A few minutes later the stranger nibbled an olive, and, in great apparent contentment, shot a curious, questioning glance across the aisle. The big man was talking slowly, and, it seemed, with unusual difficulty, in a queer language that was full of clicks and short, sharp-sibilant words. The girl's lips were compressed, and she shook her head several times, as if in emphatic dissent. But her companion only laughed—a big laugh that rumbled through the restaurant as though it came from the depths of his enormous chest.

The young man leaned back, surveyed his own garnished table, and began to plod solidly through a series of delicacies on which Florio's inspired chef had lavished all his culinary genius. The attendant waiter stood as if at a sacrament. In between courses, the stranger caught the big man's eyes fixed keenly on him. Once he leaned forward and said something to the girl

in an undertone. She, too, glanced, then nodded.

Half an hour passed. The thin young man sipped at his Burgundy and watched his gigantic neighbor lay a hundred-dollar note on the inverted bill. He put down his own glass with a touch of resignation, dipped a long finger in the bowl, looked at his own waiter, and nodded. There was a queer expression on his lean face. It seemed at once grim and amused. He had dined well, but his dinner apparently was linked with some inevitable sequence for which he now waited. He leaned back, with his jaw thrust out and his hands deep in his pockets.

The big man's change and his own bill arrived at the same moment. He glanced at the total of the latter. It was nine dollars and forty cents.

"I would like to see the manager," he spoke very distinctly.

The attendant waiter looked at him, then hurried anxiously away. In another moment the manager of Florio's appeared.

"I hope you have no complaint, sir," he said, folding fat hands over a spotless waistcoat.

The tall young man hesitated. "No —not exactly. I—er—rather think the complaint—er—will not come from me."

"I don't quite understand you."

"You—er—will shortly. That is, I was looking in through your window, you know, and it looked—er—such a capital place—I decided to dine here."

"Yes, sir. Your dinner was what you wanted, I hope."

The young man's lips twitched, and again that curious smile flickered across his thin face. "Exactly! Never wanted a dinner so much in my life. Never had one that seemed half so good. The only trouble is," he added, with a flush in his hollow cheeks, "that I can't pay for it."

A medley of expressions chased across the manager's countenance. "You're joking, sir."

"Not at all—at least, it's not my joke. Now," he added, with a touch of quizzical defiance, "what are you going to do about it?"

"Do you mean to tell——"

"I mean to tell you just this," said the stranger doggedly, staring straight at him. "I am dead broke. I had to have a dinner; there are times you know when one has to have a dinner. It might just as well be a good one as not, and since I believe you have the best chef in New York, you see it was quite natural for me to come here. Unfortunately I can't pay you at the present moment, but you will be paid without question within the next few years. Here's my card. Now it's your move."

The dazed manager glanced at it, dubiously wrathful. "How do I know this is your name? If it were, why, I might——" he hesitated.

The young man's hand plunged into his pocket. "I can prove it. Just look here." Then, as if moved by some new and negative impulse, his back stiffened. "You'll have to take my word for it."

"Take the word of a——"

"Steady! Look out for yourself?" snapped the stranger viciously and drew back his clenched fist.

The manager recoiled and grew suddenly purple. "Get a policeman, quick!" he gasped.

Two or three waiters heard him and started nervously in a run for the door. Then a big, deep voice boomed suddenly: "Stop! There is some mistake. The gentleman is joking; he is dining with me."

The young man wheeled abruptly. His black-bearded neighbor had risen, and, crossing the aisle, now looked down on them from his great height. He was smiling.

"There is no occasion for trouble." he said smoothly. "You will be kind enough to forget this matter, and the

gentleman will do me an honor. We shall finish our dinner together with a kümmel. So! Two kümmels—at once."

The rotund little manager melted away in a cloud of fluent apologies. A waiter flashed down the aisle and disappeared in pursuit of the order. The big man laid a hand on the stranger's shoulder, and, in a moment, the latter, questioning his own sanity, found himself seated at the table across the aisle, sipping a liqueur.

The girl did not so much as look at him; then, after a perceptible pause, the big man began to talk, with evident friendliness in his deep, smooth, velvety voice. He spoke perfect English. It struck the stranger that he spoke English better than his own strange tongue.

"I am Ivan Stanovitch, of—St. Petersburg. We Russians are, if I may say so, believers in chance. The unexpected has a curious fascination for the Slav. Chance is a beautiful goddess. To-night I have begun to think so more than ever. Now, my English guest, for you are English, even though you are unknown, be kind and follow me."

He sat back, lit a long cigarette, and beamed blackly through the smoke. "Men are too much in chains. Almost all men serve a slave driver. They call her Convention. To-night I stamp on Convention, here, in Florio's restaurant. Across the table I have watched you, and my interest in you began before your dilemma. Then when your dilemma came I said to myself, 'There is a man.' That is because you, too, stamped on Convention. There are not many men who will order a good dinner with empty pockets. That is why I call you a man. If you weighed another forty pounds I should have called you a Hercules. I myself am not a weakling. So—observe."

He took the plated sugar bowl between thumb and forefinger, then, slowly, and without the slightest evident effort, compressed it. The young man stared. The broad, flat nails turned a vivid scarlet and a staring white under terrific force. Gradually the bowl flattened and the sugar in it was crushed to powder. When the top edges were touching like the twin shells of an oyster, Stanovitch, with the touch of a child, laid it delicately on the cloth. Then he looked at his guest and laughed.

"So! You see you are talking to a man. To resume—I ask you, my unknown friend, whether you are open for an engagement?"

The young man took out his card-case and pushed over a pasteboard. "I had better introduce myself."

Stanovitch glanced at it, smiled again, hesitated, and then rose massively. "Natalie, I present Mr. Pearson."

The girl looked up quickly and bowed, but did not speak. Pearson, watching her curiously, fancied he saw a shade of displeasure in her exquisite face. Then the deep voice broke in again:

"I want a man who has courage and self-reliance, who can withstand danger, exposure, and hardship, and who is ready to withstand them. He must be willing to do exactly as he is told, at any place or time. To such a man I will pay five thousand dollars for a year's service."

Five thousand dollars was a fortune to Pearson that evening. "Perhaps before you go any farther I should tell you something of myself," he said.

The Russian lifted a huge hand. "I can assure you that it is not in any way necessary. You have already told me a great deal about yourself. Far more, perhaps, than you at all imagine. You English have a saying that actions speak louder than words. Your action this evening has proved your courage. Your clothes indicate your birth. Your shoulders betray your strength. So, you see, I am fairly well informed."

Pearson flushed. "With every credit to your powers of observation, I should prefer to make my own statement."

"So! As you wish."

"Meeting you across the dead body of Convention," began Pearson, smiling, "I might add that you must also have been very well aware that I was dead broke and half starved. Your consideration makes you silent on those points."

Stanovitch nodded. "A distressing subject."

"Yes, but quite evident. In addition, I would add that I am twenty-seven years old. In a few years, if I am alive, and if somebody else is dead, which I can reasonably expect, I will come into a place in England of which, perhaps, you may have heard. They call it a show place. In the meantime, according to an admirable Saxon custom, I am without means of support. I have done a good deal of big-game shooting in Canada, and am considered a good shot and an excellent woodsman. I played in the Oxford Rugby team and rowed stroke for my college. I hold the cross-country record for ten miles, and have done a little botany, which interests me a great deal. I have no sisters or brothers. The present owner of the estate is unkind enough to regard me with extreme disfavor, and, to be candid with you, I don't hesitate to say I would like to wring his neck. I served in South Africa, and can speak a little Zulu. I think that is all."

His host nodded again very contentedly. "You may be surprised to know that I have assumed most of that. It is not at all difficult to guess your age approximately. Your long arms look like an oarsman's, your long legs like a runner's, you have lost the African tan, and I observed a small white scar under your left jaw. It looks remarkably like a bullet hole. I heard you order your dinner, and, as you must admit, that explains a good deal."

Pearson laughed. His eyes wandered to the girl's impassive face, then back to her father. "There is one thing I would like to know. Where do you want your man to go?"

"Ah, that reminds me, there is one thing I omitted to say. The man I engage must not ask questions—under any circumstances whatever."

The young man stared at him keenly from beneath half-lowered lids. Then he glanced at the girl. There came from her an infinitesimal movement, and for a fraction of time their eyes met. In that fraction he seemed to catch a flicker of warning, but so faint was it that a second later he questioned his own vision. Then, thinking hard, and with Stanovitch obviously waiting for his answer, there crept into Pearson's heart a curious defiance of time and circumstance alike. An hour ago he had groped for something—for anything to do. Now, looking back at that lean figure which had stared so hungrily in through Florio's window, he realized vividly that he had no stomach for what he then knew, for that which waited a beggar in New York. Beneath Stanovitch's bland cordiality, there seemed, in spite of all his bluff hospitality, to lurk something cold, mysterious, unfathomable, and sinister. At this, the Saxon in Pearson rose in sudden defiance, a defiance that sent a new, vibrant pulse tingling through his body. Presently he looked up, with a sudden color in his cheeks and a new glint in his steel-gray eyes.

"Let us refer it to the goddess of whom you spoke—Chance."

The Russian nodded quickly. "Yes, by all means."

Pearson blushed, and hesitated. "Then, will you—please—I—unfortunately——"

"Ah!" laughed Stanovitch. "Forgive me. I had forgotten. Those days are ended now."

He picked a gold piece from a small

mountain of coin, flipped it in the air, and smothered it beneath his great palm.

"Well?" he said, with a curious note in his voice.

"Heads!" snapped Pearson.

The palm lifted, and the profile of the czar glinted on the spotless linen. Simultaneously the girl started, with a quick indrawing of the breath. "Father!" she said sharply.

Stanovitch laughed, and patted her slight shoulder; then he held out his hand to Pearson.

"The goddess smiles," he chuckled. "Waiter, champagne—at once! You, Mr. Pearson, will forget your troubles."

The champagne appeared as if by magic. Stanovitch rose, towering above them like a bland, smiling, confident giant. Pearson felt again that strange wonder as to what was moving behind this unwrinkled exterior.

"So, Natalie, we will drink to the success of my new associate. May he prosper, may he find what we seek. Get up, Natalie, and drink!"

There was in his voice a strain that struck Pearson with a sudden and unexplainable chill. Stanovitch seemed potent with something about which he would not under any circumstances say anything. The girl hesitated, then rose from her chair. Her face also was a riddle. Its smooth contour betrayed nothing. The eyes of Stanovitch held her strongly as she drank. They seemed almost to have lifted her from her feet. Then, as she sank into her seat, her glass dropped and shivered on the floor. And all the time she had not spoken a word.

A strange expression moved across her father's face. Pearson got an idea that it was suddenly and swiftly transformed into fury—but only for the minutest space of time. In an instant he was smiling again.

"A good augury. It means 'to the very end.' My daughter has paid you a Russian compliment. That glass will never serve any meaner use. So, my friend, you will meet me to-morrow morning at the Baltic Hotel. In the meantime, since I am fortunate enough to be your employer, you will allow me."

He pressed a roll of notes into Pearson's hand, then dropped the girl's cloak over her shoulders. She turned, glanced at the young man without expression or word of good-by, bowed silently, and walked slowly toward the door. Stanovitch took his guest's hand into a gigantic clasp. "Till to-morrow, and good night—my confrère."

The young man gaped after the retreating form. He was too dazed to say much. Then, tingling with the fact that his hitherto empty pockets were now full of unexpected wealth, he walked thoughtfully to a lodging house on the East Side. There he rooted out a leather portmanteau and sent a boy for a taxi. The habits of old days were strong upon him. He ordered the chauffeur to drive him to the most expensive hotel in New York.

He tossed through a restless night. The world was good again, after a very bad dream. In the back of his head he had never entirely relinquished the belief that the world at large was at the bottom an excellent world. He had been unfortunate enough to get out of touch with its most attractive phases, but that was only an incident, and did not effect the main axiom. Now he seemed to have bobbed up in some other world dominated by an enormous man with a black beard, at whose mission in life he could only guess. But it was, nevertheless, a world that had suddenly become vastly more suggestive and inviting than the easy, comfortable one in which he used to jog so luxuriously along. As for Natalie, Pearson gave up the thought of her altogether. No matter how darkly luminous her eyes might be, or how exquisite the oval of

her face, she was cold, utterly and absolutely cold and uninteresting. "But," he thought suddenly, "why did she break that wineglass?"

CHAPTER II.

Stanovitch at Florio's and Stanovitch at the Baltic were two different men. Thus Pearson concluded when next morning he reached that ancient hostelry. The Russian now seemed very quiet, rather silent, and, without the slightest doubt, a man of affairs. He spoke in a level monotone which revealed nothing of what might be moving in his massive head. As to his destination he gave not the slightest hint. Nor was there anything in his face to encourage the inquiry. He simply handed Pearson a short typewritten list.

You will, if you please, get these things at once, and meet me at the Grand Central Station in the center of the rotunda at exactly a quarter to eight to-night. With regard to the rifle which you will notice on the list, I assume from what you have told me of your own experiences that you have your preference. I myself have found the Ryolet .305 an excellent weapon under many varied conditions. With the cordite cartridge it is practically point-blank up to four hundred yards. The bull-nosed bullet expands admirably, and is very effective. Of course, it is quite probable that you know as much about all this as I do. I would only add, however, that it will almost certainly contribute to your personal security to be extremely careful about what you decide to get. One thing more. I find that in very low temperatures those rifles that have cast-steel parts are apt to be very tricky. The castings get brittle. I have found that forged steel is much more dependable. The rest of the list does not require any special direction. As for footwear, I might say that you will only wear boots in summertime. I think that is all. At seven-forty-five, if you please; good morning.

Pearson read the note, and nodded.

"Yes, I quite understand," he said; "but I'd like to suggest that a little more information as to your object would be very acceptable. That isn't a question; it's a statement."

The Russian smiled. "Ah, you put it very neatly, and for your curiosity I will tell you this: We go where few men are for that which all men want."

"Gold!" speculated the new recruit.

The big man lit a cigarette. "There is that which is more precious than gold."

"I'm afraid I'm not much wiser. Diamonds?"

"Knowledge is born of experience, and yours is yet to come." Then, his expression changing, Stanovitch added coldly: "Good morning!"

Pearson rose and bowed. At the moment he seemed to be dealing with a strange, remote, incomprehensible person, whose individuality required some exchange other than a blunt, Saxon shake of the hand. Next moment the elevator door clashed, and, dropping earthward, he walked down Fifth Avenue in a maze of conjecture that resulted in a total disregard of traffic regulations, and risked his life a dozen times. Very carefully he went over what Stanovitch had said. It was perfectly clear that obviously there could be no question about these explicit orders, and yet, on the other hand, he was conscious subjectively of nothing except one enormous question. He loved a rifle, but had no desire to go barefoot in winter. The puzzle jockeyed about in his brain. Was Stanovitch some magnificent maniac who had developed a grotesque vagary in which the goddess Chance had involved a wandering Saxon? Was he himself standing on the threshold of something remote and mysterious that men of his own type could only dimly guess at?

Half an hour later, he entered the shop of a famous gunsmith and stated his requirements.

The proprietor seemed particularly affable. He took up a rifle that lay on the counter, fingered it lovingly, glanced

along the steel, blue barrel, and dusted an imaginary speck from the glossy walnut stock.

"This is a Ryolet .305. I think it is one of the best we ever made. We only had three in stock, and I sold two yesterday. It looks as if this one wouldn't be here long."

Pearson balanced it, and crooked two fingers round the trigger. "It's a beauty; it's a perfect weapon!"

The gunsmith beamed. He had been watching Pearson's hands, and noted the two fingers. They spoke volumes. "We couldn't do any better if we tried for a hundred years. We only make one thing, and we do our level best with it. How about the drop in the stock? It seems about right for you. There is a private range behind, if you would like to try her."

The young man nodded, and followed to the rear of the shop. Three hundred feet away, down a four-foot lane, shone the target with a four-inch bull. The light was excellent. He fingered the rifle, and began to feel supremely happy.

The gunsmith handed him half a dozen gallery shells. "Is the light all right, sir?"

Pearson nodded, and grinned contentedly as the butt of the Ryolet nestled into his shoulder. Slowly the foresight rose till it centered the aperture. Then the two fingers tightened on the trigger.

"Shade low, sir," said the gunsmith, peering through his glass.

Pearson reloaded, took a little more elevation, and fired again.

"Bull, sir!" The proprietor smiled as he recognized a marksman. "Won't you finish them? It will get your eye in."

Pearson grinned again. There was something he found supremely comforting in the pressure of his cheek against that smooth stock. There was a certain grim satisfaction in the control of his muscles, the steadiness of his nerve, and the way in which the black disk on the target crept so steadily into the center of the sights.

"Thanks; don't mind if I do. Ripping rifle, this!"

Three minutes later the gunsmith ambled down the four-foot lane and stood for a moment with his nose close to the four-inch disk. Then carefully he detached it. There was just one hole on the lower edge of the bull's-eye. The middle of the disk was torn and ragged. It had been shot clean away.

He came trotting back, with a new respect in his pink face and quick, blue eye. "Good work, sir!"

"I'll take her," said Pearson cheerfully, after another close inspection of the Ryolet. "That is, of course, if you have plenty of ammunition. I want a thousand rounds of cordite, a hundred of them with bull-nosed bullets."

The gunsmith nodded. He had decided that things were going very well with him. He felt communicative, also he liked the clean-cut look of this young six-footer with the steady, gray eyes.

"Well, I'm glad to say that's the third Ryolet I have sold since yesterday morning. I told you that before, didn't I? The same gentleman bought them both; one of them was a lady's rifle. The prettiest thing you ever saw—that is, I mean the rifle," he said, with a twinkle.

Pearson pricked up his ears. There came a faint suggestion that perhaps already his feet had stumbled onto the mysterious trail. "That's rather curious. Do you remember what he was like?"

"Yes. I certainly do. Couldn't forget him if I tried. A great big man, about a mile thick, with a black beard and calm, black eyes that seemed to see right through one. A foreigner, I think. I took him out to the gallery, and he did some shooting, too, but he didn't come quite up to your record.

The funny thing is he wanted a thousand rounds of cordite, just like yourself."

Pearson's heart beat a trifle faster. "Did he say where he was going to shoot?"

"No; he didn't say a word about it. He had me puzzled. But he was very particular about the material I put into Ryolet rifles. Why, do you know, I had to guarantee it is all forged steel. Of course, it is all forged, but no one ever cross-questioned like that before. I remember he said one had to be very particular, because——"

"Yes. Why?"

"He said that when cast steel got very cold it was apt to get brittle. So, judging by that, I reckon he is not going to South America."

Pearson hesitated, then laughed uncomfortably. "It doesn't sound much like it, does it?"

A little later, his brows wrinkling, he stared at the last item on the list. "What on earth does any sane man want with a hundred small sacks of stout canvas, numbered in sequence, and with a piece of strong cord stitched to one corner of the mouth? It looks as if the old villain were going to cart about a mint. By George!"

He stopped so abruptly that the man immediately behind ran into him full-tilt. He turned, apologized, and went slowly on, so slowly that passers-by glanced at him curiously.

"I believe the old devil is going to loot something. That's what the rifles were for." He nodded over this with a momentary satisfaction, then shook his head in sudden dissent. "But is that girl going to help stand off the owners?" At this, he strode on, with a shake of the head. "John Pearson, stop guessing! You're a fool; you want to know all about the whole show, and the curtain isn't even up yet."

He completed the last purchase, then dined exceedingly well. It was, if possible, an improvement on the meal of the previous night—with a vast difference. Looking round the brilliantly lighted room, he almost pitied the groups of pale-faced New Yorkers. To them, life held no mysteries, but a straight-ahead, obvious, uninteresting, fairly profitable occupation, that lacked the thrill which he himself had found. He drained his wineglass; then, with a sudden and nonunderstandable impulse, dropped it on the floor. There was a tinkle of shattered crystal, and a waiter came up anxiously. Pearson glanced at him serenely. "It's all right," he said; then added, with a lift in his voice: "I did it on purpose. Put it in the bill."

It lacked a minute of the quarter to eight when, burdened with a fraction of his purchases, he entered the waiting room of the Grand Central. Immediately opposite the south door, Stanovitch waved his hand from behind a small mountain of luggage.

"Ah, Mr. Pearson, I am glad to see that you are punctual. It is an excellent beginning. You have everything?"

Pearson turned and pointed to a staggering porter, who moved slowly toward them. "Yes. It is all here."

"Then you will please follow me."

He moved very lightly, as most big men do. The new recruit followed to the train platform. Passing the entrance to this, he peered hard at the indicator placard. It read: "8:02—Albany, Syracuse, Buffalo, Toronto."

Stanovitch entered a sleeping car. His vast bulk seemed to fill the narrow entrance aisle.

"This is my section, that is yours. My daughter is in the drawing-room. If we are on time, we should reach Toronto at eleven-twenty to-morrow. We leave again the same evening. And now will you join me in the smoking car? There are one or two things I have not yet had time to say, and I am anxious that you should thoroughly understand your duties."

. Pearson nodded, and followed. Stanovitch settled into a big leather chair, ordered drinks, lit his cigar, and began to talk in a low, modulated tone that reached Pearson perfectly, but seemed so marvelously pitched as to be inaudible to the man across the car. His lips seemed hardly to move. Face and eyes were impassive and expressionless. He might have been talking to himself.

"Mr. Pearson, you have made a good beginning. You have obeyed my instructions, and, what is equally important, you have asked no questions. It is possible that you may wonder why I rank one with the other. As to that, I can say nothing, but I am absolutely justified in doing so. You have probably been asking yourself about the future. It is quite natural that that should seem mysterious. I regret that it must still remain to a large extent of that nature. It is, however, possible for me to tell you certain things. I have undertaken in"—he hesitated perceptibly—"in the interests of my principals, a certain expedition, which, if successful, will have very important and far-reaching results. You will remember that I intimated to you that this expedition would involve hardship, and, most probably, personal risk. I have every reason for saying this. The reason will appear later, but in the meantime I have no desire to leave you uninformed about that side of your engagement. So far as any publicity is concerned—that is, any individual credit to be gained by any individual achievement—I can only say that the names of no individuals whatever will appear. My principals do not consider them; they consider only results. You will not be allowed to keep any notes or data. All such things are in my province, and, in addition to your instructions, you will kindly consider yourself on your honor in this matter. Before the expedition disbands, you will be required to give me your word that you will not disclose any information connected with it, and that you will not use any such information for your own benefit. Were it subsequently found out that you had done so, and it would undoubtedly be found out, I would not answer for your life—in any part of the world," he concluded significantly.

A curious gleam crept into Pearson's gray eyes. "I assume, of course, that you do not expect me, under any circumstances, to do anything which—which a gentleman could take exception to," he said bluntly.

Stanovitch smiled. "I am glad you ask. Nothing whatever, I assure you. As to salary, you may draw six months in advance, if you wish."

"When do we return?"

"You are engaged for a year," said the big man calmly, "and I would remind you that you are not expected to ask questions."

A silence followed, in which the young man stole a penetrating glance at the sphinxlike face. "He got me there," he said to himself; then aloud: "I beg your pardon. I entirely forgot. You see, it is rather a difficult thing to remember, and I'll probably put my foot in it pretty often. As to the money, I don't want any at present, thank you."

Stanovitch blew a cloud of smoke into the air and surveyed it thoughtfully. "You may have it at any time before we disappear," he remarked calmly. "After that it will not be any use."

CHAPTER III.

A week later, a ballasting engine, with a flat car in tow, pulled out of the Transcontinental station, at Cochrane, and puffed eastward till it drew up at the great steel bridge which crosses the brown Abitibi River a few miles from the junction of the Ontario Government Railway with the Grand Trunk Pacific. On the car were Stanovitch, Natalie,

Pearson, six Chippewa Indians, a mound of tents and provisions, and three huge Peterboro canoes.

Two or three hours afterward the party was gliding peacefully downstream between high, spruce-covered clay banks. The immense stretches of rolling country were invisible. The travelers seemed to slide along the bottom of a ravine that was paved with water, and was curiously remote from the rest of this untenanted world. Pearson leaned back and tried, as he had tried a hundred times, to sort out a medley of impressions and conjectures. Whoever or whatever Stanovitch was, he always seemed to do things well. The Hudson's Bay Company's stores, at Cochrane, had seldom been so ransacked for comforts and delicacies as at the order of the impassive Russian. At Cochrane, also, the party had stayed at a hotel, noted in the North, whose service had almost rivaled that of New York. Here, Stanovitch had seemed as much at home as ever. For a day or two they had lived royally, and their leader had been lavish of champagne. Always, at night, it gave Pearson strange sensations to turn out his electric light and stare northward across an unbroken wilderness that undulated in great, soft, smooth folds into the speechless distance.

Here on the Abitibi he felt more at home. It was as if the forest was slowly drawing him into herself with a wordless understanding to which he yielded utterly. The old life began to look very far away.

But Natalie, after a week's time, was no more approachable than before. Romance and the elusive mystery of the thing had got into the young Saxon's blood, but he could find no response in her dark eyes. Once or twice he had caught snatches of conversation between her and Stanovitch. Sometimes these were in Russian, which the black-bearded man seemed to speak with difficulty, in spite of his nationality. This puzzled Pearson. There was a day on which he had detected a curious expression on the girl's exquisite face. This, it appeared to him, was almost one of fear. On the way north through Canada he had noted her looking from the car windows, with a strange longing in her gaze. Once, Stanovitch had seen it, too, and had spoken to her, with a chill threat in his voice. By now it seemed to Pearson as though there was no fixed bond of affection between them, as if that which held them together was nothing more than a matter of language and nativity, and, perhaps, as well, that mysterious object of search for which he himself fumbled so ineffectively.

They made Moose Factory in six days. It was a luxurious progress. The farther north they paddled, the more the brown waters of the Abitibi increased in volume and speed. Then it joined itself to a large river that ran rapidly, with great stretches of broken water, to the sea. From east to west, tributary streams emerged from dense swamps, and lost themselves in this mother of rivers.

The night before they arrived, Pearson, lying on his back, staring out through the tent door and across the dying embers of the camp fire, lost himself in the stars. The farther north they got, the larger loomed the question: Where and why did they go? Why should that expression of fear rest more and more on Natalie's face? Did she not trust her father, or was she a partner in some mutual and terrific mystery? Why should his own life be endangered, if, after this quixotic enterprise, he should speak and tell that of which he knew? Who were the principals of Stanovitch?

Lying sleepless, he heard voices coming in subdued tones from the water's edge. Stanovitch and Natalie were sit-

ting on a log, talking in Russian, with a new lift of dissent in their voices. The deep tones of the man sounded unusually harsh and forbidding. He was, it appeared, disputing and thrusting aside something that the girl put stubbornly forward. Through the gloom, Pearson could dimly make out that the great arms were gesticulating violently, a rare thing for Stanovitch. Presently, through the argument, one word came out sharply, distinct and unmistakable: "Nicolai." It was uttered in a tone of absolute contempt, as though, at that moment, Nicolai, whoever he might be, was remote, and divorced from the question in hand. Natalie's reply was earnest and impassioned. She spoke with an unwonted vigor, and seemed to summon to this argument a force and directness that hitherto had lain unnoted behind the smooth perfection of her brow. She uttered a warning. Pearson knew that much, though he knew nothing else. At the moment she seemed to defy Stanovitch and anything he could do or say.

Suddenly the big man rose to his feet. Through the gloom his vast bulk loomed dark and threatening—a giant, born of shadows and gloom. One hand went out and pushed Natalie from him. It was apparently his finish to the dispute.

The girl staggered and fell. She lay for an instant, then rose and faced her assailant like an accusing spirit. What she said Pearson did not know, but to him it sounded like the lash of a whip. Stanovitch shrugged his shoulders, and lit a cigarette. In the glow of the match his face appeared, calm, marble, and Jovelike. He put his hands in his pockets and chuckled audibly as the girl stumbled to her tent.

Pearson swore, and ground his teeth. He was suddenly filled with a desire to jump at the Russian's throat and sink his thumbs deep in beneath the black beard. Then, as he lay, gazing, Stanovitch walked slowly directly toward him, and paused at the door of the tent.

"It is bad for the eyes to strain them in the dark. It is also advisable to get all the sleep one can," he said coolly. "Good night, Mr. Pearson!"

There was a curious note in his voice. It seemed to linger in the young man's ears. It still lingered when, next noon, the flotilla glided through the mouth of the Moose River and lay gently at the Moose Factory canoe landing. For miles the Moose had been expanding in its course to salt water, and its turbulent waters were getting browner and more brackish. Now Pearson stared with sudden interest. The whitewashed walls of the oldest trading post in the world blinked at them. To the north there stretched a gray waste of heaving waters that lifted clear to the arctic. It all seemed infinitely remote, a new world that they had suddenly discovered within the old one, a detached principality that made laws unto itself, a jumping-off place for the unknown.

He felt a strange exhilaration as he trod the narrow plank walk. The air was bright, but there was in it still a keenness sharply reminiscent of a lately vanished winter, for in the North summer is a laggard, who waits till men's hearts are sick of waiting, and then comes with a sudden progress, sweet and divine. Indians from all parts of James Bay loafed luxuriously with a languid consciousness that the worst part of their year was over. Big sleigh dogs of every shape, size, color, and genus, barked, fought, snarled, and slept in the sun. Through their brains, also, seemed to travel the memory of bitter days and hard. Everywhere in men and beasts, in the earth and in the vast dome of the sky itself, it appeared that there was an easing and slackening after some tense and arduous conflict.

Stanovitch and the girl walked stiffly

up to headquarters. The factor himself met them on the threshold. Visitors were very welcome at the end of the world. Pearson, following at a little distance, noted the respect that came into the factor's voice as he spoke to the Russian.

"The canoes are quite ready," he heard him say. "We have been working hard over your order, and I think we have full quantities of everything you want, except the dynamite. It is rather a scarce article up here, and I'm sorry, but I can only spare one case. Oh, there is one other thing—there is one man short. The Indians are almost too lazy to live for a while, once the winter is over. I can't say I blame them very much, either. Fur was very scarce, and they had a hard time of it!"

Pearson listened closely. He saw Stanovitch frown, and he seemed about to speak. Suddenly Natalie put her hand on his arm. Her face had turned ghastly white, and there was a sudden alarm in her eyes. She seemed about to faint. Stanovitch glanced at her in wonder; then she pointed to the shore —"Look!"

Pearson wheeled. A man was strolling by the water's edge. He had, it seemed, appeared from nowhere, and now had neither object nor purpose in his walk. He was small and thin, with stooped and rounded shoulders and a hawklike profile that projected curiously from the flat curve of his back.

Stanovitch was staring, too. Slowly his face became transfigured and his lips compressed. The blood mounted vividly to his temples. His great hands clenched till the broad nails sank deep and the immense knuckles stood out white and gnarled. Whoever he might be, this stranger was significant of something that roused in Stanovitch a sudden blaze of emotion. At the moment his face did not express fear so much as a savage defiance.

"Nicolai," he whispered, "Nicolai!"

The man stopped at the still-unloaded canoes and examined their contents. He did this with a slow, noiseless deliberation that made him appear almost like a figure in the long end of a telescope, so completely did he seem removed from the watching group. Natalie's hand still rested on the arm of Stanovitch. Their eyes were riveted on the stranger with a fascination they did not seem able to break. Soon he looked up, and fixed his hawklike gaze on the three at the door. He stood like this, motionless and peering. Then, after a moment, he turned straight toward them, walking with a curious spring in his stride. This seemed to lift his lean body into an undulating progress at every step. His arms swung free. Natalie's eyes rounded with fear. She shrank involuntarily. But Stanovitch seemed turned to stone.

The stranger drew nearer. Pearson, watching with all the strength of his eyes, saw a narrow face, tanned a yellowish, sickly brown, a small, thin-lipped mouth, ears with peculiarly large lobes that protruded awkwardly. The eyes had apparently been injured. The iris was green and the pupil pin-pointed and black. They gave one the impression of gimlets, that somehow should not work, being injured, but actually did work, and with a forbidding intelligence. The whole visage was a menace.

Coming up to Stanovitch, he held out his hand. "Ah, this is a pleasure for which I have waited a fortnight!" Pearson remarked that he took no notice of Natalie.

Stanovitch bowed with a formality that seemed strange in this wilderness. "An unexpected pleasure to me," he said acidly, "and I regret that you are just in time to say farewell."

Nicolai's lids dropped over the green eyes. With this hooded gaze, he looked doubly sinister.

"It is quite evident that your information is not complete. When did you

leave Petersburgh? Ah, Miss Natalie, I beg a thousand pardons! I am too occupied with my friend. This wild country agrees with you."

The girl acknowledged him with the slightest possible movement of her head. The color was coming and going in her cheeks, and aversion still streamed from her eyes. She had stepped back till she was partly behind the vast bulk of Stanovitch. She did not answer.

The shadow of a smile crossed Nicolai's face. He addressed Stanovitch again. This time there was authority in his voice: "You left when?"

"Three months ago," said the big man quietly "We spent a few weeks in London."

Nicolai looked carefully about. The factor had reëntered headquarters. Pearson was at a little distance, apparently out of earshot. The girl was the only one who could comprehend.

"I left later than you, and, without any particular exertion, am here before you. Perhaps you do not know that the river has been open for three weeks. You certainly do not know that Number One has altered his decision."

Stanovitch started, and his lips moved nervously. "What! Do you tell me it is abandoned?"

"The expedition? Not at all. A new method has been adopted, otherwise the plan remains the same. We had a long talk about you, Stanovitch, after you left. It would surprise you to know how carefully you were taken to pieces and examined and put together again. The result of it is, that, in the interests of our friends, Number One decided that it is very unwise that one of us go alone on this expedition." He paused, looked hard in the big man's eyes, then added sardonically: "You see, Stanovitch, we value you so much that we refuse to risk you."

"Then you——"

"Exactly. You have guessed it at once. Naturally I would not come without orders, so Number One has written. Here is the letter. It is very important, so you will be kind enough to give me a receipt for it—now, please."

He unfolded a piece of oilskin, handed Stanovitch an envelope, then waited while the great, trembling hand scribbled a receipt. This, also, he folded in the oilskin and put carefully away. His action suggested that it was something very precious of which at some mysterious time he would be in great need. This done, he turned and talked easily to the unwilling girl, while her father, with the color flying through his cheeks, read the letter.

Presently Stanovitch looked up. In the space of a few moments the whole physical appearance of the man had utterly changed. He seemed now to have lost his mastery, to have visibly dwindled.

"What do you suggest?" he said slowly.

"No change whatever in your plans," answered Nicolai, with a smile that made him doubly repellent. "Your plans are no doubt most carefully made, and," he interjected acidly, "with every consideration for comfort. We all know you as a 'bon viveur,' Stanovitch. I only trust that our united efforts will be successful."

Stanovitch turned to the girl. "Mr. Nicolai will accompany us," he said quietly.

She raised her black eyes and stared at the newcomer. It seemed to Pearson that something like contempt flickered through her steady gaze.

"It is a matter of entire indifference to me." Her lips curled as she spoke.

Stanovitch flushed with anger, and his face, usually so calm, seemed transfigured with a sudden emotion that he mastered with difficulty. He was about to speak hotly, when Nicolai fixed his green eyes significantly on Pearson.

"Who is he?"

"I picked him up in New York, and, since he seemed to be about what I wanted, I engaged him for a year. I think he is the right sort. Would you like to speak to him?"

Nicolai shook his head. Pearson, with an effort, managed to look absolutely unconscious that he had overheard anything. But, as he approached, he experienced a swift, savage desire to put a heel on the neck of Nicolai and grind the forbidding features into the earth. He had noted the stranger as he came up from the shore with that curious undulating walk, and it had seemed then, before the man came into his full vision, that there was something ominous in the queer movements and the long, lean, hawklike face. It had seemed, also, that Nicolai had emerged from the sea cloaked with a mystery no less dumfounding than that of Stanovitch, but enveloped, as well, with a nameless threat. Pearson felt it settling into his brain, and involuntarily every faculty assumed the defensive. Nicolai was, he had instantly concluded, a man who needed watching. Now he struggled not to be contemptuous.

"You will obey any orders Mr. Nicolai gives you. They come as from myself," said Stanovitch. Then, turning to the stranger, he added meaningly: "I discovered, a night or two ago, that Mr. Pearson unfortunately does not sleep very well."

"That is a pity," replied Nicolai softly. "I have known men to sleep very soundly in the North, so soundly, in fact, that it was practically impossible to wake them. I hope that Mr. Pearson will improve as time goes on."

The pulse of the young man gave an unaccustomed flutter. Then, close at his elbow, came the girl's voice. She spoke in Russian, so sharply that it sounded like the crack of a leather thong.

Nicolai's eyelids drooped. He looked at her quietly, with a filmy, hooded gaze, in which, it seemed to Pearson, that warning and admiration were curiously blended. Only two words came from him, but she shrank back as if from a blow.

"Your efforts, if faithful, will be recognized," he went on to the new recruit. "And perhaps it is only fair to you to say that if they are unfaithful they will also be recognized." He turned to Stanovitch: "I would talk with you. Your companions are too intelligent for my taste."

They walked off slowly, conversing in low tones. Pearson gazed after the pair. They seemed strangely unlike. The vast bulk of Stanovitch towered above the slight, stooped figure of his companion, but there was in the shoulders of the big man a new droop that was eloquent. It struck Pearson that whatever else might be true, the little man was master. He glanced at the girl. Her face was full of apprehension, and she, too, was staring after them. Suddenly to the young man's eyes her slight figure seemed terrifically desolate and alone. It was as if she, the sole survivor of her sex, had been dropped out of the clouds into the heart of this endless wilderness, and demanded the protection and help of every man, for the sake of the whole world. He racked his mind to imagine why she should have left the shelter of other women for the barren solitude of subarctic regions. What was the link between her and the black-bearded giant? With what mysterious authority did Nicolai so suddenly appear and dominate his compatriots? Again her loneliness weighed on him.

"Miss Natalie, let me help. What can I do? What is this mystery?" he said impulsively.

The slight figure shivered as if in a cold wind. Then she gazed at him steadfastly. Her great, dark eyes were so rounded with fear that they seemed globes of softly luminous radiance, re-

flecting in their tortured depths the anguish of an agonized mind. For all his earnestness he could not fathom them. Her face was very pale, and on the smooth beauty of brow and cheek there rested a strange look of sudden and incongruous age.

"You can only help by being silent. I have sworn not to speak, and I cannot tell you what it is, but"—her voice dropped to a whisper—"I think it is death!"

CHAPTER IV.

The western coast of Hudson Bay above Cape Lookout shows but little timber. Pearson, surveying the flat, barren shores from the deck of a small coasting steamer that plowed sluggishly northward, thought he had never seen anything half so dreary. Emerging from the shallow, brown waters of James Bay the little vessel held steadily northwest day after day. It was an event when they put into Fort Churchill for fresh water. Then she shifted her course and thrust her blunt bows straight into the north. The season was that in which the subarctics wake into life after the grimness of a terrific winter. Overhead, vast flocks of ducks and geese winged swiftly, guided by the strange wisdom that lies hidden in their flat and feathered skulls. In between, came droves of smaller aquatic birds, headed straight from Florida and the Gulf of Mexico, searching out the remoteness of breeding places soon to echo with their cries. Higher than all, the great arctic eagle sought her royal abode in distant islands of the frigid seas. The days were long. The tumbling waters of the bay were alive with porpoises and white whales, whose smooth backs glinted in the trough of the long swell. But on land no life was visible.

At noon, on the seventh day, the steamer was abreast of Cape Eskimo, and, as the night drew in, she crept slowly toward the land. Then, sounding carefully, she dropped anchor opposite a long, shelving beach. Through the gathering dusk, Pearson could see a cleft in the land, and made out what he took to be the mouth of a river.

Disembarkation commenced at daybreak. Soon the shore was littered with a small mountain of supplies, which Nicolai and Stanovitch checked over with unusual precision. At noon, they waved good-by to the steamer. In an hour she was hull down. Silence seemed to close in on them. There was nothing left that was human except themselves, and only the voices of the earth, multitudinous, insistent, and undying, moved abroad in the air.

Stanovitch collected the Indians, of whom six had been brought from Moose Factory, gave them orders, and started them building a cache in which to store provisions, for which they would return later. Then he talked long and earnestly with Nicolai. Presently they spread out a map on the sand and beckoned to Pearson.

"We are," said the black-bearded man, "at the mouth of the Maguse River. You can see it here. This river is, so far as we know, one hundred miles long. If you follow it, you will notice that it flows out of Maguse Lake. To the west, again, on higher ground, is Angikuni Lake, and, still farther west, is Dubawnt Lake. Now, if you will look very carefully where my finger is, you will also see that on the northeast shore of Dubawnt Lake, near its lower end, there is a long, sharp point. That point, I may say, is the object of our journey. It is, as near as we can tell, two hundred and fifty miles from here. The whole party will proceed at once. We will take with us all the provisions and supplies that we can carry, and the Indians will then return immediately and spend the summer in getting in more."

Pearson strained his eyes on the map.

He noted that Dubawnt Lake flowed northward, and its waters emptied through long channels into Chesterfield Inlet. Chesterfield Inlet looked as though a steamer, especially one of small draft, might penetrate it for a hundred miles and bring them infinitely nearer their destination.

He traced the route carefully. "Wouldn't that be an easier way?"

Stanovitch frowned. "We are perfectly aware we are not taking the usual route. Also, I would like to remind you that you are not expected to ask questions. You have evidently forgotten that that is part of your contract. We have our own reasons for taking this route. I and Nicolai will go first, my daughter will follow in canoe number two, then you will come."

It was a grim country they traversed. The Maguse River falls three hundred feet on its turbulent way to the sea. It is broken with rapids, between which are successions of long, swift reaches. The land is high and barren. As far as one could see there were long, bare rock ridges that thrust up through the moss-covered soil, splintered and split with the frost of many winters. Irregular ravines cut sharply on either side to the river's edge. Here and there, but only in low land, were straggling clumps of dwarf spruce and poplar, a scanty growth, that seemed to draw but little sustenance from the earth, and to have exhausted its vigor in an unending fight with the severity of an appalling climate. It was utterly bleak and utterly unhuman—a vast territory of rolling distance, flat horizon, and unfertile ground, and overhead the superb dome of blue sky.

Their progress soon took on a strenuous sameness. One big canoe with the two Russians forged steadily ahead. Pearson, day after day, could see it, just a mile in front, moving like a gray beetle up the flat stretches of the river. Midway came Natalie. Only in the evening and at mealtimes did the men speak to her. For the rest of the day she moved on, silent and solitary, craving apparently no human communication. Last of all came himself.

As time went by, he grew used to watching the broad back of the Indian in the bow, and noting the free swing and thrust of the arms, and the blue shirt that rippled into quick wrinkles with the play of tireless muscles beneath. He grew used to the forward swoop of the flattened blade and the semicircling rain of diamond drops that flew, hissing, into unbroken water beyond. The bow man smoked constantly, but seldom spoke. His eyes were fixed on the farthest visible bend of the river. Occasionally he rapped the gunwale sharply, and instantly swung his paddle to the other side, and changed stroke. The stern man was equally silent, till at last it began to seem that with gradually diminishing speech they were all paddling steadily out of the world of men and into the mystical abode of silence itself.

Night after night there was the same chiaroscuro of firelight and glimmering tent walls, the throb of the rapids between narrow clay banks, the subdued murmur of talk between Stanovitch and Nicolai, the monosyllables of the Indians, the drone of the wind through the sparse timber on the river's edge, the canopy of brilliant stars, the hoot of the northern owl, and that unfathomable quality in Natalie's eyes. Once, looking at her suddenly, he found her staring at him with an intensely searching gaze. She seemed almost to have put him in some mental balance, to be estimating his strength and reliability, and to be seeking that on which she could count in time of need. It gave him a strange sensation. He began to weigh his own strength and courage.

A few days before they reached the expanse of Dubawnt Lake a corner of the curtain was lifted and Pearson got

a fiery glimpse into those elemental passions that the Russians had so far successfully concealed.

A few miles east of the lake, at a point where it drops into foaming narrows, there is a portage. Across this, the three Russians had walked, and stood on a flat rock, watching the river as it plunged swiftly into a cañon whose rocky walls flung back the roar of rapids.

The portage itself was carpeted with moss. Pearson came up noiselessly, staggering beneath the weight of a heavy pack. Dropping his burden, he slipped to the ground, breathless. He was perhaps fifty feet from the end of the portage. Beyond him, the three figures were silhouetted sharply against the sky. They were talking. It was all incomprehensible, save that as the moments passed a ripple of rising anger crept into the big man's voice. He was, it appeared, protesting, but against what Pearson had no knowledge. The girl's eyes were fixed on the green-eyed man. They reflected her abhorrence. Nicolai's replies were as cold as ice, and harbored a ring of unmistakable authority.

Pearson watched them, fascinated. A few moments later he saw Natalie glance meaningly at her father. Simultaneously the big man began to move behind Nicolai. So slow was the movement as to be almost imperceptible, and still he talked, with that rising tremor of anger. Then, like a flash, he stooped, and, with superhuman strength, lifted Nicolai clear of the ground and hurled him forward through the air. The river received and swallowed, then whipped him out of sight. There was neither sound nor cry, but two now stood where a second ago there had been three. Nicolai was suddenly snatched out of existence.

Stanovitch and the girl stood motionless, staring at the spot where the man had disappeared. A moment later, Natalie sank to the earth, and, with her face hidden, burst into a passion of sobs.

Something snapped in Pearson's brain. He sprang up and raced back over the portage, with a vivid consciousness that now the first act of the tragedy was over, and he himself was about to step on the stage and be no longer an impassive onlooker.

A hundred yards lower down, another path skirted the water's edge. Along this he hurried. Here the water was still too broken for a loaded canoe, but the force of its plunge had modulated into a great pool, which was streaked with foam, and swung in slowly diminishing cross-currents and eddies. It was deep and black. Its surface was broken into irregular swirls that came up from beneath and were blotted out, and reappeared and sucked audibly at the flotsam of Dubawnt Lake.

From the middle of one of these eddies there suddenly projected an arm. Came another surge, and Nicolai's body was heaved sluggishly into view. The face was livid, and across one temple a great cut gaped redly. His coat was half off, and the empty sleeve was plucked hither and thither by the chuckling river.

Pearson filled his lungs, and plunged. He felt the water pulling, but struck out strongly for that lifted arm. Just as he gripped it, the river took them both in one deep inspiration. Then they sank together. His hands closed on the limp figure while he fought for air. The world became black and dense and choking. Suddenly they were heaved into upper sunlight. Pearson gulped, lay on his side, and headed for shore, trailing Nicolai's body like a weed. A moment later, he caught at an overhanging root, and swung to land. Drawing the inert form up on the bank, he lay, gasping.

His breath came more slowly, and he

filled his lungs to shout. At that instant a strange thought flickered through his brain. It was the thought of Stanovitch as he moved so quietly behind his companion, and the mighty thrust that hurled him to apparent death. Perhaps, he concluded swiftly, it were better for Nicolai if he did not shout.

He turned the rescued man on his face, straddled his back, and compressed his ribs with slow and regular motions. No water ran from the speechless mouth, and there were faint and dimly distinguishable signs that life was not extinct. He worked thus for a few moments. Then, very faintly, Nicolai sighed—such a sigh as a man might give who had grappled with death and returned to earth to tell of it. Pearson knew instantly that he had been stunned when, with the impact of the thrust of Stanovitch, his head had struck a rock. Being stunned, his lungs were motionless, and had not filled with water. In a short time, the green eyes opened slowly, and a baffling expression stole into them.

"You pulled me out?" he half whispered, staring weakly at the dripping man beside him.

Pearson nodded. "Yes. Better not talk now."

"How did I get in?"

"You—you went in off that rock at the head of the portage," stammered Pearson in confusion.

"I went in! Are you sure I went in?" There was a grim sarcasm in the voice.

Pearson hesitated. He had been drawn into the warp and woof of that which weighed on heart and brain alike. Fate had made him an involuntary part and parcel of some tragedy that was born in a distant country, and was now to be played out with hatred and murder to the bitter end in the vast loneliness of the subarctics. Then, as Nicolai's gaze still demanded his answer, there flashed back into his memory what Natalie had said in answer to his appeal: "You can only help me by being silent." At this he set his lips firmly.

Nicolai looked at him with unconcealed suspicion. "Since I owe you my life I will not press you. You will doubtless have decided that I am rather hard to kill. That is quite true. Several people have come to that conclusion. Now, follow me, and see me get the answer myself."

He got shakily to his feet and staggered along the path to the main portage. Pearson followed in amazement as he tottered westward toward the flat rock. His own heart was beating furiously. It seemed that Nicolai must fall to the ground, but some marvelous strength held him together, and he forged indomitably ahead. Nearing the end of the trail they could discern Stanovitch and Natalie still seated on the flat rock. The Indians were at the other end of the portage. Nicolai saw the two, turned, put his finger to his lips, and reeled on. His feet made no sound in the deep moss. Presently he stood directly behind the two.

"Well, my friends!" he said sharply.

The two figures started violently; then, as if drawn by some invisible and irresistible force, they turned slowly. Nicolai had come so close that he could have put out a hand and touched them. He stood, swaying slightly with weakness. Water ran from his clothes, and a little pool slowly spread out on the flat rock at his feet. His hands were hooked and stiff with the cold of the icy river. His black hair was plastered down over the narrow skull, and his face streaked with slime and blood. The gash on his left temple was long and crimson. It seemed a marvel that it had not killed him. The contracting flesh shrank away till at the bottom of the cut a fine white line of bone was visible. His eyes had almost disappeared. They seemed to recede into his head until there was only left two green, bale-

ful slits, animal rather than human. His lips lifted like those of an angry dog.

"Well, my friends," he repeated slowly, with a curious lift in his voice.

Natalie grew deadly white at this apparition. It was as if the river, finding him too foul for its depths, had flung him shoreward, stained with mire and blood. She slipped to the ground and put her hands before her face. "Don't come back," she panted. "You're dead—you're dead!"

The vast bulk of Stanovitch was motionless for a moment. His face seemed transfixed with amazement. Then he began to shiver as a tree shivers at the stroke of an ax. He stood his ground, but he, too, grew ghastly pale. His lips moved, but no sound came. Into his face there stole a strange expression. It was that of utter hopelessness and speechless resignation to a fate that he was amazed to find he had not conquered. This look deepened and grew stronger. In another moment it seemed graven there.

Nicolai sneered audibly, and his forbidding stare swung from this silent giant to the girl crouching at his feet. "I wonder what Number One will think?" he said quietly but with a deadly distinctness.

Stanovitch began to tremble violently. Whatever power there was in these words struck home to the innermost heart of him. Slowly his eyes protruded, and he seemed stricken with mortal fear. An instant later he was on his knees, plucking at Nicolai's hands. "No, no," he implored, "not that!" Natalie's lips moved uncertainly, but she could not speak.

"Ah! Now you begin to remember! It is a strange thing, Ivan Stanovitch, but there are many things that you forget. You forget that behind me there is another, and behind that one still another. There is no place in the world where we are not. Surely you are old enough and wise enough to know that. You enter the North with me, but what would be your word should you emerge without me? See, there is dirt in my hand. Your life is there, as well. In fact, Ivan Stanovitch, they are just the same thing. And the arm of Number One is very long. In spite of you, there are still many drops of blood in my body, but those who are waiting for Ivan Stanovitch to come from the North with me are more numerous. It would be well if you remember that. I think I shall sleep now. Kill me if you dare!"

He swayed weakly, then stretched himself on the moss in the sun.

Late that night, above the murmur of the wind, Pearson caught the harsh voice of the green-eyed man: "Ah, Ivan Stanovitch, you are very strong, very brave, and very foolish. It is the mind and not the muscle that wins. I am yet undecided what to do. You would still like to kill me, would you not? But think, Ivan, what it would be like were I to desire to kill you! You could not sleep because you would dream of me. You would continually feel my knife between your shoulders."

"Shall we settle it now?" said Stanovitch suddenly.

"If you wish—but probably you do not know that Number One has made certain arrangements covering your future, in the event of my not returning. The trouble is, Ivan, that the thrust of a knife or your fingers on my throat may end matters for me, but will only begin them for you; and, besides, there is your daughter."

"And what of her?"

"Number One has suggested her final disposition, in the event of any accident to you. So—it will profit you to be careful."

The big man's voice shook with baffled fury: "She is not for you or any man like you! You were better at the bottom of the river, than to touch her."

"And yet, at a word, you would both be very silent."

There fell a pause in which the water chuckled past the men's feet. Then the deep voice broke in sulkily: "What do you want me to do?"

"Nothing. But I warn you to remember that I can see through your thick skull—if murder lies there again. Who are you, to destroy the plans of those who sent us? For the future, then, there will be forgiveness from me and repentance from you. And, though I forgive, I do not forget. So, are you content, or do you prefer that I be your enemy? I am not any man's enemy for very long—one bears no hatred against the dead. Come, your answer?"

"It shall be as you wish," replied Stanovitch slowly.

"But do you not wish it, too?" interrupted the harsh tones.

"Yes, yes; of course! So, the matter is forgotten?"

"No, not forgotten, but put away." There was a curious note in the voice. "Ah, my friend, you fail to see what a forgiving nature I have!"

CHAPTER V.

Dubawnt Lake opened before them in a flat immensity, along which they journeyed, hugging close to the eastern shore. From this shore the tundra lifted in long, rolling swells carpeted with moss and small, brilliant flowers. The odor of them came sharply, as, at sundown, the canoes headed landward.

If you look at the large-scale map of the Northwest Territories you will note at the northern end of Dubawnt Lake there is a large island about ten miles long, and immediately opposite this island there stretches out a point as sharp as the tooth of a husky dog. Toward this they paddled steadily, and, on the night of the third day, Nicolai's canoe, which had been crawling slowly ahead, turned in at the mouth of a small bay that indented the southern shore of the long point.

The two Russians got out stiffly, walked a hundred yards, then stopped. Stanovitch produced a tattered sketch, which he and Nicolai had been examining every night but one since they left the shore of Hudson Bay, peered at the horizon, then at the end of the point. Finally he stooped, picked up a fragment of rock, and, turning it over in his hand, scanned it closely. Finally he nodded confidently at Nicolai.

Nicolai nodded back. Pearson watched them intently from his own canoe. Since Nicolai's rescue and even after their midnight truce, it had seemed strange to the recruit that there could any longer be speech between these men, since murder was in both their hearts. But in these later days something of the weight of the wilderness had apparently fallen on them. They consulted each other. They even exchanged cigarettes. It was as if there was some common, formless enemy against whom they must soon battle jointly, and in order to wage successful warfare they had mutually agreed, for the time being, to forget a mutual hatred. This endless desert was, moreever, oppressive. It had, Pearson felt, the effect of herding humanity together. On the way up the river there had been something comforting in the nearness of the shores and the murmur of hurrying waters, but here one seemed to be on the threshold of a cold and speechless infinity in which human enmities, passions, and desires were dwarfed and lost to sight.

In this moment of waiting, the canoes of Pearson and Natalie swung closer, and he glanced at her curiously. Between them there had been no words since that eventful day at Moose Factory. Now she was staring at the two Russians. A strange and hopeless apathy had settled on her face. She might, the young man thought, have

been surveying her own prison. Something rose in his throat. He had a sudden mad desire to pick up his Ryolet and put an end to both Nicolai and Stanovitch, and carry the girl away out of this desolation.

He was about to speak, when she looked straight at him. Then, as if reading the thoughts burning in his brain, she shook her head slightly, and put a finger to her lips. There was an inscrutable expression in her dark eyes. "I will tell you when the time comes," it seemed to say, "but not now. Till then, trust me. You must trust me."

Something intangible and indefinite passed between them. It was not comprehended in any speech. But across the baffling mystery these two young spirits reached out confidently, each giving what the other sought. Pearson had known many girls in his life, but never a girl like this. It did not seem that she needed to speak to make herself understood.

Stanovitch called, and raised an arm. The canoes floated forward, the Indians jumped out, and in a few moments the work of unloading was under way. Pearson, when his own craft was empty, picked up his rifle and clambered slowly to the top of a ridge that paralleled the shore at a distance of half a mile.

Opposite was the loom of the large island. It floated, apparently, like a dark-purple strip in the bosom of an inland sea. Southward, Dubawnt Lake glittered like a sheet of flat silver, and thrust irregular arms into the encircling shores. Northward, it contracted into a long waterway that swam out of sight. He knew that ultimately it emptied into Chesterfield Inlet. Eastward, toward the distant Hudson Bay, the land was strangely broken and contorted. It was as if the backbone of the ridge had been shattered, and its massive vertebræ strewn over hundreds of acres in huge crystalline masses of black rock. In the northeast was a great hill, scarred and seamed. Its flanks were split and ruptured. Deep ravines ran into it, and these were littered with a fringe of talus that widened with every successive springtime. There was no timber except in patches of low ground close to the shore. It was all inconceivably barren and desolate. In the softened light of the descending sun it had a strange and fascinating beauty, but it was, nevertheless, a stark and naked wilderness, patched with moss and spangled scantily with hardy flowers. It might have been the scene of some conflict of Titans, so strewn was it with wreckage of the world.

The air seemed light and thin. In these high latitudes, the atmosphere is peculiarly transparent. It is clean and hard. There is none of the softening haze that tempers the vision of men in warmer climes.

They pitched camp near a clump of spruce. Stanovitch seemed charged with suppressed excitement. He glanced continually at the shattered distance, exploring it with great, wide, inquisitorial eyes as though to distinguish some particular spot in its immensity. Nicolai took on a curious manner, and watched his comrade closely. His green eyes seemed to suggest that he knew much, but that just now he must not reveal it.

The tents were no sooner up, than there arose an argument between the two Russians. Nicolai, assuming the management, had ordered the Indians to start at once on the construction of log huts.

Stanovitch shook his head. "We will not need them," he growled.

Nicolai sneered. It seemed sometimes that he could hardly speak without sneering. "You talk as if you had a hundred men to do the work, instead of three. Our information is only general, and we are given no exact lo-

cality. What if we search till winter, and don't find what we seek?"

"Even so, we will not wait till winter. I have changed my mind about that. Do you propose to spend December here"—he swung his arm toward the wilderness—"with the bears and wolves?"

"We will stay till we find."

"And if we never find?"

"We will still stay." Nicolai's voice was like ice. "I have no intention of returning empty-handed."

The chest of Stanovitch expanded, and his eyes glittered. "For my part, I shall not stay. You may, if you wish"—then he added angrily—"with the other wolves."

Nicolai's expression did not change. He puffed a cloud of smoke, and surveyed it intently. "Stepan is still here."

The gaze of Stanovitch faltered. He seemed to hesitate and fumble for words that evaded him.

"It is not so long ago since we said good-by to Stepan in the hotel at Novgorod," went on Nicolai thoughtfully. "Do you remember how excited he was and how his gold teeth flashed, when he told us he was coming out here to search? I do not think his teeth flash any more, Ivan Stanovitch. But, so far as we know, he did his duty. And yet, strangely enough, he did not return, and I would remind you a man cannot lose himself in the North—that is, aboveground. What, then, must come to those who do not do it? For the present, you see, I have decided to forget that little incident of the river."

The big man paled. "Let the huts be built," he said briefly.

Pearson heard it all, and moved on, stirred with new questions. The Russians had grown extraordinarily indifferent as to whether he overheard them or not. This, he concluded, could only be because the farther they penetrated into the wilderness the more completely he was in their power. To whom could he repeat, even should he break his word? For the time being this savage exchange proved the end of their bickering, but each man watched the other out of the corner of an eye.

That night, Stanovitch called his recruit and talked long and earnestly. "I am now at liberty," he said, "to tell you the object of this expedition. You will kindly remember that you have promised not to ask questions, and I will again remind you that they will not be answered. Now, as to our present undertaking:

"Two years ago my principals sent an explorer into the subarctics. Later in the same year they received a message from him. He reported that he had been successful in finding what he sought. That was"—here Stanovitch hesitated, then continued, with a curious note in his voice—"that was gold."

"But you told me that you were to search for that which is more precious than gold."

"Did I? I fear your memory is imperfect. I merely said: 'That there was that which was more precious.' I also suggested that knowledge is born of experience.

"You may wonder why our explorer should be sent to such an inaccessible place. That is a matter which does not concern you. The main thing is that the samples he forwarded were entirely satisfactory. It was immediately arranged to send the further assistance for which our explorer asked, and also to determine accurately the value of the deposit. For various reasons, the men who were sent did not arrive till last winter. When they did arrive, they were only able to establish the locality approximately. Nothing definite was determined. They had a map, which I have now, and which our explorer sent out with his letter. Owing to bad weather and deep snow, this second expedition did not effect anything fur-

ther. The strange thing is that our explorer, who had undertaken to wait for them at a given point, had disappeared. He has not been heard of since. We have established the fact that he has not left the country. And, I might add, that we have unusual facility for finding out anything we wish to know in any part of the world. We would have heard of it if he had come out without reporting to his principals."

Pearson breathed deeply. Part of the mystery was clearing. He glanced at the Russian, searching his face for something on which to hang the belief that there was no more mystery. But —who was Number One? Why were no questions to be asked? Why did Natalie say that it was death to which all were traveling? At this, his mind whirled. Then, with an effort, he gathered self-control.

"I am afraid I don't know anything about gold, or what it's found in."

"That is easily remedied," said Stanovitch blandly. "I will tell you enough for the present. You will have a certain area to work in. Now, for your guidance, here is a sample which our explorer sent out. You will notice it is a bluish-white quartz. The gold, you also will notice, is native—that is, it is not in chemical combination with any other metal except silver. The proportion is about nine to one. You will see that gold does not glitter, but has a soft, yellow tinge that is quite distinct and very easily recognized. It appears in threads, in specks of various sizes, in flakes, and small, irregular lumps. These latter are often held together by connecting wires of the metal. You will bring me a portion of anything you find that looks at all like this, and, of course, you will mark the place where you find it. There is another mineral occurrence in which I am very much interested. This consists of small, bright metal beads which are found in a very hard, brown crystalline rock. The rock generally appears in veins, and is noticeable on account of its banded structure. If you discover anything which looks at all like this, I would be very glad indeed to see it. It is not"—here he paused, and the blood crept strangely to his temples—"it is not of any particular value, but it has a certain geological significance, and I would be proud to establish its existence in this remote country. It would enable me to settle in my own favor a technical dispute I have had with several eminent geologists for several years. You will conclude that I am one myself. That is quite true. Nicolai has but a smattering of the science."

He paused, glanced keenly at Pearson, and continued: "You will, of course, work steadily, and keep me fully informed. The—differences between myself and Mr. Nicolai are our own affair. I advise you to forget them. I —I cannot tell how long we may be here. Should we return to civilization in less than a year, you will get your full salary. If in more than a year, it will be recognized. I am ready to give you all the information you require regarding minerals—but that is all. One word more: It will be unsafe for you to question my daughter in any way whatever. For the present I have nothing more to say."

Pearson flushed with anger. "Do you expect me to slave for you in silence? Do you think I'm a machine? Why shouldn't I talk to your daughter? You're not very conversational yourself. What do you take me for?"

"I take you for an English gentleman, who has given his word that he will do what he is told for a year, without asking questions, for the sum of five thousand dollars," said Stanovitch calmly.

The color rose higher in Pearson's cheeks. He recalled vividly his own lean figure staring into Florio's window, and the revolt of body with which he saw

other people feeding luxuriously. Then had come his own bravado and the dramatic Stanovitch, and that flush of daring in which he committed himself to that which he knew not. Suddenly he thought of the appeal in Natalie's eyes. At this, his anger grew white-hot. But —he had given his word.

"I'm doing what I undertook to do," he snapped; "but that's no reason why you should speak to me as you would to a dog."

"Wise dogs don't lose their tempers, especially in the North," said a cold voice behind him. Nicolai looked down and smiled sardonically.

Pearson felt a chill at his heart. He seemed a million miles from sane and normal people. Then he remembered, with grim satisfaction, a Ryolet rifle, and a thousand rounds of ammunition. This comforted him for a fraction of a second, till there came the vision of Natalie alone with these two. His brain steadied at this reflection. He must be wise—very wise and very careful. The rest was on the knees of the gods.

Nicolai's green eyes searched his face. They seemed to read his very thoughts.

"We don't want to make you uncomfortable," he said, with an assumption of friendliness. "The circumstances which govern us make our present course of action imperative. You have only to live up to your contract. If you do, we shall part very good friends. If you don't—why——" he shrugged his narrow shoulders, and turned away.

The rest of the day passed without comment from either man. They were busy building a strong, rough table in Nicolai's tent. On this they set a large mahogany case that had been guarded sedulously ever since the canoes headed down Abitibi River. Natalie busied herself in her own camp. Once she came to the water's edge and stood for a long time, gazing silently across the shoreless expanse of Dubawnt Lake. The slim figure seemed pathetically alone. To Pearson, she was now the sole survivor of a world of women that had vanished utterly. The beauty of her face made him wonder whether the most exquisite of them all had not been selected by fate for this amazing journey. Behind her beauty was mystery. The two held him in an unyielding grip.

That night he weighed himself in a new and inflexible balance. What the future might hold was vague and remote. But here, in the present, was that from which no man could turn and still call himself a man. He pondered deeply on this. All unknowingly he was unearthing qualities of courage and steadfastness that were as yet, in him, only half tried, but which in olden days had carried his ancestors across many a deadly field.

Finally the resolution came. He would see it through, whatever the result. A certain place in England might fall into another master's hands—but that, too, was on the knees of the gods.

He slid contentedly into the blankets, then sat up quickly and threw back the covering. In the middle of his bed was a stone. Beneath it lay a piece of paper. He relit the candle and held it close. There was writing—fine and small:

If you would help me, be patient and wait. The time is coming.

Next morning, whatever might have been concealed behind the calmness of Natalie's gaze, there was no new recognition in it. He shot curious glances at her, wondering whether he had not dreamed. His fingers closed over the scrap of paper, but even this hardly reassured him. She was distant, indifferent, and aloof.

This was in his mind as he toiled slowly toward the flanks of the shattered hill. There he began to search his mind for some better understanding of Stanovitch's orders. Even if

gold were here, no miner could stand the expense of working in these bitter regions. In South Africa, he remembered, that it was an achievement to reduce working costs by a penny a ton. While here—he smiled at the thought of it—diamonds might pay, but never gold.

The hill, as he reached it, seemed more austere than ever. One flank thrust westward, and, mounting this, he slowly won to the top. The summit was bald and glistening. The bare rock, rubbed and polished by the glaciers of dead ages, was furrowed with fine cuts where slowly traveling bowlders had ground into the living stone beneath the terrific pressure of overlying ice.

He stood at an elevation of perhaps three hundred feet above the flat expanse of Dubawnt Lake. In the clear light the cluster of tents was plainly visible, and, as he watched, a miniature figure emerged like a small, black speck from Natalie's tent and moved slowly to the water's edge. His eyes dwelt on it, then swung southward. A moment later he caught the tiny forms of the two Russians. They plodded laboriously inland, and were heading for a smaller hill that lifted nakedly above the rolling sea of moss and rock. So distinct were they that he could see Nicolai stoop and pick something from the ground. Then he apparently called to Stanovitch, who plodded toward him, and both men looked at the object until Nicolai tossed it aside. They were like extraordinarily definite pygmies, dwarfed by the huge dome of sky and the flat and limitless horizon of this immensity.

Pearson saw them dwindle out of sight, and turned moodily to his own work. Hour after hour he scrambled about, part of the time on hands and knees, in this contorted desert. For wide spaces the ground was littered with splintered trap. Its blue-black crystalline surface gave no indication of any precious content. He hammered, dug, and picked without result, ate his lunch in solitary state on the hilltop, then spent the rest of the afternoon in unprofitable wanderings.

It was after supper that Stanovitch spoke: "You found nothing?"

"No."

The big man turned to Nicolai. "It is perfectly reasonable. In a wilderness, one would be foolish to expect anything at once. How long was Stepan here?"

"He arrived in the spring two years ago," said Nicolai, through a cloud of cigarette smoke. "My information is that he wrote to headquarters about two months later. I naturally assume that the discovery was made in those two months."

"And when did Number One receive that letter?"

"In the winter of the same year. There were a good many things to delay it. He sent, as you know, at once."

"And the messenger," said the big man, pondering deeply; "who was the messenger?"

"A man we both know," replied Nicolai, with a glint of his green eyes. "He arrived in wintertime, made a thorough search, and when he returned sent in his report that Stepan had vanished."

Stanovitch pondered. "So—if Stepan, single-handed, found it in two months, we should, without doubt, find it in less."

Nicolai glanced suddenly at Pearson, with a strange expression on his crooked face. The look was both careless and malevolent. It seemed to suggest that here in the wilderness it was immaterial whatever the new recruit might overhear.

"You will understand, of course, that I did not see the messenger's report," he resumed. "Like you, I only know what I was subsequently told at headquarters. It happened the day I was

there that another man had just come in from Berlin on important business, and Number One was very busy. In fact, he became at once practically invisible. That was some time after you were supposed to be on the way," he added cynically.

"That is my own affair," said Stanovitch violently, his cheeks florid. "And you—how did you come?"

"I am not quite sure that it is your own affair," replied Nicolai grimly. "It is strange how seldom one's own affairs are absolutely one's own affairs among our people. As for myself, I came very comfortably to Moose Factory by an early Hudson Bay Company steamer from Liverpool. I possibly avoided some of the dangers of traveling by coming that way," he concluded meaningly.

Something flickered across the face of Stanovitch; then he suddenly looked clumsy and helpless. It was as if he had ineffectually used a bludgeon against a rapier, and the rapier had shot in under his guard. He moved uncomfortably. For all his strength, he seemed no match for the small man with the green eyes.

"And nothing has been determined about Stepan?" he continued.

"Nothing."

"Those outside have not seen or heard anything whatever?"

"Nothing."

"Then how do we know that Stepan is dead?" demanded Stanovitch bluntly.

"We do not actually know," answered Nicolai, "but a man cannot hide in the wilderness as he can in a city. The wilderness has eyes, tongues, and ears. A fugitive can only hide himself successfully among many other men. There he becomes merged, he is lost and blended with humanity in general. If Stepan were by any chance still alive, the fact would have come to our knowledge; and," he murmured thoughtfully, "if he does happen to be alive, he were much better dead."

He dropped into silence; then, without a change of tone, and without taking his eyes off the black-bearded man, he continued: "There is more philosophy in that than you imagine, my young English friend."

In spite of himself, Pearson started, but the dry, level voice went on in a queer, impersonal strain, as though Nicolai had at last found both time and place in which he might rehearse that which had lain in his soul for years.

"How little, after all, the faces of men tell us! We may be looking at tragedy or drama, and know it not. A man with an evil face may, by some queer twist of nature, be a saint—and a great, good-humored-appearing giant may be a murderer. What is the matter, Stanovitch? Are you cold? As I was saying, my friend, one imagines so much and knows so little—especially when one is young—about your age, for instance. It is just possible that you may be thinking that this friendly expedition of ours is a bad dream from which you will presently wake up with a start, and be light-hearted as before. And then again it is just barely possible that you may not wake at all. Ah, to my mind, the wise man is he who does not think or feel too much. He does not weaken his brain by love, or even by the thoughts of love. If he is really wise he will learn first to obey some one wiser than himself. So—I have talked too much."

He rose and walked quickly to his tent. With him there seemed to vanish a shadow of a cloud. Stanovitch did not stir; but, as Pearson watched, his face took on an indefinable change. So long and motionless did he sit that he appeared to be an image that had lost the power of sight and sound and sense. Gradually he took on a hunted look that seemed pathetically grotesque in one of his stature and strength. Once he

seemed about to speak, then checked himself. The night deepened. Question after question trembled on Pearson's lips, but he remembered his promise, and was speechless. Finally, it seemed after many hours, Stanovitch raised his arm, and, without a word, waved Pearson to his tent. The young man went, and the mystery deepened with his going. All night he tossed restlessly. His brain was exhausted. He woke at daybreak and lifted the flap of his door. Stanovitch was still sitting by the shore. His vast shoulders were shining with dew. Then, as the rim of the sun slid above the horizon, the big man rose painfully and stiffly and stumbled blindly to his tent. Pearson glimpsed his face as he passed. It was like a mask through which the dark eyes glowed with quenchless fire.

CHAPTER VI.

For months the three men explored without avail. Life gradually fell into a featureless routine of eating and sleep. There was no companionship. Pearson scratched the face of the earth and laboriously carted in small mountains of samples. These were laid every night on the table in Nicolai's tent, examined carefully by the two Russians, then, one by one, thrown contemptuously aside. The recruit gradually fell into the habit of botanizing for hours at a time. He discovered that these trackless plains were alive with blossoms, and he collected, with a queer, poignant pleasure, the hardy arctic brethren of English flower beds. He found all the Northern berries and kinnikinnick, the red man's tobacco; and wild tea, for which the squat Eskimo come down to trade on the northern edges of the barren land. He found tiny clustering roses and marvelous gray mosses, among them the caribou moss, which thrives beneath other growths that spread above its tough, gray, wiry tendrils. Over his head, distant wedges of wild geese flew high and fast, and once on the horizon he caught a vast herd of caribou grazing. They looked like a great, yellow-brown blanket.

There came a day when he sat on the hillside miles from camp, speculating for the millionth time on the outcome of it all, that a small stone was pitched close beside him, flung apparently by some invisible hand. He started and looked up. Above, and not a hundred feet away, stood Natalie. She remained motionless, and, as he stared, put her fingers to her lips and beckoned. He hesitated, stared again, in blank amazement, then began to climb, and in a moment was beside her.

She looked at him strangely, put a small hand on his arm, and pointed to the south. Far down the shore he saw a canoe. It was a tiny speck that moved almost imperceptibly. At this distance it seemed like a water beetle. He could just distinguish that there were three figures in it.

"My father, Nicolai, and one Indian," she said. "The other Indians left an hour ago. Nicolai sent them to the Maguse River to bring in more supplies. They won't be back for a month. We are quite alone. I must speak to you now." She blushed vividly.

"Yes," he said, with an unaccustomed thrill in his voice.

"You must promise first not to ask questions. Will you?"

"You, too!" he blurted. "Must I never ask a question when everything is a question?"

"Oh, don't—don't misunderstand me," she implored, with sudden emotion. "I can't tell you anything about the past. You mustn't ask me to. I have taken an oath like the others." Then, her manner changing: "Do you want to help me?"

"More than anything else in the world."

Her glance softened in an instant.

"Then listen, listen very carefully, because there is great danger, and I may not be able to tell you again. You think I am rude and that I dislike you. I can't blame you, but it isn't true. I don't. It's the only attitude I can safely take. You'll understand it all by and by. I can't tell you more than that now, but you must believe me. Tell me you believe me."

"I have no reason to believe you, but I cannot doubt you," he said slowly.

"You must not. Now, as to the rest of it, we are all in great danger. My father tried to kill Nicolai—you saw that. He will try again. There are dreadful reasons. Nicolai will kill my father if he can, and I must not be left alone with Nicolai. I would sooner shoot myself, that's why I carry this."

She drew out a small revolver. Pearson noted that every chamber was loaded.

"I hate him, and am in deadly fear of him. He was the most dangerous man in Russia. Just now he is polite, and Nicolai is always most dangerous when he gets polite. He will kill my father without doubt, if he can. You know why. You may wonder why I am here. I know it seems strange, but I can't tell you even that yet. Perhaps you will know some day. Now, listen, very carefully. There will be death in the camp very soon, and I can see it coming. But before it does come you must always keep armed, and expect danger and be prepared for it. Look round often behind you when you are out here. If you have reason to think that any one is watching you, always make sure. Don't get into a place from which it would be difficult to get out in case of necessity, and, above all things, don't walk so that your figure will be thrown clear against the sky. Oh, be careful—very careful, for my sake! Now, listen. When the danger is very near I will put a red handkerchief round my neck. When you see that, you must be ready to fight for your life and my—my——" she hesitated, and a royal color flooded her cheeks.

Pearson had a queer sensation that all through body and brain alike there was a sudden mustering of those faculties and qualities that, combined, make up a man. He found himself thanking some invisible deity for his strong frame and steady nerve. Then, because he was a Saxon, he experienced a strange, cold, deadly resentment against those who threatened this wide-eyed, crimson-faced girl standing so bravely before him with a petition in her troubled gaze.

"I will serve you to the very end," he said slowly.

"And you will not misunderstand anything I may do or say?" she insisted gravely. "I will seem very strange to you sometimes."

"I don't understand anything, but—I believe you," he answered quietly.

Her face grew marvelously tender. She held out her hand. "Thank you"—she hesitated—"my friend."

In a moment she was gone. He stared after the dwindling figure till it was lost in a dip of the land.

"Nicolai!" he said thickly. "Nicolai—look out for yourself!"

CHAPTER VII.

Now there be strange promptings which enter the minds of men—queer, intuitive self-whisperings which come to us out of a formless void—but come, nevertheless, pregnant with truth. And it was one of these intangible messengers that jockeyed about in the mind of Pearson, as, on a certain morning many weeks later, he set out on his daily task.

The night before, Nicolai had been studiously polite. His voice had had a certain quality of softness that contrasted vividly with the iciness of his

usual talk. It had been a queer thing to note the man unbending; relaxing visibly, and, as it were, unscrewing the joints of his grim personality and exhibiting them to prove that he was not the inflexible, acrid individual the Englishman took him for.

In the middle of this process came a glance from Natalie. Her eyes met Pearson's with the silent warning that Nicolai was too polite; that when he spoke softly he was one to be feared. Pearson deciphered it all. He had felt happily thankful that the test was coming at last.

Now, tramping the hills, came another prompting, that he was near the end of his own trail—that something waited here that he might pick it up.

He climbed on and on till he was past the old landmarks. At his elbow was that which plucked at his sleeve and said, "Not yet—not yet." His farthest previous point was far behind, but still came the mysterious order to march on. The hill sloped gently northward. Rounding a shoulder of it, there opened at his feet a new ravine. It seemed at that moment as if something invisible had moved away from him. So narrow was the ravine that only by standing near the edge was it possible to see its depth. This was perhaps fifty feet. The walls were almost vertical. At the lower end it widened out and merged imperceptibly into broken ground.

He looked down with a curious contraction of throat. A dryness came into his mouth. He knew—knew absolutely that here was that which would change everything. The whole place slowly seemed to become familiar. It came back to him—the fragments of a forgotten dream. Painfully he remembered that in his dream he had found a way down. He looked and found it. Standing on the rocky floor, he explored his mind for another shred of memory. This time he failed. Then, quite involuntarily, he walked slowly uphill, scanning closely the black walls of the gulch. In a few moments his feet seemed riveted to the earth.

On his right, a white streak of quartz was plastered to the dark rock. Two feet wide, it mounted to the top. He could see it bisect the sharp shoulder of the upper surface. In the middle of the streak ran a blue-gray band, peppered almost solid with dull yellow grains. These stood out roughly in heavy masses, unstained and untarnished. At his feet was a pile of broken vein matter. This had been sorted and lay in two portions—one barren—the other a pile of bullion—inconceivably rich.

Pearson stared. It seemed extraordinary, and yet somewhere in the back of his head something whispered, "Of course—why not—it was written." He tried to shake this off, but his efforts only resulted in an overpowering sense that it was not all—that there were yet other discoveries to be made.

He knocked off samples and stowed them in his pack; then, with great deliberation, walked slowly downhill. A little lower, a band of dark-brown rock ran up the wall. Examining it carefully, he saw small, white, fine particles of metal that paralleled the band on either side. It was as if a stream of rice had been powdered into the living rock. It rang like flint at the stroke of his pick. He frowned at this dubiously. "Stanovitch said that if I found a brown rock it would be of geological interest. How the devil did he know I would find it?" Hammering hard, he broke off a piece. "I believe it's tin," he said, thrusting it into the sack.

Then, very deliberately, he stood and waited. By now he had achieved a strange belief that all this day's work was a program laid out when the world was young, and that the program was not yet quite complete. The last act was still to come. Presently he felt

again that indefinable influence. This time it was perfectly definite. "Walk on —walk on—very carefully," it said.

The orders were quite distinct. He stepped slowly downhill. For some unknown reason, his eyes fixed themselves on the ground—darting studiously into every nook and cranny. Presently he caught a glint of sunlight on a bright speck that blinked up from the moss under his feet. He stooped and fingered it. Instantly he straightened and stared down with rounding eyes. Glancing carefully about, he knelt and pulled away the moss. A human skull, of which the front teeth were glittering gold, projected whitely.

Pearson shrank back, then mustered all his nerve and took the thing between his hands. The flesh was utterly gone. The dome of bone was scarred with long, glancing cuts. "Wolves," he said to himself. Inside there remained a dried remnant of brain. The thing grinned at him. The gold teeth glittered with horrible reminders of a vanished tongue. He turned it unflinchingly, then gasped. In the left temple was a three-cornered hole; so clear and perfect that it might have been cut by a machine. A wisp of dark hair still clung to the segment of sunken bone. This was horribly human.

"Stepan," said Pearson, under his breath. "Stepan."

He looked curiously about. A little lower down rested a toboggan. It was loaded with sacks of rock. From one sack projected a fragment. It was brown. Another bag was torn open. This had evidently held provisions. There remained a few cans perforated by the sharp teeth of animals.

He examined it all with extreme care. There was no gold—only the brown rock with the white, metallic grains. This puzzled him. Traces were attached to the toboggan. These were cut.

Slowly he pieced it all together. Stepan had found the gold. He had had a toboggan and dogs. He had loaded the toboggan and was heading away from camp when he had been attacked by some one with a three-cornered hammer. He had run a few yards, and been caught and killed. His enemy had taken the dogs—and left the toboggan, which was loaded, not with precious ore, but with a valueless brown rock of merely geological interest. Furthermore, the assailant had not troubled to take any of the gold—or to conceal the murder.

He groped and wondered till the futility of it mocked him. Suddenly he looked quickly round, with the start of one who feels some nameless and invisible presence. He could see nothing but the sky and the hospitable cliff. His brows wrinkled. The very air seemed tense and brooding.

Slowly he slid the grinning skull into his pack and heard it knock on the other samples of this fateful day. Mounting the steep ravine, he glanced thoughtfully back. Here tragedy had been enacted. The cycle of the North had passed over with storm and snow and frost. The spring rains had washed these away, and the subarctic sun had warmed the grim solitude against the arrival of the stranger who should revive the tragedy anew. The place seemed potent with death.

Supper was eaten that night in silence. Pearson vainly endeavored to catch Natalie's eyes. She took not the slightest notice of him. Nicolai glanced at them once and smiled sardonically.

It was not till afterward that Stanovitch asked whether he had found anything—asked it with patent indifference.

"Yes—I have." Pearson spoke abruptly.

Stanovitch looked at him anxiously. and Nicolai moved closer. "Ah—I would like to see it."

Pearson brought in his sack and laid

it on the table. "Gold," he said, and produced the first sample.

Stanovitch picked it out of his hand. "So—my friend, you have found it." His eyes glittered. Nicolai did not speak—but watched closely. His lips moved silently.

"A brown rock of geological interest," went on Pearson suddenly, and produced the second sample.

Nicolai jumped, and in an instant both he and Stanovitch were snatching at it. Their faces were ablaze with excitement.

"Let go—let go!" shouted Nicolai violently, pulling at the fragment with all his strength.

Stanovitch growled like a bear and straightened his gigantic arm. The green-eyed man shot across the tent and fell in a heap in the corner.

"You found this, where?" panted the big man.

Again the young man felt something plucking at his elbow. "Be cool," it said, "be cool." At this, his heart steadied and his nerves turned to steel.

"In a ravine, five miles northeast. You said such a rock would be of geological interest."

"It is," answered Nicolai quickly. His face was very red, and the green eyes protruded. "You have done well," he added.

"There's another sample," went on Pearson, with a curious lift in his voice. His hand dived into the pack. "Look at this!"

Stepan's skull lay on the table, with its left cheek to the rough boards. Silence, dreadful and cringing, fell in the tent. It seemed at that instant that the whole, vast country had dropped in a voiceless abyss and that the very processes of nature were halted.

Stanovitch grew deadly pale. His lips twitched, but no sound came. His fingers curved and uncurved. His eyes seemed glued to the thing in front of him. Nicolai had turned a flaring red. It was as though every artery in his lean body was pumping the blood desperately to his face. His lids were half closed; but, beneath them, the green eyes had turned upward, till a thin line of yellowish white glistened below his lashes. Pearson could hear him breathe. It was like the choking gasp of a drowning man.

The tent door lifted, and Natalie stood at the entrance. Her glance fell on the table. For a moment she swayed, as though under a blow.

Pearson turned, and their eyes met. She flashed him one inscrutable look and vanished.

Stanovitch moved uncertainly. "Stepan," he whispered. "Is it Stepan?"

Pearson put out a hand that trembled in spite of himself and turned the skull over. The three-cornered hole seemed very small, but very deadly.

"Ah," panted Nicolai, "Stepan was a traitor, after all. Do you see, Ivan Stanovitch—do you see what happens to traitors?"

The big man stood like a statue, but did not answer. His cheeks looked strangely mottled, and a gurgling sound came from his bearded throat. Then slowly his massive head began to droop, and he pitched forward on his face.

The Englishman knelt quickly and fumbled at his collar. At that moment the tent door was lifted again, and Natalie reëntered. Her face was like chalk, and her large, dark eyes were dilated with horror. A red handkerchief was about her neck.

CHAPTER VIII.

They made a curious procession next morning walking toward the ravine beneath gray clouds that traveled swiftly from the north with a promise of snow. They moved in a triangle, of which Pearson was the leading point. Close behind him tramped the two Russians, side by side, each watching the other

closely. Pearson could almost feel their eyes in the small of his back. An hour went by, but not a word was spoken as the miles dropped slowly behind. The recruit could hear the big man puffing as he lifted his bulk over the heavy ground. His own mind was groping for light in this silence.

It had been a night of anxiety and watchfulness. As day broke, he had fallen into a restless doze till the sun came up and the Indian cook made a fire that crackled sharply in the chill and early hours. In the darkness nothing had happened. Then, when morning broke in the east, Nicolai had come out of his tent, stretched himself, glanced shrewdly at Pearson, as though trying to ferret out what was moving in the young man's mind, and said quietly: "You will lead."

As they neared the ravine, there came again to the young recruit that mysterious sensation of being watched. Of proof there was none, but deep in his brain moved the conviction that somewhere and somehow was an invisible individual who saw their actions, interpreted them perfectly, and put away the result for future and non-understandable use. Once Stanovitch took out the tattered map and laid it on a flat stone. Together the two Russians pored over it and tried to establish their locality. This was without success, the map being apparently at fault.

As they neared the edge of the gulch, Pearson experienced a curious sense of imminence. They were approaching, it appeared, a theater in which there was to be worked out another grim act in this amazing drama. He felt like a stage manager who led to the stage his two most notable actors. Presently he stopped and pointed. At their feet, down below, shone the blue-white streak of quartz. Beyond this was the seam of brown rock.

"The toboggan is farther down," he said shortly. "It's only a few hundred yards, but you can't see it from here."

The others stood as though all power of motion had died in them. Neither foot nor hand nor face stirred by the slightest fraction, only their black eyes roved up and along the ravine, then back to each other, with quick, dominant questions. Pearson sat down and eyed them silently, with his right hand creeping toward the trigger guard of his Ryolet; but, for all of this, with an outward assumption of indifference. In reality, a lump had risen in his throat, his heart was pounding, and he was full of breathless excitement. Before him moved a vision of Natalie with the red handkerchief about her neck.

"How do we get down?" rasped Nicolai.

The discoverer led them to the narrow cleft in the wall of the ravine. In a few moments they were at the bottom. Instantly both men raced past the quartz vein to the brown seam of rock and put their faces close to its crystalline surface. Stanovitch began to tremble violently. Nicolai seemed more controlled, but his voice shook in spite of himself. He turned to the big man.

"At last," he said slowly. "At last. It is amazing."

Stanovitch tried to speak, but his breath failed him. His eyes swung from his companion to the brown seam and back again, as though doubting his own vision.

"There is nothing else like it in the world," he stammered. "Stepan did not send us half the truth."

They attacked it with hammers, breaking off projecting pieces, searching them with magnifying glasses, and balancing their weight in outstretched hands. Now and again they looked impatiently at Pearson, as though he were an intruder into some inner shrine where he had no place. But always their eyes wandered quickly back to the

face of the rock. They seemed almost to doubt the reality of its hard surface, so often did they finger and examine every sharp projection.

"Do you want to see the gold?" said Pearson impatiently.

They turned with a start. "Ah, I had forgotten about the gold!" murmured Nicolai almost apologetically. "By all means, let us see it!"

Stanovitch grunted, and did not move. "Bah—who wants gold? Let us stay where we are."

His companion's green eyes half closed, and he laughed uncomfortably. "You already know that Stanovitch is very interested in geology," he said to Pearson. "But, of course, in this case, he is only joking, being carried away by scientific interest. He undoubtedly wants to see the object of our search," he added, with a curious intonation in the last words.

The big man laughed awkwardly. "What was that I said? I must have gone crazy. Of course I want to see it."

In front of the quartz vein, their guide watched them closely. Somewhere in the back of his head was born a new suspicion as to what manner of men might be these who seemed so indifferent about such riches as lay here. Could sane men prefer a brown streak of rusty rock to the wealth of Solomon? The more he watched, the deeper grew his suspicion. They glanced, admired, examined, poked aimlessly in the yellow pile, and knocked off haphazard samples. But all the while it was palpable that whatever riches might lie at their feet, they were negligible in comparison with the elusive importance of that brown seam. In a few moments they stood glancing at him restlessly, uninterested and unimpressed, and in evident discomfort at his presence.

"You said you found the toboggan near the other place?" said Nicolai smoothly.

Pearson nodded and turned downhill. "Yes, it is only a little way. You can nearly see it." Then, yielding to an irresistible impulse, he added meaningly: "You come to the skeleton of Stepan first."

Nicolai's lids dropped again. The eyes of Stanovitch looked coldly hostile.

"Go on!" they said simultaneously.

Four hundred yards down the hill, the young man stooped and gently lifted a piece of gray moss. Beneath it, Stepan's upper vertebræ lay like a thick and jointed stick. The Russians stared without words. Their faces expressed a thousand poignant emotions. Then they closely examined the ground near the skeleton. Pearson, watching them, could think of nothing but bloodhounds, in silent, remorseless pursuit of their quarry.

Presently they glanced at each other simultaneously, and Nicolai shook his head. A moment later they turned to the toboggan. Again that strange frenzy of interest was exhibited. The contents of the rotting sacks were spread out, and the two men sat in the moss, handling, examining, and exclaiming. Suddenly Stanovitch looked up. "This is much better than anything Number One showed me. I wonder why Stepan should not have sent out the best."

Nicolai glanced at the toboggan and smiled grimly. "It is very strange, but it is too late to ask him now. I notice that the toboggan is turned north. Why should Stepan wish to go north, when his orders were to come south? Do you not think it is very probable that the three-cornered hole in his left temple is in some way connected with the direction in which we find his loaded toboggan pointing?"

Stanovitch looked at him curiously and nodded briefly, "Perhaps."

It was a strange scene, thought Pearson—the two crouching figures, the moldering bags, the brown, glistening

rock, the dead man's bones glinting in the November sun, and, all around, the far-rolling expanse of the northern tundras.

For a while they seemed to have forgotten the presence of Pearson—then Nicolai looked up. "We will eat now. Then we will carry back what we can."

They ate in silence. Suddenly Stanovitch burst out: "Why did he try it?"

The green-eyed man glanced toward the skeleton. "Who knows?" he said briefly.

"You see he was going north?"

"Yes, to Chesterfield Inlet. He was a traitor, Stanovitch—and—he forgot something."

"What!"

"A shadow—all traitors, so far as I can remember, forget that."

"A shadow here?" put in the other contemptuously.

"Wherever the sun shines there are shadows," replied Nicolai coldly. "Think perhaps you, too, forgot a little."

"It was an impulse," said Stanovitch awkwardly.

"You have peculiar impulses. Were it not for my friend here—I"—he stopped abruptly and looked curiously at Pearson—"I would not be discussing impulses now. Stepan, for instance, merely had one. I don't believe he discussed it with any one."

"His orders were to return by the route he came?"

"Yes—our route. The other one has many curious eyes."

Nicolai turned to Pearson. "We are discussing our headless friend over there—who was so unfortunate as to make a mistake of judgment. Among our friends that is almost always regrettable, and," he added cynically, "almost always fatal."

"I have no desire to discuss your friends," said Pearson bluntly.

"That is an admirable sentiment." Nicolai paused, then interjected meaningly: "The wise man does not discuss his affairs with either sex."

The young man colored. "What do you mean?"

"I mean so much that there is at present no opportunity to explain, and it is just barely possible that the time for explanations may never come."

"You haven't answered my question."

"You are under agreement not to ask. Now let us start for camp. The trail is longer with a heavy load."

Each took what he could carry. There was no gold among it. Pearson noted that they selected the rock which was impregnated most with the white metallic beads. He noted also, that while Nicolai shouldered a moderate amount, Stanovitch took an enormous quantity. He handled this with superlative ease.

On the way home, Nicolai automatically took the lead. Not a word was spoken.

At supper, Natalie was strangely distrait—looking anxiously from one man to the other. Once she caught Pearson's glance, and her eyes dropped swiftly.

"You have missed our young friend," said Nicolai acidly.

"Why should I miss him?" she flashed.

"You surprise me, after your long talk of a few days ago. You seemed very friendly then."

"I have no need of talk," she retorted, with a trace of contempt. "I can find my own society."

Nicolai smiled coldly. "Indeed, that is very unusual in one so young."

"It is nevertheless true," she replied, with a touch of finality.

Pearson's blood boiled; then, suddenly remembering, his jaw thrust out and he bit his lips. She had warned him that he must never misunderstand. He turned to the green-eyed man.

"You do me far too much credit. I have been hoping for such a happy oc-

currence for months. My attentions have been politely declined. I have come to the conclusion that Miss Natalie does not care for men."

"On your honor?" snapped Nicolai. His lips were set like a steel trap.

Instantly it flashed through Pearson's mind that once in a thousand years there comes a moment when truth must be hurled swiftly into the ditch, and that moment is when one is fighting for a woman, and for that which to her is more precious than life.

"On my honor," he said calmly, staring directly at his questioner.

Nicolai nodded, with an unwonted contentment. "Ah, that's exactly what I wanted to know!"

Evening drew on to night. Through the darkness, a lantern burned late in the tent of Stanovitch. Pearson could hear them arguing violently, speaking occasionally in Russian, but for the most part in high-pitched English. Gradually this argument quieted and ceased. Hours passed. He tossed restlessly, longing for sleep, and yet not daring to sleep. Suddenly there came again that strange, inscrutable feeling of human nearness. He tried to shake this off, comforting himself with the reflection that for to-night, at least, Stanovitch and Nicolai would take care of each other. Ultimately he became aware of the slightest possible noise on the ground outside the head of his tent; then a rustle, after which there breathed the faintest murmur of his own name:

"Mr. Pearson—are you awake—don't move—can you hear me distinctly?"

"Yes, perfectly. What is it? Are you in danger?"

"No—you are. Nicolai will try and kill my father very soon—now, listen."

"Yes."

"When you find it out, you must not on any account reveal to Nicolai that you do know it. This is your only chance, and mine, too."

"What do you mean?"

"Just as soon as Nicolai finds out that you know, he will take the first opportunity to get rid of you. Then I shall be alone with him."

"I'll stay near you. I won't leave camp."

"No—don't do that. That would be fatal. You must do exactly what Nicolai tells you, and you must trust me for the rest."

A step sounded at the tent door. The whispering voice suddenly ceased, and a small hand withdrew swiftly.

Nicolai, for he it was, paused outside. He had half a mind to enter and talk to this fool of an Englishman. But if he had entered it would have been the last act of Nicolai, for the English fool was sitting up, with his blankets thrown back, the Ryolet leveled straight at the slit-canvas door, and a cold, wintry gleam in his gray eyes.

The steps moved on. Then, after a moment's silence, came the faintest whisper of a voice:

"I'm glad you didn't shoot. Good night—my friend."

Before morning, frost came and whitened the subarctics. When Pearson put his head out of the tent there was a fringe of thin, glassy ice that tinkled along the margin of Dubawnt Lake.

In the chill of morning, Nicolai shivered and flapped his arms. The increasing cold struck hard at his lean, bloodless frame; but, after a breakfast that he ate standing by the fire, he looked dominantly at Stanovitch.

"Get the instrument," he said. "There is much to be done, and we will get at it at once."

The big man nodded and brought it out of a tent. Pearson recognized a transit box. Nicolai shouldered the tripod, then turned suddenly to the Indians, who stood silently watching these preparations without the slightest apparent interest.

"You will take all the canoes but one and go down the river for more provisions. Start at once. You will have to go quickly so that you get back before the ice comes. Lose no time."

They began to obey without a word. Stanovitch watched them. "I will not stay here all winter. It is not necessary," he said savagely.

Nicolai lit one of his unending cigarettes. "You, of course, wish to do the work properly, as our principals would like it better. It would be a foolish thing to come six thousand miles and not do what we know is our duty."

"Of course," growled the big man impatiently. "We both know that, but I——"

"Then it is necessary," went on the other calmly, "to take a solar observation for meridian and a polestar observation for latitude. I am not an astronomer like you, but I know that much. It is also necessary to do some superficial work to determine the size and value of our discovery. It will take some weeks to do this properly. I am satisfied that you do not wish, on our return, that Number One should ask us questions that we cannot answer. The observations and instrument work I will leave to you, but I will be responsible for the rest of it."

Natalie, who stood slightly behind him, shot a quick, warning glance at the young man, and her fingers stole to the handkerchief about her neck. He strained his ears; but, in spite of this terrific tension, his face was without expression.

"And when we have done all these various things, how do we get out?" said Stanovitch hotly.

Nicolai swung his arm westward toward the gleaming width of the lake.

"I have selected the winter route by Campbell Lake, then past Fort Reliance into Great Slave Lake. Once there"—he shrugged his sloping shoulders—"we are a thousand miles or so from civilization, but on a well-traveled trail."

"And how far is it to Great Slave Lake?" said the big man, in astonishment.

"Not far. Only about five hundred miles."

"Then you propose that we walk fifteen hundred miles in midwinter. Really, Nicolai, I am not such a fool as you are sometimes pleased to think me."

"What else do you suggest?" said the green-eyed man smoothly. "You seem to forget that the walking is very good in winter."

"But—my daughter!" expostulated Stanovitch.

Nicolai smiled till his yellow teeth were bare. "I had naturally assumed that when a man of your intelligence decides to take a lady into the wilderness, he has also, to say the very least of it, provided for her getting out again. However, I will answer for that personally." His voice dropped as he added suavely: "There will be no question whatever about Miss Natalie getting out."

The girl paled visibly. Her mind was shouting to Pearson: "Did you hear that—did you hear that?" But her expression remained unchanged, and she smiled with an attempt at cheerfulness into the green eyes. "I am quite sure of that, Mr. Nicolai."

"And will you cook for us for a day or two? It is important to get in all possible provision. Hunger is to be avoided in the North at all costs. The Indians won't be back for some days."

"With pleasure," she said jokingly. "That is, if you can eat what I cook."

Stanovitch looked at her with a strange, boyish impulsiveness. He seemed about to speak, then turned and silently picked up the transit box. But his eyes nevertheless clung to her own. In them moved some speechless appeal, some elusive shadow of remorse, as though he were trying to say, "Forgive

me, forgive me!" Natalie herself seemed to grasp something of their message, and, for an instant, her own eyes softened. But presently, as though at some new mastery, her glance hardened into an accusing stare that seemed to transfix the black-bearded giant. Pearson held his breath. This interchange, momentous as it was, had a certain inhuman quality. It seemed strange that it should pass between father and daughter. Noting the growing depression in the face of Stanovitch, he wondered whom he could safely believe. Then the big man broke away from the accusing gaze, motioned him to take the lead, and all three swung off into the wilderness.

CHAPTER IX.

The wilderness has a speech that is all its own—a language that is as old as time. To certain men it is understandable, but only to those who are big enough to yield unhesitatingly to that which they do not understand.

And all unconsciously Pearson had been learning to synchronize himself with the wilderness. After a while there seemed to come to him great gaps and spaces in which there was nothing. In that nothing he got a new perspective. He began to grasp the fact that man is a pygmy to nature—that no matter how great his passion or desire—no matter how brightly his fire may burn, these last but for a second, and then he is swallowed up—being unfortunately more transient than the least of his own products. His future inheritance, with its ancient walls and walks, seemed very far away. It was almost a matter of indifference now whether he got it or not. He would only have it for a moment, after all.

From this he reasoned slowly to another truth. The man dies, but he may leave behind him that which never dies —thought. Then finally he reached the ultimate goal. The realization that for himself man can do but little, while for others he can do a vast deal.

This thought brought him sharply back to Natalie. The feet of the Russians tramped close after his own. For them he had only disgust and that contempt we acquire for situations that baffle us. But there went out from him to Natalie a royal oath of service. If it were only for some divine second he would do for her all that man would do for any one. Whatever came, he would not leave her to Nicolai. If he himself went into the darkness, she should go with him.

They walked slowly. There was only the shuffle of heavy feet behind, and those tiny, but multitudinous, noises of the wilderness that blend into that which men call silence. In two hours the ravine opened. They climbed cautiously down, Stanovitch handling the transit box with extreme care. Then, opposite the brown streak of rock, he set the instrument up. Pearson watched his great fingers moving from screw to screw, leveling and adjusting. His touch was supremely light and delicate.

Pearson suddenly thought of the evening on which those same fingers had closed on the plated sugar bowl and flattened it to a shapeless mass. Now the man seemed lonely, but prodigious. His black beard glittered in the sun, and the whole vast body of him might have dropped with his instrument from some far planet into this cleft of the naked earth.

Nicolai beckoned, and the two examined the brown streak with renewed and minute care, measuring its height and thickness, tracing its rusty outcrop, poring over fragments with magnifying glasses, weighing, balancing, talking rapidly and turning again as though fascinated by this remote deposit. To the gold, they turned not at all.

Then they told Pearson to build a cairn of stone, and in the top of this

Nicolai planted a square wooden post he had brought from the camp, and on the post he carved the date and his own initials. Stanovitch looked at him and shrugged his shoulders.

"Why not mine?"

Nicolai laughed. "They are unnecessary. The man higher up makes the record."

"And these are your orders?"

"You may ask Number One—when you return."

At that moment the sun became suddenly obscure. A dull grayness settled on the land. Then, from a lowering cloud, a few flakes of snow, fine as star dust, settled on the earth and vanished. Stanovitch shivered. Something seemed to have struck a chill into his heart. It was all instantaneous and fleeting, but it had, nevertheless, a certain elusive, unforgettable quality that sank deep into Pearson's mind with a picture of the glittering transit, the black-bearded giant, the small, threatening, green-eyed man, the rusty streak of mineral, the heap of disregarded gold, and, over all, the first faint whispers of approaching winter in subarctic desolation.

Presently Stanovitch took out his watch. The sun was nearing its meridian. He slipped a smoked glass over the object end of the transit telescope and pushed a prismatic eyepiece into the other end. He stood immovable, with his great legs spread and thumb and forefinger on the vertical adjusting screw. Half an hour went by. Nicolai sat staring at him thoughtfully, pitching up and catching a fragment of brown rock, glancing occasionally at Pearson, a mute, observant figure, with ominous suggestions in every line of his lean, narrow face.

"Ready!" said the big man sharply.

Nicolai jerked out his own watch and fixed his eyes on it.

Moments passed. "Now!" roared Stanovitch.

The other man nodded. "Excellent! I am only four seconds from solar time. Your assumption was very nearly absolutely correct. Will you give me the exact figures?"

The astronomer seated himself and began to calculate rapidly. In a few moments he looked up.

"I make it one hundred degrees, fifty minutes, twenty seconds west of Greenwich."

Nicolai took out his notebook. "Ah! The Geological Survey will be much interested—later on," he added significantly. "But would it not be advisable to make sure that you are absolutely correct?"

Stanovitch glanced at the vernier on the vertical limb of the transit, then went rapidly over his figures.

"I am quite correct," he said shortly.

"Very good. Now we shall do some real work."

He emptied a sack that had clinked over his shoulder all the way from camp. Three pieces of drill steel and two hammers rang on the rocky ground. Then from his inside pocket he drew forth two long, oily cylinders of yellow paper. From another pocket he brought out cap and fuse.

"We will put in a shot," he went on, "and thereby get better samples. You Stanovitch and Pearson will do the striking—but," he added dryly, "be careful of my fingers."

In a few moments they were at it. The big man's hammer came down with terrific, smashing force and bounded back from the mushroomed head of drill steel. Pearson swung stiffly. He was afraid to put his back into it, and, all the while, Nicolai sat on his haunches with his long, thin fingers wound round the jumping bar, and his green eyes glinting warningly up, as though to say: "Strike me if you dare!"

The grayness of dusk descended ere the hole was finished. Nicolai loaded it hurriedly, and all ran for shelter. Came

a dull boom, whose echoes lost themselves in gathering darkness. A clattering shower of splintered rock spilled itself widely. The three men waited until the last fragment descended, then walked quickly to a gaping rent in the brown ore body. It was perhaps four feet deep, with sharp and jagged edges, and from its bottom an acrid smell spread out in suffocating waves.

The shot had broken deep. Around it, masses of ore lay scattered. The Russians snatched at these and examined them, with startled ejaculations.

"By Heaven!" said Nicolai in a whisper.

Pearson stared. In the shaking hand lay a rough lump of rock, weighing about a pound, sown thick with great, rough, irregular beads of the white metal. So thick were they as to seem cemented together in a brown and glistening matrix. The other was on his knees among the fragments, groping, picking up, pitching hurriedly away, turning again to the pile, and all the time talking to himself in a queer, broken, halting tongue. For a moment the two men had utterly forgotten each other.

Presently Nicolai looked hard at his companion, with a dazed stare in his green eyes. "It is more than enough. I could not have believed it. There is nothing in the world half so amazing as this. We have established ourselves for all time."

Stanovitch nodded. "It is a thousand fortunes."

"There will now be nothing beyond our power," went on Nicolai thoughtfully. Then he added, with a subtle change in his harsh voice: "How fatal had we not found it!" He turned to Pearson: "I congratulate you, my young friend. The sum for which you were engaged will seem small when you receive your final settlement. I have heard there is an American saying about being a fool for luck. You have demonstrated the truth of it," he concluded sardonically.

"You are very kind," said the young man.

"Ah, you put that well! It is my object in life to be kind. My exterior is perhaps misleading; but, if you are wise, you will never judge by exteriors. That is a fault of youth. I am very soft-hearted." The green eyes turned to Stanovitch: "All that is perfectly true, is it not? You know me of old, Ivan."

The voice of the big man shook, but through it ran a thread of ill-concealed hatred: "I? Oh, yes! I am quite sure it is."

"Of course it is. You would be the last man to disagree with me, would you not? And now we will leave you for a few hours. Polaris is in the true north about midnight, is it not? We will expect you back in camp an hour or so after that, with the result of your observation. So, take some cigarettes. The time will not be so long."

Stanovitch hesitated, and Nicolai went on: "Or, if it is too lonely, Pearson will stay with you. Surely you are not nervous, Ivan Stanovitch! You are the biggest man in the North country to-day."

"No, no! Pearson need not stay on any account. It is entirely unnecessary. What is an hour or so?"

Instantly it flashed through Pearson's mind that what Stanovitch really meant was that Natalie must not, under any circumstances, be left alone with Nicolai at any time whatever, and that in some strange way this was what lay behind the sudden remonstrance. The thought of this brought a curious tightening around his heart. The tragedy, whatever it was, was now drawing nearer, and in the depth of the rapidly closing night some mysterious menace seemed to lurk and gradually move nearer and nearer.

"It would be rather silly for me to

stay and keep company with Stanovitch, wouldn't it?" he said casually.

No sooner had the words left his lips than the big man shot him a lightning glance. So full of meaning was it that Pearson recognized a terrific appeal. It was as if at that moment Stanovitch had flung out his whole spirit in one ultimate and overpowering petition. "Take care of her," it said. "Guard her, watch her, with all your strength and courage. I am in the power of that which is stronger than myself, and I cannot help her now."

The young man flashed his answer, and flung into his gaze all the understanding and encouragement he could muster. Then he and Nicolai stumbled off toward the camp.

They moved slowly toward camp. A strange, slow resentment engulfed Pearson, and he had a ghastly desire to jump on Nicolai's back and grind his threatening face into the earth. Then, as they neared the camp, the green-eyed man began to talk, and his harsh voice rasped as if from a specter that had suddenly come to life, and was plodding dimly ahead.

"A good fellow Ivan Stanovitch, a very good fellow, but he has lived too much in America, and I regret that he has almost ceased to be a Russian, in language and taste, at any rate. You notice that he speaks his own tongue with difficulty. He is full of moods, which I have always believed to be a bad thing for a man of affairs. One should be cold and immovable in order to carry a project through, especially when such a project involves more than ordinary risk. He is too much a man of impulse and, as you know, an impulse of his occasioned a slight misunderstanding between us on the Maguse River. However, here in the wilderness it does not do to bear ill will. Strange though it may seem, I wish nothing but the best for him. I like him, we all like him, and I should be very sorry if anything were to happen to Ivan Stanovitch."

He rambled on, talking apparently half to himself and half to Pearson, as though he were unburdening his soul of something which, before this, he had had no opportunity to impart. But for all his impassiveness, there was still that chill threat in his level, icy tones. Pearson, with his eyes fixed on that indistinct form, struggled to believe that the truth was in him. At this he failed utterly. Then, at the end of a long lane of darkness, came the glimmer of firelight on the white walls of their tent.

Natalie looked up from her cooking, and her eyes rounded with fear as she discerned the two approaching figures. "Where is my father?" she said, with quick alarm.

"Do not be alarmed," answered Nicolai in a voice like silk. "He only stays to take an important observation, which is a necessary part of our work. At the present moment he is stargazing. His mind and telescope are both searching out the true North. It will not take him long to find it," he added smoothly.

The girl glanced at him, terror-stricken. Her face had grown deadly pale.

"I wanted to stay with him," put in Pearson quietly, "but he wouldn't let me. He assured me that he was quite all right, and would be back in camp before morning."

Nicolai sneered. "Strangely enough, Ivan Stanovitch prefers his own company."

An extraordinary expression moved in Natalie's eyes. "Of course," she said coldly, "that is quite natural."

Pearson flushed with sudden revolt, then very suddenly he remembered her warning. She had her own part to play.

"I, too, am perfectly satisfied," he blurted. "There is no particular pleasure in sitting out all night waiting for a star."

Her lips trembled, and she smiled

nervously. "Perhaps you think that is not covered in your agreement, Mr. Pearson."

Pearson stared. As she spoke, a small hand had wandered to the red handkerchief on her neck. Then she laughed. "I have always heard the English were rather particular. Your supper is ready, gentlemen."

It was a strange meal. The candlelight flickered on the pale oval of her face and cast grotesque shadows on the sinister lines of Nicolai's grim countenance. Pearson did not taste what he ate. The girl talked and laughed with little flashes of humor that to one listener at least did much to disguise the terrific tension of the moment. He searched her eyes to discover what it was that lay beneath the lightness of her speech and the quick play of her wit. His gaze continually wandered to the red handkerchief flaming its scarlet warning; but, for all that, it seemed inconceivable that her gayety was now cloaking the tragedy she had prophesied weeks ago. Nicolai chatted with a harsh amiability. He spoke admiringly of Stanovitch, referring to him as his best friend, and exhibited a supreme satisfaction with the complete success of their exploration.

The night deepened, and the cold grew more intense. Lying sleepless, with his rifle within instant reach, Pearson could hear the newly forming ice crisping and whispering along the shore. There was no rest for him. His mind oscillated between Stanovitch peering at the North Star and Nicolai peering at the girl, in whose eyes was moving the quick terror. Once he grasped his weapon, with a strange conviction that footsteps were approaching. Then silence, ghostly and profound, enveloped the camp. Thus, hour after hour, the night drew on.

In the small of the morning, something struck sharply against the roof of his tent. He started violently, and his fingers crooked on the trigger of the Ryolet. Then came a voice at the door: "Mr. Pearson, are you awake?"

He jumped up and threw the flap open. "Yes, what is it?"

"Nicolai is not in his tent. I am afraid that—that my father——" The girl was tottering.

He put out a steadying hand. "What can I do? I must not leave you alone. Have you heard him, and do you know when he went out?"

"I think it was about an hour and a half ago. I was almost sure I heard steps about that time. I don't know what you can do. I thought he would come back soon, so I waited. And now" —she wrung her hands in agony—"it's too late!"

Pearson put his arm around her shoulder. "Do you mean that Nicolai would kill him in cold blood?"

"Yes, yes! Nicolai would kill any man who was in his way. Oh, you don't understand. Nicolai is not afraid of murder."

For a fraction of a second Pearson hesitated. His blood was boiling, and his whole body was charged with a strange, savage desire for slaughter. He thirsted to match himself against the green-eyed man who had gone out by night to kill.

"You must go!" went on Natalie faintly. "Please, please go at once! See! I can take care of myself." In her small hand lay a shining revolver. "I'll be quite safe till you get back. I won't stay in my tent; I'll hide on the edge of the camp. You must go at once, only don't take the usual trail. If you do, Nicolai will be watching for you. Then come very quickly back—my friend."

Her glance had the light of supreme confidence. A thrill ran through Pearson, and he could feel the blood thumping against his eardrums. Then his lips got dry and his fingers twitched. He gazed down at the girl's fair face,

and longed to take her in his arms for one ineffable moment. Then his pulse steadied.

"I'll be back as soon as I can. Keep in hiding, and don't get into the firelight. If you are in danger or if you think danger is near you, fire your revolver. Good-by, my friend!"

She held out her hand. It was the second time he had ever touched it. He wondered if peril were riving them together; then suddenly he bent and kissed it. In another moment he had vanished.

An hour later, he had covered more than half the distance to the ravine. It was a bitter walk in the darkness, and his whole body was aching from bruises. His breath came fast, then for an instant he paused and stood motionless. The night was thick around him, and he seemed to be in the very domain of silence itself, but some indefinite sense told him he had heard a sound.

Finally, faintly, and with delicate pulsations, there came a small, light noise of stones slipping under a rapid tread. At this, he moved quickly and without sound into the shelter of a great rock that reared its huge mass fifty yards away from the trail. For a moment he stood rigid, as the noise gradually became clearer and more distinct. Then along the crooked roughness that is called a trail by men in the North there walked a man. He could see a tall, thin figure top a rise in the ground and loom murkily against the gray sky. The figure seemed too tall for Nicolai and too slight for Stanovitch. But yet, thought Pearson, it must be Nicolai. It strode quickly along without pause or hesitation.

Instinctively he lifted his Ryolet and brought the moving blur into the middle of the foresight.

"Nicolai," he whispered savagely, "I've got you now!"

His fingers crooked to the pull, but, just as the trigger began to yield, a thought flashed vividly through his brain. Natalie had implored him to go at once to Stanovitch—to go very quickly. It had seemed that she dreaded not her own danger, but her mind was torn with black fear of what might be happening in that lonely spot where the big man peered through his transit across the skeleton of Stepan Kolkoff.

Then, as Nicolai's footsteps died away, he filled his lungs and began to run toward the ravine.

The deep purple of night had yielded to a chill grayness when he neared his goal. The stars vanished behind masses of low, drifting clouds that came sailing from the northwest, with promises of snow in their soft and fleecy depths. The world was very still with suggestions of that winter which would soon obliterate its stark and naked bosom.

The floor of the ravine was carpeted with a dense fog that wrapped its grim tenant in a white and clammy covering. Pearson, gazing down, experienced a curious aversion to descending to the lower level. He stood on the higher ground and strained his eyes as the edges of the mist began to roll slowly back and reveal the damp and stony earth beneath. It was as though some invisible hand had reached from the heavens and was delicately withdrawing a gigantic coverlet, beneath which some mystery had lain hidden all through the watches of the night.

First, there came into view the toboggan of Stepan, with its scattered load and torn sacks. This was nearest Pearson's feet and close to the walls of the ravine. Then the ivory ribs of the headless skeleton glistened in the cold light of dawn. Lastly, as the mist withdrew still farther, the legs of the tripod came into view, and the transit with its telescope tilted and pointing to where there had once been a polestar that was now far on its journey round the world. He held his breath, and waited for something more, he knew not what, that

the mist had yet to reveal. Presently, from the white wall, he saw very distinctly a man's feet projecting. The toes were turned to the sky. Then the knees, the trunk, and, as it were by inches, the whole body of Ivan Stanovitch detached itself from the white blanket and slid into clear view. He was on his back.

Pearson's eyeballs burned at the vision. His lips stiffened, and the muscles on his jaw stood out like cords of steel. He waited, without moving, conscious only that he was framing silent and deadly oaths of revenge, oaths that he would carry out if they took him to the other side of the world. At last, as though drawn by irresistible chains, he climbed slowly down.

The big man was quite dead. His eyes, half open and still staring, retained a ghastly look of horrified surprise. There was no mark of injury, but a pink foam had gathered on the rigid lips. The transit book lay open beside him, and a multitude of cigarette stubs were scattered about.

Pearson felt something tugging at his heart. Then he stooped and turned the dead giant on his face. In another instant he started back involuntarily.

Between the broad shoulders the blood had welled from a narrow slit. The back of Stanovitch was wet and soaking. The hole in his coat was directly opposite his heart. Death must have been instantaneous.

"From behind!" said Pearson in horror. "From behind!"

Suddenly, into these ponderings, flashed the memory of that tall, thin, indistinct figure hurrying along the trail in the darkness. What a fool he was to stand here looking at the dead and speculating on the future, when the living might be in dire distress. Bending over Stanovitch, he closed the staring eyes, and, opening the transit book wide, laid it across the still face. Then, with his rifle at safety, he raced back along the trail.

It was well for Pearson that in bygone days he had been a long-distance champion. He called now on the deep lungs, the long stride, and the tough sinews that had enabled him to breast the tape in many a breathless contest. Faster and faster he went, leaping from rock to rock, while in his brain moved a new and forbidding terror. The miles dropped behind, as the light grew clearer, but his pace never slackened. His chest pumped steadily, his heart beat with a quick, powerful, steady throb. Pearson was in condition, and he thanked God as never before.

Then, still a mile from camp, three revolver shots snapped sharply through the motionless air. At this, his pace increased, and his heart struck up a new and unaccustomed throb. He began to torture himself as to whether his hand would be steady enough to shoot, and shoot quickly. In another hundred yards he had savagely decided that he would not trust his eye, but would strangle Nicolai with his strong, lean hands.

At last there came a glimmer of water ahead and the white wedges of tents. He dashed into camp, his eyes searching rapidly. The place was in utter silence, and there was neither sight nor sound of struggle. A frightful thought struck him that the triumphant Nicolai might have carried the girl off. But there instantly flashed a question: "Where could he carry her, and be safe from an avenger?"

He remembered, with a curious start, that it was Nicolai who had said that a man could not hide himself in the wilderness. Hastily he ransacked the ground. The tents were all empty. Casting nervously about, he glimpsed a spot of red in the low bushes at the edge of a clump of spruce. In another moment he was kneeling beside the form of Natalie. Her eyes were closed and her cheeks deadly white. He took her wrist. After an endless moment

the pulse began to beat, but very faintly. At this, he took new courage, dashed to the water's edge, filled a cup, and threw the contents straight in her face. He began to rub her hands and wrists.

Presently she sighed and shivered. Her eyes opened weakly. They were full of dread, as if still remembering some soul-destroying vision, then slowly they melted into a timid self-consciousness as she blinked up into Pearson's grim visage.

At that moment he would have advanced against an army, so charged was his spirit with a terrific lust for revenge. "Are you all right?" he said quickly.

Her hands wandered nervously to her disordered hair. "Yes. Has Nicolai gone? Where is my father?" she faltered.

Pearson's brows contracted and his eyes were full of an infinite pity. "Will you not wait till you are stronger? You are perfectly safe now."

"I'm all right. Please, please tell me at once." There was a growing terror in her face.

He racked his brain how to tell her without crushing the life out of her spirit. "Nicolai is a murderer," he said slowly.

She winced. The blood again deserted her cheeks. Pearson questioned himself as to how so frail a mortal could survive so fearful a trial. "Dead!" she said faintly. "Ivan Stanovitch is dead. Nicolai was always a murderer."

He nodded. It seemed hard to find speech for such a moment as this.

Suddenly the girl trembled, and shrank close to him. "Where is Nicolai?" she whimpered. "Where is he?"

"I didn't see him. Did he attack you, too?"

Again she began to shudder violently, and again he put his arm around her shoulders and steadied the slight frame. It seemed impossible that in her was blood and bone and strength enough to withstand more.

"Never mind. You are perfectly safe now. I won't leave you. Please lie down in your tent, and I will watch outside. There is nothing to be afraid of when there is no one here but ourselves."

She nodded, and tried ineffectually to rise. Pearson stooped and picked her up bodily in his arms. Thus he took her to her tent and laid her on the blankets. Then, with a sharp glance into the wilderness, he got his flask.

"Drink some. Then rest—you must rest. Please don't worry about anything."

She tasted the spirits, and lifted her eyes. They were dark with weariness and a weak relapse. She smiled once at him, and in an instant her lids dropped.

John Pearson swallowed a lump in his throat. Very carefully he examined her revolver. In it were three empty shells. He puzzled over this; then, rifle in hand, began to traverse the ground around the tent. Nicolai was watching somewhere. He felt almost sure of that, but why did not Nicolai shoot from his hiding place? It would be easy work, as easy as stabbing a man in the back.

The immediate vicinity yielded no discovery. Pearson, poking through the bushes, had a queer sensation between his shoulders. Nicolai, he felt sure, would not hesitate to shoot if he were within range. This was biting in his brain as he turned toward his own tent. In another moment he stood rigid.

Nicolai was on the ground in front of him. The green eyes were half closed, and the thin lips drawn back in a snarl that revealed the broken, yellow teeth. One hand was open, the palm turned upward. In the other was clutched a fragment of Natalie's sleeve.

Pearson's own heart seemed to stop at the sight. Wherever he turned, this

naked land was charged with death—sudden and mysterious.

Now, at his feet, the body of Natalie's assailant stiffened in the frost. Again, as with the murdered Stanovitch, the blow had fallen out of a voiceless immensity, and the slayer had, for the time, faded out of sight and sound. He stooped over the corpse, with a fierce exultation. Whoever or whatever the avenger might be, the life had been literally driven out of the green-eyed man. He was not disfigured except by nature. There was no mark of violence or struggle. There was no blood.

Pearson felt a repulsive sensation of recurrence. It seemed that, for the rest of his life, he was fated to tramp anxiously through the subarctics and to find dead men, and for thousands of years keep turning them over to find what had killed them. Then suddenly his jaw dropped.

In the left temple of Nicolai was a small, three-cornered hole, so clean and perfect that it might have been cut by a machine.

CHAPTER X.

An hour later, Pearson sat outside his tent gazing into a leaping fire. The day had suddenly grown excessively cold, and from the gray clouds the snow was floating steadily down in great flakes that hissed and vanished in the flames. Slowly and with infinite care he traced the days back to that eventful night when he had walked into Florio's restaurant with empty pockets and ordered the best dinner of which New York was capable. Now, out of his retrospection, certain facts shone with vivid distinction, but these yielded no solution to a mystery that seemed more profound with every passing hour.

He was, he decided, a casual soldier of fortune, who had demanded less assurance in his venture than any soldier had ever demanded before. That Natalie had disliked and feared Stanovitch he could not question, and yet it had been palpable that she was stricken with fear at the prospect of his death. She loathed Nicolai as she would loathe a snake twisting through the grass; but, nevertheless, she had obeyed him through all these eventful months. One man had tried desperately to drown his compatriot and traveling companion, and had fallen in solitude with his enemy's knife between his shoulders. The other had yielded up his life at the stroke of a weapon wielded by some invisible third person. The two had spurned gold, but blazed with sudden excitement over a brown rock which, according to the assurance of Stanovitch, was only of geological interest. Behind all this there was over all of them a strange shadow of some elusive individual or power that could follow, see, and punish even in the desolation of this rocky wilderness. The deeper he probed, the more distant seemed the answer.

In the silence, a voice sounded at his elbow:

"Mr. Pearson, do you see how the ice is forming? Will the Indians be able to get back?"

He started. Natalie stood beside him, poised and quietly confident. Looking at her, it seemed that the terror-stricken girl had disappeared, and there had emerged another girl, who, more beautiful than ever, looked frankly at him, and, in a wordless appeal, asked that he consider her with good-fellowship and trust.

"I don't know," he said slowly. "I am afraid that ice as thick as that would cut a canoe to pieces." His eyes searched her exquisite face.

There came to him a faint suggestion that when fear had disappeared from her dark gaze it had been replaced by a peace to which their lustrous depths had long been stranger. It was as though terror had passed away while

she slept and there had descended upon her frail and unconscious form a new calm that now wrapped her in comforting folds.

"You see," she went on quietly, "if we can't get out by canoe we shall have to walk hundreds of miles. You remember what Nicolai said. I don't think I am strong enough to do that."

Pearson pondered. The ice still formed along the shore. He knew that its knifelike edge would shear through any small craft in a few moments. Already the smooth, glassy sheet was reaching out north and south along the encircling curve of the bay. Overhead, the clouds gave no promise of release. It was evident that nature was already yawning and stretching ere she yielded to that vast, fleecy covering which would soon envelope her ancient bones.

"I think you must make up your mind either to stay here till next summer or try and walk out. We might have made it a week ago. I'm very sorry, but there is no chance now."

She gasped. "Stay here?"

He nodded silently.

There came a pause in which both stared into the fire. Then she began to speak, with a tremor in her words that moved him mightily.

"I must tell you," she said under her breath. "It's only fair that you should know. I owe everything to you now."

Pearson's heart jumped. Was he actually to know at last?

"After you went out to the ravine," she continued, with a catch in her voice, "I didn't go back to my tent. You were quite right, and, in any case, I was much too afraid. I tried to hide myself in the darkest shadows over by the edge of the spruce trees. I waited there for a long time, and nothing happened. It must have been hours, and I got very cold because I did not dare go into the firelight. Then, just when I began to think that Nicolai would not be back before you returned, I thought I heard a noise, as though some one were breathing very hard just behind me."

Her voice dropped, and she trembled violently. "Don't, if you'd rather not," put in Pearson, with compassion. "There will be lots of time to tell me," he added thoughtfully.

"I must. I will feel better after I have told you. In another moment I did actually hear breathing, but I was too frightened to move. The sound was just like a man panting after a hard run. Then Nicolai spoke, though I could not even see him in the shadows. He asked me, in a curious tone, why I did not go to bed and sleep, and said that I could not help Stanovitch in his observation by hiding in the woods at night. I had not breath enough to answer him. And that moment he moved nearer me, and I saw his face.

"His face was fearfully distorted. He looked like a beast of prey, and his eyes seemed to flash with green fire. I knew I was in great danger, and then, quite instinctively, I fired the revolver three times. My fingers seemed to pull the trigger by itself, for I was hardly conscious of doing it."

Pearson nodded. "I heard your shots. I was more than a mile from camp, on my way back. But I am afraid I didn't do much good," he added bitterly.

She gazed at him strangely, as though thoughts far different were moving in her own mind. Then she continued, with a quiver in her voice:

"As soon as I fired, Nicolai sprang at me. My strength seemed to come back, and I was able to keep him off, but only for a few moments. He got his hands on my neck. They felt like claws, and he pulled me so close to him that I could feel his breath hot on my face. I screamed, and his fingers began to close round my throat. I was quite weak by that time. My eyes were shut, and everything seemed to get purple. Then, just as I was going to fall, I heard Nicolai scream. It was not a

shout, but a horrible yell, just like an animal that had been caught in a trap. I was only half conscious, but the fear in his cry made my blood run colder than ever. I thought some animal was going to attack us both. Just at that moment I was conscious that his hands let go of my throat, and everything spun round, and I think I fainted."

She paused, then added slowly: "The next thing I knew was that you were rubbing my wrists. Where is Nicolai now?" she concluded tremulously.

Pearson's face was very grim, as his lifted hand pointed to the clump of timber. "He will not threaten you or any one else any more."

"Is he—is he dead?" Her eyes were riveted to his own.

An unaccustomed chill came over the young man's heart, and he nodded. "He was dead when I reached camp."

"Was it an animal?" A new tremor had crept into her voice.

"No, it wasn't an animal," he said slowly.

She faced him bravely. "Tell me—what killed him. You must tell me. You frighten me when you look like that. Who or what is there here to kill Nicolai?"

"The man who killed Stepan Kolkoff," he answered gravely.

Her hand closed on his arm, and the slight fingers sank into it with nervous strength. "How—do you know? There is no one here now but ourselves."

"In the left temple of Nicolai there is a small, three-cornered hole. There was also such a hole in the same place in the skull I found in the ravine."

She glanced timidly at the mound of trees where Nicolai lay hidden for all time from the world of men among whom he had moved with such menace in his green eyes. "No, no! You don't mean that!"

"I *must* mean it. I have not been able to tell you before, but I have felt for some time lately that we were not alone. Once I heard footsteps beside the trail, heard them quite distinctly, and early this morning I saw a man who I know was not Nicolai moving quickly toward the camp. I know it sounds strange, but I'm positive."

She shook her head. "It is quite impossible. How could any one get here without our knowing it?"

"I begin to think that nothing is impossible in the North. Everything that is strange and mysterious and dreadful seems to happen here," replied Pearson thoughtfully. "Suppose that this man were here before we came? It is quite possible."

"But why should he come here?"

"That is what I don't know." He hesitated, and looked at her with a question in his gray eyes. "You probably know much more than I do, and I can only guess. But there is one good thing that is quite evident, you are not in danger, nor am I, and that is something to be thankful for, after the last few months. Think for a moment. I have been trying to reason it out, and what strikes me is, that Stepan was killed when he was going away. He was not heading for camp, according to the position of the toboggan. Isn't it quite possible that he was disobeying orders, some orders that we know nothing about? Nicolai was killed when he was attacking you. Apart from any enmity that any other person may have had for him, there was every reason that he should be killed. Don't you see that if there is some invisible third person, and he had wanted to do away with either of us it would have been perfectly easy? If it is not that, I can only conclude that there is a native hidden somewhere near here who, for some unknown reason, hates all Russians—that is, Russian men—but who would not stand by and see a woman injured. Is there any one else who could possibly be here, and who was in danger of any kind from either your father or Nicolai? I know

I am not supposed to ask questions, but things are on a different basis now," he concluded gently.

She sat, profoundly silent. Then the color gradually left her cheeks, and a new oppression seemed to return.

"Please don't tell me, if you would rather not," put in Pearson hastily.

"It isn't that I'd rather not, but there is so much that I dare not tell you," she said, searching the camp again with a timorous gaze. "There are certain men, a body of men, whom we all fear —utterly!"

"Your father, too?" ventured her companion.

"Not my father—he's my stepfather."

"What?"

"I wanted to tell you before, but there was no reason for doing so. My own father has been dead for years. Stanovitch married my mother soon after he died."

Pearson stared. He wondered if this was one step to the solution of this mystery.

"He was afraid of these men," went on the girl. "I know that. Oh, I can't speak any more now, and you must not ask me. It's torture. I gave an oath not to speak. I dare not break it. Don't you see? Stanovitch broke his oath." She stopped abruptly, as though there had slipped from her that which was perilous to divulge.

Her glance besought him, and his hand went out involuntarily.

"I'm awfully sorry. Please forgive me. I forgot that I was under an oath, too. I won't ask any more questions."

The girl's eyes filled with tears, the first tears that Pearson had ever seen in their liquid depths. His heart punished him, and he vowed not to transgress again.

"I think we had better make some breakfast," he said lightly. "Come along! This country makes one as hungry as a moose. I could eat anything. By George, it's getting colder than ever!"

She smiled sadly. They cooked and ate; then, over a contemplative pipe, he tried to work the thing out. In a few moments he shook his head, and glanced at the solitary figure across the fire.

"I say, there is a job I have to do. It will take me half an hour at least, if not more. Won't you go down to the shore for a while? It is hardly a woman's work, and I will call you when I am ready. Then, if you feel up to it, we will both walk out to the ravine, but please don't attempt it unless you are perfectly fit. I don't in the least mind going by myself."

Very, very silently she walked shoreward. Then, halfway to the water's edge, she turned. "Should I see him first, in case——"

"No!" said Pearson violently. "For God's sake, no! It's too horrible! Please forget about it, if you can."

He turned doggedly to work. The dead Nicolai was, if anything, more repulsive than Nicolai alive. The narrow slit of green eyes seemed to leer sardonically as the young man toiled in the rock-strewn earth. He did not close the eyes, having a queer idea that perhaps the body of Nicolai might see the digging of his own grave. The man's frame was limp and slack, as though muscles and sinews had melted away when the baleful fire died so suddenly in his threatening eyes.

Pearson looked down at him ere he filled the grave. Whatever was left of Nicolai was huddled grotesquely at the bottom. A few crumbs of earth had fallen between his parted lips. It seemed, somehow, astonishing that this powerless frame and this brain now forever stilled should for so many months have dominated his companions and filled them with fear and foreboding. Nicolai would lie very still now.

An hour later, he started for the ravine, with the girl behind him. Silence

fell over them both. The miles fell slowly behind till he turned and pointed to a ridge that paralleled the trail.

"I heard footsteps there one evening."

She started. "Who was it?"

"I don't know. But," he added slowly, "now I think it was the man who killed Stepan and Nicolai."

Her eyes rounded. Memories seemed to move through her brain till she was about to speak. Then, as though an invisible finger were laid upon her lips, she remained voiceless.

In two hours they reached the gulch. Here there was a film of snow that sheeted the tragedy in a glistening robe. Pearson pointed from the edge.

"Everything is exactly as I found it. You see that the transit was not touched, and Stanovitch had evidently just stepped away from it when he was stabbed. I don't think he can have suffered at all or even knew that he had been attacked."

Her eyes contracted with sudden agony as they climbed slowly down. She knelt beside the form of Stanovitch and began to stroke his cold cheeks, and talk to herself in a voice that was full of heartbreak.

"I am so sorry, Ivan! The first night I listened at the door I did not think that this would be the end. I tried to stop you after I had found out, but you wouldn't stop. I told you that Nicolai had read your thoughts, but you would not believe me. I had to come because I knew, too, but I don't blame you now. Sleep well, you who were so nearly my father, sleep well! If God is good, and I reach home, I shall put an offering on the grave of Theodora. Good-by, Ivan Stanovitch! It were well that you had been more content with what God gave you."

She crouched on the ground, put her lips to the icy forehead, and looked up through a sudden rain of tears.

"I will go away to pray now. I will come back when you call me."

Again Pearson bent to his task. When the huge frame had plunged heavily into the pit, he looked down as that morning he had looked before. It appeared now that Jove himself was to pass out of sight of men. Never had the brow of Stanovitch looked so broad and white. Never had the noble head seemed more noble. There was on the face a calm majesty, as though fear and horror and fatigue and ambition had been wiped clean away, and at last he surveyed peacefully the magnificent processes of nature and eternity. Whatever mystery harbored in his brain was now lost in the greatest mystery of all. His generosity, his pride, his impulsiveness, and that elusive goal for which he strove—all had vanished. He would rest forever, and above him would boom the requiem of arctic gales.

Quite automatically, as if bidden by some invisible overlord, he picked up the headless skeleton of Stepan and laid it in the grave. The earth began to rattle down through the naked ribs and crumble into the black, silky beard that lay so smoothly on that massive chest. Presently it was all over, and he called loudly. He did not know that he was calling: "Natalie, Natalie!"

The girl appeared quickly. Together they inspected the toboggan, with its scattered load. Then he led her to the quartz vein, with its ruddy filling. At this she stared, fingering fragments of precious metal and regarding them with a curious intelligence in her face. He wondered if she, too, were a geologist.

Finally they stood in front of the brown streak, in which it seemed to her companion that those white, metallic beads were longer and more plentiful than ever. Involuntarily she gripped his arm. Her eyes were riveted on the rock, and blank amazement moved within them. She spoke one word. A

strange word, that brought no meaning with it.

She turned to Pearson: "It is marvelous! I didn't dream that such a deposit could exist. Ah!" She ceased in a sudden swift confusion, and the color flew to her cheeks.

"What do you mean?" he said sharply. "Is gold worthless beside this?" He kicked a piece of the bead-filled stone.

"Forget what I said!" she implored. "I should not have spoken."

He leaned on his rifle, and regarded her fixedly.

"I don't want to be unreasonable, but do you mean that you still consider I have not any right to ask—under the circumstances?"

Her eyes softened. "Don't misunderstand me," she pleaded. "You have every right, but I am under oath, as well as the others. It isn't that I don't want to speak, but I mustn't. I beg you to believe that."

Pearson subdued his questioning spirit, and surveyed her quietly. Straight, slim, and very beautiful, she faced him with utter confidence. She seemed made for worship, passion, and caress, with her smooth, clear skin, black hair, dark, lustrous eyes, and perfect mouth. The thought of all that such a woman had to give oppressed and baffled him.

"The day may come when I can tell you," she continued gently, "but until then it is safer that you know nothing. I am thinking of you more than of myself."

Something in her wistfulness touched him, and he felt a pang of remorse. "I'm sorry! I won't say any more. And now I think we had better get back to camp at once. It's snowing harder every minute."

She nodded, without a word, and silently they commenced the tramp home. It appeared now to the young man almost as if they had left behind them a world of crime and horror, and set their faces toward a new country, no less full of mystery than the one they left.

Ere night the snow ceased, and the gray clouds lifted. A light wind whined down from the north and blew the dry snow like wool across the earth. Then the wind itself dropped, and a sharp, clear cold settled from the sky.

It was after breakfast, next morning, that Natalie looked bravely in her companion's face. "What is the best thing to do now?" she said.

He rooted out the map of the Northwest Territories from the dunnage bag of Stanovitch and laid a brown finger on the small, green, oval patch that marked Dubawnt Lake.

"It's quite right," he said, pondering deeply. "We must either stay here till next spring or else face the walk out. As to the latter, there are two ways, according to the map. You notice that Dubawnt Lake flows north through Horton and Aberdeen Lakes, into Chesterfield Inlet. A hundred and fifty miles down the inlet will bring us to the sea, but at a point nearly a thousand miles from Moose Factory and four hundred miles from Fort Churchill. So I think that route is out of the question. Even if we could get along the west shore of Hudson Bay, down to the Moose River, it would take us all winter to get out."

"And the other?" she put in, a little breathless.

"You remember what Nicolai said about making for Great Slave Lake. He had evidently inquired about the possibility of getting out that way, before we came in. That is the Thelon River, nearly a hundred miles west of where we are. The map doesn't say anything about the country in between, but I fancy it is pretty much like what we can see from here. After you cross the Thelon River, you come to the height of land between Hudson Bay and the Arctic Ocean, the dotted line

you see marked. Once past that, I think the worst of it is over. Then we come to the old site of Fort Reliance, and strike McLeod Bay, which is the northeast end of Great Slave Lake. Then we hug the south shore for two hundred miles, and reach Fort Resolution. The rest is easy. We ought to be able to get out to Edmonton with the mail carriers. I heard Nicolai speak of that, too."

She stared at the map, tracing their proposed course with a slim finger. Then she looked up. "How long will it take?" she said soberly.

Pearson began to reckon rapidly. "From here to Fort Resolution, in a dead straight line, measures about four inches, but the way we will probably go will make it five. That is five hundred miles."

She gasped with astonishment. "Do you mean I am expected to walk five hundred miles? You're joking."

"No, I'm afraid there is no joke about it. But there is a good chance that we will get hold of an Indian and his dog team. That, as far as I can see, is the only possible way we could carry provisions."

Again she searched his face, questioning him with eyes that seemed to ask: "Do you really believe that a girl like myself can walk five hundred miles across the subarctics in winter?" Then suddenly her gaze changed into a glance that made his pulses leap: "Is that all?"

"No; there is a good deal to do before we start. You had better go through the papers of Stanovitch and Nicolai and pick out anything you think it is wise to keep. If you don't mind, I would sooner you do that alone. As to our journey, please understand that we can carry nothing but what is absolutely necessary. We will take food, a minimum of clothes, the light silk tent, blankets, a rifle, an ax, and ammunition. And, as a matter of fact, I don't know how we are going to put all that on a single toboggan, if we are lucky enough to get one."

"One tent?" she said suddenly, shrinking from him.

Pearson flushed. "Look here," he snapped angrily, "there is something you apparently don't understand. I am trying to take the same care of you as I would take of my mother or sister. If you can't accept that, and believe me absolutely, I am perfectly content to sleep in a snowdrift. Don't you see that we two have to win out single-handed against the eternal North and the winter of God Almighty?"

She breathed sharply, and her eyes dwelt on him as though fascinated. "Forgive me again!" she said softly. "It seems that I am fated to wound my best friend." Then she added: "And if we do win out?"

"We will each go our own way," he answered slowly, "and try and forget what happened on Dubawnt Lake."

CHAPTER XI.

Five days later, the tiny caravan started westward. There had been a strange overhauling of the contents of the camp, and a weighing and counting of provisions. Natalie had sorted over the possessions of Nicolai and Stanovitch, but of them all she had only kept a small package. They had spent a day in the building of a great stone cairn within which were safely buried the things of value that they could not take. The assay scales, the transit, the dynamite, the spare tents, a mound of tinned food—all these made a small mountain that Pearson eyed with cheerful satisfaction.

"By George, there is enough there to do a man for years! I'll use them all when I come back."

A shadow flickered through the girl's eyes.

"When you come back?" she protested.

He laughed happily. "Of course I'll come back! You don't mean to suggest that I'm going to leave a mint like that behind and forget all about it? Not at all! That thing is good enough to spend a lot of money on, and I know plenty of men who will go in with me. I'm coming in again next spring, only by an easier route."

She looked at him strangely, and shook her head warningly. "My dear friend, you must never think of coming here again! Whatever happens, on no account do that, even though the earth were paved with gold, or——" she stopped abruptly.

"Or what?" he demanded quickly.

"Or diamonds. My friend, my dear, dear friend, there is nothing so valuable as life."

And, in spite of all his questioning, she would say no more.

Now, traversing Dubawnt Lake toward the long, blue island to the west, he still pondered over her words. The fateful camp had dropped out of sight around the point. Beneath their feet the new ice was smooth and hard. Behind him the toboggan slithered along without weight, though it was packed high with everything he had dared to take. Into Natalie's face had come a new light, one that he had never seen there before. It seemed as though dread and anxiety had been smoothed out of her eyes. The trials of the future seemed to lie lightly on her. She was suddenly endowed with an unaccustomed happiness.

At noon they were abreast the northern end of the island. Here they ate. Then Pearson commanded the girl to mount the toboggan, and he struck boldly across, in a long, loping trot, for the western shore of Dubawnt Lake. The sharpness of the air intoxicated him, and a new joy of life throbbed in his veins. Hour after hour he kept up his pace, and the miles slid smoothly and swiftly behind.

Halfway over to the opposite shore came a sighing sound from the north, and slowly the wind arose. Then, gradually, beneath his feet, the whole transparent sheet began to move in long, slow, flat curves that heaved ominously with the motion of the water. The ice was so thin that it was plastic. For an hour this danger lasted, but some Providence kept the sun behind the gray clouds and stiffened the frost. Pearson breathed more freely when they came to land.

He caught his breath, and fumbled for his pipe. "We're well out of that," he said shortly.

"Out of what?" The girl spoke, unconscious of peril.

Instantly it came to him that always and at all times, whatever the danger to which they might be exposed, the knowledge of it must be kept from her. The smiling face was part of the rôle he had assumed.

"Oh, nothing," he laughed. "We were going so fast that I was afraid we would would fall and break something."

He made camp ere sundown in the shelter of a patch of small timber. The girl was very silent as she held the tent pole vertical while he drove peg after peg and strained the guy ropes taut. Then he built fire, cooked, served her, and washed the dishes. Last of all, he spread a ground sheet near the door of the tent, and put his own blankets in the middle. "What do you think of my cooking?" he said cheerfully.

She smiled at him, but did not speak. Nearness and night were enveloping them. All the tribes of fur and feather were now seeking warmth and comfort. Once she caught his glance. It was impersonal and indifferent. He looked as though she were there purely by accident.

In a few moments he rose and went into the bush. She heard him chop-

ping, then the blows of his ax ceased, and he returned, bent beneath a pyramid of spruce branches. These he spread out on the ground beside the fire.

"It's eight o'clock, and we had better keep travelers' hours; so I think you should turn in now. We'll make a very early start."

She glanced at him. Her cheeks were scarlet and her lips moved, without words. In another moment she disappeared into the tent.

He kicked the fire into life and thrust a grimy forefinger into the bowl of his pipe. To the eastward he could see Lake Dubawnt lying like a shining mirror in the white light of the risen moon. On the other side of this glassy sheet was the land, cold and desolate, to which he had grimly determined to return and wrest from it riches already bloodstained. West of the lake, the woods themselves were bare of snow, and their shadowy depths were very silent. The spruce tops moved slowly in a light wind and sang in that gentle, sighing unison which has been the lullaby of the open road ever since the world was young. Above him, the canopy of night stretched in purple immensity, sown thick with brilliant stars. Presently he knocked the ashes from his pipe, heaved another log on the fire, glanced at the tent, and rolled in his blankets. In an instant he was fast asleep.

Toward midnight, he woke with a start. Cold had reached his blood, and he had dreamed that some one touched his shoulder. He sat up, blinking, and dimly made out a figure standing over him.

"Will you please come into the tent? I am very sorry I was so rude."

He chased the shadows out of his brain.

"I'm all right, thanks," he stammered. "This is a ripping place to sleep, and you weren't a bit rude. I quite understand."

She moved impatiently, and then said in a small, thin voice: "Please don't make it any harder for me."

He leaped to his feet and stumbled to the tent without a word. The girl had moved her coverings to the right side. There was a space for him against the left wall. Silently he unrolled his blankets. Then sleep engulfed them both.

It was broad daylight when he sat up with a start. In another dream he had heard again a human voice. His eyes wandered across the tent. Natalie had dreamed it, too. They both listened acutely.

In another moment the voice sounded again. Pearson ran out and raced to the shore. Not a hundred yards away a tall Indian was trotting lightly ahead of a long toboggan. He carried a rifle loosely in his left hand, and his eyes continually searched the shore. The toboggan, only half laden, was drawn by five large, yellow, black-nosed, bushy-tailed dogs. The Indian wore a curious pointed flap cap. It looked as though it were made of the skin of a wolf's head.

Pearson's heart leaped with sudden relief. "Hello!" he shouted. "Hold on! Come here, I want to talk to you!"

The Indian stopped as though he had been shot. The leading dog bumped into his legs and the rest of the train tangled themselves in a snapping confusion. Then the Indian's rifle leaped to his shoulder, and he stared hard at the shore.

Pearson walked out with both arms in the air. "Where are you going, Neeje?"

The stranger pointed south. "Me go to Big River—good hunting—plenty fur."

"You want job?"

"How much? Where go?"

"You wait! commanded Pearson.

"Eat now—talk by and by—plenty food —plenty money."

The Indian smiled, kicked his dogs into the traces, and led them shoreward. As he did so, Natalie ran down from the tent. She was dressed in furs. Pearson had not seen them before.

The Indian stopped and stared at her. "You squaw," he said, with a grin.

"Yes, my squaw," answered Pearson, with reddening cheeks. He had a swift consciousness that the girl was safer thus.

The visitor ate ravenously. His dogs lay round him, with noses thrust between great, soft paws, watching him with unwinking gaze.

"Which way you go?" he said presently, in a sleepy, satisfied voice.

Pearson got out his map and traced his proposed route to Great Bear Lake.

The Indian shook his head. "Kahween kago neshashin—no good—much big hill there." He put his finger west of the Thelon River. "Bad place—no meat—plenty wind."

The white man frowned. "You seem to know a lot about it. Which way would you go?"

Again the steady brown finger slid over the map. It was evident that he knew much about that particular patch of the wilderness which was not yet known to the map makers of Ottawa. This desolate area was a piece of paper to them, but to him it was home. "Here Big River. Dubawnt River. Go up river. Good walk. Here long lake and Hudson Bay post. Me stay on ice all time. No go in bush. Too rough. Snow too soft."

"How long will that take?" put in the girl suddenly.

Pearson had almost forgotten her presence, so engrossed was he in the stranger's program.

"How long?" he repeated.

"Twenty days—maybe thirty days—if good trail and dogs no die," answered the Indian.

"How much do you want to take us there?"

The Indian plunged into thought. Presently he looked up and showed his pointed teeth. "Twenty days: five dollars one day. Thirty days: four dollars one day."

Pearson turned to the girl. "It doesn't seem much, if it is going to get us out of this. As a matter of fact, I haven't any money. Can you manage it?" He laughed awkwardly, with a swift memory of a similar occasion.

She nodded, smiled at him, and went into the tent. In another moment she reappeared with a long, flat, black pocketbook and handed it to him. "It was Nicolai's, but it will do more good now than ever before."

The young man's lips twitched as he examined the contents. There were more than a thousand dollars.

"All right," he said to the waiting guide. "I'll give you that when we get to the post. You will be able to buy a lot of things with a hundred dollars. Perhaps you can get a squaw. When can you start?"

The Indian shook his head. "One hundred dollars too much for squaw. Me start—wabungejabe—to-morrow morning. I go now get fish for dogs—Boozhoo—sahganosh—good-by, white man!"

In a few moments he had rounded a point and dropped out of sight into the wilderness. There was only left behind the trail of the toboggan and the dwindling sound of his excited voice as he shouted to the dogs.

Pearson looked at his companion. "That's first rate! We strike luck as soon as we start, and quite possibly this has saved our lives." He handed back the pocketbook. "Perhaps you had better keep this?"

"No," she said gently; "that's part of your work. If it isn't enough, let me

know. I have another purse, as well, belonging to Stanovitch. After we get out, we will divide what's left—when we say good-by."

There was a finality in her words that hurt him horribly. It seemed at the moment that he was merely being used as the only possible means of escape, and that she intended to cast him off, whether he loved her or not, as soon as they escaped from the wilderness.

"Are you thinking of that already?" he said slowly. For an instant their eyes met.

"Ah, my friend, I try not to, but I can't help it."

CHAPTER XII.

Two weeks later, a tiny procession toiled slowly along the white, flat lane beneath which lay Selwyn Lake. At first, all had gone well. Day after day they had counted off twenty-five miles, sometimes even thirty miles to the good. Muqua the Bear strode ahead, breaking the trail with his long, pointed shoes. Behind him tramped Pearson, smashing down the snow. Then came the five yellow, black-nosed, white-tailed dogs, their tawny sides rippling with every straining muscle. And, last of all, the new toboggan, with Natalie wedged into a long, narrow mound that was laced tightly with cross cords to the springing side rods.

Beneath the curving bows the lumps of snow powdered with a dull, steady, unending crunching. The quick breathing of the dogs sounded in a sharp, panting staccato, and the snowshoes creaked as they yielded to every swinging stride. But beyond this there was no sound. Past their dazzled eyes stretched a crystalline plain that swam beneath dark and distant banks to a horizon that seemed continually to retreat. There was nothing to break the glistening monotony of this expanse except little gusts and pyramids of snow that danced daintily with every circling wind.

Pearson had been conscious of being quietly satisfied. The greater part of the distance was covered. They had crossed the watershed that heaves up brokenly and splits the country between Dubawnt Lake and Lake Athabaska. They had now left the waters that flow into Hudson Bay, and were traveling over those that seek the arctic. The Hudson Bay post, at Fond du Lac, was only seventy miles from Selwyn Lake, which they now traversed.

But in these later days, Pearson had been conscious as well that there was smoldering within him that which might burst into flame at a word, a touch, or a look. He found himself in the grip of that which was stronger than his own strength. Heart-whole when he turned northward, he had yielded at last, in spite of every struggle, to those resistless chains which the subarctics and nearness and mutual danger had thrown over them both. His body, grown strong in the fight for life, now craved that which it might protect and nurture. His mind pierced the future, and saw that no other woman could ever be so near to him as was this dark-eyed girl with whom he had walked on the edge of eternity. His heart longed for that which it might love and worship, and, he reflected often, had she not said that she tried not to remember that day on which they must part. His heart contracted at the vision of her in another man's arms.

These thoughts were burning in his brain when he was tramping down Selwyn Lake. The answer seemed farther off than ever. Then, looking up, he noted that Muqua had suddenly turned directly for the shore.

"Hold on," he shouted, "we're not going to make camp yet! It is only three o'clock."

The Indian turned and pointed into the northwest. The white man looked.

As far as he could see, the horizon was blotted out in a gray wall that seemed to stream across the earth. It came so fast that beneath its feet the distant woods were suddenly eclipsed. It struck the far end of Selwyn Lake, drove across it swiftly, then leaped past the eastern shore. From its heart came a dull moaning. At the same moment the first breathings of an icy blast took him in the face.

Natalie also had turned and was staring into the northwest.

"What is it?" she said nervously.

"A blizzard! Now—sit tight!"

Muqua was running toward the land. Behind him raced the dogs, with their ears laid back and yelping with excitement. They, too, had sensed the approach of a common peril.

The gale hit them ere the shelter of the woods was reached. It was heralded by a vicious wind that whipped the spruce tops wildly and drove the snow in long, level, streaming lines. After this the full weight of the hurricane snored down from the arctic with a droning monotone that settled into a deep, steady roar.

The tent went up as if by magic. Muqua erected his lean-to in the thickest part of the timber. It was not till after supper that he spoke again.

"Big snow now—maybe two days—maybe two weeks—stop here—plenty grub—go very slow by and by—hard work for dogs—no hunt—too much snow—cut wood—make long fire—eat—sleep—good place."

He disappeared for the night. The dogs dug holes in which they coiled like round heaps of warm, palpitating, yellow fur. The snow sped, hissing, into the blaze. There was no light in the heavens, but overhead stretched a gray pall that seemed a foe to light. Through the darkness, the trees loomed tall and ghostly. Pearson thought that never before had man and woman been so utterly alone. The rest of humanity was blotted out.

The firelight lay warm on Natalie's smooth brow. Gazing, he marveled again at her loveliness. Then suddenly another tempest enveloped him, and a voice whispered: "Life is short, and she is very beautiful!" At this, a slow fire ran through his veins.

She turned as if he had spoken. Her eyes were unfathomable, but Pearson felt that a chain had been broken from around his heart. In another instant he was close beside her.

"Natalie, Natalie! Can't you see that I love you? I want to take care of you all my life, and I won't give you up!"

She looked at him strangely. "Don't say that," she whispered; "don't!"

"I must say it. I want you more than any man ever wanted any woman. I'll worship you all the rest of my life. But now I can't even touch you. I'm only human, Natalie."

She did not move, but her eyes filled with tears. He was stirred by infinite pathos.

"Have you no answer for me?" He took an unresisting hand.

"Oh, my friend, do not talk to me," she said faintly. "I can give only one answer, and you know that that will pain you. Cannot it remain just as it is?"

He winced perceptibly. "I shall never let you go. Don't you understand that I mean that?"

The color deserted her cheeks, but her eyes grew soft and luminous. "You must not say that," she protested weakly. "You don't know—you can't know."

"I only know one thing, and that's enough. Is there any one else?"

"No, no! There never was any one else."

"Then, why——"

"Because, my dear, brave friend, I must not marry any man."

"That's right," he laughed. "Don't

think of marrying any man—marry me."

"Oh, believe me, I am not ungrateful! I realize all you are doing, and I pray for you every night. But you must not speak of love."

"It's the only thing I want to speak of."

"I must never marry." Her eyes were full of pain.

"Why do you say that?" he protested.

"Because the man who marries me will always be in danger. He will be followed wherever he goes, and his life will often tremble in the balance, no matter how good or brave he is. And all this will be because he is my husband."

"You speak in riddles," said Pearson bluntly. "Is that the only reason—in my case?"

She nodded almost imperceptibly.

"Then I love you all the more. I would brave anything for you. Danger is a small thing, if it means that you are mine. Natalie, let me stand between you and a world of enemies." He stooped and kissed her hand. The blood was rising in his veins. He longed to take her in his arms.

"My dear, dear friend!" She spoke slowly and with a gentleness that moved him mightily. "Don't you see that it is because I do care that I will not say what you want me to say? Supposing"—here she faltered and her voice trembled—"supposing that I did love you very much. Could I let you imperil yourself on that account? I am afraid that would be a poor love, my friend, and if what you feel for me is so deep, could you not say to yourself that you loved me, even though——"

She grew deadly pale, and swayed weakly.

Pearson caught her in his arms and drew her close. For an unforgettable moment her head lay on his shoulder, and his lips were close to her face; then, because his love was a tender love, and because he desired, above all things, that his lady's soul be peaceful, he drew back from his great desire and from the gate of heaven.

In another moment her color returned. She glanced at him with supreme pride. "My big brother," she said slowly, "you are more than any man to me."

The blizzard raged incessantly all through the night. Once Pearson thought he could distinguish the snapping and growling of dogs. Then he fell into a broken slumber, in which he dreamed that Nicolai had come to life, and was sitting beside the fire.

Morning was gray when Muqua's hand banged sharply on the tent. "White man come out—come quickly!"

He crawled out into a white world. Trees and stumps were crowned and festooned with snow. A white, woolly blanket had enveloped the earth. There was no sound. The fleecy covering continued to dip silently down, so thickly that the very words of Muqua seemed muffled. The Indian's eyes were full of anger, and he spoke excitedly.

"See—last night I hang grub in tree—dogs pull down—eat him all—no grub now—me go to post quickly—bring back more grub—you stay here—drink tea—smoke much tobacco—no get hungry—me come back soon—come back fast."

Pearson stared. The provision bags, hung the night before on the branches of a poplar, had disappeared. In the snow were scattered a few scraps of torn canvas. The flour sack had been ripped open and its contents had vanished. The bacon and sugar had disappeared, as well. Behind a tree lay one of the train dogs. His sides were bulging, his ears pitched forward, and his quick, black eyes followed them unwinkingly. Then he discerned another dog, and another, all watching with uncanny wisdom. For the moment they

had revolted against the tyranny of trace and toboggan, and had reverted to the primordial beast of prey.

Pearson snatched up a whip and advanced. In an instant the dogs retreated, retreated by exactly the distance he had neared them. Again they squatted, and again their black eyes regarded him suspiciously.

"No, no!" said Muqua. "Me get them—white man no understand."

Ostentatiously he threw down his whip, picked up a fragment of bacon rind, impaled it on a sharp stick, and began to cook it over the fire. Apparently he had forgotten all about the dogs. The scent of hot fat spread abroad, and, after a moment of hesitation, one by one they advanced by inches. Muqua did not move. It appeared almost that for him a dog had never existed. He talked to himself in Chippewa, a language that they seemed to understand, for in ten minutes they came close up and formed a black-nosed, bright-eyed, yellow ring around the fire. Still he went on talking, and still that resistless odor spread abroad. Last of all they came close to him and pushed their black muzzles appealingly into his hard, brown hands. A few moments later they were in harness.

The two men dug in the tumbled snow and rescued precious scraps of mangled food; but, in all, they did not find more than a day's rations. Muqua divided it exactly, rolled up his rabbit-skin sleeping bag, strapped it to the toboggan, and shouted to his dogs. They jumped forward, thrusting their tough shoulders into the collar. The toboggan lurched and started. Muqua's legs began to move like pistons. Just as he reached the edge of the lake he turned and called back:

"Make plenty fire—eat, slow—me come back in four days—make squaw sleep plenty—Boozhoo!"

In another instant he had dropped out of sight and sound. For a little while the whining of the dogs came faintly back, but soon this, too, was swallowed up in a profundity of silence.

Pearson glanced at Natalie and laughed. "You'll have to put up with me again for a few days, but I promise to behave."

She evaded the suggestion. "Do you think that Muqua will be sure to return in four days? There is dreadfully little to eat."

"Yes, I think so; without fail. Thirty miles a day is nothing to a man like that."

The wind began to moan overhead and whip little gusts of snow in their faces. She peered anxiously into the leaden skies. "But if this storm lasts?" she said doubtfully.

"A storm won't stop him. Why, if those chaps stopped traveling for a bit of weather like this, they would never get anywhere!" He piled more wood on the fire, and smiled at her cheerfully. "Will you have breakfast with me? I know it is not a very fashionable hour."

She nodded, with an assumption of gayety, while Pearson carefully divided the scraps of bacon into four tiny parts and handed her the major portion of one of these. "That's your breakfast, dinner, and supper. I'm afraid we will have to call upon our imagination to supply the rest."

She stared doubtfully. "You mean that is all you and I are to have today?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so. That mountain is yours, this one is mine."

"But I could eat the whole of it now. I'm simply ravenous. You're joking, aren't you?"

He laughed again, but in spite of himself a shake had crept into his voice: "Yes, of course! The rest of my food's outside. This is your portion, please eat it all. As for me, I don't believe I ever told you that I was a champion faster."

For a few moments she nibbled slowly. He watched her closely, then slid his own portion out of sight.

She looked at him sharply. "Where's your bacon?"

"I ate it," he said firmly. "I simply lost control of myself, and swallowed it whole. Didn't you see me gulp? It was simply delicious, the best bacon I ever had in my life. Beautifully cooked, too."

She eyed him suspiciously. "Are you quite sure that you are telling me the absolute truth—because I am certain you didn't gulp?" she demanded, with a rising color in her cheeks.

"Why, of course—the absolute truth," he lied cheerfully.

"On your word of honor?"

Pearson hesitated. "There is a good deal of the unbeliever in you. Won't you accept a statement without that?"

"My dear friend," she said gently and with a softened light in her eyes, "I'm afraid you care too much!"

"You are perfectly right. I do," he maintained. "I care more than I can tell you."

Her gaze wandered out of the tent to the white flakes driving so swiftly into the leaping fire. "Look!" She pointed. "It comes down perfectly beautiful and pure. Then it touches the flame and vanishes. Our lives are like snowflakes in a camp fire. I am very sure of that now. We may be driven and very anxious, or tired, or frightened, but it does not last long. Our love would be like that—it would go out very suddenly."

"If it lasted only a moment it would be worth it to me," he said hungrily.

She smiled at him sadly. "I have accepted too much from my big brother already."

The day drew slowly on, but the storm did not abate. Whatever distant sun there was had hidden itself remotely behind a dull, murky sky from which millions of great flakes came whirling down like drifting feathers. Tall mounds and grotesque minarets of snow toppled over from tree and stump and merged, without sound, into the deepening blanket that spread in such smooth folds over the vanished earth. Night came with denser shadows. The rest of the habitable globe seemed at last to have been utterly removed from this white and speechless territory. It was strange to think that there was such a place as England, that there were such yellow lights as those which marshaled themselves cheerfully along the streets of London, strange to remember those smooth, velvet lawns and gray memorial walls that one day a wiser Pearson would possess if by some sudden turn of fortune he should escape from the grip of the relentless North.

Days merged into nights and nights broadened into long, gray days with a slow succession that made them question time and eternity alike. Natalie's face grew white and pinched. Pearson, noting it, cursed audibly, and, with his rifle, plowed through heavy miles of snow in a hunt for game, furred or feathered. But game there was none. Bird and animal each had sought their own shelter. Sometimes he caught the small, pink eyes of a rabbit, but these disappeared instantly, and the round, white body was invisible against the snow. Once he toiled for hours on the tracks of a wood caribou, but returned racked with weariness and a new, sharp hunger.

On the fourth day the girl looked at the remaining morsel of food, and burst into tears. "Something has happened. I know now that we will die here. Why should I cost you your life? Forgive me, forgive me!"

He comforted her as best he could. "It's all right," he said encouragingly; "we didn't expect Muqua till to-morrow morning. It's very easy to lose a day or two in weather like this."

"Are you sure, quite sure that he will come?"

"Of course. A day one way or another is nothing to a man who tells the time by the sun and who knows what month it is by the shape of the moon. Have a bit more bacon. I couldn't touch it; in fact, I have been rather overeating."

He forced her to take the food, though it was nothing more than a mouthful. She did not know that for three days he himself had tasted nothing. By now his eyes were overbright and his heart had begun to sound noisy.

"I'm so cold!" she said plaintively.

Pearson kicked at the fire, although it was already roaring furiously. Then he perceived that she was shivering with the chill of hunger, for in the North to be hungered is to be cold. "Look here," he said gently, "if I were you I'd just crawl into your blankets. You had much better be warm, and I'll keep the fire up. It's only for a few hours longer, in any case."

She smiled wanly. "Yes, dear, it is only for a few hours longer."

"What do you mean?" he turned to her with a start.

"It's very simple. I mean that Muqua will find us here, I don't just know when, but when he comes we won't see him. I mean that it was written millions of years ago that you and I should drift together and stay together for just a little time before we step back into the darkness out of which we came. One of your poets has a line about the dewdrop slipping into the shining sea. I think we are something like that, only in our case it is just two snowflakes in the North."

"I think you are nervous and worn out with hunger," said Pearson stoutly. "Please try and eat this, and then if you go to sleep I'm pretty sure you will find Muqua here when you wake up, and I expect to have a first-rate breakfast all ready for you. Please!"

She smiled at him strangely, and closed her eyes. He studied her face with loving care. Already the exquisite curves of her smooth cheeks had become hollow and fine lines were marked curiously on the broad, white brow. She seemed more slight and frail than ever, and, leaning over her and listening to the weak, irregular breath, he shuddered, and thrust away the thought that this loveliness was to be blotted out. Peril seemed, somehow, remote from a goddess.

The gray hours dragged slowly by. The storm seemed to become denser, and the wind more violent, till at last he was unable to determine when day merged into night. Natalie lay motionless. Her hands were half open, and the slim fingers curved in toward her small palms. Then she began to talk in her sleep, a queer, unintelligible talk, that was broken with querulous questions and appeals. It was half English, half Russian, and here and there he caught words and sentences that made the blood leap to his heart. Presently he himself dropped into a fitful slumber of weakness, broken by visions of Florio's restaurant and Nicolai's green and threatening eyes. In an hour he started into consciousness again, looked at his watch, and was horrified to find that it had stopped. What time it was now he could not reckon.

The blackness of another night softened into the gray of dawn. He bent over the girl. Her lips moved, but so low was the voice as to be nearly inaudible.

"Don't mind leaving me," she whispered. "I'm all right. Perhaps you can shoot something. I'll fire if I'm in danger." She smiled weakly, and memory moved in her eyes.

A blind, helpless fury was in his heart as he took his rifle and stumbled on through snow that was now nearly waist-deep. Most of the time he felt as if he were falling, and all strength

seemed to have left both bone and sinew alike. But there was neither sight, sound, nor track. The white blanket of earth showed no evidence of the wanderings of wild life. There seemed to be only an endless, flat expanse through which the trunks of innumerable trees thrust vertically, black on one side and like spotless columns on the other. Then, when his last reserve of force was yielding, he swerved back to the camp.

Natalie looked, and he shook his head. Her lips quivered, and were silent.

Time dragged on with leaden feet. He experienced a gradual and strange sensation that outside of this solitary tent all the grim forces of the North had marshaled to defeat two presumptuous mortals who had dared to defy the eternal processes of nature. From remote caverns of the frigid arctic came deadly winds and chilling frost, a voiceless and invincible army before which had bowed the bravest of the earth. The very trees themselves seemed to muster in forbidding battalions, and close every channel of escape. Above hung the winking stars, surveying with their myriad and glittering eyes the tragedy of love and death, blinking down, unmoved, at one more of those grim dramas with which the trackless subarctics have been anointed. Then suddenly the soul of Pearson rose up and demanded that in this last and terrific hour, ere yet it was too late to love, the woman of his heart speak the blessed word with which he was content to go out and face eternity.

He turned to her with infinite compassion and worship. "The end is coming near, Natalie. Are you brave enough to face it with me?"

Her dark eyes engulfed him, and she stretched out a thin hand. "Come here, my dearest," she whispered.

A weak tumult set up in Pearson's breast. He sat beside her, and, without a word, put his arm round the slight shoulder. "I love you," he whispered, "and my heart is breaking that I cannot save you."

"Don't be unhappy," she answered faintly. "It's just as well. There would have been nothing but fear for the future."

His brain became on fire at the thought of this pale, exquisite face lying motionless.

"Is that the only reason you refused to marry me?"

She looked at him with a glance of infinite confidence. "Yes, dear."

"Then you——"

"Yes—yes! I do love you! I think I loved you from the moment I saw you."

His arms tightened around her. For an ineffable moment the appalling solitude fell away, and they were again in a world of joy and love. Then the tent walls closed in again, and he gazed down into the face of the girl with whom he would so swiftly pass out of the wilderness.

"Say that once more," he demanded triumphantly. "Death does not seem so dreadful now."

"I love you utterly, to the very end!" she murmured.

Again their lips met, and at this poignant touch she clung to him desperately.

"Will it be long, dear?"

"What?" he said uncertainly.

"The end."

His lips twitched. The end was coming so close to the beginning of his life. At this he revolted.

"You must not die, I tell you! You must not! Maqua will be here to-morrow or the next day."

She shook her head. "And if he does not come?"

"Don't!" he said. "Don't!"

"It will be together," she said slowly. "We two."

A mist came into his eyes, but her gentle insistence held him wordless.

"And now, I must tell my dear love what I could not tell him before. Death relieves from all oaths. It is so with me."

"Tell me nothing," he said brokenly. "It is enough that you love me, if only at the end of everything." He crooned over her as a mother over her baby.

"Ah, you must know now. You see, dear love, that the end is coming very quickly, and when it does come I want you to know all about me. Perhaps I will not be able to tell you in another world."

"Don't!" he pleaded again. "Don't! You torture me!"

In answer, she put her thin cheek gently against his own. They stayed thus, staring into the fire and clinging to each other like lost children, as indeed they were. Then she began to talk very weakly, but with a fine-drawn, delicate steadiness in her failing voice.

"There is so much to tell you that I don't know if there will be time enough to say it all. I remember Ivan Stanovitch ever since I was a little girl. He married my mother soon after my father died. I found out afterward that he had always loved her. Soon after that he went away to America, and we went from the country to Novgorod to live. He came back only for a few days at a time, and I remember that mother used to joke with him that he was forgetting how to speak Russian. I noticed that although he was away practically all the time, he never mentioned his business, and once when I asked mother what it was she looked frightened and told me not to be inquisitive. When I was about ten my mother died, and Ivan Stanovitch arranged with an old woman to live with me. The years went by very quietly, and then, just a few years ago, I found out."

"What did you find?" said Pearson abruptly.

"Stanovitch had come home from America as he did at intervals of about a year. I was lying awake and not able to sleep because I was unhappy from loneliness. Then I got a curious impression that there were a lot of people in the house. I don't know why I thought this, because there was no sound, but I slipped downstairs and crept very quietly to the door of our sitting room. A heavy curtain always hung in front of this door, and I put my hand in behind it and found that the door was closed. Then I heard voices and got inside the curtain and opened the door the very least bit. Through the crack I could see a part of the long table that stood in the middle of the sitting room, and could observe four men. There were others there whom I could not see without opening the door wider, and I was afraid to do that. Nicolai was there, and my stepfather was beside him. I did not know the other two men. Altogether there must have been a dozen in the room, because I could hear them talking in very low voices. At last one man said: 'Then let it be at Tsarkoe Seloe on the fifteenth.' That puzzled me, and I did not know what he meant until I saw Nicolai's eyes as he said: 'His majesty has borne a charmed life.' Then I guessed at the truth."

"Nihilists!" broke in Pearson.

She moved in his arms, and her eyes dilated with horror.

"Yes," she said feebly. "It was the meeting place of the central committee, and it appeared that whenever Stanovitch came back from America he made a report. Every one thought that headquarters were in St. Petersburg, but this committee met in various places to avoid the government secret service. It came to Novgorod as often as Ivan Stanovitch got home. I slipped away at once, filled with terror at what I had heard. In two months, on the fifteenth, an attempt was made to kill the czar

at his summer palace. You remember it?"

He nodded. "Beloved, is it too much for you to tell me these things?"

Her dark eyes streamed into his own. "No—no! I must tell you everything now. Don't stop me, dearest—there is so little time left."

A pang shot through her lover's heart as the small, weak voice went steadily on: "After that I always listened. I seemed to be fascinated, and was unable to keep away. I used to steal down about midnight and spend hours behind that curtain, shivering with fear, and knowing that if I were caught I would probably be killed. They always sat in the same places, so that I never saw who the other men were. I heard dreadful things planned with the utmost coolness and care. Just as if they were business undertakings. Then, months later, I would read that a king, a prince, or a prime minister had been shot in the street. It was frightful. I knew these murders were about to take place, and yet I was too frightened to speak. Ivan Stanovitch always had money, but I did not know before where it came from. It appears that he used to send reports from America with regard to the movements of all distinguished foreigners who might be there. I could tell you many things about which the world knows nothing. You remember reading, years ago, of the death of Prince Rupert? I know all about that; they frequently spoke of it."

"What happened?" whispered Pearson.

"There is no time to tell you, but it was very dreadful. Then, about two years ago, I first heard of Stepan. Stepan was sent out here on the strength of a report that there was a deposit of very precious metal somewhere near or on Dubawnt Lake. The committee had heard of this, and, since they have an extraordinary way of securing information from all parts of the world, they were informed approximately where it was. This information came at a time when there was great need of money. So it was thought that it was worth the risk of a search, because, if found, this deposit would provide the committee with sufficient money for a very long time."

"What deposit?"

"The one you discovered."

"I did find gold, but neither Stanovitch nor Nicolai would look at it. They seemed to think it was hardly worth picking up."

She looked at him strangely. "But you found something else."

"Yes, that's perfectly true. But it was only a seam of brown rock with beads of white metal in it. I noticed that they both got very excited about it, which was rather curious, because when Stanovitch had asked me to keep an eye open for such a thing he said it was of no particular value, but was only of geological interest, and the discovery of it in this neighborhood would enable him to settle a dispute with some other scientist."

"Then you don't really know what that white metal is?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"It's platinum."

"What?"

"Platinum—worth three times as much as gold. The chief source of supply has been in the Ural Mountains in Russia, and the mines are owned by the government. For years it has been getting scarcer and scarcer, and the price has been going up till it is now valued at sixty dollars an ounce. In some roundabout way the committee heard of this deposit and knew that if only a moderate amount of platinum were found, it would make them independent financially. They planned to operate through private individuals."

She stopped suddenly and looked up at him with a strange expression.

"What was that outside? I thought I heard something move, didn't you?"

He shook his head. "I'm afraid not. If it were Muqua, we would have known about the dogs long ago."

"Won't you look?" she said pleadingly, with a curious light in her eyes. "There was some one outside."

"Beloved, it cannot be anything. Lie still in my arms. When people are very weak and hungry they see and hear things that don't exist."

"Perhaps," she answered almost inaudibly. "Now, listen, dear one, and I will tell you the rest. Hold me very close, my husband. I call you that, because very soon we will be married by a strange priest who has no flesh nor blood, and whose name is death."

Again his arms tightened around her, and she went wearily on:

"Do you remember what I told you when you first wanted to help, the day we found Nicolai at Moose Factory? You asked me what it all meant, and I told you in just one word. That word is soon coming true. But now, dear, you must listen, in order that you may know everything. About two years ago they got a letter from Stepan Kolkoff. He was the man they first sent out to investigate the report about the deposit of platinum. I don't believe they fully trusted him, because once I heard a man—he was one of those I could not see, but whose back was quite close to me—murmur to himself, 'A traitor will betray a spy, but a spy will catch a traitor.' That made me think that after Stepan was sent out here a spy was sent to watch him. It may seem strange to send a spy to watch a single man in the wilderness, but that was almost always the policy of the committee. They wanted every one of their men to feel that wherever they were, or whatever they did, they were always under observation. But no one ever knew who was sent to watch him. Then, as you know, after Stepan disappeared Ivan Stanovitch was sent to investigate. A spy was sent to observe Stanovitch. That was Nicolai."

"But why?" said Pearson breathlessly.

"Because they caught me."

"What?"

"Yes, at the door. I had fallen asleep. I was leaning against the door, and when Stanovitch, who came out first, opened it, I literally fell into the room."

"Beloved, they didn't—they didn't hurt you?"

"No—but there was a terrible scene. Stanovitch wanted to kill me. This was just after it was settled that he was to come out here. He held me by the arms in the hall while the committee went back into the sitting room. Then they put out all the lights, and he brought me in, and they had a trial at once. It was ghastly, and I was sick with fear. The men's voices came out of the darkness, but I could not tell who was speaking, and, of course, I would never know who was there. After all had spoken they were evenly divided. Their leader, the man they call Number One, had not said a word except to ask for opinions as to what should be done. After all had spoken, six were for killing me at once, and the others advised imprisonment somewhere so that I would never be seen again. Then Number One spoke. His voice was cold and absolutely without expression. It seemed that they were just words—without any accent or color or feeling, either of sorrow or anger or any emotion whatever. It was like some machine in human form that had found the means to make itself understood. He addressed Stanovitch and said that if for the rest of my life he would keep me in his sight and be absolutely responsible for me I might live. But I must on no occasion ever marry or leave him, and that if I did he knew what both might expect."

"And that is why——"

"Yes; but it's all over now. I am yours utterly."

Silence fell over them both. Pearson strained the girl to him while he tried to fathom the tragedy that hurried them into each other's arms only in time to drift out of life together. Her face was illumined with a love through which the purity of her fleeting spirit shone high and clear.

Presently her voice came in again, faint and threadlike, but animated by indomitable faith and courage:

"There was a frightful scene. Stanovitch roared at me out of the darkness that I had destroyed the honor of his house. His tones boomed like a foghorn in a storm. It was all the more dreadful because I could not see him, and I could only imagine that ring of faces filled with deadly hatred. Then Number One spoke very quietly and said that perhaps there was enough work to be done as it was, without sending me on. That was the way he put it. So he ordered Stanovitch to take me with him to America."

"But what about Nicolai?"

"As I told you, Nicolai was sent to spy on Stanovitch."

Pearson's head began to swim with weakness and wonder.

"Then that's why Stanovitch tried to drown him. I see it now; he would have said it was an accident. But—who killed Nicolai?"

The girl shuddered. "The same man who killed Stepan. Stepan was trying to escape with a load of platinum that was worth a fortune. From the very first there must have been a third person who saw everything and knew everything. He has been there all the time."

Her lover nodded with sudden remembrance. "Then I heard him one night beside the trail as I was coming back to camp."

"Don't you see," she said wearily, "the members of the order do not trust each other—they cannot. It is easy to kill a man and report to headquarters that he was found in a treacherous act. They are all in fear of Number One and of each other. Even Number One has secret guards of whom the rest know nothing. No nihilist can even sleep without fear."

A sudden fainting took her, and she drooped in his arms. He laid her in the fur robes, and, with a dread tightening over his heart, began frantically to rub her hands. Her cheeks were inexpressibly wan, and a ghastly grayness began to creep slowly over her face. He put his lips to her cold mouth.

"Beloved!" he entreated. "Beloved!"

Her eyes opened for an instant, and he saw deep into her soul. What he saw there wrung him in agony. Her arms lifted and fell round his neck. Thus, for an instant, they lay very silently, wrapped in each other's embrace.

"We would have been so happy together," she breathed. Then her eyes closed.

He gazed at her for a poignant moment, then staggered through the tent door. He wanted to get out into the wilderness and curse his Maker to the high heaven and then come back and lie down and sleep beside his love. He glanced unseeingly at the fire, then stopped and stared.

Immediately in front of the tent door a cotton sack was spread out upon the trampled snow. On the sack was a haunch of caribou meat, a small bag of flour, and a large flask.

He stared again and rubbed his eyes. The things looked real, but they could not be real. This was only the imagery of dying eyes. He hesitated and turned away, but again his gaze was drawn to this mirage. In another instant he was on his knees in the snow, fingering the flask and talking to himself in a high-pitched, querulous voice:

"It's a joke! It's a whale of a joke!"

Then he found himself stumbling into the tent, kneeling beside the girl, opening her clenched teeth and pouring the precious liquid, drop by drop, into her mouth. Presently the dark eyes looked out again on the world. "Drink," he said, shaking her violently. "Drink."

She obeyed, and looked at him in wonder. "Where did it come from?" she whispered.

"I don't know. There is food, too. I think—I think"—he hesitated, and a wild fancy darted into his brain—"I think it comes from the man who killed Nicolai and Stepan."

Then John Pearson tottered and pitched slowly forward on his face.

CHAPTER XIII.

A week later a tiny caravan approached the Hudson Bay post of Fond du Lac.

In that week many things had happened. Three days previously, Muqua the Bear came tearing up Selwyn Lake behind his yelping team. Black fear was in his heart lest he should find the white man and woman frozen as stiff as the ice he traversed. There was, he thought, but little chance that they could survive the united assault of starvation and cold. But vastly to his surprise he had found a comfortable camp in which the white people were eating caribou steak in comfort, warmth, and apparent happiness. They had laughed at his anxious face in a way that made him more silent than ever.

Then they had told him a wonderful white man's tale of how Pearson had found meat and flour and fire water laid on the snow in front of their tent, and when Muqua, in utter mystification, had asked them who it was to bring it there, the white man had only shrugged his shoulders and asked him whether he did not know himself.

With much diffidence and wonderment, Muqua had ventured the guess that it might be the Wendigo of Dubawnt Lake whom he had sometimes seen traveling very fast. When further questioned about the Wendigo, he vouchsafed the information that he had arrived in the summer about two years ago, and was a very tall, thin man with a scar on his left cheek. And after this Muqua had relapsed into a noncommittal silence which yielded to no further entreaties. Now, nearing the post, he contemplated, with supreme satisfaction, the galaxy of traps and blankets and ammunition he would shortly be in a position to buy.

Tall columns of silver-gray smoke were rising vertically into the keen, bright air from the cluster of snow-laden roofs which was known in the North as the post of Fond du Lac. In front of one building a knot of dark figures had gathered.

Pearson turned to the girl and pointed. Their eyes met, and an unfathomable quality crept into her lingering gaze. They both experienced an exquisite sensation in the sight of humanity after so many terrible and speechless days, but it was humanity nevertheless that Natalie most feared. Hunger itself was fearful, but there had been a certain benison in solitude. There had been the knowledge that for that time at least the dangers that dwelt among mankind did not exist. In the wilderness they had grown together. They were wedded by peril and by that grim and unforgettable bond that holds in unison those who together have looked in the face of death. Now, as they neared the end of privation and toil, their spirits merged more completely than ever before.

The factor at Fond du Lac was, like most other factors, a Scotchman, and this because, above all other races, the grim, taciturn Scot is, by nature and insight, best fitted to explore and dominate the wilderness and lord it over

trackless solitudes. He is, furthermore, subject to fear of neither man nor beast.

Dougall Macdougall dropped his hand from his eyes and walked quickly along the trail to meet them. His brows wrinkled as he drew near. He had not expected to see a white woman at such a season of the year.

"It's welcome ye are," he said, pulling a fur mitten from his fingers. "Yon Neeje of yours staggered intil the fort blind wi' the snaw and frozen in spots. He was yappin' like a terrier pup that twa pairsons were starvin' on Dubawnt Lake."

Pearson wrung the proffered hand. "He told you nothing but the truth. We were in a very bad way."

"An' whoo's yer wife? Man, but this is no country tae cairt a lassie aboot in December."

The blood rushed to Natalie's temples. "I'm quite all right, thank you, and very glad to be here," she broke in.

"Come awa', come awa'! Ma wife wull be glad tae hae a crack wi' ye." He turned to Muqua: "Mush—ye red fule, mush!"

They came into the post on the run. Natalie was gathered into the arms of Jean Macdougall, who petted and patted her like a lost child. Macdougall planted himself on the other side of the table in the little office at the back of the store.

"Hae a drink," said the factor.

The traveler nodded and lifted his glass; but, at the taste of whisky, there came a vivid flash in which he saw himself putting a flask to the cold lips of Natalie. At this he put the glass down.

"If you don't mind I'll have some tea."

The factor blinked. "Tak yer ain way. Yon's the only bottle of whusky in the post, and I'm no one for coaxin' anither mon again his wull."

Pearson laughed. "I'm content with the tea."

The factor stared at him curiously. "Ye are no after fur, I'm hopin'."

"No; as a matter of fact, I am after civilization, and hope you will be able to help us. When does the next dog team go out?"

"I'm gey glad of that. The free traders are makin' the fur business a pairfec' joke. But ye are in a hurry, I'm thinkin'."

"Yes, I am in a hurry. I have"—he hesitated—"I have very important business in New York."

His host leaned back. "I'm told yon's a wunnerful place."

"It is," said Pearson, with a reminiscent thrill, "but I believe I would sooner live up here."

The factor nodded. "It's a braw place is the post at Fond du Lac. A mon can mind his ain affairs and no be bothered wi' the rest of humanity. Sometimes it is na necessary tae speak for a week except tae Jean. It's maist as gude as the Hebrides."

The young man laughed. "And when did you say the next dog team would go out? I don't want to bother you, but it is very important to me."

His host chuckled. "Mon, but ye stick tae it! It gangs oot the morn's morn. Forbye it's no stormin'."

"And when does it reach where?"

"It gangs frae here tae Fort Chippewyan, then up the Athabasca tae Fort McMurray, and syne ye reach Fort McMurray ye are practically in ceevilization, only twa hunnred miles frae Edmonton."

Pearson listened attentively. "What's the whole distance?" he asked.

"Gin ye tak the Hudson Bay route 'tis ony aboot five hunnred miles—a matter o' three weeks an' aiblins less."

An hour later the door opened and Natalie entered with Jean Macdougall There were pink spots in her cheeks. Pearson thought that she looked more exquisite than ever. The elder woman's arm was round her in a motherly clasp.

"Here's the child wanting to move on," said the factor's wife. "My, but she's a restless lassie!"

"An' here's her mon itchin' in his chair," answered Macdougall. "I'm thinkin' they've no muckle likin' for Fond du Lac. I've been speirin' him, but he'll no tell me where he hails from. It's customary, in the North," he went on, turning to his visitor, "tae answer when a mon speirs."

The Englishman reddened. "I came in with a party last summer—two geologists from Hudson Bay. We stayed later than we should. We were working north of here and got frozen in."

"They were hunting for mineral," said Macdougall wisely. "An' did they find any? It's a fearfu' country yon—for prospectin'."

"No—they didn't find any," answered Pearson steadily.

"An' where are they the noo?" There was an insistent note in the voice.

"They went out another way." The answer was slow and distinct.

"An' ye were trappit in the ice! Mon, but ye hae had a bellyfu' of trampin'! Weel, I'll send ye on mair comfortable the morn's morn."

That was a memorable evening. They sat in at Macdougall's tea table, and the lamplight cast a warm glow over the kindly features of the factor and his wife, and touched the exquisite face of Natalie into a beauty that seemed more than human. The wind shrieked outside, but no chill breath could penetrate those sturdy walls. Through the window they could see the white moon-smitten plains and the flat marble sheet that stretched westward to Fort Chippewyan on the last leg of their journey. The intimacy of it all moved him mightily. He searched Natalie's eyes for some response, but in her gaze could only read a tender sadness. She, too, was mindful. In both their hearts was the consciousness of the drawn sword that hung between. But there was always the memory of that confession of mutual love in the hunger-stricken solitude at Selwyn Lake. Whatever fate might befall, that poignant moment could never die.

Next morning, much to Muqua's surprise, he was called into the store and presented with a hundred dollars in cash and a brand-new sporting rifle, that for the last six months had been the envy of every Dog-rib and yellow knife and Cree and Chippewa Indian who visited the post. And while his soul was still moved with the magnitude of this gift, there was heaped in a pile beside him two bear traps, a pair of blankets, an ice chisel, a four-pound ax, and as much pork and flour as would take him to Fort Churchill and back again in the worst of weather.

At this his silent soul was cast into turmoil, and he could only stammer: "Meqwach—gitche—megwachah-waynomin," which Dougall Macdougall interpreted as meaning, "Thank you, many, many thank yous." After which he harnessed his dogs, loaded his new wealth, turned to Natalie, and remarked, "Heap good squaw. Boozhoo, Boozhoo," and struck eastward toward his distant tepee.

Twenty-four hours later, Natalie, swathed in furs, looked over her shoulder from the gliding cariole. The post of Fond du Lac was dwindling in the east, and Jean Macdougall was only dimly visible as she waved from her door. Ahead of the cariole loped five husky dogs, and in front of these three other toboggans broke the trail. Pearson rested his weary legs in comfort while five tall Indians trotted along untiringly. The air was sharp and crisp, and the sun beamed intensely through a cloudless sky. There was no sound but the crunch of the curved bows, the whimper of dogs, and the quick breathing of the red-skinned runners. This expedition was fortified and secure. It was shepherded by those who are wise

in the wilderness, and it was immune from all those dangers that two of the wayfarers had so recently encountered. The dogs were strong, well fed, and full of courage. Mile after mile slid rapidly by.

Suddenly one of the leading Indians stopped and stared at the snow in front of him. Then he called to the next man and the next as they came up till a little group had joined him, and all stood wrinkling their dark brows as they examined a faint toboggan track. This turned abruptly toward a cleft in the long ridge that paralleled the south shore of Athabasca.

"What is it?" asked Pearson curiously. A toboggan was a matter of indifference to him.

"Man pass here last night—go very fast—four dogs—small load—take short cut to Fort McMurray—we no know him—perhaps free trader—don't like pass Fort Chippewyan—free trader no good."

"What is it?" called Natalie from the cariole.

A curious expression stole over the young man's face. "They say a man passed here last night going very fast. They don't appear to know who it is, and no one saw him."

"What do you think? Could it possibly——"

"Perhaps. I can't tell. But why should any one follow us here?"

"Why did any one follow us to Selwyn Lake? Oh, my dear, I am frightened!"

"We didn't come to any harm there, even though some one did follow us," he said stoutly. "I'm thankful we were under observation. I hope it will last as long as it is of that kind."

"Don't joke, dear. It's too serious."

"Well, whoever it is, we can lose ourselves in Edmonton."

She shook her head anxiously. "We can never lose ourselves, if it is what I think."

A whip cracked, the dogs jumped into their collars, the toboggans creaked and shot forward.

That night they camped in a clump of dense timber at the mouth of Grand Rapid River, which comes into Lake Athabasca fifty miles from Fond du Lac. After supper Natalie and Pearson sat in the door of the tent. The Indians squatted beyond the fire, staring silently into the flames with dark, oily, lustrous eyes. Beyond them and all around was a dismal darkness.

"Do you know we have not yet settled what we are going to do?" he said suddenly.

She looked at him tenderly. "I have settled for myself, dear."

"You can't do that. You can't leave me out," he protested.

"I must. It's all very clear. You will take me to New York and put me on a steamer when we say good-by."

"We shall never say good-by," he answered bluntly. "You are mine for all time."

She shook her head.

"You know I love you too much for that," he went on confidently. "I'll have five thousand dollars, and that will do till I get hold of something."

"Will you?" she said gently. "Where will you get it?"

He looked at her sharply, then sudden knowledge flashed into his eyes. "By heavens!" he exploded. "It's true! I can't get it without Nicolai or Stanovitch. Why didn't I take the pay when it was offered? What a fool I was!" The blood rushed to his temples.

"Don't, don't! You must not speak like that."

"Oh, I see it all now," he went on moodily. "I was filled up with the thought of adventure, and nothing else mattered. I was an ass to come, anyway."

"Were you?" she said, gazing at him intently. "If you had not come, perhaps I should have been alone with

Nicolai now. He could have taken his own time about it."

He drew her suddenly to him. "Forgive me, darling. I am content to go hungry for the rest of my days if I have saved you. But now why should we not both be rich for the rest of our lives?"

She shuddered in his arms. "You must forget Dubawnt Lake for the rest of your life and never refer to it."

"I don't see that," he said thoughtfully. "I found it, and the men who employed me are both dead. It now belongs to the man who stakes it and gets title from the government. That's being done in every mining district. It would be easy to get enough capital to develop it, and there is no difficulty about guarding the place."

She clung to him desperately. "Oh, you don't understand! Nothing is safe from Number One. His spies are in every corner of the world. They can almost read one's thoughts. We will both be followed everywhere for the rest of our lives."

Pearson's jaw clenched. "That wouldn't bother me."

"My dear love," she said tenderly, "there is only one thing for you to do. I have told you what that is."

"And if I don't?"

"Then you will break my heart. Don't you see that we can never be together again? We will love each other all our lives, and perhaps, at the very end, you will hold me just as you did when we thought the end had really come. And I will always worship you, just as if you were my very own husband."

"I will make no promises," he said stubbornly.

"Ah, you will do anything for the woman you love. You will even give her up."

He shook his head. "I will hold you against the world."

The night deepened, and they drew closer. The gathering gloom enveloped them in a comforting obscurity. In both rebellious minds was the consciousness that only in the wilderness were they fated to be utterly alone. Death and peril and hardship had united them for a space, now the world of men and the fear of men would snatch them from each other's clasp. Even as Pearson protested that he would never give her up, he knew in the bottom of his soul that not for any longing or desire of his own would he endanger the woman who was dearer to him than anything in the world. All through the darkness the knowledge tortured him that what he had won and saved and kept alive and worshiped must soon vanish out of his life.

CHAPTER XIV.

The trail broadened as they traveled swiftly southward. Then one memorable day they passed the farmhouse that lay farthest north of Le Pas. Beyond this they found surveyors locating a railway. Gradually the grim severity of the land changed. Here and there were the marks of a pioneer humanity. The trail became a road on which they passed settlers who waved their whips and glanced understandingly at the dog team. At last, on the horizon, they caught the smoke of Edmonton. The Indians shouted and urged the dogs onward. Presently they entered a lane dotted with houses. This merged into a street at the end of which were electric lights.

The dogs yelped as they tore along. From the south came the whistle of a locomotive. Then the leading team pulled up, panting, at the door of a hotel. Across the road was the railway station.

Pearson looked deep into the girl's eyes as he lifted her from the cariole. The look said: "You must trust me—trust me to the end."

He went direct to the proprietor, and

found a ruddy, good-natured Saxon, brimming over with human kindness.

"Look here," he said. "I've come down from the North with a young lady I am doing my best to take care of, and I want your wife to look after her. She has had rather a hard time and lost her father in an accident in the Barren Lands."

The hotel keeper expanded visibly. "Certainly! I'll be only too glad to do anything I can, so will my wife. I suppose you would like two good rooms."

"Yes, if you please, and would you mind not saying anything about the matter outside? People are rather inquisitive. Can I depend on you for this? It would be conferring a real kindness."

"Of course you can. Depend on me for anything you like, and on my wife, too. Come along and register."

At the desk, the young man wrote the two names. Then in a flash wondered if he had been rash in throwing off all disguise. In another moment he laughed at the idea of their being recognized in this outpost of civilization.

"Many people here?" he ventured.

"Hardly any one. Never saw business so bad. We generally get a good many in from the North, but there is only one man here now."

"Who's that?"

"He is over there now. You see that chap by the door."

Pearson looked and saw a tall, thin man with sloping shoulders, black eyes, and bronzed face. There was a small, white scar on his left cheek.

The traveler's pulse quickened and his voice shook in spite of himself.

"When did he get in?"

"A day or so ago. Never saw him before, and don't know who he is. Come and I'll show you and the lady your rooms."

A few moments later Pearson rapped at Natalie's door.

"Come in!" said a faint voice.

He entered. Her face was pale, and she looked at him with the old terror moving in her eyes.

"You saw him?"

"Yes," he said slowly, "I saw him."

"It's the third person of Dubawnt Lake. Don't you remember that Muqua said there was a white scar on his cheek?"

"Then he killed Nicolai!" snapped Pearson.

The girl tottered to a chair and buried her face in her hands. Presently she looked up, with the light of decision on her face.

"Listen, dear. We must start at once—by the very first train. Make any explanation you can. It doesn't matter if we have to leave everything behind, we must lose ourselves very quickly."

Pearson's brow wrinkled. "But why do you think there is danger?"

"I don't think. I know. He is the man who put food outside our tent at Selwyn Lake. He is the man whose toboggan trail we saw that day after we left the post at Fond du Lac. It is true that he spared us once, that, in fact, he saved our lives, but there is a reason in his following us. I think he wants some promise or oath from you, that you will leave me and forget everything, and while you are with me he does not believe that you will give it."

"I'll promise nothing, much less promise to leave you."

She gazed at him steadily. "Not for my sake?"

He hesitated. "You should not ask me till I've had a chance to show what I can do."

Her form relaxed. "Go, dear, now, and find out about the train. We must not miss it. Perhaps I can make you understand later. If you love me, hasten."

Two minutes before the midnight train pulled out for Calgary, two fig-

ures hurried into the forward passenger coach. Half an hour afterward Natalie smiled brightly at her companion. "I think you managed that very well."

His arm slid round her. "Ah, I see you are beginning to put a little more faith in me. Now wait while I go and secure berths. I was afraid to do it before we started."

He disappeared toward the rear of the train. She waited, yielding happily to the rocking motion as the miles slid by beneath the roaring wheels. The shadow was beginning to withdraw from her heart. Presently Pearson returned. His face was strangely stern.

"I got the berths, but——"

She looked at him anxiously. "Yes, what is it?"

"The tall man with the scar on his cheek is in the smoking compartment."

She quailed visibly, staring, speechless, as though fascinated. Pearson himself fumbled for words, but could find none with which to answer this question.

"And what now?" she whispered faintly.

"There is only one thing to do, and it's perfectly reasonable. This man has no case against us, nor we against him. We can't prevent his following us, for there is no law against that, and he certainly can't attack us publicly. On the other hand I don't see that we are in any position to lay any complaint about him. There are many things we think we know, but," he hesitated, "we can't swear that we know. As far as the law is concerned he is a perfectly peaceable citizen. We can only go straight ahead and take no notice of him whatever."

She glanced at him curiously, and a strange expression flickered through her eyes. "Then you mean me to give up without an effort?"

"What!" he said, astonished. "You told me what I must do if I loved you."

"Oh, don't you see, I can't give you up like that!" She pulled him close to her and put her trembling lips to his ear. "Don't you understand, Jack. I'm afraid I love you too much."

His heart quickened. She was utterly his own, and now, captured by her love, she was ready to make a fight for liberty.

"Wait, darling. Let me think."

He sat plunged in profound introspection. She watched him anxiously for a moment which seemed hours. Presently he glanced up, with a new resolve in his gray eyes.

"I think I see it now. We will go on just as we are, doing what I said, then when we get near some large city —say Toronto—we will slip out at night and wait a day or two. It's no use trying that here. The population is too thin, and we would only attract attention. I think that will throw him off."

"I trust you absolutely, Jack."

Next morning, after breakfast, Pearson seated himself in the smoking compartment. Immediately opposite, the tall stranger was exhaling a blue cloud from a cigarette and expelling it in two thin streams from his nostrils. The odor was like that of the cigarettes of Stanovitch. The sun struck sharply through the polished window and touched the white scar on the smooth brown cheek.

"Nice morning," said Pearson.

The stranger nodded. "Winter comes early this year." There was no accent in his voice. He might have been of any nationality.

"You have been in the North?" ventured Pearson daringly.

"Yes," said his neighbor calmly. "I came down from Le Pas a day or two ago."

"Fur, I suppose?"

"Yes, fur. The prospects are not very good this season, especially for

mink and otter. Marten, on the other hand, are up to the average."

"Then you had not a satisfactory journey. It is a long way to go for a small result."

The slightest flicker moved through the tall man's eyes. "On the contrary," he parried coolly, "I obtained some very useful data, which will be of great service to me."

A sudden impulse hurried Pearson along. Listening to his own voice, it seemed that he was reciting something he had rehearsed many a time previously in preparation for this one occasion.

"A lonely place, isn't it? One doesn't see much of humanity."

"Ah, yes, quite true! I was quite alone, but curiously enough I did not lack humanity. It is curious how society is represented in the North." Then he added dryly: "All kinds of society."

"You were alone? Is not that unusual? It would have been very awkward in the case of an accident."

"You are quite right, it would have been awkward. Fortunately things went very well with me—although there are many accidents in proportion to the small number of inhabitants."

"You seem very much at home—are you a Canadian?"

"No, but I have had Canadian interests. I represent a foreign syndicate." For a fraction of a second the lids dropped over the dark eyes, then the level voice went quietly on: "You travel with your wife?"

Pearson's pulse fluttered. "Yes, fortunately."

"She is brave to face the North. Her first journey I suppose?"

"Yes, her first journey, and I think I may say her last. A little of such an experience goes a long way with a woman. I am afraid she rather repents the curiosity that took her there."

The stranger exhaled another blue cloud and stared with contemplation into the smoke. "Ah, you are quite right. My observation is that curiosity invariably has strange and often extremely uncomfortable results. It is a dangerous tendency. You, for instance, do not look as though you are curious."

"No," said Pearson slowly. "I used to be at one time, but I think I have got over it now."

The stranger nodded. "I congratulate you. In that case you have safely survived that period of life which is most apt to be perilous. You were prospecting in the North, were you not?"

The Englishman started in spite of himself. "No, not prospecting. We were just knocking about."

"Ah, please pardon my mistake. The curiosity which I have just condemned recoils in my own face. I only happened to notice a piece of rock sticking out of one of your bags in the hotel. Last night I did not expect to be so fortunate in my traveling companion. You made a very short stay in Edmonton."

"Yes. I got an important telegram, and we had to leave very suddenly. In fact we just had time to catch the train, and no more."

"And now you return to England. You will pardon the assumption if I say that it is quite evident that you are English."

Pearson nodded. "Yes, by the first boat." Then he added unconsciously: "We go by way of New York."

"In that case," said the stranger thoughtfully, "it is quite possible that we shall meet in New York. I have often noticed that very strange and unexpected encounters take place in large cities. One is apt to meet the person one least expects to meet, and," he added curiously, "one sometimes meets the person one most wishes to avoid."

He relapsed into silence. His companion furtively examined the thin

face, tanned a copper brown, the high cheek bones, the white, staring scar, the quick, dark eyes, the lean, sloping shoulders that so disguised their strength, and the long, loose, sinewy, prehensile hands. What there was behind all this he could not determine. But deep in his own soul some higher intelligence told him that here was the third person who had stretched Stepan Kolkoff dead in some act of treachery, whose steps he had heard in the nighttime, who had driven that three-cornered hammer deep into the scheming brain of Nicolai, and who had saved two young lives on the icebound shore of Selwyn Lake. Again he studied the smooth face. There was no evidence of cruelty, but rather a calm, fixed, inflexible quality, with which this stranger would pursue a changeless course, unmoved by pity and unstirred by passion.

Later he spoke of all this to Natalie. "That man is neither cruel nor vindictive, and I don't believe he has a trace of ambition, either. He seems to me like some cool and perfectly balanced machine which has been designed for a certain purpose, and will do its work without a trace of variation. You can't get behind his eyes and guess what he is thinking of, but all the same I believe he has the face of a man who will play fair."

"Then if all that is true, what is the use of trying to escape him? It is out of the question."

"Do you remember what Nicolai said about men being able to lose themselves, not in the wilderness, but among many other men?"

She shook her head. "Others have tried to escape," she said hopelessly. "Dearest, I don't forget what I said a little while ago, and you must not think that I would not risk anything to escape. You know I would give the rest of my life for a single year with you, but now there is only one thing that I see you can do. Would it not be better to go to him and ask him what he wants? It sounds strange, I know, in a free country, but only some are free in any country. If you went to the police and asked for protection, you would not need it in a week."

"Do you mean," said Pearson hotly, "that I am to walk up to a man I have never seen before and ask him what he wants us to do?"

She nodded wistfully.

"Then I am sorry, but I can't do it —at least," he hesitated, "I won't do it till I have tried again to throw him off the trail. Even then, if he does not drop out, I may take the affair into my own hands."

"You must not think of it. It would be the end of us both."

He sat, silent and stubborn, then suddenly blurted: "I'm not used to taking things lying down."

She gazed at him with love in her eyes. This was a different Pearson from the one who had stared so hungrily into Florio's restaurant. The wilderness had set its seal on him. The lean figure had filled out, and superb strength was obvious in every movement and gesture. He seemed now a man who had found himself, and was armed and trained to strike back with vigor and return the buffets of the world.

"Darling," she said gently, "we have not much more time left together. Shall we not be as happy as we can?"

For the next three days it was a strange journey. All the way down from the Northwest, the tall man shared the sleeping car. He ate when they ate. It gave them a curious sensation to look across the aisle and see him ordering his meals. Very rarely did their eyes meet, and when they did his lids always drooped and his glance turned away. Once or twice, scanning the smooth features, they noted an extraordinary expression in which determination and regret seemed to mingle.

It was almost as though the stranger man who had found himself.

Gradually there grew up in Pearson's mind that even though the tall man's orders were absolute, he might yet relent long enough to let them slip away in peace. This blossomed into a final resolve.

"I've thought it all out," he said, with grim determination, on the evening of the third day. "To-morrow morning we reach Toronto, and our car joins a new train at North Bay. It stops at a place called Bracebridge, about five hours after we change. We will slip out there and then come on to Toronto a day or two later. But we must get out just before reaching the city and come in by some other way. Then the thing will be not to go to a hotel at all, but to some very quiet boarding house in the suburbs. If we succeed in that, I defy any one to find us."

"And if any one does?" she breathed, with a strange light in her eyes.

"Then, if it's absolute and final and shows that our movements are absolutely known and understood, I'll do what you say."

For the rest of the evening they watched very carefully. He crawled into his berth and lay there, fully dressed, chuckling at the thought of the expression the tall man's face would bear in the morning. In the small hours he noted the time carefully, and rapped gently at the wooden partition at his head. Instantly there came an answering tap.

In three-quarters of an hour, Pearson, as he left the car with Natalie, glanced back along the narrow line of green curtains. There was neither stir nor sound. It appeared that every passenger was plunged in profound slumber. In another instant the conductor swung his lantern, the porter touched his cap, picked up his wooden stool, and swung nimbly on board as the train began to move. Pearson stood on the small station platform and put his arm around the girl's waist. Together they watched the red and green tail lamps swing through a curve and drop suddenly out of sight. His grasp tightened, and he pressed her to him.

"Beloved," he whispered, "this is the first step toward freedom and happiness."

After a discreet wait of two days, they approached the city. Already the winter night had fallen darkly, and high overhead the reflection of the electrics whitened the murky sky. It looked as though Toronto were illuminated in welcome of the two wanderers.

A small boarding house was found without difficulty. The curious glances of the landlady abruptly ceased when Pearson put a bill into her hands.

"Please make my sister as comfortable as you can. We have had a long journey, and she is very tired."

Next day they explored the western part of the city, keeping well away from the central section. Pearson felt subjectively surprised at the number of people in the world. It drew them together, even as the wilderness had drawn them. These people were free, happy, and independent. It was visible on every face. This was his own right and that of the girl he loved. He wondered whether a practically penniless man could settle down here and compete with these multitudes. Then his mind turned to the treasure house of Dubawnt Lake, and he swore a great oath that he would not desert the fortune that by now was buried beneath arctic snows.

"Natalie," he begged impulsively, "we must be married, now—I implore you. I can't wait, dearest. We have escaped, and you are perfectly safe. Don't you understand, darling, that I can't do without you any longer?"

"Dearest," she answered slowly, with a tremor in her voice, "if a week from

to-day we have not been discovered I will marry you. I need you just as much as you need me, and if in spite of all I have told you you still want me——" She paused, and a vivid blush mounted to her cheeks.

Pearson's gray eyes grew misty with emotion. "I shall live for you, you only."

That night they were very daring and went to a moving-picture theater. The reel was of Northern life. He turned to her and laughed. "How little they know of the real North. We could tell them a thing or two, couldn't we?"

Her shoulder pressed against him. "I want to forget the North."

They said good night in the narrow hall of the boarding house. Their drab surroundings had suddenly been transmuted into gold. He caught her close in his arms. "Mine, mine, mine!" he said. Then his lips fastened hungrily on her own.

CHAPTER XV.

In the lives of most men there comes at one time or another a period when their highest hopes are crushed and the treasure ships of their hearts are wrecked. Thus it was that the Pearson who descended next morning was not the man who had held the girl to him in the shadows of the hall the night before. This man's face was drawn and lined, and in his sleepless eyes was anxiety and fear.

He ate little, and hardly looked up till Natalie entered. Then their eyes met.

Her face, too, had changed. The brightness had gone, and it seemed that age had descended overnight. Her lips moved, but she did not speak.

The room emptied, and at last they were alone. Then Pearson slowly laid a slip of paper in front of her.

"You, too!" he said, under his breath.

The girl shuddered and put another crumpled scrap beside his hand. "It was under my pillow."

He nodded despondently. "Under mine, too."

"How did it get there?" She was deadly white.

"I don't know. I'd sooner not ask. I only know I thought we had escaped." Then he added bitterly: "But we haven't."

He took the slips and laid them side by side. "I will be at Florio's restaurant in New York to-morrow night," he read slowly. That was all. There was neither date nor signature.

"Well," he continued grimly, "I think I will go to Florio's and finish it there."

Her hand trembled as she laid it on his arm. "Jack, dear, we must be very wise now. You can see now how impossible it is to slip away. Is it not better to know the worst than to be always tortured with suspicion and uncertainty? The truth, after all, may not be as bad as we think. This is either the end of everything, or," she hesitated, "the beginning."

Pearson's gaze was as cold as steel. "Very well, we will go together. If he tries to take you away from me he must stand the consequences. He is a strong man, but I will break his back like a stick. It's you and I together now—no matter how soon the end comes."

They left for New York the same night, drawn by an occult attraction that seemed stronger than any power they could oppose it with. Pearson surveyed the calm, pale face of the girl he loved and vowed that nothing would drag her from his arms. This journey was even stranger than the last. There was no tall man whose personality they silently explored, but at the other end he waited, invisible and irresistible, while they came in swift obedience to the magic of a few scribbled words.

Natalie smiled bravely and then tried to lose herself in a Toronto paper. An hour passed. Hamilton dropped behind, and the train began its long climb to the level of Lake Erie. Suddenly the girl leaned forward, with her eyes riveted on the paper. Her lips moved without words as she read. She glanced quickly at her lover with an extraordinary expression, and her hand closed tightly over the sheet. In another moment she had folded and slipped it quickly into her bag.

Pearson's gaze was turned into the darkness. Then, as the features of a woman become doubly beautiful when she regards the man who is everything to her, so those of Natalie became transfigured. Such looks remain in the hearts of men with undying meaning.

"Beloved," he whispered, "what is it?"

"Jack," she said, with infinite tenderness, "if some strange chance kept us together, would you always cherish and love me? You don't know who I am or very much about me. It might be that you would find life very difficult with me for a wife, even if danger were removed."

"Don't you know," he answered slowly, "that if I do not marry you I will not marry any one? God meant us for each other or we would not have been thrown so strangely together. Do you think I am a man who could forget Dubawnt Lake and the perilous days we have gone through together?"

"But I don't know either English ways or English people. Have you thought of that?"

He smiled bitterly. "I am only a younger son. You know in England that means one has to forage for oneself. It's a poor country for younger sons, and they generally ship us out to Canada or Australia. Perhaps, when I am old and gray, I shall come into my own and take my place and name and will go back home—that is, if I want to," he added cynically.

Natalie's face still wore that inscrutable look. "Who can tell?" she said gently.

Memory rushed back and engulfed them both as they walked through the Grand Central Station next morning. Here had begun that memorable journey, and here Stanovitch had stood only six months before to greet his new recruit. But Stanovitch seemed so far away now that it was as if he had only appeared in a dream that vanished at its birth.

The roar of the city deafened them. Pearson blinked at these hurrying multitudes and wondered if in any single breast there was buried such poignant emotion as in his own. Together they tried to prepare for that which this eventful night must bring forth.

"He will insist," said Natalie wearily, "that I go back to Novgorod with him at once, and be always under guard. You will have to give your oath that you will reveal nothing you know. Then we will say good-by, and I will take ship for Russia, and you, dear heart, will go your own way, but you will not forget me."

Pearson was silent. His jaw set firmly, and the muscles in his arm began to twitch as his fingers closed over an object in his pocket. Presently he looked down at her. "And you think I am going to stand by and do nothing?" he said after a moment.

"Yes, because you love me."

"What did you mean when you were talking in the train about not being able to make me happy?" he demanded suddenly.

She hesitated. "Don't you know, dear, that all girls love to talk about all kinds of impossible things?"

"Nothing is impossible!" He blurted this violently, and people in the street turned and stared at him. "If to-night should decide matters for us, believe

me they will be decided for some one else, too!"

The hours dragged slowly on, till, as evening closed, their feet turned automatically toward Florio's. Again Pearson felt as he had felt the night of that memorable dinner. Again he was about to risk the future in one throw. Again he fumbled as to that which might lie on the knees of the gods.

As they entered, he glanced on one side as though expecting to see his own lean figure staring through the window. Then, walking slowly down the aisle, he stopped at the table where Stanovitch and Natalie had once sat.

"Will this do?" he said quietly.

"Yes." She was a little breathless, and her eyes wandered to the table opposite.

"That one is engaged, madame," put in the waiter. "But I have no doubt that the gentleman would——"

"It doesn't matter," broke in Pearson. "This will do very well."

Again that sense of recurrence stole over him. Natalie looked as she had looked that night before. Florio's had not changed. Only the chair of Stanovitch was empty.

The manager walked up, looked hard at the young man, and bowed courteously. "Ah, sir, you are welcome back to Florio's." There was a pink flush in his cheeks.

A mocking spirit took hold of the newcomer, and he laid a bill on the table. "Thank you, you are very kind, and I can assure you there will be no misunderstanding this time."

The round little manager blushed. "It is difficult sometimes not to make mistakes," he said apologetically. "Perhaps monsieur and madame will do me the honor of taking a glass of wine with me later. I have an admirable cuvée which I keep for very special occasions, and," he bowed again, "this is a very special occasion."

Pearson nodded. "With pleasure." Then suddenly Natalie breathed sharply, and the color fled from her cheeks.

"Jack!" she whispered. "Jack, look!"

He looked. The tall man with the scar on his cheek was coming slowly down the aisle. He glanced at Pearson, bowed distantly, and deliberately sat down at the engaged table. He was quite alone.

Pearson's eyes signaled to the girl. "Take no notice," they said; "take no notice."

She smiled nervously and began to talk about topics of the day. Pearson mustered all his powers, and, between them, they kept the ball rolling. Dishes appeared and vanished, and he noted, with a queer pang in his heart, that she only toyed with the food. Across the aisle, the stranger ate methodically, never turning his eyes in their direction. He seemed devoted to a good dinner, and had apparently no other object in the world than to make the most of it.

Natalie played with knife and fork and sent petitionary glances that made the blood throb riotously in Pearson's veins. Presently the stranger, with a word to the waiter, got up, stepped across the narrow space toward them, and bowed with formal courtesy.

"Might I beg for the favor of a few moments' conversation with my former traveling companions?" he said, in a level voice.

Again that tide of daring lifted Pearson in its embrace. "By all means! Won't you sit down and have a glass of wine?" he concluded calmly.

The stranger bowed again. "You are very kind." Then he added, in low tones: "You put another aspect on duty."

Natalie's lips were parted as she scanned the dark face. "Duty," she said faintly.

"Yes. I often think how strange a thing is duty. It is often very hard to perform. It falls on the innocent as well as the guilty. In fact, it seems to me that it is almost always the innocent who suffer most."

"Do you not think it would be wise to get down to business?" said Pearson abruptly.

"You are very impetuous," was the deliberate answer. "Business done in the proper way is an art—I had almost said a pleasure. It calls for the most tactful qualities of humanity, and business should always be considered a diplomatic matter. Especially since it is often painful and distressing."

"Take what time you please," put in Pearson coldly. "I need hardly remind you that we have come a long way for the privilege of this interview—if it is a privilege."

"Accept my thanks. Now," he began carefully, "I would like to put a case to you, and while I am describing it I trust you will do me the kindness to believe that it is purely imaginary. Let us assume first that in a very remote place there is something of value. The knowledge of this comes through means which I will not weary you by describing, to those who have, without question, the very best use for it. After careful deliberation, an emissary is sent out to discover and thoroughly examine this thing of value, it being the policy, I might add of those who send him—let us call them the society—not to put too much trust in any one man's honesty. You are still young, and your impatient nature may question the wisdom or fairness of such a policy. To this I can only say that the wise men of the world believe that human nature is apt to vary, especially where wealth is concerned. Very well. The first man goes, but he does not go alone, although very naturally he thinks he is entirely beyond observation. He discovers the object of value and is at once carried away by the extraordinary wealth which lies, let us say, at his feet. Then a thought works like poison in his brain, and, since wealth is apparently in the balance, his honesty falls to the ground. In the act of theft and desertion, he is given his ultimate lesson by the shadow which accompanied him from the first and was acquainted with every movement."

"Then you killed Stepan Kolkoff!" broke in Natalie, her breast heaving.

He looked at her in surprise. "Who is Stepan Kolkoff?" he said calmly. "I'm afraid you forget that I state a purely imaginary case. I merely said that the unfaithful emissary got his ultimate lesson. To continue, this imaginary society is fortunately headed by one who is very wise. He decrees that another man be sent forthwith, and with him still another. You will now observe that already four persons are involved. Now follow me carefully, if you please. This third man is vastly brave and clever. He has the strength of a giant, but in some respects the heart of a child. He also imagines that he sees the riches at his feet, at least let us assume that they are at his feet, and conceives the idea that although one has already failed, he himself can carry the treasure to his own hiding place. This idea possesses his mind, even before he starts on his journey. Gradually it grows in his brain until he thinks and dreams it constantly. Finally he talks of it in his sleep, and his companion hears. Another traitor has entered the scene."

"What?" interrupted Pearson. "Stanovitch a traitor?"

The stranger flipped the ash from the end of his cigarette and gazed sadly at the young man. "I am afraid I must have been very stupid. I tried so hard to explain that the case I recite is purely imaginary. Forgive my clumsy use of your admirable language. With your permission let us proceed. We

have now a situation in which the third man has turned traitor, and the fourth man knows it. The next development naturally is that the traitor attempts to kill the discoverer."

"No—no! That wasn't the reason," breathed Natalie. "It was something more dreadful than that."

"Madam, you have remarkable intuition. I begin to think that you could have put my case much better than myself. We have come at length to the point at which it is necessary to remember that a fifth person, a woman, steps upon the stage. The curious thing is that she is there not because she does not know enough to stay out of the wilderness, but because she knows too much to be left alone. The third man warns her against the fourth and gains her help in an attempt to murder the latter on the grounds that her life and what is more than her life are in danger."

"What!" stammered the girl. "Was Stanovitch deceiving me?"

"Pardon me, but I do not understand your question. It is obviously impossible for me to explain the actions of an individual who exists only in your mind. I merely put to you a certain affair which may or may not have happened. When I have finished, your advice will be asked on a certain point as to what certain individuals should most wisely do. So! The fourth man survives and later on kills the traitor. It was, I admit, unfortunate, but entirely necessary under the circumstances. The fourth man now thinks he is the sole survivor of the four emissaries. A strange thing then follows. He is left quite alone, so far as he knows, with the girl for a few moments."

Natalie grew deadly pale. "Don't!" she implored. "Don't! You are cruel!"

"I am sorry," continued the stranger, "but you should not allow yourself to suffer purely on account of the visionary effect of anything I may say. The fourth man then makes a great mistake. He forgets that he is there for a set purpose and allows himself to be swayed by emotions for which the society makes no allowance whatever. It becomes necessary to remove him—and—he is removed by the same shadow that was sent to keep watch on the first emissary." He hesitated again and went calmly on: "We now arrive at a situation which you will admit is very intricate. Three valuable men have perished. The society which sent them has not benefited. A knowledge which is of vast importance is in the possession of a girl and of a well-meaning employee of limited intelligence who it was not intended should ever leave the scene of discovery."

"Do you mean that?" cried Pearson. "Was the villainy as deep as that?"

"The purely imaginary villainy. Yes. My friend, you should not be so realistic. The affair now becomes even more delicate. These two escape and survive," he hesitated, "owing to the human weakness of one who should not have intervened."

"On Selwyn Lake," broke in Pearson suddenly.

"I'm afraid I do not understand," said the stranger smoothly.

"Ah—I forgot. I, too, refer to a purely imaginary case of a man and a girl who were starving to death and were saved by an invisible friend who left food outside their tent."

A flicker darted through the dark eyes.

"Not actual food, of course."

"No, not actual—I'm describing just such an occurrence as you did."

"In that case, I must admit that the imaginary food was left on Selwyn Lake."

"Then you saved our lives only to separate us," interrupted Natalie quickly. "It would have been kinder to leave us there."

A sudden wrinkle appeared on the stranger's brow.

He lit another cigarette, while a faint color reddened his brown temple. "It is an unfortunate fact that no human mechanism can eliminate humanity. It it almost invariably the heart and not the mind that makes the false step. So! This knowledge is to-day, one might almost say this evening, about to escape, and with it any possible gain by the society. And now for a moment I beg your careful attention. It has been decided that the girl return to the supervision of those who know the meaning of the word silence, and the man"—he paused again—"the man will give his oath to go back to his native land for the rest of his life and not to speak of what he knows under any circumstances whatever."

"And the alternative?" snapped Pearson angrily.

"Ah! I hesitate to mention the alternative."

There was a moment's silence, then a voice came in like the click of a steel trap.

"Sit still! If you move I'll blow your brains out if I swing for it. Now I've got something to say."

The stranger shrank. Pearson's hand was covered with a napkin from which the shining muzzle of Natalie's revolver protruded for a quarter of an inch and just cleared the edge of the table against which it rested. The tall man could see straight down the barrel.

"You will be kind enough to sit perfectly still, and please remember that in the past few months I have seen enough of death not to mind a little more. Now listen, although I won't take as long as you did. You saved our lives, but your terms are ridiculous. You talk as if you were omnipotent as to the platinum—for that is what you mean. Also please observe that I am not stating an imaginary case. All I have to do is to tell the Canadian government the truth about this whole, horrible affair and they will put a guard of Mounted Police up there that will blow holes in every Russian murderer in America. Now, as to my future wife, she will stay with me, and we are going to be married to-morrow. I think your past dealings must have been with cowards."

The stranger's face was as motionless as marble, but one arm moved, and his shoulder shifted slightly.

"Another quarter of an inch and you're a dead man. Put your hands on the table! One—two——"

The long brown hands came up and descended slowly on the spotless cloth.

"That's better. Now I want to ask something. Do you actually think I am going to sit here and take what you hand out? I'm a poor man, I admit it, and that platinum would mean a good deal to me, but I'm willing to forget it if—if you will forget us. There is one more thing. If you insist on this girl going back to Russia with you, you will never leave this place alive."

"Do you expect me to yield to a threat?"

"I expect nothing, except that in an hour you will be in the morgue and I will be in jail."

The stranger smiled coldly. "So, my young fire eater, you think I'm alone. You are very shortsighted."

"What do you mean?" stammered Natalie.

"It's very simple," he said impersonally. "The policy of our society is always to provide for emergencies. It is quite true that you may be foolish enough to shoot me, but that will not make any material difference to the program. My work will be carried on by another."

The muzzle of the revolver trembled, then steadied again. "Are you a man or a machine? What do you gain by this?"

"Personally I gain nothing, but others profit much."

"And if they could profit just as much in another way?"

The stranger shook his head.

"Who are you?—a homeless wanderer. Can I trust you?—I have no reason to."

Pearson wracked his brain, and began to speak carefully and slowly. "Look here, you want to secure a certain thing—very well, you can secure it. I will give my word of honor not to use my knowledge or divulge it to any one, on the understanding that you drop out of this matter, here and now. My future wife will give the same promise. It is not on my own account that I say this. I'm not afraid of you."

"The word of an unknown soldier of fortune?" The tall man smiled. "Hardly!"

"Would the word of Lord Aldwych do?" put in Natalie quietly.

Pearson started violently, but the revolver did not even waver. "What do you mean by that?"

"It's true, dear. I've known it since yesterday."

His eyes remained riveted to the stranger's brown face. "Natalie, you're joking!" Then he added severely: "This isn't exactly the time for a joke."

"Perhaps," broke in the stranger, "the lady is not joking."

The Englishman's cheeks reddened, but still that small, shining barrel covered the man at the end of the table. "Where is your proof?" he said in level tones, although the blood was rushing riotously through his veins.

She glanced at him strangely, and laid a newspaper clipping on the table before him.

"Read it," he commanded; "I'm busy."

She obeyed him in a shaking voice. "This is taken from a London paper, dated three weeks ago. A firm of English lawyers is advertising for information concerning the Honorable John Pearson, of Dyce Castle, Beaulieu, Hampshire. He came to America early this year and has not been heard from since that time. His brother, Lord Aldwych, died two months ago."

There fell a silence, into which the young man's voice broke with queer, deprecating tones: "It appears that I'm Lord Aldwych. I knew I would be one day, if I lived." He stared straight into the tall man's eyes. "You would not take my word before—will you take it now—although it's no better?" he added quizzically.

The stranger paused. "Ah, that affects the matter considerably. Now I deal with a personage. One can always find Dyce Castle, in Hampshire, without too much exertion or expense." He looked hard at the young man. "And if I do take it——"

"You may regard the incident as closed," said Pearson. He slid the revolver into his pocket and turned to the girl. "What do you say, best beloved? You understand better than I do?"

She stared at the Russian, and spoke quickly in their own language. He thought for a moment, then replied in a brief, crisp sentence.

"It's all right," she said tremulously. "You may believe him. That was the password of the inner circle, and he dare not break his word now."

"Then it is mutually agreed," continued Pearson, with a queer lift in his words, "that we part now—at once, and that neither of us mention what we know, and that from this time on the person of this girl ceases to be in danger or under observation."

"She will not be in any further danger, but both of you will always be under observation. That is inevitable, since you know what you do know, but you will be unconscious of our obser-

vation, and it need not cloud your sky. So, it is agreed!"

He rose, and a look of sadness came over his lean, brown face. "In saying farewell I would ask you to remember that no man is happy whose fate it is to be the shadow of his fellow men. You must believe that. But," he hesitated for a moment, and then went quietly on, "when, in the future, you think of me, I will ask you also to remember the imaginary food which was found outside an imaginary tent on Selwyn Lake." He bowed to Natalie, and held out a long hand to Pearson. "My lord, I have the honor to bid you good evening!"

As he came, he went—tall, noiseless, and mysterious. At the door he turned, bowed slightly, and vanished.

Pearson breathed hard. It seemed difficult to get air into his lungs. Slowly his eyes met those of the girl, and hung there, piercing far into their starry depths. Her lips were parted, and it seemed that her spirit paused ere it rushed to meet his own.

In another moment, a voice broke in: "And now, sir, will you do me the honor of taking a glass of wine, and perhaps the lady will, also?"

Natalie nodded brightly and with relief. She was beginning to be afraid of the tumult in her soul.

Their host lifted a brimming glass. "To your very good health." He emptied it at a draft.

"You are very kind, for, as a matter of fact, we are celebrating a very happy event. Accept my compliments."

The manager bowed. "I'm doubly fortunate. And now, I am sorry, but my duty——" He saluted them again and vanished.

The young man refilled his glass, and stared at the girl over its shining edge. In the bubbling depths he saw life and joy and a new, intoxicating future. Across the table was beauty and love.

"Why didn't you tell me before?" he said slowly.

"Don't you see? If you had known, you would have gone to the police and demanded protection, and then," she faltered, "not only would they not have been able to protect me, but you, too, would have been in great danger. Dearest, it was not Lord Aldwych I learned to love, but," here she lifted her own glass, "I shall not love him less."

His brow wrinkled. "So you would have let me go?"

"My heart would never have let you go; but since my presence would have meant peril to you, I would have slipped away from you forever. But now ——" the rest was lost in an unutterable look.

He lifted his wineglass. "To ourselves," he smiled. "We need it."

She nodded, and drank. Then, with a curious gesture, she dropped the glass. Their eyes mingled again as it shivered into fragments.

"You did that once before," he put in suddenly.

"Yes—and for the same reason: 'To the very end.'"

Half an hour later, they were walking, arm in arm, up Broadway. He stopped at a jeweler's window. "I should like to buy an engagement ring for the future Lady Aldwych, if she will kindly advance me the necessary amount," he laughed, with worship in his gaze. "It's only for a day or two, and I'll give excellent security."

They leaned over the counter and surveyed the jewels. The salesman glanced at them and opened a drawer and brought out a magnificent diamond.

"You can't do better than this," he remarked admiringly; "it's a perfect stone, set in the latest fashion—in platinum."

Her lips trembled. "It's beautiful," she said, under her breath, "but not—not in platinum."

C o u g a r

By Victor Maxwell

Of a man who goes out to the Northwest to hunt cougar. He gets his chance to join in a hunt—and it is cougar hunt too, if you like. Vastly different from the hunt he anticipated, though he found it as entertaining an adventure as if he'd gone into the Olympics to shoot the "varmints" there. It is a detective story as well as a story of the outdoors, but the significance of the title will be apparent to you when you have read the story.

JOE STALEY and I were sitting in the open lobby of the hotel, toasting our feet before the giant fireplace in which a great fir log was roaring. Joe, who was a forest ranger in the Olympics, had come down to meet me in response to a letter I'd sent him some weeks before, telling him I wanted to get some more cougar pelts. Joe knew all about cougar, and had been of invaluable aid to me on two previous expeditions.

Aside from us there were but two other guests in the lobby, with a sleepy Japanese bell boy lounging on the straight-backed bench in front of the desk.

"I tell you, there's no cougar to be had over my way," said Joe, breaking the silence with a reiteration of his first greeting to me. "The winter has been heavy and bad, and the big brutes have all gone over to the 'burns,' on the coast side. You couldn't get in that country nohow now, and on my patrol there's nary a varmint worth your while. Better come back in the summer—then I'll show you some hunting."

I made no reply. I had already protested, but Joe knew what he was talking about, and I realized that if he said there were no cougar there was no use in crossing the Sound with him.

Joe turned slightly in his chair and regarded the other two guests of the house, who, like us, were enjoying in lonely state the splendor of what was in summertime probably the most popular tourist hotel in the Northwest. After a careful survey of our companions he turned back to me.

"If you've got time to run about a bit," he said, "and you really want a cougar hunt, maybe I can fix you up with Kelly."

"Who's Kelly, Joe?" I asked, somewhat surprised.

Joe bobbed his head toward one of the two men sitting across the lobby from us.

"Gent over there in the gray suit," he said. "Kelly is part cougar himself. And he's hunting one of the biggest, meanest, and most bloodthirsty of the varmints right now."

I turned in my chair to get a better view of this Nimrod hitherto unknown to me. The man in the gray suit was of large frame, yet at first glance he seemed almost thin enough to be a consumptive. On studying him more closely I realized that this impression wos due to his high cheek bones, which

accentuated his rather long, pale, smooth-shaven face; and also because of his abnormally long legs, which were outstretched far in front of him.

"Is he a ranger?" I asked.

Joe laughed silently. "Yes, Kelly is some ranger," he answered. Then, after hesitating a moment, he continued: "Maybe he won't thank me for doing it, but I'm going to tell you about him. Kelly is a government man —special agent or something, nobody knows just what except his boss, and I guess his boss is the president. Kelly usually slopes along behind counterfeiters; but every now and then they put him on something extra special and dangerous, and then Kelly is real happy. I helped him on a timber case over my way once, and he took a sort of a shine to me, I guess—for ever since then he sends me a magazine about once every six or seven months. That's pretty demonstrative for Kelly."

My ranger friend paused, reached in an inner pocket for a cigar, carefully removed the band, and cut the end open with a vertical jab of his penknife, and lighted up. A ring of smoke that whirled away from his lips occupied his undivided attention for some minutes, and then he turned to me again.

"Did you ever notice that a cougar was the busiest thing in the world? They're always doing something, and they only sleep with one eye at a time. Why, I've sat out in the woods and watched one of them big, tawny brutes lying on a rock or out on the limb of a tree, or maybe on a fallen trunk in a windbreak—and, believe me, he's a busy critter. He may look perfectly still, but he isn't. If his eyes are quiet his ears are moving; and if his ears and his eyes are both still, his nose is a-twisting and sniffing. And if a twig falls he sees it, and if a tree toad chirps he hears it. And if a squirrel or a rabbit dodges out, he sees that, too, even if it is behind him; and if the squirrel or the rabbit gets within eight feet of him there's an eruption of nature where that cougar was lying so still and yet so busy but a second before, and at the same time there's only a blotch of bloody fur where the smaller animal was. Well, Kelly is like that, too. Just now to look at him you'd think he was sick and disgusted with his own company and that he was trying to forget how much he hated himself—yet I'll bet my next quarter's warrant that he knows I'm talking to you about him, and that he's also wise to the fact that the Jap bellhop over there on the bench is telegraphing with his foot to Pete Kohler, who is the short, fat gent over there reading a paper."

I glanced in the direction of the third guest of the hotel, who was sitting at a writing table apparently reading a newspaper and strumming idly with a pencil on a piece of paper at the same time. And now that Joe had called my attention to it I saw that the man was writing intermittently, his periods of penmanship alternating with the restless tapping of the Japanese bell boy's shoe upon the tiling.

"If you want to hunt cougar," resumed Joe, "I'll introduce you to Kelly. Come out to the bar and we'll wait for him."

Joe dropped his hat on his chair as he rose, and I supposed that he had done so to reserve his seat by the fire, though the fact that the hotel was nearly empty made this quite unnecessary. I was going to mention this to Joe, but decided not to, lest he think that I was trying to tell him how to behave in the city. I had found out by previous experiences that Joe did not like me to call attention to his occasional vagaries of behavior.

In the grill we sat at a corner table and split a bottle of imported beer between us. Just as we were ready for

C o u g a r

By Victor Maxwell

Of a man who goes out to the Northwest to hunt cougar. He gets his chance to join in a hunt—and it is cougar hunt too, if you like. Vastly different from the hunt he anticipated, though he found it as entertaining an adventure as if he'd gone into the Olympics to shoot the "varmints" there. It is a detective story as well as a story of the outdoors, but the significance of the title will be apparent to you when you have read the story.

JOE STALEY and I were sitting in the open lobby of the hotel, toasting our feet before the giant fireplace in which a great fir log was roaring. Joe, who was a forest ranger in the Olympics, had come down to meet me in response to a letter I'd sent him some weeks before, telling him I wanted to get some more cougar pelts. Joe knew all about cougar, and had been of invaluable aid to me on two previous expeditions.

Aside from us there were but two other guests in the lobby, with a sleepy Japanese bell boy lounging on the straight-backed bench in front of the desk.

"I tell you, there's no cougar to be had over my way," said Joe, breaking the silence with a reiteration of his first greeting to me. "The winter has been heavy and bad, and the big brutes have all gone over to the 'burns,' on the coast side. You couldn't get in that country nohow now, and on my patrol there's nary a varmint worth your while. Better come back in the summer—then I'll show you some hunting."

I made no reply. I had already protested, but Joe knew what he was talking about, and I realized that if he said there were no cougar there was no use in crossing the Sound with him.

Joe turned slightly in his chair and regarded the other two guests of the house, who, like us, were enjoying in lonely state the splendor of what was in summertime probably the most popular tourist hotel in the Northwest. After a careful survey of our companions he turned back to me.

"If you've got time to run about a bit," he said, "and you really want a cougar hunt, maybe I can fix you up with Kelly."

"Who's Kelly, Joe?" I asked, somewhat surprised.

Joe bobbed his head toward one of the two men sitting across the lobby from us.

"Gent over there in the gray suit," he said. "Kelly is part cougar himself. And he's hunting one of the biggest, meanest, and most bloodthirsty of the varmints right now."

I turned in my chair to get a better view of this Nimrod hitherto unknown to me. The man in the gray suit was of large frame, yet at first glance he seemed almost thin enough to be a consumptive. On studying him more closely I realized that this impression wos due to his high cheek bones, which

about "the biggest, meanest, and most bloodthirsty varmint." And the Japanese bell boy who had been telegraphing a message with his foot to Pete Kohler—what part did he play in the plot?

Kelly sent word that I was to have breakfast with him in his room, and I hastened there as soon as I received the message. An excellent meal was awaiting, and we attacked it without ceremony. Kelly talked most entertainingly about Joe, whom he praised highly, both as a forest ranger and as a man of parts; and he told me many anecdotes of the woodsman that greatly raised him in my esteem. But of the business in hand he said nothing until we had finished breakfast. Then we drew up chairs near the window and sat down. Kelly reached over to the porcelain washbasin in the corner and turned on the cold water.

"Finest thing in the world to discourage eavesdroppers and dictaphones," he said, laughing. "Not that I distrust the hotel, but it is always well to be cautious. The sound of running water won't bother us a bit, but a person listening at the door or wall, or at the other end of a telephone line, can only hear the gurgling and bubbling of the stream in the pipes. Good thing for you to remember."

I made mental note of it, and Kelly resumed, seriously this time:

"Of course you understand, Mr. Smith, that until this little business of ours is completed you are just as much an agent of the United States as I am, and that you are bound by every bit of honor and patriotism in your make-up to maintain the utmost secrecy regarding the matter. After we have settled this affair you may use your own discretion. Joe assures me that you are thoroughly able to do what I want, else I should not be talking as I am now."

"I understand, Mr. Kelly, and you may rely upon me," I replied.

Kelly reached into his pocket and drew out a letter written on the hotel stationery, and passed it to me.

"That is the result of the little stunt that Joe called your attention to in the lobby last night," he said. "I got it at the post office this morning just to be sure that Kohler hadn't added anything to the message that Hiachi gave him. Kohler is a dreamy sort of a cuss, and sometimes he adds his own ideas to messages that he is supposed merely to pass on. Read it, and then I'll tell you some more."

The letter ran as follows:

MY DEAR SISTER: When this reaches you Arabia will have left Los Angeles, and should meet you in a day or two. She is much better than last summer, and now weighs one hundred and seventy pounds. After seeing you, she plans to visit an old school friend of hers at St. Louis, and will then go back to Los Angeles. I had a night letter from her to-day telling me of her plans. Everything is going well here, and my rheumatism has not bothered me at all. I am going to Seattle next week, and will stop at the Grand Hotel, so if you want to write, address me there. With love and kisses, I am, your brother, PETE.

The letter was addressed to Mrs. Joseph Katz at an address in Spokane. To me it seemed odd that such a missive should have been dictated by a Japanese bell boy, or that it should interest a United States agent who was hunting "cougar." Kelly read my bewilderment and laughed at my expression.

"Now I'll tell you about it," he said. "In the first place, you must know that the United States has developed a wonderful munition of war. I do not need to tell you what this is, or how it is to be used. It is a substance invented by a Western woman chemist, who has nobly turned the secret of its manufacture over to the government. It is one of our secret powers of defense or attack, and experiments that have been

secretly made prove that it is of inestimable value. It has been manufactured by the government in considerable quantities at an isolated plant in southern California; but in some way secret agents of a foreign power have got an inkling of what we have.

"This foreign power has made truly remarkable efforts to obtain this national secret of ours, and finally, through the organization of an elaborate system of agents, has been partly successful. To conceal its efforts this foreign nation has employed agents of various races, who are scattered over a roundabout route across the continent. And so clever has been their work that they have actually obtained a quantity of this secret material. Their aim now is to get this sample that they have in their possession out of the United States, so they can analyze it in their own laboratories and either discover a method of manufacturing it for themselves or provide an antidote, as it were, to use against it.

"Ever since the theft of this material from us, the government has had agents working on the case, and I am one of these agents. We have identified a number of the secret agents of the foreign power—Hiachi, the Japanese bell boy, is one; Pete Kohler is another, and this so-called 'sister' of his is, I presume, still another. You see, the foreign power is taking no chances, and no one of its agents knows all the others, while the plot to get the stuff out of the country moves progressively among them.

"Now this letter conveys the information that one hundred and seventy pounds of this material—probably all they have, for but one hundred and seventy-two pounds were taken from the government plant—is on its way from Los Angeles to Spokane, and that from there it will go presumably to St. Louis. If it cannot from there be successfully transferred to the Atlantic seaboard for shipment abroad, it will be returned to Los Angeles and probably be sent to Europe across the Pacific, or possibly through the Panama Canal. Government agents will be on watch everywhere, and, naturally enough, each agent will try to stop the stuff in his or her own territory.

"I have a 'hunch'—and it is nothing more than that, I tell you frankly—that I know who has been intrusted with bringing this stolen secret north from California. And it is for that that I need help; if it is the person whom I suspect, I myself could do nothing in the matter. Of course I could get another government man to help me, but just because I am taking a chance solely upon a hunch—or call it a flash of intuition, if you prefer—I'd rather have a man outside of the service work with me. Then if my hunch is wrong there will be no embarrassing explanation to make. And if I am correct—well, we all of us like glory."

A piercing shriek ringing out through the hotel hallway interrupted Kelly and startled us both. While I sat trembling and trying to collect my nerves, Kelly had leaped to his feet and dashed through the door, whence I followed him a second or so later to find him pinning a Japanese bell boy to the floor. Before I grasped the situation, Joe Staley's description of an "eruption of nature" when a cougar leaped flashed into my brain, and I thought of the poor squirrel or rabbit. Then I thought that Hiachi had been listening at the door and had cried out when he heard Kelly reveal the plot; but just then Kelly dragged the Jap to his feet, and I saw that the lad was not Hiachi at all.

"What is it? What were you running for?" demanded Kelly, shaking the boy like a rat and revealing to me the strength that was hidden in his spare frame.

"Hiachi," gasped the boy, "Hiachi, he fall down elevator and I run for help. Door open and he fall."

Down the hall a few feet the door of the elevator shaft stood open, and the indicator above showed that the car was several stories higher. It was four floors down to the basement, and as I craned my head within the shaft I saw a twisted heap of brass buttons and green uniform lying sprawled in the half light at the bottom of the elevator well. I nodded my head to Kelly, expecting to see him release the boy; but instead he dragged him into his room and shut the door. Pushing the whimpering lad into a chair, he turned to me.

"Go downstairs to the public-telephone booth," he said, "and call up the immigration bureau. Use the nickel-in-the-slot phone; don't call through the hotel exchange. When you get the bureau tell them to send Gray up to Mike Kelly's room right away. Then see what they are doing for Hiachi, and come back and let me know."

Considerably mystified, I did as Kelly asked. After I had telephoned I walked out into the lobby. Hiachi had been killed by the fall, and the police were taking his body away in the patrol wagon. A sergeant buttonholed me and demanded gruffly what I knew of the accident. I was about to give him full particulars when it occurred to me that possibly Kelly would prefer me to keep silent, so I answered that I was in the telephone booth at the time and knew nothing of the affair. Then after waiting about the lobby a few minutes, gathering what meager information I could, I returned to Kelly's room. He was still standing in front of the bell boy whom he had caught in the hall.

"The boy is dead," I said, "and they have taken his body away. The police are taking the names of such witnesses as they can find."

"Did you give them yours?" snapped Kelly.

"No. I told the sergeant who asked me that I was in the telephone booth at the time."

Kelly smiled. "Joe said you knew your business, and I was banking on his estimate," he said. "I guess you are all right."

An immigration-bureau inspector entered the room just then, and Kelly pushed me in front of the Japanese bell boy, who was regarding all of us with some considerable resentment.

"Don't let him move," said Kelly. "If he as much as twitches his arms hit him on the point of the jaw and knock him cold."

I didn't see why Kelly should be so harsh, but supposing that he knew his business I watched the bell boy as a hawk might watch a mouse—or as a cougar might watch its quarry. It was curious how the cougar idea was taking possession of my mind. Behind me, Kelly and the immigration inspector were talking rapidly, but I could only catch a word or two of what they said. I heard Kelly say something about "potash and bandages" and "the detention hospital," but could not gather his meaning. Yet already I realized that my experience was fully as thrilling as any cougar hunt with Joe Staley might be.

The immigration inspector left presently, and Kelly relieved me of my guardianship.

"Go on over and turn off that water," he said, "and then sit down and think it out. Maybe you'll see a light presently."

I sat down by the open window, but all I could think of was Kelly's odd reference to potash and bandages, and what connection they could possibly have with poor Hiachi, who had fallen down the elevator shaft, or with the theft of the government secret. While I was still pondering on the matter the

immigration inspector returned, and with him came a man in the uniform of a junior surgeon from the naval hospital, carrying a black satchel. Kelly turned his captive over to these two, and they took him from the room, after which Kelly locked the door behind them, turned on the cold water again, and resumed his seat by the window.

"Do you see it yet?" he asked.

I confessed that I was utterly in the dark. Kelly laughed at me, and, before explaining, passed me a cigar and lighted one himself.

"Wait until you've been at this a little longer," he said, "and a thing like this will be simple to you. In the first place, it makes me believe that my hunch is right. But before I get to that, let's clear this up. You see, this foreign power that has stolen our secret is doing all that it can to cover its tracks. It employed Hiachi as one of its agents, and he transmitted a message to Pete Kohler, who in turn was to pass the word on to 'Mrs. Katz.' When Hiachi had done that, the foreign power was through with him; but they figured out that maybe Hiachi might tell *his* government what he knew, and so perhaps let Japan know that there was a valuable secret running around unprotected and hunted. So they probably hired this boy that we had in here to push Hiachi down the elevator shaft. They didn't have to tell this boy *why* they wanted Hiachi put out of the way—all they had to do was to hire him for a killing. That stopped up one possible source of leaking information and put a dead end on the trail. Most likely Pete Kohler framed the killing; it is like a lot of Pete's work.

"If Hiachi hadn't yelled when he was pushed off into space I wouldn't have jumped out there and caught this other boy running away. Probably it would have been best for us to have let the boy get away, too; but I didn't think about that at first; I just grabbed him. *Then* I thought, and I saw that it would never do for me to let it appear that I suspected that Hiachi had been murdered—for if I showed that I suspected that, Pete Kohler would wonder if I didn't have a *reason* for suspecting it. In this game you can never let the other side get the idea that you suspect anything. Kohler knows that I'm a treasury detective and that I hunt counterfeiters—and that is all I want him to know about me. As a treasury detective, Kohler wouldn't figure me in on this deal at all.

"So, having grabbed that Jap in the hall and dragged him in here I had to get rid of him. If I had just turned him loose he might have told Kohler about the way I fell on him, and perhaps Pete would have changed his plans and so spoiled my hunch. But now he'll never see that Jap again, and what he hears about him will be astonishing enough to seem perfectly plausible. You have to give an astonishing reason for making a human being disappear from sight, you know, even if he is only a Japanese bell boy."

"But what has potash got to do with that?" I asked as Kelly paused to draw on his cigar.

"Oh, you heard what I said to Gray, did you? Well, that poor Jap is going to have smallpox. When Gray and the doc get through with him—they're working on him now—he'll have the finest case of smallpox you ever saw—eruption, scabs, and bandaged sores. And he'll be taken out of the hotel with just enough secrecy so that everybody, including Kohler, will know that Federal health officers spotted the plague on him. When they get him to the detention hospital they'll clean him up, send him back to the immigration bureau, where he'll be held until this matter blows over. And even his con-

sul won't have a good enough case to make a fuss about. See?"

I made no reply; I was too busy thinking—about cougar.

"To get back to what is in hand," resumed Kelly. "I said that Hiachi's murder made me more sure of my hunch. It makes me believe the big people are getting near. Kohler said in his letter that 'Arabia will have left Los Angeles and should meet you in a day or two.' That was the message he relayed from Hiachi. Now maybe 'Arabia' is just their code word for the stolen material—but if it is, and there is one hundred and seventy pounds of it traveling without personal guard, they are taking a chance that I don't give them credit for. Of course 'Arabia' may mean the party of big people; but it is an odd name for them to use, and it happens that I know an honest-to-goodness Arabia who'd be pretty apt to mix in on a deal like this. And you are going to see if it is the real Arabia—that is my hunch and where I take my chance."

"And who is Arabia?" I asked.

"Arabia is a little girl," answered Kelly, his eyes twinkling merrily at the surprise that manifested itself on my face.

"Arabia Marston is the cleverest smuggler in the world—she has the record of having buffaloed thirty thousand dollars' worth of pearls through the customshouse at New York just because she cried. But that is another story—I'll tell it to you some day. Arabia Marston is twenty-nine years old, she's as beautiful as the sun when it dips into the Golden Gate, and she is the finest actress, bar none, that ever trod this earth. She can give a perfect imitation of a child of seven or eight—that was how she got those pearls into New York—and if she wasn't 'wrong' she could make a fortune on the stage. But she's the crookedest thing in the world next to a mad rattlesnake, and she's got all the playful cruelty of a cougar whelp. She is a daisy, dandy thing."

"And what do I do—kidnap her?" I asked, laughing at the ridiculous idea of Kelly asking me to match my feeble wits against a creature of the attributes he had catalogued.

"No, you don't kidnap her," said Kelly. "You look like a kindly, simple soul—you just take an interest in her and try to help her on her travels. You just be fatherly and attentive to her—and stick to her. That's all you do, and you'll find it will be plenty."

"I'll try, Kelly; but I don't know that I'll do much good," I replied.

"If you manage to stay with her as she travels from Portland to Spokane you'll be doing plenty good," said Kelly. "Nobody has ever stayed with Arabia for that much distance yet."

"But why can't you do it?" I asked, wondering what made Kelly believe I should be anything but a miserable failure on the mission he was outlining.

"Because she knows me," answered Kelly. "You see, I proposed to Arabia after she lost her first husband. Oh, yes, Arabia knows me all right."

That afternoon I went to Portland, Oregon, to wait for Arabia Marston. Kelly had filled in the day describing her to me and telling me of her exploits and most of her tricks. It appeared that she was a very accomplished young person, who had started life as the daughter of an aëronaut and developed into a conscienceless criminal. And I felt far from confident that I would be successful on my mission when Kelly bade me good-by and gave me a host of parting instructions. His last words were that he would see me later—time and place to depend on circumstances.

According to Kelly's plan, I was to meet all incoming trains from California at Portland, and if I saw Arabia —a minute description of her had been

drilled into my brain by Kelly—I was at once to "take an interest in her," ascertain her route to Spokane, wire Kelly her plans, and then "get on the same train with the little girl and be nice to her." Kelly had provided me with five sets of tickets from Portland to Spokane, so that no matter which route Arabia elected to take I would be prepared. And, above all else, I was not to lose sight of the little lady.

The more I thought of my problem, the less chance I saw for my success. I did not question Kelly's hunch, but I seriously doubted my ability to even make the initial identification of Arabia. When my train reached Winlock on the way to Portland the porter came through the cars with the afternoon papers from the Oregon metropolis, and I purchased one to give my mind a rest from its turmoil.

Alas! On the front page was what newspaper men term a "human-interest story" that only increased my inward perturbation and troubles. The article stared me in the face as soon as I opened the paper, and the heading so excited my already overwrought nerves that I could hardly read the type, so greatly did my hands tremble as I held the sheet before my eyes.

LITTLE GIRL TRAVELS ON LONG TRIP ALONE.

TINY MISS JOURNEYS FROM LOS ANGELES TO SPOKANE UNATTENDED AND FEARLESS.

ASTORIA, December 12th: When the steamer *Bear* reached here to-day, en route from San Francisco to Portland, one of her passengers was Miss Estelle D. Whitman, nine years old, who is on her way from Los Angeles to Spokane; and who, in spite of her age, had with her neither relatives nor guardian.

The article then went on to describe the little traveler's trip and her impressions of the voyage, and concluded by saying that she would arrive in Portland late that night and there take up her journey by train. That the young miss referred to in the newspaper was none other than Arabia Marston I had no doubt, but the intelligence that she would arrive in Portland at night was far from comforting to me. How was I to scrape an acquaintance with her on a night journey?—for she would undoubtedly travel in a sleeping car. Kelly evidently had foreseen no such contingency; or, if he had, he had wisely refrained from mentioning it, and had trusted to my inventive genius to discover a method to rise above such a circumstance.

I ascertained from the conductor that the Frisco boat would probably not dock until an hour or so after my train arrived, and throughout the remainder of my journey I cudgeled my brain vainly for some method by which I might take an interest in a seemingly nine-year-old girl in the short time between her arrival by boat and her departure by train. And just as we were drawing into the depot at Portland the still further disturbing thought occurred to me that the tiny traveler might elect to go to a hotel.

In Portland I at once secured a taxicab and was taken to the steamship dock. It was alive with bustle and expectation, and an attendant informed me that the vessel would arrive in a few minutes, the boat being even then in the lower river. There was a considerable crowd of people on the dock waiting to greet friends, and as I made my way among them I lost all confidence in myself and wondered that I had ever had the temerity to enter into Kelly's plans.

In this frame of mind I was startled when somebody plucked my sleeve and called me by name. I turned to meet the laughing eyes of Bobby Trelawney, a reporter who had interviewed me some months before in Denver regarding one of my hunting trips. He told me he was working on one of the Portland dailies, and had been as-

signed to meet the child traveler and get a "story" from her. I could hardly conceal my joy as I asked him if he thought he would be able to get her to talk.

"Get her to talk? Well, I guess yes," said Trelawney. "She'll talk her fool head off. I've had to handle a lot of stories like this, and they are always the same. Some fool mothers always send their children about this way, safely tagged and in care of the purser, so they can get a lot of cheap notoriety. I'll bet a hat that the whole thing is a 'plant,' and that the girl is some child actress looking for free advertising. It makes me tired to be handed an assignment like this. What are you doing—looking for a friend?"

"No," I replied, lying glibly. "I just came in from the North, and, reading about this child in the papers, I thought I'd run down and see her, just out of curiosity."

Trelawney laughed. "I get a story, after all," he said. "Edwin Smith, noted novelist and hunter, meets child traveler at the dock. What you been doing up North—after big game again?"

The presence of the reporter gave me confidence, and I found prevarication easy. I told him I had been seeking local color for a novel among the Puget Sound Siwashes—and Trelawney told the world this through his paper the next day. And the world is still waiting, if it remembers, for my novel about the Indians.

While we were talking the vessel we were both awaiting docked, and I was the second man up the gangplank and aboard, Trelawney being the first. We waited on the deck for the child to appear among the disembarking passengers; but, though there were many children, all were accompanied by older people, and none of them even faintly suggested the very minute description Kelly had given me of Arabia Marston. When we could see the end of the line of departing passengers, Trelawney left me to make inquiries of the ship's stewardess, while I stood gloomily by the rail, convinced that Arabia must have left the vessel at Astoria. Finally the last passenger, a fat man with a bulging canvas bag, went down the gangplank, and I followed him disconsolately to the dock, there to idle about waiting for Trelawney, and hoping against hope that he would appear with the "child."

As I paced to and fro on the wharf, glancing over the groups of passengers who were seeking cabs, friends, or their baggage, my eye noted a trimly dressed young woman who carried a fur coat over her arm, and who appeared to be looking for somebody. Quite casually I noted that she had a great mass of tawny hair piled under her hat and peeping out all around in bewitching curls; that she was small of stature and of considerably less than average height—and then suddenly I was galvanized into activity by realizing that the fur coat she carried was a cougar-pelt robe.

Now there is no reason under the sun why a cougar-pelt robe should have electrified me as that one did, but throughout this adventure my subconsciousness had been thinking and feeling cougar, and I had associated every detail of Kelly's quest with the wily and heartless beast of the Northwest forests. Probably Joe Staley's remarks had something to do with it, for I have an oddly impressionable temperament. So, instead of continuing my idle pacing to and fro, I moved to a position from which I could obtain a clearer and closer view of the young woman. And then my heart began to pound against my ribs, for I realized that in every way she answered the description Kelly had given me of Arabia Marston. As I watched her I recalled his description word for word.

"You'll find her like her name," he had said; "beautiful, appealing, yet baffling and suggesting hidden mysteries. She's got the physical form of a diminutive Venus, yet there is that about her that suggests the wanton passionateness of Omar's women. Her hair is tawny and abundant—when she wears it up it wreathes her face in a halo of tarnished gold; and when she's masquerading as a youngster she wears it in heavy braids that hang to her waist. Her eyes are brown, dull brown, like buttons on russet shoes or like the dirty sand of the desert; her nose is short and upturned, her mouth is small, but her lips are full and alluring, her face is devoid of the slightest wrinkle or mark. Her feet are small, and her ankles are thin; it is only her hips that show she is a woman. When she is made up as a youngster you don't notice the maturity of her form. Her tastes are erotic, and when she's herself her clothes are almost too extreme and striking to be in good taste, and yet she's maddeningly appealing. When you see her you'll realize why I lost my head over her."

And surely this young woman whom I was watching was Arabia Marston. I was positive of it, yet I knew not what to do. Then I saw that she had noticed my scrutiny of her, and I moved on hastily down the dock. As I faced about—too abruptly to seem natural, I know—there came within my vision the fat man with the bulging canvas bag who had preceded me down the gangplank; and some way I got the impression that, just as I turned he had received a signal. I do not know what gave me this idea—I have since tried to recall some movement that he may have made, but I have no image in my mind that is distinct enough. But the impression was vivid, and I was still puzzling over it when Bobby Trelawney, the reporter, came hurrying down the gangplank, and, catching sight of me, rushed to my side and said:

"Maybe I've got a story, after all. The girl isn't on the boat, and nobody can remember having seen her since they left Astoria. And her baggage is all in her room, too; maybe she went ashore there and got left behind."

I was thinking quickly, even automatically. And while I was tremendously excited I felt as cool as ice, and my wits were all collected.

"The girl didn't get left, Trelawney," I said. "Never mind how I know that—I'll tell you later. Maybe I can give you a bigger story than the one you have now—a great big story, Bobby. But you've got to help me. Don't turn quickly, but look out of the corner of your eye. See that fat man down there by the big stanchion, holding the canvas bag? Well, he's part of the story. Follow him, only don't let him know it. See where he goes, and get him located for the night if you can. If he gets on a train find out where his ticket is for, and then wait for me at your office. If I don't come or call you up by midnight, telephone all about the man to Mike Kelly, at the Federal Building, Tacoma, and tell him you're doing it for me. It is very important—now slip away casually, and I'll explain it all to you later."

Trelawney either had great confidence in me, or else he thought I was crazy. But he said nothing as he turned away. The fat man with the canvas bag was still standing by the stanchion, and my reporter friend passed him without a glance, joining one of the petty officers of the steamship, and, walking out through the entrance of the dock, disappeared into the night. I prayed silently that he would wait outside, where he could watch the man that I felt had received a signal.

Trying to appear unconcerned, I walked a few steps onward, and then

turned back again, trying to give the impression that I was still merely pacing idly back and forth. Arabia Marston, as I called to myself the young woman with the cougar-pelt robe, was still on the dock; but she had moved toward the waiting room to avoid the rush of longshoremen who were trucking cargo from the big steamship. Determined to bring matters to a point at once, I walked slowly toward her, and, raising my hat politely, I said:

"I beg your pardon, but I noticed you standing here as if you were looking for somebody—a friend perhaps who failed to meet you. Can I be of any assistance?"

She glanced at me sharply, and for an instant a spark of orange fire illumined her dull brown eyes—just such a hue and color and intensity as I have seen in the cold eyes of a cougar when it is cornered. The simile, as it flashed through my brain, made me smile. Then she laughed, and her voice was as fresh and sweet as the happy gurgle of a mountain stream falling in a foam-flecked ripple over a rocky ledge.

"I *was* rather expecting somebody," she said, "but he has not come." Then she paused a moment, and her next words stunned me utterly. "I was expecting Mike Kelly," she said, just as if all the universe was not overwhelming me. "I wonder if by any chance he sent you; you seemed to be looking for somebody, too."

I tried to speak, but my nerves were dead, and my brain could form no phrase. I wanted to shriek—to roar—to do something violent and unreasonable to shock my shattered self into sensibility again. But Arabia Marston appeared to take no notice of my condition, though my confusion must have been evident. Instead, in a perfectly normal and most pleasing voice, she continued:

"I have just come from southern California on a matter of vital importance. I could not communicate with Mr. Kelly directly, so I did the next best thing—I made up as a little girl traveling alone, and I got some of the newspaper boys to write me up. I thought Mr. Kelly might see the item and realize that the 'child' was I. Don't look so surprised; I am an actress, you know. Did Mr. Kelly send you?"

Was I mad? Had my reason left me, and did I imagine this? Or had Arabia Marston gone mad—or Kelly? I looked about the dock. Longshoremen were methodically pushing their trucks back and forth, hurrying the cargo from the vessel to the shore. The lights were burning steadily in the long shed under which we were standing, and from the river came the whistling of vessels and the sound of splashing water. Plainly I was not mad—and so I gained control of my wits.

"Mr. Kelly could not come," I said, "and he did send me. Is this Miss Marston?"

She reached forth one of her hands impulsively, and laid it on my arm, and her face burst into smiles like the April sky after a shower.

"Oh, I'm *so* glad!" she exclaimed, and once again I had the mental vision of a mountain brook gurgling on its way through the cool forest, so sweet was her voice. "I'm so glad; I was so worried for fear he wouldn't understand. Yes, I'm Arabia Marston—and if Mr. Kelly sent you, you must know how important it is that I see him—all about the theft of the secret and all that. Do let us go somewhere so we can talk, and so I can communicate with him."

"Don't you want your things? They are in your stateroom on the boat," I said.

Arabia laughed. "So you looked there for me, did you? No, I don't want that stuff; it has served its purpose. And, besides, I'd rather just

have the little girl drop out of sight in that mysterious way; it may save me and Mr. Kelly some annoyance and perhaps some peril. What I want most now is to get something to eat and then to get to a hotel. Do let us hurry."

Profoundly mystified, yet determined to be on my guard, I led the way to the dock entrance, and there found a taxi-cab. On the way to the hotel, Arabia kept up a constant chatter about her adventures on the boat as a little girl, and told me a dozen charming anecdotes about her fellow passengers and the nice things they had done for the "child who was all alone." She seemed to have thoroughly enjoyed her trip, and to be utterly carefree.

At the hotel we found the palm room still open, and Arabia ordered a substantial meal for both of us. I was glad that she took the initiative, for I doubt if I could have selected dishes fit to eat. After we had been served, Arabia ate industriously for a while, finally pausing to say:

"You must forgive me for eating like a pig, but I'm nearly starved to death. You know, a little girl can't eat very much, and the sea air always gives me an appetite. Now tell me, where is Kelly, and why didn't he come to meet me himself?"

"He's in Tacoma," I answered. "As to why he didn't come, you can probably guess better than I."

"Oh, yes, I suppose he's got a hunch on some important end of this case. Kelly is the best man in the service, and I was so glad when I heard that the powers had pulled him off that stupid counterfeit chasing and put him on this. Anybody can catch counterfeiters, but it takes Kelly to handle an international episode like this. Is Kohler with him?"

For a minute I couldn't place the name—and then I remembered that Pete Kohler was the man who had relayed the message that cost Hiachi his life. My world was beginning to collapse about me again, but by a great effort I kept my head and answered:

"There was a man named Kohler in the hotel at Tacoma, if I remember rightly."

Arabia burst out laughing again. "Oh, you men!" she exclaimed. "You're always so very cautious and circumspect in your language. All the boys in the service are the same way; you make me tired. Kohler is a good man, though, and I'm glad Kelly has him with him. When is Kelly coming down here?"

"I rather think Kelly expects you to go to Tacoma to meet him," I said. "Do you want to take the owl train? I think we can make it."

"Me travel to-night, when I haven't got a thing to wear? I guess nothing like that for little Arabia. I'm going to sleep right here to-night, if I can borrow a nightdress from the chambermaid; and in the morning I'm going shopping. This dress is all I've got, you know—a 'little girl' couldn't very well carry a woman's wardrobe. No, sir, if Kelly is as anxious to see me as he ought to be, he'll come down. I think I'll telegraph him. No, I won't; I'll telephone!"

And, swinging round in her chair, she beckoned to the waiter and demanded an extension phone. I began to think that Joe Staley and Kelly had played some preposterous practical joke upon me, and I hardly knew whether to laugh or to be furious. Arabia got her telephone, and at once began cooing into the transmitter.

"Hello! Hello, central! Give me long distance, please. Long distance! Say, listen, girlie, I want Mike Kelly, at Tacoma, in a hurry. You find him either at one of the hotels or at the Federal Building. Tell him Miss Marston is on the line; collect. No. I won't have you call me, dear; I'll hold the line."

With the receiver held at her ear by one little hand, she sat and ate raisins, smiling at me roguishly as she waited. I never had a more charming dinner companion, nor was I ever more puzzled in my life. Suddenly I saw her stiffen slightly in her chair, and I knew that Kelly was at the other end of the line. Of course I could hear but one end of the conversation, and I could not well imagine Kelly's replies.

"Hello—hello, Kelly; this is Arabia. Wait a minute till I swallow this raisin—there. Now I can talk. . . . Oh, yes, I've got Smith here, Kelly, and he's scared to death; doesn't believe a thing I tell him, though he tries to act as if he did. I guess he's a good man, Kelly, but he's green. . . . But listen! I've got to see you quick. . . . No, I can't come up to-night, and if I wait until to-morrow I'll lose eight hours, and time is precious. You grab the night train as it goes through Tacoma and come on down, will you? I'll be at the Portland. . . . Oh, Kelly, come on down, like a good boy. . . . What? . . . Oh, yes, sure; hold the line a minute till I get Smith to talk to you, so he won't think I'm 'faking' him; here he is."

She passed the telephone to me.

"Hello, Kelly; we're here all right," I said.

"I don't doubt it at all," came Kelly's voice over the wire. "Anybody else with you?"

"No."

"Well, that's all right. I'll be down in the morning; in the meantime you watch that girl like you would a catamount up a tree. Good-by."

Sometimes they call a cougar a catamount, I reflected, as I hung up the receiver and looked at Arabia. She was laughing at me frankly and heartily.

"Satisfied?" she asked.

"Perfectly—even with what you said to Kelly about me," I replied.

And at this Arabia gave way to such a peal of whole-hearted mirth that even I had to join in with her. When we were both of us out of breath, so we had to stop, Arabia leaned across the table and said:

"Now suppose you eat your dinner, Mr. Smith. You won't have to watch me; I won't run away. And I haven't poisoned your food or drugged your coffee—to do so would be useless, for right now I'll bet you that Kelly is making the wires burn down here, and in five minutes there'll be enough secret-service men around this hotel to make the night clerk think business is good again; and when I retire and go to bed the house detective will plant himself in a chair outside my door, and stick pins in himself all night long, so that he can keep awake. And, what's more, I'll wager you the price of the dinners that they give me a room on the fourth floor, over the cement sidewalk and as far away from the fire escape as they can get. So eat your dinner."

And Arabia laughed again. She turned out to be perfectly correct, for the clerk *did* give her a room in the middle of the block on the fourth floor, and the house detective went up in the elevator with her. And when I also engaged a room, two men who were lounging at the desk, but who were evidently not guests of the house, looked at me strangely.

However, I didn't go to bed. Instead, I put in a long-distance call for Kelly at Tacoma, and, after I had waited possibly ten minutes or so, the night operator sleepily said: "There's your party." But it was not Kelly's voice that answered.

"I want to speak to Mr. Kelly," I said, somewhat nettled to think that somebody else was on the line. "Please tell him it is Mr. Smith."

"I'm sorry," said the voice that came over the line, "but Mr. Kelly has gone to Portland. He left word that he would see you in the morning in case you called."

"But Kelly must be there," I persisted. "His train for Portland doesn't leave Tacoma for over an hour yet."

"Train! Train nothing!" exclaimed the voice from Tacoma. "He left twenty minutes ago on a special."

At that I felt better, and decided that I was not the victim of a practical joke, after all. So I went over to the newspaper office to hunt up Bobby Trelawney and discover whither the trail of the fat man had led. Trelawney was impatiently awaiting me, and greeted me enthusiastically:

"Say, Smith, you're all right! At first to-night I thought you were crazy, but I followed your dope and I got a peach of a story. Why didn't you tell me the little girl had been kidnaped?"

"Kidnaped? Why, what do you mean?" I gasped.

"Why, the fat man that you pointed out to me. He blew the whole works. You remember that you told me to stay with him, and said he might try to get away on a train? Well, I went outside and got a cop, and when Fatty came out I had him picked up on suspicion. He put up a stiff fight, but the cop clouted him one on the bean, and he lay cold then till the wagon came and we got him to the station. There they searched that canvas bag of his, and in it was a lot of girls' and women's clothes and stuff—face powder, hair oil, curling irons, dresses, and stuff like that. At first he wouldn't talk, but finally he came through and said that he and his wife had kidnaped the girl at Astoria, that his wife had come up on the train this afternoon, and that he followed along on the boat, bringing their clothes. But he wouldn't loosen up as to where the woman and the girl were, and so they locked him up for the night. To-morrow the dicks will put him through, and then they'll probably locate the girl. In my story I've played you up as the man who gave the police the tip, and it makes good publicity stuff for you, besides adding interest to the yarn."

I laughed to cover my confusion. While I did not understand things at all, I surmised that the fat man's kidnaping story was pure moonshine, invented to cover up the disappearance of Arabia. And I had no desire to be held sponsor for the kidnaping story in the newspapers, for I saw that when the whole thing got straightened out I would be held up to laughter and scorn. So, after thinking a moment or two, I said:

"See here, Bobby, I don't want to appear in this matter at all. There are really some very good reasons why I shouldn't be known in the case at all. Now I tell you what you do—you change your 'story,' as you call it, and say that you, as a reporter, learned of the kidnaping and told the police. You really did tell them, you know."

Bobby wouldn't have it that way at first, insisting that I ought to have the credit; but finally I persuaded him that my plan was the best. And I think he was really pleased at it, too, for it gave him the credit of having scored a big scoop. After he had his article altered so as to conform with my suggestions, he suggested that we both go over to a near-by saloon and have a sandwich and a drink. We did this, and when he threw his money down on the bar to pay for our refreshment, I noticed a brass baggage check among the loose change in his hand.

"So you haven't been in town much longer than I have, I see," I said, pointing to the check. "You haven't got your trunk in your room yet."

Trelawney looked surprised for an instant, and then he laughed.

"Oh, that? That isn't my check. It

fell on the sidewalk to-night when the fat man and the cop were fighting. I didn't know which one had dropped it, but I meant to ask when we got to the station. Then, when Fatty told about the kidnaping, I forgot all about it. And, say, that reminds me; the chief wants to see you, Smith, to-morrow about this case. You'll be up earlier than I will—you take this check down with you when you go—will you?—and tell him I gave it to you. He'll find out whom it belongs to."

I put the check in my pocket, and then Trelawney and I had another drink, just for good-fellowship. After that, I went to the hotel and to bed, though I didn't suppose for a moment that I'd be able to sleep. But the minute my head touched the pillow, I forgot everything; and, now that I look back at it, I know I must have been tired, for I had been through one of the most strenuous days of my life.

My sleep was profound and untroubled for some time, it seemed to me, and then I dreamed that Arabia and I were in one of Joe Staley's cabins in the Olympics, and that cougar were whining all about us. Arabia was terribly frightened, and told me that the big beasts were seeking her because she was wearing a coat made from their pelts. She implored me to protect her, and just as I assured her that I would give my life to save her from harm, a great, big, tawny cat began to scratch at the cabin door. The ripping of its claws against the woodwork grew louder and more terrifying as the brute tore its way through the panels, and Arabia clung to me and wept pitifully, like a child that is frightened in the night.

I woke in a cold sweat. The room was dark, and the faint light from the streets that gleamed in through the windows served only to dim the outlines of the strange furniture and make me feel utterly out of place and lost. At the door something was unmistakably scratching and tapping; and, half frightened still, I leaped from bed and switched on the electric lights. Then I threw open the door and stepped back.

Kelly came into the room, and, noting my apparent excitement, smiled at me.

"Did I frighten you, old man? I've been tapping on your door for five minutes—I didn't knock because I didn't want to waken everybody on the floor. You must be a sound sleeper."

"I had the nightmare," I answered sheepishly. "What time is it?"

"About four o'clock. Sorry to waken you so early, but I came down in rather a hurry. There's something about this trick of Arabia's that I don't like, and so I didn't waste any time. Don't bother to dress—get back in bed so you can keep warm. But tell me all about it—how you located her, who she was with, and how she happened to call me up. She's got something up her sleeve, and it's up to us to find out what it is."

I told Kelly of my adventures on the dock, how Bobby Trelawney had been looking for the child actress traveler, and had failed to find her, and of how I had recognized Arabia in the trimly and attractively dressed young woman. I repeated our conversations in detail, told him of the incidents in the grill, and wound up with her remarks as she bade me good night.

Kelly frowned when I had ended my report, and, taking a cigar from his pocket, smoked vigorously for some minutes.

"And you didn't notice anybody who might have been with her?" he asked, after he had evidently reviewed my narrative fully.

Curiously enough, so intent had I been on telling Kelly everything in regard to Arabia herself that I had entirely forgotten the fat man. Kelly's

question recalled the secondary episode of the night, and then I told him of the curious outcome of Bobby Trelawney's efforts to follow out my advice. Kelly never uttered a word as I gave him the details of this as nearly as I knew them, but he smoked steadily; and when I told him that the fat man had been arrested at Trelawney's suggestion he leaned forward in his chair and a grim smile played about his lips. And when I told him of the fat man's confession of kidnaping, he laughed.

"Smith, you are a man of rare perception," he said, when his mirth had ceased. "Joe Staley certainly did his Uncle Samuel a good turn when he introduced you to me. I begin to see something now. How long was it, do you suppose, between the time you saw Arabia give the fat man the signal and the time he was arrested?"

"But I didn't see her give him a signal," I protested. "I merely got that impression."

"It was a pretty good impression, I guess. How long do you suppose it was from then until he was arrested?"

"Maybe ten minutes, perhaps a little longer," I answered. "Yet, come to think of it, Kelly, it might have been a good deal longer—you see, I was so rattled when I found out that it really was Arabia. It may have been half an hour; it certainly couldn't have been more than that."

"I wish I knew what your fat friend did in that time," said Kelly, "or whether he did anything at all. Well, that will be my problem. Now you go to sleep again, old man, and I'll call you for breakfast. You've done fine so far—you've done even better than I thought would be possible. You roll over and snore a while; there's nothing you can do until later."

"Have you seen Arabia?" I asked.

"Yes. I took a peep over the transom of her door. She was sleeping just as quietly as a kitten. And that's a bad sign—it shows she's too contented."

I dozed off again soon after Kelly departed, and it was eight o'clock before I wakened and started to dress. I was just tying my scarf when Kelly came in again, and at first glance I could see that he was worried.

"Did you see the fat man? Do you know who he is?" I asked, anxious to know what Kelly had been doing.

"Yes, I saw him," answered Kelly. "He is Lieutenant Karl Honsloff, a man high in the confidential service of the foreign power that is behind this effort to get our secret."

"Did he talk to you?"

"No, he laughed at me," snorted Kelly, who evidently was far from pleased with his morning's work. "And the papers won't help us any, either—if Arabia reads the account of his arrest and the kidnaping concoction of his, she will know that we have him in custody, and she will be more on her guard than ever. However, I think I can fool her—I've got a first edition of the paper, and the story of Honsloff's arrest isn't in that—it went to press at half past ten last night. Don't you breathe a word about it when we see her; we're going to have breakfast with her in a few minutes."

Kelly had engaged a suite of rooms on the same floor as Arabia's chamber, and thither we went as soon as I had completed dressing. In one of the rooms, the table was set for four; and soon after we arrived, Arabia, accompanied by a dark and heavy-set man, came in.

"Smith, this is Jack Randall," said Kelly, introducing me. "I believe you are already well acquainted with Miss Marston. Well, let's all sit down and have breakfast."

Arabia smiled bewitchingly at Kelly, and held out her hand to me as she crossed the room.

"We're all going to have a nice family party, aren't we?" she said. "Kelly, I hope you've ordered grapefruit for breakfast; you ought to remember that I just love them."

"I tried to remember all your preferences, Arabia," said the host of the occasion. "I've ordered grapefruit—and, among other things, fried corn-meal cakes and bacon."

"Kelly, you're a dear boy," gurgled Arabia. "And did you get the morning paper, too?"

Kelly drew his first edition from his coat pocket, and, while a waiter placed the breakfast upon the table, Arabia skimmed over its columns.

"I see they think the 'little girl' left the boat at Astoria," she said, laughing. "It says here that she was missed when the vessel docked. I'll bet the police at Astoria have a good time looking for me."

"I've telegraphed them not to worry," said Kelly.

"That was thoughtful of you, dear," said Arabia, drawling her words. "You always are thoughtful, aren't you, Kelly?"

Apparently Bobby Trelawney had telephoned his office that the little girl was missing before he got his story of the "kidnaping" for the later editions. It seemed oddly curious to me the way chance had steadily played into my hands so far.

Breakfast passed off merrily, Arabia being the life of our little party, and teasing Kelly constantly with bantering references to their acquaintance in New York at the time of the smuggling episode. Kelly met her mood, and both Randall and I had a most entertaining time of it. Randall, I gathered from Arabia's remarks, was another government operative. When the meal was over, we rose from the table and passed into an adjoining room, taking seats near a bay window that overlooked the hotel courtyard. Arabia and I sat together on a divan, Kelly faced us in an armchair, and Randall sat a little distance off, between us and the door.

"Well, Arabia," said Kelly, "let's have it. What did you want to see me about?"

Arabia reached into her waist and drew forth a small parcel wrapped in tissue paper. She carefully unwrapped this, and revealed a little more than a handful of a peculiar granular substance, grayish in color and with a metallic luster.

"There's five pounds of it, Kelly," she said. "It is heavy stuff, isn't it?"

Kelly took the powder and weighed it in his hand, then passed it to me. For such a small amount of material, it was surprisingly heavy. I examined it as closely as I could, and it appeared like nothing so much as pulverized cast steel, yet it was even heavier than mercury, I should say. Randall reached out his hand, and I passed the parcel to him. He studied it intently, rubbed some between his thumb and finger, and then tasted it. Folding up the wrapping again, he placed the parcel in his pocket.

"That's the stuff," he said.

"Well?" asked Kelly.

Arabia placed a cushion behind her head and leaned back, letting one hand fall beside her upon the divan, where it touched one of mine. My first impulse was to move away, but it was such a little hand, and so soft, and she had let it fall so unconsciously, that I didn't want to embarrass her by withdrawing; so I let things remain as they were. And, to confess frankly, I did not in the least object to being on such intimate terms with such a genuinely charming girl. I began to understand how Kelly had felt when he first got to know her.

"I'll tell you, Kelly, the whole thing is like this," said Arabia, speaking with apparently the utmost candor: "The first I heard about this deal was when

I got a letter from a certain party telling me there was a big smuggling trick on at Los Angeles. You know I like the excitement of smuggling"—she laughed archly and winked at Randall —"so I came to the coast. There my friend told me that the deal was to get something out of the country, instead of getting it in. That seemed funny to me, and I began to ask questions. At first they wouldn't tell me anything, but I told them I wouldn't work unless I knew the whole plan. And this brought me eventually to Honsloff, the man who was trying to put the scheme over."

I must have jumped, or twitched my hand, or made some other unconscious movement, for Arabia paused and turned her head so that she could look full at me. Then she patted my hand and smiled. The blood rushed to my face, and a great surge of warmth filled my whole frame. It was only by a considerable effort that I refrained from doing something foolish, for Arabia's eyes were liquid amber as they looked into mine.

"Never mind hypnotizing Smith," said Kelly. "He's only a spectator at this séance. Go on with your talk."

Arabia laughed and turned away. "Jealous, Kelly?" she mockingly asked.

I pulled myself together—but I didn't move my hand, and Arabia still kept hers on mine.

"After I found out what Honsloff wanted," resumed Arabia, "I drove my bargain. I insisted on having five pounds of this stuff and a certain sum of money, which he gave me at once. In return, I promised to get the rest of the stuff away. But it was hard work. The government people were all around us, and we couldn't make a move. And then I heard that you were on the case, Kelly, and I quit cold. I'd had one experience with you, and that was enough. You know that other time you nearly made me marry you, Kelly, and I was afraid——"

Arabia paused again, and I knew that her wonderful, liquid-amber eyes were focused squarely on Kelly. He half rose from his chair, then shook his head and sat back.

"Cut it out, Arabia," he said, but his voice showed that it was an effort to speak as he did. "Cut it out and get down to brass tacks."

"You think you could still love me, don't you, Kelly?" crooned Arabia, and the tenderness in her voice made me visualize once again cool forest glades with laughing brooks leaping along over moss-covered rocks at the roots of sighing trees.

"Cut it out, I tell you!" snapped Kelly, and the muscles of his wrists strained as he gripped the arms of his chair.

Arabia laughed and leaned back against her cushion so that her tawny hair was pushed forward over her forehead.

"The same old Kelly," she said. "Well, I told Honsloff that I couldn't beat you, but he wouldn't listen. He offered me everything—a title in the court of his country and all the money that I wanted. He said he believed I was the only person who could get the stuff away, and that if I didn't do it he would kill me. He had no scruples about having people killed—I knew that—so finally I consented. I told him I'd give him six hours clear start over you, Kelly; and then that I'd turn evidence against him and tell you all I knew. He said two hours in the clear was all that he wanted, so we sealed another bargain.

"I've got more money than I'll ever need, Kelly; money enough to fight any case you may ever bring me into court upon—and if I ever go to Honsloff's country they'll make me a countess."

"Do you think Honsloff has his six hours yet?" asked Kelly.

"He ought to have," answered Arabia. "I gave it to him. If he doesn't use it, that is his affair. He had from the time I telephoned you last night, Kelly, to the time you got here this morning."

"That wasn't six hours; I took a special train down here and made the run in record time."

Arabia laughed. "I thought maybe you'd do that, Kelly. The faster you came, the more time you gave him."

Kelly drew another cigar from the apparently inexhaustible supply he had within his pockets and bit off the end. "You don't mind if I smoke, do you?" he asked.

Arabia shook her head. "No, go ahead," she said; "it will steady your nerves. Now listen, Kelly; I'm going to tell you how I fooled you and all your men—it will help you in the next case. Just as soon as Honsloff and I made our final bargain, we laid a snare for you. We sent Kohler to Tacoma to get in your way. Your men followed him from Los Angeles and told you that he was one of our group. Then we scattered the rest of the crowd in California, and that kept your agents busy. One night Honsloff skipped out in disguise and went to San Francisco to wait for me, and I sent him the stuff under assumed names in parcel-post packages. The men who were watching me were looking for one hundred and seventy-five pounds of the stuff in a lump, and they never tumbled to the small stuff that was sent through your own government mail. When I got rid of all but the five pounds that was mine, and which I just gave you as evidence to prove my good faith, I wired to Kohler and he hooked you. He framed Hiachi to tap out Morse with his foot in the hotel lobby, and to send that letter mentioning my name. You see, I knew you'd be watching Kohler, and I figured that as soon as you got the idea that *I* was mixed up in the deal you'd center everything on me. And I guessed right, didn't I?

"Well, Honsloff and I left San Francisco on the *Bear*. He traveled in the cheapest and most inconspicuous way possible, and I put on that 'little-girl' make-up to attract attention. I knew you'd recognize *that* and decide that I was going to play the same old game. That was why I got all that publicity stuff at Astoria—I wanted to be sure of *you*. But when we got to Portland and you weren't on the dock, I nearly had heart failure. You see, all my plan depended on getting you here and interested in me. I waited on the dock for ages for you to turn up, and poor Honsloff was so nervous that he nearly went insane. And then your friend Smith, here, turned up, gave me a regular 'Hawkshaw' looking over, and I knew that you'd sent somebody else. So I gave Honsloff the high sign and let Smith discover me—and the deal was done. I knew you'd come down as soon as you could get me located."

My spirits deserted me utterly and left me in despair. Here I had gone and bungled the whole thing, it appeared. I had played into Arabia's hands like the veriest tyro, and probably long before Honsloff had been arrested he had dispatched the stolen government secret on its way.

"I rather thought Kohler's letter was a plant," said Kelly, "especially after Spokane reported that there wasn't any Mrs. Katz there."

"Oh, wasn't she there?" asked Arabia, in genuine surprise. "She should have been; I got the name out of a Spokane telephone directory in the hotel at Los Angeles. It was a clever scheme, wasn't it, Kelly? You thought it was a case of shipping the stuff in relays across the country, didn't you? Well, it wasn't. While Smith was entertaining me, and while you were coming down here and were burning up the

wires to have me surrounded with all the sleuths you could muster, Honsloff was going north. You most likely passed him while you were rushing down here on your special train—and I'll wager he laughed when he was sidetracked to let you fly by. By this time, Kelly, he's on board one of his country's warships, steaming west from Gray's Harbor; and even you won't dare to have a cruiser go out and overtake him. . There are some things, Kelly, that are not international courtesy, and you know it."

"Arabia, you're the most wonderful woman in the world," said Kelly. "If you'd only straighten up and work for the government, you'd get a place in the Hall of Fame."

"And die of poverty, too," replied Arabia. "It's good of you to take it so nicely, Kelly."

"I take it so nicely, Arabia, because it didn't work. Your simple-minded friend, Smith, there beside you, did what I wouldn't have done if I'd come down myself as you wanted. He spoiled the whole thing."

Arabia raised her hand from its resting place on mine. It may sound strange, but I have been, in my rather adventurous life, in many exciting and perilous positions; but never did my flesh creep and my very lifeblood congeal as it did when Arabia's fingers drew over the back of my knuckles. There was a stealthy, velvety softness about the movement—a sort of a magnetic drawing, as if a high-potential electric current was passing from my hand to hers. Without reason I shuddered, and the gentle, scarcely perceptible movement of the withdrawal of her fingers made me think of the silent, uncanny, deadly, treacherous advance of the stalking cougar. Simultaneously I sensed, rather than felt or saw, that every muscle and nerve in Arabia's body was tense and ready for action.

"And what did Smith do?" she asked, her voice flat, colorless, lethal in quality.

"He didn't like your fat friend's looks, and he had him arrested," answered Kelly. "Give me that paper, Randall."

Randall passed over a last edition, that contained Bobby Trelawney's story of the kidnaping, and Kelly passed it to Arabia. Glaring headlines on the first page proclaimed in startling type:

CHILD TRAVELER KIDNAPED FROM INCOMING BOAT.

A column of double-leaded matter told the story in modern journalistic style. Arabia took the newspaper and read the account carefully. And as she did so, I felt that she answered literally Joe Staley's description of "the busiest thing in the world"—a cougar. There wasn't the slightest trembling of the newspaper as she held it; there wasn't any evidence on her face of the emotions that must have been raging within her mind and breast; yet I had the impression that she was reading the printed words and weighing every phrase and that at the same time she was acutely aware of everything that was going on in the room where the four of us sat. I knew she saw the dry smile on Kelly's face and hated him for it, that she was alive to the alert poise of Randall as he balanced on the edge of his chair, and that she knew I was inwardly trembling with an unreasonable and indefinite dread.

When she had perused the last line, she dropped the newspaper at her feet.

"You got Honsloff, but you didn't get the stuff," she said, and there was elation in her tones. "If you had been successful, the paper wouldn't have printed a line—and you three poor fools wouldn't have sat here waiting for me to tell you the one thing that I haven't told you. If you had Honsloff and the stuff, you'd have kept

the papers off it if you had to suppress them, for you don't want the people to know how the government has been robbed of its one best bet. You don't yet know how we disposed of your secret mess—and I won't tell you."

Then rage took the place of elation in her voice, and she faced about on the divan and glared at me. There was no liquid amber in her eyes now, only a blazing orange fire that streamed forth from the little circles within the dull, flat, brown orbs.

"You, you poor meddler, *you* spoiled it! Thank yourself for having lost your country its secret. You, in your great wisdom, let Honsloff have fifteen minutes alone on the dock—oh, you all make me sick!"

"You will observe, Smith, that Arabia is a lady of peculiar temperament," said Kelly, mocking seriousness in his tone. "She doesn't like to see bungling work done. She wouldn't mind our having spoiled Honsloff's plans if we had done it skillfully. If our wit had matched hers, she would have been happy, even if we had won; but she hates botched jobs, and you surely did a poor piece of business. You got Honsloff, but you didn't get what he had."

I couldn't reply—Arabia's outburst, followed by Kelly's cutting irony, quite scattered my thoughts. And perhaps it was as well, for Kelly spoke again.

"Come now, Arabia, tell us the rest of it," he said, not unkindly. "You are quite correct. We have got you, and we have got Honsloff, but of the stuff we haven't the slightest trace, saving that five pounds that you gave me. He had fifteen minutes to himself—what did he do in that fifteen minutes? Did he throw the stuff into the river, where a submarine will later recover it; or did he slip it to a trusted agent to send it on its way? Tell me, Arabia, and there shall be immunity baths all round, and perhaps a very sizable reward. Or, better yet, you get it yourself; recover it from Honsloff's agents or his government, and I'll guarantee you all expenses and work under you myself."

For a moment the light of battle flashed in Arabia's eyes again; then she shrugged her shoulders and smiled wanly.

"I don't know where it is myself, Kelly. That is where the big blunder was. There was nobody at the dock that we knew, and God only knows what Honsloff did. There was no plan made for such a mess as this; you see, I was too sure of *you*. If I had had fifteen minutes, or even five, I would have laughed at all of you. But I don't know how Honsloff thinks—if I knew that, I'd get the stuff in spite of all of you."

She rose from the divan and paced back and forth in the room. Randall slipped like a ghost to the door and stood with his back to the panels, but Arabia never went near him.

"Do you know how he transported it?" asked Kelly, turning in his chair to watch her.

"Yes, I know how he transported it," she answered petulantly. "I planned that. But there is something else—oh, if I could only remember, I'd beat you all yet. Oh, why can't I think?"

Pressing her hands to her temples, she threw herself into the chair from which Randall had slipped when he changed his position to guard the door. She rocked back and forth, evidently trying by main force to squeeze some fugitive recollection back into its proper place in her mind. Suddenly she sat bolt upright and pointed both her index fingers at me.

"You, Smith—think of a number! Say the first number that comes into your head—call the figures off as you see them!" she exclaimed.

Surprised by her demand, I sat stupefied, but even as I vaguely wondered

what she was driving at, numerals appeared in the air before my eyes.

"Read the number!" shrieked Arabia. "Read it quickly—just as you see it!"

And from what seemed a long distance away I heard my own voice saying:

"Thirty-nine thousand five hundred and twenty-one."

Kelly sat looking at the smoke that curled from the end of his cigar, a quizzical frown wrinkling the skin about his eyes. Arabia threw herself back in her chair and laughed excitedly, then clapped her hands gleefully like a child and exclaimed:

"I've got you beaten, Kelly! I've laid all the cards down on the table in front of you, and I've got you beaten. Now go ahead and see what you can do."

Kelly got up from the chair and turned to the window, where he stood blowing clouds of smoke against the pane, and searching the convolutions of the vapor with his eyes as if he might find there the answer to the puzzle. Arabia watched him, patting her tawny curls into place with her hands. Randall still stood by the door, his eyes never leaving Arabia. As for me, I could not think; I could only record on my brain the impressions received from the movements of those about me. Kelly's head moved from side to side and up and down as his eyes followed the clouds of smoke, and for perhaps five minutes he stood like that. Then he carefully put his cigar on the window sill and turned about.

"Smith, let's have a look at you," he said. "Come here!"

I rose from the divan, and like a flash of light Arabia sprang from her seat and hurled herself at Kelly.

"You shan't!" she shrieked, and her cry was like the savage, terrifying cat whine of the cougar in the full blast of its rage—just such a cry as I have heard from the big beasts when they fell into one of my traps in the forests of the North.

Her lithe body struck Kelly on the chest, and she seemed to veritably climb upon his shoulders, scratching and cuffing his face and neck. The impact carried him off his feet, and I expected to see them both crash backward through the window and fall to the courtyard below; but Kelly caught his balance; and a moment later both he and Arabia swayed forward and fell to the floor in a writhing heap. Then followed such a struggle as I hope never to see again. Arabia fairly twisted and squirmed all over the big frame of the man she had attacked, and together they rolled against the furniture of the room, sending it to the floor with a clattering smash. The thud of blows upon flesh and clothes resounded through the room, and once I heard Arabia's teeth snap like castanets as she made a futile attempt to bite her adversary. Randall stepped from the door to aid Kelly, but he shouted hoarsely to him to go back. I was powerless to help; my muscles would not move, and I could only stand and watch.

Finally I saw that Kelly had his arms about Arabia in a viselike grip, and as he began to squeeze her attack lessened. Then I heard him say: "Stop it, Arabia, girl; I don't want to hurt you." After that there was no more of the bitter fight, and, save for but a futile struggle or two to free herself, Arabia lay inert in his arms. Slowly he picked himself and her from the floor, and tenderly he placed her on the divan, where she lay, sobbing as if her heart was broken.

Kelly went into the next room, dishevelled, and bleeding in a dozen places, and with his coat and vest in shreds. When he came back, he had on a smoking jacket, and there was a

weird pattern of pink, white, and black court-plaster on his face and neck. In his hand he carried a water carafe and a towel, and, kneeling beside the divan, he bathed Arabia's face. She seemed glad to let him do it, and, as she looked at him, I caught a gleam of the liquid-amber glow in her eyes. After a while he stood up, and, as Arabia fingered magically with her hair, transforming it from a wild and tawny mop into two long braids that hung to her waist, he stepped over to me.

"The game's all over now," he said. "Arabia and I are sorry for the whirlwind finish, but we had to have that, it seems. Now, Smith, what have you got in your pockets?"

Puzzled at the question, I placed on the table my bunch of keys, a pocket-knife, some small silver change, and the brass baggage check that Bobby Trelawney had given me the night before.

Kelly laughed as he picked it up.

"'San Francisco to Portland,'" he read. "'No. 39521.' And that solves the riddle. Honsloff had the stuff in a trunk, only for some reason he didn't get a chance to recheck it before your reporter friend had him arrested. It was clever, Arabia—its very simplicity and frankness made it clever. And if you could only have remembered that number, I'll bet we never would have beaten you. When I heard you were the 'blind,' I knew it was something like this, and I hoped you'd tell me what it was. But you didn't mean to tell—only a slip of the memory spoiled your plan, and you were afraid Smith would get away before you could find out. How did you know Smith had the check, Arabia? He didn't tell me."

"I didn't know it, Kelly. I knew you hadn't found it on Honsloff, so I just took a chance. Smith spoiled everything, Kelly; he always seemed to get the wrong things."

Kelly turned to Randall. "You and Smith take this check and go get the trunk," he said. "Arabia and I want to talk things over alone. You'll know what to do with the trunk, Randall. As for you, Smith, if you want that hunting trip you might just as well go on up North to-day. I'll see you in Tacoma in a couple of weeks, and we'll settle up then. Just now I'll be busy here for a while getting presentable."

Arabia, all signs of the conflict gone from her face, accompanied us to the door. "And if you see Kohler," she said to me, "tell him not to expect me—tell him I'm stopping in Portland to nurse a sick friend."

The Luck of Captain Slocum

By H. de Vere Stacpoole

Author of "The Pearl Fishers," "The Buccaneers," Etc.

II.—THE ENCOUNTER WITH KELLER

MR. AMBROSE, second mate of the *Contra Costa,* was a person whose face value was low enough, yet who yielded surprisingly when you came to cash him in an emergency. He was a first-class schooner sailor, a gaff-and-boom man entirely, and utterly useless when fronted with yards. In his own special work, and especially in a crisis, he was all there; in the ordinary business of the world he was often very much abroad.

God-fearing, and proper as an old maid in all that related to the sexes, he had married early in life, and had a wife and small family somewhere down in the Tillotson Street quarter of San Francisco, not a mile from the China docks. He carried her portrait about with him all over the seas, the picture of a stout woman, with an enormous cameo brooch, and at odd times he would sit in his cabin and smoke and gaze on it, conjuring up his home and family from a thousand miles away.

The only amazing occurrence in this gentleman's life, the only one thing that had really fetched him—to use his own expression—was the occurrence at Christopher Island, when he put in there with the *Contra Costa,* under Captain Rogers. He had been shipwrecked on a Patagonian beach, chased by Solomon Islanders for the sake of his head, at Ysabel, all but shanghaied at Frisco; he had been through an earthquake, and at least half a dozen times had been saved from horrible and imminent destruction in the midst of thrashing canvas and flying foam, yet nothing of all this had remained in the mind of Mr. Ambrose to stir it to the act of speech as when, in a reminiscent mood, he would say: "But what you was telling me is nothing in the way of a coincidence to what happened under my eyes on the *Contra Costa.* Rogers was her master and owner, and Captain Slocum owned the trade aboard. We put into Christopher Island, anchored, and went ashore, at least, Rogers and Slocum did, and a chap named Setchell, who was first mate. Well, sir, they went to visit a trader by name of Byford, his house was under the cliff, and while they were in the house down came the cliff atop of it. I was in my cabin, smoking, and thinking of Frisco. I remember, when the noise came; I thought it was the stem end of a tornado hitting the island, I did so, and up I came, and there was the house with a mountain of rubbish atop of it, and every man jack in it dead—but Slocum. And there was Slocum on the beach with a Kanaka baby on his arm, as cool as a cucumber.

"'This is my luck,' says he, 'saved my life,' says he, 'and Rogers and Setchell and Byford being defunct,' he says. 'I take the schooner as well as the trade, and there's all Byford's trade

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in that godown that the cliff hasn't touched. Luck!' he said. 'I never believed in it till now,' with that he made me row him off to the schooner with the baby. You see, smallpox had struck that island some months before, and every native had been swept away but the mother and father of the child, and they were in the house with Byford and the rest when the cliff fell on it. The baby was outside with Slocum. I never could get to the rights of that, for when I questioned him, all he'd say was to tell me to shut my head and not be a—fool! Anyhow, we got it aboard—extraordinary—it was that!"

So much for Ambrose's yarn.

When the captain boarded the *Contra Costa* with his Luck under his arm, he placed it on the deck in the sun, where the Kanaka crew surrounded it, solemn-eyed and speculative, and calling Sea-lion Jim—known for short as Sirloin Jim—their bo'sn, he gave him charge of it. Then, taking Ambrose by the arm, he walked him to the after rail, and, leaning on it, spoke:

"There's some who'd call up their consciences in a traverse of this sort," said Captain Slocum, "and see a jedgment on those chaps lyin' there under all that rubbadge; there's some would say your duty is to go an' hunt for the sons and heirs or the widow of that chap Byford; there's some who'd say Rogers hasn't kith nor kin, but it's your duty to hand over the schooner to the United States gover'ment. Well, I haven't got no conscience of that sort. If I started to hunt for that chap Byford's widow, I guess I'd strike half a dozen, and every one glad to be shut of him and his drinkin' ways. And the United States gover'ment isn't goin' to get no schooners out of me.

"It *was* a jedgment on those chaps. They got me in there into that house and fetched out an old, greasy deck o' cards and choused me. Four thousan' five hundred dollars they choused me out of, and I'd have paid, couldn't have helped it, seein' I have five thousan' dollars' worth of trade under the hatches of this schooner, and the schooner of Rogers'.

"Then the house fell on them—and me saved. What do you call that but a jedgment? Why, it clean beats all the jedgments I've ever heard of, beats Dan'l in the lion's den. Makes a body feel as if he'd jest stepped outer the Scripturs."

"Well," said Ambrose, "what do you propose to do about the schooner?"

"What do I propose to do? Why, sail her to the nearest port where I can sell the trade. What else?"

"And the stuff in the storehouse over there?"

"Well, I reckon we've room for some more cargo under the hatches," said the captain, "and we can stow some stuff in the cabins, and there's room for some on deck."

"I suppose," said Ambrose, "they can't have the law of you?"

"Law of me! And who's to have the law of me? Whacher talkin' about, who's doin' anythin' unlawful? My aunt, if you ain't enough to make a man turn superstitious! Who's to say Rogers didn't give me the schooner before he died and the house fell on him, and what man in his five senses would leave that cargo of trade rotting on the beach, shoutin' to be took away? What you've got to do is to keep your head shut! You're first mate, now, and thankful you ought to be for the rise; or would you sooner be bo'sn and see Sirloin Jim in your place? You've got a wife an' family to look after, don't you forget that, and you'll have a share in this venture, if I pull it off, and don't you forget that! Now, then, *histe* yourself and get the hatches off, and see what spare room you can make; and, Jim! Where's that chap? Hi, you, Jim, leave off foolin' with that baby and get

the whaleboat down with haff a dozen fellows to row. Grease yourself!"

Jim did as he was told, and the Kanaka baby, put down on the hot deck, sprawled about, clutched at a tholepin of one of the boats that was lying near the scupper on the starboard side and began to hammer on the deck with it.

Plump, with black-brown eyes and not a rag of clothing, it seemed perfectly content.

"Blessed if it ain't as solemn as a parson!" said Ambrose, who was standing by as the fellows were undoing the locking bars of the main hatch. He referred to the infant's expression, a solemn and contented expression, almost serious and most certainly quaint.

"It's a female," he went on, as though he were talking of a pup. "Pore thing, to be left in the cold world without a mother, at its age."

"Cold world be blistered," said Sloclum, "with the th'mometer at ninety in the shade. Blessed if you ain't like the chaps that write po'try in the corners of the papers. Get the hatch off —and see here, fetch up a tin o' milk and give it a feed. Mix it haff an' haff with water, and it will take it on a spoon—and see here, keep an eye on it or it'll be maybe tumblin' down the cabin companionway, it's that sort."

As he was going down the side to the whaleboat, he shouted back, "You can make some biskit pap if it won't take milk—but I guess it will take the milk, all right."

"Thinks he knows all about babies," said Ambrose to himself when the other was gone. "Half and half with water —biscuit pap—why, any fool who's ever had to do with children knows that you want to put twice as much water as condensed. Wish he had my wife listenin' to him. Now, then, go easy there with that bar. What you think you're doing?"

He was a more literate man than Slocum, and he was the father of three children, and though he had a great deal of respect for the captain, in many ways, he had none at all as regards the treatment of infants.

Ambrose, besides being a father of a family, fancied himself for his medical knowledge. He carried Pain-killer and Pound's stomach mixture and Frost's anti-bilious pills with him, and was constantly dosing himself and others; he had also a copy of Wright's Shipmasters' Vade Mecum, which gives all sorts of instruction in the art of medical plain sailing and the sounding of old sailors' constitutions and the healing of their wounds and injuries.

Slocum, when he had beached the whaleboat, brought his men up to the door of the godown. He was by no means a thin-skinned man; still, he felt some faint qualms at realizing on a catastrophe so recent—little more than two hours old—and he salved his conscience by going to the huge mound of debris, under which lay the house and its contents, and standing before it for a moment with folded arms.

Not that he felt the slightest pity for the victims. Rogers, Setchell, and Byford had been a right-down bad lot. He felt sure in his mind that Setchell and Rogers had conspired to skin him; they had won four thousand five hundred dollars of his money, and when he had stepped out to recover himself he had heard Setchell laughing. No, he had no pity for that lot, and as for the Chief Rakatupea and his wife also consumed by the catastrophe, why, they were Kanakas.

He kicked a fallen tree trunk with the toe of his boot as if to make sure that the contents of the mound were beyond response or assistance, then he glanced at the showering mass of convolvulus and hibiscus blossom that the fall had brought with it, and which lay strewn upon the red earth and rubble of the tomb.

"No use in those chaps writin' 'No

flowers, by request' on their 'bituary notices," muttered he to himself, "same as they do in the English papers—*Jerusalem*, what a tumble!" He contemplated it for a moment more, and then turned away to the storehouse. Byford had laughed at the idea of their bringing a cargo of trade here, and he had good reason for his mirth. Here were cases of tobacco, cases of canned salmon, clay pipes, ammunition. Here were bales of cloth and prints, knives, boxes of fishing tackle, cases of gin—everything conceivable to make glad the heart of a Kanaka; and as Slocum looked, the mournful fact was borne in on him that the treasure was beyond his lifting capacity. It would not be possible to carry away more than half of the things exposed here, and, recognizing this, he set the fellows to sorting out the most valuable of the goods.

He took off a boatload, hoisting the stuff on board with a tackle. Ambrose, having removed the hatch, had redistributed some of the cargo and now began the work of lading the new goods.

Meanwhile, the sun had set and a gorgeous moon had risen over the sea, a great, triumphant full moon flooding the anchorage and the beach and the island with its light.

"Where's the kid?" suddenly asked the captain, pausing to wipe his brow, for he was working with the others while directing them.

"Down in my lower bunk," said Ambrose. "It's full up with milk, had a pannikin and a half, two-thirds water and one milk."

"Two which?" asked Slocum.

"Thirds—two-thirds water and one milk."

"I don't know what you mean by thirds—I told you haff an' haff—what you mean by thirds?"

"Well, it's this way," said Ambrose instructively. "Taking it in pannikins, it'd mean two pannikins of water to one of milk—condensed."

"Condensed—and what else would you have?—we don't carry a cow. I tell you," suddenly blazing out, "I said haff an' haff, and you've been fillin' that kid up with water. When I lays down sailin' directions, I expex to have them carried through. I ain't goin' to have it now, I tell you that, I ain't goin' to have my orders messed in that way, scrimpin' and savin' on a ha'porth of milk."

"Why, God bless my soul," said Ambrose, "it wasn't with the idea of saving the stuff. I tell you, your half and half is too strong for an infant's stomach. I ought to know, that's brought up three of them. Who ought to know better than me? Three of them, and never a day's illness."

"Well, you ain't goin' to bring up this kid," grumbled Slocum. "I know you; give you a free hand and you'll be fillin' it next with patent medicine. I ain't brought up no children, but Gor' A'mighty has given me sense in me head, and He's rigged me with eyes, not deadlights."

A contribution to Slocum's irritability was the fact that Ambrose had put the object of dispute in his own lower bunk. He felt as a man might feel who, possessing a mascot, finds another man wearing it. He did not want the luck watered like the milk. Besides this, he resented Ambrose's vague air of proprietorship in the thing, and his air of knowledge as though he were the only person in the world who knew anything about babies; also, he believed Ambrose to be wrong. Slocum was a person who put his faith in good solid food, and no kickshaws or adulterations. However, he chewed on his irritation now, turning from Ambrose and letting fly at the Kanakas, who had stopped work during the dispute and were standing round, open-mouthed, to listen.

An hour after moonrise, they knocked off and retired for the night,

leaving the bo'sn in charge of the anchor watch.

The relationship between the two men was rather strained. All seemed quiet in Ambrose's cabin, and the captain, tired with his day's work, made no reference to the newcomer as he finished a tot of whisky and went to his bunk. Then Ambrose retired; he peeped in the lower bunk and saw the baby curled up and asleep, with the blanket still over it just as he had placed it some hours before, undressed, got into a suit of striped pajamas, said his prayers, clambered into the upper bunk, and, having popped out the light, turned on his right side. It was a fad of his that he could only go to sleep when on his right side. Then he turned his thoughts to San Francisco, and was walking down Tillotson Street, in his imagination, and nearing his own front door, when a sound from the lower bunk made him open his eyes.

The baby was stretching itself and moving uneasily, making the sounds of a pup or some small animal restless in its kennel. Ambrose, who had some knowledge of what to expect, lay still as death, hoping that it would recompose itself to slumber. A minute passed, and then the wailing began.

Slocum, in his cabin, heard it. It was just like the noise that the *Contra Costa* made rolling in a beam sea, only that noise allowed one to sleep, this did not.

Ambrose put one leg over the bunk edge, then he dropped onto the floor, lit the lamp, and tried to soothe the occupant of the lower bunk with his hand and voice.

Then he fetched it out, rolled in the blanket, and, holding it in his arms, walked up and down the cabin with it. The cabin allowed only six or eight steps either way, and he was making this short promenade when the door opened and Slocum, in canary-colored pajamas, appeared.

The irritation of having his rest disturbed and his past irritation against Ambrose, which had come to life again, joined hands.

There is nothing so strange as the human mind, and the mind of Captain Slocum was eminently human. He felt no animosity toward the disturber of his rest; Ambrose was the object of his wrath, Ambrose entirely. And the sight of Ambrose helped to blow the flame. Ambrose was never an heroic figure—few of us are. Ambrose, despite his undoubted courage, his daring in difficulty, and his coolness in disaster, had about him a touch of the maiden aunt. Dressed in striped pajamas, with his hair tousled, a lugubrious expression on his face, and a baby in his arms, he looked for all the world like the comic man waiting his turn to go on in a badly written music-hall sketch.

"Well, I'm dashed!" said Slocum. "Ain't there no peace to be had on this ship when a body turns in dead beat with work! What are you startin', a kindergarten? Haven't you better sense in your head than to be standin' there in your pajamas lap-nursin' that baby an' keepin' it awake an' squallin' this hour of the night? Where's your *sense?*"

Ambrose, one hand flapping rhythmically on the body of the infant, stood without speaking under this unjust attack. Then he revolted. It was rank mutiny, and had it occurred during the working of the schooner or the cargo would have had bad results for Ambrose, but circumstances alter cases.

"Look here," said he, "you've no call to interfere in what you don't understand. This is my business, which I am used to; ought to be, seein' I've brought up three of them. This is my cabin, and you go out of it, either that or take the thing and nurse it yourself. I'm not no maidservant to be stood and abused at; d'you think I'm standing here for fun? It's cryin' for its

dead mother, pore infant, and you standing there abusing me and talking through your blessed hat about things you know nothin' about. You just leave me alone. I'm right fed up with people poking their noses into my business."

"I'll talk to you about this in the morning when you come to your senses," said Slocum, and out he went.

After a while the wailing died away to silence, and next morning the captain said nothing. Ambrose had triumphed. When he came on deck with the Kid, for that was the name by which it was now referred to, and placed it on the deck in the sun, he did so with the air of proprietorship of a nurse in her charge. Slocum, superintending the cargo workers, noted this and vaguely resented it, but he could do nothing. Ambrose had the "bulge" on him. He, Slocum, was quite at sea in this business. While he had been pirating on Chinese rivers and selling opium to Malays or arms to Chile revolutionaries, Ambrose had been quietly potting about as a schooner man and raising a family in Frisco. Slocum had never had to do with babies at close quarters in his life, Ambrose had paid for and helped in the rearing of three. It was just like growing potatoes or planting asparagus or raising corn, the man who does not know has to give place to the man who does, and play second fiddle until such time as he can learn; and Slocum, for all his pig-headedness, and he was a most pig-headed man in the ordinary way, had sense enough to perceive that where the Kid was concerned he was nowhere.

However, he had not much time to think about the matter this morning. He had fixed in his mind to get all the stuff he could on board and sail that evening if the wind held. He was anxious to get away from the island. There was always the chance of a ship coming in, and then there would be explanations and bothers. Here was an island depopulated, without a soul to be seen on it, colored or white. No trader, and no trader's house, yet a schooner filling up with stores out of a storehouse belonging evidently to a once trading station. To strangers the thing would seem more than quaint, but should the visiting ship contain people who knew the place or friends of Byford, it would seem highly suspicious.

The best thing was to get clean away, and as quickly as possible, so he worked the hands without sparing them, neither did he spare Ambrose or himself. The consequence was that the Kid had to be left to its own devices, and played about on the hot deck near the galley door. Ambrose had found the tholepin for it, and it had found a coil of rope for itself, and, engaged with them, it played and sprawled, knocking off sometimes to gaze, with dark, beady eyes, at the work in progress or the men at work. The captain, helping in the business like any stevedore, would pause now and then to see what "that Kid" was after, and Ambrose, returning from the shore now and then with a boatload of stuff, would have an eye in the same direction, but they had no cause to find fault. Open hatches and other patent ways to destruction had no attraction for the Kid; it seemed cautious by nature and unadventurous and content with small things, and, though desperately serious and self-contained, happy enough.

When they knocked off for dinner it was asleep, curled up in the shadow on the port side of the galley.

"What I can't make out," said the captain, with a look at it before he went down, "is the way it was squallin' last night for nothin', and all this mornin' not a sound out of it, sittin' there, solemn as a jedge, playin' with its things, and all the time with one eye on the cargo work, sort o' superintendin'. I'm blessed if that Kid's right!"

"Oh, it's right enough!" said Am-

brose. "Kids always squall at nights. *I* don't know why. I expect it's the way they're made. I expect this kid's mother let it play about pretty loose by itself in the daytime and then had it to sleep with her at night; that's what made it yell, most likely, the wanting of her, for when I took it into my bunk it——"

"You slep' with it in your bunk?" said the captain.

"Slept—if you can call it sleeping with it digging its claws into my back and kicking with its heels—but it stopped yelling."

The captain mused on this matter as they went below; then, as they took their seats at table, he said:

"I've heard tell of children smothered by bein' laid on, laid over they call it. Eustiss, that chap that was goin' to sign on for this voyage, and didn't, Setchell takin' his place, told me he had a own brother laid over when an infant, his mother had taken too much gin or some'at, and when she woke up in the mornin' the kid was a deader. So I'm just tellin' you so's you may be on your guard, for I don't want anythin' to happen to that kid."

"Who's going to overlay it?" cried Ambrose, flying out suddenly. "What have I to do with Eustiss' gin-drinking mother? Overlay's the word, not lay over. Here'm I put to all sorts of inconveniences, and all I get for my trouble is being abused and set on." He got up from the table and walked about, a most unusual proceeding for a sailorman. "Here'm I with my eyes bulging out of my head from hard work and want of sleep, and you sitting there and jawin' me."

Slocum was astonished for a moment. His long experience in life, however, had made him somewhat acquainted with the oddity of mankind; he knew that some men would get put out over trifles, or what seemed to be trifles, while retaining their composure over serious matters. He had seen a man in a mining camp deaf to all insults, yet drawing a knife to defend his reputation from the charge of having overboiled the potatoes for dinner. Instead, therefore, of losing his temper, he soothed the other.

"Sit you down," said he. "There's no manner of use in loosin' your hair over sich rubbadge. I only spoke as a warnin' to be careful. Well, where's the harm done? Sit you down."

They sailed that night under the full moon and with a favorable wind for Neukohee. The captain had chosen this port of call as being the nearest and the most likely. "There's a big tradin' station there," he said, as he stood talking to Ambrose the next morning, "with a man called Keller head of it, and there's another station back of the island."

"I know it," said Ambrose; "been there twice, and Keller's hot stuff. You look out in your dealings with him."

He went off to wash the Kid. The cook kept potatoes and things in a small tin bath, and he had this out and half filled it with water. One of the hands had given the grubby one treacle out of a spoon, much to Ambrose's indignation, and it was one mass of stickiness. He had to kneel to the job, and, with his shirt sleeves rolled up, he looked like a man washing a dog, and all the time he was washing it he was swearing at the crew and the unknown who had administered the treacle.

Slocum stood by, looking on and joining in.

"Passel of fools, sailors is the biggest passel of fools the A'mighty ever packidged; last trip I made a chap brought a parrit aboard, and a greaser gave it a chunk of ruby twist soaked in rum, and there was the parrit on his back, with his claws in the air, deader'n Solomon. If I catch that chap I'll give him m'lasses."

The weather still held perfect, and

the wind, steadily breathing, bowled them along across the blue and perfect sea.

It was a happy ship, infinitely happier than when under the mastership of Rogers, who, without being exactly a hard man, had proved himself mean and that worst thing of all, a nagger; things went well in the fo'c's'le and in the cabin. Slocum and Ambrose, though they still had tiffs about the little things that were created to make tiffs, still had now a bond of common interest; but, though Slocum allowed the other a free hand in the management and feeding of the Kid, he never for a moment abdicated from the position of proprietor. The captain, without knowing it, had a new interest in life, and had come under a very potent influence. This thing that fate had given him power over and possession of told upon his mind in quite an extraordinary way. He had never even owned a dog, he had never had charge of anything entirely depending on him; had he married and had children, the wife would have looked after them. This was an entirely new proposition that no sailorman, however prescient, could have foreseen or dreamed of, and the captain, sometimes, in meditation, allowed to himself that it "knocked him." He firmly believed that this thing had brought him luck. All that talk of his about the nonsense of believing in luck had been talk, and nothing more. In his heart of hearts he believed in luck as firmly as any one else.

There were some bales of cotton among the trade on board, and Ambrose fetched some out, and, with the help of the bo'sn, rigged the Kid out in a dress of sorts. Slocum demurred at this, but he held off and let the other have his way, only throwing in such remarks as, "Well, I don't know, I may be in the wrong of it, but I've heard say that these missionary blighters started c'nsumption on the islands when they rigged the natives out in stays an' petticoats 'n' top hats."

"Well, I'm not troubling the Kid with stays nor top hats," said Ambrose. "I'm just making it look like a Christian." But when, two days from Neukohee, the Kid went off its food, Slocum came back to the attack.

"I tell you, it's nothing to do with such rubbish," said Ambrose. "It's the grub on board. Fresh milk is what it wants, goat's milk for choice. There's sure to be goats at Neukohee, and the first thing you have to do is to get one aboard."

Two days later, three hours after sunup, they cast anchor in the lagoon of Neukohee, and scarcely had the cliffs finished answering to the anchor chain than a boat put off, with a stout man sitting in the stern sheets and steering. It was Keller.

He knew Ambrose of old, was introduced to Slocum, and came down to breakfast; at breakfast, Slocum introduced the question of trade.

"Well, gentlemen," said Keller, "I'm sorry you haven't struck a better port than Neukohee. I'm full up with trade, and that's the truth."

The faces of Slocum and Ambrose at this gloomy piece of news were a study. The only other island where business might be done lay seven hundred miles away, and it was German.

"It's unfortunate," went on the big man, "still, maybe I can relieve you of your stuff at a price. Better for you than carting it round the Pacific. Goods are goods, anyhow, s'long as they're not perishables. Let's see."

He studied the manifesto which was lying by his coffee cup and the inventory of the Byford trade that Ambrose had made out. Then, with a pencil, he made calculations on a piece of paper and then he announced his price.

Slocum, after a rapid mental calculation, estimated that when all was said and done, including the money for By-

ford's lot, he would not get his outlay back. He had brought a cargo across the Pacific to sell it for less than he had given for it. He was furious.

"Well," he said, rising from the table, "I can't say offhand. It's a loss to me. It's flingin' stuff away, it's makin' you a present of it."

"Look here," said Ambrose, who had accepted the situation calmly, "how about those goats?"

"D—— the goats!" said Slocum. Then he checked himself, and, leaving the cabin, went on deck.

When they came up they found him ordering a boat to be lowered.

Keller interposed. "See here," said he, "you have no call to be doing that. I'll row you ashore if you want to go."

"You leave me alone," said Slocum. "I'm goin' ashore as I want to. I've a cargo to bring back." He got into the boat which had been lowered and started for the shore.

"Don't mind him," said Ambrose. "He's put out a bit, but he'll be all right when he's cooled down. Have a cigar."

Keller took one, and they smoked for half an hour, and then Keller, looking at his watch, took his departure.

"I may see him ashore," said he, "but if I don't, tell him my offer holds good till to-night—not after." He rowed away.

An hour later, Ambrose saw Slocum's boat coming off. Slocum was steering, and there was a goat in the stern sheets beside him, but Ambrose forgot the goat when he saw Slocum's face. The captain looked as though he had been drinking, but it was not drink that had him in its grip; it was excitement, the excitement that is half brother to triumph.

"What's up?" said Ambrose, as he came aboard.

"Luck," replied the other, "big luck! Get that goat in with a tackle, and be swift, I want the boat to take me back. Can't 'xplain now."

He dashed below, and in a few minutes returned with the manifest and inventory; the goat had been got on deck; but, without even a glance at it, and with scarcely a word to Ambrose, he got into the boat and started for the shore.

"Seems gone crazy," said Ambrose to himself. "Hope it isn't the sun's got hold of him." He watched the shore-going boat for a moment and then turned to the new arrival to which the Kid was making advances.

One of the pleasantest and most fascinating facts in the world is the love of children, even quite small children, for animals. The Kid, though young enough to be called a baby, was old enough to be able to recognize the charm of a goat and to crawl toward it and make advances of friendship.

Ambrose mused on these facts, and then, while the goat was being milked by the bo'sn, he cast an eye shoreward. There was nothing to be seen of Slocum. Having landed, he had gone up toward the village, half visible among the coconut trees, and was doubtless now engaged with Keller. What did he mean by great luck, and what had occurred to alter the complexion of things so? There could be no answer to that question till Slocum returned, and Slocum did not return for four hours.

It was half past three when he put off, and when he boarded the *Contra Costa* it was no longer excitement that blazed in his eyes, but victory.

He dragged Ambrose down below, closed the cabin door, sat down at the table, banged it with his fist, and shouted, "Done him!

"Done him!" he went on, in a raving voice. "Done him brown; said he was full up with trade, didn't he? Said he would take our stuff for next to nothin' to save us from cartin' it about the Pacific, didn't he? Well, he was starvin'

for the stuff all the time, he had nothin', his storehouses were empty. His ship's been wrecked, and there's the whole of the copra of the island waitin' to be bought, and he without a stick of tobacco to buy it with, and the trader on the other side of the island with his ship due to arrive to-morrow with a full cargo of trade."

"But how did you find out?" asked Ambrose, excited as the other.

"It was the Kid that did it. When I went for those goats, a Kanaka chap offered to sell me one. His house is close by one of Keller's storehouses, an' the storehouse door happened to be open. I looked in, and the place was empty. Then I begins to smell rats. I questions the Kanaka, and for four dollars he unloaded the whole story. I rushes back here, gets the papers, goes back and tackles Keller. For mor'n three hours we've been at it, hammer an' tongs, and there's the upshot, there's the price he's payin' for the stuff."

He put a paper on the table, and Ambrose glanced at it.

"Three thousand dollars profit," said Slocum, "and we expectin' to make a loss; three thousand dollars! Come on deck—if I don't get some air I'll bust."

They went on deck, where Keller's men were already arrived to break cargo.

The goat was wagging its scut near the galley door, and the Luck was playing near it, trying to lift a marline spike so as to hammer the deck with it.

"I guess that's some kid," said the captain, looking proudly at the prodigy. "Three thousand dollars—by *gosh!*"

Ambrose, looking on, was thinking the same.

But to neither of them had occurred the truth, that Captain Slocum's luck had originated not in the Kid, but in the thought of its welfare which had driven him ashore to hunt for goats at the moment when he was suffering from what seemed a smashing defeat.

The third story in this series is entitled "A Question of Conscience," and will appear in the December month-end POPULAR.

MIXING UP THE MACHINERY

IN the last session of Congress, James R. Mann, the Republican floor leader, and "Jerry" Donovan, a Democrat of Connecticut, spent a lot of time kidding each other while consideration of various bills was in progress.

Late one afternoon, when members were becoming out of humor, and impatient to get away for dinner, Mr. Mann, referring to the many objections Donovan had made against the pending appropriation bill, said:

"Of course, Mr. Chairman, when we are proceeding under unanimous consent, any member can arise and throw a monkey wrench into the machinery, but——"

"Mr. Chairman," shouted Donovan, "I make the point of no quorum!"

After thirty minutes had been used up in digging absentees out of the offices and cloakrooms of the capitol, Mr. Mann resumed his remarks as follows:

"As I was saying, Mr. Chairman, when we were interrupted by the gentleman from Connecticut, Mr. Donovan, when we are proceeding under unanimous consent any member can throw a monkey wrench into the machinery, but it does not necessarily follow, Mr. Chairman, that every monkey ought to throw a wrench."

The Hate of the Heel-Marked

By Frank A. Latour

Author of "The Cant-hook Man," Etc.

The life of the logging camps. A big dramatic novelette of the lumberjacks by a man who writes with the same sincerity as an old "river dog" would talk. Atmosphere and reality and action are here—a story that will "hold" you

AXMEN out!" Big Ed Scanlon threw open the door of the bunk house and bawled the order with a frost-steamed breath. Out of the smoke-filled interior the axmen boiled, pulling on their mackinaws and yarn caps as they came. They followed him to the tool house and armed themselves with their keen-edged, double-bitted axes for the day's warfare against the mighty army of pines, and they stood, a rugged score of them, rubbing critical fingers over the ax blades or squinting down the crooked handles of broadaxes to be sure that each had secured his own particular tool, while Scanlon, with crisp orders, detailed them in squads of two or more to various sections of the timber. Then he bawled another order that brought the sawyers tumbling out of a long log structure, and he sent them in little straggling groups to follow the axmen, their long saws bobbing and flashing across their shoulders. Next came the squads of "swampers," "road monkeys," and "cant-hook men," and the big, powerful teams began to file out of the corrals with a frosty jingle of harness. In a few minutes the rattle and screech of the steam "jammers," the steady swoosh and crash of falling trees, and the long-drawn, warning call of "Timber-r-r!" coming from far and near proved that Camp Five was "getting into the collar."

Promptly at seven-thirty the "Trey-spot," logging engine No. 3, came up the long grade and swung into the spur track, pushing a long line of odd-looking, bunked "Russell" cars into position behind the nearest jammer and making all the rattle and grind that only a Lima or "grasshopper" type of engine can. Scanlon strode over to the track to superintend the placing of the cars and to receive the new men who climbed down every morning off the first train of empties looking for work.

He was a whale of a man, this Scanlon, as he needs must be who holds the reins over a hundred and fifty lumberjacks cooped up in an isolated camp in the Idaho "panhandle." It was not his mere size that distinguished him, for there were at least a dozen men in the camp as large and powerful as himself, but even standing among that dozen no one but a blind man could have failed to pick him out as the camp boss. It showed in his face, in the set of his head; it gleamed in his cold gray eyes and called out from the swing and stride of him. Aggressiveness, brute courage, and will power, "the mountain must come to Mohammed" kind, was expressed in every action that he made.

He was boss—and every man in Camp Five knew it. They realized it

every morning as his snappy sentences sent each to his task, and that realization was behind each ax blow and saw stroke they made all day. That is why he got results. Red-headed, bull-necked, and clad in felt boots and a tight sweater that accentuated his muscles as a clinging gown does the form of a woman, he waited while the new arrivals pulled their blanket rolls off the bunks and fumbled through their pockets for employment slips. They were the usual timber product, all save two, and he glanced at each man in turn as he took his slip and waved him aside until he came to the last two whom he told to wait. Then, turning to the group, he treated them to a full half minute of cold appraisement and said, "You fellows just turn over what booze you've packed in with you and go down to the filer's shed and report to Callahan."

They looked at him sullenly, but made no move to produce their bottles, and Scanlon made a quick step and slapped several suspiciously bulging pockets, confiscating three pints of "squirrel-poison" whisky and a half-emptied quart that had not been thrust far enough into a roll of blankets.

"When you want a little nip of this, boys," he said, "I'll have it handy at the office, but it don't go circulatin' around camp. Get me?"

They moved off to the filer's shed, and he turned his attention to the two remaining. They were a contrast. One was a towering mass of Slavic passivity whose swarthy and vacant face showed Scanlon at a glance that the man's value lay entirely in what could be bullied out of his ponderous frame. The other was a direct antithesis of the usual "timber beast," and Scanlon spat in open disgust as he looked at him. He was small to the point of insignificance, with small wrists and pale, stringy hands whose fingers flitted about nervously exploring buttons and stray threads on their owner's coat. The little man's hair was a washed-out drab, and the washed-out color scheme was carried out consistently throughout his countenance. His timid, apologetic gray eyes were exactly the same color as the masterful ones that were boring into them. His nose was thin and pinched like his colorless cheeks, and above a buttonlike chin his thin lips were striving between quavers to break into a deprecating smile. He was scantily dressed in cheap, thin clothes, and the top of a medicine bottle and the tip of a spoon stuck out of his breast pocket.

Scanlon glanced down at the slip of paper in his hand and read Edgar Wright, for swamper, and he jutted his jaw and growled:

"Who in glory sent you up here?"

The little man almost jumped at the sudden growl and answered shakily, "The man at the agency said you needed men to cut brush."

"*Men* to cut brush!" scathingly mimicked the boss. "Rogers must be going nutty; he'll send up a ladies' hairdresser to swing a broadax next. And a 'bohunk,' too!" he muttered savagely. "The old-timers will roll their blankets and go down the road talking to themselves when they get a sight of that 'breed.'" He placed his hands on hips and took another up-and-down survey of Wright. "Say, little un," he grunted, "you couldn't swamp road for a team uh field mice. What did you work at before you came up here?"

"I am a bookkeeper, sir," quavered the little fellow.

"Sir," muttered Scanlon to himself, with a grin. No man in a log camp ever honored him with that title. It isn't done. He jotted Wright's name down in a book and answered, "Bookkeeper, eh? Well, you're in wrong up here, son, but since you're here I'll try to use you. Go over there to the cook shack and tell Slim, the cook, to put

you to work as a flunky," and he turned contemptuously on his heel and strode off, taking the big Slav with him.

Wright started for the kitchen, and only once looked back to encounter a glance of amused contempt from the cold gray eyes of the boss, who had paused to watch him. The little fellow shriveled farther into his thin coat and hurried on.

Why didn't Scanlon send the two undesirables back to town, you wonder, perhaps. The answer is that Scanlon, like many another camp boss, was playing the mean little game of "three-platoon system," which means he had a standing order with the labor agency for a certain number of men every day. Thus he had one gang coming, one working, and one going, culling out the best for his working force and collecting a tidy little rake-off from the agency for employment and hospital fees.

The noonday meal at Camp Five was a scene that would bring tears of envy into the eyes of a dyspeptic. Here are displayed a hundred and fifty real appetites, double-edged by hard labor in the keen, piny air that bites the lungs at each deep breath, and the example of these, no less than the general atmosphere of the place, would tempt a wooden man to deeds of gastronomic prowess. The great log dining room, with its low-hanging pole rafters, smoke-blackened, and with the bark on; the immense black ranges in the corner cluttered with shiny copper kettles and "gunboats" the size of a tub; the long board tables loaded with the best of common fare; the rows of bobbing heads and reaching hands seen through a haze of smoke and steam; the jovial rattle of enameled tableware, all blend into an atmosphere that would make the most bored habitué of the gilded lobster palaces find himself a vacant seat and eat corned beef with a relish. White-aproned flunkies hurried about, one arm piled chin high with steaming serving pans, striving valiantly to cope with the onslaught of the hungry timbermen and to keep the "set-ups" in their stations replenished.

In this bustle of hurrying service, Edgar Wright found himself, or rather lost himself, for the lost feeling predominated as he tried to juggle his pans of soup over the bobbing heads without subjecting them to a hot baptism. He had reported to the cook as ordered, and Slim, sweaty without, but cool within, prodigal of action, but scanty of speech and temper, gave him a swift, analytical glance and set him to wait upon the "officers' table" because it was the smallest and closest to the range.

Slim took no thought of the quality of service Wright might render, for he extended the officers no favors. To him they represented only so many mouths to feed. Indeed, Slim, surrounded by his black pans and white flunkies, was an autocrat whom even Scanlon approached with deference due.

The "crowned heads" at the officers' table comprised Boss Scanlon, Callahan, second in command, surveyors, clerks, timber cruisers, scalers, and "straw bosses" of various degrees of importance. Wright had a full perception of the fact that he was a servitor to the "royalty." Perhaps if this perception or the pans he carried had not been so full the accident would not have happened.

He was standing behind Scanlon with a deference that would have done credit to a Fifth Avenue waiter, a hot pan of "boot grease"—brown gravy—in each hand. He was awaiting a lull in an arm-waving argument anent the difference between the Doyle and Scribner scale sticks, hoping to relieve his suffering fingers of their scalding burden. His occasional mild "Excuse me, sir," went unheeded. A real flunky would have bawled "Heads up,

you guys!" and have received immediate attention. Seizing a moment when the waving arms were still, he attempted to set down his pans, but a fresh point occurring to Scanlon, his arm went up to emphasize it, and was drenched from the shoulder down with the scalding gravy. With an oath, the boss leaped from the table and sprang toward Wright. His powerful arm went up to deliver a smashing blow, but dropped harmlessly as he encountered the frightened eyes and quaking form of the little flunky. Instead, he grasped him by the collar with one hand and carried him over to Slim as a cat might a kitten amid the laughter of the whole dining room.

He set him down, choking, before Slim.

"For the love uh Mike, Slim," he bawled, "put this useless little runt at the dish tub where he can't scald anybody to death but himself, and give me something to put on this burn!"

Slim called the boy away from the dish tubs. "Tommy, put an apron on and take care of table number one." He jerked his thumb toward the dish tubs. "Get busy, you!" he growled at Wright.

For a moment Wright prayed with all his stunted little soul for strength enough to crush the burly tyrant, and his fingers groped for his apron strings in a wild determination to throw it down, curse Scanlon properly, and return to the city. But at the thought of the city, the great, cruel city where he had starved and shivered and been refused work, the fear to which his whole life was fettered gripped him anew, and he merely slunk away to the tubs and cursed Scanlon silently, cursed him to the limit of his vocabulary with every splash of the greasy water.

He had feared the big boss from the first moment that he saw him. Now he hated him. All day long, as he scraped at the black pots and kettles, he distilled in his heart that high-potency hatred known only to life's incompetents whose lot it is to squirm beneath the heel of the masterful.

Wright stayed at the tubs as the camp "pearl diver" for three days, and hated the work with an intensity second only to his growing hate for Scanlon. The endless array of dirty dishes never seemed to lessen. The mountain of piled-up pots and pans often made him look around at Tommy, his predecessor, and wonder where that freckled gamin could have acquired the fortitude of soul that had enabled him to whistle as he scraped at them by the hour. Wright seemed unable to grasp the technique of the dish tub. He somehow lacked Tommy's finesse with the skillet scraper, and despite the lad's many illustrations of how a crusted "gunboat" could be put into a state of black cleanliness in about a half minute, Wright failed to show any form. At last one morning, after many dubious glances at supposedly clean utensils, Slim said to Wright, not unkindly: "You can't seem to cut the mustard here, lad. Report to Callahan; he says he can use you. I can't."

Wright made no excuses, although excuses were his métier. He had a lifetime of experience at it. But somehow people never seemed to make excuses to Slim, so, with a parting glance of disgust at the mound of unwashed pans, he put on his thin coat and muffler and went out in search of Callahan. Tommy, at a nod from Slim, resumed control of his little kingdom in the corner. He donned the rubber apron like a robe of state and grasped his scraper like a scepter, and Wright caught the sound of his cheery whistle and scraper accompaniment as he crunched away through the snow.

The little man felt almost a thrill of relief as he contrasted the beauty of the woodland about him to the reeking scene of his late labors, and, though

stung by the cold and half blinded by the glare from the snow, he caught something of the crisp buoyancy of the morning and strode on almost hopefully. During the night the mercury had traveled toward Gehenna, and showed no immediate intention of returning, and the trees all about popped and creaked in the biting cold. The pendant moss beards and snow plumes on the boughs were lacquered with frost crystals that sparkled like countless diamonds in the glare of a keen winter sunshine that gleamed without warmth. Wright traveled again the enchanted forest of his fairy-book days, drinking in the plumed beauty of the tall, straight trees until the appearance of the jammer station and Callahan destroyed the illusion.

Here in the clearing all was stern reality, crashing, screeching noises and swarming action, and he paused for his first survey of a big, modern log camp in action. He viewed the scene with all the interest of one to whom it is new, but especially he watched the jammer as it swung about at its giant task, and he marveled at the wide range of its usefulness.

It consists of a set of extraordinarily heavy railway trucks, from the frame of which four steel girders rise, two on a side. These girders are bent in an outward curve like a set of badly bowed legs, about eight feet high and terminating in a circular steel platform. The platform is fitted with a turntable such as is used on the base of a steam shovel, and perched jauntily atop of this turntable, like a tiny Tyrolese cabin on a crag, sits the jammer house, containing the boiler, engines, and operators; the motive power and the brains that actuate this useful device. From the front of the jammer house a stout boom protrudes, equipped with hoisting blocks through which run the pair of long, tough cables that drag in any sized log, lift it airily, and drop it gently into its bed on the waiting log car.

The jammer sits on the sidetrack, and can propel itself to any desired position, pushing a line of loaded cars or dragging a string of empties behind it. To the front and rear end of the jammer truck a long section of portable track is hitched. These take a gentle slope from the railway track itself, up and across the jammer truck, and down again to the track on the other end. Thus the right of way is never obstructed, but a clear passage is provided for the low empty cars to go right up and through the bowed legs of the jammer and down again onto the track ahead.

Having finished the loading of a car, the jammer, with a satisfied grunt of its engines, gives it a bunt down the line to the waiting train. Then, reaching back a tentacle of cable, it fastens onto an empty car, and, dragging it up and through itself, eases it gently down the inclined track before its business end, and, with a rattle and screech, promptly proceeds to pile it high with logs. When a rollway is depleted, the jammer hoists its forward section of track and sallies down the line, seeking new worlds to conquer.

The deposed flunky crossed the clearing and found Callahan directing the replacement of a broken stay chain on the jammer. The work was being done by a gang of a half dozen boisterous young lumberjacks who were doing their best to make life miserable for the giant Slav, who, much to their disgust, had been detailed to work with them. Callahan stopped their abuse with a half-hearted reprimand and an indulgent grin and sent the gang off to the blacksmith shop to carry over a new chain.

"La-ad," he drawled to Wright, in an emerald-green brogue, "ye'd better go long wid 'em. Maybe ye might be able to help carry a link or two. But

put yer mittins on, bye, the iron bites these cowld mornin's."

Over at the shop, the men were pulling on mittens, preparing to take hold of the big frozen chain that lay stretched in the snow.

"Wait a minute, fellows," whispered one of them wickedly; "let's leave off our gloves and make a bluff at takin' it up barehanded, and we'll fool the big 'goof' into grabbin' it with his bare fists, and then watch him dance when it peels his 'dukes.' Now, then! All together! Grab hold there, hunkie!"

Their backs bent to reach the frozen chain, but nobody took hold except the Slav, who promptly let go under the weight, and found his hands minus large patches of skin which had stuck fast to the frozen chain. The men's roar of mirth drowned the Slav's surprised yell of pain, and, donning their mitts, they shouldered the chain and went off with it, staggering with laughter and leaving the big Slav wringing his hands and filling the air with weird, splattering, foreign oaths.

Verily, verily, a "hunkie" in a "white man's" camp is as welcome as the flowers in May.

Wright remained behind at the blacksmith shop, held by some instinctive sympathy for the abused giant, and he sacrificed a badly needed silk muffler in an effort to make bindings for his injured hands. As he and the Slav came back to the jammer, the boys were still laughing so much that they could hardly stake down the chain, and a trifle apart, the grinning Callahan, with much thumb-jerking toward the blacksmith shop, was telling his chuckling superior something very funny. They straightened their faces as the Slav approached, boiling with rage, but Scanlon quickly forestalled any complaints by a sharp command.

"Come on, there, bohunk, grab that hook and get busy! Throw those chunks out of the rollway, runt!"

Both obeyed; the Slav, after a short, venomous stare at Scanlon, rumbling curses like an uneasy volcano.

Scanlon shot a sobering look at the grinning group of cant-hook men.

"Come alive, men; don't keep that jammer crew idle! It's fifty dollars waiting on four bits. Get your hooks and open up that rollway, but for the love uh Mike handle it easy, like a sore thumb, or you'll have trouble. That's a nasty-looking pile of logs."

It was, indeed, a mean-looking pile. From the jammer tracks to the base of a near-by hill the rollway stretched away. Two parallel lines of peeled poles, about ten feet apart, laid end to end on a gentle slope, provided a smooth-rolling bed for the logs down to a point where the jammer cables could reach them. Up the sloping hillside, from its base to its very crest, piled log on log, lay the immense heap accumulated during the skidding season. These logs, cut on the heavily timbered upper benchland, were "snaked out" of the brush by teams, and rolled down onto the pile. Ordinarily the lumberjacks ease them down off the pile by dint of skill with the cant hook and a knowledge born of experience that tells them which log should come first, and, when properly started, they follow each other in orderly succession down the rollway. But sometimes, through careless piling or other causes, the bottom of the pile breaks out, and then occurs—to use the phrase of an old "river dog"—"a dry land jam, and hell a-poppin'!"

The men went at the pile cautiously but confidently, and in a few minutes the first log came bounding down the skids, guided to its course by a "bunt" or a "cut" from the hooks of the agile cant-hook men stationed along the skids.

To Wright, who stood watching it, the great oncoming log looked like a monster run amuck, and he positively expected at any instant to see it bound

from the skids in almost any direction, crushing whatever might be in its path. It was coming straight at him as he stood working between the skids, and he started to turn and seek shelter behind the jammer, when Callahan shoved a large block of wood in his hands and said: "Bud and Amos will break her speed as she passes 'em, and when she gets down here you throw the chock under her, sharp end to. That'll stop her. Savvy? If she hops the chock, beat it!"

Wright's nervous glance flashed to the unconcerned, tobacco-chewing Bud, with the butt of his hook laid on the skids ready to "break her," and a dozen apprehensions flitted across his mind. "What if Bud failed to break her? What if she left the skids? What if she hopped the chock? What if——" and he kept unconsciously retreating to the jammer as the log advanced. Suddenly he heard Callahan yell: "Throw it! Throw it!" and as he stood rooted to the spot, the chock was torn from his hands, and he heard it thump as the big log rolled easily to a standstill, and the next instant he sat up dazedly in a snow bank, where he had been hurled by the brawny arm of the disgusted camp boss.

"You useless little runt!" he bellowed, as he towered over him: "If it wasn't for damagin' the jammer, I'd 'a' let it run over you! If I had a nine-year-old kid that couldn't throw a chuck under a log, I'd feed him to the hawgs. I've half a mind to——"

A long, thunderous rumble, ending in a resounding crash and a concerted yell from a score of throats, smothered Scanlon's tirade to a gasp. The rollway had slid out! The whole hillside seemed a mass of plunging, flying logs. They were rolling off the pile, bounding into others, upending over obstructions, and falling into inextricable tangled jams, with a thunderous, grinding roar that echoed and reëchoed through the still, frozen woods, and brought sawyers and axmen hurrying in from the farthest cuttings.

The cant-hook men had just started the first few logs down the skids when they loosened out a log that caused a small slide from the top. This they checked easily enough, but the small slide must have disturbed the set of the pile, for in a moment the men on the pile felt a sudden lurch, and knew without looking that the bottom had gone out; and, with a yell, each took to the woods, and not a second too soon.

Big Ed seized a hook from the hands of a dazed and hesitating tyro, and, with a yell that would almost set a seismograph aquiver, he plunged into the pile straight to where a teetering, jammed-up mass of logs threatened to renew the side, which now, in its forward movement, menaced the safety of the jammer and the powder house near by. The men rallied to his yell with an answering shout, and swarmed up the pile behind him with a catlike agility and daring that was only excelled by the boss' own.

Scanlon, in a pinch, showed himself a leader as well as a driver of men. He was a master hand with the cant hook, and displayed an easy balance and speed of foot unusual in so bulky a frame.

With the practiced eye of long experience, he searched about under the very brow of the beetling mass, seeking the key logs of the jam. He crawled about under the tilted logs without the slightest hesitancy, while each crunching, settling movement brought a shout of warning from his waiting crew. Taking a stand waist-deep in the clutter of logs, he called for an ax, and coolly chopped through an upended log, while the whole pile trembled, and seemed about to fall at every blow. The log snapped when half cut through, and the pile, with a crunch, settled more compactly. Scan-

lon, unhurt, wriggled his way out, with the aid of ready hands, and he called his whole crew together, and, working from the top, began the ticklish task of letting down the pile.

One by one, as the logs bumped down, the nimble-footed cant-hook men, with their spiked boots, leaped or dodged them, keeping them to their course with a swift bunt or a deft cut with the hook, and taking all the hazard of life and limb that men in the primal industries take as a matter of course, as part of a day's work.

Gradually, after hours of strenuous labor, an orderly pile began to form itself again at the end of the battered skids, and, after a few hasty repairs wherever possible, the old peg-legged signal man, battered, silver-haired relic of the old "bean-hole" days, blew his shrill whistle to resume the roll-down.

Scanlon, sweat-drenched and irritable—for the delay would cost him half a trainload on his weekly tally sheet—came down to the jammer and gave the order to let out cable. The Slav, who had impassively watched all the excitement from the shelter of the jammer, was standing by, and the boss ordered him to carry the cable end to the nearest log and "dog it." The hunkie picked up the cable and lumbered away, without a backward glance to see that it did not kink. Amos, who carried the other cable, carried his end at a trot, and the jammer man paid out to suit his gait. The slack in the Slav's line went into a coil and looped itself neatly about the base of a near-by stump, but the unheeding giant picked up the hammer and drove the cable "dog" into the end of the log, with never a look behind to see that all was clear.

The signal man blew, and the cables came taut. One end of the log spun around, the jammer snorted viciously once or twice, and, with a sharp crack, the cable parted at the stump. It whistled through the air like a whiplash, and cut a big limb cleanly from a pine that stood at the side of the clearing.

Scanlon was furious. Hours of time lost splicing cable meant another half trainload minus on the tally sheet, and he swore loud and long. Then the remnant of cable around the half-drawn stump caught his eye, and in a sudden blind rage at the evident carelessness he sprang at the Slav and felled him with a blow of his hairy fist.

The Slav leaped to his feet with the first burst of energy he had thus far displayed, but at the sight of the boss' tense crouch and back-drawn fist, he paused. He wiped the blood from his mouth and looked at it dazedly, and, pointing his gory finger impressively at Scanlon, bellowed a string of consonants, that, judging from their threatening delivery and his venomous glare, could only have meant: "I'll get you later!"

"G'wan, ye big gob of Boolgarian cheese! Get over to the swamper gang an' out o' me sight, or I'll put the boots to ye!" roared Scanlon, lapsing into the brogue, as he always did when excited.

As the Slav slouched away, Callahan laughed uneasily.

"Believe me, Ed, that hunkie's little spiel sounded mean! You'd better fire him."

"Fire nothin'! The thing to do, Danny, me bye, if ye want Camp Five to remain a white man's camp, is to let them Dutch dagos stay until they get tired av yer gintle hospitality. Whin wan av 'em gets into a camp he sizes up the work and the grub and the treatment he gets. Thin in a few days, if things is favorable, out comes his paper, an' he writes a letter. In a few days more ye've got a half a dozen av 'em, an' these all write letters, an' thin they begin to come in swarms. An' for ivery

hunkie that horns in, a half dozen white men drift out, an' before ye realize it the word goes out that ye're runnin' a bohunk camp, an' divvil a good white hand can ye get or keep, an' there ye are. But if ye make life interestin' fer wan av thim, the rest seem to find it out somehow, an' yer not bothered with 'em. So, Danny, me bye, put the screws to that Slav ivery chancest ye get."

With this injunction, the boss strode off, and Callahan went over to the swamper crew to continue Scanlon's policy of "gentle hospitality" to the Slav.

The next day was Sunday, and Wright, ignoring the breakfast signal, lay in his bunk until quite late, preferring to rest his aching muscles rather than feed his indifferent stomach. Later, he arose and took a walk about the camp, but it was too cold to be enjoyable. He went out to the scene of yesterday's strenuous labors, and, as he passed the blacksmith shop, he caught a glimpse through the window of a coal fire glowing on an iron plate laid on the floor. A burst of jovial laughter and the promise of warmth lured him within.

There were three men in the place, and, as he quietly entered, the smith, a huge, good-natured French Canadian, was gayly exhibiting a bottle. At the creak of the door, he thrust it hastily in his pocket, and a look of relief spread over his face as he beheld Wright.

"Ah, eet is de ront," he laughed jovially. "Come in to de fire; you look cold, leeter feller."

The others made room for him at the fire, and shoved him a box to sit on, and Wright extended his sodden shoes out to the blaze.

"Dose are not de kind shoes you mus' wear at dis work," said the smith kindly as he observed them. "I t'ink I have somewhere in de shop a good pair felt boots an' de rubbers dat was lef' by a boy who us' work wid me. Ah, here dey are, leeter feller!" he exclaimed, diving under a workbench. "Now, take off de wet shoes, dry de socks by de fire, an' put on dese. Wet feet is keel de beeg, strong man, an' you"—with a sympathetic shrug—"are not much strong."

Wright gratefully made the change, and his heart went out to the big Canuck with the dancing black eyes and jovial, white-toothed smile. "These are much warmer, and just what I needed," he said, his voice shaking a little at the unusual bit of kindness. "I am surely much obliged to you, sir."

"Non, non, my boy, not in de leas'. Yesterday I am watch from de shop door, an' I see de beeg Irisher fling you into de snow like a rag. I am moch enrage', an' I am boilin' to do de same wid heem, but it happen dat de logs jam jus' den. Ah, it ees mos' onfair for de strong man to abuse de small one, an' twice have I see it happen to you.

"In my contree, up nort' of here," he continued, waxing excited and boastful, "soch t'ing ees not done. Dere de beeg man he fight de beeg man. Dere is not foun' de jail every few mile, an' we handle de bully like dis Scanlon wid de spike boots. If dis was de nort' contree, you would not be long abuse, leeter feller, for I—yes, I, André Boncour, would sink de spike in dis beeg Irisher an' twis' de heel! On de river drives de name of André Boncour is known, an' many soch as heem have I brought to de groun'!"

At this point in the Canuck's loud and boastful harangue, the door opened slightly and the head of old "Paddy the bull cook" peered in.

"What's the row, Frinchy?" he called. "Ye sound like a steer wid the colic. Shure ye'll blow the shack down wid yer wind!"

"I am like to cool your head in de snow pile, old Irisher," laughed the

Canuck good-naturedly, and, reaching for a gob of oily waste, he flung it at Paddy's head. The head bobbed swiftly out, and the waste spattered against the closed door.

A significant, uneasy glance passed between the two men and the blacksmith. Although Paddy's official title was a "bull cook," he was no cook. His duties were to clean the bunk houses, provide wash water and clean towels, and police the camp, and, besides these duties, he was known to be a tireless ferret after smuggled and hidden booze.

Wright, now warm and dry, rose to go, and he again thanked the big Canadian gratefully for the boots.

"Ah, do not speak of it, my fr'en', an', later, I will try an' fin' de warm sweater for fit you. It ees mos' necessary. But," he added, as an afterthought, "you can do me de small favor, if you are so please. I have here a box which is contain small articles that I need now an' den, but I am afraid to leave it here in de shop, where so many come and go while I am busy, an' de shelf under my bunk is already full of t'ings. Maybe you will be so kin' to keep it under your bunk in de bunk house. Dere it will be safe, an' I can easy fin' it. I notice you do not use your shelf."

Wright jumped at the chance to return the favor shown him, and eagerly besought his benefactor to allow him to take care of his belongings. The blacksmith went to a tool chest and produced a small goods box, the lid of which was fastened down with a strap, and he gave it to Wright, patting him on the back, and promising to "keep his eye out for de leeter feller." At the door he gave Wright a low-voiced instruction: "Don't let any of de crew notice where you put de box away. Dere are too many crooked fellers roun' de camp who might steal it."

The little man promised to be careful, and, warmed as much within by the smith's kindness as he was without by his fire, he strode away almost manfully in his new boots. He did not notice old Paddy slip from behind the shop and follow him.

As the door closed behind Wright, one of the men turned to the smith and said, with a wise and wicked grin: "I'm glad you managed to get that booze away from the shop, Frenchy. Old Paddy was beginning to get wise to something here, and under the runt's bunk is the last place in the world that Paddy would look for booze. It will be safe and handy there. Frenchy, you're a genius!"

Wright dodged through the thick of a hilarious snowball fight going on before the bunk house, and ducked through the door, Paddy following silently. The place was deserted. He felt about under his slightly raised lower bunk and found a shelf that he had not known was there, and he carefully laid the box away.

Paddy was tremendously busy now, stirring up such a cloud of dust with his broom that Wright, coughing and sneezing, took refuge outdoors. He had no sooner gone, than Paddy was on his knees before Wright's bunk. He pulled out the box and unfastened the lid, displaying a dozen pint bottles of "squirrel-poison" whisky neatly packed in straw mats. He swore softly to himself, refastened the box, and swiftly shoved it back as some one entered. Paddy was puzzled. "Now, who the divvil would suppose that that timid little cuss would be in on this booze game?" he muttered, between strokes of his broom. "It beats me! I'll leave it where it is, and tip Scanlon off to get the whole bunch red-handed."

The big Slav was the only man who still kept to his bunk at this late hour. He was sprawled out in an attitude of hoglike comfort, sucking on a long, blackened pipe that gurgled and sang

like a steaming kettle. Every time Paddy passed his bunk with the broom he viciously deluged him with dust, but the Slav merely regarded him with vapid indifference, and never batted an eye or shifted his annoyingly lazy sprawl. Finding that his usually effective means of dislodging late birds was lost upon this torpid mound of flesh, Paddy stopped before his bunk and shook his broom at him.

"Roll out, ye lazy divvil, and bile up yer ould clothes, like every decent white man is doin' this minute. Out wid ye!"

The Slav puffed a few times more before answering: "Dees is Sonda. Me rest now. Not worka to-day," and resumed his even puffing.

Paddy swore. "All right, me bucko. If you're too weak to get up and do your wash, I'll see to it that ye get some help," and he hastened out the back door.

The clearing along the creek back of the bunk house was a lively place on Sunday. A riotous game of schoolboy "leapfrog" was going on in one place and another trampled patch of snow was devoted to pitching horseshoes. Several stumps were improvised barber chairs, where groups of men stood about and freely criticized the efforts of amateur barbers or consoled their victims. In a sunny spot a bundled-up old-timer was bewailing how sadly the American lumberman had declined in hardihood since the good old days of the "bean hole," to a bare-headed, strapping youth, whose hairy chest was bare and exposed to the four winds of heaven. In yet another place a heated argument regarding the pulling merits of a certain team of bright bay mares as against that of a gray Percheron span, was going on among a group of "skinners." The monumental and ingenious lies offered as evidence did credit to the imaginations of the debators.

9A

Strung along the creek bank were nearly a score of fires with five-gallon coal-oil cans swung over them on iron rods fastened to driven stakes. Sunday being washday, the kettles were bubbling merrily, and around each fire a group stood idly talking while one man steadily stirred the clothes with a stick. Soap is used in abundance, and the method, though crude, does well enough, and be it known that the habitually unclean man is not long tolerated by his fellows at Camp Five.

Wright strolled from group to group, listening to the talk, and finally brought up at a larger group, where Scanlon, in an easy, reminiscent mood, was detailing how, in his early career as a gang foreman on railroad construction, he had beat into submission an unruly crew of Italian laborers, who had sworn to "get him." Wright stood on the edge of the group, with warped lips and narrowed eyes, watching the boss' domineering face and truculent air, with an inward sympathy for the Italians.

The yarn was interrupted by the arrival of the fuming Paddy, who shouldered his way to Scanlon.

"Say, boss, that big, greasy bohunk is still a-layin' on his back in the bunk like a bump on a log, an' divvil a bit can I move him. He won't get up an' boil his clothes, an' the very smell av him is enough to convince any man wid a nose that he surely needs it!"

"He won't, eh?" growled Scanlon. "Well, we'll just see about whether he will or not! Come on, boys; I may need you!"

The group trailed after him to the bunk house, where the Slav still lay, puffing away in utter comfort. As Scanlon approached, his black, beady eyes glittered meanly. The boss reached in and jerked the blanket off the Slav.

"Get out of that, you mountain of grease! Get outside and air yourself, and take your duds with you and wash 'em. Savvy? Get a move on, now, or

I'll take hold of your old face an' make a concertina out of it!"

The Slav stolidly replaced the blankets and doggedly repeated his set speech: "Dees Sonda, an' me rest now. Not worka to-day. You no pay me for worka to-day."

For answer, Scanlon stuck two fingers into his mouth and whistled shrilly, and the men came crowding into the bunk house.

"Boys, this fellow don't believe in soap and water," he said. "I'll turn him over to you. There's plenty of water in the Copper Creek, and a little of it won't hurt him. It's up to you!"

"Into the creek with him!" shouted some one in the crowd.

The shout was taken up, and in a moment the surprised Slav was seized, dragged from his bunk, and borne aloft, writhing helplessly, on a half dozen husky shoulders, to the creek. They swung him by arms and legs while they counted three, and, with an "All together!" heaved him far out into the icy stream.

He rose, spluttering, close to the bank, and, amid cries of, "Once again! Souse him! Slough him under!" from the gleeful savages on the bank, they seized him, and repeated the performance. Three times they flung him in, until, half drowned and stunned with the cold, he crawled out on the bank and sat there, strangling and shivering.

Wright had turned away when they first threw him in, and hurried into the bunk house, and he now returned, carrying a blanket taken from his own bunk. This he threw about the shaking shoulders of the Slav. The Slav arose, with a little help from Wright, flashing him a look of gratitude. He flung a string of guttural curses at the boss, and lumbered away into the bunk house.

Scanlon turned on Wright savagely.

"So, runt, you play valley to the hunkie, eh? Did you do any washing yourself, to-day?"

"I didn't know, sir, until just now, what arrangements were made about the laundry."

"Well, you do now, so get a can and get busy right sudden. And by the way, was that a company blanket you used just now to wrap around that big side uh beef?"

"I think so, sir; I took it from my bunk."

"Oh, you did, did you? Well, since you're so attached to that hunkie you can keep the blanket, for no white man would care to use it now, and I'll charge it to your commissary account at five dollars. Maybe that will help you to remember that this good Samaritan stuff is sometimes expensive."

Wright choked inwardly at the rank injustice of charging him five dollars for a worn-out, cheap blanket, but he went in search of a wash can without a word of protest.

Shortly after supper that night Paddy followed the boss into his office, and they held a consultation, with the result that about eight o'clock, when the crew in Bunk House One were lounging about, playing cards or listening, with varied emotions, to the wailings of a mouth harp, that was trying to strike a happy mean between four badly matched voices, the boss entered, closely followed by Callahan.

Scanlon occasionally dropped into the bunk houses of an evening, and no attention was usually paid to him, but something in his face and the manner in which he took his stand at the door struck the place to silence.

"Boys," he said, "there's a lot of booze cached away in this bunk house, and I've come to get it. Whoever has it had just as well turn it over, for I'm going to find it if I have to search every bunk and every man in the house."

There was an uneasy shuffling of feet and murmuring talk among the men,

but nobody made any answer. Frenchy, the smith, sat in his bunk, calmly rolling a cigarette.

Scanlon swept the crew with an impartial glare.

"I know well enough that at least a third of you know who has it and where to get it, but I'm not asking for any information. It isn't the buyers I'm after, it's the sellers. I'm going to give the booze men one chance to come clean and hold their jobs. One minute from now I search the bunks, and whoever has it on him goes down the line."

It was a long minute, during which the men muttered and shuffled among themselves uneasily. If Scanlon was aware that he was handling a mean situation, the bulldog set of his jaw did not betray it as he stood calmly by the door, watch in hand. The sharp snap of his watchcase was plainly audible as the minute expired, and he stepped briskly to the first of a row of bunks that lined either wall and rummaged briefly among its contents. Its occupants stood aside without protest; but, farther back, several men sat down doggedly in their bunks, with a sullen expression that betokened opposition to any meddling with their belongings. He progressed rapidly down the line of bunks without meeting any protest until he came to the bunk of the little man, Wright, who stood aside at his approach. He groped about beneath his bunk and drew out Frenchy's box. He carried it out into the center of the room, unfastened it, and, tossing aside the straw mats, held up a bottle in each hand to the light, smiling grimly.

A low exclamation of surprise, not at the whisky, but at its unexpected hiding place, swept the room. Scanlon put down the bottles and held up his hand for silence. Frenchy rose carelessly to his feet. His two accomplices flashed him an uneasy glance and edged away toward the rear door. Several of the older men, scenting the possibilities of trouble, followed suit. Scanlon, observing the motion, backed against the front door, and Callahan similarly barred retreat from the rear.

"Not yet, gintlemen," said the boss, with a steely suaveness and an easy-rolling brogue, "not until we hould a little invistigation. Now, I'm not fool enough to believe that the runt over there has gumption enough in him to peddle whisky, but we'll just ask the little gintleman to step out and tell us how he comes to have the stuff under his bunk and who gave it to him."

Wright, still dazed by the exposure of the box's contents, could only stand and gaze stupidly in the direction of the nonchalant Frenchy.

"Step out here, runt, and tell us who gave you that whisky!" demanded the boss.

Wright came forward, quaking, but determined to be loyal to the man who had been kind to him. He shrunk visibly under the freezing smile of the boss.

"I don't know how the box came to be under my bunk, sir," he quavered.

"You lie!" snapped the boss. His hairy paw fastened upon the little man's shoulder with a grip that made him wince. "Come, now; speak up quick or I'll rattle ye till I shake the truth or the teeth out of ye!"

The tightening fingers brought a choking gasp out of the little fellow, and he half sank to his knees, but he made no answer. With the eyes of all fastened upon Scanlon and his frightened victim, no one noticed the Slav slip quietly from his bunk and take a stand behind the big heating stove, with a billet of stove wood in each hand, his eyes glinting malignantly, and his great chest heaving as he muttered and mouthed to himself.

Scanlon's patience snapped at Wright's dogged silence, and he swung him about viciously.

"Ye little rat!" he roared, "I'll have

it out of ye if I have to shake ye to bits——"

"Not while I, Andre Boncour, have yet de stren't to prevent!" boomed the loud, dramatic voice of Frenchy, the smith.

"It ees great fon, eh, to smile an' twis' de small man wid your great han's?" he demanded, advancing truculently. "But maybe it might be more fon to try de great stren't on dis"—baring a herculean knotted arm—"eh, vile Irisher?"

The boss flung Wright from him while the crew drew back in a widening circle. "You sneakin', four-flushin' frog-eater!" he bellowed. "I don't have to make the runt name my men. You've proved you're one of them by your interference. Now I'm just going to make *you* name the rest of your crooked gang."

He gathered himself for a rush at the tensed and waiting smith, but before he could spring a billet of wood sped over his head. There was a crash, and the big, swinging lamp above him went out, showering him with broken glass. Almost instantly a second stick crashed into the lamp near the rear door, leaving the place in darkness. Immediately the bunk house was in an uproar. Men tumbled over each other in an effort to get in shelter of the bunks. Scanlon and Callahan sprang to the doors, and, above the babble of voices and shouts for lights, the boss' voice rose:

"Paddy—Callahan—light the hand lanterns! Stand where yez are, every man of ye!"

His voice betrayed his location in the darkness, and he was answered by a storm of flying stove wood, that thudded against the door and smashed out a window. There was a fresh uproar and a wild scramble for the bunks to get out of the range of action. Matches glimmered feebly in the dark, and in a few seconds Paddy had found and lit his lanterns. The first flash of light showed Scanlon leaning limply against the door, with a long, ragged gash across his forehead from which the blood streamed freely down his face and neck. Frenchy also was nursing a badly lacerated arm, having been close to the boss when the heavy sticks began to fly. There was no one near the stove. The Slav lay in his bunk, serenely stuffing very black tobacco into a still blacker pipe.

When quiet was restored and the boss was able to speak, he addressed the crew, his face working malignantly beneath its mask of blood:

"Men, this is a serious business, as some of you will find out before I'm through. If I did the right thing I'd send the 'speeder' down to the city and have Sheriff Darrell up among ye, but I won't, for I mean to show yez that I can run me own camp, an' run it me own way. I can see that it is no use to try to find out who threw that wood, although I'm positive I could lay me hands on him this minute. So I'll leave him to chuckle himself to death now, but I'll wait and get him aplenty for this at the next break he makes. There are two more men mixed up in this booze business besides Frenchy and the runt, and I'm droppin' 'em a hint to leave camp early in the mornin' if they value their health. And as fer you, Frenchy, there's a small matter to be settled bechune us as soon as my head and your arm will allow, and if ye draw yer time an' leave camp before we do settle it ye'll prove that yer a coward an' yaller to yer backbone."

"'Tis not for me—Andre Boncour—to ron from any man. I hope de head will get well ver' quickly so I am soon to have de pleasure of ponchin' it," replied Frenchy, with a suave and careless shrug.

"We'll see, me bucko, we'll see! An' now, Callahan, take that whisky outdoors and break it, every bottle av it,

over a stump, an' byes," warned the boss, turning to go, "if I hear any row over here after nine o'clock I'll tie the can to the crowd av ye if I have to close down camp to do it."

That night the big camp boss did not sleep well. It was not his wound that troubled him, nor was it any problem of camp discipline or management that kept him awake, but a vague, uneasy feeling that he could not shake off. He was sensible of a boding unquietness within himself that made sleep impossible. He was a man of little imagination and no nerves, so the strange sense of evil portent clung to him and disturbed him the more from its very newness. He flung himself from the bed, dashed off a stiff drink of brandy, and lay down again, but the ghost of impending evil would not down. Outside, a rising south wind snored softly in the pines, and at its warm touch the loads of plumy snow on their branches slipped off and fell, with a steady, dull sound, like muffled footsteps in the snow. Out of the inky heavens, a single star stared him stonily in the eye through either window, no matter how he might move, until, exasperated by he knew not what, he reached up and dropped the burlap curtains.

A physician would have explained his disquietude with a curt verdict of "indigestion" or "nervous reaction," but a psychologist might impute it to mental suggestion, and—who knows?—hit nearer the mark. For over in Bunk House One two other men lay awake that night, rendering him limb by limb in the crucible of hatred and offering incantations to the red gods of vengeance for aught of evil that might befall him.

It was long past midnight before Scanlon fell into a tossing state of half slumber and wove into his fitful dreams a wild fantasy of nameless perils, always imminent, but always narrowly averted. So vivid were his visions that he did not hear a soft footfall outside his cabin, nor a groping hand that carefully tried the fastenings of door and windows, but in the warp and woof of his tangled dreams loomed one ever present, sinister figure, huge, dark, and muffled like the one that moved slowly and reluctantly away from the cabin and slipped into the bunk house on silent, unshod feet.

Next morning Scanlon, arising with a sense of relief at the sight of the bright new day, picked up a wicked-looking, crooked-handled stiletto with a foreign trade-mark in the trampled snow before his door.

In the interval between breakfast and work time that morning Wright hastily assembled his belongings, confidently expecting to be discharged as soon as the crew were called out. Whether because he was considered too insignificant to be taken seriously in connection with the whisky row, or because his few days' wages did not meet the debit the company held against him for the blanket, board charges, and employment fee, he was allowed to remain. The Slav also was on the job as usual, and Callahan directed them to work together with the "road monkeys," digging sand from a sand bank and drying it over a fire for use on slippery roads.

Later, the boss, making his rounds, came up to them, and he stood apart watching them work, his bandaged face grimly thoughtful and his eyes traveling from the broad back of the Slav to something he held concealed in his hand. He called to Callahan and said in a low, constrained voice that puzzled his subordinate:

"Send that bohunk out to the outside cuttings, up on the bench, anywhere out of my sight, for I can't trust myself around him, and send the runt with him."

At a word from Callahan, the two

undesirables dropped their shovels and followed him up a rough trail through thick timber to the outskirts of the camp. They emerged on a clean plateau or "bench" fringed by partially cleared timber and terminating in a ragged cliff. A long, steep log chute led down from the cliff into a small, natural lake, fed by blind springs, on the flat below. A sloping rollway fed into the head of this chute, and on it a pile of logs stood ready to be dropped into the slide and shot down into the lake. Occasionally a skid team appeared out of the surrounding timber, dragging a log up on the rollway and clanked away after another. The log chute was constructed of long, peeled logs. Near the top it was bridged over a yawning ravine by a heavy log trestle. Halfway down its length it ran for about a hundred feet through a deep cut in a knoll, with high, steep banks flush on either side. For the rest of the way it was again carried on trestles to the lake. Down at the side of the lake a donkey engine grunted and clanked, drawing the logs out of the water and up on a rollway by means of a long cable. Opposite the rollway at the head of the chute, a small platform bounded by a light handrail hung eerily out over the chasm. Here was located the lever that operated the half-round blocks used to hold the log at the top of the chute until ready to be released.

Into this new scene of activities the two banished incompetents were led and told to busy themselves clearing away the accumulated chunks and bark lying about the head of the chute until "Stubby" Mason, the "straw boss" in charge, came along and gave them further orders. Callahan then hurried back down the trail to his own gang.

Left alone to their own devices, the runt and the Slav worked away silently. Wright, as he worked, watched the operations down at the lake, dwarfed to pygmy proportions by the depth and distance. As he watched he saw the figure of a man climb up on the distant end of the chute and begin to toil his way up the steep, slick ascent. He continued to scoop up bark, wondering idly why the fellow did not come round by the trail instead of making that laborious climb. After a while he looked again and caught a glimpse of white on the bobbing head of the man in the chute, and, remembering Scanlon's bandaged head, he made a guess at the identity of the climber. A few more steps, and something in his gait strengthened the guess. Another advance, and it was confirmed by the wave of mingled fear and animosity that always gripped him foreshadowing the hated one's coming, whether seen or unseen.

It was Scanlon. The "donkey" bŏss at the lake had reported that the logs were coming down badly battered and splintered on the ends, and he made the climb to ascertain for himself whether a lodged stone or a loosened end of a log in the chute floor was doing the mischief. He kept his eyes and attention to the chute floor, and did not notice the two men above him.

Wright forgot to work as he stood watching Scanlon's progress and wishing that his calked boots might slip and treat him to a swift, splintery ride and a ducking. He looked behind him to see if the Slav had noticed, and the malignant glitter in the hunkie's beady black eyes and the snarling curl of his lips told him that he had not only noticed, but recognized, the man. Their glances met, and the sign manual of a mutual hate leaped across the barrier of race, creed, and language, and was revealed in a look that did not need a common speech to interpret. Wright had to avert his eyes, for there was that in the Slav's brutal glare that aroused a dormant devil within him.

Scanlon continued to plod slowly up the chute, his eyes closely scanning its

surface, but his mind was engaged in a mental tussle to master a dawning, unformed apprehension. It had seized him as he entered the chute and rode him with increasing weight at every step, clogging his footsteps till it brought him to a slow halt just below the cut. He swore irritably.

"I'll have to see a doctor," he muttered, mopping his face, "there's something wrong with me. Sure it's a regular old woman I am. Phew! 'Tis the first time I knew those sort of willies had a hangover. I had 'em last night, an' now I've got 'em again." He shook himself and resumed his climb.

At the top, the silent pair watched, until Wright, with a sigh that was half a curse, turned to work lest the boss find him idle. A huge log lay in the chute, and, at the sight of it, a dastardly thought seized him, and he stared at the lever on the little platform. One had but to push the handle—push it just a little—scarce a foot! It could be done—done in a second, and no one would ever know how! The blocks would drop—the log would lurch—and then—— He trembled at the complete and fiendish effectiveness of the idea.

He drew his fascinated eyes away from the handle and turned them upon the Slav. The idea seemed to have been born to them both at the same instant, for the Slav was staring at the handle with a wide-eyed intensity that betrayed the workings of the same thought in his torpid and hate-poisoned brain. Their eyes met again, with an instant recognition of each other's thoughts, and the Slav's wolfish smile held a mute proposal of instant action.

Wright's hate did not tend to action. It was a hidden venom that fed upon and tainted his imagination, but fear denied it active expression. Hate, companion to fear, as fear is to weakness, had walked beside him through a lifetime of unequal struggle until it had become impersonal. To him Scanlon represented the very embodiment of that type of physical superiority and mental mastery that had always defeated him in the remorseless competitions of life, and collected from him the victor's toll in subservience and unchecked oppressions. The tyranny and abuses that Scanlon had heaped upon him were but a replica of many wrongs for which his inherent weakness had always made him a magnetic target, but Scanlon's despotism had served to finally bring his inward fever of revolt to a crisis.

The big Slav's animosity was keenly personal, and the result of a special grievance. It craved and sought opportunity for vent in action, and here before him lay the opportunity. The Slav's gaze furtively swept the flat and the scattered woodland back of them. No one was in sight. He sidled close up to Wright and silently pointed, first to the log, then to the handle and down to the climbing figure below, and the nether fires burned in the gaze that he sent into Wright's distended eyes. He reached down and slowly lifted Wright's bared arm. Across it ran a vivid bruise of a hand's breadth where the boss' ruthless fingers had impressed their angry grip. It stared up at him; the stripe of the thrall, the shame of the weak, the brand of his master!

At the sight of it, something in the brain of the little man snapped, filming the world with red. He drew a quick, choking breath like the gasp of a drowning swimmer, the shackles of fear fell away, and his frail figure quivered with the lust for vengeance. With a strangled cry, he flung himself at the lever, but was thrust back by the Slav, who held onto the lever and pointed below, with a crafty leer. Wright saw his meaning and waited, panting like a hound at leash, until their victim should advance well into the cut where the sheer flush walls made escape impossible. Once there,

he was at the mercy of the merciless. Wright chuckled insanely at the thought. Now he had the big bully on the hip! A single motion of his hand could send his broken form hurtling down into the lake. He had a mad desire to call out so that Big Ed might have time to realize his coming fate—so that he might know whose hand dealt the blow, and why—so that he might suffer an age-long moment of freezing terror—so that he might hear his laugh ring high above the rasping rush of the huge missile. He hungered to see that great, virile frame tremble and shake—to see his arrogant mastery cringe and abase itself in useless pleas—to make him know and exhibit the fear that comes to those who squirm helplessly beneath the lash of another's power. In all his meager existence he had never felt such a thrill of power as that which gripped him as he rocked drunkenly at the lever, and he could scarcely restrain himself from shouting.

Down in the chute, Big Ed felt the nightmare seize him again as he entered the shadow of the nichelike cleft. It seemed to require a special effort of his will to drag his leaden feet up the incline and to keep his eyes intent upon their business of examination. He crunched his spiked soles savagely into the slick logs and toiled on, mentally cursing Slim's "hearse-varnish coffee" and "dough-ball biscuits," or whatever it was that could reduce a man's nerves to a state of jangling disorder and people a radiant winter morning with ghosts. Halfway up through the cut, he discovered a small, sharp stone lodged between the logs in the chute floor, and as he kicked it loose and bent to pick it up he paused in the act, struck by a sudden consciousness that comes to us sometimes when shut up in a room or alone in the dark. Some one was watching him. He could *feel* eyes fastened upon him, and he jerked himself around, expecting to find some one standing at his back. He laughed shakily as he faced about again, and his eyes, traveling up over the walls of the cut, seeking the ambushed presence, stared full in the faces of a pair of hideous gargoyles, gloating and derisive.

For a moment he blinked stupidly up at them, unable to grasp the meaning of the hate-distorted faces and the tensed figures crouched at the lever, and then suddenly comprehension burst on him like a blazing meteor. They meant to *get* him!

He glanced swiftly about with an instinctive thought of escape, but the sheer walls mocked him. Their flush sides offered no possibility of foothold or handhold, and the chute was too wide to straddle it until the log should pass. He stood rooted, but his mind worked at lightning speed. To take a step ahead or back he knew would be the signal to throw the lever, and if he attempted to run or slide the log would overtake and crush him before he had barely time to start. They had waited for him. He was trapped!

A pall of horror fell over him, and the cold sweat crept out on his face as he read his sentence in the faces up on the cliff and realized that he was opposed to a force superior to his will and confronting a situation that demanded bigger things than his hand and brain could furnish.

He looked at the two faces above him, hoping to read some trace of wavering that his will might freeze into inaction, but the answer stared back at him implacable and resolute.

"I'm up against it," he groaned. "I'm done for."

He steadied himself and gathered his courage about him like a mantle, gripping it to him feverishly while he bowed his head and awaited the shock.

He waited, every nerve keyed tight and his ears straining for the expected

thump and rip of the log as it started, but up on the high platform a little man with a devil loose in his brain restrained the big hand reaching for the lever and waited, too. Age-long seconds went by. With the very essence of cruelty, Wright measured the seconds of strain against the resistance of the big man in the chute and waited for the fear to come. It would come—he was sure of it. He knew from experience what it was to helplessly await the falling of a blow or the approach of a disaster that could not be averted.

The strain was telling on Scanlon. His face grew ashy gray, the sweat dripped from his nose, and his limbs grew cold and rigid. His ears ached as seconds went by, straining for the sound of the log, and yet he dared not raise his head to look.

"For the love of Heaven," he gasped, "why don't they trip the blocks!"

Another second. He smothered a desire to yell, and his chest was heaving, and his whole body began to tremble. Another interval, and something between a gasp and a sob slipped his clenched teeth, and his hands opened and shut convulsively. A chill crept into his bones, and the freezing fear ate slowly to the heart of him. It stifled his will and corroded his courage, and slowly the invincible light in his eyes went out like a flickering lamp. With the fading of that light, the grim lines of his lips went pitiably slack and his distended eyes grew dull as frosted windows. Slowly, like a giant pine that leans from its stump and falls, he tottered and crumpled to his knees in the chute. He wrapped his arms about his head, and gusts of dry, racking sobs and noises wholly animal were torn from him, and then he raved like a madman, alternately cursing and pleading. He screamed defiance at them until the forest echoed his cries, and with the next breath he cringed and pleaded hysterically:

"Don't do it, boys, don't do it! I've never harmed ye. Give me a chance—just a chance. I can't go out like this. I'm trapped, I tell ye! Ye'll crush me like a rat!

"Trip it! Trip it, ye hellions! Don't eat me up a-waitin'. Ye can't make me crawfish—ye can't! Do yuh hear me—ye can't! Ah—they've turned it loose! It's comin'! It's comin'!" and he flung himself down flat in the chute.

Above his ravings, the shrill cackle of the delirious Wright punctuated each outburst. He had accomplished his purpose. His mad eyes gloated over the abject, unmanned thing in the chute, and he reveled in each craven cry. He was finished. It mattered not at all whether the log was released, and Scanlon might go now unharmed in body, but he knew he had broken something in his spirit that the balance of his years would never replace. All desire to trip the blocks left him, and he let go of the lever to clutch both hands to his shaking sides. The Slav was watching the little man with something of fear in his eyes, and when he dropped the lever he sprang at it with a snarl. He had read Wright's purpose, and had no intention of letting their prey escape. Quick as his movement was, Wright was back at the handle before him and faced him with blazing eyes.

"Back! Go back, you barbarian! We're finished with him. We are going to let him keep his carcass to parade his shame. We have no further quarrel with that poor, creeping thing down there. We've stolen the soul out of him! Don't you understand? No, you can't understand—you don't even know what I've done to him! He has got to live now to make my revenge complete—I won't be cheated. Keep away from that lever—keep away!"

For answer, the Slav sprang at the handle, but Wright clung to it and hung on, wrapping his legs about the slide bar so that it could not be moved. The

panting Slav tried to tear him loose, shaking him until the frail platform rocked and his clothes were stripped from his back. Failing to pluck him loose, he fastened his clutch into his shoulders like a vise and bent him slowly backward. Wright felt his senses slipping away from him as the giant's grip searched among his bones and his fingers relaxed from the handle one by one. When he could hold on no longer, he twisted suddenly and leaped up on the Slav, twining his arms and legs about his middle, and hung there like a terrier on a mastiff, forcing him back against the handrail. The Slav redoubled his grip, but the clinging manikin seemed now incapable of feeling. The arms and legs fastened about him were like tentacles, and he fought and thrashed to free himself while the little platform quivered under his feet. He braced himself against the handrail and wrenched Wright loose and hurled him into the chute. The rail behind him snapped under the impact of his frantic struggles, and the pieces flew far out into the chasm. For a second the big Slav teetered on his heels at the edge of the platform, with arms outspread, fighting to regain his balance, and then, with an awful scream, he toppled backward, down among the spires of tall firs that looked like stunted brush far below.

At the same instant Wright's limp form shot down the chute into the arms of the cowering camp boss.

A few moments later Big Ed came staggering up to the "donkey" station at the lake. He was ghastly white as he laid his battered, half-naked little burden tenderly on the ground before the gaping crew. They volleyed him with questions, but he made no answer as he stood swaying above the torn figure, his gaze fastened upon the blood-stained face with a rapt, far-off expression. They crowded about him and tried to shake him to attention, but he seemed unconscious of their presence, and neither spoke nor moved until the flickering of an eyelid brought him swiftly to his knees beside the still form. He gathered Wright up in his arms with infinite tenderness, and tried, with voice and gesture, to hold the glimmer of consciousness that came and went across his features.

"Listen, lad, listen to me! If you're going to die I want yez to know that ye've taught me a lesson. I had it comin' to me, boy. You're the only man that lives who ever saw Ed Scanlon show a streak of yaller, an' ye've got to live now until I teach ye how to forget it. Ye've got to live, I tell yuh! I want to show ye that it was worth what it cost ye to save me skin. I'm going to make good wid ye, runt—can't ye hear me?"

Big Ed half shouted his plea, tumbling the words out of him with strained insistence as he chafed Wright's hands and shook him gently, and presently a low, whimpering moan and a stirring of the inert heap gave evidence of returning consciousness. His eyes opened behind the clotted fringe of hair that hung over them and stared up at Scanlon, icy blue and glittering with delirium. He lay still a moment, breathing with shuddering, hissing gasps, and then, seemingly impelled by a force beyond his own volition, he jerked himself to his feet unaided and thrust a naked, wizened arm out at Scanlon. Two hectic spots of color blazed in his cheeks, and his lips writhed in a smile of scorn unutterable.

An old, half-forgotten Bible phrase came to him, and he jerked it out hysterically:

"Rise, Samson, and shake thyself, the Philistines be upon thee! Roar, great bull of the woods, and hear your voice choke in your throat! Whine if you can't roar—whine for these men as you did for me up there in the slide.

Grovel for them as you did for me—they've never seen you do it. Bully some one! Curse some one! See if you can find a tone left in your throat that will make them jump. Look them in the eye now and see if you can make them obey you!

"I've stolen the heart out of you, Big Ed! I've searched you to the bone, and you're yellow—yellower than I am! See that tree over there"—the deliriously eloquent voice screamed its derision as the twitching fingers pointed out a hoary dead pine that reared its gigantic, silvered trunk high above the ranks of lusty forest life about it and threw out its twisted arms to heaven in pathetic appeal to spare what yet remained of its former greatness—"see that big pine? That is what you are now. Still mighty in frame and powerful of arm—still able to stand up straight against the snows and winds of the world, but you can't wave your crest and whistle your defiance to the storm; you can only creak dismally and strain against its weight. People will still point out your head reared high above the forest of men, but you—*you* will know that your heart is hollow and your substance rotten food for the worms of slow defeat!

"Me and my kind have feared you and your kind since the first life stirred, but sometimes some of us discover how small the big ones are and how big the small may be, and then we free ourselves. All my life I've feared you and the sordid world you've set aside for such as me to live in. I've licked the lash—and blind, blind fool!—I never dreamed that you were not as big and unbeatable as you seemed. I bowed before the law of survival as before the Tablets of Stone, and believed in a breed that were born to rule. Oh, I've kissed your boots, you clay-footed supermen, and dreamed that the fears I feared had no part in you, and the obstacles I bowed before, you would leap with a laugh. But I've taken one of the best of your kind—yourself—rendered you as helpless as I am, and made you look into the face of a force that you could not hope to beat. And you squealed! Oh—that squeal of yours made a man of me!"

The little man paused in his delirious rush of words, drew a deep, lung-filling breath, and threw out his arms as if to embrace the whole arc of the sky and the full stretch of the aged wilderness before him, and his slight form thrilled and expanded even as it swayed.

"I'm free now!" he shrieked. "Free! I've found a new soul that is my very own. I'm going to live! I'm going to tear my share of life out of the world's fingers. I will make it pay tribute to me for every broken year that I've lived. I've found out that I can fight—and win! *And I'm going to fight!*"

His wild yell smashed through the forest silences and swelled away until even the cloistered firs in the high recesses of the hills whispered back his new determination, and the little man pitched forward in the dust, bleeding at the nose and mouth.

Down in the weird land of shadows, Edgar Wright fought a long fight for life and reason in the weeks that followed. A mere spark of life like a flickering altar light gleamed through his trancelike stupor or lighted his eyes in hours of tossing delirium, and any moment might see it wane and expire. At his bedside in the little office cabin, Scanlon the domineering, the reckless, the tyrant of other days, guarded that glimmer of life like a vestal of old. In the long hours of the night he warded off the rustling, imminent specter, and in the darkened cabin by day he watched, tense and breathless, for the frail spark to survive the travails of the smitten mind. The man's face seemed transformed and refined, the

old challenge in his eyes had melted into a pathetic, womanly tenderness, and the gentleness of his clublike hands was wonderful to see. Time and again, at a sudden change in his patient, his breathless order would send the speeder roaring through the night, with muffler open, down to the distant town for the doctor, and the only man to whom he would relinquish his charge for the brief periods of sleep his crying nerves demanded was the blacksmith, Frenchy. Their feud was utterly forgotten as they stared in each other's frightened eyes whenever Wright's lamp of life ebbed low.

Camp Five ceased to exist in the mind of its boss during the time that Wright lay ill. Relieved of his iron rule, camp discipline slackened, whisky circulated freely, rows were a nightly occurrence, accidents happened, machines broke down, and the tally sheets showed a decrease in output that brought first letters of anxious inquiry, and then sharp reprimand from the company's officers, and these lay unopened and unanswered, along with an increasing stack of mail on Scanlon's rude desk.

Callahan was at his wit's end. He was a competent man, but he had never exercised real leadership over the crew. They knew he was not the Big Boss, and they let him know that they knew it. Sometimes in his extremity he would dare to invade the office sick room to ask Big Ed's aid and advice on a matter of vital importance, but all he ever got was abuse for the intrusion.

"Get out av here!" the boss would hiss at him in repressed rage, his eyes blazing. "Ye've no business here. You wid yer blatherin' mouth an' yer great, stompin' boots. Clear out! The camp is yours right now, run it any way ye like."

At last there came a day after the back of the winter was broken, a day when the first chinook wind blew. It came stealing down through the gaps in the hill like the breath of God. The chinook wind! It is the miracle of the Northwest. The essence of all romance stirs in its languorous breath. The spice of the tropic seas, the keen tang of high altitudes, the pungent, cleanly fragrance of the wide prairies, the heavy, damp redolence of tangled vegetation, all seem to mingle in its winelike, mellow blandness. The smell of new-turned earth, of drying wood, of last year's wet leaves newly exposed to the sun, all are a part of it.

It is the same wind that wanders like a vagrant through the half-opened window of a clattering shop and kindles a dream in tired eyes. It wafts for an instant into the straining grind of a busy office, and some one's pen ceases scratching while his mind a-fishing goes. It brushes past the whistling youth in the street, and straightway his tune grows pensive, *con amore*. It chanced to blow over the bent back of a sawyer at his task, and he straightened up with a slow, understanding smile and pulled off his stocking cap to let it blow through his hair. "Guess I'll make the harvest field in Kansas this summer," he remarked absently to his partner across the saw.

The big team sniffed it with perked-up ears, and as it passed over the worried Callahan, he turned to the sled boss at his side and said, "That means you'll have to pound 'em on the back from now on," and the sled boss merely nodded. The spongy brown patches of earth could be plainly heard drinking up the snow with a sucking sound as it approached, and at its touch the needles of the pines seemed to bristle out with awakening life. It lifted the curtain of Wright's sick room and stole in like a healing spirit, and Big Ed raised his chin from his chest with a wan smile, and his weary eyes lighted

up. It fluttered a thin lock on Wright's white forehead, and he stirred and opened his eyes with a long sigh. He stared up at Scanlon with the clear eyes of calm sanity, and, with a half smile, his eyelids fluttered a little, and he fell asleep. Big Ed leaned over the bed and listened to his tranquil breathing, and a tear slipped out of his shining eyes.

"Now praised be the saints!" he said.

One full round of the clock Wright slept, and when he awoke again in Scanlon's arms to find a bowl of warm liquid held to his lips he shuddered and drew away, but his first searching look into the fervid face above him flooded him with understanding. Out of the chaos of his darkened hours flashed memories of a gentle, ministering presence, and he closed his waxlike hands over the great, trembling fist and drank the liquor gratefully. He sat for a little time watching the boss' changed face with a puzzled air. Evidently he read there much that was new and strange to him. Scanlon marveled equally at the new Wright who regarded him. Even in the extremity of his weakness his face glowed with an inward strength, and every feature was instinct with a fresh conception of life. His soul sickness seemed to have vanished with the ills of his body, and when he spoke, an undertone of easy confidence had replaced the apologetic whine in his voice.

"What made you trouble yourself to pull me through, Scanlon?" he asked.

"Don't ask me," the boss answered wearily, as though communing with himself. "I've asked myself that question a hundred times while you lay there. All I had to do was to pull the blankets back off your feet for a while or let the fire go out and you would have gone into town next morning in a box. And still I sat there and asked myself why I didn't do it.

"When they picked up something down there on the flat that looked like the Slav and sent it in on the mornin' train marked, 'Result of an accident,' I only needed to raise a holler and you'd be slated maybe for a long rest at the big stone house, an' yet I was dumb as a clam, an' I'm still askin' myself why.

"I don't believe in hypnotism or any o' that sort o' rot, but I'm free to admit you've got me buffaloed. I've sat alongside you in the night, an' I hear them trees out there sayin, 'I've stolen the heart out of you. You're yaller—you're yaller!' until I've had to turn the light out so I couldn't see your face. I've sat there an' listened to them drunken hellions in the bunk houses a-fightin' an' yellin' an' bustin' up me camp, and I've caught meself a-makin' a dozen good excuses why I didn't darst stop them, when all the while I knew I should be out among 'em with me two hands. I haven't lost me nerve, an' you'll never make me believe it, but there's somethin' wrong wid me, and whatever it is, you did it, and you'll have to undo it, so I guess that's why you're still here.

"An' then again I've thought a heap o' things while I was a-watchin' you, an' I can see where you're right about me walkin', spikeshod, over better men than meself just because circumstances gave me the chance to do so. But I'm not altogether to blame, because the pressure always comes from the top. When the bunch down in the city crack their whip I've got to jump, an' then I crack mine to see some one else do the same. I've always thought that the world belonged to the fightin' few, and I've been scaling men with the same scale stick that I use fer timber, figurin' 'em accordin' to the bulk amount I could cut out of 'em, but now I see that I've got to alter me measure to reckon in the clear an' the waste, the heart an' the sap, the straight-grained

an' the twisty, in order to know men or timber for what they are.

"I'm going to ask you, Wright, to wipe off the slate between us and start a new tally, because I need you, an' I need the things I can see stickin' outen your eye. This camp has gone to the dogs like a widder woman's ranch while I've been tending you, and it is going to be a man's sized job to whip it back into the collar again, an' for the first time in me life I feel as though I'll need a friend at me elbow to help me do it. There's a bookkeeper feller, the camp clerk, laying outside the door right now, and as soon as he gets sober enough to hear me I'm going to fire him, an' if you'll stay with me you can have the job at the highest figure I can make the company stand.

"I want you to stay with me, for I know you meant every word of that war talk you made over on the flat, and you deserve a chance to make it good right here in the timber where there is always a double-handed reward awaiting for two-fisted men. Come, lad," he concluded, rising and extending his hand, "will you tie up with the old 'bull o' the woods'?"

Wright raised himself up in the bed and gripped the big paw with both his wasted hands.

"I'm with you, Ed," he answered, "as long as there's timber in Idaho!"

They are still up there, these two, lords of the timber from the State line to the company's farthest holdings. They have cut one syllable from Wright's first name and they call him "Little Ed," to distinguish him from his pardner, Big Ed, but to make up for the lost syllable he bears the title of field accountant for the company, while Big Ed is now division manager for the Copper Creek section. There are many tales told along the Copper Creek concerning the ways of the little man. Lumberjacks will tell you how he ran the speeder down through miles of a blazing hell to get aid for the trapped camp, when Big Ed had reached his last ditch in the fight against the great fire that once swept across the State. They will tell you how he bullied the authorities into providing proper medical attention for a quarantined camp, and how he stormed into the company's office one day, white-faced and quivering, like a furious bantam, and actually scared the directors into laying an extra three miles of expensive grade to replace a road so dangerous that for a time it reaped in men at an average of one a week. The lumberjacks swear by him, and the company has long since learned how futile it is to swear at him. Indeed, their attitude can be summed up in the remark of old Paddy, the veteran camp warden.

"You might bluff Big Ed and get by with it," he said, "providin' the moon's favorable, but when Little Ed puckers up his eyes at you you'd just as well begin to roll your blankets, 'cause when that little cuss speaks, believe me, you're listenin' to the voice of the company."

A SUFFRAGETTE ADVANCES AN ARGUMENT

AT one of the street-corner meetings held in Philadelphia during the campaign to promote the cause of suffrage, a young suffragette, mounted on a barrel, made this ringing declaration to the crowd:

"What we need in this country to make everybody happier is more divorces and fewer marriages. That's what we women demand."

At that point a middle-aged man, lacking in chivalry, but accomplished in voice, cried out to the speaker:

"If all of them are like you, they'll get what they want."

High Finance

By Frederick R. Bechdolt

Author of "Black Gold," "A Matter of Business," Etc.

The plain tale of Lime-juice Jack, a financier of the water front. A sense of humor he had, and seven dollars and a half when he landed at San Francisco. What he did with it gave old Captain Robertson ample grounds for his assertion that not any of our twentieth-century Napoleons were swifter than Lime-juice Jack.

OLD Captain Robertson and I had taken a walk down the Embarcadero, from Meiggs Wharf to Pier 34; and the long distance on hard pavements had left us comfortably weary. We were sitting on a cluster of fender piles, looking out upon the harbor. Idly we watched the coughing launches, the great, sedate steamships, the stream of busy traffic crossing on the fairway. For a long time neither of us spoke; and then, glancing at his spare, stoop-shouldered figure, with the white beard covering his lean chest, I remarked that he must have seen a deal of change in the port.

He shook his head, and his eyes twinkled. "Change?" He smiled. "I find that men are doing things just about the way they used to do them years ago."

"What!" said I. "In these days of complicated mechanics—and high finance!"

"Well, there"—he nodded slowly—"you've said it. We'll leave out the mechanics; for it was men that I meant. Methods don't alter as much as you think. You mentioned high finance." The smile returned under his snowy mustache. "Now I was just thinking of a fellow—— Did you ever hear of Lime-juice Jack?"

I shook my head, and waited for him to go on.

"I can't see where any of your twentieth-century Napoleons were swifter than him." He said it with an air of finality, and then fell silent, as if the matter were settled. At length I urged him warmly to tell me wherein this man of a bygone decade might deserve to have his name coupled with the term which I had used. And thus, by guileful strategy, I launched him upon the story.

"Lime-juice Jack was all the name he was ever known by," Captain Robertson began. "He got it, of course, from being an Englishman. A lean, hatchet-faced fellow, with little rat eyes.

"He landed in San Francisco one afternoon back in the days when sailing vessels and big crews were the rule, the days when the grain cargoes used to go round the Horn from Porta Costa.

"Port Said had known him, and Calcutta, and what other beaches he never told, beyond the fact that he hailed from Hongkong this time. He had drifted round here, keeping to the east;

and he'd pulled a Whitehall boat out to many a ship on many a rascally errand. Experience and an awful gall was all he had accumulated out of it; excepting seven dollars and a half. That composed his capital.

"The port looked good to him. He took a turn about the city front, seeing what he could see and hearing what he could hear; and by the time the afternoon was half gone, he had made up his mind that this was the place for him. He was ready to settle down in business now.

"'So,' says he to himself, 'I'll pick out an office,' which is the first thing, of course, for a business man to do. Being what you might call a bit seedy when it came to looks—for he wore an old suit of tweeds that he had gotten off of some charitable countryman in Hongkong, and it had lasted him through considerable wear and tear and hard knocks—he couldn't very well rent a place without putting down the money in advance. So he picked out a fire hydrant at the corner of East and Folsom Streets, and set up in business at once.

"Now, you needn't smile; there's many a man has made his fortune on the curbstone, including policemen, panhandlers, and Wall Street brokers, too, from what you read in the papers; and although the word high finance hadn't been used much in those days, the art of starting in on a shoe string was pretty well known.

"Well, Lime-juice Jack took possession of his office; leaning against the water plug as if he owned it, or at least paid rent for it. The same crowd passed that corner then that does now—sailors, longshoremen, coal heavers, beach combers, drunk rollers, ship's captains, mates, and workingmen out of jobs. They went on by that afternoon, and Lime-juice Jack watched them, until he saw one that he knew by the looks of him to be both wise and broke.

"'I sye, mate,' Lime-juice Jack sung out, and the man came alongside at once. ''Ave a beer with me.'

"That was easily enough negotiated; and when the pair of them came back from the nearest saloon, Lime Juice was out ten cents and in by a lot of information. In five minutes he had picked up a good share of the gossip of the beach, and knew how ten ships were laying at anchor out in the stream because they could not get crews; how blood money was up to a hundred dollars to the man; how the Bells o' Shandon—which was a saloon and a sailors' boarding house—was for sale, because the Dutchman who ran it was too slow for the shipping business; and was ready to quit when any one came along with two thousand dollars in cash. All this and a lot more. But he hung on to his man; and occasionally he would ask:

"'Who is this?' or 'What ship does *he* command?' or some other question regarding those who passed. Which the fellow answered all of them, in the hopes of another beer—not knowing Lime-juick Jack, who went on pumping him quite dry, with no intention of loosening up on any of the seven dollars and forty cents that he had left.

"Finally the man began to get restless; and when Jack was asking him about a ship that was laying alongside the Clay Street dock, he suggested one more steam. But Jack went on as if he had never been interrupted at all.

"'That Yankee clipper,' says he, 'got a full crew, I tyke it; for there's four men with clubs on the dock.'

"Well, the fellow told him how that was the old *Maid o' the Mist;* how her skipper, Cap'n Erickson, had been fightin' off boarding-house runners from the day that he had come into port.

"You understand, of course, when men are worth a hundred dollars apiece, if the crimp has them in his

boardin' house, a skipper with thirty of them in his fo'c'stle has to keep a weather eye out, unless he wants to lose his crew. Lime-juice Jack understood it, you can lay to that. Now he knew that he had all he could get in the way o' news in this quarter. So when the bum started to talk about that steam beer, he told him to go to the devil and set off up East Street.

"He was a business man now, with a big deal to put over.

"He stopped at the first barber shop that he saw, and he spent fifteen cents for a shave and thirty-five cents for a hair cut; and with those things to help him, along with the brushing off, he came out looking a little more like a civilized human being and a little less like a bit of something that has been cast up on the beach.

"He went straight over to Steuart Street and looked at the signs until he found a saloon which the fellow had said was a great hang-out for captains of sailing vessels. Lime-juice Jack came in the door as if he owned the place. It took all the strength of character that he had to pass by the free lunch; but he did it and went on to the bar. Says he to the bartender, who lost no time in asking him what he wanted—not being any too sure of the looks of such a customer:

"'My man, can you tell me where I can find Cap'n Anderson?'

"I may as well let you know, this Cap'n Anderson was one of those whose ship was tied up for want of hands. He'd been cursing this port for a good two weeks now, and it looked like he would be cursing it for a month more, for all the men that he could get.

"He was sitting down at a little table right then, reading the marine register, and growling over the top of it to another skipper about his luck. The bartender pointed him out. Lime-juice Jack gave him a hail:

"'I sye, captain, a word with you.'

"Which nearly floored old Anderson, who was used to giving his own orders to the likes of this shabby customer. But Lime-juice Jack nodded to him easylike; and looked so full of business that the skipper got up from his chair.

"'What d'ye want?' he said, looking as if he had half a mind to follow it up by kicking Jack out onto the sidewalk. But he changed his mind right away, if that was what he was thinking of. For——

"''Ow much for thirty men, signed to-morrow arternoon?' Lime-juice Jack whispered into his ear.

"'Seventy-five dollars to the man,' Anderson came right back at him.

"'Myke it a hundred and you're on,' says Jack, 'and quick about it, too, for I'm a busy man.' He was talking louder now, and Anderson pulled him by the sleeve to hush him up, for there were three or four other skippers in the place as hungry for a crew as himself.

"'Don't make so much noise about it, man. Whose boardin' house are ye running for?' says he.

"''Oose boardin' 'ouse? Me own, o' course. 'Ave to excuse my appearance this arternoon, cap'n. I've been lookin' arter these same men.' And with that Jack stuck his hand into his pocket among the six dollars and ninety cents, and managed to make considerable noise with the cartwheels before he slammed one on the bar. There are all manners o' buying a drink; and he knew how to make one dollar sound as big as ten.

"And, what was more, when the bartender asked him what he would have, Lime Juice nearly broke his own heart by passing up the whisky which Anderson was taking and asking for a good cigar.

"''Ave one yourself, cap'n,' says he, when the box was in front o' them. And then, 'Tyke another to smoke arter

a while.' That finished Anderson, who says:

"'Come outside; there's too many ready to listen here.' And when they were on the sidewalk, 'What boarding house?'

"'Bells o' Shandon,' Lime-juice Jack told him. 'And now I'm be'ind on business already, cap'n. 'Ow about it? Thirty men, a 'underd dollars to the man, ready to sign to-morrow arternoon. Wytin' for you in my boardin' 'ouse.'

"'I'll be there,' says Anderson. 'Two o'clock.'

"'Make it three,' says Jack, who had done some quick figuring before he answered. 'I've got to go to the bank at two.'

"They shook hands on it, and Anderson went back into the saloon, mighty well pleased with the turning of his luck; while Jack went on down to East Street again. Six dollars and twenty-five cents in his pocket and a good cigar, which he hadn't lighted yet. He stowed it away for future use as soon as the skipper was out of sight.

"On East Street, north of Market, there was the same row of secondhand clothing stores that there is now, only a good share of them were dealing in slops. Lime-juice Jack headed for them, and he dived into the first one. He stayed there for a long time, and the noise that came out of that place sounded like one of the old ward primaries south of the Slot, when they used to keep a squad of reserves on hand all evening down at the Southern Station. By the time the proprietor got through with Jack he was sweating blood. And here is the result:

"One long-tailed Prince Albert coat, three dollars—marked down during the proceedings from ten; one thunder-and-lightning vest, a dollar—which nearly broke Jack's heart, but he had showed how badly he wanted it the minute he laid eyes on it; red and green it was; four bits for a stiff hat that the pawnbroker had ironed out himself after rescuing it from a sack of junk; a dollar for a pair of shoes, which held together well enough to support a bright shine; four bits for a red tie and a white collar; and two bits for a dickey.

"Which stage of the affair left Jack shy of new pants, and it took him nearly half an hour to persuade the proprietor to trade him a pair of black breeches without any seat for the tweed suit and cap which he was wearing. On top of which Lime Juice demanded a worn-out old black valise as boot.

"Well, when that session was over with, Lime Juice came out again, wearing the stiff hat on one side of his head, smoking his cigar, and very noisy in the thunder-and-lightning vest—which loomed up big when he left the Prince Albert open. Fifteen cents left. He tried to jingle it, and when he saw that it was useless, he made up for that by cocking his hat a little farther.

"'Now,' says he to himself, 'I'll tyke a look at me boardin' 'ouse.' And having forgot just where the Bells o' Shandon was—not being familiar with the port, you understand—he asked a man and got directions.

"It was evening by this time, and Jack happened to remember that he was good and hungry; so he stopped by the way at a water-front lunch counter, first dousing his cigar and stowing it in his vest pocket. He filled up on beans and coffee for fifteen cents, and felt more like a man of money.

"Five minutes later, the Dutchman who kept the Bells o' Shandon saw him coming into the door and rubbed his eyes. Business was poor with him, you understand, and he was sitting in the barroom with only a sort of man of all work—combination of bartender, swamper, and chambermaid—for company. Being slow of thinking, the Dutchman just sat there with his mouth and eyes wide open while Jack breezed

up to him. Then, having managed to size up that red and green vest, the blazing tie, and all the rest, he shook his head and said that business was slack, and, even if it was good, his was a beer trade; he didn't need any case goods.

"That gave Lime Juice the opening he wanted. He sat down beside the Dutchman and got him to tell more about how bad business was with him. And when he had pulled the old fellow on enough——

"'Too bad,' says he. 'If that's the case, I don't know as I want to tyke a look at your place, arter all. I'm thinkin' o' buying a doss 'ouse.'

"Which brought the Dutchman up standing, and he tried to back away from all that he had said; but Jack only gave him the laugh; and inside of a short time the old boy was fairly begging him to buy the Bells for two thousand dollars.

"'Tell you what I'll do,' says Jack. 'I'll tyke a look around, and then I'll think the matter over. I got another plyce in mind. But a party tells me about this one, and I'll see it any'ow.'

"So the Dutchman took him upstairs and showed him the beds, and then downstairs again and showed him the bar, and Jack acted very offish; talking all the time about the other place, until the Dutchman was afraid to let him out of sight, and managed to persuade him to stay there overnight—after being very liberal with drinks.

"The next morning Jack showed up in his new clothes, but he had made some changes. He had left off the thunder-and-lightning vest as well as the red tie; and he wore the Prince Albert, buttoned up tight, showing only a nice little white patch of dickey and a clean collar. He had the hard hat right on the middle of his head.

"The Dutchman was anxious to do business right away. Jack let himself be persuaded to eat a bite of breakfast; and then he says:

"'Tell you wot. I like some things about the plyce. There's chances 'ere to make money, if the right man 'as it. Now, you come down this arternoon—say one-thirty o'clock—I got a bit of an offis at the corner of Folsom and East Streets. Meet me there and I'll say the word. Make it 'arf arter one sharp; for I got a deal on 'and to-day.'

"Which the Dutchman agreed to do, as it was the best he could do, and promised to be on hand at one-thirty punctually. And Jack left the place.

"He did not go far, but loafed around the corner of Steuart Street, keeping one eye on the Bells o' Shandon, until he saw the Dutchman going out. Then he shot back in a big hurry and sung out to the man of all work who had heard and seen most of what had gone on—asking where the boss was.

"'Well, then, my man, you'll do,' says Jack. 'Gimme two bottles o' the sailor whisky, and give 'em to me in a 'urry. I got a crew to 'andle this mornin'.'

"He stowed the stuff away in his black valise and rushed on out, without saying anything about pay. And, o' course, the man was afraid of offending him by asking.

"He headed for the Clay Street dock, but on the way he saw one of those seamen's missions which you can find on any city front; he dropped in there long enough to get a double handful of tracts, which he stowed away in the black valise, covering up the two bottles of sailor whisky.

"It was eleven o'clock by the time he came to the wharf where the *Maid o' the Mist* was lying, the ship that he had asked the loafer about the day before. The crew were aloft making ready to go to sea, and Lime Juice saw two burlies with clubs pacing up and down the dock, to repel suspicious boarders or keep any of the hands from

deserting. Neither of the guards gave him a second look, for there was nothing about him to make a man think of crimps or runners, and he went aboard at once.

"The skipper was uptown, and the second mate was on deck. Jack headed straight for him and held out his hand.

"'Mornin', brother,' says he, drawing a long face, 'I 'ope there's no hobjection to my 'avin' a word with these poor sailormen when their toil is done.'

"The second mate cocked his eye at that long Prince Albert and the black valise and said he guessed not, but it all depended on what he wanted with the crew.

"'Their souls,' says Jack. 'That's wot I want, brother. Before they go to sea, where the perils of the deep awytes them, I would 'ave a try for their salvation. Brother, are *you* saved?'

"That got the second mate all right, for he didn't fancy having any sky pilot throw his hooks into him for a long talk; and, says he:

"'Never mind about me. Go on for'ard if you want to and preach to the cook. And, when the men come down, you're welcome to any salvation you can pound into their heads.'

"'Pore sinful souls,' says Jack.

"'Aye,' says the mate. 'That's them; and then some.' And he beat it into the cabin, for he saw Jack hauling a tract out of the black valise.

"So Lime-juice Jack went on his way into the galley where the cook was getting dinner ready for all hands. Now ——"

Captain Robertson turned to me and smiled broadly. "There's one accepted rule about cooks. They're all crazy. Every one knows that. And Lime-juice Jack understood it, for he'd dealt with more than one.

"The cook of the *Maid o' the Mist* gave him one look and started swearing right away, thinking to drive him out of the galley by his language, which was something scandalous. A lean little French Canadian, that cook, and so cranky that he was sputtering all the time. Jack let him curse himself blue in the face, and sat there saying nothing; but when he was done at last——

"'Stow it, cooky,' says he. 'Let's 'ave a drink.' With that he reached down under the tracts and pulled out one of those whisky bottles.

"Well, the cook saw what was in the wind right away; but it was none of his business if a runner had slipped aboard; and he was good and thirsty, anyhow, along with the morning's work. So they pulled the cork, and they took a drain at the bottle. That is to say, the cook had a long pull, and Jack wet his lips.

"Sailor whisky, you understand. Warranted to work swift. The kind that makes a man want to bite somebody's ear off when he's had the second drink, and brings ambition to fight his weight in wild cats after the third.

"So the cook had drink number one and went on with his work over the hot stove, talking to Jack between times in the hopes of getting another chance at the bottle before the crew had hold of it. The two of them got on nice and sociable; and, of course, within ten minutes the cook was telling the old story—what a low-lived crew he had to dish food out for. Once on this tack he talked a blue streak; and the more he talked the more he sympathized with himself for being shipmate with this bunch. And——

"'Ave another pull,' says Jack; and when they'd upended the bottle this time: 'It's a shame to 'ave to cook good grub for ungrateful men. *I* know wot you're up against. Hain't I 'eard 'em tell about you?'

"'Tell wot?' says the cook. But Jack shook his head.

"'I wouldn't stir up trouble by

talkin',' says he, 'and wot them beggars said would make you wild.'

"'You mean they been sayin' things about me?' The cook was wild already, for sailor whisky, as I said, is swift as chain lightning.

"'I'll not say nothin' more,' Jack told him, and then he sat there, letting the cook beg until the French had come out good and strong and he was fairly dancing. Then Jack passed the bottle, telling him to calm himself with another drink.

"Now, you know the yellow soap that ships use, and every galley has a bar or two lying around? Well, Jack was close to a stick of that soap, and while the cook was taking a pull at the bottle he managed to lay hold of the stuff and slipped it under his coat.

"'Mate,' says Jack, when this had been done, 'I'll tell you if you don't sye a word, for I don't want to stir up any trouble. But a man like you—wot's got a head on his shoulders, a man o' brains—well, it makes me hot under the collar to 'ear a lot o' bleeders like them up for'ard a blaggardin' such a man.'

"'Blaggardin' me, are they?' says the cook.

"'Mate,' says Jack, 'I was aboard the other night and talkin' with them 'ands; hand the wye they misnamed you was something terrible. One o' them sailors tells me that the stuff you sends into the fo'c'stle for them to eat mykes him so sick he can't turn to for a week—and that down off the Horn when the ship's in a hard wye, too.'

"'He does?' says the cook. 'I know who you're talkin' of. *He* said that?'

"'Ho! Worse than that; leastwyes, the others said worse.' And then Jack shook his head and made believe that he did not want to repeat the language—until the cook had begged him long enough, when the string of scandalous talk that Lime Juice laid to those sailors would raise the hair on a sober man's head, let alone a cook, and him very badly stewed. Finally he ended up with:

"'And they sye you'd bloody well like to p'ison them, and only for them keepin' their heyes open, you'd o' done it long ago.'

"And by this time the hands were coming down to the deck. So Jack warned the cook to say nothing about what he had told; and went on out. But while he was going—the French Canuck being too busy swearing vengeance on that crew to notice what was going on—Lime Juice dropped the cake of yellow soap into the kettle of soup.

"All hands were in the fo'c'stle when Jack showed his head, and they growled when they saw him, for they thought it was a case of long-winded preaching and hymns. But they changed their tune when they saw what was inside of the black valise. The first bottle went round, and they drained it, as only sailors can when they've been months away from port and no chance to go ashore. And by the time Jack had pulled the cork from the second bottle everybody was talking fast.

"This was a regular deep-sea crew—good sailors, strong, able-bodied men, and fit to do what was told them at any time aboard ship. Not one but could show a landsman tricks that he'd never dreamed of, aloft in heavy weather. Not one of them, either, but knew just why Jack was aboard; knew that he wanted to steal them from this ship; knew that, and hated him because he was a crimp.

"But sailors are children. That's what they are. It is a fact.

"So now they had that drink inside of them after a morning's hard work and on empty stomachs. And all of them were beginning to talk at once, sitting on the bunks, with every eye on the other bottle, hoping for a second pull.

"Then Lime Juice mentioned the

cook; and, of course, somebody slanged poor Frenchy right away. Always a feud between the fo'c'stle and the galley, and Jack knew that. He passed round the second bottle, and two or three hands began trying to talk at once, telling him how many kinds of a crank Frenchy was.

"Jack let them have a good five minutes at that, which was plenty of time for the liquor—it being made for such purposes as this. Then he put in his oar.

"Of course, the cook had said enough to him—being somewhat stirred up—to make anybody mad if it was carried back to them. And Jack did not stop with the truth, either. He managed to get one or two local hits off that made several big seamen begin polishing their knuckles. If any of the ship's officers had been passing by the fo'c'stle scuttle at the time, they'd have been surprised at the kind of language the sky pilot had started down there.

"Well, along about then, the pannikins and pans came in; and as soon as the boy had gone back to the galley, Jack fed the bunch drink number three. Then he started a little talk about his boarding house. 'Bells o' Shandon, mates. Beds fit for a king. And best meals on the coast.' After that he let drop a word or two to the effect that anybody who wanted a nice, easy berth on a coastwise vessel with forty-five dollars a month and plenty of time in port could get it by coming ashore with him and chucking this old hooker right now. He drummed these things into their muddled heads before he had his final say, which was something like this:

"'And, mates, I'm tellin' you, look out for that cook. 'E says you're such a lot of bleedin' swine, 'e's 'arf a notion to p'ison the soup on you and get rid o' the 'ole lot.'

"And just then, of course, in comes the boy with the soup.

"Well, the whisky had done its share now, and was good and hot inside of every man of them. And the soup went round.

"Some one—whoever was the first to taste it—let out a yell. And somebody else bellowed that the cook was trying to poison them. And then another—'twas one of those who'd been polishing his knuckles because of what the cook had said about him—started for the galley on a run.

"'Where you goin'?' says Jack.

"'Goin' to pour this soup down Frenchy's throat if I got to choke him to death doin' it,' says the fellow; and somebody else sung out, 'Come on, lads!'

"They piled back, all thirty of them, heading for the galley, with pans of hot soup in their hands and telling one another what they'd do to Frenchy.

"Of course the cook heard them coming, and, of course, he had been stewing a whole lot over what Jack had told him. So he just laid for them close beside the galley door, and when the first head showed he landed on it with a sooty skillet—whang!

"That was the beginning. The noise that followed was loud enough to hear up on Telegraph Hill. Thirty sailors fighting one another for the chance to get into that galley door, spilling the hot soup down one another's necks and tramping on one another's feet. And the cook handling that skillet as fast as only a man can who figures on saving his face from getting stove in by sailors' boots.

"The racket brought the captain and the mates on a run from aft; and, what with the whisky and the general desire to let off steam, the men gave them a pretty warm reception when they landed in the middle of the fracas. Nice, long-winded, free fight it was, and left half a dozen black eyes, one or two broken heads, and several bleeding noses.

"When it was all over, the officers herded the men into the fo'c'stle and went back aft, pretty well the worse for wear themselves. The cook was tending to his own bruises in the galley. And the whisky was dying out all round.

"A minute or so afterward came the call, 'All hands!'

"Time to go aloft again. An afternoon's work ahead of them. No dinner. Not a bite. Empty stomachs. And, on top of that, the general disgust with the whole world that a man feels when the whisky is getting cold. That was the way in the fo'c'stle. The thirty of them sat round cursing the ship, the cook, the captain, and the mates. And then the call to turn to came again.

"Lime-juice Jack showed his head in the companionway. 'Any of you lads wants a berth coastwise——' He started, but he didn't finish, for——

"'Aw, to thunder with this ship, anyhow!' says somebody, and another sings out, 'Come on, lads!'

"Before a man could say three words, the whole bunch was piling out on deck and over side. They came dropping on to the wharf like sheep. The burlies with the clubs started for them, but they lasted swift. The crew of the *Maid o' the Mist* went on, surging up the dock, with Lime-juice Jack in front of them and jail behind—if they got caught.

"Up the dock to East Street, and down East Street to Folsom. And when they neared the corner, Lime-juice Jack saw the Dutchman who owned the Bells o' Shandon standing by. He had been in half a dozen places asking for Jack's office, and was about to give it up, thinking he had been done, and never knowing that he was standing right in the office now, when Jack hove in sight.

"Now the Dutchman was a crimp himself, of course, and it didn't take him long to size up that end of the situation when he clapped eyes on the thirty seamen. He naturally didn't stop to talk about the sale of his place when Jack hailed him.

"'''Ere, mates,' Jack told the men. ''Ere's my pardner.' And he winked at the Dutchman. ''Ow about a coastwise berth for these 'ere lads?'

"'Sure dings!' says the Dutchman. 'Blenty off chobs!'

"'Come on, lads,' Jack sung out, 'and we'll 'ave a drink on me when we get to the 'ouse.'

"So they rushed the crew up to the Bells, and the Dutchman got no chance to do any thinking, either; for there was a round of drinks to serve; and then another; and at the same time it kept him running to get his hands on what dunnage the men had brought and clap it under lock and key—which is the first proceeding in every sailors' boarding house. He was still puffing when Captain Anderson blew in.

"'Got my men?' says he, not more than half believing that he was going to see them. He nearly fell over when he laid eyes on the bunch. Lime-juice Jack had them well in hand by now, having let them know how easy it would be to turn them over to their skipper—which they knew meant irons, rough treatment, and losing their pay. So they followed him meekly enough up the street to sign with their new ship. And, when that had been done, and the last of them was on board, Anderson turned over three thousand dollars to Jack.

"The Dutchman was sitting alone in the Bells o' Shandon when Jack returned. During the afternoon he had been thinking considerably. The first word he said was to ask what he was going to get out of all this.

"'Hit's my boardin' 'ouse, ain't it?' says Jack. 'Hi says I'd buy it at one-thirty.'

"'But you didn't buy it,' says the Dutchman.

"'All right,' says Jack. 'Then we call the deal hoff, eh?'

"The Dutchman scratched his head, trying to see just where he was at. And Jack started for the door.

"'Tell you wot,' says he, over his shoulder, 'I'll give you your two thousand now and take the plyce, or you can try and collect your share o' that blood money.'

"And the Dutchman was quick enough to see that he'd better take the two thousand."

Captain Robertson laughed and gazed out across the bay.

"So," I said, "he got the boarding house."

Captain Robertson brought his eyes back to me, and he stroked his beard. "Wait a bit, I'm not through. High finance, I said; and that is a game where all hands are playing all the time. Now——

"They couldn't swing the deal through until the next morning, of course, and Lime-juice Jack was set on taking possession at once. The Dutchman considered for a long time, and in the end he said, all right; and he would stay around to show him the ropes. Which sounded fair enough. So Jack established himself here in the barroom, and the Dutchman introduced him to every one who dropped in.

"Along about eight o'clock the Dutchman went out—to take the air, he said; and by nine he was back again. Soon afterward there came a bunch o' sailormen, and Jack was on his feet with an eye to business at once. He invited them to have a drink, and the boy who tended bar shoved the glasses to them, including Jack's, of course."

Captain Robertson paused again, and I could see that it was for effect. When he resumed his eyes were twinkling.

"The next morning Jack awoke with his head ringing like a church bell and the gurgle of water right against his ears. He knew that sound. He lost no time opening his eyes. The creak o' the mast came to him at the same minute. And in that same second when he knew the truth—that he was in a ship's fo'c'stle—he made one grab for his pockets; but it was time wasted. They'd robbed him as well as shanghaied him."

"You mean?" I interrupted.

Captain Robertson nodded. "Aye. I mean the Dutchman was slow, but he was sure; he'd put up the job while he went out early in the evening, and they'd hocused Jack's whisky later on. And here he was—as poor as he had started out, poorer, in fact. And that wasn't all. The call of 'All hands' came, and he stumbled onto the deck; and then he found out the cream of it——

"They'd shipped him with Captain Erickson on the *Maid o' the Mist*, the ship whose crew he'd stolen yesterday. And so I tell you, as I told you on starting out, when it comes to high finance, I can't see how these twentieth-century Napoleons are any swifter than Lime-juice Jack, and I'm dead sure that you won't find any o' them any surer than the Dutchman. As for the game, why, it's the same now as it was then, after all."

"ZEKE" CANDLER AND HIS WATCHES

Representative "Zeke" Candler, of Mississippi, famous for his oratorical exploitation of the Tombigbee River, has a fad of which he makes no secret. He carries two watches, a slow one to go to bed by, and a fast one to regulate his time for getting up in the morning.

His Six-Gun Job

By B. M. Bower and Buck Conners

Everybody has heard of the fearless Texas Rangers—there is not another body of men in this country like them. Doing scouting duty, police duty, detective work—anything that makes for the peace and order of the State—they always accomplish whatever they set out to do, or die on the job. In this powerful story the hero is a hero-worshiping kid, initiated as a Ranger and out on his first trail; so you see him literally "in the making." This is the first of a series that will follow the fortunes of Van Dillon.

(A Two-Part Story—Part I.)

CHAPTER I.

AS a general thing I like boys. I like them if they are real boys, and if they don't make life too miserable for me, though I'm willing to stand for a lot of misery, too, provided there's a real boy back of it with the makings of a real man in him.

Van Dillon, when I first met him, was what I would call a real boy. Seventeen and getting a little too much for Brazos Peaks to handle, so that sober citizens—the kind that hang out in the wagon yards and around the post office—got the habit of prophesying what the kid's future was going to be. According to them, it was not going to be a bit pleasant for Van.

You might say I met him before I even landed in the town. At any rate, when I rode, ambling in off the open range to the edge of the burg, where said sober citizens dumped their garbage in a fringe along the outskirts of their city after the manner of little towns the West over, I met the first general effect of Van's seventeen-year-old energy. This came in the shape of a white dog with liver spots and a good pair of lungs and a high, soprano voice and a long tail and two tin cans attached thereto. Also he had all the doorways filled with outraged citizens, who named the name of Van Dillon as the author of all this disturbance which they hated. You'll notice that sober citizens always are outraged by any disturbance they don't create themselves.

Well, I went on up the street, making almost as much fuss about it as the dog, except that I wasn't hollering my head off. I was riding, believe me! My horse was dog-shy, anyway, and take one with a couple of tin cans and a bunch of yelps the size of these, and he couldn't seem to invent enough motions to express his feelings. I kept right along with him—but I admit I was doing some riding.

At the far end of the street was a whooping, yelling bunch of boys that scattered like throwing a rock into a flock of chickens when I surged up among them. But one big, good-looking kid didn't run; he stood there just touching a match blaze to a cigarette, and watched me while he pinched out the blaze.

He grinned and sauntered closer when I'd calmed Frog Walker down and got off in front of a saloon, and

advised me to paint my saddle with glue so I could stick to it better. I looked him over with one glance—that's part of my trade—and sized him up for a young cub that's feeling the first growing pains of character and takes it out in devilment; and went on in and forgot about him.

I remembered him when I came out and started to ride out to the livery stable beyond the edge of town. I found that the glue had been thoughtfully supplied and was just beginning to stick good. So I joined Brazos Peaks in prophesying the future of that kid, and I didn't dope it out as being any too pleasant, either. Hanging was about the mildest fate I thought he had any right to expect. I'm human, you see—and glue is glue, and I consider it outa place on the seat of my saddle.

The next day I ran into him again. This time his devilment was more mild—or maybe I thought so because I didn't happen to be the target. He had caught up a burro from out on the mesa, where hundreds of mixed stock grazed. He had taken it to the stock pens at the railroad, where there were several small corrals built for the loading out and receiving of stock, and he and his bunch were having a bucking-horse contest with that one lone burro, in imitation of the contests they had seen at San Angelo and Pecos.

Van Dillon was not only running the show and calling out the names of riders and mounts, but he was also doing most of the riding. He'd cup his hands around his mouth like a megaphone and holla something like this: "Lay-dees and *gentle*-mun! We will now have the pleasure of *wit*-nussing that world-famous *ry*-dur, Pecos the *Peel*-ur, riding and subduing without candy, chloroform, or *six*-shoot-urr, that wild-eyed, kicking, fighting son of a gun *Coffin* Nail. (Hey, you, Red, whatchuh mean, letting that burro git away off there? Bring 'm back here! I'm goin' ta ride 'im in a minute!) Lay-dees and *gentle*-mun, this *far*-famed *ri*der has traveled from the Bay of Mexico to the Hudson, and has never bit the dust! Er——"

He'd see that Red was getting leery of the burro maybe, and cut his talk short and grab the rope and watch his chance and pile on as Pecos the Peeler subduing Coffin Nail. Sometimes he would subdue, and sometimes he wouldn't. That particular burro was some scrapper himself, and I could easy see why the rest of the bunch was willing to sit on the fence and be the audience; but you will understand that I mean it when I say that Van Dillon was the busiest kid in Brazos Peak, and that his mother was going to take a fit when she saw his clothes and his scratches.

There's always some boy left in all of us, I reckon—till we get too old to hobble, anyway. If I had any pressing errand I plumb forgot what it was, and climbed up and roosted alongside a kid that was mostly freckles and faded blue overalls and holla. Then Van spotted me and remembered me, and sized me up to see whether I was friend or foe. Next announcement, he waved his hand toward me and announced that "*Sticking* Plaster *Bill* would now pro-ceed to ride *Star* Scraper without *saddle, bridle,* or *sofa cushion*"—and then he stood and looked at me.

So I looked at him a minute, and decided to forget about the glue. I climbed down and straddled the burro, who was named Star Scraper for the time being and trying his little darndest to live up to his name, and managed to hang on till I could leave him and take my dignity along with me. A burro, believe me, can give a man all he wants if he sets his mind on it, and lightning don't strike him before he's through.

This didn't happen to be a good day for lightning, so I got as busy as Van Dillon before I'd been there long. There was a lot of devil in that kid all right. I guess maybe that's why I kind of took a fancy to him. He had brains, and he didn't spill over with words, like most boys of that age do. He sized me up, and, without his saying a word, I sabed that he was trying, as the saying is, to get my goat. He played fair, though. He'd announce himself, every other time regular, and make his ride. Then he'd announce me, and I'd make a ride—or a spill, as the case might be. That burro sure was some burro!

Well, we rode turn about, and no words passed on the subject of goats or glue till the burro just naturally gentled down and refused to perform. And I invited Van over to the hotel to have supper with me, just like he was a grown man; and after that we were friends. I figured that he wasn't used to having men treat him like an equal. He'd got in the way of handing them trouble just to sort of even up that aw-go-off-and-play attitude they used toward him. Van Dillon was growing up. He was at that hard age where kid play didn't satisfy him any longer, and men wouldn't take him in and make him one of them. I can look back at that time myself, and I know it isn't any picnic to feel you're a man, when your mother tells everybody you're only seventeen even if you are big for your age.

So I guess I was about the first man that threw in with him, and he sure froze to me. Brazos Peaks had watched him grow up out of dresses and spanks to knee pants and a switch, and out of knee pants to chaps and boots and spurs, and Brazos Peaks couldn't see him as anything but a nuisance. But to me Van talked man talk and didn't get the laugh—and I guess that meant more to the kid than I realized at the time.

Now, before we go any farther, I'd like to have it distinctly understood that I'm no story-writer by trade. What that trade is I'll tell you when I get to it—but it sure isn't writing stories. I can tell them, the boys say; and that's why I had the nerve maybe to start this yarn. I thought I'd write it down just like I'd tell it to the boys, but somehow it don't seem to unwind just the same.

What I'm getting at is this: There are two things that happened while I was in Brazos Peaks that I want you folks to know about. They sort of helped to build up what comes afterward. And the darned things don't seem to flow into this burro deal, nor into each other, nor into anything They stand by themselves, and I don't know how to slide them in smooth the way a real story-writer would do it. I guess about the best way is to tell about them and call them incidents, and let it go at that. I won't try to fit them together, because I'd just make a mess of it. I can spell, but this other comes under the head of plot construction; I know, because I asked a man that knew a real, honest-to-John author once. And plot construction and I haven't ever been introduced to each other yet. So, if you'll excuse me, I'll go ahead the best I know how, and let the plot-construction stuff slide.

A week or so—maybe longer—after the burro contest, I happened to be riding away out west of town. Coming in from Big Valley, I was. That's where this thing happened that I wanted to tell about, and was stumped for three days over the best way to slide it in.

Two roads cross the river and fork on both sides. They made a wide swing to hit that crossing—both of them did. And that's because that river is surely treacherous, with eddies and deep holes and quicksand patches along the bank.

Here at the crossing there was a strip of shale rock that made hard bottom and safe enough for a ford, so long as you didn't get off it. If you did, it was just about good night for you and your horse, unless somebody happened to be right handy with a rope.

And, while we're on the subject, I want to say that there's a lot of stuff you've read about quicksand that you ought to forget. All this slow-agony business, while waiting for help, and the like of that. Take it from me, folks, quicksand is not *slow!* That's why it's called quicksand. There's a soft sand that will suck you down, give it time enough—that's a different proposition. This that I'm talking about was *quick*sand, and it was right alongside the rock-bottom ford, on the downstream side as you ride from out on the mesa toward Brazos Peaks.

Van Dillon, it seems, had been out on the mesa on that side the river, and was headed for home. He was a great kid for being out that way—the range and range folks and range work looked better to him than anything he ever knew, so he had kind of taken charge of the town herd to the extent that he used to hunt up any cattle that strayed off. A greaser did the straight herding, and when he missed any stock he'd tell Van, and Van would get out after it. Gave him an excuse for riding the range and made him feel like he was doing a man's work and packing a man's load of responsibility. Van didn't have to work—his dad was a doctor and making good money, and Van could do as he pleased.

Well, he rode down to the ford, and his horse started to drink. You know how a thirsty horse will kind of follow the current and drink downstream? That's what Van's horse was doing. And Van never noticed that he was working off the rock-bottom ford, because the current had sort of shifted sand over the rock and made it hard to tell just which was which. And the first thing he knew about it, his horse stepped right off into that bed of quicksand.

No chance for Van to scramble out—none in the world. The water was running about ten inches deep over it, and the best he could look for was to drown before the sand choked him. He was a nervy kid, but I know he went to hell and back right in the next minute. I know, because I've had my taste of quicksand. It was bad enough to give me a nightmare yet, sometimes—and none of the boys that know me well will sleep with me just on account of that. They claim wild cats is nothing to me when I get to fighting quicksand in my sleep.

What saved Van was his horse, that got the fear of death the minute his feet sank in the stuff. He struggled and threw himself from side to side and kind of slowed up the sucking-under process. He was in to his saddle skirts, though, in the first half minute, and Van was in to his hips and hanging to the saddle to hold himself up. He yelled—just twice.

A fellow was coming down to the ford on the other side, and he saw what was happening and spurred out in big lunges. That much I saw myself, because I was riding down the trail from Big Valley, on Van's side of the river. I couldn't see Van for the low bank—him being in the edge of the water. But when I saw that horseman plowing out into the water that way, and nobody after him, I spurred up just from instinct that something was wrong.

He was still out in midstream when I saw him shake out his rope loop and whirl it over his head without slackening up a bit of speed. He threw his loop and took a couple of turns around the saddle horn, and dashed on across the ford and out on solid ground.

By that time I was tearing down the bank and could see what was wrong.

Van was down to his shoulders then, with his arms and head out—that's how fast quicksand gets in its work. He had caught the rope in both hands, and he hung on. And the fellow's horse leaned forward, and the man himself threw his weight to the other side of the saddle to keep it from turning under him, and the two of them pulled Van out just as I got there with my own rope swinging over my head.

Van's horse threw up his head, and you could see the white all around his eyes with the death fear that had him. He screamed—and, say, if you never heard a horse scream when he looks at death, believe me, you don't want to. It's a sound that's hard to hear, and a whole lot harder to forget.

My own loop settled over the horse's head—that was about all of him that wasn't under, for all his struggling; that and the horn and cantle of the saddle. Van got his hands out of the loop, and the stranger widened it with one flip, and with another flip got it over the saddle horn. Then we both threw the steel into our caballos and pulled the poor beast out.

If he had been built like Van, long and slim, he'd have come out of it all right. But his body had more surface for the sand to grip. So I broke his neck getting him out of it. But we saved Van's saddle and bridle, anyway.

Van came out of that pretty white, and pretty shaky; and it wasn't any shame to him that two big tears rolled down his cheeks when he reached up to shake hands with the man who had saved his life by quick work and quicker thinking. If he'd waited till he got across the river before he started to do anything, Van would have been head under and still going. No, it isn't a nice death; I don't know but what I'd choose hanging myself—and a man is supposed to dread that worse than anything.

The man was a stranger to Van and to me—and I gathered he was a stranger to the country, too. He wasn't the kind I'd pick for a trail partner, either. Part of my trade is to get a man's number in the wink of an eye or thereabouts—and his number was on the wrong side of the book, if I was any judge. He had shifty, green eyes, and he also had a ragged scar in the shape of a cross on his left cheek bone, where his face had probably been laid open in a fight some time.

He helped get Van's saddle off the dead horse, and he kept saying, "Aw, that's all right, kid. Don't mention it!" whenever Van tried to stutter something about how grateful he was. But he didn't tell us his name, nor where he was going, nor anything about himself. Not that we asked, of course, but he didn't hand out any information. When we were through, and Van had got up behind me on my horse, we started off in different directions; Van and me across the ford and on to town, and the scar-faced fellow up the trail toward Big Valley.

So, when Van got into some dry clothes and kinda got over the scare, that winds up the quicksand deal. And there isn't any way that I can see of making that lead up gently to the Brazos Peak clean-up; that's where real authors have got the best of me. All I can do is jump right into holiday time, with me still in Brazos Peaks on business of my own, and still good friends with Van Dillon.

Brazos Peaks had one holiday custom it wouldn't hurt other little cow towns to copy; or big towns, either, for that matter. All the year round it was just like any other town; not very good, and not so terribly bad you couldn't live in it; just a plain, ordinary cow town with hilarious nights at the saloons when the punchers rode in off the range at shipping time, and so on, and gambling and wine and song—you know about how it goes, I reckon.

But on New Year's Eve, precisely, the sober leading citizens always rose up on their hind legs and had a general, moral house-cleaning. They'd make the rounds of all the naughty places, gather up all the undesirables that had accumulated during the year, escort them solemnly out beyond the garbage dumps which signified the city limits, and tell the bunch to vamose. And they'd stand there with their six-guns and watch them fade into the distance; and then they'd go back and have a few drinks and feel so dog-goned virtuous angels had nothing on them but the wings.

They didn't overlook any bets—those same sober citizens. They always saved them one chink for the laundry business, a Mexican scavenger, and another one to serve chili at Jim's place. But the rest had to go, and no argument about it. Van Dillon told me about it first, and I thought he was just joking—though I'd heard, of course, of the row they had the year before. Van said, though, that they'd done it ever since he could remember, and that he'd grown up thinking New Year's beat Christmas and Fourth of July rolled together.

Well, the year before, things hadn't gone off as per usual. There had been a hitch in the custom; a bad hitch, at that. The wicked did not flee the way they'd always done. They had showed fight, and they had shot up two of Brazos Peaks' best men. One was a cow-puncher that was popular, and all the punchers this year were fixing to get even.

Along after Thanksgiving, toughs commenced drifting into town, and a blind man could see that things were due to pop on New Year's Eve, if the clean-up went on as advertised. You couldn't hear anything else talked about around the saloons and wagon yards scarcely; and the sheep and the goats, as you might call them, commenced giving one another the bad eye long before Christmas. It got to be pretty well understood that the fight the year before was just a sample package of what was due to happen this year.

So, along before Christmas, some of the leading citizens framed up a petition and sent it to the governor of the State, asking for protection during the holidays; and the timid ones cheered up a lot—till they saw the kind of protection they were going to get.

The governor did not send the State militia, as they probably expected he would do. Instead of that, he sent one lone Texas ranger, with orders to watch things. I saw the order myself, and that was how it read.

Van was just telling me how *he* would handle that tough bunch if he had the running of things, when Ranger Kent walked into the post office. We'd all heard he was coming, and since Brazos Peaks had never had a State ranger sent there on any special public duty that let the town in on his business, Brazos Peaks was curious. Van looked him over when he walked up and introduced himself to the postmaster, and gave a grunt. "Is *that* a Texas ranger?" his grunt said, plain as words.

Kent did not look a satisfactory substitute for the State militia, and that's a fact; and I grinned to myself when I saw how Van and some of the others were sizing him up. Kent wore a six-shooter and belt—but so did lots of men in town. I did myself, for that matter. Except for his star, with "Texas Ranger Force" stamped across it, that he wore on his gun belt where his coat generally hid it, and his thirty-thirty carbine neatly cased in its scabbard, he did not look much different from any other simon-pure Western man—unless you knew Kent, and knew what it meant to be a ranger.

Brazos Peaks knew about the ranger force—since it was in Texas. So did Van. But Brazos Peaks had not seen

one man sent to do the work of a company of militia, and Brazos Peaks had its doubts. Van didn't have doubts exactly. Van knew just where that ranger person was going to head in at. Van, over a cigarette which he smoked with that self-conscious manliness of a seventeen-year-old, told me over and over, with the sublime assurance of youth and ignorance, that this Texas ranger was just simply committing suicide the minute he faced that tough bunch on New Year's Eve. He would look at Kent with those round, blue eyes that always got bigger and rounder when Van got more serious than usual, and size him up as a doomed man or one that was going to turn tail and run when the fight came off.

Now I'm not going to stop here long enough to tell about that clean-up. That would be a story itself, and that wasn't what I started out to tell. My story is about Van Dillon, and not State Ranger Kent. But you must know that there is not another body of men in the country like the State rangers of Texas. Picked men, every one of them, they are; they've got to be. Doing scouting duty, police duty, detective work—anything that makes for the peace and order of the State. Doing it quietly, without any flags flying or any brass-band effect. Let this one fact sink into your minds, with all that it means: Soldiers marry—a ranger never does. I don't know as it's against the law exactly, but it sure is against all custom. Their lives are too full of hazard. There must be no wife or children to cry and cling when a ranger takes to the saddle. Generally the chances are at the best only fifty-fifty that they'll come back the way they went, sitting up straight in their saddles. It's a case of do what they're sent out to do, or die on the job—and they do it. That's what makes their power. The State backs them up to the last ditch. If they must kill, no questions are asked.

If they are killed—well, they are buried. And they are remembered for brave men—real men, who died a-trying. I could tell you things—I will, too, some other time, when I get through with Van. But just bear in mind what I've said about the breed they call rangers in Texas.

So Ranger Kent cleaned up Brazos Peaks, and cased his carbine, and went his way to do whatever else his captain might command.

He didn't get killed. Nobody got killed. Ranger Kent rounded up the undesirables, and he told them to go—and they went. Brazos Peaks, I reckon, is talking about it yet.

The point I'm getting at is the way it affected the kid. Seventeen is just the right age for a real hero worshiper, and Van had just the right stuff in him to worship a man like Kent. Van went farther, after he had watched that clean-up. He had brains—a mind that thought things out pretty straight for a kid of his age. He saw what stood back of Kent; what it was that made that tough bunch trail out like sheep when Kent said go. He saw the State ranger force—and force is right; it is a force, few as they are, in numbers. He saw the spirit of the men that relieved the Alamo away back before Van was born.

He got more quiet in his ways, and Brazos Peaks found him a heap easier to live with. He used to sit and talk to me as long as I would listen about Ranger Kent and the way he handled those toughs, and about the rangers as a body. To Van—not to be disrespectful at all—the Texas rangers stood right up close to the Almighty for being a power to reckon with. Oh, he had it bad, all right; worse than I realized at the time.

Now—and don't think I'm throwing myself any bouquets; I'm merely stating my trade—I'm a ranger myself. I didn't tell Van that, though. My business in Brazos Peaks was not a matter

for public knowledge, it being in the line of detective work and having to do with smuggling arms across the border into Mexico. I wasn't out with any brass band, announcing that I was a ranger, understand. I was a stock hand for the time being, and my star I wore pinned on the inside of my vest—and I kind of hate to tell you that much, even.

I could have told Van a whole lot that would have made his eyes stick out. I bunked with Kent, and hit the long trails with him, and had helped him put over harder stuff than cleaning up Brazos Peaks. I stood back of him that night, if there'd been any call to help him out; though it would have had to be a show-down, of course, before I'd give away my identity. Van, I reckon, would have stepped high, if he had known that the fellow he was chumming with that night, and that stood beside him watching Kent, had an extra six-gun in his coat pocket and his finger crooked on the trigger, ready to shoot if Kent got the worst of it. Kent and I passed each other up for strangers, of course—for I'd caught his eye when he first walked into the post office that day, and gave him the tip. But—well, I reckon I could have kept the kid interested for a minute or two, anyway, if I had told him a few little things I knew.

I could have put him wise to a lot of hardship and long, hard trails and lonely days and nights, to say nothing of knowing that your life is in your own hands every hour of the twenty-four that you're a ranger. I could have told him what it felt like to sit with your back always against the wall and your face toward the doors and windows, and to have your hand go into your pocket or back to your hip just by instinct when you hear a noise you can't place on the instant; and to get a cat's habit of seeing in the dark, and to sleep with your carbine and your six-gun for bed pals, under the blankets alongside you. Not under your pillow! Lord, I should say not—that's too risky. Down under the blankets, where night callers can't watch your hand get a grip on your weapon. I could have wised Van up a lot, but I didn't. For one thing, I wasn't advertising my knowledge of the force. For another, a kid like that has got to have his spell of hero worshiping, and they generally get over it like the measles and come out all right if you leave them alone and don't argue with them. And Van, I figured, could pick a lot worse hero than State Ranger Kent to worship.

So after a while, like Kent, I did what I was sent to Brazos Peaks to do. And then, one evening, in the edge of dusk—rangers travel under cover of night mostly—I saddled my horse and rode away across the mesa; and not even Van Dillon knew when I went, or why I went, or where.

CHAPTER II.

If this was my story, there wouldn't be this gap, between January 15th or thereabouts and the middle of May. Things happened in between—don't figure life as just one string of days where eating was the biggest adventure I could count on. Eating, in the ranger service, is something you do when you've got time and grub; otherwise you roll an extra cigarette and go along about your business and try to forget about your stomach. No, sir, I'll bet anything I've got that you never heard a get-fat-quick crank advise anybody to join the rangers. Fresh air and exercise you get aplenty; grub you get when the play comes right.

On the whole, if you want to account for me during that winter and early spring, just put me down as being on intimate terms with my saddle most of the time, with a breathing spell now and then when I hung out at headquarters and rested up and held down a chair in the office and wondered what

minute I'd be called out, and where it would take me—something like firemen sitting around waiting for the bell.

This day I was camped down in the captain's office with my feet on a chair and a cigarette in my face, reading what the public believed to be a truthful account of the Mexican situation, but what I knew to be about as close to facts as the comic supplement I'd just laid aside. I was just in off a long, hard trip up toward Organ Pass, and I felt as if a millionaire had nothing on me for solid comfort and luxury—me camped down in two chairs and reading a paper that was only a couple of days old! Captain Oakes was just signing a field report of my trip and had told me he was going to ride in to town and I could look after the office; which I was dead willing to do, you bet, as long as I didn't have to take down my feet. If you've ever made a sixty-mile ride in to camp and settled yourself down with a cigarette and a paper, and your stomach full of good grub, you know the feeling, all right.

Somebody stepped up on the narrow platform outside and knocked at the door, and I kind of braced myself just by instinct. You get that way, on the force. You never know what's on the other side of a closed door, and you get the habit of being ready for anything. I was in the office at headquarters—but I was sitting with my back to the wall and my face toward the door and both windows, for all that. Captain Oakes was the same. He straightened up quick from buckling on his spurs, and told the knocker to come in. It was probably one of the boys—we always gave warning when we came to that door—but it didn't sound like one of our bunch; you get to know footsteps and knuckle tattoos when you're right with a bunch for a while.

So the fellow came in and faced two men ready to meet a friend or an enemy, whichever showed on the threshold.

If you'll believe me, it was Van Dillon. He took off his hat and held it in one hand. He had a letter from the adjutant general in the other, and on his face he had a look of importance and seriousness and a kid complacence with himself that I got, all right, and grinned over behind my paper. He didn't know me—for the simple reason that he didn't recognize my boots, and the rest of me was hid behind the newspaper. Before he got to the desk I savvied. I knew the envelope he carried—it was official. I knew that look on his face; his lips twitching with trying to hold back a smile, and his eyes big and round as a dollar with his seriousness. You bet, I *savvied*.

That youngster—just barely scraping eighteen years of life, by the calendar—had gone to the governor and made personal application to be appointed a State ranger. He'd jumped his age up to twenty-one—he had to, or he wouldn't have been legally eligible!—and what sort of a talk he had made for himself I could guess, knowing Van as I did. It was an all-right talk—his being here in the office of Captain Oakes, with that letter, proved that much. I knew how careful the governor was about putting men on the ranger roll. But Van was big for his age, and straight and well muscled from living so much out of doors with gun and horses, and he had the right look in his eyes. Anyway, here he was.

The captain sat down and read the letter, and then looked Van over with those little, quiet eyes of his that could spot the yellow in a man a mile off. He didn't say anything at all—that was Captain Oakes' way. He'd give you the once-over, as the saying is, and get your number and say nothing about it. But he'd sure have you tagged and laid by for future reference—and the blun-

ders he made you never knew about; I never caught him in one, anyway.

Van was altogether too busy himself, sizing up the room and staring at a stack of rifles in their scabbards and an assortment of handcuffs and spurs and things on the wall, to realize that he was being weighed and measured for the work before him, or to wonder who was the fellow behind the newspaper.

The captain could have refused to accept him, but he didn't. He turned and reached into a drawer for the enlistment papers he wanted, and commenced filling out a descriptive list and warrant.

"I might as well salt you now," he said, when he had finished. "Stand up and take the oath."

Van stood up, smiling all over his face because he just couldn't help himself, he was so tickled. He went through the form like he was saying "I will" in a marriage ceremony—kind of scared, but happy and too proud for words. Poor kid, he didn't know the trail he'd have to travel—none of us knew when and where it would end. It kind of got me, that knew the life so well and how hard it is in spots. I sat back there and looked at him through a slit in the paper where it had torn on the fold, and wished the Lord his father had caught him and shut him up somewhere. I did, for a fact.

I wish you could have seen Van's face when the captain issued him his thirty-thirty carbine and scouting belt—or no, I don't, either. It would have hit you, maybe, the way it hit me; sending a baby to war is kind of how I felt about it; and the worst of it was his pride and his joy, and never realizing that giving him the gun and the belt was just like saying, in so many words: "There you are, kid. Ride out and kill or be killed, as the case may be." To Van it was just simply like saying: "Here! You sure are a man now, all right!"

I saw his fingers go feeling over the thimbles for the thirty-thirty ammunition, and up to the top row that was reserved for fifty rounds of forty-fives, after he had buckled on the belt. And his eyes were big and round, and his lips, that had the baby look to them still and had not learned yet how to be stern and cruel, quivering with the smile he felt it would not be proper to show. Oh, well! They play ragtime with brass bands, and they flutter flags and hurrah till they're hoarse, when boys like Van march off to war. And the boys step out, proud as a circus horse, and never think how they'll wind up, wounded in fever swamps, maybe, and living like dogs and dying like dogs. Being a man is hard and grim and cruel, after all.

When the captain picked a pair of handcuffs off the wall and told Van to put them in his pocket, the kid's shoulders lifted a full inch with the manliness he was growing into so fast. And when Captain Oakes got a badge out of a drawer and handed it to him—just a plain, white metal star with little knobs on the points and the words "Texas Ranger Force" stamped deep across the face of it—Van turned red and then pale with the pride that filled him. I had to swallow hard myself. I could remember how I felt when I first pinned on a star the mate of that one—and I was nearer thirty than Van was to twenty-one when I joined the force.

Of course I could have stopped the thing right there. I could have told the captain that Van Dillon was just barely eighteen years old, and that would have settled it. But I didn't have the heart to do it. I wanted to get up and turn him across my lap and spank him good, and I wanted to go up and slap him on the back and wish him good luck, but I didn't do either one.

Looking at it calm and impartial,

it would be dandy schooling for Van, providing, of course, he didn't get killed off before he got educated. If he was lucky and didn't get shot or knifed, he'd be some *man* in a couple of years! And I kind of figured that, take a kid with his energy and general rambunctiousness, and he was about due to break out somehow. And letting him into the ranger force would keep him clean and straight, anyway; and that's more than half the battle, to my way of thinking..

When the captain asked him what he had in the way of equipment, Van looked up and said he had his own riding outfit and bedding roll. And then he hauled out a range model Colt forty-five, and asked if that would do for a six-shooter. You could see how proud he was of owning a gun!

The captain looked at him a minute. "It would," he said, in that slow, dry way he had, "if it didn't take you all day and half the night to draw it."

Van's face turned red and his eyes got round again and kind of staring—a look that used to make Brazos Peaks folks hunt corners. I don't suppose Van had ever stood for a remark like that in his life without letting folks know what he thought about it; he was the kind of kid that won't take anything off anybody, no matter who he is that hands out the jolt; and, to tell the truth, I looked for results right there, because Captain Oakes was not Brazos Peaks, and his quiet ways were not to be mistaken for any easy-going disposition. He was captain of the rangers, remember—the god in the machine that kept order along that turbulent border line—and there wasn't a man under him but stepped when the captain spoke.

Van didn't start anything, though. He did have some sense, and he swallowed what he wanted to say. "I wasn't pulling it like I would if I was going to shoot," he said, in a sort of half apology.

I guess the captain understood. He reached out and laid his hand on the kid's shoulder. "Son," he said, "a ranger never knows what he's going up against. If you pull your gun, pull it *quick*. Always take it for granted that the other man is greased lightning on the draw—and then beat him to it. Like this, Dillon." The captain turned half away, so that Van could see how his hand flew to his hip, but he was so swift I don't believe Van caught the movement or saw anything till the captain's gun was out and aimed from the hip.

"Gee!" said Van, goggling at the gun.

"Practice that," said Captain Oakes. "You're young, and if you start in right you ought to learn fast. You may never have to shoot a man—but if you do you want to shoot quick, and shoot straight. That's a part of every ranger's training—that's what makes the force what it is. If you go after a man, and he *knows* you'll shoot quick, and shoot straight, he's going to think twice before he pushes you that far. Never argue with a man. And never take it for granted you know what's in the other man's hand. You don't. The mildest-acting man may be watching his chance to kill you; the toughest may go a long way to do you a favor. Keep this fact always in mind, son: You never can tell. So never be off your guard."

Quite a lecture, to come from Captain Oakes; but of course he knew Van was just a boy and had a lot to learn. He picked up a bunch of letters for the mail. "Now you may as well get acquainted with the camp," he said, before he went out. "Read the rules posted up outside there. And when you've nothing else to do, practice that quick draw and shooting from the hip."

He went out, and Van followed him without seeing who I was. It wasn't all laziness on my part that kept me there on my shoulder blades in the arm-

chair with the newspaper spread before my face. It wasn't that I had forgotten my liking for Van. I'm not the kind that forgets. But I wanted to sit back a while and see how the kid performed; and I guess I wanted to spring a little surprise on him after he'd milled around a while and had got the feeling that he was sure enough among strangers. I figured that a friend in camp was going to look a heap better to Van after he'd got over the first sensations of his own importance, and after the strangeness of things began to soak in a little. I had a hunch he wouldn't be sorry to discover that Bill Gillis was there on the job and a ranger himself.

I smoked another cigarette or two and kind of milled things over in my mind, and wondered whether I was glad or sorry to see Van here. A little of both, maybe. Through the window I could see him wandering around, sizing up things and stopping now and then to read the bulletins posted up here and there for the information of the men. I saw him look down pretty frequent at the star on his breast, holding that side of his coat back so it would show. And I saw him glance toward the office, and then pull his gun quick and aim it at a post. Tried to do it the way the captain had done; but I guess it looked to him like too public a place for practicing, because he glanced my way again and put the gun back and walked on out to the corral.

Just then the phone rang with a loud, whirring jingle that made me jump, I was so taken up with watching Van. It was the operator, phoning out a telegram from the adjutant general to the captain. I noted it down word for word, put it where it couldn't be overlooked, and went out to look over my outfit. It was a safe bet that I'd be hitting the long trail again pronto—the way I sized up that message and the general lay there at headquarters.

So I refilled the empty thimbles in my belt and stuck a couple of boxes of cartridges in my saddlebags, and so on. I was squinting down the barrel of my carbine that shone like a moonbeam trail on water, when I heard a step behind me. I whirled, and my hand dropped to the pocket where I carry the extra gun I bank on in a surprise meeting, where it may mean adios for you if your fingers go feeling for the gun on your hip. But it was only the kid coming up behind me.

"Why, hello, Bill!" His hand fell away from the star and reached out for a shake. "Where did *you* come from?" Just like he was welcoming a visitor, he sounded, and I could not help grinning.

"Me? Why, I didn't come. I'm right to home," I told him, just to make his eyes stand out. "I was in the office when you got salted. How d'yuh like it, kid, far as you've got?"

He looked at me, and he looked at my badge that I turned back my coat to show him just for a josh. "When did *you* join the rangers?" he wanted to know, as if he kind of doubted my right to that star somehow.

"Little better than three years ago," I told him offhand, and got the big, round-eyed stare I was playing for, that always kind of tickled me, it was so full of boy wonder at life and the surprises of life.

"Was you a *ranger* all the time——"

"All the time," I assured him, without waiting for the rest. "I wouldn't have held out on you like that, Van, only my business was secret." That impressed him a lot, and also took away the little resentment I saw in his eyes when he remembered how he had talked and talked about the force, and how I had never once let on like I knew anything much about it.

I asked him again how he liked it far as he'd got. He said he liked it fine, only he wished the captain would hurry up and send him somewhere on

duty. He said he didn't join to put in his time laying around camp and reading bulletins about what the other fellows were sent to do.

He had been in camp as much as two hours, all told, with that star pinned on him. But I didn't laugh.

Captain Oakes rode into camp then, on the long lope that was his regular gait between camp and Ysleta. I was chinning with Van about Brazos Peaks, but I kept one ear and one eye open for orders. I had a hunch it was coming; and sure enough it came in about five minutes. The captain came out of the office with my copy of the telegram in his hand. He looked at me, and then at the kid.

"Dillon, get your outfit ready to hit the trail at dusk," he said. Honestly I got a thrill myself of sympathy with the kid's man pride at having that order barked at him just like he was an old veteran.

"Gillis, you are to go with him. Use the sorrel mule for your pack, and take grub for ten days. You took down this message when it came—govern yourself accordingly."

That was about as far into detail as the captain ever went, unless something unusual came up. The rest was strictly up to the man that got the order. He never asked you if you could make good, or if you knew how to go about it; he told you what to do—and you went off and did it. I guess it was a pretty good way, in the main.

Van was like a colt that's run a race or two and wants more. He started right off for the corral—I reckon he would have saddled the first horse he got his hands on and pulled out if I hadn't stopped him.

But I hollered: "Hold on, son—let's get some supper first!" So he turned back. We swallowed cold beans and bread and coffee, and then I went and roped out the horses the captain assigned to us while we were eating, and let the kid catch up the sorrel mule—name of Swift because he was anything but that.

I knew it would tickle him to be treated like an old ranger, and there wasn't any harm in letting Van show the captain what he could do; so I gave him a hand in slinging the bags and left him to do the rest of the packing alone. I knew he had picked up considerable range science around Brazos Peaks, because he always throwed in with fellows off the range and the ranches around there. But I admit I was surprised myself at the way he went to work—just like an old hand.

He passed his lash rope with the loop spread before and behind the crosses of the tree, and left the long end on the off side while he put the bedding roll across, just like I or anybody would have done it. He grabbed the rope when he was all set, stuck his foot up against old Swift's paunch, and set back a couple of times so hard the sorrel mule groaned and leaned toward him—you've seen 'em act like they were being cut in two when you cinch up—and then Van finished with as neat a squaw hitch as I ever saw tied by anybody.

I glanced out of the corner of my eye at the captain—I wasn't letting on to him I'd ever known Van before, you see, because he might think to ask me how old the kid was, and I hate to lie unless I have to. Captain winked at me and grinned, much as to say, "He'll do, all right," and I grinned back and nodded.

While I went into the office after our saddle guns, Van filled the canteens and tied them on. And the captain gave me my final instructions—what there was of them—and told Van to consider himself under my orders while we were out. Even with two men on trail, one has got to be the head, you know. So then we were ready. Van turned old Swift loose, and we swung

onto our horses and took the trail at a poco-poco trot. And when I turned and looked back, in a minute, Captain Oakes was standing still, looking after us. And his big form was already blurred by the dusk that was creeping out of the desert.

CHAPTER III.

Camping on the trail of gun runners was an old story with me. Seems like I was always due to get out after either sheep thieves or gun runners in the last few months, and I wouldn't have minded something else for a change. For, ever since the Madero revolution, the rangers have been kept on the lookout for smuggled arms and ammunition —it being directly against the neutrality law to sell munitions of war across the border.

Still the Mexicans go right on killing one another off with American guns, you notice; though I will say that if it wasn't for the rangers there would be more guns slipped across than there are now. There's money to be made selling anything it's against the law to sell. And where there's money to be made you'll find plenty of men willing to take a chance at the making. So gun running might almost be called an industry down there—and it's a big, wild stretch of country to watch, and not many of us to watch it.

That telegram had said that suspicious shipments of rough boxes had been received at Agua Frio, by a man named Tate, and told Captain Oakes to investigate the matter. This was the rangers' way of "investigating." Van and I weren't headed for Agua Frio, as you might naturally suppose we would be. We were headed straight for the Franklin Mountains, away to the south and west. And I'll tell you why:

Franklin Mountains cross the line east of El Paso and run up thirty miles or so into New Mexico, and close to the border. Through Franklin Mountains there is a pass like a deep gash sliced through with a giant's knife before the hills had cooled off from the making. I don't know any better way to put it than that. There were wrinkles, as you might say, running crisscross on either side, like the knife had been nicked and hadn't made a clean cut all the way through; but in the main the cut was clean, down through rock that walled the gash on either side.

Well, right near the north end of the pass is the little adobe town called Agua Frio—cold water, if you don't know your Spanish—on the railroad just where it slips in between Franklin Mountains and the Almagordos. Close to the south end of the pass is another little adobe settlement called the Hell Hole. I suppose I might say that in Spanish and make it look different, but it would be the same and mean the same, so we may as well have it in English and be done with it. The name of the place describes it better than I could do if I got writer's cramp—which must be awful—trying to find other words to fit it.

That's the kind of place Hell Hole was—just what we called it. A little settlement of Mexicans mostly that lived just any old way so it wasn't honest. They'd even get down to some hard graft like running guns if it was against the law. You can see for yourself what a fine kind of filter that pass was for smuggled guns. You can see, too, why Captain Oakes headed us out for Franklin Pass. "Suspicious shipments of rough boxes" was a plenty hint, seeing we knew Tate and knew he wasn't in the undertaking business; not direct, anyway—he kept a saloon.

The force figured this way: Those rough boxes were full of rifles, and after dark they'd be loaded on burros and headed for the pass. Daytimes they would cache themselves in some of those little cañons I named for wrin-

kles—Lord knows there was enough of them to hide an army, so it was no use searching them—and at night again they'd shoot 'em along down toward Hell Hole. From there to the unwashed hands of the Mexican fighters was an easy jump, and the devil's own job to stop it.

About our only chance—and I might just as well have cut out the first word—was to head off that burro train somewhere in the pass before it got to Hell Hole. That was what Van and I had to do. No try and stop them, no maybes, no do your best. He sent us out to *stop* that burro train—and you know I told you the ranger's creed.

I put it up to Van just the way it was. I said: "Well, kid, you're on your first job already. And I want to tell you, boy, that this is no vacation camping-out party. We're out after gun runners, and we'll either get 'em or—we won't come back. Savvy?"

"Sure, I savvy," said Van, in his old, cocksure way. In the half light I saw his fingers go up and feel of the star on his breast, and then drop to his gun. Say, he could have talked an hour and not said as much! Some kid, I told myself, while I looked at him. Some kid!

I made up my mind to put him wise to all the little tricks of the trade I knew myself. I wanted nerve like his to have a chance to win out, and not be wasted by some dirty greaser's bullet just because he didn't know how to wipe out most of the odds against him. School him right, and I saw where he'd grow up to be some ranger, and a terror to snakes, but it would take schooling.

So from then till the time we bedded down for the rest of the night I talked to Van. I didn't talk like the Bill Gillis that had fooled around with him in Brazos Peaks, and several times I caught Van eying me kind of queer, as if he was thinking I'd changed a heap since last winter. But I went right on talking. I told him all about this gun-running business, and about the last outfit I'd rounded up single-handed, and about Price, that went out and didn't come back. I told him how foxy men get when they're breaking the law, and how a ranger's only chance is to be foxier than the men he's after.

I pointed out to him that our system is to guess what's in the other fellow's mind, and then beat him to it. If you don't guess right, you want to guess safe, anyway. I explained that where some would hit up to Agua Frio and go nosing around in Tate's saloon, trying to get a line on things—and letting the guns get clean across the border while the investigation was still at the little end, trying to pick up a clew—we were hitting right straight for the point they'd be aiming for, and we'd get there first.

"Supposing," I said to him, "those rough boxes haven't got anything more dangerous than—cabbages, say. We're taking our trip for nothing, but we'll be dead sure they didn't slip anything over on us. But supposing they're rifles. We aren't wasting any time making sure. We're taking a short cut to the point we have to reach to head 'em off. We're guessing they *are* rifles, and we're acting up to that guess so as to play dead safe. If it's cabbages—well, if it's cabbages, they'd have the laugh on us if they knew, only they won't know, and no harm done."

Well, you see the point I was aiming to make in my argument. But Van was not seasoned enough with hard knocks to see the sense of it. He looked at me, big-eyed and disgusted.

"I thought you was sure!" he said. "I thought you said we'd get 'em or we wouldn't come back."

"We will," I told him, "if there's any to get."

"You're just guessing about it, though," he fired back. "That don't look good to me, Bill—this running

around loose without knowing. The captain should have made sure what was in those boxes before he sent out any men. Darn it——"

"He'll be sure what's in the boxes," I argued patiently, "when we make our report. Believe me, this is the trail to take when we go out investigating what's shipped mysterious into Agua Frio."

Van laid a hand on the cantle and swung his body half around so that he was facing the humpy sky line off to the northwest, where the Big Dipper was tilted up with the handle resting on a low ridge that was mostly rocks and choyas. I turned and looked the way he was looking; and I guess I knew just about what he was thinking, too; a fellow learns to guess when he's dealing with that unknown quantity called human nature. He was thinking that the trail to Agua Frio did not lay three-quarters away, toward the border, and that if he was running the ranger force he'd find out what was in those boxes before he sent a couple of men wearing out good horses on a wild-goose chase to Franklin Pass.

I guess all the stories he'd ever read went the other way about. I know all I ever read makes the hero stall around at the little end, trying to pick up clews, and then finding out, when it was next thing to being too late, that the villains he's after have put one over on him and are gone to helenbeyond, so it takes him plumb up into the last chapter to overhaul them. I realize that's what makes you hold your breath while you're reading and wondering how the hero will ever make good with all that handicap to buck against; that makes a good story—I admit it. But that kind of thing don't make a good ranger, believe me. And I couldn't help it if Van thought the proper thing for us to do would be to slip into Agua Frio and stall around in Tate's saloon doing the sleuth act, instead of jogging straight away into the desert with some ungodly rough country before us and a guess to guide us.

He looked at me with that big-eyed disgust he could show so plain in his face, but he didn't say anything. I don't know as he needed to; I got his thought, all right, and it made me kind of sore. A kid like him, to think he knew more about the best way to handle this job than men who have made a study of such problems! But that's the way it goes: the less you know, the surer you are that your opinions are right.

We didn't talk any more after that. We jogged along at that half-walk, half-trot gait that goes by the name of poco-poco trot. It eats up the distance, and it's easy on your horse and you. Without slacking, I rolled and lighted a cigarette—which sounds easy till you try it. From the tail of my eye I saw Van watching me. After a while he tried it himself, in a casual kind of way, as if he'd done it ever since he was born. He made a mess of it, of course—and threw away the paper as if he'd made up his mind not to smoke just then. I saw it all, but I never let on, and he never let on.

Pretty soon he gave a laugh, as if the whole thing was beginning to look like a josh. "About how soon will we have our meal of boiled cabbage and bacon, Bill?" he asked me, trying to poke fun at the trip.

I could have fired something back at him, and started the argument all over again on the trail to hard words. But I didn't say anything at all; that's the best way to head off trouble. Pretty soon I remarked that I guessed we'd push right through till close to daylight and lay over again till dusk, so at the little spring ahead we'd stop and eat a bite and let the horses rest and feed. It was close to midnight then, by the stars.

I was figuring close, so as to hit the

pass ahead of the burro train. The distance to the point I was aiming for wasn't quite as long as their trail to and through the pass would be; almost, but not quite. And we were beating the pace of loaded burros by a good, wide margin. Still, from the spring on I knew where we could shave off a few miles by taking a short cut on a blind trail through the hills. It would also land us before daylight in a hidden little basin, where we could lay up till dusk, with small chance of being seen. You never know when a spy will be out scouting around—and half the ranger's game is to land unexpected.

So at the spring we ate a little cold grub I'd stuck in my saddle pockets, and grazed the horses and old Swift with the cinches loosened. We didn't talk much, and when we did it was under our breaths; and I set Van the example of smoking with the cigarette glow hidden behind my cupped hand. Maybe it wasn't necessary right then and there, but I was teaching him to be careful on general principles.

After a while I got up, and we tightened the saddles and mounted and rode on. And there I left the fairly well-beaten trail and struck up a rough, narrow little dry arroyo that would take us over a small mesa that the main trail curved around and avoided. It was rough going, and we had some trouble with old Swift, that balked at the worst places and got scared at the best, and kept one or both of us on the job of herding him along. He was a pest in some ways, but you couldn't lose him, and a stranger—greaser especially—would just about have to shoot him down to catch him and get his pack off. So on trips that were specially risky, old Swift was a kind of stand-by.

Any little coolness over the cabbage question wore off while we were getting up that arroyo in the dark. At that, it didn't take us very long, and I think the kid enjoyed the roughness of the trip; kind of made him feel as if he was doing something, you see. He was laughing and giggling, boy style, over the performances of that fool Swift before we'd got halfway to the mesa.

It sprung up again for a few minutes when we made camp just before daylight in the little basin on the far side of the mesa that I'd been aiming for. I left Van to look after the horses and old Swift while I hunted for water, which I was not just sure about. I'd spotted the basin on another trip up on the mesa, and laid it by in my memory as a good hidden camp some time; but the water question I had to settle now. I was quite a little while finding any, and when I got back Van had the 3D horse hobbled in a little, blind clearing, and Plunger and the mule loose, with the lariats on and dragging, all fine and dandy. I made sure of that before I went up to where he was laying out the bed. I was feeling pretty well satisfied with the kid as a trail partner, even if he did think he could tell me a few things about hunting gun runners. But when I crawled into the blankets I missed something that gets to have a mighty comfortable and familiar feel to a ranger.

"Say, Van, where's the saddle guns?" I asked him, feeling around in the bed. "And where's your six-gun, boy?"

"The saddle guns are under the saddle blankets and packs, right over here, handy and outa the damp," he told me, and wriggled around for a soft spot for his shoulders. "Why? Think I used 'em for a drag on the horses?"

"Why?" I came up a-cussing. "If you expect to be a ranger long you never want to make distance between you and your arsenal." I told him kind of sharp, for I didn't like the way he answered.

He sat up, and began reaching out and feeling for the carbines. "Aw,

what's the difference?" he grumbled. "We ain't to the cabbage patch yet." But he handed them over—or mine, anyway. His own he held waiting to see what I was going to do with mine.

I slid my carbine down beside me under the blankets, where I could get my hands on it in case of an emergency and come up ready for action without doing any feeling around that would make my intentions perfectly plain to my visitors. And I sure read Van a lecture on the subject, with few words, and pointed ones. He didn't say anything back, but I guess he was pretty sore for a minute. I got that much from the way he turned his back and pulled the blankets up around his ears.

I reached out and gave his shoulder a friendly grip. "That's all right, son," I eased up the lecture. "You don't want to put Bill Gillis down for a natural-born crab. But this ain't Brazos Peaks, kid. You're a ranger now, and dead anxious to make good. If I roast you now and then about something, it's just to keep you headed out the right trail. Sometimes a fellow remembers a thing a heap better if it's handed out to him hard."

Van gave a grunt at that. "Leave it to you," he came back at me. "You'll hand it out hard enough all right!"

"Well, you'll remember it, and you won't stick your gun under the pack again, where you can't get at it in a hurry," I told him again because I did feel mean about handing it out so strong. "And some time it may save your life, kid. Don't be mad at me."

"I ain't mad," he told me. "But you've got a way of making a fellow feel as if he was about ten years old."

I hadn't wanted to hit him that way at all. I felt pretty sorry. "Let me tell you, Van, you're sure the oldest kid of your age I ever met," I told him, and I meant it. "Why, you've aged three years since last New Year's," I said. "Give you a year on the force and you'll be able to stand up alongside any one of us. Now get some sleep. The hardest is yet to come. We'll be standing guard, turn about, after this." I started to turn over, and thought of something else I wanted to impress on him.

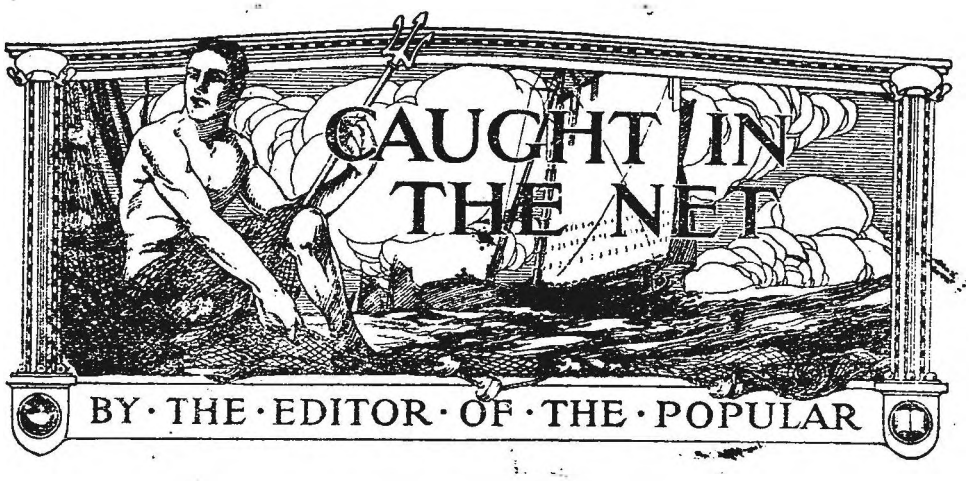
"Say, have you got a mental notebook?" I asked him. "If you haven't, get one right now. Keep it in your mind, where it will always be handy. And on the top of the first page write this down, and write it big and plain: You never need a gun unless you need it darn bad. So always have it where you can put your hand on it. Right under that write this down, bigger, if anything, than you wrote the other: You never know what's in the other fellow's mind. So play safe. Got 'em?"

"They're down," said Van, and the grouch was all gone out of his voice. "I won't forget 'em, either. And—Bill, I sure am lucky to have you around to keep me from being a darn, swell-headed, fool kid. Take it out of me, Bill, whenever you see it cropping up. I'll get mad, but I'll get over it—and thank you afterward."

"Aw, shut up and go to sleep," I told him. And I turned my back on him. But what I was thinking was that I hadn't made any mistake in Van Dillon. He was some kid—that boy. Had a mind, and used it to think things out for himself. It wouldn't be just so much breath wasted in telling him things. So, after all, we went to sleep better pals than we'd ever been.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

The second and concluding part of this story will appear in the next issue of the POPULAR.



THE NEW EDUCATION

THE best fruit of the past few years of agitation for improvements in our public schools is the manual-training school. And the manual-training idea is growing in spite of opposition on the part of educational stand-patters who believe Greek roots are more important than a job, and Latin conjugations more to be desired than a meal ticket; and the sneers, on the other hand, of practical workers who scorn any effort to teach trades in schools.

Tests are proving that graduates of manual schools are usually better educated in arts and sciences than graduates from purely classical schools; and it is also proving they are readier for profitable employment.

Of course, the manual school is not intended to make skilled and technical workmen of the students. Its object primarily is to train them to competency; to make them resourceful in the use of their minds and skillful in the use of their muscles and tools.

A young man entered a wholesale jewelry house and applied for a job. The manager asked him a few perfunctory questions; but when the youth mentioned he was a graduate of Manual High School, of Kansas City, the manager was alive with interest.

"That's good. We have had three young men from there, and they have all made good."

The young man got the job. In Manual he had not had any course related to the jewelry business; but, like the other three, he made good.

More than half of the notably successful men got their training that made them successful in some other occupation. A prominent and wealthy real-estate owner and banker says his training for success came from a merchant for whom he clerked when a boy. The merchant for three years drilled him to be constantly watchful for opportunities to improve the stock, to make the store more attractive, to increase his sales. "He used even to spill coffee in the sugar barrel to see if I would notice it."

Keeping a store clean and orderly and the goods attractively displayed is far removed from building city blocks and organizing million-dollar trusts; but

it was the habit of close attention and searching for opportunities that he had learned in the store that made his success.

So it is in the manual schools. Their success is, and is to be, not so much in making skilled carpenters and smiths and electricians out of the students, as in training them to do something. They learn to use their hands and eyes in connection with their brains, and they get a self-confidence and self-mastery that comes only with successful muscular control.

The problem to work out now—and it should be done speedily—is how to carry the benefits of the manual idea to the small towns and rural schools.

HUMILITY

WAR removes all backgrounds. Persons are seen spiritually naked. Trappings have been cleared away, burned away, shot away—the fine house in which the doctor lives, the mahogany office of the banker, the flattering attendance of body servants. At one stroke, all these persons had been leveled, their props knocked down, their veils torn, the heavy atmosphere of their "position" dispersed. Under the tight hand of the military, they shed their prestige. You see them as they really are, fussy little, inefficient people, without much charm, or claim on life.

It is curious, too, to see some of them irk under it. There was a popular and gifted novelist at the front—a woman of clever, rather strong face, gray hair, and the self-contained manner of a successful person. She was used to being treated with distinguished consideration. How she sulked when she was left to fend for herself. She would come to the table and sit unserved for five or ten minutes.

"Why, Miss MacFadden, you haven't any breakfast," one of the group would exclaim—before they learned her little ways.

She would lift a martyr face.

"Really, I hadn't noticed," she would say. "It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter at all."

She would cheer up under the bustle and clatter of bringing her coffee and porridge. She had attracted attention. She was being waited on. But she was soon found out, and had to win her own breakfast, like the rest of the busy doctors and nurses.

No one counts in war time outside of the general staff. If you don't move back when ordered, a soldier drops his gun butt on your toes. Public opinion ceases to exist. Generals don't hold their jobs through popular election. There is no common will, regulating life. There is only the will of the military.

THE LIFE OF A STEAM ENGINE

WORK is for machinery the breath of life; idleness means decay and ruin. A good machine, no matter how ponderous or complicated, will outlive a human being if well cared for and well used. But it must have continuous employment. Otherwise it is doomed. Few persons appreciate the good old age of some of the machinery in use to-day. Here,

for example, is an instance: Way back in 1853 a steamship was built at Buffalo for service on the Great Lakes. It was christened the *Cosmopolitan.* John English, a marine engineer famous in those days, designed the engines. The *Cosmopolitan* had a prosaic career, and when, in 1860, the vessel was broken up, the engine was taken out and shipped in parts to the Atlantic seaboard, where it was installed in an ocean steamship called the *Morro Castle.* For seventeen years that engine drove the *Morro Castle* through storm and calm. Then the engine was dismembered and installed in the excursion steamboat *Grand Republic.* For the last thirty-eight years it has served the *Grand Republic* admirably. To all intents and purposes it is as good to-day as the day it was fabricated. Andrew Fletcher, of the great machinery concern of Hoboken, inspected the engine recently and reported to the Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers that it was good for half a century more of use. So far as known the engine of the *Grand Republic* is the patriarch of all American marine engines, but there are stationary engines so much older that by comparison the *Grand Republic's* big machine is youthful.

THE HUMAN MACHINE

THE bodily machinery we inherit bears certain resemblances to the man-made engine. There are a few principles underlying all natural or invented things, and one of them is that use is necessary for the preservation of any organism or machine, and that things rust out more quickly than they wear out. If we were purely physical animals, muscular exercise would suffice, but the more brain we have the more we must give it to do to keep well and fit. In some, we fancy, the brain is quite an important part of the machine. Think of the men you know who carry their years best. They are all likely to be men of active intellectual interests, who read and think as well as exercise.

SAFETY IN STEAMBOATS

DESPITE the appalling loss of life in the *Eastland* tragedy at Chicago, travel by boat still remains the safest method of transportation the human family has introduced. The American railroad record of killed and injured presents the stupendous total of approximately 200,000 a year. The automobile has left a trail of maimed and dead. The trolley car is a terror. The prosaic buggy is by no means safe, but the steamboat continues to be the most secure vehicle man has designed for his use.

For every 735,822 persons carried, only one is killed or hurt on a steamboat. This covers every form of damage to which the steamboat is susceptible—fire, explosion, collision, sinking, or other accident.

One company, the Iron Steamboat Line, has carried 60,000,000 passengers in thirty years without the loss of a single life.

In ten years all the steamboats of the United States carried 3,730,616,083 persons with the loss of only 5,070 lives, or an average of less than ten a week. When it is considered that this includes suicides—and self-destruction cuts no

small figure in the total—the record is surprising, all the more so when such tragedies as those of the *Eastland* and the *General Slocum* are bulked with the minor casualties.

A $1,500,000 RAILROAD GHOST

THERE is a proverb that nothing is as hard to kill as a railroad. Its charter may be faded, its right of way buried under weeds and forgotten, and its equipment, if it ever had any, in the junk pile; it may never have carried a passenger or a pound of freight, yet there is life in the old thing yet.

This is exemplified in the case of the so-called Interstate Railroad Company, of Kansas City. In 1904, Charles H. Atkinson, an ambitious gentleman from Ohio, got a charter to build a standard-gauge railroad from Kansas City through the counties of Jackson, Clay, Platte, Clinton, Buchanan, Andrew, Nodaway, Holt, and Atchison, a distance of one hundred and sixty-two miles. He spent $35,000 getting right of way and in other preliminaries, but did no construction work, although it was specified in the charter that the company was to begin work within two years and spend ten per cent of its capital stock in actual construction within three years.

When the three-year limit expired, Atkinson considered his charter null and void. Then came the panic of 1907. Atkinson charged the $35,000 up to experience, and when, in 1908, one of his associates, Ernest D. Martin, asked for power of attorney to sell the charter, he complied with the request.

A few weeks ago Atkinson was in St. Joseph, Missouri, and heard by chance of the Interstate Railroad Company having obtained a judgment for $1,500,000 against the Kansas City, Clay County & St. Joseph Electric line. Investigation disclosed that the Interstate was the paper road that he had spent $35,000 in promoting and that the verdict was based on the fact that the electric line had used part of the right of way Atkinson had secured. The electric line is a going concern, in which prominent New York and Boston financiers are interested. When the old Interstate began suit, the action was considered a joke, but it soon turned out to be serious.

Atkinson now wants the award. He has begun suit to restrain the Kansas City, Clay County & St. Joseph from paying the $1,500,000 to the Interstate. He alleges that of the $4,050,000 stock of the paper railroad he held all but the few shares he parceled out to attorneys and clerks. That being the case, he considers the $1,500,000, if it is ever paid, belongs to him.

There probably will be litigation long drawn out, but meanwhile the Interstate ghost will parade in State courts and Federal courts and serve to plague a perfectly good electric railroad.

All of which goes to show that there is truth in the proverb mentioned and also that in building a railroad you must be mighty careful about your right of way, for the ghost of some paper railroad will get you if you don't watch out.

Lincoln-by-the-Nine

By Thomas Edgelow

For a speed artist we commend Leighton Wynne of the United States Secret Service. Hustle and he were raised together. This is his introduction to POPULAR

THE White Viennese Band was playing the latest waltz. Everything was very brilliant indeed, but then that was to be expected, for when Mrs. Leonori flung wide the doors of her huge mansion on Fifth Avenue, "New York sat up and took notice," to use a colloquialism of the policeman on duty.

And to-night the affair was a particularly brilliant one even for Mrs. Leonori, who felt, with some justice, that she was reaching the pinnacle of her social fame. Not that Mrs. Leonori was a parvenue social climber; the position of the Leonoris as a family was too securely placed for that; but for the first time one of her receptions was to be honored by the presence of royalty, in no less a personage than Zarl, Crown Prince of Zorania.

Now the kingdom of Zorania, which, as all the world knows, lies on the shores of the Adriatic, is of far greater importance than its surrounding states, for not only is it rich in mineral and agricultural resources, but its army is rapidly becoming a force to be reckoned with.

It would therefore be readily understood how great was the sensation caused by the visit of the crown prince to the United States. Although a man well over forty, the prince had hitherto confined his wanderings to an occasional week in London or Paris and the Riviera, so that it was with particular interest that social New York filled the house of Mrs. Leonori the first time that indefatigable woman shone in the reflected glory of the purple.

The prince, a short, fat, dumpy little man with an olive complexion and black, beady little eyes, whose long, thin mustache was waxed straight out from his rather sensual mouth, was graciousness itself. "We have nothing in Zorstaat to compare with your Fifth Avenue," he had said to Mrs. Leonori, in his creditable English, yet with a marked Zoranian accent. "And we should be hard put to it to collect such a galaxy of beauty," he had concluded, with a smile, as he had led out Mrs. Leonori's daughter after the first cotillion.

In the conservatory that led from the huge ballroom, the various couples dotted here and there among the palms had for the most part discarded even flirtation for the topic of the moment —the prince.

"He is so very short and plump!" objected Mrs. Fanshawe to her partner. "The prince of my dreams should be tall and athletic, and he simply must be dressed in a uniform that includes shiny top-boots and spurs!"

Leighton Wynne laughed inanely with the silly-ass chuckle of a certain type of London society man. Born of good Virginian stock, with an income apparently sufficient for his bachelor needs, Wynne occupied his own particular niche in New York society. De-

voted to traveling, he spent at least half his time in Europe. Three weeks after he had been seen leaving his apartment on Gramercy Park, he might be encountered at some smart Vienna cafe, or on the veranda of some well-known Cairo hotel. But whether in New York or in Tokyo, Leighton Wynne was always perfectly turned out, and equally always perfectly fatuous.

It is possible that the men of Wynne's set treated him with a certain good-natured contempt, because he had never been known to do a day's work of any kind; while on the other hand he was eagerly sought after by the women. Perhaps they liked the steel gray of his eyes, the dark-brown hair sleeked close to his head by many liquid preparations so that not a single hair was ever known to be displaced. Perhaps his well-kept hands, or his athletic body, just above medium height, appealed to them; or, again, they may have found some charm of manner underlying the vapid foolishness of his London pose. That Mrs. Fanshawe liked him was proved from the fact that she had already cut two dances to sit with him in the conservatory and laugh good-naturedly at all his quips.

"They say," continued Mrs. Fanshawe, "the prince gets on so badly with his wife that he was really glad of the trip away from her."

Leighton Wynne stuck his absurd monocle in his eye, letting it fall again immediately. "Yes, by Jove," he chuckled, "that's always the way with married people—they can't help getting bored stiff with each other."

"Well, there is not much danger of you getting bored that way, Mr. Leighton, although you are thirty-four and should be thinking of settling down by now," smiled Mrs. Fanshawe.

"Thirty-three," he corrected her.

She smiled. "Thirty-three, then. But besides that you are too selfish to give up your bachelor ways and your little trips to London and Paris."

"Oh, by Jove! That is really too bad of you, Mrs. Fanshawe!" Wynne interrupted. "I am really not a bit selfish, you know. Why, only this morning I was up and out by eleven o'clock to help poor old Farley van Halman buy his wedding garments. The dear old boy has really no taste at all, so I exerted myself and went round with him to his tailor man. By gad! You can't call that selfish, can you?"

"Oh, Leighton, you are so delicious!" cried his partner. "If I were not so much in love with my own husband—which is really bourgeois of me, isn't it?—I declare I would run off with you myself!"

"That would be topping, wouldn't it?" giggled Wynne. "I assure you that——"

A footman interrupted further inanities for the moment by announcing that Mr. Leighton Wynne's own man was in the hall and wished to speak to him.

"Will you think it awfully rude of me if I run away, Mrs. Fanshawe? It must be something important, or my man would not worry me. Not that I can understand anything important happening to me. Makes me feel like one of those Wall Street Johnnies who are always jumping around a telephone!"

In the hall Wynne found Riddle, his valet and confidential servant, awaiting him.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir," the man said, in a low voice, "but you are wanted on the private wire, and I have Hollis outside with the car."

"Good!" replied Wynne shortly. "I will come at once."

An extraordinary change had come over Wynne. Gone was the foolish, vapid fop, and in his place stood a man whose voice was that of one accus-

tomed to command, of one accustomed to act quickly in any emergency.

Slipping into his fur-lined coat, Wynne sent his excuses to his hostess by a servant, and followed Riddle out to the waiting car.

"Drive like hell, Hollis!" he ordered curtly, as he jumped in.

The big car stole silently away, and sped down the avenue, eating up the distance. At Thirty-fourth Street, a policeman held them up. "You were going forty-five if you were going fifteen," he growled through the open window. "I am going to——"

"Oh, cut it out, and let me get on!" Wynne interpolated, as he held something for the policeman's inspection.

In an instant the man sprang to the salute. "I did not know, sir. I could not——"

"Get on, Hollis!" Wynne cut him short.

Once in his apartment, Wynne went immediately to the telephone, concealed in a closet. "Hello, Washington—Leighton Wynne speaking. Who is that at the other end?"

"Twenty-seven, Paris," came the answer. "Give the password."

"Lincoln-by-the-nine," Wynne replied softly.

"The chief wants you at once. It is urgent. Can you hustle?"

"Sure!" grinned Wynne. "Hustle and I were raised together."

Nor was Wynne's boast an empty one. In an incredibly few hours later he stood in the chief's office in Washington.

McMahon glanced up at him sharply, but a hint of satisfaction at Wynne's promptness lay in his austere tones.

"Are you ready for a long job and a dangerous one?" he asked.

Wynne, pulling out a chair, sat down opposite his chief. "I am always ready, sir," he replied briefly. "May I have the details?"

McMahon rustled among his papers before replying. "Wynne," he said at last, "you have proved again and again that you can handle most situations; but frankly I have one of the toughest propositions that I have yet encountered. Here are the facts: We are in the devil of a mix-up. You know, of course, that the Crown Prince of Zorania is in this country?"

"Sure!" agreed Wynne. "I was at a dance where he was present when you sent for me."

McMahon smiled. "It beats me, Wynne, how you can stand this social stunt. Still it has its uses. But, to get back to business. The crown prince is here; officially in the character of a pleasure seeker. Secretly he is empowered to act for his government. Negotiations have been taking place between our government and Zorania with reference to a treaty between the two nations. Zorania, as you know, has very valuable mining concessions to give away. Again, there is the question of the proposed Zorstaat State Railway. Taking it on the whole, the Zoranians are in a position to make us a very tempting offer, but naturally they are not doing this for the sake of the secretary of state's winning smile. They need a little money, but still more they need the assurance that if they are at any time attacked by any of the European powers we will finance them, and possibly lend them the assistance of the navy. Now you can imagine the trouble that would be raised if this ever got to the ears of our political opponents."

McMahon paused a moment, while he looked shrewdly at Wynne sitting before him.

The latter smiled. "I thoroughly appreciate the point," he said quietly; "in fact, it is rather obvious. For instance, if Goocher, of the other side, got to hear that this government even contemplated plunging into south European politics for the sake of some min-

ing and railway concessions; if he knew that the United States could possibly be dragged into a naval warfare on behalf of Zorania, he would probably swing the next presidential election. I can imagine the joy in the editorial offices of the Goocher papers if the news leaked out."

"I am glad you appreciate the significance of absolute secrecy," went on McMahon slowly, "because I have to tell you that on the strength of the whole situation the secretary of state entered into a preliminary treaty with the crown prince. More, he solemnly pledged, on behalf of the nation, that absolute secrecy should be maintained, for naturally Zorania is as anxious to keep the affair quiet as the government of the United States. On receiving this assurance, the crown prince completed the deal, and the preliminary papers were duly signed in New York."

The old man paused a moment, as if lost in thought.

"I see no difficulty so far," remarked Wynne, "unless—unless——"

"Exactly. There *is* an unless!" snapped McMahon fiercely. "That is where you come in. The papers were signed in New York by the crown prince and the secretary of state. They were then placed in an envelope, which the crown prince sealed in the presence of the secretary, and which the secretary placed in a portfolio. Mr. Secretary left the hotel where the crown prince was stopping, and drove straight to the depot, from where he left by special train for Washington. To the best of his belief, the portfolio never left his hands for one instant. But, on arrival at the White House, and on opening the envelope in the presence of the president, it was found that a dummy package had been substituted for the original papers. Now I come to the point. I omitted to tell you that the theft occurred a week ago to-day. Yesterday a letter was mysteriously discovered on the desk of the secretary of state. How it got there no one is as yet able to inform us; but the secretary found it there on his return from lunch. The letter stated that the writer was perfectly aware of the whole situation, and that not only did it mean political ruin for our party, but that our word of honor as a nation was pledged to observe secrecy. The letter stated that those papers were for sale, and demanded that some one empowered to deal for our government, with full power to purchase, should immediately get in touch with the writer, failing which, the whole affair would be given to the world."

"Blackmail!" gasped Wynne. "And what blackmail!"

"Exactly," returned his chief. "What blackmail! Here you have a very pretty situation: The United States government is held up by blackmailers, and not only are our interests at stake, but our very honor itself. Wynne, it is up to you. Do you think you can make good?"

Wynne drew from his pocket a gold case, and selected therefrom a Russian cigarette. Three people in the world were supplied with that particular brand. One was the czar of all the Russias, another was a certain lady of the half world, and the third was Leighton Wynne himself—a privilege that he had won over the Moscow dynamite affair.

Wynne, striking a match, blew a thin wreath of blue-gray smoke toward the ceiling. A little silence fell between the two men, and then Wynne spoke. "I feel," he said, and into his voice crept a note of firmness and determination, "the honor you have done me, sir, in selecting me for this mission. I can only say that I will do my best." Then: "Does the crown prince know of the loss?"

McMahon laughed. "The prince was immediately informed, and his tone was

hardly pleasant. He considered—and I must say with some justice—that we are to blame, as the papers were in our possession. He has let us clearly understand that it is up to us to keep our promise of secrecy. We do not propose to inform him of the attempted blackmail until you have brought the case to a successful conclusion. It is for you to see that we do not pay too dearly for our folly."

"And my instructions?" Wynne's tones were becoming exceedingly businesslike.

"Are quite simple," replied McMahon, with a smile. "You have only to get back those papers, without which the blackmailer can have no proof; and without proof, as you know, even Goocher could do nothing. You can buy those papers if there is no other way; steal them, beg them, but you must get them. And understand this, Wynne: that whatever motives you employ, you can expect from us no other than financial aid. You understand? Money you can have in plenty. No expense will be queried. We will even pay up to five million dollars for the purchase of the papers if you can get them by no other means. But I repeat, and I repeat again, that officially we know nothing of your mission. On the other hand, the reward will be large, although I believe you work more for the excitement of the chase than the money end of the proposition. There will be fifty thousand dollars for you if you get the papers without having to purchase them, and ten thousand dollars whether you purchase them or no as long as you get them."

"That," remarked Wynne calmly, "is of secondary importance. I work because in this century there is so little excitement and so little for which a man can use his brain apart from mere moneygrubbing. The secret service provides me with the excitement I need. But you have no clew as to the identity of the blackmailer?"

"Absolutely none," the old man returned, "unless you can learn anything from their letter." He opened a drawer as he spoke, and, taking from it a paper, tossed the typewritten sheets across the table to his companion.

Wynne took them to the window and examined them carefully in the morning sunlight. "I see," he remarked at length, "that they have been clever enough to use three different typewriters. They have shifted the paper to another machine every three or four lines. Of course, were I the detective of fiction, the Sherlock Holmes of the magazines, I should already have solved the problem of whom we are fighting. As it is," he added, gayly handing the letter back to his chief, "I know no more about it than that table. I notice that I am to communicate with them first of all, through the personal columns of the *Trumpeter*."

"You have a difficult task before you, Wynne, and one that will tax even your wonderful powers; but somehow I believe that you will pull us out of this mess."

For an hour or more the two men remained closeted together, the while Wynne fired question after question at his chief that drove at the very core of the matter. At last, with all the available facts stored within his retentive memory, Wynne rose from his chair. McMahon looked at him, and into his eyes came an expression almost paternal in its admiration for the man whom he had helped to train.

"Good-by, chief," Wynne said simply, with outstretched hand. "If I fail, it will not be because I have not tried."

II.

An elderly man registered at the quiet hotel off Madison Avenue under the name of Henry B. Elliott. So perfect an artist was Wynne when it came

to a question of make-up that had Mrs. Fanshawe herself, or any other of Wynne's set, encountered Mr. Elliott, no suspicion would have crossed their minds that in the quietly businesslike exterior of the supposed silk importer lay the fashionable personality of Wynne, the social butterfly. With the London accent and the single eyeglass had gone the bored manner, the silly tout ensemble which made up the outside mask or shell under which Wynne's strong personality was so carefully concealed during those times when the secret service did not claim him for its own.

Mr. Elliott was plump, and Mr. Elliott was elderly. His gray hair, rather thin at the top, matched in color the grizzled, close-cut mustache, for Wynne held secrets that many a well-known actor would have willingly bought from him. By the skillful manipulation of facial clay, Wynne was able to alter the very outlines of his face; and so accustomed had he grown by long practice to disguise, that such a change could be brought about in an incredibly short space of time.

As few business men who come to New York are attended by valets, Mr. Elliott had brought with him his secretary, Mr. Smith; and if the latter bore a strong resemblance to Mr. Leighton Wynne's manservant, Riddle, no one was any the wiser.

In his modest suite, on the sixth floor, Wynne scanned the personal columns of the New York *Trumpeter*.

H. B. E. can talk to-night. Letter making appointment waiting at the Hotel Brownmore.

Wynne smiled as he put down the advertisement, which was in answer to the one he had inserted as had been suggested in the first blackmailing letter received at Washington. Touching the bell, Wynne awaited Riddle's coming impatiently. "Riddle," he remarked, when that faithful follower stood waiting, "I want——"

"Smith, sir, not Riddle," the man interrupted, with a smile. "You'll get me all balled up, Mr. Wynne—I mean Mr. Elliott—sir, if you do not watch out. I feel that nervous as it is, so stick to Smith, sir, while we are here."

Wynne laughed. "All right, Smith, I want you to go to the Hotel Brownmore and ask for a letter for Henry B. Elliott. Say that Mr. Elliott has changed his plans and is stopping elsewhere."

Alone again, Wynne paced the narrow confines of his sitting room. So at last he was to have a look at the blackmailers; and it were time that he formulated some schemes for their defeat, but schemes are not to be thought of in a moment. His difficulties were so greatly increased, he realized, by the fact that should he attempt anything like violence, and the police should take a hand in the game, he would be compelled to fight against them instead of with them. McMahon had been clear on that point: the police must know nothing, for so twisted are the ways of politicians that there must be no possibility of political capital finding its way to the other side.

Riddle returned with the letter, typewritten as had been its predecessors.

DEAR MR. ELLIOTT: We are glad that your employers have judged it expedient to send you from Washington without delay. The matter will brook no delay, and we are very determined to see the affair through to what we trust will be a satisfactory ending for all concerned. We suggest to you that a personal interview would help matters, and for this reason we are prepared to run the slight risk of meeting you, and yet that risk is purely imaginary, for should you try to have us captured by the police, we should instantly publish broadcast that which we have to sell. If you wish to talk with us, be at the corner of Wall Street and Nassau Street to-night at midnight. At that place and at that hour there are few automobiles about, so that when you see a big limousine come to a stop at that corner,

put your head inside and ask: "Are you interested in treaties?" The occupant will reply: "Zorania may need assistance." Then enter the car and permit yourself to be blindfolded, when you will be taken to where we can talk. We repeat that no harm will come to you, and you will be taken back after the interview.

THE THREE MASKED MEN.

Wynne put down the typewritten letter, firmly determined to keep the appointment, so that at six minutes to twelve he came up from the subway at the Wall Street station and slowly paced to the corner of Nassau Street. Wall Street, at that hour, was practically deserted, and, as Wynne reached the corner, a large limousine came to a standstill beside the sidewalk. Wynne advanced with interest. There was something unreal about this adventure that appealed to his imagination. He felt that his enemies could hardly be American. "The Three Masked Men" sounded too theatrical to have originated on this side of the Atlantic. An American would have been too keenly sensitive to ridicule so to have signed a letter.

Although the night was not a cold one, the chauffeur who sat at the wheel had a fur collar turned up round his ears, while his cap was pulled down over his brow. With a swift glance at the man, Wynne, standing on the footboard, put his head in at the window. To his surprise, the occupant of the car proved to be a woman heavily swathed in veils.

Wynne, stepping back, took off his hat. It was, he reflected later, merely an essential part of his respect for women, and yet the action was a little incongruous in itself, in that he was saluting one engaged in the most despicable of all crimes.

"Are you interested in treaties?" Wynne asked softly.

"Zorania may need assistance," she replied, and Wynne fancied that he detected a slight foreign accent.

Opening the door, he got in and sat down beside her. The car remained stationary. "Before we go on," the woman said, and Wynne decided that she was of French extraction, "you must permit me to blindfold you, and you must promise, Mr. Elliott, that you will not take it off until I tell you." In her hand she held a black silk scarf.

"I promise. But if I break my word, what then?" Wynne asked quietly.

"You will not; but if you did, I should stop the car and ask you to get out."

"You need not fear," Wynne assured her. "I will not look if you do not keep me too long."

She tied the scarf around his head, so that, even if he had wished to do so, he could see nothing. Then the woman spoke to the chauffeur by the tube, and the car glided off. Wynne knew by the turn that they were going uptown. But so often did they twist and turn about that he soon lost any idea of direction. The car sped on and on, and before long the increased speed seemed to indicate that they had left the city behind them. Wynne spoke to his companion once; but, on receiving no reply, he kept silent for the rest of the long drive. At last they stopped while some gates were opened, and then in and presumably up a long driveway. Evidently, Wynne concluded, the blackmailers were not of the poorer classes.

The limousine came to a stop, and some one helped Wynne out and up some steps. Down a long corridor he was led, followed by his companion of the drive, and then a door was opened and closed behind him. The woman fumbled with the knots of the scarf.

Wynne, when the bandage fell from his eyes, found himself in a long, narrow room, lighted dimly by a few candles. At the other end of the room, behind a table, sat three figures cloaked in long black robes, whose voluminous folds completely hid them. The three

were hooded in black, while long scarlet masks came down below their chins. One of them held a revolver pointed toward Wynne.

Another of them spoke. "Sit down, Mr. Elliott," he said, and the woman pointed to a chair. "Do not be alarmed; the revolver is only to see that you come no closer."

"Alarmed?" laughed Wynne. "What do you take me for—a child to be frightened by your silly masks? What are you? Do you think I am impressed by the exhibition? Have you been reading anarchist stories that you play the mummers so successfully?" Wynne still laughing, sat himself down and lit a cigarette.

His ridicule seemed to anger his hosts, for they whispered together, and one of them gesticulated wildly. It had the effect, though, of removing the revolver, for the man who held it slipped it into a drawer in the table.

"We may yet prove to you that we are not a subject for laughter," the spokesman went on, "but now to business. We hold certain papers that relate to the Zoranian treaty affair. You know as well as we do, Mr. Elliott, that if that treaty became public property the political powers that be would be powers no longer. Why, if the other side got hold of this, they would wipe the floor with you people at the next elections. More than this, the secretary of state pledged the word of the nation to the Crown Prince of Zorania to preserve absolute secrecy, so that it is a matter of honor for Washington to get back these papers."

"I think," snapped Wynne decisively, "that we may leave the question of honor out of these proceedings," and forthwith Wynne became possessed of a winning card. For, as he spoke, one of the three masked men started in anger, as if he would hurl the inkstand at the man who sneered at them so bravely. He controlled himself with an obvious effort at the very moment that his hand encircled the heavy silver object, and on his hand gleamed a huge jewel.

Now Wynne knew every stone of superlative value in the civilized world by name, *and, more still, he knew the owners.* Wynne managed to suppress his start of surprise as he threw away his cigarette. "And your price for these papers, gentlemen?"

"Fifteen million dollars will buy them and not a cent less," replied the spokesman.

"But even if the government were prepared to pay such an exorbitant sum," argued Wynne, "I do not carry fifteen million dollars about with me."

"We do not wish to be unreasonable," the blackmailer replied calmly. "Such a sum will take time to raise, as your side will hardly account correctly for the money. We shall expect five million dollars within a week from to-day and the balance within three months."

Followed an hour or so of futile bargaining, in which Wynne allowed no hint to appear that he held so important a clew. "Very well," he said at last, "I promise nothing, but I will get in touch with Washington. I am stopping at the Hotel Newington, on Madison Avenue. You can communicate there with me directly."

"We warn you," the man replied as Wynne allowed himself to be blindfolded again, "that we must see some money after a week or a mysterious hint about Zorania will be given out to the newspapers."

Once back in the car, and accompanied by the woman, Wynne was driven back to the city. The car stopped suddenly after an hour or so, and the woman took the bandage from his eyes. "Good night," she said, and Wynne got out. The car dashed off rapidly. As it sped past him, Wynne looked at the number. The chauffeur had

switched off the light which shone on the number plate.

Wynne laughed a little as he went up to his room at the Newington. The limousine had considerately dropped him near his hotel. Riddle met him at the door, red-eyed from want of sleep. "Mr. Fletcher is here, sir," he said in a whisper; "he is waiting in the sitting room."

"That hardly surprises me, as I expected him," Wynne returned. "How are you, Fletcher?" he continued, as he entered the room. "Did you succeed?"

"Sure, I succeeded; it was so easy I had to," replied his visitor. "I'll bet these people are new at the game, whatever it is, as they never thought they would be followed. The chauffeur never even looked round. I should have thought they would have had enough sense to know it was the first thing we should try. He twisted about half over the city before he hit Seventh Avenue, and after that he drove straight out. I kept close behind him all the way. Do you know where he went?"

"I have not an idea," answered Wynne cheerfully. "I left that to you."

"It is a big house, standing in its own grounds," Fletcher explained, "on the Pelham Road, between Pelham and New Rochelle. After you had gone in through the gates I made some inquiries. The house was taken recently by an Italian, a Mr. Farnelli, he calls himself."

"Does he live alone?" asked Wynne, as he mixed his guest a drink.

"I don't know; they know very little about him in the neighborhood. He arrived about a week ago, and took the house, furnished. From the number of servants and cars, he seems to have money, and——" Fletcher began to laugh.

"And what?" demanded Wynne.

"They told me at the drug store where I stopped to make my inquiries that several pretty ladies had been down to see him."

"That is interesting," remarked Wynne dryly. "But make a point of it that Operative No. 3 is told off to wait my orders. She is far the smartest of the bunch. That bit of gossip, though, about his lady visitors is distinctly interesting."

"You bet it is," Fletcher agreed, biting off the end of a cigar Wynne passed him, "but you know how those small places gossip. A man arrives and takes a big place—a foreigner at that—and all the neighbors are more anxious about him than if he was their own brother. But what's the game, Mr. Wynne—can't you tell me? You let me help you over the Moscow dynamite affair."

"Fletcher," said Wynne earnestly, "do not think I distrust you, but I had distinct orders from Washington that I was to let no one know the whole game. I pointed out to McMahon that I might need some assistance, such as you have given me to-night, for example. The chief said that I could have it as long as no one knew what I was after, and you know what he is like."

"You bet I do, Mr. Wynne," Fletcher returned, "and I am content to act under your orders, even if I am in the dark. I don't forget the chance you gave me out in Russia. I made enough out of that to send my boy Jim to college."

"I may have to tell you the whole thing yet," Wynne consoled him, "but we are up against a tough proposition, Fletcher. It is going to take me all I know how to win out."

III.

The following afternoon a smart touring car came to an abrupt standstill outside Mr. Farnelli's house on the Pelham Road. A remarkably pretty

girl, neatly tailored in her trimly cut blue serge, got down from the car of which she was the sole occupant and opened the bonnet.

For a while she tinkered incompetently. Then, with a pretty gesture of despair, she gave it up and walked up the driveway to the house. As she approached the porch a foreign-looking gentleman with a long-pointed black beard rose from where he was sitting and looked at her with unfeigned admiration.

Now Miss Irene Mitchell was well worth looking at, with her wealth of corn-colored hair and her violet eyes that looked so pathetically big and childlike.

"My car," she explained, "has broken down outside your gates. Could you please telephone to a garage and tell them to send somebody?"

"I shall be charmed to be of assistance," the foreign gentleman replied; "but let me introduce myself. My name is Alberti Farnelli."

Miss Mitchell smiled, and a challenge lay in the depth of her violet eyes. "I am Miss Mitchell," she said demurely. "Miss Irene Mitchell."

"Won't you come and sit down, and I will have my chauffeur see if he can arrange the trouble?" Mr. Farnelli suggested suavely.

Miss Mitchell consented, and followed her host into the house.

"And you will have some tea?" he continued hospitably, when the girl had accepted the chair he had offered her in the drawing-room.

"It is very kind of you," she smiled, "to take so much trouble on behalf of a stranger. I'm afraid my father will be horrified."

"But why? Surely it is most natural that you should appeal for help to the nearest person when your car has broken down." He rang the bell, and gave orders for his chauffeur to go down to Miss Mitchell's car, and then occupied himself with his visitor. His black eyes narrowed a little as he looked at her, and an unpleasant expression crept over the sallow face.

A grand piano stood open in the room. "You play, Mr. Farnelli?" she asked.

"Only as an amateur," he replied as he sat himself down at the instrument and began to play with no little brilliance Zuluetta's "Starlight Intermezzo." As his hands darted over the keys, Irene noticed the huge stone that flamed from the ring on his hand.

"But you play superbly," she told him when he had finished. "You must meet my father some day. He is crazy about music."

Already it was growing dark, and the headlights of her car had been turned on when the chauffeur had completed his work. "You are going back to New York?" Mr. Farnelli asked as the girl thanked him prettily for what he had done.

"Oh, yes," she answered. "We live on the Drive. I must hurry or my father will be anxious. He does not like me to be out driving alone after dark." She looked provocatively at him, and then glanced at the empty seat by her side.

"I wonder," he replied suavely, "if you would give me a lift into the city? I have to go in this evening, and I should very much dislike going alone if you would allow me to come with you instead."

"With pleasure, if you care to," she answered a little formally, and then suddenly broke off with a little exclamation, as if she had forgotten something. "Oh, what is the time?" she asked.

"It is only a few minutes past six," he said, looking at his watch.

"And I promised to dress early tonight. You have made me forget all my engagements. Now may I use your telephone before we start?"

Once left alone in the small room off the hall, Miss Mitchell spoke quickly into the telephone for a moment, and then joined Mr. Farnelli, who had already got into his coat. When he had helped her into the car he sat down beside her, and chatted gayly to the girl as she turned the car toward New York.

It was as they entered the Concourse that a swiftly moving automobile approached them. Miss Mitchell threw on the brakes with a jerk. "Daddie," she called, and the other car came to a stop. An elderly man with a gray beard and motor goggles, who stooped as he walked, got out and approached his daughter's car. "Irene," he said petulantly, "I have been so worried about you. I expected you back long before this, and I called up your friend in New Rochelle, who said that you had left hours ago, so I came out to see if I could find you. But who is this gentleman?"

"Oh, you silly, nervous, old daddie!" Irene replied caressingly. "I broke down with some engine trouble outside Mr. Farnelli's house on the Pelham Road, and he had his man fix me up, and I am giving him a lift into the city. Let me introduce my father, Mr. Farnelli."

Mr. Mitchell shook hands effusively. "You can go back, George," he called to his own driver. "Miss Irene will drive me home." And as the chauffeur turned and sped toward the city, he recommenced to thank Farnelli. "It is so kind of you to have looked after my little girl," he said warmly as he climbed into the tonneau of his daughter's car.

Irene pressed the electric self-starter and slipped in the clutch. Her father knelt in the tonneau behind them and rested his arms on the back of the front seat so that he could chat gayly to his daughter and her companion. "You must come and dine with us some night when you have nothing better to do," he insisted hospitably, and, as he said it, he rose and pressed a chloroform-soaked cloth over Farnelli's face. The girl drove on steadily, as if nothing of untoward interest had occurred.

Farnelli, with an awful effort, thrust the cloth from his face and emitted a shout for help, but only one, for the old man's muscles seemed made of steel, and he crushed back the cloth over his victim's mouth and nose. But at the moment when Farnelli had shouted a policeman chug-chugged past them on a motor bicycle. Hearing the cry, and catching a momentary glimpse of the struggle that was going on in the car, the officer turned his machine and started in pursuit at a terrific speed.

"Let her out, Irene; let her all out!" the old man directed tersely. "That cop saw me and is following."

"He will have to go some, Mr. Wynne, if he is going to catch us." Irene laughed from the sheer joy of speed that surged within her.

Wynne smiled with satisfaction as Farnelli showed unmistakable signs that he was gripped fast by the fumes of chloroform. Lifting him over the seat, Wynne laid him on the floor of the tonneau and threw a rug over him.

So excellently was Wynne disguised as an old man that no one who did not know could have recognized him either as Wynne or as Elliott. He glanced a little apprehensively behind at the glowing lamp of the policeman's motor bicycle. "Irene," he said, "I wish that you were made up. You know that if we are caught Washington will deny all knowledge of us, and that cop shows a deplorable tenacity of purpose. I make no doubt that I shall outwit him in the end, but you do not want to be seen."

"Come and take the wheel for a moment," she called over her shoulder. "I have something with me that will

help. I know the risk, but I don't pick up five thousand dollars every afternoon of my life."

Wynne climbed nimbly into the driver's seat as she slipped out of it. Lifting up the seat by him as the car raced through the evening air, the girl extracted from the space a widow's bonnet with a thick black veil. It looked a little incongruous over the blue serge of her trim suit, but at least it hid her face and the glory of her hair. She changed with amazing quickness, and in a miraculously few seconds was back at the steering wheel.

Wynne climbed back and administered a little more chloroform. Then he looked round again at the pursuing bicycle. As it flashed under an electric-light standard, Wynne saw that the fellow had pulled his gun. "Slow up, Irene!" he ordered. "He is going to bust a back tire."

Irene slowed down with desperate suddenness, causing the car to skid half across the road. As she did so a shot rang out, and the bullet ricocheted off the road on their left. A second later the car came to a standstill, and Wynne had barely time to congratulate himself that he carried a false number plate before the policeman had dismounted beside the automobile.

"What's the meaning of this outrage?" Wynne thundered as surreptitiously he passed the bottle of chloroform to Irene. "You might have killed my sister." As he so bluffed, Wynne inwardly bewailed the fact that it was not permitted him in this case to use the magic of his secret-service badge.

"You can cut all that out," the officer answered. "I saw you struggling with the other guy as I passed you. Why, there are only two of you!" he exclaimed. "What have you done with the other?"

"Other! What other? Come and search the car if you doubt it," cried Wynne as he opened the door of the car.

The policeman deliberately placed the stand under his back wheel, and then, peering in, laid eager hands on the rug which covered the unconscious Farnelli. As he did so, Wynne leaped on him and pulled him into the car. They rolled on the cushion in desperate struggle, but in a moment Wynne's enormous strength prevailed.

"Quick!" he called over his shoulder to Irene.

The girl jumped out, and, mounting on the footboard, pressed her handkerchief, soaked in the chloroform, over the policeman's face.

"We'll have a crowd round here in a minute," Wynne muttered as two cars sped by. "That handkerchief isn't big enough. Take mine from my breast pocket."

Irene got into the car, and, leaning from behind him, took out the handkerchief. "Plenty for all," she laughed pluckily as she tipped the bottle and pushed the larger handkerchief over the man's face. The policeman fought desperately, but at the first signs of weakness, Irene was back at the wheel.

"Turn her round!" Wynne ordered. "We are too near the city." And, as the girl obeyed, he gave full attention to the fast-collapsing officer.

Once thoroughly under, Wynne propped him on the seat. The car circled again and came to a standstill beside the motor bicycle. A few cars shot by in either direction, but no one noticed anything amiss. The moment the road was clear again, Wynne carried the policeman to the side of the road, where he would run no danger from the passing traffic. Then very deliberately he dug his pocketknife into one of the tires of the motor bicycle and leaped back into the automobile.

"Home, Irene!" he called gayly. "And do not exceed the speed limit.

I will give Mr. Farnelli another whiff or two, and I think most of our present difficulties are over."

The car made its way through the streets. Wynne, as they passed through the park, affected one of his marvelous changes. Stripping off his wig and false beard, with the aid of a pocket mirror and the light on the dashboard, he emerged shortly as Wynne the immaculate society man, mondaine and debonair as ever. Then he stepped back over the seat to the tonneau and buried himself in his plans until the car halted at the corner of Twentieth Street and Fourth Avenue.

Fletcher advanced anxiously. "You are late," he said. "Did you have trouble?"

"Nothing to speak of," chuckled Wynne, "but jump in; I will tell you all about it afterward."

The car turned and slipped through the square to stop outside the apartment house where Wynne lived on Gramercy Park.

Together the two men carried the recumbent Farnelli into the hall. But before Irene stole silently away in the car, Wynne laid a kindly hand on her shoulder. "Washington shall hear," he promised, "of how gallantly little Miss Operative No. 3 has carried herself this evening."

"Mr. Wynne, sir!" exclaimed the doorman. "Why, I thought you were out of town."

"Yes, a bally nuisance, George," Wynne drawled in his most English voice. "I had to come back, and then this fellah insisted on getting beastly drunk. Quite disgusting of him. What? Just telephone up to my man to come down."

They laid Farnelli on the floor until Riddle's arrival. "Carry him to the elevator, and take him up and put him to bed!" Wynne ordered. "If I had not been asked to look after the chap I swear I would leave him in the street."

Wynne had thoughtfully poured a half pint or so of whisky over his victim's clothes, so that the slight fumes of chloroform were drowned or at least disguised by the smell of the spirit.

"We can manage him, thank you, George," Wynne added as he handed the man a five-dollar bill. "You need not let everybody in the building know that a friend of mine was so hopelessly intoxicated; and, oh, George! This has so frightfully got on my nerves that if anybody calls or rings up I am—er—er—not here. I must be left alone in peace for a few days."

"I quite understand, sir," the man grinned. Wynne was such a magnificent tipper that he was willing to understand anything.

Once in the apartment, they carried Farnelli into the spare bedroom and laid him on the bed. The man showed signs of coming round. Wynne slipped a handcuff upon each wrist, and clipped the two ends to the rails at the head of the bed. Then, tying a rope around the feet, he made it fast to the end of the bed.

Wynne turned and faced Fletcher and Riddle. "You both of you know," he said gravely, "for whom I work. You are about to receive a very great surprise, and a surprise that holds a secret which I am not at liberty to disclose even to you. Have I your confidence, and can I rely absolutely on your secrecy as to who lies on that bed?"

"Surely," agreed Fletcher. "I know what Washington says goes."

Riddle looked protestingly at his employer. "I do not work for Washington, but for you, Mr. Wynne. I should have thought, sir," he went on almost pathetically, "that you would know that I have not forgotten that night about ten years ago."

Now it so happened that on the night

in question, Wynne had rescued Riddle, who since had so faithfully served him, from the long bread line that stretched so hopelessly on Madison Square. Impulsively Wynne laid a hand on the man's shoulder. "Forgive me, Riddle," he said. "I did not doubt you, but this is no ordinary matter."

Turning to the bed, Wynne began to work on Farnelli's face. Bit by bit he took off the beard; the mustache was a natural one. Then he slipped off the wig and false eyebrows. "Facial clay," Wynne murmured, more to himself than to the others. "I should not have thought he had learned enough about the game from the way he has gone on. I wonder it did not come off in our struggle."

"*Good Lord!*" ejaculated Fletcher. "*The Crown Prince of Zorania!*"

Riddle said nothing, but watched intensely.

"I am afraid he does not look very princely in handcuffs," smiled Wynne. "But now, Fletcher, I am going to turn you out. His royal highness and I will have a great deal to say to each other. Riddle, he will probably feel very ill. I will leave you with him. Do everything you can for his comfort when he comes round, as he will do in a few minutes. But do not talk to him, do not free his hands, and if he makes a noise gag him. You can let me know when he is fit to talk business."

Wynne followed Fletcher out of the door, closing it on the prince and his guardian.

"Well," remarked Fletcher as he picked up his hat, "I certainly have had some surprises during my career in the secret service, but this beats all."

"Thank you for your assistance," Wynne said as he shook hands at the door. "You will probably receive a check from Washington before long that will surprise you."

Early the next morning, Wynne, in dressing gown and slippers, interviewed his unwilling guest, who, he learned from Riddle, had calmed down after his first burst of anger and had slept fairly well. The gag had been necessary only once, and altogether he seemed in a fairly reasonable frame of mind.

It was, however, with very violent abuse that the prince greeted his host. "How dare you," he almost screamed, "so treat a prince of the blood royal?"

"I must ask you," Wynne said quietly as he sat down by the bed, "to refrain from so much noise, as I do not wish to have you gagged. Now listen to me," he went on sternly as the prince broke out again. "You and I have to understand each other. The facts are briefly these: When the preliminary papers were signed by you and the secretary of state, you played the very old game of substituting a dummy package for the original one. You are, of course, in debt, and you do not wish the king, your father, to find it out, so you hit on the pleasant little plan of blackmailing Uncle Sam. Without the papers, you would be harmless, as you could prove nothing, and no one would believe the bare assertion of Mr. Farnelli. Zarl of Zorania, of course, could not stoop to blackmail."

"You swine! Oh, you pig dog!" moaned the prince. "Ah, if only I had you in Zorania!"

"On the contrary, I have you in New York," Wynne grinned. "It only rests with yourself for you to return immediately to Zorania. You will stop here for three days, unless you send for the papers before. At the end of that time I shall go and see the Zoranian ambassador, who happens to be stopping in New York, and explain to him the honorable course that his crown prince has seen fit to pursue. You know," he added genially, "I can perceive quite a pleasant interview between you and your father, and I understand that in

your country there is a beautiful law which enables the king to change the succession to a younger son should he so wish, and should the heir to the throne be judged an undesirable successor."

"I will never, never give up those papers, *nevaire!*" expostulated the prince, his accent becoming more and more foreign as his excitement increased.

"You know you'll have to in the end," urged Wynne, "so why not be sensible? Besides, you were never cut out to be a professional crook. Look at the amateur mistakes you made from the very first. When Mr. Elliott came out to see you, it never struck you that the automobile would be followed. And then look at that ring of yours. Most anybody would recognize that stone and know that it belonged to the Crown Prince of Zorania. Then again, you go and fall for the first trap a pretty woman lays for you. Take my tip and cut it out. If you are in debt, own it up to your father and be a man, or ask some newly arrived multimillionaire to lend it to you. He would fall before royalty easy."

"You can go," said the prince politely, "to the devil! I shall never give up the papers."

"In that case, I will leave you, but remember you have only three days," Wynne warned him as he strolled from the room.

But in spite of all the prince's protestations, he took not three days, but three hours, in which to alter his mind. Perhaps Wynne's advice with reference to a loan from a millionaire decided him, but be that as it may he sent a message by Riddle that he was ready to capitulate.

Carefully watching him, Wynne permitted Zarl's hands to be loosed the while he wrote a letter.

"But will your confederates do as you tell them?" asked Wynne when he had read the letter.

"They are Zoranians," replied the prince stiffly, "and I am their crown prince. I command, and they obey. If ever Mr. Wynne puts his foot inside Zorania, he will find that my people obey to some purpose."

Wynne smiled as he dispatched the letter by the faithful Riddle. "Who knows?" he asked, when the man had gone. "Perhaps one day you will have your revenge." And in the expression that lay in the prince's small eyes, Wynne realized that Zorania would afford him, should he ever again visit there, plenty of the excitement for which he lived.

On Riddle's return a few hours later, he brought with him a bulky envelope. Wynne rapidly satisfied himself that all the papers were intact and locked them up in his safe.

A few moments after, the prince was ready to return to his hotel, as his existence as Mr. Farnelli had abruptly come to an end. "Do not forget," he remarked somewhat melodramatically, "that you have not yet heard the last of Zarl of Zorania."

Wynne laughed as he held open the door of the apartment. "And don't you forget," he said, "that it takes a man to put one over on Uncle Sam and get away with it."

THE HARD JOB OF STATESMEN

"WHAT is the principal job of the political party in power in this country?" inquired an Englishman.

"It is the duty of the party in power," explained the cynic, "to see to it immediately that all prices shall be lowered and all wages shall be raised."

Monte Jones

By John B. Ritch

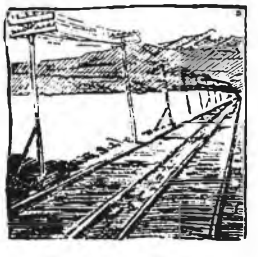
RIVER'S name was Monte Jones,
One o' them good, rollin' stones,
Not accumulatin' mosses,
(All such ideas he disowns),
Likes his whisky, loves his hosses,
Stagin's bred right in his bones.
Monte yanks us out o' Benton, strings his six across the flat,
Heads 'em down the trail for Billings, sets the gee string on his hat,
Pulls the hill and makes for Highwood—gad, them leaders humps and trots,
And that coach ain't hittin' nothin' but the landscapes' highest spots;
Monte's throwing silk and cussin', says we're goin' good and fine,
Explains that cussin' helps make schedule on 'most any six-hoss line.

That big coach jest rocks and reels,
Like a drunken sailor feels
When his overstay on shore leave
Gets to workin' in his heels,
And she "cathops" like a broncho,
Runnin' mostly on two wheels.
Hits the Highwood all a-blowin', stock's been changed back at the Sag,
Ten big miles an hour we're driftin', ain't a horse there dares to lag;
On thro' rollin' bunchgrass stretches, 'long past freighter's lonely camps,
'Cross the benches to the Judith, here's where nature gayly stamps
Her choice colors on the scenery like some gorgeous rainbow sign,
Monte swears 'twere fixed and put there for the Benton six-hoss line.

Says he'll never understand
How some folks can't see the hand
Of the Master Range Boss smilin'
Like a song all thro' the land—
All the green and all the blossoms,
Where He's put His lovin' brand.
Tells me how he's allus staged it—herded six along the trails—
Watched the clouds from off the mountains drive down like big, snowy sails,
Down to where the grass is wavin' and the winds go rippin' by,
Where the nights is filled with echoes of the gray wolf's long, weird cry—
Refused two drinks in all his lifetime, then he tells me, on the square,
Once a fellow didn't ask him, the other time he wasn't there.

Time's he's heard the stage wheels groan,
And the horses sob and moan,
Driftin' down before the blizzard,
Out there in the night alone,
Fightin' jest to save his outfit
Like the devil's very own.
Knows stage hosses talks like humans, 'cause he's heard them on the trail,
When the snow whipped down in whirlwinds and death challenged in the gale
Every livin' thing that faced it, as it lashed and tore its way,
When the cold had crushed and dazed him, and he tried his best to pray—
'Til he heard the big, gray wheel hoss tell the others, straight and plain:
"Somethin's wrong up there behind us; guess the driver's drunk again."

Sometimes stage roads seem to him,
As they winds there long and dim,
On, on, 'cross the endless benches,
Then up near the mountain's rim,
Like the trail on to Forever—
Like the Last Drive—stern and grim.
Then again it seems the waybill's jest the record of a load
Of the tired ones, of the weary, makin' down that hapless road
To the "station 'cross the ferry," and the outfit hits a gait
That's a hummer, for no driver wants to make that station late.
And the coach jest chucks and joggles while he drives and ponders why,
Then the thought comes up plumb sudden—that he never was so dry.



Oh, the Montes that we knew,
In the wild, rough days, it's true,
How they drove the pace that does you,
How they hiked their sixes through,
How they loved their "broncs" and whisky,
How they loved the women, too.
Cussin' helped him make his schedule into every minin' camp,
Every road ranch all through cowland knew this reckless, cheerful scamp,
But his coach has chucked and joggled on its last trip down the line,
For the steam horse pulls the mail sacks and an iron road finds the mine,
Where the stage road crossed the benchlands wave wide fields of golden grain,
And the trail is closed to Monte—he'll not pass this way again.

Whipsawed

By H. C. Witwer

Author of "Confidence," "The Emancipation of Rodney," Etc.

The great Bentonville mystery that gave the new city editor of the *Times* many sleepless nights. A comedy-drama of the newspaper world

LUCIUS ELI WAINWRIGHT—"Luscious" to a disrespectful staff responsible for the daily appearance of the Bentonville *Times*, of which he was the inordinately proud owner—leaned his six foot three of bone and muscle over at Hendricks, the desk chair creaking at the strain.

"I'll give you twenty per if you make good, and eight seconds' notice if you don't!" he said, turning the battery of his piercing gray eyes on the frail but efficient-looking young man opposite. "Are you game?"

"I——" began the other.

It was the huge, warning finger of Luscious, coupled with an odd contraction of his features, that shut off his reply, because at that moment there came a knock at the door of the private office. It was something more than a conventional notification of a desire to enter—there was a kind of mystic significance in the solemn, distinct rapping.

Luscious allowed it to be repeated, cocking his ear attentively at the sound. Then he turned again to Hendricks, winked solemnly, straightened up suddenly in his chair, and boomed:

"Come in!"

There was more defiance than invitation in the tone—it was a challenge.

The door opened slowly, and a tall, slim, middle-aged person, bareheaded and carrying a handful of proof sheets and yellow "flimsy," entered the room. He carried himself with such austere dignity that Hendricks would have smiled had it not been for the obviously charged atmosphere of the office. He walked with a peculiar, ramrodlike stiffness to the editorial desk, and deposited there his burden.

"The proofs of to-morrow's editorials, yesterday's leftovers and to-day's special correspondence," he announced aggressively. It was as if he had added: "What do you think of that, eh?" or some such belligerent remark.

Receiving no reply other than a frowning contortion of Wainwright's features, he cast a curious glance at Hendricks, strode to the door, and, to the astonishment of the latter, bestowed a significant wink on him and vanished.

Wainwright sat staring after him until Hendricks had coughed once and blown his nose twice by way of reminding the other of his presence, then he looked around hazily.

"Did you see *that?*" he asked irrelevantly.

Hendricks caught his meaning in a general way, and nodded.

"Well, sir," exclaimed Wainwright, with sudden warmth, "that person is a modern Frankenstein's monster to me! I'm a man of simple likes and dislikes, but I don't know that I have ever run across any thing or body, in my forty odd years, that I have had a more nat-

ural, confirmed, and undying distaste for than that creature who interrupted our conversation!"

He swung the chair around swiftly, and, reaching in a pigeonhole of the desk, extracted a thick, black cigar, lit it, and puffed vigorously for a moment in silence.

"He's my ex-city editor!" he resumed abruptly. "If *you* want the job!"

Hendricks blinked, but marshaled his wits quickly.

"I'll accept your offer," he said, after a pause.

"Fine!" answered Wainwright, extending a hand which Hendricks grasped. "You can go upstairs and start to work now. Just tell Richards, that's that eyesore that was just in here, that he's working for *you*, will you? And what's your name? I'll put you on the pay roll."

Hendricks spelled it out, wondering what would happen next. He felt like a spectator at a three-ring circus or an eleven-inning ball game.

"All right," was Wainwright's next comment, as he wrote the name on a pad and swung around in the chair again. "The editorial rooms are three flights up. You'll find the staff there, or we'll get a new one, if you don't! We don't run much to formality here," he added, evidently reading Hendricks' expression correctly, "but—our circulation's all right!"

A wave of his hand closed the interview, and he turned back to his desk. Hendricks recovered some of his poise, and bowed himself out of the room.

II.

Outside the office, he stopped at the bottom of the stairway leading to the floors above and rolled a cigarette, his youthful brow contracted until it was a fair replica of Wainwright's. He had come to Bentonville as the result of a tip from a friendly city editor in New York, who, however, was not quite friendly enough to give Hendricks a job on his own paper. It was midsummer, dog days in metropolitan newspaperdom, and jobs were scarcer than starving chorus girls, so Hendricks had jumped at the opportunity—at first merely as a sop to his conscience, which would have reproved him had he turned it down, but later quite enthusiastically—there was a tinge of possible adventure in running a country daily that appealed to his imagination.

But now, as he toiled up the three rickety flights of stairs, he began to have disquieting doubts as to the wisdom of his course. To the prematurely blasé Hendricks the breezy, abrupt manner of Wainwright was not particularly reassuring. Rather than a big-hearted, candid, bluff, but honest, Westerner, Hendricks, having lived and worked in New York, saw merely a loud-mouthed person, who sold, perhaps, gold bricks when not engaged at perpetrating the Bentonville *Times*. Ruminating along these lines, he finally arrived at the head of the stairway, pushed open a creaking, unpainted door, and stood in the editorial chamber.

He found himself gazing at a long, narrow, poorly lighted room occupied by three men, two small, wooden tables, a couple of backless chairs, and about a thousand copies of the Bentonville *Times*—the latter scattered about until they almost formed a carpet for the floor. The walls were hidden by newspaper illustrations and clippings, apparently covering every event of moment from the sinking of the *Maine* to Jess Willard's victory at Havana.

But the thing that caught and held his attention was the actions of the three humans the moment he opened the door. As though, at a given signal, each with one accord seized a stack of "copy" paper and a pencil, and, bending over the tables, began to write

at an astonishing rate of speed. There was no comment at his entrance, not a head turned in his direction, but the three pencils raced across the table as though propelled by high-powered motors.

"Boy! Oh, copy boy!" yelled one in a voice that rattled the window-panes.

From some hidden crevice of the room a dirty-faced youngster appeared magically, snatched at the handful of paper held out by the speed-crazed writer, and vanished through a door at the far end of the room, dropping a good half of his burden on the floor on the way out.

Hendricks chuckled, and one of the trio very slowly and carefully twisted his neck around in his direction, holding his face close to the paper and keeping the pencil moving at undiminished speed. He appraised Hendricks with one cautious eye, and then, with a grunt, straightened up, threw down his pencil, and arose from the chair. The other two, watching him covertly, did the same, sitting back, with relieved sighs. Hendricks heard one asking for a cigarette as the first approached him.

"What's yours?" he demanded, eyeing Hendricks curiously.

He was young and slim, Hendricks noticed, wore his hair a trifle long, a baggy, shiny suit, a green celluloid eyeshade, and an air of importance.

"I'm Hendricks, the new city editor," answered Hendricks in an easy, conversational tone.

The other instantly held out his hand.

"Welcome to our city!" he said, smiling. "We would have had the band and militia meet you at the station if Luscious had but given word of your coming. Luscious, you know, owns this sheet—he may have told *you* his name was Mister Wainwright, but it's Luscious, just the same. I'm glad to hear you're the new city editor; we thought you were old Luscious when you came in, hence our mad rush to get something in the paper besides the weather guess and the date line. You know every time Luscious comes up here we reproduce the one-reel thriller entitled, 'Getting out the Bentonville *Times*.' It goes big with Luscious, and costs us nothing. Come hither, and I'll introduce you to your future inferiors!"

Halfway back to the other two, he stopped suddenly and turned to Hendricks.

"One moment!" he said solemnly. "Did you ever work with Luscious out in Oklahoma?"

"No," confessed Hendricks.

"Do you know one Richards who did?" persisted the other.

Hendricks shook his head.

"Not guilty!" announced his inquisitor. "You've passed! My name is Greer—I'm the head of the copy desk, *the* copy desk, your assistant, and the feature editor. Over here," he went on, as they reached the first table—"over here we have Lucullus Benton Haviland—he writes editorials, obits, and the daily optimistic thought."

Hendricks held out a hand to an individual who at first glance appeared to have stepped bodily out of one of Dickens' novels. He was apparently on the shady side of sixty, and wore clothes fashionable at the time when Lee surrendered. His massive, leonine head was surmounted with tousled, silvered locks that gave him an imposing appearance marred only by the deep circles under his eyes and the radiance of the tip of his nose, neither of which were caused by overindulgence in ice-cream sodas. As he rose and bowed courteously, Hendricks noticed that his left leg hung a trifle stiff.

"I am extremely glad of this pleasure," he intoned solemnly, when Greer had introduced Hendricks. "I am also glad to see our young men coming to the fore in modern journalism. I hope you will prove worthy of the great

trust Mr. Wainwright has placed in you. Being the city editor of a daily, I may say, is quite a responsible position, but it only proves the wonderful kindness of Mr. Wainwright in giving you this great opportunity. Now, I remember, in the early eighties, when——"

"Lucullus, behave!" interrupted Greer impatiently. "This man has not come to interview you for 'Who's Who'; he's merely going to be your boss for a while. Write that out, and I'll have it set up in ten-point caps, and he can read it. Just now I must show him around the office."

And Greer seized Hendricks by the arm and pulled him away.

The third member of the staff looked up slowly as Greer and Hendricks approached him. It was the man Hendricks had seen in Wainwright's office.

"Mr. Hendricks," said Greer formally, "this is Mr. Richards. He has been city editor up to now. There is some sort of mad infatuation between him and our beloved Luscious——"

He adroitly ducked the phone book which Richards suddenly shied at his head, and went back to his place at the table.

Hendricks looked at Richards, who unsmilingly returned his gaze. He felt he must say something to bridge the embarrassing pause.

"I am the new city editor," he began hesitatingly. "Of course——"

"Don't apologize," broke in Richards, raising a silencing hand. "That man Wainwright would do *anything* to annoy me. I expected this. And now, what did the low rotter say about me?"

Hendricks, taken aback by the other's manner, looked at him blankly.

"I mean that person downstairs," explained Richards, "who had the assurance to remove me as city editor of this paper—Wainwright!"

Hendricks, being human, could not repress a smile.

"Why, he said nothing especially that——"

Richards interrupted again, expelling his breath in a deep sigh.

"Ah!" he exclaimed mysteriously. "He *knew*, then!"

"Knew what?" asked Hendricks.

"I'll get him!" went on Richards, ignoring the question. "I'll get him, if it's the last thing I do!"

He turned abruptly and walked away, leaving Hendricks staring after him in amazement.

The dirty-faced urchin who had responded to the call for a copy boy during the excitement following Hendricks' entrance into the room, now appeared from somewhere and tugged at his arm.

"Boss wants you," he said laconically.

Hendricks looked down at him.

"Do you ever wash your face?" he inquired.

"*You* should worry!" retorted the boy. "You better go down and see what the big boss wants or he'll come git you!"

Exasperated, Hendricks turned to Greer, and the latter pointed significantly to the door.

"Better go," he said, "or he'll come up, bawl us all out, and can you."

Hendricks went.

"Sit down, Mr. Hendricks, I'll be with you in a moment," was Wainwright's greeting, as he stood once more in the office. He slumped into a chair and glanced apathetically around the room, while Wainwright reached for a desk telephone. Hendricks' roving gaze noted many decorations not usually found in a newspaper office—for instance, there was the huge cowhide whip that hung over the desk, the crossed spears that formed a frame for a cheap colored lithograph of "Custer's Last Stand," several weird paintings of cowboys engaged in roping steers and busting bronchos, while in a corner stood a double-barreled shotgun, an as-

sortment of lariats, and a brace of revolvers—and Bentonville was but twenty miles from New York!

Wainwright's quick eye caught Hendricks' inspection, and he swung around in his chair.

"They all come from *my* country," he remarked proudly, "Oklahoma—greatest little old place on earth! Only thing against it is that that whelp Richards came from there, too, and—— Hello!"

He turned back to the phone, and Hendricks turned back to his perusal of the room, until Wainwright, hanging up the receiver with a bang, swung around, facing him again.

"Excuse me," he began. "One of our, or *your,* I should say, correspondents has just thrown up his job. However, we can get along without him—matter of fact, I didn't know he was working for me until he just now quit—I guess that little fiend Richards hired him. That brings us to what I sent for you about. Find the staff upstairs, all right?"

Hendricks nodded affirmatively.

"Er—meet Richards, did you?"

"Yes, sir," answered Hendricks.

Wainwright drummed for a moment on the edge of his desk, his roving gaze sweeping the room, and finally coming back to Hendricks.

"Well"—Wainwright suddenly leaned very close to him and lowered his voice—"I want to know just what he had to say about me—every 'if,' 'and,' and 'but,' now mind!"

Hendricks' surprised exclamation was involuntary—the thing was commencing to get on his nerves.

"Why, really, Mr. Wainwright," he answered, "he said nothing to me—I had barely time to introduce myself, you know, when you sent for me."

He put a rebuking emphasis on the last, but Wainwright allowed it to pass unnoticed. He was staring at Hendricks incredulously.

"Do you mean to say he said absolutely *nothing* about me?" he demanded.

Hendricks nodded. He was determined not to become involved in the great Bentonville mystery, whatever it was.

Wainwright's glance was as searching as an X ray, but he appeared satisfied at what he read in the other's face, for he nodded suddenly, with a gesture of dismissal.

"Well," he grunted, "if he didn't say anything yet—*he will!* I sure would like to fire that fellow—and some day I'm going to do that thing!"

And there was unutterable longing in his voice.

As Hendricks strode to the door and opened it, Wainwright came over and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"If you can discover some nice, legitimate way we can get rid of him," he whispered, "you'll make yourself so solid with me that I'll create the job of managing editor, and make you *it!*"

III.

A month after Hendricks came to Bentonville, Richards was still on the pay roll of the *Times,* and Hendricks was as far from getting at the bottom of the animosity between Richards and his employer as he was when he came there. Neither would vouchsafe anything more enlightening than the fact that each cordially detested the other, and one day would square accounts in a particularly horrifying manner, yet there were no open clashes—one rivaling the other in painful politeness. Hendricks thought it more than passing strange that, under the circumstances, Richards did not resign or Wainwright apply the traditional "can," but there were scant indications of either event becoming a fact. The other two members of the staff failed to evince any interest in the situation,

although Greer's solution was that Richards was the guardian of many dark secrets having to do with Wainwright's early career—and Richards hinted as much on several occasions. Hendricks did manage to gather the information, however, that Wainwright, like Lochinvar, had come out of the West some years before, bought the decrepit Bentonville *Times,* and, by the application of his personality and dollars, made a near approach to a newspaper out of it. Later, he had used it to elect him to some minor State office, of which he was childishly proud. Richards had arrived some time later, and had been installed as city editor—the day after, Wainwright began cross-examining the other members of the staff as he had Hendricks—and Richards began where he stopped.

As Hendricks was entering the office one morning, he chanced to meet Richards on the stairs, and stepped aside, with a greeting, to let the latter pass. At that moment, Wainwright came flinging out of his office, almost bowling the pair over. He apologized gruffly to Hendricks, bestowed a look of deepest scorn on Richards, who returned it in kind, and then went clattering on up the stairs. Richards stood stiffly looking after him, an expression of unrelenting hatred on his mournful features.

"Did you notice *that?*" he asked abruptly, turning to Hendricks.

Hendricks hesitated.

"The *look* he gave me," went on Richards solemnly.

Hendricks smiled embarrassedly.

"Well!" went on Richards, with such sudden vehemence that Hendricks stepped back, startled. "Let him do it *now,* but I'll prevail, despite him! You saw how he flew up those stairs, didn't you? *Well*——"

He shook his head meaningly, and hurried out of the office.

As Hendricks reached the top of the stairway, he observed Wainwright standing there, obviously impatient for his coming.

"He's gone, eh?" was his salutation.

"Yes," answered Hendricks dazedly—the thing was affecting his balance.

"Did you see the way he looked at me when I came out?" inquired the other.

"Yes," returned Hendricks wearily; "he frowned."

Wainwright slapped a mammoth fist into the palm of his other hand.

"How much longer do you think I am going to stand that?" he demanded, raising his voice until it boomed through the little building.

Hendricks refused to hazard a guess, backing away from the angry Luscious.

"You saw how he scurried away, didn't you?" pursued Wainwright, as though he found comfort in the fact. "Very anxious to get out of my sight, eh? Well, it won't be for long *now!*"

They entered the editorial sanctum together, and, as Hendricks removed his hat and coat, Greer and Haviland bent to their work with feverish energy, conscious of the watchful eye of Luscious. The latter stood and watched them for a moment, his hands on his hips and his massive head thrown forward at a belligerent angle—then, with a snort, he walked over to one of the tables and picked up a copy of the *Journal,* Bentonville's only other daily. He opened the paper noisily, and swept the front page with a glance. Then——

"Say, what are you fellows doing up here, sleeping, eh?" he roared out suddenly, striding over to Greer and shaking the paper under his nose. "Do you see *that?*"

He spread the paper out on the table and pointed to a flaring headline somewhere on the first page.

Greer's pencil sped along the copy paper under his hand. He intimated neither by sound or movement that he was aware of the proximity of the an-

gry Luscious. He scribbled away furiously, reaching for a fresh piece of paper, while Wainwright stood off and eyed him malevolently; then, without looking up, he bawled:

"Copy boy!"

Glancing up, he regarded Wainwright blankly, as if aware of his presence for the first time.

"Did you want something, Mr. Wainwright?" he inquired easily.

Luscious, his face the color of a ripe tomato, threw the clutch off his pent-up emotions, at that.

"Oh, did you want something, Mister Wainwright?" he mimicked in a high, falsetto voice. "You said a pageful!" he finished, his tone changing to the roar of an irritated lion. "I want some *work* out of you fellows, instead of whatever you're doing here now. I want the *Times* to print news events the day they happen, instead of the following week. I want——"

"What's the matter now?" demanded Greer wearily, interrupting the litany of Wainwright's desires.

"How is it *we* haven't got that post-office story?" bellowed Wainwright, pointing to the *Journal*. "*That's* what's the matter!"

Greer gazed at the paper as though it were a rare curiosity.

"What—*that?*" he said contemptuously. "*That* story? I guess you don't read your own paper, Mr. Wainwright—*we* printed that yarn a week ago!"

He turned back to his work.

"Boy!" he yelled. And, ignoring Wainwright, he seized a fresh sheet of paper, and again the pencil sped merrily along.

Wainwright stood wagging his head from side to side for a moment, started to say something, and then, evidently thinking better of it, strode to the door in silence. When they heard him clumping down the stairs, Greer turned to Hendricks.

"Well, Luscious had us then, all right!" he remarked. "Say, you better get a line on that post-office story, at that—we really should print *something* about it!"

Hendricks, with an amazed gasp, sank into a chair.

"Why, *didn't* we have that story?" he exclaimed.

"Shucks, no!" returned Greer. "They're so sore at us over at the post office that they wouldn't give anything but the mail to a *Times* man! But Luscious won't know the difference—by the time he can dig up the files of last week he'll forget what he's looking for. That's the beauty of our filing system here!"

"Well——" began Hendricks.

They heard the heavy, unmistakable tread of Wainwright coming up the stairs again, and Hendricks mechanically fell in with the other two, snatching a piece of copy paper from a pile and starting a spasmodic rewrite of the post-office story from the *Journal*.

Wainwright pushed open the door, and, as Hendricks looked up, beckoned to him silently, walking ahead to the far corner of the room. When they had reached that point, Luscious cleared his throat and laid his hands on Hendricks' shoulder.

"Hendricks," he said, "we need some dignity in this here office—we also need a goat. Know what I'm getting at? No? Well, I'll elucidate. I don't know whether we had that post-office story or not—that man Greer is not especially noted for truthfulness, but he's a hard worker. Now, I'm going to have some system here pretty soon—in fact, I expect *you* to get things in some kind of shape as soon as you've been here a little while longer. But what I'm driving at is this: I couldn't find a last week's *Times* if I hired Sherlock Holmes to look for it. It's around here somewhere, because, unfortunately, we don't sell them all—but

where it is is beyond *me,* so I can't check up on this particular story."

He stopped for a moment and glanced balefully at the staff, which was bent over the little tables.

"Now, sir," he resumed, "what we need here is a managing editor! Some one we can hold responsible for such details as you can't look after, and who we can shoo at the Pro Bono Publicos and Constant Readers when they come in to kick. We want a man with some dignity to him—somebody that looks the part, and knows a lot of twelve-voweled words which he can use when he wants to. You know what I mean, con them into thinking they're wrong, and then make 'em know it, without getting 'em sore! Now, old man Haviland, there, your chief editorial writer, was born for just that kind of a job. He looks it, acts it, and I've caught him rehearsing it around here many a time. So he's elected! When I go downstairs, you tell him he's managing editor of the Bentonville *Times.* If *I* do it, he'll tell me something about what a glorious æon it is going to be for journalism here, and get me so sore I'm liable to fire him!"

And Luscious tramped away from the dazed Hendricks, and banged the door after him.

IV.

Hendricks made his way back to the table and tapped the venerable Haviland on the shoulder.

"Mr. Haviland," he said, as the latter peered up over his glasses, "Mr. Wainwright has just asked me to inform you that he has selected you as the managing editor of this paper!"

"That's a typical rotten trick of Luscious!" declared Greer. "Sounds just like him!"

Haviland blinked for a moment, seemingly stunned by the shock. He removed his glasses and polished them absently with a sheet of flimsy. Then he pulled his disabled leg off the supporting chair and cleared his throat vigorously.

"It's no use," remarked Greer, catching the sound, "I absolutely will not buy. Not if he gave you the paper! Besides, you ought to go on the wagon as an example to us."

But Haviland did not seem to hear him. He rose from his chair and started for the door, calling over his shoulder to Hendricks:

"I will be back presently to finish my editorial on the growth of the Populist movement in the South. It is of vast importance, so kindly do not disturb it. I am going down to—express my thanks to Mr. Wainwright!"

Greer turned to Hendricks as the door closed after their new chief executive.

"He's not a bad old scout, at that!" he remarked. "He's been in this game since Horace Greeley was a cub reporter, and he firmly believes that some one besides the linotyper and proof readers read editorials. But wait until Richards gets this! He thought Luscious was going to *give* him that job when you came here. Just wait, that's all!"

Ten minutes after Haviland had left the room, he reappeared. He was breathing hard, not only from the exertion of climbing the stairs, but evidently from the effect of some mental turmoil.

"Brr!" he exclaimed scornfully, as he laboriously resumed his seat at the table. "Downstairs is a monster without a soul, without a single human attribute, a creature; a—— I'll do a monograph on him some day!"

He glanced up at the bewildered Hendricks.

"Mr. Wainwright desires to see you immediately!" he said.

Hendricks snapped his fingers irritably—this was the limit! He had had

enough of Bentonville, the *Times,* and Luscious. The petty intrigues and teapot tempests had filled him with a great deal of disgust and a growing longing for the city room of some New York paper—any of them! He was going down and tell Mr. "Luscious" T. Wainwright that the *Times* would have to worry along without him after to-day!

Entering Wainwright's office in this frame of mind, he came upon the latter pacing the floor like a caged beast at the zoo. He scarcely looked up as Hendricks entered, but motioned him to a chair. The latter, however, remained standing, his ultimatum trembling on his togue.

"The ingrate!" shot out Wainwright suddenly. "That's what a man gets for trying to aid his fellow men in *this* rotten part of the country—they're all alike!"

"Who—Richards?" asked Hendricks spitefully.

"No!" roared Wainwright, stopping suddenly. *"Haviland!* That old scoundrel that I made managing editor in a moment of aberration, and a fine managing editor he'd make! Ha! Ha!" he laughed wildly. "Why, he hasn't enough *dignity* about him to be head office boy! But wouldn't you think that a man would be grateful for being elevated to the highest position on a newspaper?"

"Why, yes," granted Hendricks.

"Well, do you know the first thing that ungrateful wretch asked me, after I had given him the job?" inquired Wainwright in a tone that bespoke unutterable scorn.

"No," answered Hendricks, with some curiosity. "What?"

"*He wanted me to raise his salary!*" cried Wainwright, as if he did not expect to be believed. "Isn't that the limit? That's enough to destroy your faith in mankind! Why, I've practically made him! Taken him from obscurity and made him managing editor of my paper, and the first thing that comes to his mind is more money! Mind you, he came down here and asked for a raise, after what I've just done for him. I never heard the equal of that for callous ingratitude in my life!"

And Luscious sank down in his chair, his face buried in his hands, the picture of abject dejectedness.

"What is his salary now?" asked Hendricks finally, restraining his facial muscles with difficulty.

"Eh? Why, I've been paying him *thirteen dollars a week!*" answered Wainwright indignantly.

Hendricks thought this beyond comment. Wainwright lit a cigar, and after a few satisfied puffs, seemed to recover somewhat from the blow Haviland had dealt him. As Hendricks started the opening remarks of his resignation, Luscious cut him off:

"I sent for you to find out what this man Richards does on the *Times.* What is his job? Does he write anything at all for the Bentonville *Times* except the date line? You've had a chance to observe him now, you know what he does—it's a mystery to me! I've been trying to discover just what efforts he put forth for this paper ever since he came to work here—Greer once told me he had charge of the date line, but what else does he do? I've searched the paper every day for some trace of his fine Italian hand, but I never see anything there that looks as if he wrote it! Now, by Heaven, I'm going to clear up *that* mystery! What does he do?"

"Why, Mr. Wainwright," answered Hendricks truthfully, "I can't just tell you his particular job. He—I've sent him out on several assignments since I succeeded him as city editor, and now and then he writes a headline or——"

"Wait!" cried Wainwright suddenly. He leaped from the chair, dashed

through the door of the office, and in a moment was back with a copy of the *Times*.

"Here!" he yelled, brandishing it before Hendricks' face. "Here's a paper hot from the press! Now point out to me something this fellow has donated to it. Mark it, cut it out, I want to see it!"

Hendricks accepted the paper, and glanced over it carefully, turning it inside and out in his perusal of the pages. Meanwhile, Wainwright stood over him, watching him as a cat does a mouse.

"Well," confessed Hendricks finally, "I don't just seem to find anything here, but——"

"Where do you expect to find it?" asked Wainwright sarcastically. "In the *Journal?* No, you bet you don't find anything there! He goes prowling around here and there and slinking in and out of the office, but what does he do? *Nobody knows!*" he laughed harshly. "The man of mystery, eh?"

There was a tap on the door.

"That's him!" whispered Wainwright. "I know his knock!"

He winked mysteriously at Hendricks.

"Come in!" he bellowed.

The door opened about an inch, and the mournful countenance of Richards appeared in the aperture. Wainwright sneered. Richards sneered back. Then he turned to Hendricks.

"I would like to see you," he murmured, *"alone!"*

"Pah!" snorted Wainwright, and dismissed Hendricks with a wave of his hand.

Outside, Richards seized Hendricks by the arm.

"I outfaced him that time, didn't I?" he asked proudly. Before Hendricks could reply, he went on hurriedly:

"Get ready to hear something big! I have the greatest story that ever broke in this town!"

"What is it?" queried Hendricks, with a gleam of interest.

"A story that will tear the town—yes, the *State*—wide open! It's absolutely exclusive, there isn't another paper in this county that has a line about it! I've been working on this for six months, night and day, but now I have gathered all my ends together, and have the proofs!"

"Well, what's the story?" demanded Hendricks eagerly. "What is it—graft, divorce scandal, or what?"

For answer, Richards motioned Hendricks to follow him upstairs, refusing to utter as much as a word until they had entered the editorial rooms. Then he reached into an inner pocket and flung a wad of copy paper on the table in front of Hendricks.

"Read it!" he commanded briefly.

V.

Fifteen minutes later, Hendricks laid down the last page of the copy, and his hand trembled as he did so, for Richards had been conservative, if anything, in his estimate of the value of the story. Hendricks forgot the smallness of the town and paper and the idiosyncrasies of Luscious as he contemplated it. If Richards only had some tangible proofs—anything!

The latter seemed to read his thoughts. He dove in a pocket and his hand emerged with a heavy canvas envelope, which he flicked on the table with a dramatic gesture. Hendricks opened it eagerly and a mass of papers, photographs, and letters fell out before his shining eyes. He seized the photographs feverishly, examining one after the other with delighted gasps—he pored over the papers—signed affidavits, personal testimony!

Richards had the goods!

Hendricks strode quickly over to

Greer, who was watching the proceedings with cynical amusement.

"Send up all the copy you can get your hands on!" he snapped crisply. "Anything—obits, local stuff, sports, even some of those exchange jokes. Take a scissors and lift everything from these New York papers, there, but the ads. We're going to do something that's never been done in Bentonville since the railroad let trains stop here!"

"What?" asked Greer. "Get out a newspaper?"

"Worse!" retorted Hendricks. *"We're going to get out an extra!"*

Greer gasped, but Hendricks was already on his way to the composing room.

VI.

The story that Richards had brought in had for its motif that inseparable affinity of ham and bacon—eggs! Not the common or garden variety, but the kind the Bentonville Egg Packing Company was selling to confectioners, bakeries, grocers, and voters of Bentonville and its suburbs. Richards had laid bare the gigantic fraud that was being perpetrated boldly and profitably by the soulless promoters of the company. He had four columns of data picturesquely setting forth how eggs known as "rots and spots" were being sold to bakeries for Bentonville's pies, eggs of uncertain age and questionable character were going into Bentonville's ice cream, puddings, and—innards. A fresh egg would be denied admittance to the factory! Huge consignments of defunct eggs were bought in New York and reshipped to Bentonville, to be sold at a large profit to the trusting, egg-loving public. Condemned carloads were brought to the town, recrated, and distributed to confectioners and restaurants.

And why? So that the directors of the Bentonville Egg Packing Company could buy self-starting systems for their autos and *fresh* eggs for themselves!

It remained for the enterprising *Times* to disclose this terrible iniquity. Here were the sworn statements of employees who had witnessed the allegations set forth, here were photographs of cases of eggs as they came from New York, with "Condemned" marked on the sides of the crates, here were affidavits from department foremen swearing that no egg was allowed to leave the plant that had not at least passed the voting age.

Would Bentonville sit up, thought Hendricks, as he wrote an eight-column headline; would Luscious throw out his chest with pride at the news-gathering abilities of the *Times* staff under the new city editor? Would Richards be forgiven, and the great secret of his fall from grace come out? Would—— But you can't write an eight-column headline and drift around in the seventh heaven, also!

When Hendricks had rushed down to the office with the proofs of the first half column of the story, Wainwright was gone. A note on the desk said he would be back in an hour, and his tired-eyed stenographer added that he had left in response to a mysterious telephone call that seemed to greatly upset him. So Hendricks decided to go ahead on his own responsibility, and get out the extra. He would show Wainwright that he was a man of initiative and experience, and that city editing a Bentonville *Times* was a small assignment for a New York newspaper man.

The printer's devil came staggering up at noon with the first papers off the press—the hastily summoned and trained corps of newsboys were rending the air outside the *Times* office. Greer, Richards, and Hendricks, hatless, coatless, perspiring, but happy, seized the papers eagerly, spreading them out on the table. The venerable

Haviland was, strangely enough, missing.

"*Some* yarn!" exclaimed Hendricks, proudly contemplating the front page.

"And yet," remarked Greer, with an admiring glance at Richards—"and yet they say the only good newspaper men are in New York!"

They heard the familiar clattering up the stairs.

"Here comes Luscious!" said Greer, "and just in time. I'll bet we all get a raise, and maybe a bonus; yes, I——"

The door was suddenly burst open—burst is the proper word, as it came halfway off the hinges as Lucius T. Wainwright, proprietor of the Bentonville *Times,* shot into the room. His appearance was as startling as it was sudden. He was hatless and coatless, and his face was the color of a boiled lobster. In one trembling hand he swung the huge bull whip that had adorned the wall over his desk downstairs. The staff gazed at the spectacle, horrified. There was no sound for a moment—the tableau was perfect. The three could not speak, being dumb with amazement, Luscious because his convulsively working mouth was unable to form words.

Then, of a sudden, the spell was broken.

"By Heaven, I've got them all!" yelled Wainwright. He cracked the whip over his head with a report like that of a revolver.

"All but *one!*" Richards sang out defiantly, springing to the open window.

The other two pulled themselves away from the table and broke for cover, the whip swishing about them as Wainwright bounded, snarling, to the center of the room for all the world like a suddenly liberated lion. Greer and Hendricks, fighting to force themselves at the same time through the narrow doorway at the end of the room, looked terrified questions at each other. Richards, having made the window, sprang lightly outside to the fire escape, and, with a yell of defiance to the baffled Luscious, vanished over the ledge, and, as Greer won the passage of the door and forced his body through, Hendricks leaped after Richards, Wainwright stumbling almost at his heels.

"Come back!" called Hendricks pantingly after Richards, as the latter fled down the iron grating. "Come back, you fool! When he sees the paper he'll forget all about whatever this is!"

"Ha! Ha!" laughed back Richards demoniacally. "When he sees that paper *I'll* be passing Galveston and points south! I told you I'd get him!"

And, leaping from the bottom step of the fire escape into an adjoining lot, he vanished from sight.

Hendricks, looking back fearfully over his shoulder, saw that Wainwright was making remarkable time for a man of his heft, and that there was no apparent reason why *he* shouldn't continue on his way. He did so, and when he finally stopped it was outside the railroad station—a commuter's caravan was just pulling out. He made it, and kept on until he reached the forward end of the car nearest the engine; he had to stop there, and he did so reluctantly—Wainwright had been traveling at a high rate of speed when he last saw him! He heard a familiar chuckle, as he fell exhausted into a seat, and looked back into the face of Richards. Not a mournful, pessimistic-looking Richards, but a grinning, disheveled, but feverishly elated, Richards.

"What's the answer?" panted Hendricks. "Quick!"

Richards chuckled enjoyably.

"I would have been deputy sheriff of Tulsa, Oklahoma, if it hadn't been for that scoundrel ten years ago," he said. "Also, *I* would have married his wife. He beat me out of both by most foul

means. I've been trying to get even for ten years—I guess I did that little thing to-day—I've just naturally whipsawed him!"

"You *faked* that story?" gasped Hendricks.

"Faked nothing!" answered Richards indignantly. "That's the most true thing was ever printed since type was invented!"

"Then *what?*" demanded Hendricks, leaning halfway over the seat, as the train gathered speed.

For answer, Richards reached in a pocket of his coat and pulled out what appeared to be a piece of very fine bond paper. It was a business letterhead, and Hendricks, after one eager glance, fell back in his seat with a groan. This was what he read:

THE BENTONVILLE EGG PACKING COMPANY.
LUCIUS T. WAINWRIGHT, PRES.

THE WAYS OF SCIENTIFIC MEN

AFTER Josephus Daniels, the secretary of the navy, made announcement through the newspapers that he wanted a special laboratory built for the use of his consulting board of scientists and inventors, two colored messengers in the navy department were discussing the matter.

"I wondah whut dey want wid anuddah laboratory?"

"I don't know," replied the other. "Wid all de lavoratories in dis buildin' dar ought to be enough for dem scientific men. Mebbe dey need somepin special to wash all dem strange acids and chemicals off'n dey hands."

BEATEN IN ONE ROUND

SAMUEL G. BLYTHE, the author and well-known political prophet, decided to take up golf. He took it up with a vengeance, playing it day after day, and paying a professional instructor large sums of money to learn the difference between a driver and a mashie, the lack of similarity between a putt and an approach, and various other things supposed to be of great value to any golfer.

In a few weeks, Sam was telling everybody he met that he was probably one of the greatest golf players who had ever swung a club. He said it so often and with so much fervor that everybody began to believe it—everybody but Major J. J. Dickinson, who confines his recreation to talking about politics. Sam's continued conversation regarding golf prevented the major from voicing some of his valuable opinions on statesmen and statesmanship. The thing got on his nerves.

"Sam, by George, sir," said the major in his finest Kentucky manner, "you probably regard me as an aged person without athletic gifts. There are twelve men in this room. I'll play you a match game to-morrow afternoon, with the understanding that the loser is to pay for the dinner for all of us twelve. And I never have played a game of golf in my life."

They played the game, and the major, somewhat breathless from swinging at the air, but triumphant over his victory, laughed at Sam for eight days and a half.

"I'll tell you what," said the major, relating the story of his victory, "I cured Sam Blythe of talking about golf. I did more than that. I cured him of golf. He hasn't touched a club since."

The Family Tree

By N. B. Beasley

Author of "With the Aid of the 'English'," "Tom Magee's Boy Ole," Etc.

The story of a man who wanted to play football, but he hadn't the physical build, though his father had been a famous star of the gridiron

JAMES HARDY, coach, was a gruff person. The fact that during each fall he was the idol of five thousand undergraduates and tens of thousands of Michigan alumni had not changed him. A gruff person he had started; a gruff person he would remain.

His business was the business of football. From August's hot days until November's late snows he drilled the mathematics of the gridiron into the heads of a score or more of youths. These were youths who had survived the pruning process. These were youths who possessed a single thought. Ambition's chains held them to the winning of a block "M" that would stand out in vivid gold against the dark-blue background of a heavy sweater.

To Hardy, two years previously, had come Wells. William Johnson Wells, as one side of the family called him; Billy Wells, as he was known to his father, his uncle, and several hundred masculine friends.

James Hardy, from the height of an even six feet, had looked down on Billy Wells' five feet seven inches. James Hardy's one hundred and ninety-five pounds of bone and sinew were evenly distributed. Standing on his heels, and pressing down with all his strength, Billy Wells could force the bar of the weighing machine in the college gymnasium to jiggle at one hundred and thirty-eight pounds.

That fall James Hardy had said:

"Wells, you're too light. You're tall enough for a quarter back or an end, but your weight is against you. Come back to me next fall. In the meantime cut out meats and go in for potatoes, cereals, and milk."

Wells came back the next fall. There was tan on his cheeks and a spring to his step. But he had only added a single pound.

Hardy once more looked him over

"Wells," he said, "you're still too light. I'm sorry, but we can't afford to take chances on having a lad like you jammed into a broken back. Now if——" There was a speculative air to this. Hardy scratched the back of his neck. Wells recognized this as an indication of good nature. There were possibilities.

"Yes, sir," he breathed expectantly.

"If you only weighed about fifteen pounds more—yes, that would make you just about right, because you go up in the air far enough."

Wells turned away. He read the answer to an unspoken question.

And now, in this fall, he was back again. Once again did he stand before Hardy. Once again did he feel Hardy's appraising eyes studying his lean, lithe form. He breathed deeply

under Hardy's keen gaze, and he knew his clothes did not hide the flat, muscular sureness of his body.

"Wells, I like your grit," growled the coach. "But why haven't you done as I told you? Why haven't you eaten the stuff that would put weight on your shoulders and ribs?"

"Good Lord, coach," groaned Billy, "I've done all those things. I've eaten potatoes until they had to spray me with Paris green; as for cereals—all the breakfast-food concerns in Battle Creek are after me for testimonials."

Hardy turned away. He was amused, although his features gave no sign. Wells studied the retreating form for a minute; then, taking a reef in his courage, he ran after the coach and cried:

"Do I get a try-out?"

"You know what I told you about broken backs," insinuated Hardy.

"But I've got to get in there," insisted Billy desperately.

"You mean you want to get in there," came the correction.

"No. I mean what I said. My dad played with Michigan back in '87; my Uncle Tim played in '83. It's written in the family tree that I carry the name of Wells into Michigan football this year. In fact, it's strictly up to me. I'm a lone male in two families of girls."

"Your father was old Jerry Wells?" asked Hardy in an incredulous tone, although he knew well enough the ancestry of the candidate before him.

Billy's chest went out. A proud "Yes, sir" issued therefrom.

"And your uncle was Tim Wells?"

The chest was still held out.

Hardy's fingers roamed over the back of his neck.

"I don't know about you," he said at last. "We have two experienced quarter backs this year in Dunne and Brown. Dunne, you know, came mighty close to landing on the All-American last fall. Brown is just about as good. You can't play on the line. You aren't heavy enough for the back field, outside of quarter. This isn't very encouraging, but if you want to come out—come!"

Hardy turned on his heels. He was rapidly swung out of sight. Jimmy stood and watched the big form as it disappeared around the corner of a building. Then he, too, turned. But he headed the other way.

He breathed deeply.

"He didn't say 'No,'" he said to himself. He repeated the sentence. And he was comforted.

Ann Arbor, quaint old college town of Michigan, was seething with excitement. From out of the East on this November morning had come a score of sturdy sons of Harvard. For the first time in the history of football the East would meet the West in the land of the setting sun. Provincial barriers had been broken down. Harvard had agreed, in return for the games Michigan had played in the immense stadium at Cambridge, to send its gridiron machine to Ferry Field, the home of the Wolverines.

Through the narrow streets surged college throngs. The colors—blue and gold for Michigan, deep crimson for Harvard—were entwined above stores, fraternity houses, office buildings, and homes. They were gayly festooned above the street-car tracks, and one adventurous youth had climbed to the tiptop of the town's highest telephone pole and there had flung Harvard's banner to the breezes after first securing it.

A thousand Harvard supporters had come into Ann Arbor on a morning train. Almost before the grinding of the brakes had ceased they were pushing their way through the coaches and were rushing through the little stone depot. Up the hill and into the town

this tide of humanity flowed. It swept everything in its path.

At the campus the factions met. There they danced and they sang and they shouted to the strains of "The Victors," the song of Michigan, and to "Fair Harvard" and to "Johnny Harvard." Michigan students were impressing upon their visitors the importance and the dignity of their own fair State and the prowess of their football team. They were backing this football team to the extent of family purses. Harvard wasn't in retreat.

From the north, the east, the south, and the west came Ann Arbor's sons and its daughters. A welcome awaited all. We shall pass over the meeting of Tommy Cummins, '94, with "Reddy" Robson, '95; we shall not listen to the glad cries of "Dick" Foster, '99, on seeing "Cupid" Allen, '01. We shall disregard them because we are not interested.

Sifting through the maze of faces and we finally come to the beaming countenances of Jerry and Tim Wells, Michigan, '87, and Michigan, '83, respectively. Arm in arm they are worming their way through the multitude.

Following them and we finally see Jerry Wells' fingers pointing upward. He has spied the colors of Harvard flapping from the tiptop of Ann Arbor's highest telephone pole.

"What treason is this?" cries he, turning to his older companion.

Into the eyes of Tim Wells, Michigan, '83, there creeps a gleam of humor. It is almost instantly replaced by a look of antagonism, and, shaking loose the other's repelling arm, he springs for the pole, and, wrapping his arms and his legs about the huge trunk, he shinnies from the base. Slowly he climbs upward until, reaching the spikes nailed at intervals for the convenience of linemen, he gains a secure hold. He goes toward the top. Carefully he picks his way through the tangle of wires, and, reaching the apex, he tears off the colors of Harvard and replaces them with the ribbons of Michigan that, just previously, had been streaming from his coat sleeve.

Tim Wells, Michigan, '83, let out a long yell for the Wolverine. From the crowd below there came an answering shout.

Then Tim Wells, Michigan, '83, carefully tied the banner of Harvard back to the pole. But below the maize and blue streamers of his own university.

Ferry Field, its immense stands and its gridiron at the base of the bowl, was packed with humanity. On one side, in a section squarely in the center, were banked the followers of Harvard. Below, above, beside, and across from them were the supporters of Michigan. But sportsmanship reigned supreme. Harvard's yells and its songs were given with a freedom and an intensity that indicated unfailing courage in its team. Michigan answered defiantly.

Harvard's eleven came on the field first. The athletes, big men all, swept through the northern gate, and the team, dashing in behind its captain, rushed halfway across the green before settling into a simple formation. The substitutes trotted to one side, and while the welcoming outburst was yet at its height they settled down, 'neath big blankets, to await the call of their coach.

The Wolverines appeared five minutes later. Harvard's greeting had been stormy; this was a hurricane of noise. Billy Wells, running with the other substitutes along the side lines, was glad when the man in front suddenly plumped to earth. He fell, too. Brown, the second quarter back, was beside him.

This was more than a game. It was a struggle for supremacy between

youthful giants who knew not the meaning of fear. Through the first quarter they fought hard, neither gaining the edge that leads into victory. It was not a test of one man; it was strength, brutish strength, that was being used in crushing opposition. In the second quarter, Harvard caught Michigan off guard. With a series of forward passes, end runs, and line smashes that broke down Michigan's defense it carried the ball to the last one-yard line of the Wolverines.

Here it was that the Michigan team, fighting nobly, strove to ward off the inevitable. Harvard was stopped in two attacks, but on the third tore through Michigan's line and crushed its back field. A touchdown was scored.

From the Harvard section of the stands there issued a wild cry of joy. Michigan's answer was a sullen shout.

The Crimson failed to kick the goal, but what mattered it? The scoreboard showed Harvard leading on a count of six to nothing.

That was enough.

Then came the third quarter. Dunne, who had been the pinnacle of Michigan's hopes, was hurt in attempting a run around one end. He was carried from the field, and in his place went Brown. The second quarter back rallied his companions and turned off repeated mass attacks. Then—the fourth quarter. Here it was that Brown, after directing the plays that carried Michigan far down into the territory of the Crimson enemy, was twisted and caught in a jam. He, like Dunne, was carried off.

On the side lines, Hardy's jaw snapped shut. Turning, he nodded toward Wells. Billy, springing up, was halfway across the field before the yell masters had recognized his lithe form. A shout went up for him, and as he passed Brown he heard his injured teammate cry:

"Fight 'em, Billy! Fight 'em! Give 'em hell!"

The ball was on Harvard's twenty-yard line. Michigan was in possession. It was Michigan's first down.

With an encouraging word here and a slap on the back there, Billy Wells started his attack. Being far inside Harvard's danger zone, he called for a mass play through the line. It failed. He repeated. It failed again. He thought of calling for a forward pass. He abandoned this almost instantly. Harvard would be expecting it. He hesitated, then his body drew tense. This time failure must not come. He rasped out the signals. The ball was given to him. He passed it on, and the full back, clutching it to his breast, plunged ahead. For a few seconds that seemed like hours it appeared as though the Crimson line must weaken. But, with a mighty effort, it held, and the Michigan attack spent its force without gain.

From the side lines, Hardy bellowed unintelligible things. The big coach stood as a man hewn from stone. Only the ceaseless working of his jaws indicated the life that was pulsing within him.

But wait——

Down on the field something was happening. The Michigan team, after having grouped itself in conference about Wells, was spreading, fanlike, across the gridiron.

Wells was dropping back to receive a toss. Michigan's best kicker, Hammond, was drawn still farther back.

"He's going to try for a goal," yelled one undergraduate.

"What for?" shouted his companion.

"It'll save part of the——" But the voice trailed away, and the explanation did not finish.

Hardy had lost his poise. As a madman, he was walking up and down the lines. He was cursing to himself. What insanity was this? What was

Wells doing, or trying to do? What formation was this? Unlike the undergraduate in his wisdom, Hardy knew he had not given a play such as this. He turned away in his rage; but, possessed with the intensity of a desire for victory, he wheeled about, and, with eyes that were hidden under lowered brows, he searched for the answer to the problem before him.

Wells, crouching low, with one knee on the ground, called the signals. Jenkins, the big center, leaning over and catching the ball between his long fingers, sent it back between his legs and into the waiting hands of the quarter back. Wells plunked it on the ground, and Hammond, rushing up, kicked above the oval. The Harvard linesmen, dashing through, bore down upon Wells and sprang into the air, with arms upflung, to intercept the ball in its flight.

But the leather oval was lost. It did not go into the air.

Wells, dodging in behind Hammond, found another Michigan man to the right of him and another to the left. Charging low, he swung around Harvard's end. Bewildered, the Crimson forwards looked for the ball, and not until the low-running quartet of Wolverines was by them did they realize the nature of the trick. It was too late then. Hammond turned over one backfield man. The other Michigan players interfered with and upset the plans of two more Harvard tacklers.

Wells, a clear field in front, shot across the chalk lines, and, running hard, swung around and planted the ball directly between and behind Harvard's goal posts. Planting it there, he held on. He was buried an instant later, but under the sweating bodies of his adversaries he cried out in his joy.

Up in the stands, Tim Wells, Michigan, '83, was jumping up and down. His hat was still in the air, whither it had been thrown when his arms swept out, and his voice, a thing of hoarseness, only croaked from his throat. Tim Wells was paying no attention to the kicking of the goal by Hammond. All he could sob was:

"I knew you'd pull it, Billy. I knew it! I knew it!"

And Jerry Wells, the father of Billy, looked on in silent bewilderment.

Only a few minutes remained to be played, but in those minutes the Crimson giants fought without mercy. They fought like men with their backs to the wall and only death in front. Ripping through Michigan's defenses, they carried the ball down the field and into the territory of the Wolverine. There it was that a Harvard player slipped and fumbled. Wells, alive to every situation and straining every nerve, pounced, like a tiger, on the ball. He gathered it in, and, without thought, it seemed, dropped it toward his toe. His right foot was driven out, and the ball was booted low and far to the front of him. It was a perfect kick. The oval, spinning in the air, was sent down into Harvard's section. It did not return, for the whistle sounded just as the teams were forming for the next play.

In the clubhouse afterward, Hardy came around to Billy Wells.

"There's a couple of young fellows out here who want to see you," he grinned.

"Send them in!" shouted Billy.

But they were already there. Tumbling from behind Hardy's big bulk, came Jerry and Tim Wells. Jerry was laughing. Tim was crying.

"I knew you'd pull it," he was still repeating.

Hardy, standing near, instinctively knew that here was the solution to the problem that had been mystifying him. So he asked:

"Knew he'd do what?"

"Knew he'd pull that play," answered Tim Wells through his tears of happiness. Tim wiped his eyes, threw back his head, and launched forth:

"That was one of mine, coach. Billy was on the farm with me, and we had worked on that trick all summer. When Billy wasn't kicking a football he was taking passes and handling them cleanly. To master Harvard was our object. When Dunne and Brown got hurt out there to-day and I saw Billy running on the field I knew he'd pull that fake before he went off. It was a desperate chance. But it went through. And we won on it. You hear? We won on it."

Hardy was beginning to understand.

His admiring eyes roved over the supple form of Billy Wells, and he murmured:

"Playing football all summer, eh? No wonder you didn't get fat."

COMING, in the next issue: PETER B. KYNE'S astonishing novel of the opium-smuggling business on the Pacific coast. "THE FREE HAND" is the title.

POOR LITTLE MARY PICKFORD

MARY PICKFORD earns more money posing for moving pictures than the combined salary and traveling expenses of the President of the United States. She not only is famous for the big bank roll she collects week by week, but there are a few envious actors who think she is overpaid. Here is another side of the story:

Charles Cherry, the actor, met Robert Edeson at a New York theater one night to discuss a play in which both of them were to have big parts.

"Charlie," said Robert, with some concern, "you look tired to death. You're a physical wreck right now."

"I am," agreed Cherry. "I've been posing for the moving pictures all day."

"Is that work as hard as that?" inquired Edeson.

"Hard!" exploded Cherry. "On the level, I think Mary Pickford is underpaid."

THE SPEAKERS OF THE HOUSE

I AM the thirty-sixth of the line of speakers of the House of Representatives since this government was founded," Champ Clark told a group of his friends the other day. "That is, I am the thirty-sixth if you do not count one man who, for some unaccountable reason, was elected speaker for one day. That is one of the puzzles of history to me.

"There have been a whole lot of speakers protempore elected, but one man was actually elected speaker for one day. That was Theodore M. Pomeroy. Schuyler Colfax was going out of the office of speaker into the office of vice president, and all he had to do was to walk six or seven hundred feet to the other end of the capitol and be sworn in.

"But on the evening of March 2d he resigned the office of speaker. So, if you count Mr. Pomeroy, I am the thirty-seventh of the lot."

The Dead Rover

By Berton Braley

AND so he is done with roaming,
He never will seek again
The seas that are wide and foaming,
The towns and the trails of men?

Perhaps, but he'll find things zestless
In a heaven of placid bliss,
And his soul will grow keen and restless
For the joys of the road he'll miss,

And I fancy the Lord, up yonder,
Will say, with a smiling face:
"Oh, venturesome soul, go wander
The limitless paths of space;

"*You* were not meant to psalm it
In a heaven of peaceful days,
But rather to ride a comet
That streaks through the stellar ways,

"Or to ramble the huge scheme over
To the uttermost frigid star,
So, tramp as you will, brave rover,
With never a let or bar!"

And the soul of our friend shall render
His thanks to the Lord, all-wise,
And his face shall be filled with splendor
As he issues from paradise.

For the spell of the road shall bind him,
That magic which cannot fail,
And with never a glance behind him
He'll wander the astral trail!

The Fighting Man

By Elmer Brown Mason

A tale of moths and the Luna Girl. A colorful picture of life among the bayous of Louisiana. An unusual bit of fiction

I AM a perfectly plain man without any education, but I have wandered more than a little, from the tip of South America through Lower California and into most of the corners of the southern coast of the U. S. A. That coast is all corners, so I have covered a lot of ground. In spite of my lack of education, I know a great deal, have picked it up from real authorities. You see, my lot has mostly been cast with scientists, men who are looking for something in out-of-the-way places and have a definite idea what that something looks like. Chapman has taught me about birds. I have hunted snakes with Ditmars, a man who is by way of being the prince of a little European country, where they run the biggest gambling hell on earth. He spent nearly a year with me collecting fishes and the tiniest of sea things.

They all come to me. Any one who wants to go after something unusual in a strange place telegraphs me at Père Guerrin's restaurant, in New Orleans. If I happen to be there, and feel like going, I wire back:

Come a-hooting.
(Signed.) WANDERING SMITH.

My real name is Isaiah Ezekiel, but somehow I have lost it in the shuffle and only my banks know it. Every one else calls me Wandering, and I don't care, because I call men by the name that best suits them. Most people have fool names, anyway. Imagine naming anything but a Persian tomcat Montmorency, or calling anything but an oyster De Haven!

I had been in New Orleans about two months, taking in all the fights, cocking mains, and horse races, but eating—and drinking—too much, when Old Bug's letter came. Old Bug isn't his real name, of course, but it's what I call him, so will have to do.

The letter read that he would like to send me a young man who hadn't had much experience in the wild—his word; he meant in the sticks, along the bayous, outdoors, in short—and if I felt like it, would I take him out of the cities to collect moths and butterflies?

I had about made up my mind to go alligator hunting, anyway, and, though I don't hold much on risking trips with tenderfeet, I like Old Bug, so I wired: "Come a-hooting!"

It was two nights afterward I was sitting downstairs in Père Guerrin's, at two in the morning, wishing I hadn't drunk the last four high balls, and watching a party of sailors getting ugly by drink degrees. Père Guerrin's place is no palace, either, in regard to the restaurant or the hotel above, and its patrons are not among our best people. I'm kind of used to it, though, and never go anywhere else. The front door was shut, of course, at that time in the morning; and when some one began to pound on it from the outside

I didn't pay any attention but put it down to some souse after just one more. The pounding stopped, and, after an interval, the side door opened and there entered six feet and a half of pink kid crowned with a black and white plaid cap above a round, baby face, black and white plaid—very plaid—suit, gray gloves—it was hot summer—white shoes and socks. Père Guerrin looked him over and walked forward on his toes, the way he does when he is getting ready to throw some one out.

"I'm looking for Mr. W. Smith," the checkerboard volunteered.

"No such gent here, monsieur," answered the père, sidling nearer.

"But, my good man, I'm just off my train, had an appointment with him at this address, can't wait to see him."

"No such gent here, monsieur." The père balanced forward.

"Mr. Wandering Smith?"

"That's different," the père grumbled, obviously disappointed that there was no excuse for exercising his bouncing talents.

"Wandering!" he yelled, and I haughtily beckoned over to my table and indicated a chair.

"Mr. Wandering Smith?"

I nodded while sizing him up more carefully, and one of the gray-gloved hands promptly tendered a card on which was scribbled Old Bug's signature and embossed in Dutch letters:

Montmorency De Haven Etheridge.

I motioned the card away and signaled Père Guerrin.

"My name's Wandering," I said to the boy; and to the père: "Take my friend Shorty's order."

Montmorency De and the rest of it looked kind of thunderstruck at first; then he grinned, and with that I couldn't help liking him. It was the kind of grin a kid wears when he tears his pants on a picket fence. He knows it isn't right, but he can't help it.

Père Guerrin brought the bottle of Scotch, and for my guest beer, which he drank promptly, as though to get it out of the way. Then he asked me when we could start and how soon we would get there; if I had a motor boat ready, or a sailing craft, and was it sloop or knockabout rigged; didn't I think it a good idea to take along two canoes in case one was busted; had I ever noticed there, by chance, a moth, fore wings maculated with white on black, black hind wings, tuft of red hairs on end of the abdomen; was the rice in blossom, or didn't it ever blossom——

I managed to cut him short with the information that it was fourteen million miles to the moon, and the *Great Eastern* had seventeen masts. Then, before he could break in again, explained I hadn't the slightest idea where we were going, and no one but a natural-born idiot would think of using a canoe among cypress knees when he could get a light, strong skiff.

Then we settled down to business. The kid wanted to cruise in and out along the coast of lower Louisiana, sugaring for moths—I was to find out what that meant later—and he had no more idea of what it was like or how to get there than a red-headed Irishman has of crocheting. I explained ways and means to him at great length while he listened as though I were reading his mother-in-law's will, and then there occurred what Père Guerrin calls a *divertissement*. Three of the sailors were dead to the world, and the four remaining had finished the bottle left them, when the old Frenchman had gone upstairs at three o'clock. Now these four souses came over to our table and offered to buy from me or fight me for the quart of Scotch from which I had mixed my last high ball. I don't like being interrupted when I am talking, and I won't fight drunks—they are liable to stick a knife into you—so I simply tipped the bottle onto the floor

with my elbow, where it smashed to pieces.

The sailors swore a good deal, and were pretty ugly, but there wasn't really anything doing since I spoke them politely. I glanced at the kid while they were making up their minds, and got one of the most disagreeable shocks of my life. His face was dead white, covered with perspiration, and his gloved hands were clenched on the edge of the table. I had begun to like him, too, but not as much as I hate a coward, and I guess I sneered when I spoke:

"Want these gentlemen removed from your august presence?"

"Yes, they—they are noisy and probably dangerous."

To say I was disgusted was to put it mildly. I left my chair and went upstairs. The sailors would leave for Père Guerrin, and I don't like fighting drunks.

The père cussed me proper for disturbing his sleep, especially as everything was quiet below, but he came just the same. We went downstairs into the restaurant and stopped suddenly.

There wasn't a sound in the room save the snoring of the three men who had passed away. The other four lay heaped in a corner beneath the fragments of a table, and my fearful friend was ruefully contemplating a pair of gray gloves burst into shreds over the knuckles.

"Were your dangerous friends struck by lightning, Shorty?" I queried.

"They got abusive," he acknowledged, and, in plaintive tones: "I've split a brand-new pair of gloves all to pieces."

In the morning I left Shorty snoring in pink pajamas and slipped over to the water front to see what I could find. Luck was with me, and I chartered a nifty forty-foot knockabout with large cabin and cockpit, and a sweet little kicker behind, ordered some stores, and then went after Mose, my cook.

When I had corralled him—no slight task, since he always marries anew after every trip and lives with his wife's relatives—the expedition was ready to start.

Shorty had a raft of dunnage—luggage he called it—a great part of which consisted of cork-lined boxes for insects, cyanide killing bottles, and a whole library of scientific books. It didn't make much difference, however, since there was plenty of room in the boat. On general principles I should have liked to kick, but when I got back he tickled me to death by standing the père on his head—something I never could have done, old man though the Frenchman was. Just a jujutsu trick, the boy explained—depended entirely on one's adroitness! So does lifting a safe—that and brute strength!

Our supplies and dunnage were stowed away by one o'clock, and we dropped down the Mississippi. Then, throwing Mose's last bottle of gin overboard and putting him at the helm, I cornered Shorty, extracted by the roots all his ravings about the sea, the sky, the what nots, and pinned him down to what he wanted to do. Briefly his program was as follows: We were to anchor near the shore each night, and, taking the skiff, sugar trees through the swamps, rowing from one to another until it was light, catching the moths that came to the bait. During the morning, we were to mount our catch on spreading boards—Shorty was sure I could help him a lot with this—and the afternoons we would hunt butterflies on the higher ground. Great program, wasn't it? The idea was evidently to save up all our sleep until we got back!

By night we anchored close in near the mouth of Bayou Lafourche, with a wet tangle of swamp in front of us. Shorty nearly went crazy at the sight

of it, and made sounds indicative of joy that he called yodling—something like a bull alligator shot through the lungs. He could hardly wait for supper, and, before it was dark, we were in the skiff among the cypress knees.

I've carried strange freight in my life, but nothing odder than that boatload. The big, pink kid was in the bow, two butterfly nets by his side, and between his knees a pail of hell brew consisting of four pounds of brown sugar, a stale bottle of beer, and half a pint of rum. He had about a hundred two-foot-square white napkins that he soaked in this mixture and tacked to the trunks of trees. The rest of the boat was full of large pickle bottles with tight glass stoppers, their bottoms holding cyanide of potassium beneath a layer of paper. There was also a large, flat box with a cork bottom, on which to pin the moths after they were dead.

It was a crazy performance; but I'll try anything once, and Shorty was so excited and happy tacking up his beer-soaked doilies that I hadn't the heart to tell him how many kinds of a fool he was. We covered over two miles close to where the water brush was thickest before all our cloths were up, and then it was dark. Shorty switched on an electric searchlight like a small automobile lamp, and we rowed out of the swamp into open water and back to where we had commenced. Then the fun began. The first bait was literally covered, and the air full of pale-green moths with two long, flowing tails to their wings like old-fashioned coats. In the glare of the electric light, they looked unearthly beautiful, seemed dreams from the depths of greenish-amber absinth.

"Why don't you grab your net?" I whispered excitedly.

"Luna moths; very common," he answered calmly. "Hope they don't crowd out everything else. They breed in the sweetgums, persimmons, and hickories along the shore."

The next tree and the next were covered with lunas. Then came quite a stretch of open water, in which we surprised an otter hunting, before the square of white cloth tacked to a giant cypress. As the powerful light fell on it, there appeared to be only a moderately sized brown moth hanging to the edge.

"The Cypress Sphinx," breathed Shorty in tones of positive awe, rose to his feet, slammed the net over it, and fell into the water. Everything was soaked, including me, and the boat half swamped, but he didn't seem to mind a particle. Holding the net well up, the bag turned over so his prisoner could not escape, he clambered onto a cypress knee and raved. Only three or four specimens yet known in collections! Reported from Georgia and Florida alone, his was the honor of adding another State to its range. Rare, rare, ultra rare! Did I appreciate how lucky we were? How fortunate a day it was when we met!

Farther along we captured a Giant Sphinx—all of two inches long! Big-game hunting, this!—a brownish-yellow, pretty thing that looked kind of like a gold nugget. The next outburst was over a Galbina Silk Moth, brown marked with white, and he had another fit over a pink, brown, and yellow Zephir, its fat body barred with crimson. After that, I lost count while he had an elegant time and only fell out of the boat once in the next three hours.

When we came to the end of the doily-marked line, he suggested that, while he stuck some of the deadest moths on pins in his cork-lined box, I row to the other end, instead of going back immediately over the same ground. I swung the skiff out into the open water while he impaled the pretty night butterflies, his tongue wag-

ging like a tickled dog's tail, and just as he pinned the last one, something went wrong with the electric lantern. It was black dark for a moment, and then our eyes got accustomed to the opaqueness of the night, and I rowed through a sea of silver moonlight while he tinkered with the battery. Rounding the point where our trail began, I saw a glow on the water and heard voices. Cautioning Shorty not to switch on his light, I silently dipped my oars and slid toward the sound. Closer the radiance lay behind us, and there were still voices. I pushed the skiff through the swamp growth and came unexpectedly to the abrupt rise of a hill straight from the water, and the murmur was replaced by a quavering old voice raised in a kind of chant:

"Butt'fly, butt'fly, floatin' goe,
Reckon thar ahn't no blood in yo'!
No blood, no bones, nothin' 'tall,
'Cause yo' is so lightsome an' small.
Nigger touch yo' full ob de moon,
Him boun' up an' die right soon.
Nigger dahr in de dahk eat yo',
Him can doe what de white folks doe."

Other voices joined in a shrieking chorus:

"When de moon am pale, white folks' blood
am red;
All de niggers be happy when de white folks
dead!
Dah's butt'flies cahved on de voodoo stick,
Kill all de white folks, kill 'em quick!
Dah's butt'flies cahved on de voodoo stick,
Kill all de white folks, kill 'em quick!"

The voices rose in higher and higher shrieks:

"Kill 'em, kill 'em, kill 'em quick!
Dah's butt'flies cahved on de voodoo stick."

And that fool kid burst into a roar of laughter!

There was instant silence, followed by the hiss of water upon fire, and then a scurrying through the underbrush.

"What a comical song!" he exclaimed. "Rather odd, too. An uproarious but innocent amusement."

"Uproarious but innocent rattlesnake!" I answered indignantly. "That's the voodoo butterfly song, and the rice planters would shoot a nigger on sight that they heard singing it—it means murder or even worse!"

Shorty dropped the subject out of politeness, and I immediately shut up. It was more than evident that he did not believe me, and we rowed back to the first of the doily moth traps in silence.

There were even more of the valueless lunas about than formerly, but every little while a prize would be captured and I would be called upon to help rejoice. Once I nearly went to sleep, but a four-foot moccasin dropped into the boat, and after that I kept my eyes wide open. The morning mist was rising from the water before Shorty regretfully suggested our return to the knockabout, and then only because the game had ceased to fly.

The entire morning passed extending the gauzy wings of the moths—there were more than a hundred of them—and I watched his deft fingers manipulate the infinitely delicate things without tearing, drawing them out with fine needles placed behind the stoutest veins and pinning them in place beneath bits of thin pasteboard.

By noon, however, all were mounted and identified, and we hoisted sail and turned on the kicker.

A mile around the point where we had begun our night's hunting, a dock ran out into the water, and off it we anchored. Provided with two butterfly nets and leather-cased cyanide bottles, we had Mose row us toward the shore. Shorty was just as excited and yodley as he had been during the night, and, as we landed, began to hum:

"Kill 'em, kill' em, kill 'em quick!
Dah's butt'flies cahved on de voodoo stick."

At the first words of the song, Mose turned whiter than I ever saw a nigger

do before. He gave a gasp and a gulp, and his voice sounded scared to death:

"Fo' de Lohd's sake, Mistah Shorty, don't sing dat! More niggers done gone crazy over dat song than am libbin'. It done been wicked vodo!"

Shorty stopped instantly, and I saw he was going to ask some questions, so I tried to stick a butterfly net kind of carelesslike in his eye, thus distracting his attention. It's rotten bad luck to even mention vodo to niggers.

Butterfly hunting wasn't as good as the sugaring game, though Shorty was mighty pleased with what he did catch, especially a crimson, black-speckled thing he called the Mexican Silver Spot. You see, our territory was very limited because we couldn't penetrate the swamp land along the shore, and all the rest of the landscape was rice with one solitary, sticky road running through it off into the distance. Mighty desolate outlook, I thought, and it was breathlessly hot. Besides, I was tired, having contracted the habit, in early youth, of sleeping some small part of every twenty-four hours.

The paddy fields were full of niggers working to drain the soil so it would be dry enough for a reaping machine to cut the ripe crop, and I couldn't help wondering how many of them had been on the swamp hill at midnight singing the vodo song.

We went on and on up that rotten road, catching a butterfly now and then, but not often enough to keep my head from nodding, until at last we left the sickly green fields behind and came to higher country. There were butterflies to burn, and Shorty yodled his head off, till, tired as I was, I caught some of his enthusiasm. We flew through the brush like two maniacs, losing all count of time; and then suddenly it began to rain!

It was no ordinary rain. The sky changed from sunshine to jet black, the drops fell faster and bigger, while the thunder roared overhead, and the lightning played around like the darting of a snake's tongue. I caught Shorty's hand—we could hardly see, so thick was the downpour—and led him to the road up which we staggered toward a large house in the distance. We stumbled through a heavy iron gate, fortunately open, and up onto a broad porch, unable to hear ourselves speak above the hiss and drum of the falling water.

Shorty grinned at me like a naughty small boy who has gotten wet on purpose, and then his face changed at something he saw over his shoulder. Sweeping me aside with his left arm, his right fist shot out to meet the impact of an immense mastiff, silent and grim as death, springing at his throat. The dog went over backward, the door opened behind us and then slammed shut, revealing a glimpse of a white-wooled nigger with square spectacles, yellow vest, and a tailed coat. The animal, recovering itself, crouched, sprang again, and Shorty's big hands caught its throat, swinging it at arms' length, while the forepaws ripped the shirt from his chest. Released again, it flew up the steps, and I yanked my automatic from under my arm only to have Shorty slap it out of my hand. He caught the brute back of the neck, swung it up into the air, and I saw his fingers turn white as they tensed into the flesh. For a full minute he stood poised, the beast above his head, and then slung it sideways the length of the porch. In a flash it was on its feet, but Shorty took two steps forward. The dog drew back, hesitated, then, turning, jumped out into the rain.

During the whole performance, I was conscious of two sharp eyes peering out from a little window in the door. Now the eyes disappeared, and, in a moment the door itself opened to the white-wooled, spectacled old darky who, bowing grandly, announced:

"Cunnel Fairfield begs yo' will honah

him by bein' his guests. He has instructed me to lead yo' to youh apahtment, where yo' will find dry habiliments."

We followed up a broad staircase and into a big hall with doors on each side, one of which, open a crack, closed noiselessly as we passed. Both of us were dripping mud and water at every step, and Shorty was nearly naked to the waist, his chest all scratched and bleeding.

Ushering us into a big room with a nice tiled bathroom off it, the darky opened a cupboard and put a bottle of whisky, some glasses, and a siphon on the table, which already held a bowl of cracked ice, and excused himself to get "dry habiliments."

Two little nips kind of restored us, and we got into the dry things as fast as we could. After we were dressed, Shorty told the negro to present Mr. Wandering Smith's and Mr. Montmorency de Haven Etheridge's compliments to Colonel Fairfield, and we would like an opportunity to express our appreciation of his hospitality.

We were met at the foot of the stairs by a little, dried-up man, whom I recognized at once. Those eyes were the same ratty ones that had watched the fight with the dog through the trap in the door—and not interfered! I fitted a name to him, of course, as I always do to people, but I didn't call him by it. He was Sir Rat without question. "Sir" because of his fine manners, "Rat" because he was one.

Shorty said something about lost wayfarers at the mercy of the elements, Southern hospitality, and suchlike dime-novel stuff; and Sir Rat, talking along the same lines, told us to forget it; he was glad to see us. He added that we must not think of leaving that night, and we would dine at once as soon as his daughter came down.

There was a rustle at the head of the stairs, and she came. Yes, she came. I never held much for blondes, but she was the exception. Her hair was straw color, looked awfully soft, and glinted as though it had caught raindrops. Her eyes were blue-black, and her skin was even pinker and whiter than Shorty's. She was very tall, and wore a light green dress with a tail to it—reminded me of something I couldn't put my tongue to just then.

Sir Rat introduced us:

"Daughter, Mr. Montmorency de Haven Etheridge, Mr. Wandering Smith. Gentlemen, my daughter, Marcella Carter Fairfield." And Shorty gave her his arm, while her dad and I followed into the candle-lit dining room.

The conversation was beyond me, but I was so sleepy I didn't care. It was all I could do to keep awake. The food was served by the white-wooled nigger with his yellow vest and long-tailed coat. He looked like a big moth moving outside the radiance of the candles. Finally the talk switched around to something I could follow. Sir Rat began to tell of the labor troubles of the rice planters, his sharp little eyes like hot pin points, while Shorty listened politely, though I could see he would much rather have heard the girl's voice.

Niggers were growing worse and worse each year. It was actually necessary to send to New Orleans to get enough to plant and gather the crop. The colonel found it impossible to use the same laborers more than one season. They seemed to get mysteriously corrupted; some even went mad, and he had had two foremen murdered. There was voodoo about the plantation, some malign influence, he'd give ten thousand dollars willingly to put his finger on the exact trouble. This year it was worse than ever—there had even been threats——

Miss Fairfield butted in here and turned the conversation to moths and

butterflies. She was perfectly lovely; there is no other word, and neither of us could keep our eyes from her. Then Shorty told of our adventure during the afternoon, not mentioning the mastiff, and worked back to the previous night, while it grew harder and harder for me to keep awake and I tried to think what she reminded me of. With the beginning of the description of the sugaring I knew. Pale-green wings with long, graceful, feathery tails, pure white body—the Luna moth, of course. It came to me in a flash as I raised my eyes to look at her. But what was that shadowy fluttering above the candles? The conversation had stopped abruptly, and all eyes were upon it. For a moment it was lost in the darkness, swept back, and a great Luna moth circled twice swiftly around the lights, and, hovering above Sir Rat's plate, settled nearly against his hand.

I heard the girl give a gasp, saw the colonel turn pale, and behind him the old darky, peering down on his master over his spectacles, triumph, hate, and fear in his eyes.

There was a long silence, broken by Sir Rat in a voice scarce above a whisper:

"Absalom, where did—that come from?"

"'Clare to goodness I don't know, Massa Frank!".

"Take it up!"

The old darky, advancing a shaking hand, withdrew it, and then let one beautiful moth cling to his black finger, murmuring beneath his breath something about "de full ob de moon."

"Marcella, gentlemen, you will excuse me for a few minutes," said Sir Rat, and motioned the trembling nigger to follow him.

"Perhaps I owe you an explanation," said the Luna—I mean the girl. "That moth is the sign of the voodoo, and we have been threatened it would be sent us three times—and then death! Father received one in a letter; this is the second. Of course it sounds extraordin——"

The last word was cut short by a scream from the next room, followed by a swishing sound I had heard before, the unmistakable hiss of a blacksnake whip, that cruel instrument of punishment of the old slave days. There was another scream, and Shorty sprang to his feet.

"Please, *please* sit down!" the girl breathed, her imploring eyes full upon him.

The kid's face was white and covered with beads of sweat, exactly as it had been in Père Guerrin's café—and I knew now what that meant—but he sank back into his chair. Then, while scream after scream echoed through the house, those two young things sat tense and motionless, gazing into each other's eyes.

The shrieks ceased, and the girl relaxed with a whispered "Thank you, oh, thank you!" The door opened, and Sir Rat entered and took his seat as though nothing had happened, but his eyes had the bloodthirsty look of a hunting ferret.

A younger nigger appeared, and the dinner went on as before, interminably, while my eyes that would close seemed to see the girl float from her seat and fly away like a great Luna moth. Then I would come back with a jerk and eat something else I didn't want. At last the meal came to an end, and, waiving the smokes, we all went into the parlor. I found a seat in a dark corner, and the Luna Girl went to the piano and began to sing:

"By de ole bayou a yaller maid
Am waitin' in de mag'olia shade.
Night owl hoot in de cypress tree.
Oh, but dat girl's sweet toe me!

"Louisiana, whar de dahk waters flow!
Louisiana, whar de wil' rice grow!
Dah's whar am waitin', mah yaller deah,
Sweeter fahr dan cohn in de yeah.

"Père Guerrin bring another drink.
Underwing moths as black as ink.
Moses, luna, vodo, snake,
Darn you, Shorty——"

These last four lines may sound rather queer, but they didn't to me because I heard them in my sleep.

When I awoke, the room was empty, and I stumbled drowsily up the stairs. Shorty was undressed and in bed, snoring mightily. I slipped off my clothes, crawled onto a cot, and was asleep before I could throw the extra pillow on the floor.

No full night's rest was coming to me, though. I suppose I had been out of the world for a couple of hours, just taken the edge off slumber, when something woke me. I lay still, trying to think what it was, when through Shorty's snores came a sound as though two bricks were being rubbed together, followed by a deep groan. I was out of bed in a second, and felt all around the room to try and locate the disturbance. It seemed to come from beyond the bathroom, and I stole out into the hall and down where a tiny shaft of light shone from a keyhole. From behind this door came more grating and another groan. I bent down and applied my eye to the aperture, and this is what I saw:

The room was lit by a single candle, and beside it sat the old, white-wooled butler, his bare back toward me, and that back was covered with long, raw welts! With a file he was grating a piece of red wood, and as soon as he had accumulated a little dust he sprinkled it over his shoulder onto the wounds and groaned. I watched this performance for a few minutes and then silently opened the door.

"Look here, you fool nigger," I whispered, "you quit this business and go to bed, or I'll tell Sir Rat—I mean the colonel—about it in the morning. It looks like voodoo to me."

At my first word he was on his feet and snatched up a heavy, carved, black stick, which he hid behind him when he recognized me. Then, down on his knees, he simply prayed to me to say nothing, that he was only applying some "right powerful soothin'"—sounded "soothin'" from his groans—to where he had been beaten. I finally promised not to peach on him. Honest, I was sorry for the old black; those raw wounds were pretty bad.

Back in bed, this time I slept through till morning.

At breakfast, where our host looked more like a rat than ever, the Luna Girl did not appear. Her dad informed us, however, she was to drive us back later, and also expressed the hope that this would not be our last visit to the plantation. Shorty said we should certainly pay our respects often, since we expected to be in the neighborhood for some time—which was news to me.

Afterward we were led out to look over the grounds and buildings, and there were sure enough of them. The nigger quarters consisted of a lot of miserable pine shacks about half a mile away; but the house, outbuildings, and barn were all that any one could ask for. There were a pack of seven bloodhounds kept there, and the big mastiff was chained to a kennel.

When we got back to the house, there was the Luna Girl in a trap waiting for us; and at sight of her, Shorty's face lit up like a bright tin dipper in the sun. That fool kid could no more conceal what he felt than he could realize that ordinary men needed to sleep once in a while.

It was a mighty rough road, but the girl drove well, so all I had to do was to wedge myself sideways in the rear seat to keep from falling out. As for those two in front, it might have been the smoothest asphalt for all they noticed it. Tall as she was, Shorty overtopped her; and I am here to maintain with rifles, shotguns, automatics, axes,

knuckle dusters, or bare fists that a handsomer couple never rode over rice clay.

They talked every minute, without saying a thing, just as birds make noises together, and it was only as we reached the dock that anything really pertinent was said.

"May I come back very soon?" Shorty asked.

"If you care to, after—after last night," she answered.

"I do," he said, "and would after a thousand such nights!"

She gave him a queer little look, the kind a woman sometimes gives a baby, and, nodding her head, quickly drove back over that desolate road.

Mose was in a blue funk when he rowed us to the knockabout, bursting with something he had to tell, and simply tickled to death to see us. When Shorty had spread out his butterflies of the day before, and was mounting them, I took Mose out in the skiff to pick up the sugaring doilies. There he unfolded his tale.

It seems that two niggers had paddled out to him as soon as we were gone and told him all about the Fairfield plantation. It was known as Niggers' Hell, so he said, all along the coast, because once a hand was lured there he never got away until the rice crop was in, and, in addition, was treated like a dog, whipped on the slightest excuse, tracked down with bloodhounds if he tried to escape. It was regular slavery, of course, but the law permitted it since labor was contracted for at New Orleans covering the entire season. Worst of all, voodoo was prevalent throughout the plantation, and a nigger who did not profess that mysterious and loosely defined cult was persecuted not only by the whites but by those of his own color, while Colonel Fairfield paid no attention to actual killing among the blacks so long as the field work went on. There were rumors that murder was to be done, and the two niggers begged Mose to let them hide on the knockabout and escape farther down the coast. He threatened them with a shotgun until they went away, and that night a butterfly-carved voodoo stick was thrown on board, though the moon was full and there was no craft or swimmer in sight.

Of course, I called Mose a fool and would hear no more of it, after I heard it all, but I did some thinking nevertheless. No wonder Sir Rat could not use the same niggers two seasons running! The wonder was how he got any at all!

We set sail at noon for farther down the coast, where there were no rice fields, but highlands back of a broad belt of swamp, and anchored just before dark near the shore. The doilies soaked in sugar, beer, and rum were tacked up, and the night's work began. It differed little from our first collecting. Shorty fell overboard twice; he wasn't really awkward, but several sizes too large for the skiff; we didn't see a single luna, but we did see and capture a Juno Moth, fore wings maculate with white on black, hind wings black, a tuft of red hairs on the end of the abdomen, exactly as it had been described to me at Père Guerrin's, and our rejoicings must have disturbed the alligators for miles. We took nearly two hundred specimens, and you can bet I was weary when the light came.

Sleep was impossible during the morning. Shorty yodled and sang so uproariously while mounting moths; and in the afternoon we hunted butterflies till nearly dark. Back on board the knockabout, the kid promptly began to prepare for another night's sugaring, and then I kicked.

I explained to him carefully, in simple words mostly of one syllable, that I was not interested in perpetual motion, that I had reached an age when I felt

I was entitled to an occasional luxury—sleep, for instance!

He seemed very much surprised, but was extremely nice about it, and I forgave him—darn the fool kid, anyway! Evidently he wasn't able to keep still, however, because he suggested that Mose sail us back to the Fairfield plantation during the night, the kicker not working so I could sleep. Back we went, and I actually had twelve hours of unbroken rest for the first time since we started.

We hunted butterflies till four o'clock next day, and then returned to the boat, where Shorty said we had better doll up and pay a duty call at the Fairfield mansion. Duty call nothing! He wanted to go. I took that opportunity to tell him what I knew of Sir Rat, and he didn't seem a bit surprised. "Of course the Luna Girl is quite a different kind of a horse," I concluded.

"Luna Girl! You noticed it, too?" he answered quickly. "I'll give you credit, Wandering, for acute perception."

There were a lot of people at Sir Rat's, and—very bad sign—they were none of them neighboring planters. In fact there was hardly a Southerner there. It was a distinctly sporty crowd, the women playing bridge and a nice little poker game going on among the men.

Here I am going to skip a lot. We stayed in that neighborhood for three weeks, and about every other night the Luna Girl had one perfectly good, six and a half feet of pink kid courting her. For a time I kept away, until Shorty happened to mention that he had dropped a thousand dollars in the card game. Then I made it my duty to hold up the poker-playing end of the combination—scientifically.

Of course it was a red-hot love affair on both sides, and the prettiest one I have ever seen. I liked the kid; he adored the Luna Girl, and they were as suited to one another as possum and 'simmons to a nigger.

We hunted butterflies and moths persistently during the intervals; but there was more love than entomology in the air, and there could be but one ending to it all. It came quicker than I expected. One night the kid and I hiked for the boat, with him yodling his head off, and I knew what had happened before he told me. He was to tackle Sir Rat the next night, and we were both too excited to sleep, so we tacked up a dozen sugared doilies in the best places and collected till morning. The moon was on the turn; it was very dark, and, strangely enough, not one luna moth came to the baits where there had been thousands before. Also we heard, from the hill in the swamp, the voodoo song come floating out over the water:

"When de moon am pale, white folks' blood
am red;
All de niggers be happy when de white folks
dead!
Dah's butt'flies cahved on de voodoo stick.
Kill all de white folks, kill 'em quick!"

and then the frenzied

"Kill 'em, kill 'em, kill 'em quick!
Dah's butt'flies cahved on de voodoo stick."

faster and faster rising to demoniacal shrieks.

I was all for breaking up this party, but Shorty said to let 'em enjoy themselves. I suppose he had a fellow feeling for them through his yodling.

Then a wonderful thing happened. Shorty's net brought in another Juno Moth. But it wasn't a Juno; the tuft of hairs on the abdomen was not red, but white!

"A new species!" he breathed. "Wandering, a new species! I'll call it Hemileuca Etheridgæ. What a beautiful, be-autiful world it is!"

Don't remember how we got through the next day—we were both as nervous as selling platers—but, toward

evening, we reached the Fairfield mansion. There were no other visitors this time, and we dined *en famille*—which means only four of us.

When Absalom had brought on the coffee and cigars and gone, Shorty detained the colonel, "something of importance" to say to him. The Luna Girl and I started to leave when the old butler shot past us back into the dining room like a scared cottontail.

"The sup'ntendent like to see yo' at de do', Massa Frank," I heard him say, and Sir Rat followed him out into the hall.

The white-wooled darky threw the door open and dived into the darkness. At the same moment a perfect flock of Luna moths came fluttering in. Sir Rat dashed to the porch, there was the sound of scuffling feet, the beat of a horse's hoofs, then silence. The girl, Shorty, and I rushed outdoors to find it light as day, the negro quarters and barn burning, the flames mounting higher and higher. One of the two superintendents stumbled out of the smoke toward us.

"Bill has been murdered," he gasped, "the bloodhounds and mastiff poisoned, and there isn't a nigger left on the place!"

Sir Rat was clean gone; there was no use trying to fight the fire, and we were all alone save for the countless luna moths that were wildly circling about our heads. There was only one thing to do. Arming ourselves from the weapons in the house, we hastened down the long road toward the landing. Twice we heard scurrying in the rice, and I emptied my automatic at the sound, and, as we approached the water, the chorus:

"Kill 'em, kill 'em, kill 'em quick!"

followed by the roar of both barrels of Mose's shotgun from the boat.

On board we drew breath and tried to think what to do. There was not another plantation within ten miles, and the nearest town was twice that distance away. Every building on the Fairfield estate was unquestionably doomed. Sir Rat was irretrievably lost. No, there was one faint hope of saving him! We sailed the knockabout well clear of the shore, and leaving the Luna Girl under Mose's protection, Shorty, the superintendent, and I got into the skiff. Muffling the oars, I pulled toward where we had sugared in the very beginning, pushed through the swamp growth, and came to the foot of the hill. Sure enough, there was a great fire burning among the trees as we stole up through the underbrush, and, just as we reached the edge of the circle of light, the voodoo song burst forth:

"Butt'fly, butt'fly, floatin' goe,
Reckon thar ahn't no blood in yo'!
No blood, no bones, nothin' 'tall,
'Cause yo' is so lightsome an' small.
Nigger touch yo' full ob de moon,
Him boun' up an' die right soon.
Nigger dahr in de dahk eat yo',
Him can doe what de white folks doe."

In a great circle about the fire were crouched some thirty niggers, a pannikin of rum before each of them. Sir Rat, naked to the waist, was tied, his face against a tree, and a black-snake whip at his feet. Old Absalom, his yellow vest gleaming in the firelight, and his white-wooled head bare, was going from pannikin to pannikin dropping a luna moth in each, but a luna moth that was blood red.

"When de moon am pale, white folks' blood
am red,
All de niggers be happy when de white folks
dead!
Dah's butt'flies cahved on de voodoo stick.
Kill all de white folks, kill 'em quick!
Dah's butt'flies cahved on de voodoo stick,
Kill 'em, kill 'em, kill 'em quick!"

With the last words of the song the niggers drank down the rum, holding the fluttering moths between their thick lips.

"No use to tackle that bunch," whispered the trembling superintendent. "We'd better beat it."

"My God, Wandering," fairly shouted Shorty, starting forward, "do you see those lunas are *crimson,* a new species?"

"Come back, you fool!" I yelled. "They are only powdered with red dust." But he was among them, and I settled down to shoot.

A big buck nigger met his first rush, and went down in the fire. Another and another fell before him. They clawed toward him, all that I could not wing, in a swaying, maddened throng. Some he whirled over his head, some fell before his fists, others he crushed or laid out with his knees in a way never learned in any gymnasium. The crowd broke, giving me more open shooting, hesitated, and the woods were full of fleeing niggers. A cask of rum burst into roaring flame, upsetting a large, covered basket, from which rose a cloud of luna moths, dashing into the flames, filling the night with the soft whir of their wings.

Sir Rat was quite dead, without a mark on him. We took his body to the boat and set sail for New Orleans.

That is really the end of the story. The rest is a kind of an introduction that you find at the end of a book to say they lived together ever afterward without throwing dishes.

The Luna Girl hadn't another relative on earth but her father—and he was dead—so she and Shorty were married in New Orleans as soon as we got there. I was witness, best man, gave away the bride, and ordered the wedding supper—cocktails, oysters, rare steak, French fried potatoes, lettuce salad, champagne, and cigars.

One thing I forgot. It happened as we were kicking up the Mississippi and just goes to prove what a king Shorty is.

"Wandering," he said, "you remember that new species, a variation of Juno, that I was going to call Hemileuca Etheridgæ? Well, it is going to be known to science as Hemileuca Wanderingi, the Wandering Moth."

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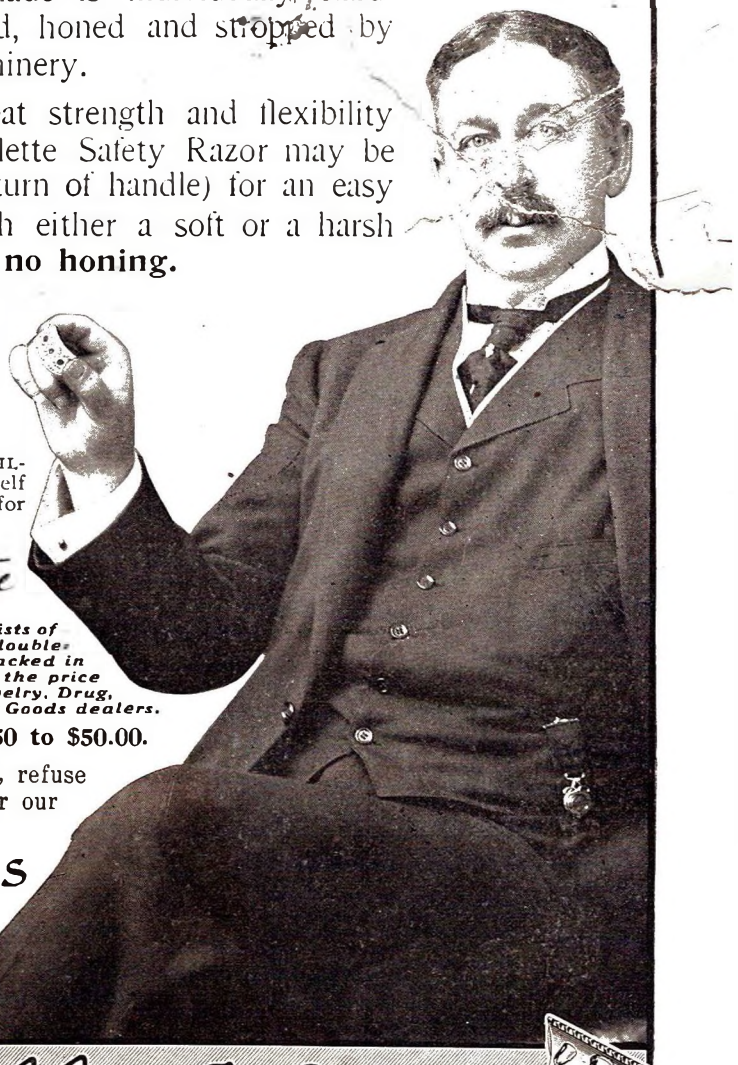

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