AMERICA'S BEST & BRIGHTEST
FICTION MAGAZINE

FIRST FEB. NUMBER

ON SALE JAN. 7, 1930

The Popular Magazine

20¢
25¢ IN CANADA

FIRST FEBRUARY NUMBER

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

20 Cents

Starts at $40 a Week

"Thanks for helping me get a Drafting position with Slyker Co. starting at $40 a week." OSKAR R. LUDWIG

Mr. Oskar Ludwig has been in our employ as Draftsman for about three months and to date we have found his work satisfactory.
SLYKER, INC.
Gary, Ind.

Who Else

wants a good DRAFTING JOB?

Both Placed with Deere Tractor Co.

I. D. Yanaway (left) writes: "Thanks for helping me get job with John Deere Tractor Co. at starting salary of $125 a month."—L. W. Jamerson (right) also employed as Draftsman in Engineering Dept. of same Company. We trained these men *and placed them.* "I thank the school for its organized cooperation," writes Yanaway.

Electrical Jobs

An easy way to break into the great, prosperous, well-paid Electrical industry, is to learn Electrical Drafting. Then the doors of opportunity in a line where the "Sky's the limit" are open to you.

Building and Construction Jobs

Many of our students specialize in Architectural or Structural Drafting, and then we help them get good jobs with Contractors or Architects. A knowledge of Drafting is a pass-port to quick success in the big building industries.

Automotive Jobs

Look through the want-ads of any city where there are automobile factories and you'll be surprised at the number of Draftsmen required, and the splendid salaries paid. Many noted automotive engineers and executives got into the work through Drafting.

Mechanical Jobs

Any experience you have in mechanical lines will be of priceless benefit to you as a Draftsman, *for then you know how things are done on the job.* Drafting is PROMOTION for the mechanic and apprentice.

DURING the past few months we have placed HUNDREDS of former mechanics, clerks and even beginners in fine positions—with Contractors, Architects and in big manufacturing plants all over America (read a few typical letters above).

These men came to us because they were dissatisfied with their earnings and with their future prospects. Now they are doing work they like—making good money—*and have a real chance to advance still farther.*

If you are trying to solve a similar personal problem, we invite you to get in touch with us. We'll be glad to show you how you, too, can get a well-paid Drafting job without risking a penny of your money.

Wonderful Opportunities Open to DRAFTSMEN

It will pay you to investigate Drafting. You'll find many of our most successful Contractors, Engineers, Superintendents and Executives STARTED in the Drafting room. The work is interesting and pleasant. The hours are easy. You'll work with a wonderful bunch of fellows. Salaries range from $25 to $50 a week for beginners, up to $5,000 a year and more for experienced Draftsmen. And best of all you can learn easily in your spare time, *right in your own home.*

Promotion for Office and Factory Workers

If you're a shop-man, you can realize that the man who *makes the plans* is a step above the workman who follows the blue-print. If you're a clerk you know that copying figures cannot compare in responsibility or salary with designing and planning machinery, buildings or the products of industry. Over 70,000 well-paid Drafting positions have been advertised in the past year—here is one of the biggest fields you can get into—one of the best paid—one offering the best future prospects.

THE AMERICAN SCHOOL

Dept. D-12, Drexel Ave. & 58th St.
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

NOW— Jobs for Students, Too!

We have recently developed a remarkable placement service which enables us to find good positions for students when only about half way through the course (*in addition* to the jobs we find for our graduates). These men are making RAPID progress because they are combining spare-time study with practical experience on the job. Mail the Coupon, and learn about this new job-finding plan.

AMERICAN SCHOOL, Dept. D-12
Drexel Ave. & 58th St.,
Chicago, Ill.

Please tell me, without cost or obligation, about your training and employment service in line marked X below.

☐ **DRAFTING**

- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Building
- ☐ Structural Steel
- ☐ Civil Engineering
- ☐ Auto Engineering
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Accounting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Shop Superintendent
- ☐ Foremanship
- ☐ High School in 2 years

Name_____

St. No._____

City_____ State_____

Age_____ Occupation_____

POP

On sale the 7th and 20th of each month

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

THE MATE OF THE *AMY C*

A Novelette by

CAPTAIN FREDERICK MOORE

Volume XCVIII Number 4

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

Title Registered U. S. Patent Office.

CONTENTS FOR FIRST FEBRUARY NUMBER

Twice-a-month publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Copyright, 1930, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1930 by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain. Entered as Second-class Matter, December 22, 1927, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $1.72. Foreign, $5.40. This issue dated February 7, 1930.

We do not hold ourselves responsible for the return of unsolicited manuscripts.

All manuscripts must be addressed to the Editors.

Yearly Subscription, $4.00 — Single Copies, 20 Cents

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING

Agents and Help Wanted

WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR, Soaps, Extracts, Perfumes, Toilet Goods. Experience unnecessary. Carnation Co., Dept. 765, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS: $15 to $25 daily easy. Introducing New Patented, Automatic Safety Ventilating Window Lock, for houses, stores, banks, garages, offices, 3 to 12 needed every house. Recommended by police, insurance people everywhere. No competition. Nothing like it on earth. 3 minute demonstration. Be first in your locality. Sample easily carried in pocket. Elmwood Mfg. Company, 1421 Elmwood Place, Cincinnati, Ohio.

RUN MY OIL AGENCY. No investment required. I divide profits 50-50 every week. $50. to $200. weekly your share. Products nationally known. My partners made $187,000 last year taking orders direct from farmers, auto owners, etc. All or spare time. Free Selling Equipment. Write quick. Central Petroleum Co., 656 Century Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.

Help Wanted—Female

HOMEWORK: Women wanting obtain reliable kinds write for information. Enclose stamp. Eller Co., 296-T Broadway, New York.

Business Opportunities

A PROFITABLE INTERESTING business. Stock Privileges; small capital. Write Paul Kaye, 11 W. 42nd St., New York.

Songwriters

SONG POEM OR MELODY WRITERS—Send for "real" proposition. Hibbeler, D186, 2104 N. Keystone, Chicago.

Detectives Wanted—Instructions

DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY. Great demand. Excellent opportunity. Experience unnecessary. Particulars Free. Write, George Wagner, 2190 Broadway, New York.

Help Wanted—Instructions

WANTED IMMEDIATELY. Men-Women, 18-55, qualify for Government Positions; $125-$250 month. Steady. Paid vacations. Common education. Thousands needed yearly. Write, Instruction Bureau, 308, St. Louis, Mo.

RAILWAY POSTAL CLERKS. $158.00 month. Men 18-35. Spring examinations likely. 25 coached free. Franklin Institute, Dept. E2, Rochester, N. Y.

Old Coins, Etc.

OLD MONEY WANTED. Do you know that Coin Collectors pay up to $100.00 for certain U. S. Cents? And high premiums for all rare coins? We buy all kinds. Send 4c for Large Coin Folder. May mean much profit to you. Numismatic Co., Dept. 440, Ft. Worth, Tex.

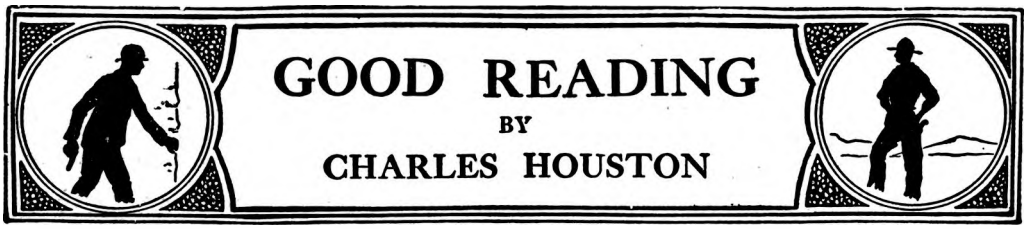
Patents and Lawyers

PATENTS. Send sketch or model for preliminary examination. Booklet free. Highest references. Best results. Promptness assured. Watson E. Coleman, Patent Lawyer, 724 Ninth St., Washington, D. C.

INVENTIONS of merit are wanted by manufacturers. What have you? Send details to Adam Fisher Co., 223 Enright, St. Louis, Mo.

INVENTORS—Write for our guide book, "How to Get Your Patent," and evidence of invention blank. Send model or sketch for Inspection and Instructions Free. Terms reasonable. Randolph & Co., Dept. 412, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS—Write for free book, "How to Obtain a Patent" and Record of Invention Blank. Send model or sketch for Inspection and Advice Free. Terms reasonable. Victor J. Evans Co., 767 Ninth, Washington, D. C.



Is Love blind, as the artists and poets would have us believe? Or is it not rather true that Love is starry-eyed and sees a world of wonder very different from the drab commonplace which confronts those who know not true Love?

At all events, blind or not, there are times when Love can speak with the voice of angels. And, fortunately for us, there are those who can interpret that speech.

These are the gifted men and women who keep Romance alive these unromantic days by writing very beautifully and tenderly about young Love.

To read such a love story is to love and live anew. When you are immersed in its pages, nothing else really matters very much. Forgotten now are the countless irritations and anxieties of the every-day. Stern Duty steps aside for the moment and the Love God has his triumphant way with you.

There is in New York City, over by the romantic borders of Greenwich Village, a great building to which the writers of the best of latter-day love stories bring their precious wares.

This is Chelsea House, one of the oldest and best established publishing concerns in America. From its mighty presses there pours forth a golden stream of golden stories that have to do with the "love of a man for a maid."

When you see the magic mark, C-H, the brand of Chelsea House on a book, know that you can have for your own a love story that will carry you along with the sweep of wings. A love story written by a master craftsman, a true interpreter of the veritable speech of Love.

Below are brief résumés of the latest Chelsea House love stories. Every one of them was written for your sheer delight.

THE KEY TO PARADISE, by Peggy Gaddis. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

"Less than a month ago, she had been back in Middleton, sheltered and protected by Daddy Philip's love, her only anxiety the worry about his health. And now she was in New York, one tiny atom in a vast sea of indifferent, hurrying atoms, each one intent on his own tiny struggles, his futile fears, his tiny triumphs.

"She who, a month ago, had read of night clubs and night-club life with the detached interest she had given to accounts of warfare in China, now found herself in the mad swirl of it, a part of night-club life, the very center of some mysterious plotting."

And on what a strange mission had Lucy come to the great city! Dying, her beloved father had handed her the broken half of a gold coin and told her with deep emotion that should she be able to find the other half, the "Key to Paradise" would be hers.

Her quest brought her to the gay, garish Montmartre Club in the West Fifties and to adventures and a great love. "The Key to Paradise" will unlock for every reader a treasure-trove of glamorous enjoyment.

GOOD READING—*Continued*

HIS STUDIO WIFE, by Violet Gordon. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

In the ranks of the "night-life chasers," Gwytha was well up in front. Her gamin wit, her boldness and the way she took things in her stride made her a favorite—particularly with the men folks. And then she made what seemed at first the big mistake of saving the life of a Greenwich Village artist on suicide bent. And found out that after you've saved a man's life that's just the beginning. You have to make it after that.

Nowadays when large cross-sections of the community are holding up horrified hands over the "goings-on" of the modern girl, it's a relief to come upon a book written by one who knows what's really going on under the apparently shallow surface. It so happened that Gwytha had a way of getting where she set out to go, and though the going was pretty rough, she made the grade. You'll chuckle over the whip-lash dialogue in "His Studio Wife," thrill at its tense situations, and long before the end thank me a thousandfold for bringing this smashing love story to your attention.

THE LOVES OF JANET, by Thomas Edgelow. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

There were plenty of "eligible" young men in love with Janet, and small wonder. You see, she was the daughter of a genius and added to a very fine set of brains indeed, she had all sorts of good looks.

But most of these "eligibles" wanted to be "soothed" in one way or another and Janet was dead sick of being a "soother." A true native of "the township of Bohemia," Janet had her fill of the artistic temperament, and when eventually her erratic father took his last bow and she was free, she got herself a job with no "soothing" requirements.

But Art is a stern master and demands the undivided obedience of his servants, and Janet could not escape.

Here is a story flung against the colorful setting of life among the artistic set in New

GOOD READING—*Continued*

York, throbbing with action and digging deep down into fundamental human passions. Read "The Loves of Janet" and see just how splendid a modern love story can be.

PARTY GIRL, by Vivian Grey. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

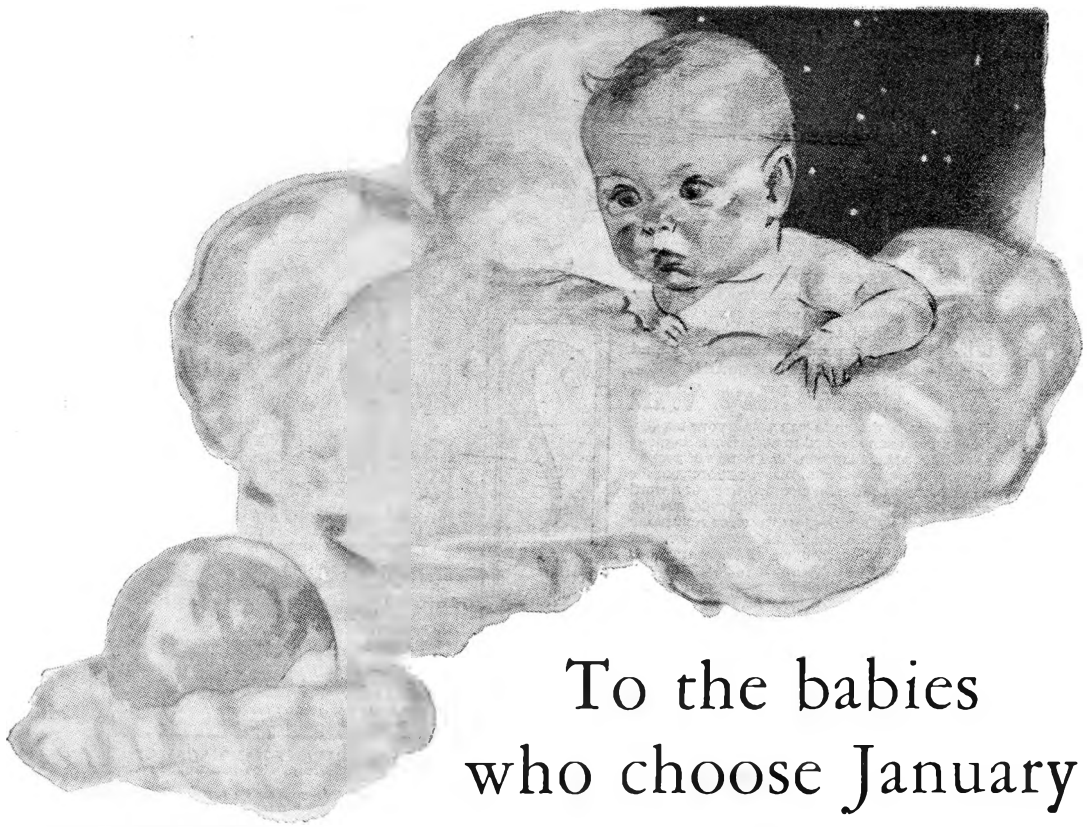
Now here was a pretty mess! Locked out of her own home by an irate father long after midnight. And locked out in the company of a most attractive young man. So attractive in fact that she mistook his politeness for an offer of marriage. He was stunned.

"I just never thought of marriage and you," he stammered. "You always seemed to be such a perfect solo! I always thought of you as the best party girl ever!"

So that was it. The center of attraction who "could be depended upon to laugh a little longer and a little louder and a little gayer than the rest." Was that all that men could see in the fair Melody?

It seemed that way for a while, for the young man's engagement to another was soon announced and things were dark for Melody. But she was game to the core and while love had not died, she did what she could to conceal it, until tragedy stalked ominously in the wings. And then of a sudden——

To be sure, this is a mean trick, this breaking-off-in-the-middle business. But no meaner than if we told you here what did happen instead of giving you the pleasure of hurrying to your dealer's and buying "Party Girl" and finding out for yourself.



To the babies who choose January

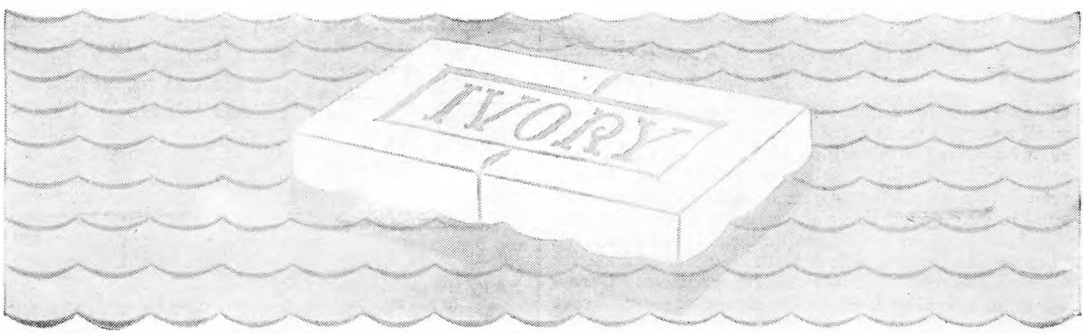
Lend us your pink ears, babies. This is I-V-O-R-Y on the air for a beauty talk.

The time is coming, fledglings, when you're going to have the thrill of your first soap-and-water bath. You can't be too firm with nurse. Don't let her forget what the doctor advised. Demand your rights as an American. Cry for an Ivory bath!

For Ivory foam is as light as the clouds you're resting upon. And Ivory's touch is as kind as mother's, as comforting to your sensitive skin. Thank goodness, you won't have to be a gold-spoon baby to enjoy a fine, pure soap!

You can't dodge making a resolution, since you just would be born in January. So why not sprout a good habit that will last you a lifetime? You will? Good! Then we'll start making a few extra hundred thousand of those nice white Ivory boats.

. . . kind to everything it touches · 99 44/100 % Pure · "It floats"



A Minute With—Edgar L. Cooper

THE GAY VIENNESE

AN hour away from Vienna lies the paradise of the Viennese—on the Kahlenberg and Wiener Wald, at the tiny villages of Grinzing, Neustift, Döbling, and half a score of others. Here on a Sunday the people journey to drink the wine of Wachau, to hear music and sing, to sit in high mountain gardens beneath the chestnuts and elders and be happy for a day, forgetting care and all the world. Up there, away from the bustle and hurly-burly of the capital, are the little old houses of the wine growers, with their graceful vineyard terraces sloping down the mountain shoulders behind.

An ancient race lives and labors in those picturesque cottages—the race of the vintners. And when the new grape crop has been turned into the wine of the new year, the *"heurige,"* the vintner hangs before his door a wreath of fir-tree branches on a long pole. Then is heard the long-awaited cry, "The pole is out!" You can say no more to a Viennese. The Ring with its theaters and cinemas, cafés and coffee houses, the delicatessens and beer halls of the suburbs, take a back seat in their appeal to him. With his family he sets out for the little wine villages, rich and poor alike, coming from every section of the city. For now is the long-awaited high season of the wine gardens.

It is good to sit, on a warm Sunday, in the shady garden of a clean, whitewashed cottage, at a little green-striped table under the horse chestnuts and walnut trees, and sip the wines. Every garden has some special mark. At one the wine is light and clear; at another it is dark like a yellow jewel; here it is dry and heady, at another sweet and mild. At one place the patron looks down upon a panorama of Vienna's one hundred and five square miles of church and palace, park and boulevard; at another he visions the sinuous Danube, the Wachau Valley, and their ringing mountains; at a third he is quite alone, deep in the elders and conifers, with the tinkle of a mountain rill as company.

The vintner, clad in leather breeches and feathered cap, assisted by his black-bodiced, red-aproned *hausfrau* or lithe-limbed girls, serve the little tables. Glasses and bottles dot the surface, and candles in glass holders. There is music—a *"schrammel"* quartet of two violins, a zither and a guitar, that plays old Viennese tunes and folk songs. People listen quietly or join in the choruses; clap their hands in time with the music or dance. All through the long day and far into the night joy and laughter and good humor reign under the leafy trees; the wine flasks are filled again and again, the food is passed around, and every earthly care forgotten. As darkness falls lanterns are lighted, and hang like yellow flowers in the blue summer night. Far below those little gardens is another world, but it lies forgotten. "The pole is out!"

The EARTHQUAKERS

By FRANCIS LYNDE

CHAPTER I.

A SHAPELESS RUIN.

AS he followed Maida Blanchard into the gun room at Bayou Noir on the morning after his arrival, Kirby was thinking less of Dick Blanchard's collection of firearms, ancient and modern, than of the changes which had come upon the homeland during his four-year exile in the Little Americas.

The changes were emphasized at the moment by the young woman in leggings, knickers, and shooting coat who was telling him to take his pick of the fowling pieces.

Debarking from a Fruit Line steamer at New Orleans a few days earlier, he had found that there was time to kill. Major Vincent, his former chief on a Gautemalan railway project, and now in charge of a district in the Mississippi flood-protection area, had sent for him; but upon landing he had learned that the major was in Washington and would not return for a fortnight or more.

Thereupon Kirby had written Blanchard, a college classmate living upon his ancestral plantation in the upriver blacklands, asking if he might kill some of the time at Bayou Noir.

Blanchard's reply had been a lively telegram:

> Delighted! Come running and shoot you a few quail. Say when, and car will meet you at Waccabee Landing.

Accordingly, Kirby had said "when," and had taken passage on an upriver boat, to be set ashore on the high levee at Waccabee late in the evening of the second day of leisurely voyaging.

Many Scientists Support the Theory That in the Atom There Lies a Vast World of Energy. And What Would Happen, Do You Suppose, if the Secret of Extracting That Power Were First Discovered by One Whose Designs Were Destructive?

As Blanchard had promised, a Bayou Noir car was waiting; but Blanchard was not with it. Instead, Kirby found himself shaking hands with a young woman, bareheaded, short skirted and exceedingly easy to look at as the beam of the steamboat's electric spotlighted her; a girl whose frankly appraising stare and boyish directness showed him afresh how far his exile had left him behind in the fast-moving American procession.

"I'm Maida, Dick's one and only sister," she said as she led the way to the car. "I know it comes as a shock, but you'll have to worry along with me for a driver. Dick had to go to the county seat—won't be back until some time tomorrow." Then, as he took his place in the roadster beside her, she went on: "I hope you're not motor shy. The road to Bayou Noir isn't quite all it ought to be—and dinner is waiting."

Following this offhand introduction and welcome there had been a breakneck flight at speed over a rough country road, and a late dinner for two served by a patriarchal black butler. At table Kirby's hostess had made him talk about his Central American experiences; and after the dinner and a short session with his pipe on the Corinthian-columned porch which the girl called the "gallery," he had been quite cavalierly told that he'd better go to bed if he was to be up for an early morning in the fields.

At this he had said that he didn't care to go gunning alone. He'd wait until her brother returned. Whereupon she had laughed and said she would go with him, adding: "I'm a better dog handler than Dick, if I do have to say it my-

self." And with a comradely "Good night," she had turned him over to the patriarchal butler to be shown to his room.

She was waiting for him the next morning when he came down to an early breakfast, and in the daylight he saw that her eyes were the bluish-gray which defies any exact color definition, that there were copper tints in her bobbed hair, and that neither her healthy tan nor the ripe red of her lips owed anything to the rouge pot or the lipstick.

Again she made him talk of himself and his experiences in the semitropics; and in the gun room, when he was trying the weight and balance of the various pieces in the racks, she said:

"You needn't be too choosy about the guns. What Dick said about the shooting was more or less apple sauce. You know—the notion that he ought to offer a stronger inducement than just bread and meat, a place to sleep and the chance to talk over old times. The dogs may possibly flush a few birds, though it has been years since the pot-hunters left us anything worth the fouling of the guns."

The succeeding tramp over the fields behind the great house and its grounds amply confirmed the young woman's assertion as to the scarcity of game. Though the dogs, a pair of well-trained Irish setters, coursed diligently, nothing came of it. But in another way the tramp was fruitful for Kirby. He was telling himself that a few days spent with Maida Blanchard would make a finished job of his adjustment to up-to-date homeland conditions. Having been out of touch with women of his own kind for a number of years, he was finding this unexpected and familiar contact with a modern young woman stimulating and exciting.

"I wish you'd tell me why I never knew that your brother had a sister," he said, as they were quartering one of the more distant fields.

She laughed. "Perhaps it was because I was too insignificant to be mentioned. When Dick was in college I was just a leggy youngster running wild here on the plantation. I wasn't sent away to school until after he came home. And I'm sorry I can't reverse the left-handed compliment. Heaven knows, Dick talked enough about you in his vacations. You may not know it, but you've a lot to live up to if you want to come anywhere near making good on what he has said of you."

"Let's talk about something else," he said, with a modest man's grin. "For example: What is that log cabin for, away out there in the edge of the woods?"

"You mustn't be too curious about that cabin. It's our hermit's hiding place."

"A hermit? That sounds interesting. Did you and Dick inherit him with Bayou Noir?"

"Oh, no; he isn't an heirloom. He came to us last fall with a letter from one of Dick's college professors. The letter said that he was doing some kind of research work that required isolation and freedom from interruptions. If we could hide him away somewhere where he could work alone and in peace, we might be the means of helping to add something to the world's stock of scientific discoveries—and so on."

"That sounds even more interesting. Is he a young man?"

"Not at all; he is well along in his fifties, I'd say—a dear, vague-eyed old somebody one would fall in love with at first sight. We tried to make him stay at the house with us; told him he might have the west wing all to himself. But he said he wouldn't think of imposing upon us to any such extent as that. If we had an old cabin somewhere out of the way where he could set up his laboratory, it was all he would ask."

"And you don't know what he is working on?"

"No. He seemed to want to be let alone, and we haven't been too nosey."

They had crossed another field, and Kirby was speculating curiously upon the exaggerated fear of espial which would make an experimenter bury himself in the blacklands for the sake of secrecy, when they entered a tract overgrown with seedling pines—a field with a barn in its center, but which seemed to have been out of cultivation for many years.

Here the dogs coursed back and forth among the little pines, the older of the pair coming in now and then to look up at her mistress, as if to say, "It's no use, dear lady; there isn't anything here," and then starting off to try again.

"Morna knows she isn't going to be able to flush anything worth powder and shot, but she is always willing to oblige," said the girl. "We'll call it a morning and go home whenever you think you've had enough of this aimless walking match."

"I don't care much for the chance of killing little birds, but I am enjoying the tramp and making a few observations as we go along—for the benefit of my coming job on the Flood Protection. What is your elevation back here, this far from the river?"

The young woman smiled and said: "We haven't any. High water and a break in the levee would drown us all out. In my grandfather's time there was a break, and the water stood six feet deep over the floor of the room where we ate breakfast this morning."

"And farther inland?"

"More of the same for fifteen or twenty miles. We are all trespassers upon old Mother Nature. We take our chances, and I suppose we shall continue to, so long as we have the richest soil in the world."

"Yet you don't use it all. This field we are in has been lying fallow for a long time, hasn't it?"

"You'd know it by the growth of old-field pines. It used to be a tobacco field years ago, and it was 'tobaccoed' out. That is the old curing barn over there."

It was just then that the dogs stopped quartering the ground ahead and came to heel, whimpering and with their tails down.

"What is it, Laddie Boy?" said the girl, stooping to pat the younger dog. And Kirby said:

"Somebody in the old barn—hobos, perhaps?"

The young woman straightened up, shading her eyes with a hand, and they were both looking directly at the old building when the astounding thing occurred.

With no warning more than a real or fancied trembling of the ground under their feet, the tobacco barn shuddered, rocked back and forth like a drunken man balancing on his heels, and then crumpled, with a din of shattering timbers, into a shapeless ruin.

CHAPTER II.

SUICIDE OR——

THERE was a moment of shocked silence. Then the young woman found her voice. "For Heaven's sake!" she gasped. "What was it—an earthquake?"

Kirby shook his head. "It couldn't have been. It was more like an explosion." Then: "Look at the dogs."

The two setters were crouching at heel, exhibiting every canine evidence of fear. Maida Blanchard went on her knees to fondle and reassure them. When she looked up it was to say, quite calmly: "It wasn't an explosion. There was no noise excepting that made by the barn falling to pieces. Shall we go and see what we can find out?"

What they saw upon approaching the ruin, over which a dust cloud was still hanging in the windless air, was scarcely less marvelous than the collapse of the building. The ground for some dis-

tance around the site was minutely powdered, presenting a surface layer of fine dust in which they sank ankle-deep. A nearer view of the wreck proved that, old as the structure was, no lack of soundness in the timbers or of strength in the framing had caused the collapse.

Again it was the young woman who spoke first.

"What is the answer?" she asked.

"I am trying to find one. I've never seen anything like this, outside of an earthquake. And the few quakes I've experienced haven't been careful to confine themselves to a circle of a few hundred feet, not by any means. Besides, an earthquake couldn't pulverize the ground like this in one small spot and not make itself felt forcibly enough to knock us down where we were standing at the time."

"Well, what then?"

"That is what I mean to find out if I can. I'm curious to know."

A comprehensive examination of the wreck merely served to deepen the mystery. Kirby, familiar with the action of high explosives, found nothing to indicate that the barn had been destroyed by a blast. There was no upheavel, and, as Maida Blanchard had said, there had been no noise save that made by the falling timbers. On the other hand, the effects, within the small area, were precisely those which would be produced by an earthquake—cracks opened and the surface soil powdered.

"Well," said his companion again, "is your engineering education any good?"

"It didn't include anything like this. If I didn't know in reason that it couldn't be, I should say it really was a miniature earthquake. It has all the indications but one, and that is its confinement to such a small space. We both know that an earth disturbance violent enough to wreck a stout building this way would be felt for hundreds of miles. And I'm not at all certain that we felt it at the distance of a few hundred feet. Are you?"

"No. I thought I felt it, but perhaps it was only the effect of seeing the barn swaying and tottering before it fell."

"It's a mystery; but whatever the cause was, you've lost what was apparently a perfectly good tobacco barn."

"Oh, the loss doesn't amount to anything. We'll never crop tobacco again; and Dick has been threatening to pull the barn down for I don't know how long. Shall we go back to the house? The dogs seem to have lost their nerve; and anyway, I don't believe there are any birds."

Kirby acquiesced, though if he had been alone he would have stayed and tried to unravel the mystery. Always impatient of the unexplained, and particularly so when it invaded his own technical field, his efforts to account for the inexplicable thing made him so abstracted that his walking companion finally protested.

"Are you still puzzling over the earthquake that couldn't have been an earthquake?" she asked. "Is that why I can't get anything out of you but an absent-minded 'Yes' or 'No' to everything I say?"

"Guilty," he confessed, "though I didn't mean to be stockish. But I am puzzled, more than a little. I'd like to know just what happened to make that old barn fall to pieces as it did."

"So would I. What do you think, now that you've had time to 'gather your mind,' as Uncle Elisha would say?"

"I can't think of anything but a theory that is too wildly impossible to be considered. But say—a little while ago you were telling me about your hermit and his research work. Haven't you any idea at all of the field he is working in?"

"No. As I have told you, we haven't tried to find out."

"You said he brought a letter from

one of our college profs.—Dick's and mine. Do you remember the name of the letter writer?"

"Yes. The letter was signed 'Andrew MacCallum.'"

"I see; the 'canny Scot,' we called him, though not to his face. He was our professor of physics, a man pretty well up to the top of the ladder in his specialty, but clannish to the *n*th degree. Anybody he'd give a letter of introduction to would be likely to be a bird of the same feather as himself. What did you say your hermit's name is?"

"I didn't say—for the good reason that neither Dick nor I know his name. The professor didn't mention it in his letter, and we've never asked it. He told me once that I might call him 'Uncle Hiram' if I wanted to, but that's as far as it got. You know the sort—genial and sweet-tempered and all that, but just a wee bit reticent."

Kirby nodded. "I know the weave. MacCallum is another yard off the same piece of cloth, though, as I have said, he is a master in his own field. His hobby was the atomic theory."

"Is that the 'wildly impossible' thing you mentioned a moment ago?"

"It is. What do you know about it?"

"You'll laugh when I tell you. One time, not very long ago, I was spending the night with some friends of ours in Mayville. I've a bad habit of reading myself to sleep, and in the room they gave me there was only one book, a little, red-covered thing by a Professor Millikan. He was trying to tell his readers all about the atom and the immense energy there is locked up in the whirling electrons; enough of it in a glass of water to drive a ship across the ocean—things like that. Most of it was miles beyond me, of course, but it answered the purpose and put me to sleep."

Kirby grinned his appreciation of a bedtime reader who had recourse to just any book that offered, and said:

"If you've read Millikan, you know as much about the 'wildly impossible' thing as I do. Yet 'impossible' is hardly the word to use in an age that has seen the discovery and development of the telephone, the wireless, the airplane, the ends which electricity can be made to serve, and dozens of other things that would have been scouted as impossible by our grandfathers. You see what I mean?"

"You are thinking that what we have just seen may have been a demonstration of still another of the miraculous discoveries?"

"It was only a suggestion. But it occurred to me that some such tremendous energy as that which is locked up in the whirling electrons of the atom would be needed to account for what we saw. Naturally, since nobody has yet discovered any means of harnessing the atom energy, we must look for another cause."

"You spoke of our hermit. Were you trying to tie him into it in some way?"

"Oh, no. But as he is a research worker, I was thinking that perhaps he would be able to give a better guess at the cause of the little earthquake than I can."

"I might take you over to his cabin and let you meet him."

"I wouldn't want to intrude. If he is like most of the research men I have known, the chances are that he wouldn't be interested in anything outside of his own particular line. We'll hear what Dick has to say about it when he comes home."

Thus dismissed, the barn-wrecking mystery rested until late in the afternoon when Blanchard returned from the county seat. And even then, it was not until after the master of Bayou Noir had bathed and changed, and was smoking a pipe with Kirby on the Greek-pillared porch, that he was told the story of the curious happening of the morning. His comment did not indicate that

he thought there was anything mysterious or unaccountable about the happening.

"The old barn fell down, you say? I've been expecting it would, any time the wind blew hard enough. But I didn't know you'd had a baby tornado here this morning."

"We didn't have," was Kirby's sober reply. "There was no breath of wind stirring at the moment."

"What—no wind? Then the old building must have been rotted worse than I thought it was."

"It wasn't rotted at all, so far as we could see."

Blanchard sat up at this. "What are you driving at, Bob? You talk as if there were something mysterious about it."

"There is," Kirby said; and from that he went into the minuter details.

"A two-by-four earthquake is your stab at it?" Blanchard queried incredulously. "If you are good for the tramp, let's go and have a look at the thing. You've aroused my curiosity."

At the end of the half mile across the fields Kirby showed Blanchard just where he and Maida had stood when the crash came, and he spoke of the singular action of the dogs. Next, they examined the ruins and the dust bed in which they were scattered.

" 'Earthquake' seems to be the word," was Blanchard's admission. "Only, of course, it couldn't have been that." Then: "Say! I have a notion, but it is just about as incredible as a fairy tale. Did Maida tell you anything about our hermit?"

"She did, and she pointed out his cabin—at a distance."

"All right; see what you can make of this: Two days ago the old chap asked me if I would sell him this tobacco barn. I told him he might have it as a gift, if he could make any use of it; that I had been intending to have it torn down and the timbers hauled to the house for firewood. Do you suppose that is the answer?"

"It might be, if he has invented some sort of silent explosive more powerful than anything in present use. Do you think that is what he is working on?"

"I don't know. We have let him pretty strictly alone, as Maida has probably told you. Suppose we go and interview him. He is a mighty decent old citizen, and he needn't tell us anything he doesn't want to."

In silence they crossed the intervening fields to the two-room log cabin half hidden in the tree fringe of the bayou marge. There were no signs of its occupant to be seen as they approached; and when they stood in the open passageway between the two rooms, they found the doors open on either hand and the place apparently untenanted.

The room at the right was the experimenter's workshop, and a glance through the open door showed them that it had been systematically wrecked. Broken odds and ends of electrical appliances were strewn upon the floor, the work bench had been overturned, and a stifling stench of spilled chemicals kept them from entering.

"Well, what do you know about that?" Blanchard exclaimed, backing away from the choking fumes drifting into the passage. Then: "Say! The old chap must have gone completely off his head—to break up housekeeping like this! Let's see what's been done to the living room."

That, too, looked as if a deliberate attempt had been made to destroy everything breakable. The cot bed had been dismantled, with the mattress cut and slashed and its Spanish moss stuffing scattered on the floor. The small wall cupboard had been emptied of its few dishes, cooking utensils and food containers, and of these nothing was left whole or undamaged.

An old-fashioned secretary desk was

lying on its back in a corner, with its drawers pulled out, the wooden mantel clock had been taken down and its works removed, and the stuffed seat of the one chair had been cut open and ripped away to leave the chair a mere skeleton framework.

"I wish you'd tell me what you think of all this sabotage, Bob," Blanchard said as they stood in the midst of the wreckage.

"I suppose there is only one answer. It's another chapter in the book of human failures. On the evidence, I'd say that the old fellow found that the thing he'd been working on was only a dud, after all, and the discovery tipped the brain balance for him. Where do you suppose he has gone?"

Blanchard shook his head.

"There is no telling where he would go, or what he'd do—after smashing things like this. And he appeared to be such an even-tempered, harmless old scientific burrower! I shall hate to tell Maida. She had sort of taken him under her wing—or she would have if he had let her. She was the one who sent that secretary desk of her grandfather's over here; that and the bits of furnishings to make him as comfortable as might be."

When they returned to the great house they found that Maida had taken the roadster to drive to a neighbor's; and again they sat on the porch and smoked, speculating thoughtfully upon the two mysterious events of the day. It was Kirby who suggested that the hermit's friends, or relatives, if he had any, ought to be notified.

"Professor MacCallum is our only chance for that," said Blanchard; whereupon he went in to the telephone to dictate a message to the professor of physics in the far-away northern college. The telephone-telegraph service was surprisingly prompt. Inside of an hour the tinkle of the phone bell summoned him, and when he rejoined Kirby on the porch it was to say, "Nothing doing. The dean answered my wire, and he says the MacCallums are in Europe—present address unknown."

While he was speaking, Scammon, the white overseer, came to the porch steps and waited until Blanchard turned to him.

"What is it, Ben?"

"Something I reckon you'd ort to know. Two of Black Julie's boys been fishin' and they come runnin' in a few minutes ago, scared half white. Say they found a dead man down by the bayou."

"A white man?" Blanchard questioned.

The overseer nodded.

"Get some of the field hands and we'll go after the body," Blanchard directed. Then to Kirby: "You needn't come, Bob, unless you want to."

"But I do want to," was the prompt reply.

At the place to which they were directed by the negro boys they found the body lying at the edge of the water under the bayou bank. In answer to Kirby's unspoken query, Blanchard said, "Yes, it's our old hermit," and, as they knelt beside the body, added: "Apparently he has been dead for some time. What do you think about it? Was it suicide, or just disappointment and heart failure?"

"Don't ask me; I'm no doctor. But it doesn't look like suicide."

One of the Negroes had brought an ax, and a rough litter was quickly made. When the sorry procession was ready, Blanchard and Kirby went on ahead to the cabin to put the living room in some sort of decent order for the reception of the old man's body.

"What will you do, Dick?" Kirby asked, as the group of bearers approached.

"The only thing there remains to do—give him six feet of earth in the family burying ground. I suppose I ought

to notify Doc Bilby, the coroner; but he is an old man, and he won't want to drive out here from Mayville if he can help it. I can phone him and get authority to do what is necessary."

"Then you think it wasn't suicide?"

"Oh, no. Your guess was probably the right one. He had failed in whatever it was he was trying to do, and the failure broke his heart."

"You are not connecting his death in any way with the thing your sister and I saw this morning? The place where he was found is in plain sight of the old barn. And you said he wanted to buy the barn, didn't you?"

"Yes; but I imagine he only wanted to move his laboratory there. You see, if he were responsible for the smashing of the barn, it would mean that the thing he was working on was some new kind of explosive, and that it was a huge success. But the wreck here at the cabin points to the madness of failure. It was doubtless just a coincidence—his passing out down there back of the old tobacco field."

In the blacklands, as elsewhere in tropical or semitropical climates, but little time is suffered to intervene between death and burial. That night, by the light of lanterns and flaring pine-knot torches, the body of the unnamed guest of Bayou Noir, in a coffin hastily made in the plantation carpenter shop, was laid to rest in the family burying ground, with only the young woman, Kirby, the overseer and the Negro bearers to stand with bowed heads while Blanchard read the simple committal service out of the prayer book.

CHAPTER III.

"MURDER."

"IT'S right mellowing to be able to 'brother' with you again, after all these years, Bob," Blanchard was saying as they went out to the porch to smoke after breakfast on the morning following the day of mysterious—and tragic—developments. "I'm only sorry we had to welcome you to Bayou Noir with a funeral. Of course, our old hermit didn't mean anything personal to you; but a death is a death, any way you look at it."

"Since the thing had to happen, I'm glad I could be with you and Miss Maida. Just the same, I can't help wishing you had phoned for the coroner yesterday evening. The more I think of it, the more I am convinced that we haven't got to the bottom of yesterday's happenings, Dick."

"You are not hinting at anything like foul play, are you? Don't let that worry you. Scammon and I made a pretty careful post-mortem when we were preparing the old man's body for buriel. There wasn't a sign of a wound, not even a scratch."

"Even that doesn't prove anything," Kirby put in soberly. "I once saw a man killed by a blast when we wouldn't have known what did it if it hadn't been for the muddy matting of his hair at the base of the brain where a lump of soft clay had struck him—concussion, you know. Besides, there is the wreck of the tobacco barn."

"Oh, I don't believe the old man had anything to do with the wreck. The mere fact that his body was found within a few hundred yards of it doesn't count for much in the way of evidence."

"Maybe not. Yet you said he wanted to use the barn for some purpose, and if——"

The interruption was an imperative ringing of the telephone bell in the hall, and Blanchard went in to answer. When he came out again he had thrown off his smoking jacket and was struggling into his coat.

"Trouble, Bob!" he exclaimed excitedly. "The bank in Mayville was blown up last night and the town has gone hog-wild! I'm one of the directors and I'll have to get over there!"

Kirby got out of his chair and knocked the burning dottle from his pipe.

"I'll go along," he offered. "Find your sister and tell her, while I'm getting the car out."

It took him but a minute or two to get the car out of the shed garage and run it up to the house entrance. Blanchard was waiting at the porch steps and his sister was with him.

"You make Dick call me up from town," she said to Kirby. "I shall be walking the floor until I can hear just how bad things are."

Kirby promised and surrendered the wheel to Blanchard, who showed by the way he clashed the gears in starting how badly he was shaken up. One of the small Negro boys had run to open the great gates, and a minute later the roadster was rocketing over the unsurfaced country road on the twenty-mile run to the county seat.

It was a silent drive, so far as speech was concerned. Blanchard had the cut-out open, and Kirby did not try to make himself heard above the roar of the unmuffled exhaust. When they reached the county town it was apparent that Blanchard's phone informant had not exaggerated in telling of the excitement. The courthouse square was filled with the parked cars of neighboring planters, and Blanchard had difficulty in finding a place for the roadster.

The bank, a substantial, one-story brick, had stood by itself at one corner of the square. Elbowing their way through the milling crowd, Blanchard and Kirby saw that the building had been totally demolished. It was a mere heap of dusty ruins, the débris hardly recognizable as the remains of a finished structure.

Blanchard got the story of the cataclysm from one of his fellow directors. It had occurred in the dark hour before dawn, and people in the adjacent buildings had been awakened by what they said was an explosion, though there were some who said that they heard nothing but the crash of the falling building. Those who were first on the ground had found the walls still crumbling and a dense dust cloud spreading from the ruin. There had been no loss of life, and apparently no robbery, since the concrete-incased vault seemed to have shared in the general disintegration.

While Blanchard was talking with the excited townsmen, Kirby examined the ruin and the ground over which it was scattered. The dust of crushed mortar lay thickly upon everything. Kirby got Blanchard out of the crowd and took him around to the rear of the wreck.

"Look at this, Dick," he said, prodding with a stick into a bed of flourlike dust. "Does that suggest anything to you?"

"Powdered mortar from the plastering?"

"Partly; but most of it is powdered earth. See here." And he thrust the stick down until it was all but buried in the fluffy dust. "Don't you remember what we found yesterday on the site of your tobacco barn?"

"Good Lord! Two of your 'earthquakes' twenty miles apart?"

"Yes, and both brought about by the same means—whatever they were. Didn't I say that we hadn't got to the bottom of things?"

"I'll say we hadn't! What's your theory, Bob?"

"I haven't any. But it says itself that we'd better be formulating one. These two exactly similar crack-ups are more than a coincidence."

Blanchard stood frowning thoughtfully for a minute before he said:

"Wait until I've talked around a bit more, and then we'll try to run this thing down—just you and I. There is no use broadcasting our suspicions until we have something definite to say, and

it strikes me that the place to begin is at Bayou Noir."

Kirby nodded and said: "Do your talking, and I'll wrestle the car out of that mess in the courthouse yard and wait for you."

They separated at this, and Kirby went to extricate the roadster. In a few minutes Blanchard joined him, and the twenty-mile run to the plantation was made at the best speed the unsurfaced road would permit. At Bayou Noir Blanchard's sister was waiting for them when they entered the house.

"I have something to show you," she said. "After you left, I had grandfather's old secretary desk brought over from the cabin. When I lent it to Uncle Hiram I showed him the secret false bottom in the right-hand drawer, and I wanted to find out if he had used it. This is what I found." She showed them a thin, leather-bound book.

It was originally a blank book, but now it was partly filled with written entries. Blanchard thumbed the written pages.

"Have you read it?" he asked.

The young woman said she hadn't; that she had just discovered it.

The book proved to be partly a diary, but chiefly a record of the daily or weekly progress made in the workshop laboratory—a record which began with the experimenter's escape from a too thickly peopled North and his finding of a hiding place in the blacklands, as the opening paragraph set forth. Blanchard read aloud:

"At last I have found a place where I won't have to double lock the doors and sleep with a revolver under my pillow. The Blanchards, brother and sister, are kindness itself, and they do not know, or seek to know, who I am or what I am trying to do. I am reasonably confident that G. and his gang of spies and cutthroats won't be able to trace me here."

Following this, there were pages recording the processes, in algebraic equations, of countless experiments, most of the entries lacking even the dates on which they had been made. But at length there was another of the more understandable entries:

"The miserable fear which made life a burden before I came here is returning. It is only a presentiment of evil, but I cannot shake it off. I can't believe that G. has given up. His persistent and unscrupulous efforts in the past fully warrant this conclusion. I don't believe he would stop at anything, not even the taking of life, to gain his ends. And the men in his pay, recruits from the underworld, every one of them, are tools fitted to his hand. If G. is wily enough—and God knows he doesn't lack any of the serpent qualities—he may be able to trace me through M. and the letter written the Blanchards for me. What I fear most is that the blow may fall without warning, without giving me time to destroy my apparatus and the formulas. To let them fall into G.'s hands would be the crime of all the ages. For, though both are still incomplete, they would be all that a trained specialist like G. would need to point the way to the tremendous discovery which I am now certain lies at the end of all these days and nights of toil and experimentation."

There were several more pages of the problem figurings, and then:

"The presentiment of evil threatening is still with me, and now there would seem to be some small foundation for it. The plantation Negroes tell me that timber cruisers are working in the adjacent cypress swamp. Are they harmless timber seekers? Or are they spies G. has set upon my track? It would be the irony of fate if, now that I am fairly within sight of the goal, this quiet hiding place of mine should be discovered and raided. One thing I have done: The formulas and the detector are safe—the formulas where nobody but myself can ever find them, and the detector where it can fall only into safe hands. As for the detonator, it will never be out of my possession while I am alive—at least, not until every precaution has been taken to keep it from falling into the hands of those who might use it to wreck the world."

There was only one more of the personal entries, and it was a pæan of triumph:

"At last, at last!—after all these years of effort! My detonator, resolver, liberator of the bound giant of universal energy, does its

work! I have been testing it all day with infinitesimally small charges and it never fails. To-morrow I shall try the major experiment in one of the remoter fields, where Blanchard has kindly provided me with the means—of course, without suspecting what use I shall make of them. But he and his sister shall be the first to share the tremendous secret with me. I owe them that much, and more. And in case anything should happen to me—in case the worst should happen—they shall be the ones to know where I have hidden the finger that will point to the source of danger."

Blanchard ran through the remaining pages of the book, but they were all blank.

"We know now all we shall ever know, I'm afraid," he said gravely. Then to Kirby: "Can you form any notion of what his discovery is, Bob?"

"Not any clear idea, no. He calls his instrument or apparatus, or whatever it is, a 'detonator.' But in the same breath he calls it the 'liberator of the bound giant of universal energy.' Is it possible that he was able to go a step farther than other researchers and find a way to liberate and control the energy of the whirling electrons of the atom?"

Blanchard shook his head.

"In this day and age nobody dares say that anything in the shape of scientific discovery is impossible. But we haven't any time to waste on the theories. The old barn didn't crumble into dust of its own accord, and neither did the Mayville bank. We can safely assume that the old man we buried last night had invented some sort of miracle machine, and that the deadly thing, whatever it may be, is now in the possession of those who are using it for criminal purposes, just as he feared might be the case if he were robbed of it. Am I right?"

"Yes; but that isn't all," the young woman put in quickly. "We may also assume that what we were calling the madness of disappointed hopes and failure wasn't anything of the kind. It was murder! And that wreck of things in the cabin—can't you just see the murderer or murderers tearing everything to pieces in their search for the formulas?"

"You've said it!" Kirby exclaimed. Then, as the terrific possibilities came crowding in upon him: "Good heavens! Think of it! There is simply no limit to the devastation such an invention can turn loose! No wonder the old man wrote down that sentence in his diary—that it would be the crime of all the ages to let his discovery get into the hands of those who would make it a curse instead of a blessing!"

"It's up to us to get busy!" Blanchard cut in impatiently. "There is a chance that these devils, whoever they are, will come back to the cabin to search again for what we hope they didn't find yesterday. I'll have Scammon arm a bunch of the steadies and we'll set a trap at the cabin. Meanwhile, you and I, Bob, will see if we can't pick up a trail that will lead us somewhere to something definite."

In accordance with this program the overseer was told what he was to do, and Blanchard and Kirby took a short cut across the fields to make another examination of the wreck of the old tobacco barn. Here the fact was pretty clearly established that the force employed was the same as that which had demolished the Mayville bank. While the upper timbers of the structure were merely splintered and disjointed, those nearest the ground were disintegrated, much as if they had been passed through a powerful grinding machine like those used in the wood-pulp mills. Kirby called attention to this.

"You see," he said, "whatever the force was, it was applied from the ground. And the shock or charge here was not nearly as heavy as that at Mayville. Could it have been touched off by wireless, do you think?"

To this question there was no definite answer. If there had been a wired con-

nection, no trace of it or its terminals could be found. From the barn site they went over to the bayou edge where the old man's body was found. Here any attempt to add to the facts already known seemed hopeless. If the soft, damp soil of the bayou brink had held any hints to point to what had occurred at the fatal moment the preceding day, the footprints, made by themselves and the field hands Scammon had brought for litter carriers, had obliterated them.

But upon skirting the waterside a short distance in the direction of the hermit's cabin, they made a discovery which seemed likely to bear fruit. In more than one of the soft areas they found other footprints leading in both directions—three different sets of them leading toward the place where the body was found, and two sets pointing the opposite way. In a spot where the soil was dampest the confused trail, with some of the impressions superimposed upon the others, told a fairly plain story.

"Here is something readable, at last," Blanchard said. "The old man was going toward the tobacco field, and he was carrying something weighty—the depth of his heel prints proves that much—and there were two men following him. And the two sets of tracks going the way we are going were made by the two men returning later. Isn't that the way it stacks up for you?"

Kirby nodded, and asked how far it was from where they were standing to the cabin.

"Just a few hundred yards; around the next bend in the bayou."

When they reached a point opposite the cabin the bank of the lagoon was grassy to the water's edge and the trail was indistinguishable. But a little farther on they picked it up again, alternately finding and losing it until it led to a fallen tree bridging a narrow place in the black waterway.

"Here is where the two men crossed, going and coming," Kirby announced, pointing to muddy stains on the tree trunk. "What is there on the other side of the bayou?"

"A cypress swamp four or five miles in extent."

"No roads in it?"

"Yes, one; an old logging road about a mile back from here."

"That road is our next objective," said Kirby, and he led the way across the foot log.

The trail of the two men was not difficult to follow in the swamp. Progress could be made only by jumping from one hummock to another, and the two pairs of footprints were well defined. A mile back in the morass they came to the ancient logging road which was marked chiefly by the rotting tree trunks of its corduroy surfacing.

"Here is where we quit," Blanchard said, indicating a double track made by automobile tires in one of the spots where the rotting corduroy had entirely disappeared. "They had a car here waiting for them. We might trace the car for a mile or a little more, but after that, nothing, because this old road comes out upon the surfaced highway crossing the county."

"These men were the supposed timber cruisers the old man mentioned in his diary?"

"It is altogether probable. We can make inquiries, but I imagine they won't amount to anything. They have made a clean get-away, and our best hope now is that they may come back to the cabin to renew the search for whatever it was they were looking for yesterday."

Kirby's eyes narrowed.

"Whatever the old researcher's invention or discovery was, or is, it certainly doesn't include perpetual motion," he commented. "And, failing that, there will have to be renewals—which can't be made without the old man's formulas."

"That is comforting, as far as it goes. But, on the other hand, while the thing

lasts these devils have a weapon that is even more deadly than poison gas."

"That is true, also. And we have nothing to fight it with."

By following the logging road a quarter of a mile to the right they came to a decrepit trestle over the bayou which enabled them to cross to the plantation area and so to make their way back to the house. Here they found the cars of a number of the neighboring planters, presumably depositors or stockholders in the demolished bank, who had been apprised by telephone of the disaster. Blanchard put in a word of caution as they were approaching the house and saw the gathering of people on the broad porch.

"The less we say about what we know, or suspect, will be the soonest mended," he said to Kirby. "The panic, if there has to be one, will start itself quickly enough, without any help from us."

CHAPTER IV.

AN ULTIMATUM.

THE neighborhood gathering upon the Bayou Noir porch owed itself to the fact that Blanchard was a director in the county seat bank, and to the knowledge that he had already been on the ground in Mayville, and the callers were eager for first-hand news of the disaster.

At a mute sign from his sister assuring him that she had not talked unguardedly, Blanchard dealt merely with the physical facts as they were known, letting it be inferred that there had been an overdone attempt at robbery.

"We shan't know what we stand to lose until the wreck is cleared so we can get at the vault, but even that may have been destroyed in the smash," he told his listeners. "The concrete shell is shattered, but the steel inner vault hadn't been uncovered when we left town."

At this, Marcus Janeway, one of the planters who had used dynamite in clearing a field of stump land, put in his word.

"Dick says you are an engineer," he said, turning upon Kirby. "Maybe you can tell us how under the shining sun they could get dynamite enough under it to smash a solid building like that into a heap of dust. There wasn't any cellar under the bank."

Kirby's answer was evasive:

"Dynamite isn't the only explosive, or the most powerful. Pure nitro might account for the wreck, and the quantity needn't have been very large. Apart from that, many new explosives have been discovered in the past few years, some of them tremendously destructive."

"Going to fall mighty hard on you directors if the vault is cleaned out"—this from Silas Page, a transplanted New Englander who was credited with being one of the heaviest depositors. "You're liable up to twice the amount of your stock, ain't you?"

"That is the law," Blanchard admitted. "But we are still hoping there may not be a loss to anybody, aside from the wrecked building. We shall probably know later in the day what has happened to the contents of the vault."

There was more talk, chiefly about the widespread crime wave, which had not heretofore penetrated to the blacklands, and there were intimations that no jail in the county would be strong enough to hold the perpetrators of the outrage safe from a lynching if they should be found and arrested.

"I will have talk weeth Sheriff Jack*sone* over the telephone," said little Antoine Dugonnard, owner of a rice plantation at the mouth of the bayou, "and I am telling heem if he is find dose dynamitards, eet is best that he saves us the trobble to go to Mayville and break into dose jail, *oui!*"

After the last of the callers had gone, Blanchard drew a breath of relief.

"I am glad that is over—for the pres-

ent, at least," he said; and then he told his sister what he and Kirby had found on the bayou margin and on their trail-following through the cypress swamp to the old logging road. "There is no doubt that you were right, Maida, when you named it murder," he added. "We know now that the old man was followed from the cabin to the place where his body was found, and that the two men who had followed him went back the way they had come, through the swamp to the old road, where they had a car."

"Could they have killed him without leaving any mark on the body?" she asked.

"Yes," Kirby answered. "A padded blackjack and a blow at the base of the skull. As I told Dick this morning, I have seen a man killed in that way by a lump of wet clay thrown by a blast."

"Get us a bite to eat, Maida, and we'll be chasing again," Blanchard put in. "The next move is to try to get a line on these sham timber cruisers who are supposed to have been checking up on the standing timber in the swamp."

Over the hastily eaten meal Blanchard explained, for Kirby's benefit, what he hoped to be able to do. On the chance that the marauders had really posed as possible purchasers of the swamp cypress, the owner of the swamp, a sugar planter whose estate lay some miles below Waccabee Landing on the great river, was to be interviewed, in the hope that he might be able to give a description of the man or men who had approached him.

"Want me to go along?" Kirby asked.

"Sure, if I'm not wearing you out with all this tearing around."

"You are not. But it occurs to me that I may be needed here at the plantation. If there is another attempt made to ransack the old man's cabin—Miss Maida will be here alone, you know."

"Nice of you," said the modern young woman; "nice, but needless. You needn't worry about me. Besides, I think you ought to go with Dick. Two heads are better than one when it comes to taking mental photographs of certain somebodies from a description passed on by another somebody."

At that, Kirby accompanied his host, and a little later they were jouncing in the roadster over the rough road to Waccabee Landing on the roundabout way to Monsieur Charbonneau's plantation of Bonne Foison. On the drive, Kirby got his first comprehensive view, in daylight, of the river-fronting levels of the blacklands. At Waccabee the road turned at right angles down the river behind the levee, and it was a sobering thought that only the high earth bank stood as a barrier between the rich plantations behind it and an effacing flood which, at least in the vicinity of a crevasse, would sweep away everything in its path.

Halfway to Charbonneau's they had to slow down to pass a place where a gang of a hundred Negroes were at work strengthening the levee, and Kirby spoke of the ever-present menace to the flat lands.

"I should think you'd have the flood threat on your mind all the time, Dick," he said, adding: "Or are you so used to it that you don't think of it at all?"

"Oh, I suppose we do have it at the bottom of our minds more or less, but it becomes acute only in periods of high water, like the present. I hope we are not going to see the river go to the danger stage, but the weather bureau doesn't give us much encouragement. There has been an unusually heavy rainfall in the North and the river has been at a flood stage for weeks. You must have remarked it on your way up from New Orleans."

"I did. At some of the landings it seemed as though another foot or two would take it over the top of the levee."

"We are pretty well protected along here. There hasn't been a break on this

side of the river for many years, and our levee hasn't shown any indications of undercutting or weakening—which is lucky for us. In my grandfather's time there——"

"Your sister told me," Kirby said. "I had an idea that the land was higher, back where you are at Bayou Noir."

"It isn't; it is about the same level all the way to Mayville and beyond. A break in the levee, even at the present height of the river, would put fully half of the county anywhere from eight to ten feet under water. That is why I say we are lucky in having a levee that has never, in late years, shown any signs of giving way. But here is Bonne Foison. Let's see what Monsieur Pierre can tell us—if anything."

As it transpired, Charbonneau could tell them nothing of any moment. Some weeks earlier a man, claiming to be a representative of one of the great lumber companies, had appeared at Bonne Foison to ask if the cypress in the swamp was for sale. Being told that it was, he had said that his company would have an estimate of the marketable lumber made by its timber cruisers, after which a price offer would be named. Beyond this, Charbonneau knew nothing; didn't even know that the cruisers had been sent in.

Asked if he could describe the man who had called upon him, the Creole planter was entirely at fault; he couldn't even remember the name the caller had given. Knowing the difficulty of getting the timber out of the swamp tract, he had atttached little importance to the tentative offer; had thought it most likely he'd never hear of the matter again.

Baffled thus at what should have been the prime source of any enlightening information, Blanchard and Kirby drove back up the river, making inquiries at the various plantations bordering upon the inland swamp tract. Here, again, the results were disappointing. It seemed to be a matter of common knowledge that timber surveyors had been at work in the swamp, but that was all. Apart from a few of the Negro field hands at two of the places, no one had actually seen them.

"No use to call the black boys in and question them," Blanchard told his driving companion as they went on. "You've heard the saying—that all darkies look alike to a white man; and the reverse is true—all white men look alike to a Negro."

It was drawing on toward evening when they reached Bayou Noir and put the roadster under its shed shelter. As they ascended the porch steps Maida met them and handed her brother a letter. It was typewritten, and there was no heading, date or signature. It read:

> Your efforts to obstruct are futile. We are reluctant to go to extremes, but we shall not hesitate if the necessity arises. Call in your armed watchers and establish a dead line at the boundaries of your house grounds. If you notify your neighbors and try to summon help, we shall know it and there will be reprisals. Your failure to comply with these instructions will bring consequences disastrous to Bayou Noir, with a possible loss of life. A word to the wise is, or ought to be, sufficient.

Blanchard handed the letter to Kirby and questioned his sister:

"How did this come?"

"Malvina's youngest brought it. A white man had given it to him when he was playing in the big road, telling him he'd be skinned alive if he didn't run with it to the 'great house.' The pickaninny couldn't tell us any more than this. He is only five years old and was scared half out of his wits."

Blanchard's eyes darkened. "So? It seems that we have them right here with us. What do you make of that letter, Bob?"

"One thing, at least—the man who wrote this is no ordinary criminal. The wording of the letter proves that much. And I'll hazard another guess. The

destruction of the Mayville bank wasn't for any mere thieving purpose. It was intended as an object lesson."

"To let us all know that there is a bunch of criminals, armed with a devil machine, loose among us?"

"Something like that—and with all that it implies."

Blanchard was shaken and he showed it plainly.

"You see the threat in that letter. The writer knows that I know he has me by the throat. If I don't do what he tells me to, he'll crumple the house down over our heads."

"No doubt that is what he means. It shows the length to which they will go for a chance to make another search for the old man's papers. There is a ray of hope in that, Dick. It indicates that this thing they have committed, a cold-blooded murder, to get hold of, bids fair to be short lived, don't you think? And when it dies, the secret of its power dies with it—lacking the missing formulas."

"Yes; but while it lives——"

"I know; while it lives it is more to be feared than an enemy bombing plane. You'll have to obey orders, Dick. You can't afford to have this fine old mansion reduced to a dust heap. We have the old man's assurance that his formulas are hidden where nobody can find them."

"What do *you* say about it, Maida?" said Blanchard, turning upon his sister.

What she had to say was said to Kirby.

"So you would have us do that, taking the risk of having the formulas found and this ghastly thing perpetuated, perhaps for all time?" she flamed out scornfully. Then two words that cut like a knife: "That's cowardly!"

Kirby's only reply to the taunt was to insist again that no course but the one he had suggested was open to Blanchard.

"All right," Blanchard returned grimly. "I'll call Scammon and the black boys in. And after that is done, I'll go myself and set fire to the cabin."

"No, you mustn't do that," Kirby interposed quickly. "If you should, you'd pay the price, just the same. It would be a declaration of war, and the reprisal this anonymous letter writer threatens would follow like a shot!"

It was at this conjuncture that the old Negro butler came to say dinner was served. The meal was eaten in such silence as the crisis imposed, and hurriedly on Blanchard's part. Before the dessert was served he excused himself, saying he would go after Scammon and the cabin watchers before it got too late. After he had gone, the young woman broke the strained silence.

"What made you say everything you could think of to break Dick's nerve?"

Kirby's answer was even toned.

"Perhaps it was because, as an outsider in this affair, I can get a clearer view of the possible consequences than either you or Dick can."

"No, it wasn't that," she retorted accusingly. Then: "If you were afraid to stay the night here, Dick would have driven you to one of the neighbor's houses."

"I didn't think of that," Kirby said mildly; and after this the silence supervened again and the meal was finished as between two who were tongue-tied.

Kirby, smoking on the porch a half hour later, had been asking himself why his temper—always more or less a handicap—had refused to take fire under Maida Blanchard's scornful assault, and he was still searching for the answer when Blanchard returned and sat down to fill his pipe.

"Well, I've taken your advice, Bob, and I feel like a whipped dog," he said. "It's a question in my mind whether I have any right to protect myself and my own property at the expense of what may happen to any one or all of us in the near future."

"You have done the wise thing—the only thing there was to do in the circumstances. Consider a moment. Suppose you had refused and we had gone to reënforce Scammon and the Negroes at the cabin. The blow wouldn't have been struck there; it would have fallen right here at the house."

"Oh, yes; I know. Your damned logic is unanswerable. Just the same, I'm feeling like a kicked hound—to know that some time to-night these devils will be out yonder at the bayou edge searching for, and perhaps finding, the thing they need—with all that the finding may mean for God only knows who or what."

Kirby held his peace. The one thing he might have said would have defeated a certain object he had in view. So, after a time during which nothing unusual had occurred to mar the tranquil silence of the summer evening, he bade Blanchard good night and went up to his room, not to go to bed, but to sit quietly in the dark, smoking and waiting.

In due time he heard the sounds for which he was listening. Blanchard and his sister were coming upstairs, talking in low tones, and through the open transom over his door Kirby overheard enough to make it plain that Maida was telling her brother quite pointedly what she thought of their guest, and that Blanchard was defending him.

After this, Kirby sat at his open window and waited again, this time until the lights shining from the windows of the two rooms next to his own were extinguished. At that, he unlaced his shoes and took them off, unlocked one of his suit cases and rummaged from it the service automatic which had been his constant companion in a revolutionary and bandit-ridden Central America, an electric torch and a camera with a flash-light attachment, and with these and his shoes made a noiseless descent to the lower floor.

CHAPTER V.

FIRE.

IT being a fair inference that the house would be under surveillance by the conspirators to insure obedience to the conditions exacted in the anonymous letter, Kirby groped his way in the darkness through the lower hall and into the library at the left, out of which a pair of French doors opened upon a side veranda which was screened by a climbing vine.

With his shoes on and the camera slung over his shoulders in its carrying case, he slipped out upon the veranda and made a quick survey of the surroundings. Seeing nothing and hearing nothing, he dropped silently to the ground in the thickest of the shadows and listened again. As at the earlier hour when he had sat upon the porch smoking his after-dinner pipe, the stillness of the countryside night was broken only by nature's night noises.

There was a young moon in the western sky, but it was low on the horizon and the side of the house where he was standing was in deep shadow. With the shrilling of the katydids and tree toads as a sound mask for his footsteps, he crossed to the nearest clump of ornamental shrubbery, and from that to another and then to a third, each shift of position increasing his distance from the house.

It was after he had thus worked his way around to the rear and was nearing the confines of a cotton field, which began where the dooryards of the Negro quarters ended, that he made out the figure of a man crouching under the low-hanging branches of a young magnolia tree. In the shadow of one of the Negro outbuildings he saw another; and farther on a third, less carefully concealed, was pacing a sentry beat in what appeared to be a closely drawn cordon of watchers surrounding the house.

Waiting until a passing wisp of cloud

veiled the sickle of a moon, Kirby crept through the widest gap in the picket line to take shelter in an angle of the old-fashioned, zigzag rail fence marking the boundary of the cotton field. Here tall weeds concealed him while he was pulling a rotted rail aside and crawling through into the field. Shielded by the rows of lushly growing cotton plants, he fled silently toward the distant tree fringe defining the course of the bayou at the opposite side of the cultivated land.

Safe under the forest shadows he turned to the left. The fruitless quail hunt of the previous day, and his later trampings with Blanchard, had familiarized him with the lay of the land, and he knew that by skirting the bayou for a few hundred yards he would come to the hermit's cabin. The presence of the watchers in the house grounds was an indication that the raid might already be in progress, but upon approaching the cabin he was relieved to find it still dark and deserted.

Confident that he would not have long to wait, he burrowed in a mass of wild hydrangeas growing in front of the cabin and a little to the right of the passageway between the two rooms. Carefully estimating the distance, he snapped the switch of the electric torch to enable him to set the focus of the camera and prepare the flash. Then, with the camera trained upon the passageway, and the automatic placed where it could be caught up quickly, he was ready for what might come.

Notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, some little time elapsed before he heard the sounds for which he was listening—voices in the tree fringe beyond the cabin. By this time the moon was poised upon the western horizon and its light was a mere thinning of the darkness. Kirby hoped that the raiders would break cover in front of the cabin, but in this he was disappointed. They came into the roofed passageway from the rear, with an electric torch to pilot the way, and entered what had been the hermit's living room.

In a few minutes a pine-knot fire was kindled on the hearth, and by its light the intruders set to work. Kirby could hear them tearing down the food-and-utensil cupboard and prying up the floor boards. Later, the light of the electric torch shining through cracks in the split-shingle roof told him that one of the searchers was up under the rafters. Still he waited, resighting the camera in the better light. It had been a fortunate second thought that had prompted him to bring the camera.

When he had first determined to do what he had advised Blanchard not to do, he had hoped that not more than one or two of the conspirators would come to renew the search in the cabin —in which case a surprise attack, backed by the automatic, might have enabled him to make a capture. But now any such single-handed holdup was out of the question. The voices told him that there were at least four of the searchers, and possibly more.

Since he was thus outnumbered, the camera was the last resort. If he could get a flash-light picture of one or more of the invaders it would afford something definite in the way of a clew. Sooner or later the ransacking of the living room would be completed, and when the searchers should come into the passageway to cross to the laboratory workshop, he would take his chance with the camera—the chance of catching a face or two on the film, together with the far more hazardous chance of getting away undiscovered after the photographing flash had revealed his presence and given the alarm.

The chance for the picture taking came most unexpectedly. Apparently satisfied that what they were searching for was not to be found in the twice-ransacked living room, the searchers, five in number, came trooping into the

passage, the one in advance carrying a blazing pine knot to light the way into the laboratory. As he entered the darkened room some combination of the spilled chemicals gave the dead experimenter a small installment of the vengeance which was his due. There was a flash, the dull roar of an explosion, and a sheet of flame shot through the open doorway into the faces of the men in the passage.

Naturally, the terrifying phenomenon was as startling a surprise to Kirby as it was to the victims of it, and it was his start, rather than quick wit, that made him press the trigger of the photographic flash—this as the five men came racing out of the passageway, followed by licking tongues of flame which were already turning the interior of the laboratory into a roaring furnace.

Taking it for granted that the blinding flare of the magnesium would betray him, Kirby dropped the camera and snatched up the automatic. But with the laboratory opening, and now even the roof, vomiting flames of many colors, the flash-light glare seemed to pass unnoted by the fleeing depredators, or was perhaps linked up for them with the fiery eruption touched off by the blazing pine knot.

Anyway, before Kirby could extricate himself from the tangle of hydrangeas, they had vanished in the direction of the bayou, some of them yelling like Indian victims at the torture stake as they tore at their clothing which had been set afire by the blast from the laboratory doorway. Their cries died away at last.

Kirby recovered his camera and backed away into the shadows of the live oaks. By this time the workshop end of the cabin was blazing like a tinder box, and whatever chance there might have been of finding anything hidden in the building was a chance safely eliminated. Waiting until the fire had swept across the passageway and the roof was crumbling, Kirby set out upon his return across the fields.

There was nothing to indicate that the alarm had been given as he approached the house grounds; no signs of wakefulness either in the great house or the Negro quarters. But since the glow of the fire was plainly visible against the distant background of the forest, he knew it must have been seen by the watchers in the grounds, and had doubtless been taken by them as their cue to disappear. None the less, he was duly cautious in making his approach, entering the house as he had left it, by way of the side veranda and the French doors of the library. In the lower hall he removed his shoes and made a noiseless ascent to the upper floor.

Once behind the locked door of his room, he drew the old-fashioned heavy curtains across the windows, lighted a lamp and went to work. His photographic kit included a small developing tank, and in a short time he had made it serve its purpose. Though he would have to wait for sunlight to make a print, he could see, by holding the film before the lamp, that he had succeeded in catching at least three of the five faces as the scorched searchers dashed out of the cabin passageway.

Thus assured that he now had a clew to the identity of some of the marauders, one that could be followed up without inculpating or imperiling the Blanchards, he called it a day and went to bed, exulting a bit over the success of his adventure, and in the thought of Maida Blanchard's self-reproaches when she should learn why he had been silent under her charge of cowardice.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LUCKY-SHOT RIFLE.

AT the breakfast table the next morning Kirby asked Blanchard if he had slept well. Blanchard's smile was little more than a sour grimace.

"With the bank loss hanging over me, and perhaps a lot worse to follow, I suppose I ought to have lain awake sweating over the prospect. But I didn't. To tell the truth, I slept like a log."

"Then you didn't see the fire?"

"Fire? What fire?"—this from brother and sister in the same breath.

"Your old hermit's cabin. It burned a little before midnight."

"You were awake and saw it?" Blanchard demanded.

"Yes, I saw it."

"Well! What do you reckon that means?"

"For one thing, it may mean that the old man's formulas are destroyed."

"I wish we could be certain of that."

"So do I. But only time will tell."

The young woman sitting on the opposite side of the table looked up quickly.

"Why all the mystery?" she queried. "What do you know that you're not telling us?"

"Not so much as I wish I did. But if you will wait until the sun has risen a little higher——"

"What's the sun got to do with it?" Blanchard put in. "Can't you spring it on us now?"

"Maybe I can. If you will excuse me for a moment——"

Leaving the table he ran up to his room, where he had left the photographic printing frame tilted on the window sill facing the morning sun. Returning, he handed the print to Blanchard. Maida left her chair and came around to look over her brother's shoulder.

"Heavens!" she gasped. "You took that picture?"

"I did."

"Tell us," Blanchard commanded.

Kirby briefed the night's adventure for them, winding up with: "It was only partly successful, as you see. I took the camera along as an alternative. What I hoped to be able to do was to bring in a couple of prisoners instead of a picture. But there were too many of them."

The young woman went back to her place, looking as if she wanted to cry. When she spoke it was to say:

"I'm the dust under your feet, Mr. Bob Kirby! You may say anything you please to me and I'll take it lying down. Did you know what you were going to do when I was saying all those mean and spiteful things to you last night?"

Kirby smiled. "I knew what I meant to try to do, yes."

"Then why—*why* didn't you hit back?"

"Because, if I had told you, Dick would have insisted upon going along. And it was to keep you and him entirely out of it that I meant to go alone. As it happened, I wasn't discovered. But if I had been, these earthquake makers would have had no reason for taking it out on you and Bayou Noir, don't you see?"

"I see you are at your old trick of faulting yourself to put somebody else in the clear, the same as you used to do when we were on the campus together," Blanchard grumbled. "Damn it, man, don't you know you're our guest?"

"I hope I'm something more than that. I didn't get all I went after, but there is a reasonably good picture of three of the earthquakers; and if we set the authorities at work with that for a lead, we ought to get some results, don't you think?"

Blanchard's reply was lost in the sharp crack of a gun coincident with the tinkle of broken glass somewhere in one of the rooms overhead. Blanchard's chair went backward with a crash and he led the race to the upper floor, with Kirby a close second. In the room in which Kirby had slept they found the dresser mirror shattered, and on the floor the photographic printing frame with a bul-

let hole neatly drilled through it. Kirby picked up the frame.

"That adds another chapter to the story, and it means that we have brains to fight as well as brute force," he commented. "When I took the print out of this a few minutes ago I stood the frame back on the window sill. The man who shot at it knew, or thought he knew, precisely what he was destroying."

"But you told us those cabin wreckers didn't discover you last night," Blanchard reminded him.

"So I did, and I am practically certain they didn't. But when they told their story to their chief—the man with the brains who writes letters in such excellent English—*he* knew the meaning of the white light they saw as they were running away; and so, knowing, he promptly sent his best marksman to pot the evidence."

"But how could he know that the 'evidence,' as you call it, would be standing here on your window sill?"

"He couldn't know that, of course. But it would be a reasonable inference that whoever took a flash-light picture of the scene last night would try to make a print from the negative as soon as possible this morning; say as soon as there was sunshine enough to make it. No doubt the man who fired the shot has been prowling around the house and watching for his chance ever since daybreak. If I hadn't come up here a few minutes ago to take the print out of the frame, he would have potted both it and the film."

"Yes, and you along with them if he had been a few minutes earlier at his firing stand. This is growing pretty damnably serious, Bob. It begins to look as if your life, or that of anybody who happens to get in the way of these devils, wasn't worth a pinch of salt! Where is the film you were printing from?"

Kirby looked on the small table at the head of his bed.

"I thought I put it there when I took the print out of the frame." Then: "Good Lord! I wonder if I left it *in* the frame?"

A hurried examination of the bullet-shattered frame proved that this was what had been done. Kirby's fingers were shaking when he picked the bit of celluloid, shriveled by the impact of the bullet, out of the smashed frame.

"The one print is all we have now. What did you do with that?"

"I gave it to Maida just before we heard the shot."

"Heavens and earth! As matters stand, you might as well have handed her a dynamite bomb with the fuse lighted! Let's get back to her!"

At the breakfast table they found the young woman calmly sipping her coffee, with the photograph lying beside her plate. Kirby snatched it away as if it had been really the dynamite bomb with which he had compared it.

"What was it made all the noise?" she asked. "Did a window fall down and break the glass?"

"Nothing so simple as that," Blanchard told her. "It was a shot fired at the printing frame Bob had left standing on his window sill. It smashed the frame and the looking-glass on the dresser." Then to Kirby: "You had it right, Bob. That picture is about as dangerous as if it were a loaded bomb. It strikes me that we can't get it into the hands of Sheriff Jackson in Mayville any too quickly."

"Or any too secretly," Kirby added. "If you'll let me have the roadster I'll run the gantlet with it."

"Not by yourself, you won't. You will need a bodyguard, and you are going to have one."

"Leaving your sister here alone—when we know there is at least one member of this cutthroat gang prowling around the place? That won't do—you know it won't."

"Listen, both of you," Maida broke

in. "Does the man who shot at the printing frame know that he hit it?"

"He can't help knowing," said Kirby. "The frame was his target, and it disappeared when he fired."

"Well, then, with the frame standing there on the window sill with the sun shining on it, wouldn't it be the natural inference that it was still printing—that the thing he was trying to destroy *is* destroyed?"

"Good Sherlocking!" Blanchard approved. "That gives us a bit of leeway. He didn't see Bob take the print out of the frame or he would have fired then."

"Here is my plan," the young woman went on in her cool voice. "Sit down and finish your breakfast, you two, Afterward you are to go out to the porch and smoke, just as if you didn't have anything else to do. If the house is watched, that will give the impression that we don't yet know what the shot was fired at and are not borrowing any trouble about it. Later, to deepen the impression, I'll get the roadster out and take one of you—you, for choice, Mr. Kirby—for a little drive—but *not* in the direction of Mayville."

Kirby would have protested at this, but Blanchard quickly commended the plan:

"Maida knows what she is about. If she drives you, the chances are that you won't be suspected or your errand won't. And, against the one chance in a hundred that you may run into trouble, I'll slip a Winchester into the car."

"All right," Kirby acquiesced. And after they had finished eating, and Blanchard had gone upstairs to lock Kirby's door to keep the house servants from discovering the shattered mirror and giving the alarm, the two men went out to the porch to smoke, and to talk about things far removed from the events of the past two days and the previous night—this on the bare chance that there might be a hidden eavesdropper to listen.

In due course, Blanchard rapped the ashes from his pipe and went into the house, and a little later Kirby saw him going toward the shed under which the roadster was sheltered. Kirby looked in vain for the rifle which was to be put into the car against emergencies. Then he reflected that Blanchard had doubtless taken the barrel from the stock, thus making the two parts short enough to be concealed under his coat.

After a few minutes, Blanchard came back to the porch and resumed his seat.

"You'll find the gun in the pocket between the top and the back of the seat," he said to Kirby in low tones; and again they talked of college football and kindred things quite as if time were the least possible consequence to either of them.

The camouflaging talk went on until they heard the grind of the roadster's starting motor and saw Maida backing the car out of its shed. When she drove up to the steps Kirby climbed in beside her and Blanchard gave them their send-off in a manner to make the small ruse click if any eavesdropping ears were within hearing distance.

"While you are over at Waccabee, take a look along the levee and see what the river is doing," Blanchard said. "The weather report yesterday wasn't so good."

The young woman took her cue quickly. "Don't worry; we'll bring you all the news there is. And you needn't look for us back very soon. This is our picnic—Mr. Kirby's and mine—and we don't care where we go or how long we stay."

Blanchard waved them off, and the roadster went spinning down the driveway and through the great gates to head, not toward Mayville and the sheriff's office, but in the opposite direction, toward Waccabee Landing.

The plantation left behind, Kirby reached for the rifle. But his seatmate said: "You needn't bother with the gun

now. Nobody will try to stop us while we are going in this direction. But when we swing around to get into the Mayville road you may need it."

"I see. There is a detour that will take us around?"

"Yes. It's a bad road, but it's Hobson's choice—unless we go all the way to Waccabee and down the river to the main county highway below the swamp. That is the safer way, but I'm not going to insult you again by suggesting that we take it."

"You didn't insult me last night. In fact, I don't believe you could insult me if you should do your best."

"But I called you a coward, and that's a fighting word, isn't it?"

"I don't believe you meant it."

"Yes, I did. And I'm ashamed of myself now. It was a piggy thing to say!"

"Forget it. You had cause—or you thought you had. Is this road we're coming to the detour you spoke of?"

"Yes. It will take us around to the Mayville road at a place about three miles beyond Bayou Noir. Did you meet Sheriff Jackson when you were in town yesterday with Dick?"

"No."

"You'll like him and respect him. He is an old-fashioned country sheriff, but he is shrewd and isn't afraid of anything that walks."

"Old or young?"

"Old enough to have been my godfather, or god-grandfather, if you like that better. He and my grandfather were old friends."

"He will know what to do with the photo we're taking him?"

"Indeed he will; nobody better." Then: "When we turned out of the plantation gates did you hear anything that sounded like a car starting?"

"No. Did you?"

"I fancied I did, but maybe it was only a fancy. Perhaps, if you'd keep a lookout behind us——"

Kirby twisted himself in the seat for a backward look, but the detour road was crooked and the view was limited.

"Nothing in sight, so far as I can see—which isn't very far," he said.

"There is a straight stretch just ahead; you can see farther when we get into that."

Halfway through the straight stretch Kirby looked again, and this time he saw a car coming on at no great distance in the rear.

"Who, besides ourselves, would be likely to be taking this detour?" he asked quickly.

"Nobody, unless it's some one whose plantation is on it. Why?"

"There is a car coming along behind us—a touring car."

The young woman gave the roadster more gas and it shot ahead at increased speed. Kirby kept an eye on the following car and said presently: "It is gaining on us. Shall I take the wheel?"

"Not unless you think you can drive more recklessly than I can over a bad road"—this with the accelerator jammed all the way down to the floor. Then, jerkily, as the car bounded over the rutted road: "How about it now?"

Kirby looked rearward again. "That tells the story. Whoever is driving that car is fully as reckless as you are. It's still gaining."

"Can't we do something to stop it?"

"Not very well—and stay within the law; not until——"

The detour road was leading them into a stretch of woodland, and before Kirby could finish what he was about to say, a bullet struck the rounded rear deck of the roadster, glancing upward and tearing a hole in the top just over his head. It was followed instantly by another shot and a third, both of which went wild. Kirby caught up the Winchester, smashed the glass of the rear window with the muzzle and fired.

With the racing car for a firing stand, only luck could make a shot count. But

that he had made a hit was proved by a burst of steam from the radiator of the overheated car in the rear, and an immediate widening of the distance between pursuer and pursued.

"You can take it a bit easier now; we're leaving them behind," he said.

"Have you—did you kill somebody?"

"No; though I shouldn't care very much if I had. The shot hit the car—the radiator. It was like a small boiler explosion. And the bullet probably went on through and smashed something under the hood and stopped them."

"I don't see how you could shoot straight enough to hit anything, the way we were rocketing about."

"Don't call it good shooting. It was pure luck."

A short half hour later, with no more hazards met on the way, the roadster was parked in the courthouse square in Mayville, and Kirby and the young women were telling their story to the sheriff, who not only bore the Jackson name, but who also resembled the portraits of the seventh president strikingly enough to have been a lineal descendant, had there been any.

"Toler'bly late, tellin' me all this now, ain't you, Maidy girl?" he said in mild reproof, after the tale was told and he had been given the print of the flashlight snapshot. "Looks like Dick might've been a little less close mouthed when he was in town yesterday morning."

"He thought, and so did Mr. Kirby, that the best thing to do was to hurry back to Bayou Noir and try to get something definite to tell you," the young woman hastened to explain.

"If I'd known I might've been over at your place with a posse last night, and we'd have got something bigger than this picture Mistuh Kirby took."

"Yes, but we didn't know there was going to be a raid made on the cabin until it was too late to get your help. And then our hands were tied, as I have told you. The letter warned us that Bayou Noir might be the next place to have an earthquake if we didn't obey orders. Mr. Kirby didn't tell us what he meant to do. He acted on his own responsibility and went to the cabin alone—which was very brave of him, *I* think."

The gray-haired peace officer turned to Kirby.

"Tell me, suh: what is this here contraption these bushwhackers've got hold of, anyway? Got any idea?"

"Nothing more than a guess. Discoveries in science have been taking long strides in the past few years, or decades, as you know. Things that our grandfathers, and even our fathers, would have said were impossible——"

"I know—the radio and things like that. But even the radio don't knock down buildings and powder 'em up. You're an engineer: seems like you ought to have some idea—enough to tell us what-all we ought to be lookin' for."

"No, I can't even do that much," Kirby confessed. "The only thing I can think of——" And again he repeated what he knew of the claims of the physicists as to the tremendous energy stored up in the whirling electrons of the atom. "So far as we know, nobody has yet discovered any means of harnessing this energy," he added. "But that isn't saying that it can't be done, or that it hasn't been done by this nameless experimenter who had hidden himself at Bayou Noir. We have two wrecked buildings to prove that he discovered something; something that might be a great blessing to the world—or a very terrible menace, according to how it is used."

The sheriff had been studying the snapshot photograph as Kirby spoke.

"How does it all stack up to you, Mistuh Kirby, as far as you've gone into it?" he asked.

"The facts point to something like

this: The old man, who was doubtless murdered, was known to be experimenting along certain lines, and he was followed when he came South. The indications all point to the operations of a well-organized gang—a large one, it would seem—headed by a leader of more than ordinary ability and education. The object aimed at is something bigger than bank wrecking and burglary. Your guess as to what that object may be is as good as mine."

"Reckon the head pusher of all this toruction was along with that bunch last night?"

"No; I am reasonably certain he wasn't."

"What makes you think so?"

"This: I took that picture as they were rushing out of the cabin passageway, as you see. The fire they had started was behind them, and they must have seen the flash in front of them when I made the exposure. If the leader—the brains of the gang—had been among them, he would have known instantly what the magnesium flash meant and would have acted accordingly. But, as you have seen, the action was delayed until this morning while we were at breakfast. Have I guessed right?"

"I reckon maybe you have. Looks as if the 'brains,' as you call him, had to be told about the flash afterward. You're leavin' this picture with me, ain't you?"

"Certainly. That is what it was taken for."

"All right. I'll have some copies made and we'll get a little publicity. Still and all, I don't reckon it'll amount to much. If they're pretty sure we've got it—you'd allow they're more than sure, the way they tried to massacre you comin' here—they'll take steps accordin', and the bunch that was at the cabin won't be seen around here no more whatever. Aimin' to go right back to the plantation—you and Miss Maidy?"

"Why, yes. There is nothing more that we can do here."

"Want me to send a couple o' depities along to watch out for you?"

"I don't believe that will be necessary. They seem to have spies everywhere, and our coming here to your office has probably been marked down—in which case, you'll be the one they'll go gunning for next."

"I only hope they'll try it," said the gray-haired one grimly. Then: "All the same, Mistuh Kirby, you better keep that there gun you've got in the car right handy on the way back to Bayou Noir."

Kirby promised; but after they had been bowed out with old-fashioned courtesy and had sought and found the roadster at its parking place in the square, they discovered that the lucky-shot rifle, which had been left in the pocket behind the seat back, had disappeared.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BROKEN LEVEE.

"MEANT to capture that picture, even if they had to kill both of you? Why, say—it's nothing less than bloody war!" Blanchard exploded.

"You might call it that," said Kirby. The return run from Mayville to Bayou Noir had been made without incident, and Blanchard had been told of the chase and attempted holdup on the lonely detour road.

"Don't you know, I was more or less worried about you after you left, Bob. Scammon said he saw a touring car with two men in it pass the gates, going the same way you were going, a few minutes after you were out of sight; and when he told me I thought I'd better take the sedan and trail you. But when I went to get the car, I found a battery connection broken, and by the time I had it repaired it was too late to overhaul you. Jackson appreciates the need for swift action, doesn't he?"

"He does. But he is handicapped,

even with the picture I gave him. He said the town had been combed for strangers yesterday, with nothing to show for it. The few transients stopping at the hotel were all able to account for themselves, and the natural inference was that the criminals who had wrecked the bank had merely dropped in and dropped out again. But what we were able to tell him about the anonymous letter and the occurrences of last night and this morning put a new face on the matter."

"Yesterday you thought the bank smash was intended as an object lesson. Do you still think so?"

"More than ever. I told Sheriff Jackson that in my opinion we might look for something startling to follow—something big enough to measure up to the size of the explosive, or infernal machine, or whatever it is these wreckers have got hold of."

"Any notion of what the 'something startling' may be?"

"Use your imagination. Judging from what we have seen, the possibilities are practically unlimited."

"I know," said Blanchard. "But the particular object in this case? The destruction of property may make us all poor, to be sure. But it doesn't get them anything. Take the bank smash: all the shakedown did was to destroy the building and bury the vault so deep under a pile of bricks and mortar that it couldn't be got at; hasn't yet been dug out."

"Exactly. But with the smashed bank for an example, we knew what they might do to Bayou Noir last night if we ignored the demand made in the anonymous letter."

"Humph! I was going to ignore it, and would have if you hadn't argued me off my feet. But I'm free to admit that the threat had its weight, too."

"Of course it had. And what the threat did to you, it would do to others—which brings it down to what I had in mind. You know your neighbors and their circumstances pretty well, don't you? Is there much wealth in this plantation area?"

"I don't suppose you'd call it 'wealth,' in this day of big fortunes. But we are not exactly paupers, any of us."

"I take it most of you have some credit standing with the New Orleans banks?"

"Oh, yes. Practically all of our business is done with the big city, and through its banks. Just what are you driving at?"

"I am trying to find out if this particular locality would be worth holding up, supposing the holdup could be made general."

"No doubt it would be, if such a thing as you suggest could be put over. But still I don't see your drift."

"I can't carry it any farther, not knowing, any more than you do, what the next move will be. But I'll venture this much: when the move is made, we'll all know exactly what these supercriminals expect to accomplish with the devil machine they have stolen."

Blanchard was silently thoughtful for a time before he said:

"I think you are wrong, geographically, Bob. You say the destruction of the bank was an object lesson. Might it not have been just a try-out, to ascertain what the devil-invention could do? Now that they know, is it reasonable to suppose they'll waste time fooling around here in a country district when they have the means of terrifying the richest of the big cities?"

"Check!" Kirby admitted. "Yet there is something to be said for my notion. In the big cities they would go up against the best there is in the shape of crime detection and prevention, while down here they have to outfigure only a county sheriff and what help he can deputize. I'm not saying anything against Jackson. He struck me as being far superior to the average county peace

officer. But if he had all the ability in the world, he lacks the machinery and the trained staff. However, we shall see. We have given Jackson all we had to give, and it's up to him to tag these scoundrels if he can."

Again Blanchard was thoughtful.

"After you and Maida left this morning, Scammon and I scouted around, looking for the sharpshooter who plugged your printing frame. Afterward we questioned the Negroes. There is a leaven of some sort working among the blacks. Two of the field hands quit this morning, saying they are going to move over on the other side of the big river. They had plausible excuses, both of them. One said his old father and mother were over there on a cotton plantation and he wanted to be with them; the other said his wife's relations were there. You may take that for what it is worth."

"Anything else?" Kirby queried interestedly.

"Nothing you could put your finger on. Just a hint of unrest and scare. But what happened here yesterday and the day before and last night would easily account for that. We have had a mysterious death, a barn wrecking and a cabin burning, all within forty-eight hours."

"Yes; and a shot was fired into my room while we were at breakfast," Kirby put in. "I don't wonder your people are stirred up. And the worst of it is we're hand-tied until it comes to a showdown of some sort. It's like going into a fight blindfolded. Jackson was confident he had combed Mayville thoroughly for suspicious characters, and yet the rifle was taken out of the roadster this morning while the car was parked in the open square in plain sight of the whole town."

Blanchard nodded. "We'll just have to wait—and hope that Jackson will be able to chock the wheels before we're run over. And that—the waiting—is the killing part of it. Any kind of action is better than suspense."

As it came about, there was a call for action, of a sort, before many hours had passed. Early in the evening a man, driving a flivver, mud-bespattered and with the radiator steaming, turned in at the Bayou Noir gates on two wheels and braked his car to a skidding stand in front of the great house. He was the bearer of ominous news. A few hours earlier the big river had broken over at the place where Blanchard and Kirby had seen the levee strengtheners at work the day before, and the flivver driver bad been sent out to give the alarm and call for help.

"How bad is it?" Blanchard asked.

"Not so bad yet—or hit wasn't when I took it. She's only comin' in over the top, but I reckon you know what that means. What we're needin' is fresh hands and somebody with the 'know hit' to tell 'em what-all to do. We got plenty men, but they've been workin' double shift and they're about worn out. I been turnin' ever'body out as I come along, but we're needin' all the help we can get."

"Drive on and carry the word farther back," Blanchard said tersely. "Bayou Noir will be there with all we've got."

Before the messenger of disaster threatening could turn his car the plantation bell was clamoring out the flood alarm and Blanchard and his foreman-overseer were marshaling all the able-bodied men on the place. For transportation there were the roadster, the sedan and a plantation truck. Scammon was told off to drive the truck, and Kirby offered to take the wheel on one or the other of the cars. But to this Maida Blanchard objected, upsetting all the Victorian traditions of the helplessness of Southern women.

"No; you go along with Dick in the roadster," she said. "I'll take the sedan. You've never driven the road, and I can drive it with my eyes shut. Your

chance will come when we get there. Didn't Mart Bigsby say they were needing an engineer?"

There was little time for argument, one way or another, and while the plantation bell was still clanging out its summons, the three vehicles, black with men, with the roadster leading and the truck bringing up the rear, were turning out of the gates and taking the road for Waccabee Landing.

"I feel like a fool, Dick—riding here with you as a passenger," Kirby protested. "If you and your sister don't quit treating me as a guest, I'll rebel."

Blanchard laughed.

"Maida is a law unto herself, as you'll find out when you come to know her better. But time is the essence of our bargain just now; and Maida, in the sedan, will set a better pace for that truck than you would dare to—which isn't saying anything against your driving ability, either."

"But leaving her alone with all those Negro men in the sedan and hanging onto the running board!" Kirby put in; and at that Blanchard laughed again.

"I don't know what sort of mixed bloods you've been working with down in Central America, but it is very evident you don't know our Negroes here in the blacklands. There isn't a man in or on that car Maida is driving who wouldn't lie down and die for her cheerfully if the need arose. When the Southern Negro looks up to you and loves you, he'll be loyal to the death."

Five or six of the ten miles to Waccabee Landing had fled to the rear under the spinning wheels before Kirby said:

"Is this levee overflow another move on the part of the men with the earthquake machine, Dick?"

"Oh, I reckon not. We don't have to go that far afield to account for a break. You saw yesterday what was being done to raise that place at Goose Neck Bend. As you know, soft earth, when it isn't given time to pack and settle, washes away pretty easily. Sacked earth or sand is what is needed for topping in a place like that, and if there had been any of the government engineers on the job, that is what would have been used."

Blanchard's promptness in turning out the Bayou Noir contingent made his volunteers among the first to reach the scene of action, and by the light of pine-knot torches and a couple of gasoline flares Kirby made a quick survey of the situation. There was no real break as yet, but a sheet of muddy water was pouring over the top of the levee to inundate the road and the adjoining lowland, and the barrowfuls of earth the tired day workers were dumping into the rapidly eroding gap were washed away almost as soon as they were placed.

Blanchard knew the few white men, near-by planters and their overseers, who were directing, or trying to direct, the losing battle with the flood, and he lost no time in putting Kirby into the saddle as an engineer awaiting his assignment on the flood-protection staff. Kirby took hold at once, quickly reorganizing the attackers. Axmen were detailed to cut brush for mattressing, a line of carriers was formed, and as fast as new groups came in from the remoter plantations, the weary day men were relieved or given lighter tasks.

Maida Blanchard, having maneuvered the sedan aside out of the wash of the overflow, sat in the car and looked on at the strenuous battle, her militant soul applauding. Her first impression of Kirby, gained on the evening of his arrival, had been a trifle disappointing. Recalling her brother's praiseful accounts of his college roommate, she had expected something different—just exactly what, it would have been hard to define, unless it were a bit more of the primitive and less of the chivalric deference to her sex which has become a matter for tolerant smiles on the part of the sophisticated.

But his self-control under her charge

of cowardice the night before, and his prompt acceptance of the challenge of the would-be assassins of the morning drive to Mayville, had pushed the disappointing first impression well into the background. And now, seeing him in action as a trained technician and leader of men, unmindful of everything but the winning of the battle with the levee-crumbling flood, she was heaping contempt upon the theory of first impressions and glorying in her discovery of a real man. And, the better to glory in the discovery, she left her place in the car and climbed to the top of the levee to stand aside and watch the progress of the battle at closer quarters, the new point of view giving her a clearer, but less encouraging, oversight of the unequal conflict between puny human strivings and the slow but resistless gnawings of a great river in flood.

Notwithstanding the fresh impetus given the work by the guiding brain of a resourceful leader, the result hung in the balance for the better half of the night. As the hours wore on, and the channeling waters were checked in one place only to break over in another, the scene was a weird repetition of many similar ones in the history of the year-by-year fight against the encroaching waters.

The gasoline flares and the smoking pine torches threw the figures of the toiling laborers into strong relief as they struggled up the embankment with their barrows or shoulder loads of earth, their half-naked bodies glistening with the sweat streaming from them as came into the light.

Beyond the threatened barrier the glow of the lights reddened upon the slowly moving flood that appeared to hesitate as it swirled in eddies past the incipent breach, poising like some sentient thing eager to burst its way to freedom in the lowlands. Across the mile-wide stretch of water, rearing itself as a wooded island more than half submerged, was the end of the peninsula which, at normal stages of the river, deflected the course of the stream around the U-shaped bend known locally as the Goose Neck.

It was in the thick of the fight, when the toiling soil carriers were barely holding their own against the encroachment of the waters, that Kirby crossed to the northern side of the breach and found the young woman shading her eyes from the flare lights and staring fixedly at something on the other side of the darkened expanse of the flood.

"You here?" he exclaimed. And then: "What are you looking at?"

"The point of land over there—only it's an island now. I thought I saw a light there. I'm almost sure I saw one."

"People refugeeing?" he suggested.

"I don't know; though you'd think that if there were people living on the point they would have refugeed long before this. There it is again! Didn't you see it?"

What Kirby saw was a momentary spark, as if some one with an electric torch had pressed the switch for a fraction of a second. Before he could speak, the *put-put* of a motor boat came across to them, and then they saw the boat itself, a dim shape in the darkness breasting the current as it was lost to sight in the upriver direction. The young woman was the first to speak:

"It was a rescue launch, I suppose. There must have been people living over there on the point, but if so, they were squatters. The levee on the other side cuts across the neck of the point, which is always drowned out in any kind of high water." Then: "Are we going to win, here?"

"We've got to win," he said shortly; and with that he left her, wading out to direct the placing of fresh armfuls of the cut tree limbs.

In the end it was only the timely arrival of a truckload of sacks from May-

ville that tipped the scale in favor of the hard-pressed flood fighters; that, and more men to take the place of the weary laborers whom Kirby was now working in fifteen-minute shifts. With the earth-filled sacks to check the scouring flow, the barrowmen fell into line and one of the Bayou Noir Negroes, a giant with a voice like the notes of a sweet-toned tenor horn, lifted the chant of hopeful triumph, with others rolling out the refrain:

"Swing low, sweet chariot,
Coming for to carry me ho-ome!
Swing low, sweet chariot,
Coming for to carry me-e ho-o-me!"

When the break had been finally filled and rammed and tramped and the danger was averted, for the time, at least, Blanchard dragged Kirby out of the raffle.

"You're to go home with Maida in the roadster, and I'll drive the sedan," he said; but Kirby objected.

"Making a guest of me again, are you? Better let me go on the truck. I'm muddy from head to foot and I'd ruin your car—to say nothing of your sister's clothes."

"You don't know the little sister yet. She'd weep if she couldn't have the honor of driving you back. You may not know it, but you have covered yourself with something besides mud to-night. We would have lost the fight if you hadn't been along."

"Just a minute," Kirby said as Blanchard was heading him for the roadster. "Have you heard anything to make you think that the break was 'assisted'?"

"Not a word. You can set your mind at rest as to that. It was just the soft earth they've been piling in there for the past two days, without sufficient ramming, and with no bags or mattressing to hold it in place. But why do you ask? Have you heard anything different?"

"Only from one of the Negroes who was working here when the water began to come over. I heard him telling one of your men that the levee 'shuck its foots,' was the way he put it, when he dumped his barrowful."

Blanchard laughed.

"You can hear anything you are listening for when you hear Scipio Africanus talking. He isn't short on imagination. Go climb in with Maida and let her get a clear road while she can. There'll be a traffic jam when all these cars get started."

Kirby obeyed; and after the scene of the late struggle had been left well behind them his seatmate said half musingly: "I wonder if you realize just what you have done to-night?"

"Directing a little army of the most willing workers I've ever handled? Anybody who couldn't do that——"

"I don't mean just that—handling the black boys. You knew how to go about it, and nobody else did. It's the consequences of the 'might have been' that I was thinking of—what would have happened if you had let the break get away from you while you were waiting for the sacks to come. You can imagine the desolation and suffering, can't you?"

"Indeed I can. It wasn't out of my mind for a second. And yet you people back here below the river level live with the drowning possibilities facing you every time there is a flood stage in the river."

"We are used to it; most of us are born to it," she returned; and nothing more was said until the roadster was measuring the last mile of the run to Bayou Noir. "Do you think the break at the Bend came just naturally?" she asked.

"Dick thinks so. He says it was merely unskillful patching."

"But you—what do you think?"

"Dick may be right; I guess he is. But why? What have you seen or heard?"

"While I was sitting in the sedan

some of the Negroes came to stretch themselves out along the road—the ones you sent back from time to time to rest. They talked among themselves, and I overheard some of it. They spoke of the man who died at Bayou Noir, and of the barn that fell down, and the cabin that was burned. And of what happened to the bank in Mayville; and then this break in the levee after they thought they had the weak place solidly mended. Old Uncle William from the Branscome place—'Yup-dee,' they call him—said: 'You-all listen at me. De old debbil's de one what's in all dis, a-goin' erbout lak a roarin' lion, a-seekin' what-all he kin revour. Di'n' I feel de yearth trem-'lin' up yonder when he puts his foots on it?' And some of the others said: 'Amen, Lord!'"

It was these two bits of overheard Negro talk, the one he had heard and the one Maida had repeated, that Kirby took to bed with him a little later. And, weary as he was, they kept him awake until the first grayings of the early-summer dawn began to blot out the stars in the east.

CHAPTER VIII.
$100,000.

MAKING up for lost time, Kirby slept until noon of the day following the night of levee mending at Goose Neck Bend. A knock at his door awakened him, and in answer to his "Come in," Blanchard entered.

"Sorry to crab your beauty sleep, old man, but there's the devil to pay and no pitch hot!" was Blanchard's excuse for the intrusion. "Just rub your eyes and take a look at this!"

"This" was another typewritten letter without date line or signature, and it had been delivered in the same way as the first—a white man passing the plantation gates had given it to one of the Negro children to be taken to the master of Bayou Noir, under penalties for failure too frightful to be described.

The letter, addressed "To All Whom It May Concern," was brief but explicit. After calling attention to the collapse of the Mayville bank and the near disaster at Goose Neck Bend, the writer went on to say that with these examples fresh in mind it was assumed that property owners under the levee would be willing to insure their immunity from disastrous loss by the payment of a moderate assessment upon their property values. If, within thirty-six hours, the sum of one hundred thousand dollars should be transmitted to a Memphis address which would be furnished later, a catastrophe would be averted.

The closing paragraph related to the manner in which an acceptance of the terms should be indicated—by having a notice inserted in the personal column of the Mayville *Weekly Sentinel,* issue of the following day, reading: "Seismologist. Proposal accepted. Indemnity bond in preparation and will be forwarded as directed." This done, the Memphis address to which the money was to be wired would be given; but it must be understood that the danger would continue to threaten until after the writer had been assured, through his own channels, of the good faith of the contributors by the actual delivery of the cash, and of the safety of the person to whom the delivery should be made.

"Well, it seems that I was a true prophet," Kirby commented. "I had a hunch that something of this nature would be the next number on the program. Of course, you know what the threatened disaster means?"

"Sure I do—a break in the levee. This is a circular letter, and a crevasse is the only thing that could affect an entire district. The only question is, can it be done?"

Kirby swung himself out of bed.

"We've had two object lessons, and possibly a third—the third being hinted at by the reference to the near break last night. What's being done?"

"Maida and Scammon have taken the two cars and are canvassing the neighborhood, and I've had Jackson on the wire. He'll be out here before long. Bayou Noir is the rallying point, and Maida and Scammon are asking the neighbors to meet here. No doubt everybody in the district able to raise any considerable amount of money has a copy of this letter."

"You are taking it seriously—which is perfectly right."

"Wouldn't you—after what we've seen?"

"I certainly should. But that isn't saying that I'd take, lying down, any such sandbagging as that letter promises."

"I'm sure we'll all say 'Amen' to that. The question is: what's to be done to nip this infernal holdup in the bud? The answer to that is what we must thrash out among us. And the time is mighty short."

"Could the hundred-thousand-dollar ransom be raised, if it had to be?"

"Oh, I suppose so. It is within the possibilities, if enough of us should go after it. But a holdup of that size, a ready-cash gathering for which the majority of us would have to go into debt —why, it's simply unthinkable, Bob!"

"Naturally. You'll put up a fight, whatever the consequences may be?"

"You have said it in five words, so far as I am concerned. We'll see what the others think about it, after we tell them what we know and what we suspect."

A little later, Kirby ate his first meal of the day in the oak-paneled dining room, with Maida Blanchard to pour his coffee; this while Blanchard was welcoming a steady stream of arrivals from the adjoining plantations. When Kirby and his coffee pourer joined the gathering in the old-fashioned double drawing-rooms every seat was filled and Blanchard was telling the story of the hermit experimenter, of his probable discovery and invention, and of its assumed connection with the crashing of the old tobacco barn and the Mayville bank, and with the levee failure of the previous day and night.

As was to be expected, the reaction to the demand made in the anonymous letter, a copy of which every property owner present had received, was vigorously militant. An incredulous few were disposed to doubt the premises at first, holding the letter as a bad joke or a huge bluff; but Blanchard's earnestness soon convinced them that there were good grounds for alarm.

At that, a number of expedients were suggested. Every foot of the levee could be patrolled and guarded; search parties could be formed to comb the vicinity for the wreckers; the governor could be petitioned to send in the militia to help run the miracle-working miscreants down. Blanchard let the storm of protest, suggestion and wrathful militancy blow itself out before he broke in to say:

"I fully agree with you that our only answer to such a demand is a refusal to consider it. But just what we can hope to accomplish in the way of protecting ourselves is another matter. Beyond any question of doubt these men possess an instrument, machine, weapon —whatever you choose to call it—that is new to science, and is apparently capable of upsetting natural laws as we know them. But we are wholly in the dark as to what this invention is or how it works. That it develops some hitherto unharnessed natural force or forces which can be set at work—most likely by wireless—at the will of the operator, is the best guess we can make. If this guess hits the mark you can easily see what a situation we are confronting. By radio or wireless, the attack may come from any point of the compass, and, so far as we know, from any distance."

At this point some one suggested sending posthaste for scientific investi-

gators to probe the mystery, but it was quickly seen that the time limit was far too short to make this possible. Janeway, Blanchard's nearest neighbor on the north, thought a trap might be set by seeming to comply with the demand of the holdups, in the hope of apprehending the receiver of the money in Memphis. But to this the terms of the threatening letter were a sufficient answer. Until the receiver had made a safe retreat, the menace would still exist. And there was the hazard that, at the first indication that a counterplot was afoot, the blow would fall without further warning.

It was Major Hollingsworth, a survival of the old-time "fire-eating" Southern aristocracy, who cut the discussion short:

"If you-all will permit me, gentlemen, we are simply wasting precious time in prolonging this heah debate. If I am not gre'tly mistaken, there isn't a man of us who is willing to—ah—contribute his share to the outrageous demands of these hijackuhs. I move you, Mistuh Blanchard, suh, that we proceed immediately to notify all concerned, including the State and national authorities, and that we make instant provisions, ouhselves, to gyard ouh property and ouh lives with every resource at ouh command!"

To this there was no dissenting voice, and after committees had been hastily formed the meeting broke up with mutual pledges on the part of the threatened ones to prepare for defense, and to organize a levee guard and patrol to go on duty without delay.

Some little time after Blanchard had sent Scammon, with a truckload of the Negroes who could be trusted with firearms, to the river as his contribution to the levee guard, Sheriff Jackson's decrepit car came limping in from the highroad. Blanchard showed the sheriff the mandatory letter and told him what had been decided upon in the meeting of the potential victims, and Jackson's approval was prompt and hearty.

"Nachully, nobody ain't borrowin' money to buy these highbinders off. Too much good fightin' blood in the blacklands to stand for anything the like o' that. But let's try and find out just where we're at. What have you-all figured out among you?"

Briefly Blanchard repeated the gist of what he had said to the assembled property owners, dwelling upon the point he had made that the thing stolen by the wreckers might be some sort of wireless development.

"You see, we found no trace of any wiring around the old tobacco barn, and I understand there was none found in the wreck of the bank," he added. "You can readily see what that may mean in the present instance."

"Sure enough," was the sheriff's reply. "Means that we'd have to hunt for 'em in all directions at once, and that would take a heap more men than we can rustle up in the next twenty-four hours. What's the answer? Or have you got any?"

"None better than the one decided upon in the meeting—to protect the levee with as many guards as we can muster, and to patrol the plantations behind it, covering the ground as thoroughly, and in as wide a radius, as possible. Can you suggest anything better?"

The white-haired sheriff shook his head doubtfully.

"If all Mayville was to come out here there wouldn't be men enough to do the job the way it'd have to be done to beat all the bushes. But I'm danged if I can see anything better to do. This here letter says 'thirty-six hours.' Means that the time's up to-morrow night, don't it?"

"That seems to be the limit."

"Well, I'll chase back to town and swear in the biggest posse I can raise, and we'll be out to the river, come eve-

nin', hell bent for election. But I'd give the shiniest nickel I ever saw if I knowed just what we're goin' to do when we get there."

Blanchard was thoughtful for a moment. Then: "I'll go to town with you and take this letter along. The town people ought to know what we're facing —what they may be facing themselves if there is a levee break. Maybe that will help some in raising your posse."

"It sure will. If you'll do that, we'll bring you back with the crowd."

After Blanchard and the sheriff had gone, Kirby said he supposed he ought to go to Waccabee Landing to help organize the volunteer watchers on the levee; and at this, Maida said she would drive him over in the roadster. The ten miles were covered quickly; and as the volunteers from the near-by plantations were already gathering at the Landing, Kirby spent the remainder of the afternoon helping to post the men at various points up and down the river.

When all was done that could be done, Kirby had a talk with Janeway and Major Hollingsworth, who were on the ground to help in marshaling the levee guard. The point discussed was whether messengers should be sent out to warn the tenant farmers, many of whom had small holdings in the danger zone, to move out to higher ground. Kirby thought this ought to be done, but the two plantation owners demurred.

"In the first place," said Janeway, "they won't go until the water drives 'em; that's the way it always is. They'll hang on till it takes boats to keep 'em from having to swim. In the next place, the bad news will travel fast enough anyhow. Most likely, it's all over the county before this time, in some shape or other. On top of all this, you know well enough, Mr. Kirby, that it'd be no manner of use to try to explain to every Tom, Dick and Harry in the district something that we can't explain for ourselves."

As Kirby and Maida were driving back to Bayou Noir just before dark they met the sheriff and a half dozen auto and truckloads of armed men on their way to the river, and Blanchard was with them. At the brief meeting halt, Blanchard announced his purpose of going on with Jackson to assist in distributing the new contingent.

"You stay with Maida," he said to Kirby, "but don't sit up for me. I may be pretty late getting home." And to his sister: "Don't worry any more than you can help. It isn't likely that anything will happen to-night. According to the letter, we still have twenty-four hours before the lightning is due to strike."

"Yes," she returned. "But if these wretches know you are preparing to fight them—as they no doubt do—what then?"

"That is in the lap of the gods. Still, I don't believe they will strike while a chance remains that we may weaken and come to their terms. The money is what they are after."

Past the early dinner in the baronial dining room at Bayou Noir, the two who had eaten together in sober silence for the better part found themselves facing an evening of suspense. It was the young woman who presently found the forced inaction unbearable.

"It is simply maddening to sit here with folded hands, waiting for the end of the world to come!" she exclaimed. "There must be something we could do, if only we were bright enough to think of it!"

"I have been trying, ever since Dick got me out of bed at noon, to think of the 'something,' but I am still up against a blank wall," Kirby confessed. "The crux of the thing lies in the fact that we don't know how these miniature earthquakes are touched off. If they are wired, we'd have some chance of tracing these wreckers. But I am afraid —and so is Dick—that some adaptation

of radio or wireless is used. If that is so, we are helpless. We shall have no means of knowing where the bolt is coming from, or even the direction from which it is coming."

"I've been thinking," said the young woman, knitting her brows, "about that little book we found in the secret drawer of the old secretary desk. I'm wondering if we studied it carefully enough. Let's get it and go over it again."

Getting the diary out of the small silverware safe in the library, they reexamined the various entries together—and found most of them more or less cryptic, as before. It was over the last three sentences in the closing entry that they lingered longest:

> But he and his sister shall be the first to share the tremendous secret with me. I owe them that much, and more. And, in case anything should happen to me—in case the worst should happen—they shall be the ones to know where I have hidden the finger that will point to the source of danger.

"What did he mean by 'the magic finger'?" the young woman queried.

Kirby shook his head. "That was something he meant to write down for your benefit and Dick's later—and never did."

"Do you suppose it was another invention, or discovery, or something?"

"It may have been. But if it was, it probably went up in smoke when the cabin was burned. And, by Jove, see here!—that opens up another question. Perhaps the 'finger' was what those raiders were searching for—and not the formulas!"

"One more guess," was the half-musing rejoinder. "It's all guesses, so far as we have gone. If we only knew where to look!"

"For this 'finger' thing, you mean?"

"Yes. I don't believe it was burned in the cabin. These people had had two chances to search the cabin for what they were looking for, and their coming back a second time showed that they hadn't found it the first time, don't you see? I don't believe the old man would have hidden it in the cabin."

"Where, then?"

She shook her head dejectedly. "Who can tell—or even guess?"

"You were the one who found this diary in the false-bottomed drawer of the old desk. Are you sure there wasn't anything else in the drawer?"

"I thought I was. We might go and see if I missed anything."

The old desk had been taken to the attic, and with Kirby's electric torch for a light, they climbed to the open space under the rafters which was cluttered with outworn and cast-off furniture. Kirby held the torch while his companion searched the drawers and pigeonholes of the desk. The space under the false bottom of the drawer in which the diary had been found was empty. But, pushed over behind the drawer, they found a slip of paper upon which was penciled a bit of doggerel verse:

> I've spent my time in rioting,
> Debauched my health and strength;
> I squandered fast as pillage came,
> And fell to shame at length;
> But dauntingly and wantonly
> And rantingly I'll gae;
> I'll play the tune and dance it roun'
> *Beneath the gallows tree.*

"Huh!" said Kirby. "Scotch verse. What does it mean—if anything?"

"I don't know what it means, and I just barely know what it is. And I wouldn't know that much if I hadn't read about it in an old book of quotations that belonged to Grandfather Blanchard. There was once a Scottish outlaw named Mac-Something who robbed and killed and played the violin. He was finally captured and hanged. The verse is a part of his 'Farewell,' which he composed in prison while he was waiting for them to hang him."

"It is in the old man's handwriting—the same as that in the diary. Can

you connect the verse up with your hermit-guest in any way?"

"Yes, it happens that I can—in a way. One evening the old man came here to see Dick about something, and as Dick was in Mayville for the night, I made Uncle Hiram—which was what he had told us we might call him—stay a little while and talk to me. We were in the library, and in running over the titles in the cases he came upon the old book of quotations. He opened it and found these verses of Mac-Somebody's and showed them to me, telling me quite a lot about the writer—how wicked he was, and yet how he could write verses and compose tunes for them and play the violin."

"He didn't write this verse out at that time?"

"No; he just had me read it aloud to him, saying something about his having been familiar with it since his boyhood."

"Nothing more?"

"No."

"Then I don't see that this slip of paper has any bearing on our problem. Do you?"

"I can't say that I do. And yet it seems as if it ought to have, since he put it in here where he kept the diary."

"We'll look again. We may have missed something more to the point than this little scrawl," Kirby suggested; but a further search in the old piece of furniture revealed nothing else.

Back in the library they waited for Blanchard's return from the river, and when he came he was told what they had done and shown what they had found. Somewhat to Kirby's disappointment, he attached little importance to the "magic finger" phrase in the diary, and none at all to the bit of verse that had turned up.

"As for the doggerel, it doesn't touch this infernal-machine business at all; the wildest imagination couldn't tie it up with that," was the way in which Blanchard brushed the verse aside. "And as for that line in the diary, whatever it may mean, it can't help us now. Everything the old man left behind him in the cabin has gone to ashes, and that settles it."

"If you are not too tired to talk, tell us what has been done since we left the river at dusk," his sister said.

"Everything that anybody could suggest. Men are posted within calling distance of each other from Lavigne's in one direction to Jarrow's in the other, and watch fires have been lighted all along the line—enough of them so that nobody can approach from the land side or on the river without being seen. After you left, your suggestion, Bob—about making a search for weak spots, cave-ins, sand boils or evidences of buried explosives—was carried out, and nothing was found to give any cause for alarm."

"All of which is good, as far as it goes," was Kirby's comment. "But, on the other hand, it doesn't get us anywhere if we are fighting an infernal machine that can attack silently and from a distance. Have the Government Flood Protection people been notified?"

"Yes, and two boats, one from above and another from below, are on their way to Waccabee. In the telegrams we didn't attempt to explain the circumstances further than to say that we had reason to believe an attempt would be made to destroy the levee at some point along our front. We all felt that we'd be laughed at if we gave the facts as we have doped them out among ourselves."

"That was wise. How about the river? Is it still rising?"

"I'm sorry to say that it is; that another crest is on the way, due to reach us to-morrow afternoon or evening. An additional foot is predicted, and that, as you know, will put the water within a few inches of the top of the levee in some places."

It was the young woman's chance to get in her word and she did it.

"To-morrow will be a hard day for all of us, and we'd better get what rest we can while we can," she advised. "You two men go on to bed, and I'll arrange to have an early breakfast for you and call you when it's ready."

CHAPTER IX.

ROUGH STUFF.

AS Maida had promised, breakfast was on the table when the two men came downstairs on the morning of the final day of grace. Over the meal, plans for the day were discussed, and when Blanchard said his place was with his neighbors on the danger line, he asked Kirby if he would be willing to do home-guard duty at the plantation.

"In the present haggard condition of things, I don't like to leave Maida here alone," was his reason for the asking; but before Kirby could assent, the young woman broke in with an emphatic disclaimer.

"I'd like to see myself messing things up that way!" she said. And to Kirby: "Until the government men reach Waccabee you'll be needed on the levee a lot more than you will be here. I can take perfectly good care of myself, and Dick knows it. Thanks, just the same."

"You see what we have come to, Bob," Blanchard put in. "You'll have to ditch all your notions of shrinking violets and such things as applied to Southern women. Do you wonder that sister is still unmarried at twenty-two?"

"I certainly do," said Kirby calmly; and the young woman clapped her hands.

"Talk about Southern chivalry!" she laughed. "That is the best compliment I've ever had paid me—and you're a Yankee. You will never marry a shrinking violet, with you, Mr. Bob Kirby?"

"Never in this wide world," was the solemn denial.

"I thought not. The shrinking-violet, clinging-vine type has gone out of fashion for a real man. I'd rather be like the old-time Grecian women who told their men to come home from battle either bearing their shields or upon them. When I can find a man who wants that kind of wife, Dickie, here, will have to find some one else to pour his coffee."

Kirby smiled and accepted the challenge, saying:

"You needn't look any farther—you've found him."

Blanchard looked a trifle aghast as he chuckled and said:

"Good Lord! Has it come to be as casual as that?"

"Why not?" demanded the modern young woman. Then to Kirby: "After that, I suppose I may call you 'Bob,' without the 'Mister,' mayn't I? And it is understood that you are to go along with Dick to the river, taking the old flivver and leaving me the roadster. If anything turns up during the day, I'll either send or carry the news."

Upon their arrival at the river the two men found that nothing of an alarming nature had occurred during the night; the only threat coming from the slow increase in the height of the flood water which the weather report said was due to continue until midnight.

At sunrise the work of strengthening the barrier had been resumed; and again, as on the day before, the adjacent plantations had been patrolled for intruders—with no result.

Word received from the two government flotillas was to the effect that one or both of the boats dispatched in answer to the call for help would reach the vicinity of Waccabee Landing by or before evening; and thus, to those who did not know the nature of the threatened danger, the chance of an overflow or a break seemed to be well provided against.

It was at Kirby's suggestion that he and Blanchard made an extended walking tour over the line of defense for an up-to-the-minute inspection of the precautions taken; and when they returned to the Landing a house boy from Bayou Noir was waiting for them. He was the bearer of a note from Maida inclosing a third communication from the enemy which, weighted with a rifle cartridge, had been flung through an open window of the library at the plantation. Like its predecessors, it was typewritten, and was lacking date line and signature:

MR. RICHARD BLANCHARD: You should know, better than your associates, that the course you are pursuing is not only futile; it is suicidal. We hoped that you and your partners in peril would accede to our demands without further demonstrations on our part. But if you continue obstinate we shall know how to convince you that, in the present crisis, discretion is the better part of valor. Prompt indications that you are preparing to meet our demands in good faith will be your only salvation now, and if the sun sets to-day without such action on your part the price of failure will be exacted without further warning, and you and your associates will be responsible for the catastrophic results.

"I guess we have all been expecting something like this," Blanchard said, handing the note, and the few lines Maida had written to accompany it, to Kirby. "The master devil knows he has us by the neck, and he knows human nature, too. That line about our responsibility proves it. It is another way of asking if our attempt at resistance is worth all the loss and suffering it will bring, not only upon the few of us who have been warned, but upon hundreds of others."

"Yes," Kirby agreed. "But the most disquieting thing about this note, to me, is the manner of its delivery. Maida says it was thrown through an open window into the library. If some of these fiends are in the grounds at Bayou Noir, with your sister alone——"

"You've said it," Blanchard frowned. "Maida doesn't know what fear means, but she's a woman, for all that. She put a good face on it this morning when I spoke of leaving you behind, but if I had insisted, I'm sure she would have been glad—though she might not have admitted it."

"You are going to insist now," said Kirby soberly. "I'm not needed here, and by evening the government boats will be in. I'll take the flivver and drive back to Bayou Noir."

"Good! Help yourself to anything you can find in the gun room. And don't be too squeamish if you should happen to get a shot at any prowlers. They won't hesitate to pot you if they think you are getting in their way."

Kirby made good time over the ten miles of country road, and it was Maida who opened the door for him after he had parked the car under the shed at Bayou Noir.

"Did you think I was hinting for help when I sent Ma'am Drusy's Ginger over with that note?" she asked.

"No; but if these land pirates are crowding in on you close enough to throw things in at the windows——"

"You needn't go on. I was glad enough to weep when I heard the car and looked out and saw you in it. You may call me a coward if you want to. I called you one once."

"A decent regard for some measure of safety isn't cowardice. Has anything turned up since you sent the Negro boy over to the Landing?"

"Nothing unusual. I have been keeping a watch from the different windows, but there hasn't been anybody in sight—not even the Negro women and children at the quarters. Have you had anything to eat since morning?"

"Yes. Dick and I had a bite at one of the river plantations a little after noon."

"What is the situation at the levee?"

"Much the same as it was yesterday

afternoon, after we got our force mobilized. A small army of plantation hands are guarding the river bank in both directions from Waccabee Landing, and Jackson and his posse are beating the bushes for strangers. Nothing has come of the bush-beating, so far, and most likely nothing will."

"And the outcome—after the time limit has passed?"

"That depends. Some of the people we have talked with claim that the threat is only a colossal bluff; that when the writer of these scare letters finds that we are not going to hand him a hundred thousand dollars, he will call it off. They are saying that only a bunch of fiends would turn the river loose upon hundreds of innocent people for mere vengeance—when there was nothing to be gained by it. But others say that the attempt to break the levee will be made, if only for the sake of the example it will afford. If the break comes at the appointed time, the news will spread and nobody will be brave enough to refuse a later demand."

"I believe the break will come, if we can't do something to prevent it. Don't you?"

"Yes, I do. My own feeling is that these men have gone so far that they can't afford to back down."

"Is there anything we can do, now that you are here?"

"There is something that I mean to do right now. I'm going to take one of Dick's shotguns and see if I can find any traces of the fellow who tossed the note in at the window."

"And what is it that you want me to do?"

"Nothing, except to stay indoors and stay away from the windows."

"You are giving me the hardest part of it—waiting and doing nothing. Do you have to go out, and perhaps get shot for your pains?"

"If it comes to that, I can do a bit of shooting for myself. Show me where Dick keeps his buckshot cartridges, if you know."

As a visit to the gun room proved, there was only one modern double barrel left in the racks, all the other available weapons having been added to the common stock in arming the levee guards. Kirby filled his pockets with the buckshot shells Maida found for him, and when she went with him to the door, he turned upon her with a smile that would have been quizzical under less sobering conditions.

"You remember what you said at the breakfast table this morning. Are you still in character as one of the old-time Grecian women?"

For answer she drew his head down quickly and kissed him.

"Did you think for a moment that I didn't have the courage of my convictions?" she asked, whether mockingly or not he couldn't tell.

"I think you are one woman in a thousand, if you want to know. Be careful, and don't show yourself at any of the windows."

To keep the scouting purpose from being suspected, if there were watching eyes to mark his descent of the portico steps, he went down the driveway to the shed garage with the gun under his arm, hoping that the watchers, if there were any, would conclude that he had driven in from the Landing to get the additional weapon, and that he was now about to return with it.

To confirm this inference, he got into the flivver and drove out to the road, turning at the gates in the direction of the river. At a safe distance he jerked the little car aside into a field road and left it there while he made his way back afoot through one of the fields. Keeping well undercover, he made a circuit of the house grounds, taking his time about it and pausing at each new advance to make sure he wasn't missing any of the many hiding places in the shrubbery.

It was after he had widened the circuit and was at some distance from the house that he saw a car, which he took to be Blanchard's sedan, turning in at the plantation gates. With no thought other than that Blanchard had driven in from the Landing to satisfy himself that nothing had gone wrong at Bayou Noir, Kirby continued his round, letting it end in the cornfield just behind the Negro quarters. As he was approaching the house, he saw the sedan speeding away toward the gates, and he wondered a bit that Blanchard should come and go without waiting to have speech with him.

Upon entering the house he was mildly surprised to find that Maida, who, as he had every reason to suppose, had just parted from her brother, was not in the hall. Stepping aside into the double drawing-rooms, he found that they, too, were unoccupied, and the stillness seemed to indicate that the house was deserted, even by the servants.

Instantly alarmed, he passed on through the dining room in the rear, and in the butler's pantry adjoining he found the white-headed Negro butler lying on the floor in a wreck of smashed crockery. His first shocked thought was that the old house servant was dead; but before he could reach him the stricken man sat up, groaning and holding his head in his hands. With a great fear gripping him, Kirby shot a single question at the old servitor:

"Miss Maida!—where is she?"

"Oh, my Lord! Dey—dey's done carry her off!" stuttered the old man, between groans. "Dey say I mus' tell Cap'n Dick he never gwine see her again, less'n he do somepin' 'r other—I dunno whut. Den one o' dem hit me in de back o' de haid wid somepin'!"

Kirby waited to hear no more. Furiously self-reproachful at the overconfidence which had made him assume that the car coming and going was Blanchard's, he raced out to the shed garage, thrust the shotgun into the roadster and climbed in after it. In the short time that had elapsed he hoped the kidnapers' car might still be in sight, and so it was. Upon reaching the road he saw it. It had taken the townward turn at the gates and was now a rapidly vanishing blur in the distance.

That was enough. Twisting the roadster to the right he sent it hurtling over the unsurfaced country road with the accelerator jammed to the floor, and before the first mile of the flight and pursuit had been covered he saw that he had the whip hand of the abductors. Though the driver of the heavy car ahead was evidently pushing it to the limit, the lighter and more powerful sport roadster was gaining upon it. Steering with one hand, Kirby opened the windshield and made shift to level the double barrel and train it upon the car ahead. But now, with the gap between the two cars closing with every wheel turn, the roadster's fore-body was in the way and he could not aim low enough to fire at the sedan's tires. And with Maida one of the occupants of the car, a shot at anything higher than the wheels might make him her murderer.

Since the hazard of firing blindly at the closed car in the hope of disabling it was too great to be taken, the alternative was to try to pull up abreast of it, to shoot it out with the driver in passing, or to cut in ahead of it and bring it to a stand by blocking the road. But when he speeded up and tried to do this, the driver of the car ahead countered the move by twisting his car from side to side in the narrow road to make a collision a certainty if there should be an attempt made to pass him.

Baffled again, Kirby could only hang on and wait for an opening. While he was holding his own, and was considering the advisability of dropping back far enough to risk a shot at the tires of the dodging sedan, he was suddenly horrified to see the right-hand door of the

car ahead fly open with a snap—this coincident with the somersaulting of the kidnapers' captive into the ditch as if she had been flung out bodily to stop the pursuit.

CHAPTER X.

THE GALLOWS TREE.

MADDENED at the sight of what he had every reason to believe was a deliberate attempt of the kidnapers to make good their escape at the price of their captive's life, Kirby jammed on the brakes and fired both barrels of the deer gun at the receding car; with what effect, besides shattering the rear window, he could not tell. An instant later he was picking a disheveled young woman up out of the roadside ditch and begging her to tell him how desperately she was hurt.

"I'm all r-right," she stammered. "Just the b-breath knocked out of me, that's all. Was I awfully awkward about it?"

"About what?" he asked, putting her into the roadster as carefully as if he were afraid she might fall to pieces in his hands.

"The parachute dive—without the 'chute."

"You mean they didn't throw you out?"

"No indeed they didn't! The man who thought he was holding me in tried to stop me when I jumped. I'd had a glimpse out of the rear window and had seen the roadster, so I knew that the next move was up to me. They had tied my hands with a handkerchief, but as soon as they put me into the car I began to work at the knot and got it loose."

"You might have killed yourself, jumping from a speeding car that way! Are you sure you're not hurt?"

"Bruised plentifully, I suppose; I'll be black and blue by to-morrow. But that's nothing. If you knew how many times I've been pitched over a horse's head. But my poor clothes! they're a magnificent ruin, aren't they?"

Kirby had turned the roadster and was sending it back over the road to Bayou Noir.

"Tell me what happened, and how it happened," he said.

"It was easy—for those two men. You told me to keep away from the windows, but I didn't; I went from one to another, trying to get a sight of you. I was nervous and trembly and it made me furious. For the first time since I was too little to know any better, I was just scared silly and wishing you would come back. I was in the library and saw the car come along the driveway. I thought it was Dick and our car; it's the same make and the same color."

"I saw it, and made the same mistake," Kirby put in.

"They must have come in very quietly, because I didn't hear anything until old Uncle Elisha chittered out my name. Then I heard somebody talking and a crash as if Uncle Elisha had fallen down with a server full of tea things. The next thing I knew, they had me, with Dick's rain coat thrown over my head, and—well, you know the rest. What do you suppose they were going to do with me?"

He told her what the old butler had told him—of a message that was to be passed on to her brother.

"They saw a chance to get another grip on us and took it," Kirby added. "They were going to hold you for ransom, and the ransom was to be the payment of the blackmail they've demanded."

"You say Elisha talked with you? I was afraid they had killed him."

"No; they knocked him down and stunned him, but I think he isn't seriously hurt."

"Didn't I hear you shoot while I was trying to keep from turning too many flip-flaps in the ditch?"

"You did. I hit the car and smashed the rear window. I hope the double dose of buckshot crippled one or both of them, but I guess it didn't cripple the one at the wheel, since the car kept on going. Could you identify them if you should see them again?"

"Couldn't I just! I only hope I may be given the chance."

The shadows were lengthening to evening when Kirby turned in at the plantation gates and braked the roadster to a stand at the portico steps. As they entered the house he said:

"You go right on up to your room, and I'll look after Uncle Elisha. You've had excitement enough for one day."

In the butler's pantry he found the old house servant up and holding his bruised head under the cold-water faucet.

"Dem mizzable white trash!" he gurgled. "Dey ain' give me no chance to tell Missy Maida to run away. What dey gone and done wid her, Cap'n Kirby?"

'They carried her off, but I've brought her back. Are you alone in the house?"

"Nossuh. Mandy, she's in de kitchen cookin' dinnah. Foh—foh how many is I gwine serve hit, cap'n?"

"Just the two of us—unless Mr. Dick comes back. Sure you're feeling well enough to wait on us?"

"Oh, yessuh; mah old haid's mighty ha'd to bus'. Dunna what-all dey done hit me wid, but hit shuah snuff me out lak a can'le—yessuh, hit shuah did."

Blanchard did not return, and since the telephone to Waccabee Landing was out of order, either by accident or evil design, Kirby could get no word from the embattled river front, and he so told Maida when she came down to sit opposite him at the dinner table.

"Not that it makes any great difference," he added. "Dick will no doubt stay on until after the crisis—if there is any crisis—and I suppose we may say that no news is good news. We'll hear from him soon enough if the lightning strikes. But tell me: have you discovered any broken bones yet?"

"Dear man! I'm not *that* fragile," she laughed. "As I said, I'll probably be black and blue in spots by to-morrow; but that's all."

"I don't yet understand how you could jump from that racing, dodging car without killing yourself."

"We had an old Negro horse trainer who taught me the knack. It's easy when you know how. When you find yourself going, you just relax and don't try to save yourself. It's the taut muscles that break the bones. But that's enough about me. It is seven o'clock, and if threats mean anything we have only a few more hours to live. Must we sit here doing nothing—just waiting to hear the river come lapping at the doorstep?"

"Is there any alternative?"

"It seems as if there ought to be, as if there must be—if we could only know what it is. Oh, *why* couldn't that dear old man have taken us into his confidence just the least little bit in the world?"

"He intended to; his diary proves that much. And he couldn't know how short his time had grown. Have you thought of anything we can do—anything we have left undone?"

"No. Before you came over from the Landing I thought and thought until my head was spinning. Where are you going?"

Kirby had finished eating and was reaching for the shotgun.

"I'm going to have another little look around outside. It's hardly likely that the two fellows you had the tussle with will come back—I hope Dick's deer gun fixed them both so they can't come back. But you never can tell. I'll not go any farther than out to the gates."

With the consequences of his failure to stay within call on the earlier oc-

casion fresh in mind, he kept well within his promise not to go far afield. A circuit of the nearer house grounds and a reconnaissance as far as the gates, where, before dinner, he had posted one of the half-grown Negro boys to keep a watch for intruders, satisfied him and he returned to the house.

In the library he found Maida once more poring over the entries in the hermit's diary.

"There is help here, somewhere," she said, "I'm just certain there is, if we only had sense enough to know what to look for—I mean to recognize it when we see it. These records of his experiments and the algebraic problems he has worked out—don't you suppose it might be in some one of them? Hidden, you know, like the buried words in an anagram?"

Her persistence in going back again and again to the little book reminded him of the dogged tenacity which had made her brother a leader of forlorn hopes on the college football field.

"You've been struggling with the algebra?" he said.

"Not I. It's all Greek to me. But I thought maybe you, with your engineering education——"

"I fancy the old research experimenter was miles beyond me in his mathematics, as well as in other things. But let me see what I can make of his figurings."

As he took the book and began to riffle the leaves a slip of paper fell to the floor, the scrap with the single verse of "The MacPherson's Farewell" written upon it, and he picked it up and handed it to her, saying: "Maybe this is where your anagram is hidden."

It was while he was going over some of the technical entries in the diary that she burst out upon him suddenly:

"Tell me! Why did he underscore this last line, 'Beneath the gallows tree'?"

Kirby looked up and shook his head. "How should I know? Is the line italicized in the book of quotations you spoke of?"

She flew to get the book, and after some searching, the "Farewell" was found. The closing line was not emphasized in the printed copy.

"Let me think!" she said, covering her face with her hands. Silence for a dragging minute, and then, slowly, as if groping her way to something that persistently eluded her: "He meant something by underscoring that one line—he wanted to call attention to just those four words—he knew they would mean something to us, or to me—they do mean something—if I could only remember!"

Kirby was careful to make no move to break the spell of her trancelike effort to recall the thing forgotten. When she began to speak again her voice was like that of one speaking in a dream, and he bent to listen:

"It's coming back—it's like a dream. I can see two of our field hands carrying the old desk to the cabin. The dear old man is walking along behind them with me, and he is thanking me for the desk. The sun is hot and we are walking in the shade of the bayou live oaks. Now we have stopped and I am showing him one of the trees where, long ago, in great-grandfather's time, a slave stealer was hanged. I am telling Uncle Hiram that the Negroes still call it the gallows tree——"

Suddenly she uncovered her face and turned upon Kirby. "Is that it? Have we found something at last?"

"Maybe," he returned doubtfully. "But don't build too much on it. You had yourself almost self-hypnotized when you were trying to recall that incident. You are still trembling like a leaf!"

"Never mind that; I'm all right. Shall we go now?"

"To the bayou, you mean—to find the tree? Could you find it in the dark?"

"Of course I can. I've known it all my life. We can get a shovel and pick-ax in the tool house."

Kirby followed her out of the house more because he hadn't the heart to suggest that she was the victim of self-illusion than for any better reason. He understood the strong emotion which was fairly taking her out of herself, but he was far from believing that there was any connection between the bit of doggerel written out in the hermit's handwriting, and a tree upon which a thief had been hanged perhaps a century earlier.

So it was as one humoring another in the temporary grasp of a strong hallucination that he went with her to the plantation tool house and got a pick and shovel, and, laden with the tools and the loaded shotgun, let her pilot him across the fields in the cloudy darkness of the summer night with his electric flash light to point the way between the rows of cotton in the planted field.

In the bayou tree fringe, less than a hundred yards from the charred ruins of the hermit's cabin, she pointed out the tree they were seeking.

"That is it," she said, handing him the electric torch.

Quite without prejudice to his own conviction that nothing would come of it, he made a thorough examination of the ground under the great oak. Owing to the dense shade under the tree, the ground around its bole was bare of weeds and grass, and it was easy to see that it had not been dug up or disturbed, at least, not within any recent period.

"You see," he said, after they had made a complete circuit of the tree, "there is nothing here; nothing to show that the surface has ever been broken. Besides, I doubt if any one could dig a hole of any size among the matted roots of a tree as big as old as this one is."

"But I know he *must* have meant this tree!" she insisted. "You think I've lost my mind—that I've just got a wild idea in my head and am letting it run away with me, because I'm a woman. You may think what you please, but I *know!*"

"I'll do anything you say," he offered. "If you want me to dig, I'll do it."

She took the little spotlight from him and turned its beam upon the surroundings. At the right lay the blackened logs of the burned cabin, flanked by the dark waters of the bayou glimmering somberly under the rays of the small searchlight. As she moved her hand, the tiny beam picked out first one object and then another until it came upon an uprooted tree lying half on the bayou bank and half in the water.

The tree was a live-oak similar to the one under which they were standing, and it had apparently been undermined and loosened to its fall by the encroaching waters of the inland lagoon. As the light fell upon this tree they saw a bleached square place on the upturned trunk; a square from which the bark had disappeared.

"Wait a bit," Kirby said as the light was moving on. "Let's have a look at that down tree." And when they were standing beside it: "That square of bark didn't rot out; it was cut out. See the marks of the chisel? I wonder what that may mean—if anything?"

"It means something; I'm sure it must mean something!" said the girl.

Kirby examined the bared space carefully. The bark from it had been skillfully removed, as the chisel marks showed, as if there had been an effort made to preserve it whole in a single piece. But for what purpose? It was the surmise of a barely possible purpose that sent him quickly back to the gallows tree to thump upon its massive trunk with the pick head; and at the first blow he was ready to admit that a woman's intuition may be a better guide than a man's reason. The tree was hollow!

"Do you hear that?" he exclaimed, thumping the tree again. "We've got it —or got something! The tree is hollow, and that square of bark was cut to patch a hole in it! Hold the light closer while I look for the patch."

As they soon discovered, the square of bark had been so skillfully inserted in the place prepared for it that only the closest scrutiny revealed its location and the nails which held it in place. Kirby pried it off with the point of the pick, and the young woman directed the beam of the torch into the cavity thus exposed. On a bed of rotten wood in the heart of the tree lay a small wooden box with a close-fitting cover.

Kirby lifted it out and opened the hinged cover. Inside there was another box, the size and shape of a small camera, with what appeared to be a tiny mariner's compass inset in its top. As he held it under the light, the delicately balanced needle of the compass was constantly in motion, pointing first in one direction and then in another, as if it were alive.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MAGIC FINGER.

"I HOPE we're not dreaming," Kirby said, with an evident effort to be casual. "This sort of thing doesn't belong in the twentieth century at all—goes back to the time of the old romancers. It's too gorgeously unreal to be true."

"Not more unreal than the wreck of the barn and the Mayville bank, or the letters we've been getting, and all the rest of it," the young woman put in quickly. "It's all unreal, if you let yourself stop to think of it—only we know it isn't. What is this thing we've found?"

"It is probably the thing that figures in one place in the old man's diary as 'the detector,' and in another as 'the magic finger.' Offhand, I'd say it's an instrument for determining the flow and direction of electric currents—a galvanoscope. You can see how even the feeble current in the flash light attracts the needle."

"I'm frightfully ignorant about such things. Is it going to be of any use to us?"

"If the earthquaking machine these bandits have got hold of works by wireless or radio—you see what I mean. You remember what the old man wrote in those last few lines of the diary—about you and your brother being the ones who should know where he had hidden the finger that would point to the source of danger?"

"Yes, I remember. But see how the needle keeps dodging around. It doesn't point anywhere for more than a few seconds at a time."

"Perhaps that is because, at this time in the evening, there are many electrical disturbances in the air—broadcastings from stations on all sides of us. That doesn't matter. The old man knew what purpose this would serve when it was put to the use for which it was designed —and so did the thieves. They knew this was the one thing they needed to fear, and they not only knew of its existence; it was the thing they were searching for when they ransacked the cabin—this, and not the formulas."

"But, now that we have it, what next?"

"We must take it to the river, and the sooner we can get it there, the better!"

At that, a hurried return across the fields to the house grounds was begun. The pick and shovel were left behind as needless impedimenta, and for secrecy's sake they forbore to use the flash light. Maida saying she could find the way easily enough without it. She took the lead, carrying her brother's gun, and Kirby followed with the little camera-shaped box, handling it as carefully as if, as he now fully believed, the safety of many lives might depend upon its preservation from injury.

On the chance that the house had again been put under surveillance in their absence, they made a detour to approach the shed where the cars were kept. When they reached it and ventured, within its shelter, to snap the switch of the flash light for a hasty inspection of the roadster, they found that the well-known perversity of inanimate things had stepped in to delay their start. There was a flat tire under the sport car; and though they might have taken the ancient flivver in which Kirby had driven over from the Landing, they were afraid to trust it for a racing flight over the pot-holed road.

Kirby, working hurriedly and as silently as possible, managed the change to the spare in the darkness. When all was ready, and he would have taken the wheel, Maida objected.

"No," she whispered; "let me drive. I know every crook and turn in the road, and you don't—you've driven it only in daylight. Besides, I'd have a fit if I had to sit still like a bump on a log and hold this priceless box thing while you're feeling your way out to the Landing."

"But if the house is guarded we may be fired upon before we can reach the road," Kirby expostulated. "The thing for you to do is to make yourself small on the floor of the car and let me take the wheel—anyway, until we get past the gates."

"Don't be stubborn!" she broke in impatiently. "If we are going to be shot at, I guess my life isn't worth any more than yours. Sit over and take this box!" And at the word she slipped into place under the steering wheel, pressed the starter pedal and backed the car to cut it for the turn into the driveway, snapping the gears quickly into second and then into high for the dash to the gates.

Kirby bent low over the little box in his lap as the roadster shot past the house, momentarily expecting to hear the crack of a rifle. But that did not come until half of the distance to the gates had been traversed. When it did come, he had an impression that one of the great trees bordering the driveway had fallen upon them, but it was only the smack of a bullet striking one of the steel supporting arms of the roadster's top and glancing from it to shatter the windshield.

At the shivering of the glass he felt a hand reach across him to switch the head lamps on, and in the sudden glare of the headlights he saw a man struggling with the iron gates in a frenzied effort to close them against the onrushing car. As he braced himself there was a crash, a vanishing glimpse of one of the gates torn from its hinges and flung aside with the struggling obstructionist beneath it, and then the car was careening to take the turn toward the river.

"The glass!" he gasped. "Did it cut you?"

The young woman's voice was quite even toned when she said:

"No; most of it fell outside, I think. But I don't know how badly the car is crippled. I had to hit the gate. There was nothing else to do."

"Sure there wasn't. Pull up after we are out of rifle shot and I'll get out and see what the smash did to us."

"Do you think they know what we've got—that we were followed when we went over to the hollow tree?"

"No, indeed. In that case we would have been mobbed on the spot. They were merely trying to stop us on general principles; anything to throw a monkey wrench into the machinery."

After the plantation had been left a mile or more to the rear, Maida stopped the car and Kirby got out. There was a bent bumper and a crushed fender, and the radiator was dented and leaking, and he so reported when he climbed into his seat.

"The radiator leak is the worst, but

maybe we can make it to the river before the engine burns up if we hurry," he said; whereupon the flight was resumed, with the girl crouching over the wheel, her eyes half closed against the blast that came through the shattered windshield. As the miles fled backward under the spinning wheels she slackened speed only when the rough road threatened a wreck; and Kirby, braced in his seat, held the little box in his hands lest the boundings and lurchings of the flying car should disrupt and paralyze the presumably delicate mechanism inside of it.

Now and again by the light of the dash lamp he could see the flutterings of the tiny pointer needle in the compasslike inset. Like that of a compass influenced by shifting metallic or magnetic surroundings, the needle pointed first in one direction and then in another; but two or three times in the first half of the ten-mile race it came momentarily to rest, pointing, as nearly as he could determine, in the general direction of the great river.

It was when there were still three or four miles of the flight to be measured that the beam of the headlights picked up a silvery reflection in the road ahead, and a moment later a dash of spray drenched the car like the fall of a sudden shower. Kirby heard the girl gasp out, "Oh, God! It's come!" as she cut the speed.

"Do you know where we are?" Kirby demanded quickly.

"Yes; it's only a few minutes' run to the Landing, now."

"We must keep on, as long as the car will run!" he told her; and over the flooded road the roadster lurched and skidded, with the spray flying from the wheels. While they were still in the flooded area the engine began to labor, giving warning that the leaking radiator had at last lost all of its cooling water.

Kirby told his seatmate to throw the clutch out, but not to stop the motor, and as the car splashed to a standstill in the submerged road he got out to refill the radiator with water dipped up in his hat. It was a time-wasting process, naturally, with the engine so hot that at first it blew the water out as fast as it could be poured in; but eventually the continued drenchings cooled it, and with the danger of stuck pistons and a stalled engine averted, or at least postponed, they pressed on.

Before the lights of Waccabee Landing came in sight they ran out of the flooded area.

"What does this mean?" Kirby asked. "Is the ground higher here?"

"If it is, I didn't know it. Perhaps it means that the break isn't at the Landing. We'll know in another minute."

At the Landing they came upon a scene as unportentous and peaceful as it was singular—in the light of their late experience on the flooded road. Two government steamboats were tied up at the levee, with their searchlights playing up and down the stream; and there were many men on the levee top, but apparently no excitement.

Before they could get out, Blanchard came down to them to stand with a foot on the running board.

"I thought I recognized the car," he said. "What brings you two here at this time of night?" Then he saw the crippled fender, the shattered windshield and the mud with which the roadster was liberally plastered. "Heavens!" he exclaimed. "Have you been in a wreck? And where did all the mud come from?"

"Never mind the wreck," Kirby cut in hastily. "When I say that the mud came from some miles of a flooded road a little way back you'll know there is no time to be wasted. What are they doing up there on the levee?"

"Nothing. And the government engineers are growling at us for sending out a false alarm. What's that you're holding so carefully—a box of eggs?"

"It is something we found, your sister and I—something we needed to find. Get this, Dick, and get it straight: There is a break somewhere. I tell you the country is flooded back of us!"

"But where is the break?" Blanchard demanded. "We haven't had a report from any of the watchers in either direction."

Kirby held the small box down so that the dash light illuminated the quivering needle.

"There is your answer. The break is below here, somewhere, and so is the devil machine that has made it. See the way that needle is pointing?"

"Great Scott!" Blanchard broke out. "And we didn't know a thing about it! Wait for me." And he ran up the embankment to electrify with his news the crowd gathered around the gangplanks of the government boats.

What he said and did could only be guessed at by the two in the car, but its effect was instantaneous. At once the throng upon the levee became a milling mob, struggling to get aboard one boat or the other before the gangplanks should be lifted and the mooring lines cast off. There was a hoarse siren blast from one of the boats, and its wheel was beginning to back water when Blanchard ran down to squeeze himself into the seat beside Kirby.

"It's that patched place at Goose Neck Bend!" he hazarded. "Let's go, Maida! We can beat those boats to the bend by half an hour or more, unless the water stops us!" Then, as the car shot away down the road paralleling the levee: "Break it out for me, Bob. What is that thing you've got, and where did you find it?"

Briefly, in jerky sentences jolted out of him by the plungings of the car, Kirby told the story of the evening's adventure. When it was finished, Blanchard said: "It would sound like a fairy tale, Bob, if you didn't have the proof of it right there in your hands. Are you sure that thing will do what you expect it to?"

"No; it's only a guess—like all the other guesses. But we shall soon know. Watch the needle."

There was not much to be deduced from the flickerings of the tiny pointer while the car was in motion and half of the time with no more than three wheels on the ground. But in the momentary intervals of smoother road it always swung back to the down-river direction.

While they were watching the efforts of the little needle to point true to its pole, Kirby said:

"How much did you tell the government people, Dick?"

"Just now? Nothing about your find. Some of them saw you drive up, and I suppose they took it for granted that you came from below with the news of the break."

"Did Sheriff Jackson go on one of the boats?"

"No; he is down below somewhere, with the bigger part of his newly sworn-in deputies."

"I hope we find him. We'll need him if things go right for us."

A short distance farther on the car once more began to splash through water, and again Kirby protected the little box, and Blanchard quickly stripped off his coat to add to its covering. As far ahead as they could see, the light of the head lamps was reflected from a watery surface, and the wash through which they were speeding appeared to be steadily growing deeper.

"The overflow is at the bend, and it's worse than it was night before last," Blanchard announced, when a final turn in the road showed them bonfire lights on the levee top. Then to his sister: "Don't try to go too close; you'll only mire down. Let us out anywhere along here, and then turn the car around and be ready to run for it if the water gets any deeper."

"That is too much of a risk," Kirby interposed quickly. "She'd best come with us to the top of the levee. That will be safer. Listen: you can hear the roar of the overflow from here! If those boats don't show up within the next few minutes they'll be too late."

"You're right, on both counts," Blanchard admitted. "You come along with us, Maida, and let the car take care of itself. It'll be there when we need it; or if it's washed away we won't need it—or anything else in this world."

Hastening down the levee with the river lapping almost at their feet, they came upon a scene much like that of the night when the plantation volunteers had toiled under Kirby's direction. At the place where the former overflow had been checked, the river had broken through again, and the light of the fires reddened upon a gap, as yet only a few yards wide, through which the water was cataracting, and upon the figure of an all-too-small gang of men, white and black, working desperately to stem the flood.

As they drew nearer they saw that it was Jackson and a part of his posse, together with a handful of the Negro levee watchers, who were fighting the losing battle with the mighty river. Jackson had seen the lights of their car, and he came running to meet them.

"My Lord! I never saw the like before in all my born days!" he panted as he came up. "Ground just melts away like so much sugar in hot water! She's gettin' the start on us, spite of all we can do. I sent a man up to the Landin' a half hour ago for more help. Are them government boats comin' down? If they ain't, we'll be drowned out, sure as the devil's a hog!" And the words were hardly out of his mouth before the ground trembled under their feet and another section of the levee top slid into the growing sluiceway, carrying one of the bonfires with it.

"The boats are on their way down," Blanchard told him, "but they can't run fast enough to beat the thing you're fighting." Then to Kirby: "Show him, Bob."

Kirby took the little boxed-in instrument from under his arm and held it down so that the light of the nearest fire fell upon it. For the first time since they had taken it out of its hiding place in the hollow oak, the little index finger was fixedly at rest. But it was now pointing straight across the wide waste of waters toward the invisible opposite shore.

"What-all's that you've got—a photograph box?" Jackson queried, stooping to get a better sight of the small object in Kirby's hands. And in the same breath Blanchard cried out: "It can't be over there, Bob! It's all of two miles across to anything like solid land on the other side of the river!"

"Yes; but not to the point that stretches out this way to make the goose neck!" was his sister's quick correction. "*That* wasn't under water two nights ago. Bob and I saw a motor boat leaving it then, and we thought it was taking refugees off."

"There's the place, Jackson!" Blanchard burst out. "They are over there on the point—and they were there night before last, shaking the levee down as fast as we could build it up! Don't tell me you haven't a boat of some sort on this side."

"A couple o' skiffs, and Dugonnard's gas launch. But they're tied up below the break."

Kirby stood up with the little box in his hands.

"It's pretty squarely up to us," he said. "Before those flotilla boats can get down here that break will be half a mile wide, and that will be the end of the blacklands. I'll go with the sheriff, and you stay here with your sister, Dick, and keep up the fight as long as you can. If the break gets away from you, you'll know we've failed and that

the time has come to do the life-saving act as you can. Now, then, Mr. Jackson, a bunch of your best men with their guns, and a dash for that motor launch on the other side of the break, before we're cut off from it!"

And before Blanchard could object to the part for which he had been thus summarily cast, Kirby was following the sheriff as the stout-hearted old veteran plunged through the deepening flood of the overflow, yelling out the names of the picked men who were to go with him in the launch.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TIDAL WAVE.

WHILE his picked men were tumbling into the Dugonnard launch, Jackson was shouting at those who were to be left behind to hold their own until the government boats came, even if it should break the back of the last man of them to do it.

As the launch's motor took the spark Jackson scrambled aboard and shouldered his way forward to where Kirby was crouching in the bow, holding the little instrument box between his knees and directing the beam of his flash light upon the steadily pointing index needle.

"It will have to be a quick dash if we hope to get them," he said to Jackson. "No doubt they have a motor boat, and they'll run for it if they get a sight of us before we can head them off."

"Think they won't put up a fight?"

"Not if they can help it. They won't want to risk the loss of the thing they've committed a murder to come by. Who is handling this boat?"

"It's Dugonnard himself. He won't miss any chances. He was a riverman before he took to plantin' corn and cotton."

The little Creole planter was already confirming Jackson's measure of his dependability. He was sending the launch upriver in the slack water of the left-hand bank to gain a distance which would enable him to shoot across the current without being carried below the half-submerged point of land in the crook of the bend. As the light of the bonfires at the break was left behind, the pointer needle under the eyes of its watchers swung slowly to the left to correspond to the changing position of the launch.

"We're not making any mistake," Kirby said. "They are over there, and the devil machine is still in action. It's going to be touch and go. If we don't smoke them out within the next few minutes they will beat us to it and the break will get away from that little bunch that is trying to hold it."

"Antoine'll head for 'em as soon as he is sure he can make it across," said the sheriff; and even as he spoke, the launch suddenly swerved into the current and shot straight for the clump of partly drowned foliage marking the source of the magnetic, or electrical, disturbance. At the same instant the indicator needle upon which Kirby was holding the beam of the flash light began to flicker wildly.

"Thank God—they've shut the machine off!" he exclaimed; and the words were no more than spoken before a motor-driven boat, a dark shadow against the still darker background of the trees on the point, came indistinctly into view and slipped away upstream. Jackson bellowed at the small man handling the launch's controls.

"See that boat, Antoine? That's what we're after! Chase 'em with all you've got!"

For a few minutes the race seemed to be going against the pursuers. The escaping power boat, holding well over to the inside curve of the great bend, had the advantage of a strong upstream eddy; this while the pursuing launch was still battling with the flood-stage current in the middle of the river. In spite of the long range and the darkness, some of the sheriff's men began

to fire at the shadowy boat to which the upstream current of the eddy appeared to be lending wings. Jackson quickly stopped the firing.

"I ain't doubtin' the way you and Dick Blanchard've figgered it out—that these here fly-by-nights are the ones that are doin' all the devilment," he said to Kirby. "Just the same, we got to keep to the windward side o' the law a hand's breadth 'r so, and not go to whangin' away at 'em with the rifles till they give us a bigger dare than they have yet."

Though the advantage in the race was still with the fugitives, after a brief space the conditions were reversed. Passing beyond the curve of the bend, the power boat encountered the downstream current, and at the same time the pursuing launch gained the quieter water of the eddy and forged ahead at increased speed.

It was at this stage of the exciting chase that the searchlight of the first of the two steamboats coming down from Waccabee Landing came in sight. As the beam of the powerful electric swung toward them, the men in the launch were witnesses of a phenomenon new, strange and terrifying in its mysterious appearance and swift descent upon them.

At a point halfway between them and the power boat struggling with the current in the distance ahead a huge wave, like that which might have been upheaved by a submarine explosion, rose in a cataract of foam and came racing down upon the launch, its curling crest arching like the whitecap of an Atlantic breaker. It was only the alertness of the helmsman owner of the boat that saved them from being overwhelmed and engulfed. With a quick spin of the wheel he fairly lifted the light craft aside and the monstrous portent went surging past, with every man in the launch grabbing for handholds as the boat danced and wallowed in the aftermath of the terror.

"You see," said Kirby to the sheriff. "That puts you well over on the windward side of the law, doesn't it? If you haven't been believing our theory—Blanchard's and mine—I think you'll give it standing room now. The next time they come at us, with a better calculation of the distance——"

"You hold your breath a minute!" growled the veteran. Then, as the launch swung back upon its course, with the motor roaring to close the gap between the two boats, he bawled an order to his men: "Let 'em have it, boys, afore they shoot us with another o' them tidal waves!"

Of what followed, Kirby had only a confused medley of impressions. There was a spattering of gunshots, answering flashes from the boat ahead, the whine of bullets in the air, and yells, whether of rage or pain he could not tell. Through it all it was borne in upon him that he must not take his eyes from the little dial upon which he was focusing the illuminating beam of his electric torch.

There was a reason. At the uprising of the tidal wave which had so nearly made an end of the launch he had seen the needle of the galvanoscope stop in its wild flickering to point straight at the onrushing menace, or to the boat beyond and in line with it. Hence in the fierce clash that came as the power boat was overtaken, he was still kneeling in the bow of the launch with his gaze fixed upon the dancing needle. In the midst of the clash, when the sheriff's men were trying to run down and board the power boat, he saw the pointer suddenly come to rest as if it were frozen in place.

"Sheer off, quick—for God's sake!" he shouted over his shoulder at Dugonnard; and as the slowed motor roared into action he had the last of the confused impressions—a shock as if something heavy had fallen upon him; the sight of a huge column of water rising

like the jet of a gigantic fountain beside the launch; and, after that, nothing.

When Kirby came back to earth out of a region of troubled dreams he found himself lying in bed in his room at Bayou Noir, and again there were confused impressions. One was that he had grown to be an old man in the dream intervals, so old that he had reached the nightcap-wearing period. When the nightcap proved to be a bandage, there were other things to be reckoned with. The sun was shining in at the western window; therefore it was daytime. But what day? And how did it come that the last thing he could remember was being in a boat—in a fierce fight in the darkness on the great river? What had come between that and this?

"Things going a bit more sensibly for you now?" said a voice at the other side of the bed, and then he saw what he wondered he hadn't seen at his first eye opening—namely, Maida Blanchard sitting in a low rocking-chair with a book opened and turned down upon her knees.

"Haven't they been going sensibly?" he asked.

"Not so as any one would notice it." Then, with a twist of the pretty lips: "It's lucky for you that you've been living a reasonably speakable life, dear boy. You've been telling us every little thing you knew, or that has happened to you, during the past two days."

"Two days? Has it been that long? What was it hit me?"

"A bullet. When that bandage comes off, you'll have a scar that will make the woman who loves you want to weep every time she runs her fingers through that nice hair of yours. At first Doc Bilby was afraid it might be going to cost you your reason—for always, you know. But this morning, when he found you sleeping naturally, he said I needn't cry any more."

"You were crying?"

"Of course I was. Did you think I wasn't woman enough to cry?"

"No. Didn't I say once that you were one woman in a thousand? What happened after I passed out?"

"What is the last thing you remember?"

"A fight in the dark, with the two boats side by side. I was watching the needle and I saw it point to the other boat. Then I knew that the earthquake machine had been switched on again and I yelled to Dugonnard. I heard the roar of the boat's engine as Dugonnard gave it the gun, and saw a waterspout jump up between the boats and lean over as if it were going to fall on us. That was the last of it, for me."

"It was nearly all of it for everybody," she said. "The waterspout, or part of it, did fall on your launch—and into it. But more of it went the other way—on the other boat. The earthquake machine, or whatever it was, and the men who had stolen it, are somewhere at the bottom of the Mississippi. When the sheriff's men got their boat bailed out, and began to look for the pieces, or the survivors, there weren't any."

"And the break in the levee?" he asked.

"The government boats got there in time to keep it from growing into a crevasse and drowning us all out. And the next day the crest had passed and the river was falling."

"The mystery—what about that?"

"It is still a mystery, of course, even for those of us who know what little there was to be known. Jackson has explained it away for others in terms that they can understand—a gang of Northern racketeers who came down here to blow up the levee with dynamite, or something, if we wouldn't buy them off. He said it was no use getting everybody worked up by calling it a mystery."

"Anything else I've missed and ought to know?"

"Nothing of any importance. Dick reported things to your future chief, Major Vincent, and the major wires that you're to stay here until you are quite fit again. But we would have kept you and nursed you, anyway."

Silence while the shadows of the window squares, cast by the setting sun, grew longer on the floor. Then, from the bed:

"You are either too good to me, Maida, or not quite good enough. Once, a few days ago—or was it years?—you said something—at the breakfast table—you remember? About finding a man——"

"Of course I remember. And you said I'd found him, or something like that, didn't you? Did you say it because you felt that you were obliged to play up and keep the ball in the air?"

"No; I meant it, with all my heart. It was you who were keeping the ball in the air. I knew that at the time, but you dared me."

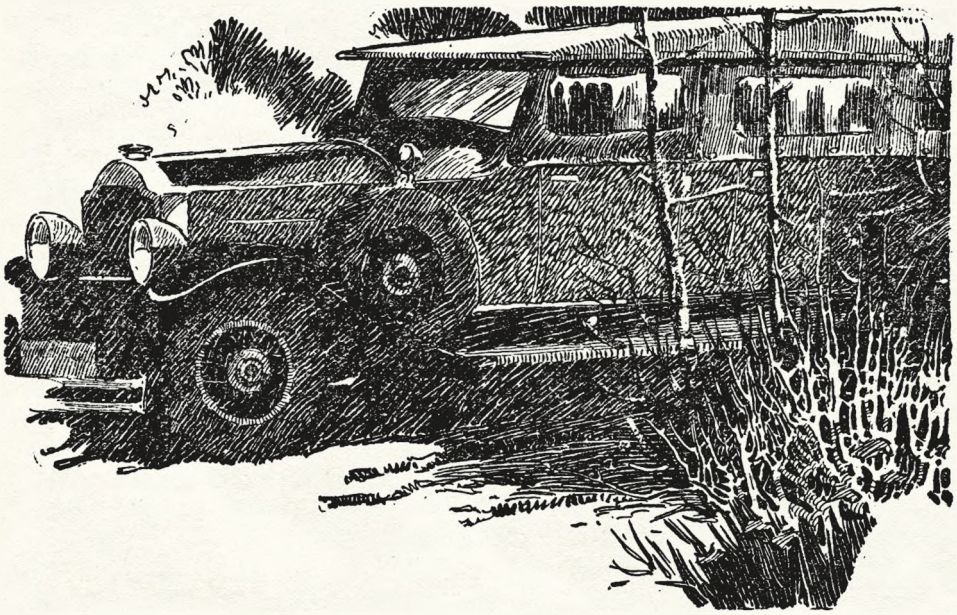
She came to sit at the head of the bed, to pillow his bandaged head on her knee and lay cool and comforting palms over his eyes.

"Listen, dear man; I'm going to dare you again. Years ago, when I was just a spoiled girl-child running wild here on the plantation, Dick came home on one of his college vacations bringing a snapshot of you—in your football rig. I fell in love with that picture, and with the boy that Dick raved about so much; and—well, perhaps I've been waiting ever since for him to come along and say that I needn't wait any longer. Now then, are you shocked out of your seven senses?"

"I am," he said weakly. "I'm about to swoon. I shall swoon if you can't think of some way of reviving me."

Being a true daughter of Eve, as well as an up-to-date young woman, she found a way.

About a Policeman Who Committed a



GANG ETHICS

RAY BERING'S hangout was a two-story bungalow, set far back from the roadway, near the city limits of Duttonson. Here he kept open house for his mob and offered a limited hospitality to square guys of the underworld. The garage alongside the building covered considerably more ground, with room for any borrowed machines that might be brought in to be made over. Al Warner could drill out identification numbers, insert others, switch accessories, and repaint a body so skillfully that in five hours the owner of a car would fail to recognize it.

To-night, however, only personal cars, purchased F. O. B. Detroit, had been driven in. Business is one thing; pleasure another. As Al had pithily put it: "An ace sharpshooter wants to be above a call from John Law when taking an armful of class out for a spin."

In the clublike room that occupied most of the main floor of the bungalow, and the entrance to which from the veranda was by a double swinging door, "Tony the Wop" and "Kid" Mearson, who had been a pork-and-bean pugilist until he was about ready to cut out paper dolls, were shooting pool very seriously at a dollar a point. Al Warner, a weary-looking individual, pointer of an A. E. F. machine-gun crew, until gassed, sat at a small table giving a State road map careful scrutiny. Above him stood Ray Bering, a tall, slim fellow with a normally cool and pleasant manner that was only disarming to perfect strangers.

His eyes followed the course of a pencil held in Al's hand.

"If you didn't have to figure out the casing, what a set-up most jobs would be," he murmured. "It's the well-known get-away that ranks many a swell lay."

Crime That No One Would Call Wrong.

By JOHN WILSTACH

Tony missed an easy combination, and turned away from the table.

"You said it, chief, and that's why Atlantic City gets the go-by," he broke in, his voice high pitched. "The way out can have a guard thrown across it in ten minutes. You're bottled up, yelling at the ocean for a sea-going hack. The dicks take their time combing the town and nab you."

Kid Mearson was annoyed. The wop was bragging about his travels instead of paying attention to the game.

"Aw, close your trap, Tony," he growled in his hoarse voice, "we all know you were once a blanket stiff, beggin' back-door hand-outs. When I last blew into A. C. on high I bet you were pushin' a rolling chair."

"I wonder if Ben Cross is getting back this evening," continued Bering, not noticing the interruption. "It shouldn't take him more'n two days to give that St. Cloud proposition the once-over."

"No, but Ben's methodical," returned Al appreciatively. "When he looks over a layout you know there's no loose ends to slip up on. He's as good a spotter as there is in the game."

"Say, Cross is on the make without taking none of the risk," blurted out Tony. "While we charge on a town, mebbe to stick and slug, he's sitting back pretty on the side lines, figurin' out his per cent."

"You've been talking out of your turn, Tony, ever since you breezed in," said Bering sharply. "Only that fellows with brains have let you travel along with 'em, you'd be a stir bug by now. Don't ever bull yourself. You'd be turned up in a week, if you was on your own."

Ray Bering regarded his man with a peculiar look of disfavor. He had been talking privately, more or less, with Al Warner, who had a head on him. Roughnecks were useful, but in their place. Perhaps he was becoming an easy boss; that was dangerous. However, it wasn't like Tony, usually taciturn, to be continually butting in.

The big fellow was the only one who actually lived in the bungalow. His mob used it as headquarters and general hangout. Tony had arrived a little after seven. He had tried to slip upstairs, unperceived, carrying what appeared to be a sample of wet goods. Bering, softly following, watched him place the package in an obsolete safe near the kitchen door.

"What is it, Tony, a couple of imperial quarts that fell off a boat?" Bering had jested.

The other had laughed nervously.

"Only something I didn't want to take home, chief," he mumbled, half to himself.

Passing downstairs, Tony had picked up a newspaper and turned the pages like a person on the stage, with a lack of attention that would fool nobody. A man's rep is an odd thing. The wop was known to be close-mouthed and stolid. Now, his nerves on edge, and excitability leading him into strange outbursts, he didn't seem the same. This aroused Bering's usual hair-trigger suspicion of anything queer.

Could there be a connection between Tony's goofy manner and the package upstairs in the safe? Safe, indeed! It was an old-fashioned box one might rip apart with a can opener, used, nowadays, to store cordials or Scotch. Ray Bering himself had several safe-deposit vaults, all under respectable-sounding monikers, in out-of-town banks. He had thought his men were likewise cagy. Oh, well, it was probably just waiting that made him fretful. Next thing he'd be shooting at bugaboos.

"I wish Ben would ease back with some hot news," Ray murmured. "I'm yearning for action, as well as more kale."

"Don't worry about that boy. He's a great spot man, with a memory like a camera. Never even needs to take notes—but he takes 'em, just the same. I——"

Al turned as the doors to the veranda swung open with a shuffle.

In any other town it would have looked like a dramatic entrance for a pinch. Captain Bryant, head of the detective bureau, and his driver, a typical harness bull, stood framed in the doorway. Though they were empty handed, Tony the Wop and Kid Mearson stiffened at sight of the officers. As a muscular reaction, perhaps, the former's fingers fluttered toward his back pockets.

"Keep your mitts in the clear," snarled Bering.

He strolled toward Captain Bryant, who was regarding the group with contempt.

"Hello, Bryant. What is this, a social call?" asked Ray. "I keep dreaming of seeing you on a slab in the morgue."

A thin smile did not show his teeth.

"If Chief Bader wants me he might telephone," Bering continued. "I'd have come right down to the carpet."

"I'm here as the chief's mouthpiece. I don't mingle with dirt by choice. If I had my way the town would be clean of crooks."

"You'll never have your way, Bryant."

"No? That remains to be seen—unless you birds deliver."

"Can the ballyhoo and speak your piece. What's up?"

"Only this. Chief Bader declared this a 'safe' town two years ago, where crooks could live in peace if they didn't operate, but made other cities foot the bill."

"Well, haven't we lived up to the agreement?" stormed Bering. "The only thing you coppers have had to protect is your corns. Not a single crime has marred the record. Burglar alarms and watchmen have become out of date. Gay cats and yeggs go right through on the rattlers, wearing blinders. They're more afraid of us than they are of the hoosegow."

"Yea," returned the officer grudgingly, "right up to now. But this afternoon one of the boys went crazy and touched off a pay roll."

The silence that followed his words was intense. This reached all of them. The pact that had made Duttonson a haven—where both they and the police kept hands off with unbroken politeness of mutual dislike—had been ripped apart.

"Come on," whispered Bering, "give us the details."

Bryant paused as if to enjoy the discomfiture he had created. Ever since Chief Bader had been brought in from the West he had felt like a dummy copper, a hunter who had every opportunity to pot wild beasts, but was unarmed.

Then he spoke in measured tones.

"Jerry Butler left the First National Bank this afternoon, a few minutes before closing time, carrying the Hilton Factory pay roll—no armed guard or anything. He was walking by the old abandoned slate quarry when a masked man hopped out of a car and jumped him. The stickup pushes a rod in his ribs and he hands over the package. The feller breezes off in his car and Jerry is so bewildered he doesn't even take a slant at the license number. No matter; it must ha' been a phony. But the holdup was no stranger—or why the masquerade stuff?

"Now, damn your hides, you wise guys has to come across. I'm spreading the word around. The chief gives you till to-morrow night to git back that twelve grand. He don't want the rat; you can have *him* all to yourself. If you don't deliver, we'll hold a batch of crooks who've burrowed in where decent people live, and let the wanted bids come in."

He spoke bitterly and glared directly at Ray Bering, whom he hated with an inflexible hatred that burned with an even flame. Bryant bitterly resented this cool-mannered and successful big shot, who raked in thousands while he himself drew down a small salary—a distinction made more clear cut by the fact that he was forced, against his will, to regard the gang leader as a rival, since they both favored the same hometown girl. His feelings were augmented by a realization that Ray had the little graces and distinctions in which he was so lacking. And the other's glance always appraised him with derision.

Now Ray Bering chuckled. "Tell the chief not to worry. We'll spread a net so tight that that fool for dumb dough won't escape us. Run along and shine your buttons. We can handle this ourselves, without the help of any flatties."

Bryant flushed and instinctively strode forward; then his arms, tensed an instant, fell helpless to his side. How he longed to wipe the sneer from that confident crook's face. Sullenly he turned and lumbered, heavily, with his driver, from the room, his exit unnoticed. The four men he left behind stood facing one another intently, each reacting to the news according to his nature, but all weighted down with the seriousness of the situation.

For two years other cities had suffered, but Duttonson had been left severely alone. The word had gone out: don't foul your own nests. In return for Chief Bader lending a deaf ear to outside appeals for coöperation, and gazing at reward and wanted circulars without his glasses, they had seen to it that headquarters was never bothered by hurry-up calls and the local cooler never held anything more important than a

souse. Outsiders, learning the town was a 'safe' one, sewed up, had given it a wide berth.

To-day some one had defied the underworld. Evade the police? Perhaps. But could he double cross upward of six-score or more professionals and get away with it?

"Well, boys, no hard feelings," announced Bering. "There's no telling who turned this trick, so everybody's a suspect—even me. Alibis are for those who like 'em; what I want to know is who needs money badly—and can't wait? We're all well heeled, aren't we?"

His glance roved from one to another.

Al Warner grinned a bit sheepishly. "The galloping African dominoes always take it away from me. But I have fall money salted, and then some."

"Me, too," chipped in Kid Mearson. "I pay a bookie's rent now and then, pickin' long shots, but sometimes I knock him for a goal. But I ain't got no broad with a cravin' for ice to cover her fingers so she can't move them."

"What do you mean?" Tony suddenly snarled.

"Take it or leave it, wop. Didn't you borrow two centuries from me last week?"

"Sure, and ain't I good for it?"

"Mebbe, but a guy in the money shouldn't be livin' from job to job. You never was that way till you got to dolling up that swell frail."

"It's my jack," said Tony, as if excusing himself.

Ray Bering, watching him intently, suddenly drew an automatic from a shoulder holster.

"Put 'em up, Tony. If I'm wrong I'll give you some cush to give that jane of yours a wine bath—and I'll apologize in the bargain."

Ray's tone was jocular, but the man elevated his hands on the instant, flushing dully.

"Run upstairs, Al, and bring down what looks like a shoe box, wrapped up, in the safe."

There was a dead hush as Warner obeyed the order. Upon his return Ray told him to unwrap the package. As the paper was stripped and the lid pulled off, an orderly batch of greenbacks were tumbled out on the pool table.

"My savings," whimpered Tony. "I was aiming to leave town to-night—on the q. t.—without giving my gal a tumble."

"Read what's on one of those wrappers."

Al picked up a bundle. "'One hundred dollars'—an' underneath, 'The First National Bank.'"

"Count the pile."

Tony looked wildly about him as Warner started sorting.

"Twelve thousand smackers," finally announced the latter. "Say, this does help some. We'd have all had to chip in to make up that twelve grand, if Tony hadn't been obliging—the poor, fat-headed sap. Guess he was afraid to lug this roll home to his gal. She's got a mouth like a radio—broadcasts everything she knows to any Moll who'll listen."

Bering laughed, and the sound was like the lash of a whip.

"Tony, you said you wanted to leave town on the q. t. You'll have your wish. Mearson, get your car. Warner, you're heeled?"

The wop stifled a cry.

"I was going to split, Ray; honest I was!"

"Better fan this rat," murmured Bering, paying no attention.

As he leaned forward to pat Tony's back pockets, the wop must have suddenly realized his position. He twisted and turned, dodging toward the door and reaching with his right hand for his gun. There was a single report from Bering's automatic. The arm went limp and Tony halted in his tracks. There was a peculiarly childish and hurt look

on his face. Blood started to ooze through his sleeve and he regarded it curiously.

"You got me in the arm, Ray," he mumbled.

"Sure, I'd have plugged you dead center, only I don't want a stiff on our hands."

The words were spoken coldly, quite impersonally.

Without being directed, Al relieved the wop of a gat and a long knife strapped, above the ankle, against his left leg.

"Take him well outside the city limits," Bering cautioned. "Might even cross the State line; it's only ten or twelve miles."

"Right, chief."

"Tony," said Bering, "you're done—through—all washed up—finished. We'll let your girl know you committed suicide."

Mearson's car was heard outside. Warner drew his weapon, and he and Bering closely escorted Tony into the tonneau, Warner jumping in beside his prisoner.

The gang leader stood in the roadway and watched the red tail lights as they vanished in the distance. He could see the finish, two men shouldering another to a ditch for the "cold meat party," pulling back his coat and vest, pressing guns against his chest and plugging him, buttoning up the vest and coat while holding the dead man upright, then laying the body carefully down and folding the arms, crosswise, neatly.

He turned back toward the bungalow.

"Better get that dough into Bader's hands," he reflected, "and give Bryant a stomachache. They'll never ask how I got it. Poor Tony—trying to make his jane happy—with money."

Chief Bader grunted assent when his desk sergeant informed him that Ray Bering was waiting in the front office. A heavy-set, middle-aged man, with iron-gray hair, and blue eyes set deep in a ruddy, overfat face, the veteran policeman had once been a notable detective, a feared "Eye," so called from the orb on the Pinkerton Agency "tin." He had long lost any man-hunting desire, believing that preventing crime was an easier job than detecting it.

The gang leader entered the private office with his usual swaggeringly confident air.

At the same moment Captain Bryant opened a side door, his collar unbuttoned, showing he was off duty.

Bering laid the pay-roll box on the chief's desk.

"Sorry you had to wait, chief," he said smoothly. "Your messenger boy told us what was wanted—and we snapped into it to deliver. You'll find the twelve grand in First National wrappers ready for the count. You know there'll be found, in any wise mob, a poor fool now and again, just as among a bunch of square-toed pavement pounders."

He chuckled at the captain of detectives.

"Glad to do your work for you, Dick; it's a good thing your best bet is posing in uniform for the ladies. If you had to really go into action you'd probably stumble over a clew and sprain an ankle."

Chief Bader raised a pudgy hand. "Don't quarrel, boys. 'Live and let live' is my motto." His lips twisted into a dry smile. "The old idea's best, Bryant: 'It takes a thief to catch a thief.'"

"Mebbe, but do I have to stand here and be insulted by this jail dodger?"

"I'm running this," snapped his superior, turning on his swivel chair. "Where's the rat who had the nerve to turn this trick?"

"It'll be kept underground?"

"Yes."

"My guns took him for a ride. We wouldn't—if we could—keep a break like this from getting about."

"No—crooks need no newspaper. Who pulled the solo job?"

"Tony the Wop."

"Humph. Had a floosie who burned up money. It strikes me that the body might be used to advantage, though—in releasing a good newspaper smear about Tony being shot by officers while resisting arrest. Where'll he be dropped?"

"About ten to twelve miles out, on the main pike to Southley, over the State line."

"Good! Captain Bryant, send out a couple of men in a headquarters car to pick up the body. This'll make a smashing first-page yarn—showing the populace it has a police force that is on the job."

"Chief, I have to hand it to you," murmured Bering admiringly; "you sure can handle your racket."

"I ought to be in the money by now," returned Bader listlessly. "Course I'm getting old. Send my share of men to make little ones out of big ones; now I crave peace."

"Aw, you're man sized," returned the other. "Now your man Friday—or Thursday, since he's generally a day behind time——"

He laughed—and the color drained from Bryant's face. Slowly he removed his uniform coat and threw it on a chair, together with his regulation hat.

"Chief, I resign, to take effect immediately," he exclaimed. "I can't swallow playing with a lot of dirty crooks any longer. Sure, I realize your point, giving the city a crime-free administration and what the voters don't know can't hurt them. But I'm all washed up, personal."

"Going to retire?" gibed Bering. "Now if you had any guts I might give you a job. But—the chief excepted—my experience is that the only good cop is a dead cop. And you're getting out before being knocked off."

"Out of town, yes!" snarled Bryant. "But I give you fair warning to keep away from *my* future preserve. I've had an offer, pending for a couple of weeks, from the City Council of St. Cloud to take charge of their police force."

"Got the courage to accept?"

"Sure, I'm sending 'em a wire tonight."

"Then I bet you anything you name that you'll be crawling into a hole in a month's time, leaving a resignation behind you—or that you'll get canned before that."

Bryant turned suddenly to Chief Bader, who sat passively listening, no expression on his face, though his eyes twinkled with something like amusement.

"Do you hear that, chief?"

"I'm getting a bit old and feeble, but I'm not deaf yet."

"Well, I'm going to take Bering up. But not with a money bet—with another sort of wager. I'll call the cheap yegg's bluff. If I'm still sitting pretty in a month's time in St. Cloud will you drop your attention to a certain young lady and leave town?"

"Sure," clicked back the gangster, "and what if you resign, or they want another boy before then? Will you declare yourself a back number by telling that certain young lady your manly affections are engaged elsewhere?"

The tone was taunting.

"Yes, that's an even bet," blurted out Bryant.

"Boys will be boys," sighed the police head. "If you ask me I think you're a couple of saps. Well, I'll hold the stakes."

Both men glanced at him questioningly.

"If Bryant here keeps his job," Bader explained, "I'll see that Ray Bering picks up and leaves town—and stays away. If I tip 'em off, his underworld playmates will attend to that. And if you resign within four weeks, Bryant, I'll go to Miss—er—we all know the

name—and say you're wanted for bigamy in Akron!"

He smiled dryly and rubbed his hands together.

"In other words I'll see that the loser doesn't welsh on his bet. This will give me a game to watch, in my old age. And I like excitement so long as it doesn't disturb Duttonson. As stakeholder, so to speak, I shall subscribe to a St. Cloud daily, to get the low-down. Sorry to lose you, Bryant, but it's slow around here and you crave action. I was the same at your age."

"He will have no cause to worry," said Bering thinly; "I'll provide the fireworks."

The evening of the well-planned raid on St. Cloud, Ray Bering felt that he had every reason to feel pleased with himself. By a lucky coincidence Ben Cross had scouted and located in the very city where Dick Bryant was, for a week now, chief of police. Business and pleasure might march hand in hand, and while replenishing the old bank roll Ray could strike a shrewd blow at his rival.

Twice, since Dick Bryant left for his new post, Ray visited June Boyd. Bryant had been a friend of the girl since their school days together at the same institution where she to-day taught the young ones and was their idol. She had never been told that Ray was a lawbreaker, but the gang leader gave the copper no credit for good sportsmanship on that score. Ray knew that it never helps with the girls to place a competitor on the pan; and in Bryant's case the question: "If he's all you say, why don't you arrest him?" would have been unanswerable.

To all appearances June wavered in her decision as to which man she favored. It would have been obvious to the dumbest younger brother, had there been one, that both were simply crazy about her. The old reliable Dick, dating back to girlhood days, and Ray, quick, vivid and colorful, were so entirely different in appeal. One she trusted, with perhaps too much of a brotherly feeling; the other intrigued her with his dashing ways—but not quite swept her off her feet.

Ray had intimated that Dick had to leave the local police force for unknown reasons, and might soon be run out of St. Cloud. He professed a sporting reluctance in mentioning Bryant's trouble. There was a satisfaction in seeing that his words stirred June; the sooner her mind became accustomed to missing the copper the better. In backing himself the gangster hoped to star as one of those "I-told-you-so" birds whose prophecies come true.

The details of the raid on St. Cloud had left nothing to chance.

At eleven o'clock, on this Friday night, Ray picked up Kid Mearson and Al Warner, in his car at the shack, the latter armed with a Thompson machine gun. Ed Smith and Jack Evans, top-notch "torch" men, would follow in another car, with their equipment, at some distance, keeping them in sight. The special panorama screen was strapped on the top of their tonneau.

St. Cloud lay forty miles away, but the two cars, going at high speed, made the trip ten miles longer by taking a roundabout route. The distance had been judged, on their time-table, and the party was due at an alley, behind the bank building, at twelve fifteen.

Before midnight the patrolman on that particular beat would be disposed of—it was hoped in an easy manner, instead of giving him the works. Tailed patiently for a week by Al Foster, subbing for the late Tony the Wop, the copper's thirst had been found his weakness. Foster had met up with him in a local speakeasy. He would be encountered on his beat, by accident, by his new friend, and slipped a bottle containing rye and the necessary chloral

hydrate, commonly known as knock-out drops. When the stuff put him to sleep Foster would get him off the main drag and borrow his uniform coat and hat. Then he would summon the unsuspecting watchman to the back door of the bank and make him ineffective. Ben Cross, the lookout, or "jiggerman," would assist, if necessary. Certain alarm wires would be severed, but not from the watchman's time plugs. The rounds would be made for him with the aid of his box.

The Farmers' Bank & Trust Company, a private institution, was situated on one of the main avenues of St. Cloud. The interior of the bank could always be viewed from the street, as an electric globe shone within, and the curtains were drawn back. From the sidewalk passing pedestrians could view the cages of the paying and receiving tellers, and further back a huge cannon-ball safe. Here were kept the cash deposits and capital on hand.

President Wiley, a shrewd individual, figured cracksmen would not dare work right in the open. His view seemed sensible enough. Yet, at twelve thirty, on Friday night, had he passed his bank and gazed in through the big plate windows, he would have noticed nothing amiss. Inside everything would have looked bare and deserted, the giant cannon ball gleaming dully, a huge circular place of safety painted a battleship gray. Mr. Wiley would have walked right along, without a tremor.

But he'd have been deceived. It had taken a crack scene painter ten days, working long shifts, to paint a panorama screen that had suddenly been run sidewise behind the cashiers' windows. On it, in proper perspective, were painted the cannon-ball safe and the corresponding interior of the place as seen from the street. Only in the few instants of substituting the fake representation for reality, had there been danger of discovery.

Behind this screen the torch men worked, with black hoods over them, unperceived. Two tanks, delivering oxygen and acetylene, were carried in the second car. They delivered, under pressure, to the nozzle of the hose, a flame of three thousand degrees centigrade intensity, that slid through manganese as if it were butter.

After burning a small hole in the top of the safe the "oxyacetylene yeggs" poured in water to prevent the heat from spoiling the paper money. Then a large opening was bored in from the side, carefully figured to avoid the exact spot where lay the currency, so it wouldn't go up in smoke, and the bank notes might be reached. The working time was three quarters of an hour. While the torch men were busy Ray Bering and Al Warner were stationed on guard. If something slipped up they had no idea of "clouting and lam," but would "stick and slug." Kid Mearson was at the cars, and Ben Cross lounged across the street.

The job was completed without a hitch—with time to get the tanks away and ring in for the watchman at one o'clock. That person lay bound and gagged behind the painted screen. That not-to-be-despised work of art was left where it stood, to give time for the get-away and because it had served its usefulness. The haul, thrust into a bag, like old paper, was a large one. There would be no Saturday pay-roll withdrawals to-morrow from the Farmers' Bank & Trust Company.

Before nine o'clock St. Cloud's new police head was at the scene of the bank raid. The public being excluded, Bryant was admitted by a uniformed guard. Inside officials scurried aimlessly about. The watchman was telling and retelling his story to a group of reporters who had edged in, as usual, somehow, without invitation.

It was simple enough to sift the gar-

bled details. The watchman had answered a tap at the back door; looking out, he thought he had recognized his friend Reilly, the policeman on the beat. The next tap had been on his head, with a blackjack. That let him out. The real officer had either been drugged or fed whisky with a funnel. The deceptive panorama screen had proved a perfect blind, behind which the torch men had worked on the cannon ball. The marks of heavy cars showed where they had been parked at the rear of the building.

Clews? Bryant shrugged his shoulders, but he proceeded to putter about, as was expected, finding exactly nothing of value. Coarse cloth gloves, cast aside, discounted possible finger prints. The job had been smoothly planned and executed. Something like seventy-five thousand was gone in cash, and an undetermined amount of securities, mostly negotiable but dangerous to handle. The institution must be closed till Monday to allow for arrangements to be made for loans from other local banks.

Bryant returned to police headquarters, trailed by a couple of reporters. Patrolman Reilly was brought in from a cell and, shamefaced, told how he had accepted a drink from the flask of Tim Downey, a hail fellow he had met off duty. After the nip he only remembered fighting against drowsiness. The man gave his testimony sullenly, sensing dismissal from the force.

The chief sent a dick out to check up on the man known as Tim Downey; another to question throughout the neighborhood near the bank, to find if the spotter of the mob had made himself conspicuous. Just useless efforts, going through the motions, ending with an announcement to the press that the crime looked like the work of some Eastern "boomers," operating from points west of Philly. Tracers would be sent out, everything possible would be done, Bryant told the slyly smiling reporters.

After the newspaper men left him alone he relaxed, facing facts. Ray Bering had started the campaign to break him. This was an utterly clean, finished job, for which that gangster was famed in his line. Bryant knew Ray's handiwork, as a connoisseur can identify a painting of an artist, at sight, without looking for a signature.

Now that the job was checked off, the swag divided, the torch men on their way, the securities would turn up, if ever, a thousand miles off. Specialists —"sheet passers" and "paper hangers" —handled that stuff, after obtaining it at a tremendous discount. The seventy-five grand might be kissed good-by. The regular dicks under Bryant's command, even if sent to Duttonson, would learn nothing. He knew their limitations. And his own. A capable copper, he knew how useless it was to venture into Chief Bader's territory in search of evidence to pin a job on any one.

He bitterly regretted that absurd bet with Ray Bering. And with regret was mingled a real sense of shame. In his anger he had wagered his chances of happiness on his holding a job; placed himself on the level of a dirty crook, betting with him on a rivalry with the girl he loved, humiliating, even in his thoughts, both himself and her, in the presence of his old chief. What a fool he had been, spurred by the thought of driving the other out of Duttonson. He had played into Ray's hands. For the next move was up to the gangster, and this first blow would surely be followed by further attacks. Also, a new broom must sweep clean, and a new police chief was not expected to come in on the crest of a crime wave.

The next two weeks were a severe test of Bryant's nerves. He got so he hated to hear the telephone ring, and backed away from newsboys. Hardly a day passed without a complaint of a daylight holdup, nor a night go by minus a prowl of a home of the well-to-do.

These outrages he privately attributed to Ray Bering's influence being brought to bear on lesser gangs operating out of Duttonson, the possible intakes being not on large enough scale to warrant his personal attention. But the newspapers started that hammering for results the official so dreads, and the chamber of commerce and Rotary Club were not far behind. Particularly galling was the dragging out of the record of his predecessor, who had retired on account of bad health—St. Cloud had suffered no epidemic of crime during *his* administration.

Where Bryant finally lost face, however, was through the devastating power of ridicule. The town started to laugh, and that, he realized, was the beginning of a quick end.

First Mayor Horton's luxurious sedan was stolen from the garage behind his home on Mott Hill. The same day that report came to the newspapers, Chief Bryant's department car was missed from the parking spot in front of police headquarters. The driver, returning from a telephone call inside, went to the street to find it gone. This news, leaking to the press, gave material for humorous stories.

In mock interviews with coppers, they were asked what plans they had made to guard their clubs and revolvers? And Chief Bryant was queried as to whether he didn't think it wise to lock up his force for safe-keeping? The cells in the city hoosegow might, in this way, be given some use!

A letter from a sarcastic citizen, in *The Bugle,* suggested opening a hotel for visiting crooks called "The Criminals' Rest," to be operated by the town, so that a revenue from that element might be gained before, between, and after jobs. The writer offered a bid for the coat room and arsenal checking privilege.

Monday morning Chief Bryant appeared before the town council and asked for a month's leave of absence without pay. He acknowledged that St. Cloud had suffered the depredations of a band, or bands, of out-of-town crooks. He knew where he could find the source of the trouble, and would fight and conquer it in his own way, bearing the brunt of the expense himself. He believed, in all fairness, that he should be given this chance, to show his qualities as a fighting police officer, before tendering, or being asked, for his resignation. The city had everything to gain by granting his request.

Unquestionably in deadly earnest, his plea was given consideration—even though Bryant refused to outline his plan. A vote gave him the desired leave, with pay, since municipal laws showed no provision for salary elimination while an official was still in power.

Bryant thanked the members of the council, and went directly to his lodgings, where he changed to civies. Then he packed a small bag and took a taxi to the railroad station, where he purchased a ticket to a small town in Illinois, though that was not his real destination.

Upon his return, after an absence of four days, he was driven into Duttonson, at night, in the company of four individuals who had an alert air of being on business. Dick avoided his father's home, going with the newcomers to an unobtrusive little hotel near the railroad yards. They were all lodged in rooms on the same floor. The four strangers were Sam Ciplone, Dick Sheer, Bud Cannop, and 'Hooch' Wendy, the first named being unquestioned leader of the others.

Bryant stayed indoors for the time being. Working under Chief Bader was one thing, defending his right to a living as an independent police head of St. Cloud was another. Forced to fight his enemy on home grounds, he did so with a clear conscience.

Sam Ciplone, the big shot, was a

short, heavy-set, dark-complexioned fellow who had little to say, but held his men under an iron rule, having a reputation of punishing with the rod. Knowing Duttonson as he did, Bryant was able to direct him just where and how to strike. Indeed the plans had been made back in Cicero. Palmer's jewelry store, which carried valuable stock, was the first objective. The trays were placed, after closing time, in an old safe located in a storage chamber behind the salesroom.

At two o'clock, the evening of their arrival in Duttonson, entrance was gained through a back door by the imported gang. The box hardly deserved expert work. Yet the cracks were given a neat drink of two ounces of "grease," and covered with soft soap, and a half dozen old carpets thrown over the safe to muffle the explosion. Then the door was blown neatly open with what is called a "jamb shot." Before three o'clock the men were back at the little hotel with a bundle of loot.

Dick Bryant was outside and joined them. For half an hour he had been anxiously waiting the flash of the high headlights and the rumble of the engine. Not an instant was now to be lost. He sat beside the driver, Sam Ciplone himself, and directed him toward Ray Bering's bungalow on the outskirts of town.

Not a word was said on the trip. Details had been discussed and agreed upon in advance.

A block away from the gangster hangout, the car parked in front of an empty lot, and the five men advanced on foot, one of them carrying a sample case bulging with jewelry. While the others lurked in the shadows, this fellow approached the garage. The sliding door was unlocked and he slipped within, hiding the sample case under a bundle of waste in a far corner.

No lights showed in the bungalow. The building was surrounded, one armed man going around to the back, and guards being stationed at both sides. Sam Ciplone and Dick Bryant, guns out and ready, ascended the steps of the veranda noiselessly. Suddenly the latter shattered the silence by knocking briskly on the door with his knuckles. There was no immediate response and he kept on pounding.

A square of light burst from an upper window.

Some one was heard inside, descending the stairs.

"Who's there?" came a sleepy voice.

The two men paused, neither stirring.

A golden crack gleamed between the veranda doors, and a lock turned.

"Well, come on in, fellows," came Ray Bering's voice, frankly unsuspicious.

Sam Ciplone thrust his left hand forward and pushed his way slowly into the big room, ready to shoot on sight. Bering stood at the back, near the stairway entrance. Over his pajamas he had thrown a blue dressing gown and his hands were thrust into the wide pockets. As Bryant shouldered his way in behind the other Bering laughed a bit unpleasantly.

"So, I'm honored, maybe, by a visit from the chief of police of St. Cloud—or is it the *late* chief? But what's the meaning of this early-morning call? And who's your friend? Tell him to put up the hardware—and do it yourself—one of those guns might go off."

"I've brought a friend of mine who's deeply interested in you, Ray," returned Bryant quietly. "I want to introduce Sam Ciplone of Cicero, of whom you may have heard."

Bering's eyes narrowed into twin pools of ice.

"The name does sound familiar."

"Yes, Mr. Bering," said Sam, in short, clipped words, "I have come a long way, and I am a very busy man But I always pay my debts."

"Indeed, and do I owe you anything?"

"Surely your memory is not so short. It is not so long ago that——"

Suddenly Bering turned sidewise and fired through the pocket of his dressing gown. Ciplone's left hand clasped his shoulder, and his legs pushed far apart; the revolver in his right hand started to weave in a circle, but finally straightened. In a sudden brace he shot three times, rapidly. The last bullet took effect, striking Bering right between the eyes, and he lurched forward, a look of hurt surprise on his face.

As if echoes of the reports there came the *rat-rat* of three more shots from outdoors.

Ciplone staggered over and pushed Bering on his back, with his foot.

"I got him," he whispered; and then he shook his head, and almost collapsed, Bryant leading him to an easy-chair.

A man burst into the room, his gun still smoking.

"Winged a feller getting out the back way. Bud's keepin' guard over him."

"Call Dick and Hooch!" Ciplone said. "We gotta start burning up the miles. I can get a doctor farther on. I only got a shoulder slug."

Bryant nodded. Their work was finished. Before they left he insisted on their lugging Al Warner indoors. He was badly wounded and unconscious.

When the gangsters departed, holding their leader between them, Dick crossed to the telephone and called Chief Bader's private number at his home.

"Palmer's jewelry store looted an hour ago. Stuff's out here at Ray Bering's. He's dead and I think Al Warner is going. Come right out and pick up a couple of men on the way."

Bader asked for no explanations. In twenty minutes his car drew up in front of the bungalow. He entered, followed by two patrolmen, glanced at the two bodies on the floor, and then looked for explanation to his former captain of detectives.

Bryant told his story crisply; he knew it by heart. After being tipped off, at the last moment, that Ray Bering was going to break the compact of the "safe" town, where crooks might live in peace if they didn't operate, Bryant had waited until they looted Palmer's strong box, and then followed them out here. The swag was hidden in the garage and he could go to it. In an endeavor to arrest Ray and his henchman, Al Warner, the two gangsters had been shot down by him.

Chief Bader said nothing in the way of comment until the jewelry was recovered. Then he ordered the patrolman to take the two bodies to the nearest hospital and return for him.

When they were alone he grinned knowingly at his former aid.

"A very pretty story, and it will give you a load of credit, both here and in St. Cloud. Bering might have cost you your job—and so won that foolish bet. Now your supposed rival will leave town—in a casket. But Miss Boyd demands a lot of explaining. You'll have to tell her just how you figured you could use her as a stake."

"You told her?"

"Sure, I'm an old friend of her father. Bad enough my having crooks in town; I'm not going to allow them to marry into the families of my associates. Now how did you pull this all off? You may be good, young man, but not quite so good—single-handed."

He swiftly reached into Dick's pocket and drew forth his revolver, breaking it open. The charges were all unexploded; the lead pellets showed that.

"I thought so. Now come across with the real story."

"Well," said Dick airily, "I went and imported four gunmen from Cicero. First they planted this robbery on Ray Bering for me, and then the leader knocked him off. Another rod toter got Warner. It's all very simple when you know how."

"Yes, but where did an honest cop dig up the money to get four real high-class crooks to do your dirty—do a job—and then give up a lot of sparklers to serve your purpose?"

"Cut out the cross-examination, big boy, and I'll really give you the low-down. Fact is, chief, I remember gang ethics. A right gangster pays his debts—and if it is a blood debt he will let nothing stand in the way. You remember Tony the Wop?"

"Who was sent for a ride by Bering? Sure, what about him?"

"Well, I knew he hailed from Cicero. His real name is Ciplone. I looked up his brother, Sam, and he was not only delighted, he *insisted* on obliging. That's why I let *him* get Bering; after what he had done for me the pleasure was due to be all his."

Bader chuckled. "Good enough—but we'll let your first story stand for the newspapers. What the public doesn't know doesn't hurt it. I wonder if you crave returning to your old job here in town?"

"No, I intend going back to my job in St. Cloud. But I wish you'd go see——"

"Aw, tell her yourself," said Bader gruffly. "I'm getting too tough an old bird to start playin' understudy to Cupid."

Watch these pages for other stories by John Wilstach.

WHEN CORBETT LICKED SULLIVAN

AT the time of the Corbett-Sullivan fight, Fred Britten of Illinois, chairman of the committee on naval affairs in the national House of Representatives, was a San Franciscan like Corbett, and, also like Corbett, a professional boxer. Naturally Britten was all charged up with excitement and enthusiasm the day "Gentleman Jim" went against the so-called unconquerable Sullivan. Moreover, Corbett's family was similarly charged.

The Congressman explains that in those days fights were reported in bulletins by telegraph, and that the Corbett family had assembled in a room over Pa Corbett's San Francisco livery stable to get the returns. Every time a bulletin would come in describing the way Sullivan was landing punches on young Corbett's ribs, the women of the family would drop to their knees and pray, while Pa Corbett would walk up and down the room in a frenzy of agitation, folding the end of his long and flowing whiskers into his mouth and biting it savagely.

Then would come another message that Gentleman Jim was eluding Sullivan and wearing him out by making him chase around the ring, whereupon the women would cease praying and Pa would open his mouth to laugh and thus let the beard drop to its accustomed place. The fight lasted a long time, and there had been a lot of praying done as well as a great deal of beard chewing. At last came the final bulletin that Gentleman Jim was the heavyweight champion of the world. Pa let the whiskers drop for the last time when he emitted a weird and wonderful yell and announced to all and sundry: "Sure, he's champion! It was a certainty from the start!"

The Singing Mouse

By F. N. LITTEN

Between Death and a Young Scientist Working on the Desert There Twice Stood—Only a Singing Mouse.

GHOSTS of the long-forgotten dead must haunt that Park Avenue apartment of Meservey's. Wharton Meservey, the scientist, I mean; the man who turned up those queer rock paintings years ago in Arizona—in the Dragoon Mountains, if you know where they are. The Canyon of the Petroglyphs, he called his find. An odd fish, Meservey. That Park Avenue place of his is like a museum. Turquoise-and-silver relics of the Incas, sun-glazed pottery from Mesa Verde, kitchen tools used five hundred years ago by a Cliff Dweller woman, the foot-high skeleton of a horse called Eohippus that Meservey says lived a million years before Adam—well, that's enough to give a hint. You may have seen places like that on a smaller scale.

Meservey's been gathering the stuff for thirty years. Valuable antiquities, claim those who ought to know. But there's one thing for which I guess Meservey and his wife, too, would give away the rest. It's the stuffed desert mouse on the mantel in his library. The taxidermist did a snappy job mounting the little beast. It crouches there as though it were alive; bat ears lifted, jet eyes alert, and sort of scared, too. Still it is only a mouse; a queer thing to put such value on. Listen, this is how Meservey came by that mouse.

Sunset's last colors were melting from the peaks of the Dragoons. The lizard that lived in the wall of the old dobe cabin perched below the canyon rim had disappeared. Jim Anan, on watch outside the cabin window, shivered as a sudden night wind sweeping from the pinnacles of the mountains touched its cold breath on his cheek. Inside his shirt the steel blade chilled his breast. He wondered if the blade would soon be warm and red. Warm and red—again he shivered. His father's gods, gods of the Apache, were potent only in the daylight; the old men had believed that night was given over to vengeful demons traveling on moaning winds. But Jim Anan believed in no gods at all—by day. Now he was not sure. Haskell School and the university in New York where he had studied were filled with unbelievers; but *they* had never felt the darkness of these somber mountains.

Inside the cabin a man, seated in the yellow circle of the lamplight, was finishing his evening meal. He took up a violin and began to play softly. A gray, furry mouse stole across the table from the shadows. It sat up, wary and yet eager, close to the man's hand. There were crumbled biscuits on the table. The mouse watched only the moving violin bow. But Jim Anan watched the man; an expression of contempt, disdain and bitter hate marking his face. He took a careful step.

In the cottonwoods along the wash, an owl hooted tremulously, and he paused. Three times its shuddering cry echoed up the canyon. Anan frowned. Death was abroad when the white owl warned three times—so he had been taught. But he remembered then the letter in his pocket revealing this man's scorn of him; and that he had lost Elise Gillette. He remembered, too, the sack of silver in the cabin. Mad jealousy and greed conquered his inheritance of superstition.

Moving soft-footed to the door he lifted the latch, first drawing from his breast the pointed blade. The knife had seen three generations of rapine and murder; it had been Geronimo's. But for long years it had been idle. As he pushed gently on the door, Anan thought of that. It would have a new baptism of blood to-night.

The crack of light along the casing widened. Only six feet now, the span of one fierce lunge, between the knife point and his victim's back. His weight made the door sill creak—an almost indistinguishable tremor. But the mouse, a sharp-tuned auditory sense its sole protection in the sinister mountains of the desert, had caught the sound. With a startled squeak it fled. The man turned, laid down his violin. Anan, hurling the dagger behind him down the brushy slope, pushed the door wide. His face, crossed by a fleeting touch of rage, at once became expressionless.

"Anan!" exclaimed the man beside the lamp. He was yellow-haired, suntanned. His smile was quiet, poised. "You're back? To-night? Did you deliver my letter?"

Anan's lips smiled, too, but deep in his eyes was a cold, ruthless gleam. He said:

"I came back for my money, Meservey. I'm leaving you."

"Money? You're quitting?" Meservey frowned. "Look here, Jim, you can't do that—just now, when the work's almost done. Stay for the glory. You know twice as much as I about handling powder, and a shot placed wrong now would bring down a mountain of waste rock—fill the excavation—ruin us! Man, I'm depending on you. Why, you know more than I!"

"For which I receive day wages," returned the other. The scientist's eyes narrowed imperceptibly at the harsh timbre in Anan's voice. "And you—what's your pay from the Ethnologic Institute, Meservey?"

Dismayed, not yet understanding, Meservey tossed back his yellow hair and stared.

"Jim, I don't get you. You're like a stranger to-night. You know what this work means to me. A name, if it's successful; oblivion, if I fail. Is it more money you want? The chief says I've already spent a fortune here to no results; but I'll finance a raise myself." His smile was anxious.

Anan hated the flash of his white teeth.

"My money," he demanded tonelessly. Meservey, he saw, had no suspicion of him; and so he would reveal where the sack was cached.

"Jim, you're a fool to leave. I'm under fire now, but when I turn in the records of this expedition, the amazing find, the petroglyphs, it will mean fame to us both. Besides, you gave me your word you'd stay. You're not an Indian-giver, Jim?"

A flush stained Anan's face.

"Indian-giver," he repeated hoarsely. "You taunt me with my blood. A chink, a black, or Apache—they're all the same to you."

"Jim!" Meservey exclaimed. "What in hell's gone wrong? You're an Indian, but what of it, man?"

"You didn't use it against me then, with her?" the other sneered.

"Her?" Meservey's blank stare infuriated Anan.

"Don't lie. You told her, or she you. Then you both laughed at the grandson of Nana, the Apache renegade, who had the nerve to think Elise Gillette might marry him."

He saw Meservey's face set as he spoke the girl's name. The young scientist said coldly:

"If you've asked Miss Gillette to marry you, I didn't know it." He paused. "I'm sorry, Jim. She's promised me. As for your Apache blood, well, it's a purer strain than any of us Anglo-Saxons. If your tribe produced Geronimo and Nana, still I know a surgeon lecturing at Rush Clinic in Chicago, an Apache, too, of whom you should be proud."

"Yet Arizona, with six other States," said Anan, "forbids the marriage of an Indian with a white."

Meservey shook his head hopelessly, but the Indian spoke on in repressed bitter fury.

"If I were rich like you, she'd have taken me. I'm the better man, Meservey. But money—it's your people's god!"

"What's yours?" retorted Meservey with startling suddenness, and Anan paused. He realized quickly he had made an error; that this outburst might be fatal to his plans; fought desperately to control himself. His face slowly altered and again was cold, unreadable.

"Why," he answered, "my gods have changed, too. I learned that much at Columbia. The serpent-god, Tusayan, that my grandfather Nana feared, the devil-gods of night winds, the Coyote-that-eats-faces—they're bedtime stories. So is the Jehovah of Israel and Jacob. In your colleges I've found a new trinity: 'Women, Rum and the Holy Dollar.'"

"A blasphemous trinity," said Meservey. Suddenly he halted, stared at the dirt floor of the cabin. When he resumed his voice had a note of kindly pity that only sharpened Anan's hate. "Jim, you're bitter. I didn't know about Elise. You can't mean all this. You're quoting the sophistry of boys; of narrow, biased minds. I know; the colleges are filled with them. But you're too big for all that rot. Don't let this trouble warp you. Believe me, I'm sorry, Jim. The work we're doing ought to lift you out of this, give you a right slant."

Anan laughed. "Give me the dollars, Meservey. Twice now I've asked you. Save your speeches for Elise Gillette."

Meservey's face darkened. Checking

an impetuous reply, he crossed the room. From a lacquered box behind his bed roll he produced the money sack. Anan, his eyes gleaming, watched him count out the silver. The sack was lighter than he'd hoped. He took the money silently.

"Good-by, Jim," said Meservey. "I'm sorry." Without tying it again, he tossed the sack on the table underneath the lamp.

The Indian smiled. "Sorry? You took my woman. If you're sorry, give her back."

Meservey straightened. Anger had the upper hand of him at last. Anan felt a tug of joy. He hoped it might mean battle. He felt renewed contempt for Meservey's slim body; a desire to close his fingers on that throat that was too white beneath its tan.

"You never had a share in Elise's thoughts," Meservey said slowly.

"Not since you came," nodded Anan. His shoulder muscles tensed but he was thinking coolly. If he could sting this youth enough—— He resumed: "Before then, I had much more, Meservey *Much* more!"

At the sinister change in Meservey's face, Anan retreated to the doorway.

"Wait!" he warned. "We're alone. There's death if we fight, for one of us. If the Apache wins, by the grace of Arizona law, he hangs."

"Retract, then!" cried Meservey. He leaned forward to spring.

"I can easily avoid you," Anan said thickly. The sack of silver was lighter than he'd thought; still the lust to kill was rising. "It's black as the devil outside. You'd lose yourself in the first minute of a chase. I'm not afraid. I won't eat my words. I'll fight; any way you like. But—give me a paper clearing me of murder first. I see you looking at your gun. Move toward it, and I'll disappear. If you want me, write."

But the glaze of hate was fading from the other's eyes. Anan cursed inwardly as he recognized its disappearance.

"You won't fight," he said cuttingly. "I thought not. Even for your woman. You don't dare chance it with an even break."

Meservey let his arms fall. His jaw worked painfully. The muscles knotted in repression. Finally he spoke.

"I think you're insane. After all, your lie's harmed no one. But I can't hold in much longer. Better go." He gestured toward the rifle.

Anan, lips quivering with baffled anger, stepped back from the door. His glance flickered desperately about the room. He gazed at the coin sack on the table, the rifle on the pegs, an empty box that once held blasting powder on the clay floor beneath it. Suddenly a hate-filled triumph touched his face.

"You won't fight, but I'll hurt you where it's vital, Meservey." Then, glancing at the powder box again, he quoted, jeering: "'An eye for an eye,' so Jehovah says. You stole the girl who'd have made something of my life. I've lost her. I'll pay you back. I was wrong; your god's not money—it's Success, Fame. If you fail here after two years, you'll be discredited. You can't come back. Listen! By sunup there'll be five hundred tons of blasted rock covering your excavations in the canyon of the petroglyphs!"

Meservey leaped for the rifle.

"Take it down and your work's gone —two years' work," said Anan quickly, dropping back into the dark beyond the opened door.

"My God, what do you want?" cried Meservey. He had halted, his hand on the rifle stock.

"A fair fight," answered the other steadily. "Write the note. I'll tell you what to say." He pointed to a pencil and a surveyor's book of field notes on the mantel. "Tear out a leaf. No need to watch me; until the note is signed my hands are tied—I don't want to hang."

Meservey walked to the mantel. Slowly he removed a blank leaf from the field book. Then, his eyes grim, he looked across at Anan.

"You're stark mad, Jim. We've worked together two years. Good friends. Now, you want to murder me."

"Not murder; a fair fight—*to the finish!*" Anan let the three words register. A longer silence while he framed the note. Struck by a sudden thought, he laughed. The hollow sound was startling; it was not like his voice. There was death in it now. To him flashed a legend of the tribe; that the spirits of the dead, reincarnated, came to earth, assumed the forms of living men. Perhaps the dark shade of Geronimo, or the bloody Nana, was pointing him to vengeance. He drew up, laughed more boldly, jeered.

"Destiny—you can see its workings everywhere. It levels mountains, so you said, Meservey. Well, then, write: *'Blame no man for this death. It is destiny.'*"

Meservey stared at him. His hunted eyes instinctively turned to the rifle, almost within reach. Anan shook his head.

"Think before you take it down. The scales are balancing. Your woman and your work—against my life. There's no other way. Write!"

"Anan," said Meservey, "I have more to win than you. Remember that before it's too late. I'm fighting for a greater thing than life."

The Indian smiled. "Write," he answered.

He watched the pencil press against the leaf. It wavered, traced a word and halted.

"Jim——" began Meservey brokenly.

"Write," repeated Anan, breathing deep.

Once more the pencil began moving. Steadily this time. Then Meservey drew up.

"It's finished." He stepped back from the mantel. The leaf fluttered from his hand. Warily Anan stooped, watching the other, hawklike, and retrieved the sheet. He read it, slipped it inside his shirt.

"Now!" he said, and crouched. Tiny red veins flecked his eyes. He weaved on his toes, a snake about to strike.

Grim, white-lipped, Meservey waited. Like the flash of a sword blade, Anan leaped, arms curved for that white throat swimming in a bloody mist before him. Meservey hurled himself aside, but hands ripped through his khaki shirt, fastened in his shoulder. He twisted wildly, tore at the iron fingers straining for his throat. They crept nearer. He stiffened, reached suddenly for a body hold. Anan felt desperate arms lock round him. They bent him back, inexorable in strength. Fear pierced through the red haze in his brain. Was he to lose?

He heard a rib snap in his chest. Fierce pain flooded over him. He snarled wolfishly. The arms were crushing bands of steel. He settled, spread his legs, arched forward, calling every ounce of maniac strength to break the hold. His back muscles roped and corded. Sweat rained in his eyes. His spine was searing torture through its length. His fingers, though, at last had closed on Meservey's white throat. Anan felt the throbbing jugular beneath his thumb; pressed—harder, though he was drunk with pain. Suddenly the crushing grip about his middle slacked. The arms loosened. A limp thing sagged against him. He let it fall; staggered back against the mantel, breast heaving, sucking in great drafts of air. The room whirled dizzily but he found a chair, and, reeling to it, sank down. His head lolled, his lips drooled blood. Almost he had lost. Another minute in that crushing grip—— He shuddered. He had underestimated Meservey.

After a time he pulled himself up, slowly; looked about him. Meservey lay where he had left him, face down, both arms doubled under—horridly grotesque. Anan turned away. The red mist before his eyes had cleared. He began to think straight. At once he recognized the folly of the note. On the white flesh below Meservey's jaw the blood had congested, leaving a blue imprint of fingers. A fool would know that it was murder. He must do away with Meservey. Now! He sprang up, though a grinding agony beneath his breast bone made him wince. A glance at the clock hanging on the wall above the bed roll was reassuring. Eight forty, the hands said. He had the night before him.

Painfully he sat down to formulate a plan. First, the money. Emptying the canvas bag, he stacked the coins on the table. Less than a hundred dollars. Angrily he glared across the room shadows. Meservey had tricked him in this, too. Yes; but now he had paid for everything. Then Anan's eyes narrowed. He was thinking of a last reckoning the dead man might yet pay. Meservey's work, the excavation for the petroglyphs, was almost complete. He would destroy it, too, to-night. They who were paying for the work had already complained bitterly of the delay. This would finally discredit Meservey.

Anan reviewed this, turning it over, gloating on it. Dishonored his enemy would be in death. Suddenly a cry burst from him. A climax of inspired cunning. To cave off the canyon face, destroy the petroglyphs. was well enough. But *first,* a body would be placed under the hanging wall, for the rock slide to bury tons in depth. Thus at one stroke Meservey's work and all evidence of his murder should vanish.

Anan broke into laughter, but the echo in the silence chilled him, and he stopped. His breast pained him constantly, too. He never should have come to grips with Meservey. The knife —why had he been afraid to use it? He would find that knife before he left. It was evidence. He looked about him. He must arrange the room. There was not much to do—a rug to straighten; smooth down the dirt. Close against the body he glimpsed a bit of white. Rising carefully, he crossed the room, stooped down. Why, it was the letter Meservey had sent him to deliver—the letter for Elise Gillette. It had fallen from his pocket in the fight.

Though he had read the message many times, yet he opened it again, smiled bitterly. These written words were Meservey's death warrant. He turned the sheet to the last paragraph:

> We are driving hard to finish, so I won't come until Saturday. When this long job is done, I'll let Apache go. So you could learn to love him? You're wrong; no woman could. The bar sinister is on his breed; he does not belong to civilization. Don't make me jealous of him or I'll do murder quick. For all your love belongs to me.
>
> And mine to you. WHARTON.

Anan lost himself in the reading of the words. When he looked up again there was reborn venom in his eyes. "The bar sinister"; he laughed.

Moving to the table, he replaced the silver in the sack. There was food on the table that remained from Meservey's last meal. Anan placed the biscuits in the sack. He would want food by morning. Drink, too. He laid down the open sack, limped to the kitchen. There were lines of suffering in his face. The night was slipping by. He must lose no time, yet he could not drive his body faster.

As he returned a tiny shadow halted by the open sack and disappeared. Anan saw it but his thoughts were far away. The task ahead appeared tremendous. The hard journey up the canyon, the transport of the body, the dynamiting of the rock reef—and ten hours of desert trail to reach the border.

He dropped the paper bag of coffee in the canvas sack; tied the draw strings. The horses next. Meservey's pack animal, a gray, was loose in the corral; his saddle mount, a half-broke paint horse was hobbled in the canyon.

The wind was blowing gustily outside. He staggered through it to the corral gate. The gray stood docile, but Anan twice let the saddle fall as he tried to throw it. Half an hour was gone when he led the pack horse to the doorway of the house.

He wondered if he would have strength to lift the body. To bend down, to move quickly, brought a dizzy blindness now. But there was no other way; he must go on. Stiffly he knelt. Inch by inch, he shifted the inert form across his shoulders, and, half lifting, half dragging, the body, crawled to the door. The gray horse whistled in alarm and whirled to run. Anan, cursing feebly, snatched the bridle line and checked the frightened animal—then sank down, exhausted.

Suddenly he realized the body pressing against him was still warm. Perhaps Meservey lived. Perhaps he would live until the final scene and know a second and more awful death. Anan's face lighted. The thought comforted him. It brought him strength. He rose, untied the rope from behind the saddle, looped it below Meservey's shoulders and passed an end over the horn. Then, with his own weight as leverage, he swung the body across the saddle seat and tied it face down.

This, too, had taken time, much time. Inside the shack the clock hands pointed to eleven. It was at best a three-hour journey to the rims of the petroglyphs. Anan took up the coin sack, and paused to glance around the room. Its appearance satisfied him. There was absolutely no evidence of the struggle that had taken place. He turned through the doorway.

Below him the canyon slope was indistinct in shadow. He chirruped vainly, hoping the paint horse would hear. The steep descent was ominous. His head whirled as he glimpsed its dim outlines. The pain beneath his breast was sapping all his courage. He dared not set foot on the slippery rocks. But the half wild horse would never come to him. He must start down. Suddenly he heard the clink of shod hoofs, the rattle of loose rock. A cold sweat wet Anan's temple. He shivered in relief. A miracle; the paint horse had answered his call. Even through his suffering Anan felt a prescience of destiny. It was meant that he should carry out his purpose.

The horse, blowing with the effort, halted on the trail beside him, stood while Anan, seizing horn and cantle, dragged himself up. With the exertion a black vertigo surged over him. He gripped the short mane blindly or he would have fallen from the saddle.

Slowly his senses cleared. The worst of the task was done. He could rest now as he rode; regain strength. Meservey had hurt him badly. If only he were yet alive. It was then the thought of the knife recurred to Anan—Geronimo's knife, lying somewhere on the rocks below. He shook his head wearily. He had drained the last vital reserves; nothing was left. He must take chances that the knife would not be found.

Pressing his mount close, he took the gray's bridle line and set out on the trail. The strange cavalcade moved up the rocky slope—Anan swaying in the saddle, chin on breast; behind him the gray horse with its gruesome burden.

The wind sweeping through the canyons had increased its gusty force. It moaned and thrashed in the cottonwoods and piñons bordering the dry wash below the trail. Anan, his perceptions dulled by pain and stark exhaustion, was at first unconscious of the sound. Gradually, as vitality flowed back, he

became aware of it. The eerie wail penetrated his sick brain, he found his breath suspending as the wind's scream touched its crescendo, and when each time it died away he drew in deep, shuddering breaths. To him flooded half-shaped, fever-twisted memories, fragments of his racial superstitions, tinged by the white man's teachings. Destiny! This night had borne a proof of Meservey's belief. But after death? Meservey had said nothing of that. In the great university, young men scoffed and said there was no resurrection; but the old men of his tribe, dying in their smoked wikiups, prayed to many gods. The sun god; or Tusayan, the great serpent of the Mayas; or the devil god of night winds, the Coyote-that-eats-faces. Anan shivered. The wind had a strange sound to-night. Might it be that, after all, old Nana knew?

The wind died, the canyon for a moment was still. Then, far away, across the distant rims, floated gray shapes, shadows on the darkness; and a gurgle of high-pitched, mocking laughter came to Anan. His body stiffened. That was the Coyote-that-eats-faces! A chill ague shook him. His mount, feeling the sudden pressure of the rider's knees, stopped. But there was no repetition of the sound. The shapes vanished; and Anan, drawing a deep breath, laughed shakily. Only a pack of coyotes—*living* coyotes. Old Nana, for all his crafty cunning, had a child's brain. There were no gods; and no life after this. Yet with each beginning year, the cactus flowered, trees budded, and in the San Pedro the lush gramma grass sprang up anew.

Anan pushed on again. Queer waves of cold and heat were passing over him. The trail ahead appeared to writhe and weave. His shirt was drenched; sweat trickled down his face, following the ridge of suffering from nostril to lip corner, until he tasted salt. A white owl began its hunting call—vibrant, tremulous, starting shivery echoes that rebounded from the reefs of rock. Mist lifted a ghostly mantel from the canyon floors. When the trail narrowed or descended through a notch, the fog, settling, touched like clammy fingers on the rider's face.

Anan longed to throw himself on the rough trail and pray for days to come. He had erred; he knew it now. Of his tribe none, not even Nana or Geronimo, would kill when once the sun had set. But to whom should he pray? Not to Nana's gods. This was the time of demons—night. They were gathering. He saw leering faces in the dark; reedy thin voices followed him along the trail. Gradually a white throat with purple marks took form. He could see it just over his shoulder. He watched it a long time, then snatched suddenly and gripped with murderous strength. But there was nothing in his hands.

He closed his eyes. That did not shut out one leering face. Nana had sometimes removed the eyelids of his victims, staked them out to stare into the desert sun until they died. Anan felt the agony of this. Still he clung to the saddle horn. The painted reefs could not be far. He would endure this travail; it was destiny.

The trail began to ascend sharply. He looked up, recognized the toothed peaks that like a cordon ringed the pit-like canyon of the petroglyphs. His horse, climbing the steep grade, wheezed and panted. The clink of metal on rock told him that the gray was following.

Suddenly the trail leveled. Anan let the bridle lines go slack. Journey's end. To his left lay a clump of piñon, dense but stunted. In low manzanita that grew thick between these trees was Meservey's powder cache. Ahead, fifty paces, was the canyon brink from which sheer walls—the painted rocks—dropped five hundred feet. Below on the floor of the canyon were massed boulders, monolithic, cruelly edged. Two years

Meservey had taken to clear them from the canyon face and expose the pictured rock. A moment would destroy all. Slow, vengeful flame rekindled in the man's eyes as he looked across the chasm. Destiny!

He rode to the piñon grove. Here he paused, reviewed once more each detail of his plan. He nodded, bent to strip his shoe pacs. His head was spinning again. Dizzy, sick, he fumbled at the rawhide thongs; but at last drew up, the soft footgear in his hands. That much was done. Now he must remove the dead man's boots and put them on. Then there would be only Meservey's footprints on the summit. He moved around the gray. Slowly, pain in every movement, he unlaced the boots, drew them from Meservey. They were too small; it was torture to don them. Suddenly he realized the boots were *warm*. A shock of joy ran over Anan. There was life, still, in this man! He dared not pause, consider what that meant. Not yet. But his brain clung to the thought. He was drunk with a wine of vengeance. He realized that now he would have the last touch to vengeance.

Meservey alive! Anodyne to his suffering! All the while his lips kept framing the two words, as, reeling, he slid from his horse, staggered to the powder cache. He took up a roll of fuse, a box of blasting powder, a full box of dynamite. The weight of fifty pounds dragged him down like tons. He glanced at the single jack and drill steel; shook his head. No strength to sink a powder hole. But a full box—he smiled. It would cave back the bank to where he stood.

A quarter hour of agonizing toil before the grim stage of tragedy was set. Anan's white lips twisted with fierce pain at every movement, but, stoic in the torture, he drove himself on relentlessly. He carried the powder box close to the canyon rim, crimped a cap on a length of fuse, and buried it carefully in a split stick of dynamite, which he replaced with the others in the box.

He led the gray horse close, and, mounting the box, loosed the rope that tied Meservey on the saddle. The body slid to the loose soil noiselessly. He arranged it, head and shoulders propped against the box of dynamite. He staggered back.

"Meservey!" he cried in the shrill voice of exhaustion. "Destiny! It's overtaken you—you and your work. Wake up, Meservey!"

He laughed like a madman—a sound that rose and trembled, ending in a high-pitched strident scream. The echoes faded into silence. Meservey did not stir. But with the stillness of the canyon pressing down, Anan heard a voice from the shadows, *behind Meservey*—faint, but crystal clear. High and like no living voice. At first he thought it was the wind, but the wind had died. The sound seemed to mock his laugh, a cadence that was weirdly faithful. He bent down. Meservey's half opened eyes were glazed and lifeless. Still, it was Meservey who had answered; it must have been.

Anan's frayed nerves drove him to sudden fury. Clenching his fists, he hammered the still face with frightened savage impotence. His strength was soon exhausted. Panting, he sank down on one knee.

"Laugh, will you?" his own crazed mirth broke out, shriller, wilder. He checked abruptly; waited; for what he did not know. Once more the thin wail answered. There was sorrow, pity, in it, Anan thought. Red hate swirled before his eyes. Fear played like searing lightning through his brain. He sprang up, snatched the fuse end, fumbled for the match can. He would finish Meservey—now!

A last sane admonition made him pause. He was not ready. First, he must lead the horses to a place of safety down the trail. Weaving drunkenly, he

approached the gray. His hand found the bridle. Suddenly he straightened, his face bleached. He had heard the voice again wailing, sobbing, near—yet somehow far away. No, it was now close by. He stared through the darkness. He saw the money sack tied to the staddle strings. Meservey's. He listened, his heart beating loudly. The sound returned. It came—*from the money sack!*

Anan recoiled, but instantly grew calm. He understood. His tribal faith was proved. The souls of men did live again; were reincarnated, for here was Meservey's soul crying for a human habitation. Or, had it hidden there to taunt him with the futility of his revenge? Perhaps it even planned to kill him in some ghastly way known only to night demons. Nana had told him stories of this. His thoughts sped on. Then an inhuman light played over Anan's face. His hand flashed out, gripped the sack and tore it free.

The stimulus of terror brought power to his muscles. Striding to the cliff he raised the sack to hurl it on the rocks below. He paused. Would that kill Meservey's soul? He did not know. But he *must* know. His arm lowered. His wavering gaze touched the sack, then rested on an edged fragment of stone by his feet. He started, smiled craftily. He would kill Meservey's soul here—on this summit, where he could be sure. Then place it by the body, blow both to atoms. Double vengeance!

A shrill, feeble cry issued from the sack. Anan heard as he tossed the canvas on the ground by Meservey. He raised the edged stone in both hands, brought it down with a vicious swing. A shriller, sharper cry; then silence. Anan, hands clenched until the sharp rock cut his palms, waited a long time; but there was no sound except the uneasy shuffle of the startled horse. Anan smiled; let the edged stone fall. He had killed Meservey's soul.

In the release of crisis a spasm of shivering gripped him. Patiently he waited while it passed. There remained to lead the horses down the trail and light the fuse. He stepped forward wearily. An impulse halted him; he felt impelled to gaze once more at the man who, soul and body, he had destroyed. He bent down.

Into Meservey's eyes, like a slow sunrise, had come a vital spark. Fearfully the other watched it kindle and then glow. A noise of thunder rumbled now through Anan's head. His brain burned. His faculties seemed disintegrating. Then it came to him what he had done. His desire for double vengeance had reacted; he had gone too far. The soul of man was eternal—he had only driven Meservey's soul back into the body it had left.

Meservey lifted his head.

"Jim," he said, "what is this?"

The killer reeled. Flashes of white light appeared, blinding him.

"Your soul!" He pointed a shaking finger at the sack. "Trapped! It cried to me from the money sack! I drove it out!" Froth drooled from his mouth; he bit his lips until the blood ran. His body twitched with the riot of unstrung nerves. "I'm not done yet!" he cried. "Destiny!"

Stooping, he reached for the fuse end. A match flared in his hand. At the instant, from the sack came a feeble sound, a gurgling noise—the death rattle! Anan sprang up, a look of insane triumph on his face. Hoarsely he cried:

"Your soul is leaving you again!" His foot struck the sharp rock beside him. He stumbled, tripped, fell backward. Fighting madly to regain balance, he rolled faster down the slope. His hand with futile weakness tore at the bare, stony ground. He reached the canyon rim. His last desperate clutch fastened on a projecting root. His body hung suspended over the black chasm. Thoughts that spanned a lifetime passed

before him in that instant; but only one remained—destiny! The soul of Meservey had wrought its vengeance. His grip suddenly released. From the dark canyon floor came faintly a sound of snapping branches. Then the night was still again.

Workmen coming to the canyon of the petroglyphs found Meservey at sunrise. He had crawled into the piñon grove. His throat was swollen shut; he could not speak. He was delirious, they thought, for in one hand he held the gray, furry body of a desert mouse and would not give it up, but fought them till he fainted.

But Elise Gillette knew. That night in the dobe shack she sat by Meservey and listened to the grim tale he whispered slowly, haltingly. He finished. After a silence the girl said:

"It was Apache, then, who saved you? A mouse?"

"A singing mouse. They're strange little beasts. Freaks of nature, so biologists say. Some defect in the larynx gives them a voice. Still, they must love music, for Apache crooned his obbligato to my fiddling every night. I meant to have you hear it. I found I couldn't tame him, though. He'd die in civilization. Why, in the letter Anan failed to bring, I told you I meant to let Apache go." He shook his head. "Lucky I didn't. Poor Anan. He read that letter; misunderstood it. And he loved you. I'm to blame in part."

The girl stirred, gazed with tender love at Meservey. Then, frightened a little by the grimness in his face, she turned, looked about her. On the table lay the crumpled paper found on Anan's body—a leaf from a surveyor's field book. The words she knew. Bending close, she whispered solemnly:

"Blame no man for this death. *It is destiny.*"

Watch these pages for other stories by F. N. Litten.

ALL THE RADIUM ON EARTH

WHEN King George of England recovered from his recent illness and it became known that radium had been used in treating him, a fund of about one million five hundred thousand dollars as a national thank offering was subscribed by his subjects for the purchase of the element to be used to fight cancer and other diseases. The occurrence is a reminder that all the radium in the world to-day amounts to between two hundred fifty and three hundred fifty grams, or from one half to three quarters of a pound, and that the demand for it is naturally far in excess of the supply.

Memorial Hospital in New York has the largest amount in any one place or institution—eight grams. Doctor Howard A. Kelly, of Baltimore, who was one of the pioneers in its use in combating cancer, has five grams in his private hospital. Madame Curie, who discovered radium, has two grams of it in her laboratory in Paris, the original gram which she and her husband extracted, and another gram presented to her by American women.

Although radium has been produced from ores in several parts of the world, notably from the carnotite ores of Colorado, it is said now that the Belgian Congo with its pitchblende has practically a monopoly of it, producing to-day ninety per cent of the earth's supply. Extraction of the radium from ore is a difficult process. On one occasion it took six hundred tons of the Colorado ore to produce an amount of radium less in size than one half of a cigarette.

A Newspaper Man Becomes Amanuensis to a Specialist in Crime and Together They Visit a House of Death.

The BAYSWATER MURDER

By ROBERT H. ROHDE

CHAPTER I.

SEE IT—AND WRITE IT!

WHEN he walked into the city room of the *Transcript* that morning, Ted Herbert, star of the city staff, would have gambled his gray fedora that he was in for another dull and deadly day. Any one who could have assured him to the contrary, who could have given hm even a hint of the thrills just around the corner, might have had a very good hat as a gift.

There were two letters in his mail box.

The first brought a shadow to his face. Without opening it, he tore it thoughtfully into small bits, which he permitted to sift through his fingers to the littered floor.

He hadn't needed to read the communication inside the businesslike envelope. It was from his tailors, and he knew exactly what they wanted. So much for the suit he was wearing, so much for the newest two of the half dozen others in his closet, so much for the dinner coat just delivered.

And Batterby & Hodge had to be paid.

They turned out clothes without bulges or wrinkles, although in every other respect they fairly groveled to the finest tradition of English tailoring; and a reputation as the best-dressed man

on the Row was something worth sustaining, even at a price.

The superscription on the second envelope was in a familiar hand. Recognizing it, Herbert experienced a thrill which drove from his mind gloomy reflection on lean pay days to come. The writing was not of the sort called flowing. Not a letter showed a curve. The name "Theodore Trent Herbert" was spelled out in a series of straight lines and squares, exactly vertical, mathematically precise, so that it seemed rather to represent a problem than a person.

Herbert smiled as his finger explored along the envelope flap for a vulnerable spot. Here, at any rate, he thought, was one vindication of those passionate experts who insist that by the handwriting they can know the man. Exactly vertical in bearing, mathematically precise in thought, was Carrington Cloud himself; built exactly as he built his T's, with shoulders as sharp and square as those his pen stroke put upon the letter, and with a mind which the *Transcript's* reportorial ace appraised as by all odds the most extraordinary he had come upon in the whole of his journalistic career.

The note itself was characteristic of Cloud. No surplus baggage of words weighed upon the simple and simply stated wish:

Drop in immediately. Important. C.

Sans salutation, that was all; but it was enough to send Herbert across the room toward the city editor's desk at a pace far brisker than that at which he usually responded to a summons from the sanctified corner. A moment later he was swinging out of the office. Carrington Cloud, the wonder-working specialist who had recovered the Tillinghast diamonds and the Equity Trust bonds in the same week, a man who was reputed to carry under his hat more unprinted and unhinted news than the front pages of all the New York dailies could hold, were he to unburden himself, was not the man to be kept waiting when in a mood to forgather with the press.

As Ted Herbert disappeared a bald-headed personage under an eye shade pushed back until it poked up almost directly from his glistening scalp, like the brim of an old-fashioned bonnet, turned to a younger man sitting hunched over a pile of flimsy at his side.

"That connection of Teddy's with Cloud is priceless," he remarked. "I've got a hunch he'll be coming back with the big beat of the month."

Usually the *Transcript's* city editor was uncannily accurate in his hunches. In this, though, he was wrong; the law of averages wrecked him. It was not with the big beat of the month that Ted Herbert returned to the shop, but with his resignation.

Carrington Cloud, for once, had no news to disseminate. Ted had sensed that within precious few seconds after he stepped into the big bare office, high up under the roof of one of New York's famous Broadway skyscrapers of the pre-Woolworth period, to find Cloud pacing the floor, with his slender, nervous hands clasped behind his back and his chin sunk upon his chest.

A pair of gray eyes whose expression was queerly contradictory, eyes at once sharp and abstracted, which seemed to miss no detail of that at which they looked and yet to look altogether through it and seek another interest beyond, met Herbert's as he walked through the door that bore only the name of the office's occupant and the single enigmatic word, "Agent."

"I thought," said the reporter cheerfully, "that you were the one man I know who never wasted a word. And yet——"

"Tell me when I do, Theodore!" challenged Carrington Cloud.

"One in your note was wasted." The

reporter grinned. "I've never known you to interest yourself in affairs of small consequence. You might have omitted 'important'!"

Cloud shrugged, smiled faintly, and dropped into the chair behind his desk. The room held only one other seat, for it was the tenant's habit to receive his callers singly. "Two heads," he had told Ted Herbert months before, "are usually better than one. And more than two are seldom better than none."

Now, motioning toward the second chair, Cloud invited:

"Rest yourself, Theodore, and tell me how goes the busy world of newspapers."

Herbert delivered himself of an exaggerated yawn and lit a cigarette.

"Heigh-ho," he sighed. "There hasn't been a story worth a pinch of ink that's broken in the last six weeks."

"Hasn't there?" murmured Cloud. "Really, I've been wondering that some of you enterprising journalists haven't unearthed the most interesting sequence of events culminating in the suicide of Senator Brunt."

The *Transcript* man's chin went up with a jerk.

"Suicide! Why, there wasn't a hint of——"

Carrington Cloud lifted a thin, almost translucent hand.

"I've nothing more to say on the subject. There's a rather nasty international mess in the background which would best not be stirred. Certainly, I'd have no hand in the stirring, and I beg you to dismiss my remark from your mind. I merely wished to suggest that dull newspapers do not necessarily signify a dearth of news. Sometimes I quite give up hope of understanding the angle from which the dailies look at current events. Forgetting the Brunt affair for one closer home, why did reports of the Bishop murder disappear so quickly from the papers, for instance?"

"Because," said Theodore Trent Herbert, with just a trace of that tolerantly superior air which newspaper men are likely to give themselves in discussing with laymen the impalpable merchandise in which they deal; "because the case was open and shut. Interest in such a killing doesn't survive the mystery. So far as the Row was concerned, the arrest of the secretary closed the incident. You'll probably read no more of the matter until the trial."

"I see," nodded Cloud. "In the eyes of the newspapers arrest is equivalent to conviction. Their attitude must be pleasing to the police."

"In the Bishop case," Herbert assured him, "the police did an excellent bit of work—and in accomplishing it they killed the story deader than Homer Bishop himself. The 'authorities'—that's the handiest synonym journalism knows—have become too damned intelligent. And the quicker at solutions they are, Cloud, the more a job on a metropolitan daily comes to resemble staff work on the *Underwear and Hosiery Review*. Do you know how I spent four days of my valuable time last week? Covering the State conventions of the Professional Women's Whist League at Utica! And I came damn near resigning instead of taking the assignment. For excitement, Cloud, I'd prefer a good snappy job compiling time-tables for a patent-medicine almanac to newspaper work as it's come to be."

Herbert was at a loss to classify the expression which came upon Carrington Cloud's narrow and ascetic face. But the tone in which he spoke unmistakably was one of congratulation, even though his words took the form of an interrogation.

"You mean that you're tiring of journalism, Theodore?"

"Not tiring," replied the reporter positively. "That phase of the thing is in the past. I'm *tired!*"

Cloud leaped from his chair, twice paced the faded rug between desk and door, followed by Herbert's curious and a little startled eyes, and then came to a halt before the convention chronicler of business women's whist.

"Excellent!" he cried. "I had anticipated having to argue you out of a stubborn and unreasoning fondness for a craft which is, in the main, stupid."

"Stupid is the word," Herbert agreed, "and you can save the argument. What was to have been the reason for it? Why should you be so pleased that I have fallen out of love with newspapering?"

With a sparrowlike hop Cloud perched himself on the edge of the desk.

"The reason you shall hear," he promised; and preparatory to revealment he lit one of those long-tubed Russian cigarettes which came to him in ten-thousand lots from some mysterious source behind the Soviets' frontier. "I," he continued, "have a different sort of berth in mind for you. The fact is, Theodore, that for the next year—perhaps longer—I'll have personal need for the services of a practical writing man. I want a man who not only can write, but who has been trained to observe, like yourself."

"The devil you do!" cried Herbert. "What——"

Fleetingly, Carrington Cloud's normally impassive face showed a gleam of triumph.

"The editors of *The American Criminologist,*" said he, "have made the startling discovery that all progress in the several sciences entering into the field of criminal detection cannot be safely or fairly attributed to the official police. Arriving at that conclusion, they have been pleased to suggest that I write for them a series of at least twelve monthly articles describing my methods."

"You've accepted?"

"Conditionally. I told them I would not—absolutely would not—conduct any first-person discussion of my cases for publication. I couldn't do justice by my clients, I said, were my activities in their behalf colored by the thought that later I must make them the subject of a paper. The compromise we reached was that I should find me a Boswell—a sort of staff historian to accompany me on my investigations hither and yon, perhaps occasionally taking a hand in them. You've been frank, Theodore, to let me know the amount of your earnings on the *Transcript.* The rate per article which the *Criminologist* is willing to pay—being one of the most prosperous of our professional periodicals, the owners can afford to be generous—would amount to almost half again as much as your present salary. If you accept, the checks, of course, will go straight to you—intact."

"You've wasted another word!" declared Herbert. "It would break my heart if it turned out you were stringing me, Cloud. Otherwise, there's no 'if' about it. You don't know an experienced reporter who's looking for a job, do you? You might send him around to the *Transcript* right away. My revered city editor may not know it yet, but he's short a man. When, sir, does Boswell report for duty?"

"As soon," replied Carrington Cloud, "as he can disentangle himself from his journalistic obligations. It can't be too soon to suit me, for there's a rather pressing affair I'm anxious to get at." He smiled. "It's one, I may as well tell you, that we've touched on in our conversation."

"Brunt?" gasped Herbert. "I'm to be treated to a trip behind the scenes in——"

"No, not Brunt. The secret service is looking after that—and it's a case, moreover, not for discussion even in a staid technical journal. Open and shut you may call it, and no longer a mystery, but the matter which arises next on my calendar is the Homer Bishop murder."

"There's a doubt in your mind?"

"I'm never without a doubt except when I have handled and closed a case myself."

"I've heard you say that before, I think. May I ask how you happen to have a finger in the Bishop affair?"

"Through the invitation of his niece. If you'd followed the case in the newspapers as closely as a man of your late calling should have, Theodore, you might have been able to figure that out for yourself."

Herbert nodded.

"I think I could have," said he, "if it hadn't seemed easier to ask than to reason. Bishop's secretary was to have married the niece, wasn't he? Wasn't that at the root of his quarrel with his employer?"

"That," Cloud cautiously qualified, "is what has been said and accepted. Martha Bishop, though, is certain that a frightful mistake has been made. Not even his arrest served to shake her faith in this Will Dever. She sees him as the victim of a monstrous conspiracy, and it is to avert a possible miscarriage of justice that I have agreed to open a fresh investigation. Because of the police action already taken, the case suggests itself to me as a likely one for chronicling in the *Criminologist,* regardless of the outcome. Do you fancy the *Transcript* could be persuaded to turn you loose at once—to-day? I'd like to start for Bayswater to-night or to-morrow. Can you make it?"

Herbert jumped to his feet. His eyes were shining.

"I *will* make it! They've more good men sitting around the shop these days than they know what to do with. I'll be back here within two hours ready to start. You may depend on it, Cloud—and bless you for my rescue from sheer and utter boredom. The little Boswells, if and when, shall be taught to speak your name in their prayers, my benefactor!"

CHAPTER II.

MURDER MANSION.

BEFORE Ted Herbert left the office of the *Morning Transcript,* a free agent, he had taken occasion to read over the accounts of the Bishop murder in the files. With his memory of the circumstances of the crime and the personnel of the household thus refreshed, he knew when he accompanied Carrington Cloud to Bayswater the following day that it was the strongest of circumstantial cases which his friend had been retained to tear down. He was prepared, too, for a meeting with Daniel Wade, Homer Bishop's blind crony and quasidependent; but the meeting nevertheless gave him a start.

The blind man had entered the library of the stately old Long Island mansion—the very room in which Homer Bishop had died and in which his niece now stood in whispered conversation with the visitors to whom she looked to salvage her happiness—as silently as a shadow moves along a wall. The sound of his voice was the first intimation of his presence.

"You are here, Martha? The gentlemen are with you?"

Fire filled the girl's cheeks, for she could not know how much of what she had said had been overheard—and Cloud had been insistent that the true purpose of his coming should be kept secret. Until his investigation was complete, he had told her, he would adopt the name of Ross and the character of a junior member of the legal firm which had served Homer Bishop for twoscore years; while Herbert should be presumably a professional accountant engaged to check the estate.

Martha Bishop was quick to regain her self-possession.

"Yes; they both are here, Uncle Dan, and ready to begin their work."

Herbert had a feeling the information she offered was superfluous; that

the keenest of glances was raking him and Cloud from the ambush of those dead-black glasses, each the size of a cart-wheel dollar, which at once masked and proclaimed the sightlessness of Daniel Wade.

The blind man bowed a grave acknowledgment of Miss Bishop's introduction.

"I presume," he said in his soft, deep voice. "you will be with us for several days. A room in the west wing has been made ready for you. You will be comfortable, I am sure."

A moment of desultory talk followed. Then, touching sensitive finger tips to the face of the small watch which he wore strapped to his wrist, with its crystal removed, Wade remarked that the time had arrived for his afternoon nap. As silently as he had entered he passed from the room, bearing in a brisk and unerring course toward the door with his feet falling against the rug like feathers in their slippers heavily soled with felt. Not so much as the creak of a stair gave notice of his ascent to his quarters above.

Martha Bishop did not speak again until she had tiptoed across the room to assure herself that Wade had actually passed beyond earshot.

"If either of you has nerves," she said, returning, "I owe you an apology. I should have given you forewarning that Mr. Wade comes and goes like a wraith. He came to live with Uncle Homer when I was a small girl, and for months his sudden and soundless appearances used to terrify me."

"I can imagine," murmured Carrington Cloud. "But you called him 'Uncle Dan,' Miss Bishop. I didn't understand——"

"He's not exactly an uncle," the girl corrected, "nor even a blood relative of any sort. He married a favorite cousin of Uncle Homer's, and when she died he came here. That was sixteen years ago. I was taught as a child to call him 'Uncle Dan.' He is really a gentle and sympathetic soul; I can harbor no resentment against him, for certainly it was only a sense of duty which led him to disclose his suspicion that Will Dever killed Uncle Homer."

Cloud made himself comfortable on a lounge near which Miss Bishop had seated herself. He motioned Ted Herbert to a place of vantage whence he could keep watch over stairway and corridor without being shut out from the conversation.

"Now, Miss Bishop," Cloud said, "be good enough to tell me everything you know about your uncle's death; all you saw, and all you heard—and all you suspect."

The girl met his eyes frankly.

"I am without suspicions."

"Is it a fact, as I've read, that Dever had quarreled with Mr. Bishop?"

"That much is true. And I was the subject of the quarrel. But I know that Will——" She broke off with a half sob, and was silent until she had mastered herself. "No, their difference had nothing to do with Uncle Homer's death. My belief is that the murderer was some one who came to steal."

Carrington Cloud shook his head.

"I hope you're wrong, Miss Bishop. If it were a casual robber, matters would be considerably complicated for me—and for Dever. The trail would be cold now, and in two weeks the murderer could have put a great distance between himself and the scene of his crime. You were not, am I to understand, a member of the household at the time?"

"I happened to be here, visiting; but for more than a year I had been living at a settlement house in the city. Will had dined with me in town the night before I came to Bayswater, and we had decided it was time to let Uncle Homer know how matters stood."

"And it was on the night following that——"

"That Uncle Homer was killed, you

mean? Yes. I came in the afternoon to find Mr. Wade ill in bed and my uncle in the midst of one of his heroic bursts of energy. His greeting was most affectionate, but he soon retired to the library. He had been engaged on and off for years. you know, in compiling a history of the county, and he took the work most seriously. But aside from the single incident on which the police have seized, nothing occurred during the afternoon or evening which by any stretch of imagination could have been taken as foreshadowing the murder.

"Just before dinner Will went in to him. In less than five minutes he was back, wearing a long face. Uncle Homer, he said, had flown inexplicably into a rage when Will told him we planned to be married. That was astonishing to both of us, for we had made no secret of our attachment.

"So violent was Uncle Homer's opposition that Will offered his resignation to take effect the first of the month. As a matter of fact only a spirit of loyalty had kept him from accepting long before an excellent opportunity urged upon him by a young broker who had been his roommate at college.

"My uncle did not join us at dinner. Later, when I went into the library to present my own personal side of the case, he would not listen. It was the first time I had ever found him intolerant. 'The man is a fortune hunter,' he said. 'I know more about him than you do.' I challenged that, of course, but Uncle Homer would say nothing more. He remained in the library through the evening and was still at work when I retired."

"What time was that, please?" Cloud asked.

"About eleven. I know Mr. Bishop was all right then, for he answered when I called good night to him."

"Where was Dever then?"

"The night was fine, and he was starting for a walk."

"Did you hear him return?"

The girl's answer came slowly.

"I did not. I went to sleep almost at once."

"Unfortunate! And did any one else see or hear Dever on his home-coming?"

"Not—not unless Uncle Homer did. It was nearly one o'clock when he returned, and everybody else had retired. Will said the light still was burning in the library; but the door was closed and he did not go in. But Uncle Homer may have been dead then. His light burned all night. It still was on in the morning when Mrs. Tucker, the housekeeper, found his body. Her screams awoke me I threw on a dressing gown and ran downstairs Will came down a moment later.

"Uncle Homer lay just inside the door of the library, on his back, with one arm across his chest and the other flung out. He had died with his eyes wide open, and the look that death had frozen in them was a ghastly one."

Martha Bishop shuddered at the recollection.

"He'd been strangled?" queried Cloud.

"The red welts from the pressure of the murderer's fingers were still on his throat," said the girl, shivering again. "The doctor we called from the village couldn't place the time of the murder, nor could the others who came later. Uncle Homer. they said, had been dead 'several hours.'"

"Unfortunate again," remarked Carrington Cloud. "Can you describe the condition of the room for me, Miss Bishop?"

"It was almost exactly as you see it now. There were no signs of a struggle. That impressed me as a rather amazing thing."

"Nothing in a nature of a physical clew was found?"

"Nothing the detectives accounted valuable. Just beyond the desk, toward the door, a burned match lay on the rug;

and there was an uncanceled postage stamp on the seat of the desk chair. Neither the match nor the stamp interest the county police. I'd thought that detectives might read much in such apparent trifles."

"Sometimes they do," said Cloud. "I have done with less than a burned match and a postage stamp myself—but then I had not been called to my case at such a late hour."

He went to he desk and lifted the silver ash tray. After he had poked an exploring finger into the match box it held, he inspected the débris in the tray as absorbedly as if he expected to find there a sign to betray the slayer.

"The burned match—where was it?" he asked, and when the place had been indicated with the toe of a small and shapely boot he dropped to his knees and carefully examined the rug. He looked up a moment later to ask, quite irrelevantly, it seemed to Herbert, how far along its stick the match had burned.

"Almost to the end," replied the girl. "There was not enough of the stick for a finger hold left uncharred. On reflection, it occurred to me that would indicate that it was the murderer who used the match, since it evidently had been thrown down before it was out. Uncle Homer was extremely careful; he had a dread of fire."

When he had scrambled to his feet Carrington Cloud whispered an aside.

"Take note, Theodore," he said, "that I follow the best precedent. It appears from all I have read on the subject that at least some small portion of a criminal investigation must be conducted on all fours. Later on I may add a microscope to my tools. That would——"

He cut short the sentence. His eyes had darted to the door—where Herbert's should have been. Martha Bishop, too, had seen the man standing there, deferentially awaiting audience.

"What is it, Palmer?" she asked.

It seemed to Herbert that the eyes of the somberly clad servant gleamed with an unnatural brightness, but his voice was stolid:

"I was to show the gentlemen to their chamber at five thirty, miss."

Carrington Cloud rose.

"With your permission, Miss Bishop," said he, "I'd like to ask a few more questions, but they can wait."

The girl inclined her head.

"You are welcome to all the information I have, of course."

As he followed Cloud out of the room Herbert took a sharper look into the eyes of the man Palmer. And curious eyes they surely were, he told himself; very bright, very alert in their immobile setting—and abnormally cunning.

CHAPTER III.

THE MAN WITH CAT EYES.

BEFORE the man had left them Ted Herbert had made up his mind to keep close watch on the cat-eyed Palmer, but to Cloud he did not make outright announcement of his intention. He remarked merely that the butler did not look as if he were in the habit of telling all he knew.

"It's to be hoped," said Cloud dryly, "that his stock of secrets has not been added to in the last few minutes. I trust you won't find it necessary, Mr. Boswell, to include in your report of the case the fact that we've been surprised twice in the same afternoon."

"Did you notice his eyes?"

Cloud gave rather more careful consideration to the question than his companion thought it warranted. Suddenly he snapped his fingers.

"It *would* be interesting to see what's behind those black disks," said he. "Thanks for the suggestion, Theodore."

"The butler's eyes, I mean," Herbert told him. "I've never seen such eyes before."

"Oh!" murmured Carrington Cloud, and he smiled thinly. "But *I* have." Then he fell to whistling softly, standing with his back to Herbert and staring out the window that opened on the white-capped waters of the bay. Presently he said: "I must manage to see young Dever to-morrow."

"You really think it likely he is innocent?"

"I have formed no opinion," replied Cloud primly. "You may note that I place no trust in circumstantial evidence, unless it be evidence I have gathered myself. The reason for that will be plain to you in time. But what would you make of the case as a reporter, Theodore? What of Miss Bishop's burglary theory?"

"I think that can be discarded," said Herbert promptly. "Wouldn't any ordinary housebreaker have waited for the last light to go out—downstairs, at any rate—before he let himself in?"

"In all probability. And also, there's no evidence of forced entry nor attempted robbery."

"Which would indicate that Homer Bishop's will would contain one logical list of suspects?"

Carrington Cloud nodded. "You show possibilities of being more than a biographer, Theodore. Every person in this house the night of the murder would have benefited in some degree by Bishop's sudden death. In only one instance could the consideration have been held negligible to the beneficiary. To Daniel Wade, himself a man of independent fortune, the will gives no more than lifelong use of the mansion, in the running expenses of which I understand he has always shared."

Cloud lit a fresh cigarette.

"But we must consider," he continued, "that this will of Bishop's was drawn up four years ago. It would have been changed had Bishop lived another day or two. Whatever may have been their basis, the man's objection to the marriage of his niece and his secretary were very real. Immediately after his talk with Dever, he got in touch with his lawyers and dictated a codicil cutting off Miss Bishop's income from the trust provided for her at the moment she should become Dever's wife. The will when altered was to have been brought at once to Bayswater for his signature. Therein lies the strength of——"

Cloud broke off. He listened intently for a moment, then tiptoed swiftly to the door and flung it open. No one was ouside, nor was a soul visible in all the length of the corridor between the guest-room door at the far end and the steps dropping to the second story of the old main section of the mansion.

"I could have sworn I heard a stirring out there," said Cloud, closing the door carefully and flicking the long ash from his cigarette as he did so. "Did you notice, by the way, that we've not been provided with key or bolt?"

"Fortunately," remarked Ted Herbert, "we haven't anything of large value in our luggage."

Carrington Cloud laughed.

"An optimistic thought, Theodore. But haven't we a rather valuable pair of lives to conserve? Just so you may realize how far you have left the bickerings of the Business Women's Whist League behind, permit me to remind you that we are in a house in which a murder has been recently committed, and that the murderer, who would have no cause to love us, may be still a member of the household."

The smile remained on Cloud's lips as he spoke; nevertheless something told Ted Herbert at that moment that he never could sleep deeply behind that vulnerable door. And just as certainly he knew that Cloud, a creature absolutely devoid of nerves, would not think of the matter again.

"The burned match accounts for itself, of course," he hazarded, after waiting in vain for his friend to speak again.

"But don't you think that stamp may have——"

Cloud lifted a warning finger. His eyes were on the door, and as Herbert wonderingly followed his glance a sound came from directly behind it. It was a muffled sneeze. The sneeze produced an immediate echo in the form of a double rap.

"Come in!" called Cloud; and the door opened to admit the Bishop butler. Straightway, without conscious direction, Ted Herbert's eyes flew to those fascinating, to him unfathomable, eyes of Palmer. One of them was just now in watery eclipse.

"Dinner is served, gentlemen," he said stiffly, and marched away.

Vaguely Herbert felt there had been a touch of virtuous indignation in his manner and tone. He turned to Cloud, and saw that his shoulders were shaking.

"Jot down a note, Theodore," said he, "that cigarette ash introduced into a keyhole makes an excellent safeguard against peepers—and preferably the pungent ash of a full-bodied Russian tobacco."

CHAPTER IV.

THE DIARY OF DEATH.

THERE were just the three at dinner—Martha Bishop, Cloud and Herbert. Daniel Wade, the girl explained, was in the habit of taking his meals alone in his rooms.

"During the last few years," she said, "Uncle Dan has been keeping more and more to himself. Now he is almost a recluse. The change in him has been particularly noticeable to me because I have been so long away from Bayswater, first at school and college and lately at the settlement. His rooms now form a home within a home; he rarely leaves them."

Over coffee they were free for a space of the hovering Palmer, and so learned more about Wade. Born blind, and with a fine compensating musical talent, he had been a conservatory student when he met Homer Bishop's cousin. When the two married they had abandoned the careers of which both had dreamed for a country place in New York's outermost suburban reaches, not far from Bishop's. And then, at the bride's death, Bishop had opened his home to the blind and bereft Wade. They may have been a pair with a grief in common; at any rate Miss Bishop suspected her Uncle Homer, too, had loved the woman who was dead.

Later, Carrington Cloud asked casually about the servants. He learned that besides the housekeeper and Palmer there were two maids, a cook and a gardener. Homer Bishop, although he owned two automobiles, had not employed a chauffeur; either he had driven himself or had been driven by his secretary.

"What," queried Cloud, "do you know about—well, Palmer, for instance?"

Martha Bishop looked up at him quickly. Before replying she cast a glance as swift toward the pantry door through which the butler had disappeared a few seconds before.

"An enigma. All good butlers are that, of course; but Palmer grants himself an extraordinary and unprofessional indulgence. He has moods."

"Had he been long in your uncle's service?"

"At least ten years."

"And the rest?"

"All were here when Palmer came."

"Superficially," said Cloud, "that would seem to eliminate the servants. And now, Miss Bishop, don't you think we'd better make a pretense of getting to work?"

As he followed the girl from the dining room fairylike music whose notes wove themselves into a gossamer web of sound were echoing in the wide lower hall. Somewhere above a master of the pianoforte was evoking from an

instrument of singularly vibrant tone the rhythmic homophonous swirl of the Mendelssohn "Spinning Song."

"Uncle Dan will be playing the whole evening," said Martha Bishop, closing the library door after they had stood a moment to listen. "That is his habit when once he begins. By the way, I saw him after you had gone to your room. He wanted me to tell you it would be useless to question him in regard to Uncle Homer's affairs, since theirs was a wholly intellectual companionship. Talk between them, he said, never touched on business."

"Good!" was Cloud's comment. "That means I won't have to worry about dissembling for a while, so far as he's concerned, at least." He blinked at the chandelier, whose crystals had just leaped to flame at the pressure of the girl's fingers against the wall switch. "Do you rely entirely on electricity for lighting here, Miss Bishop? I——"

"Altogether. Uncle Homer had the gas fixtures removed years ago, and the pipes were capped at the time."

"I should imagine," mused Cloud, "that the service would be none too dependable in an isolated place like this. Or do you have your own generating plant?"

"No, the current is supplied by the local company. To my knowledge, though, it has never failed."

Carrington Cloud leaned back against the big desk, hands in pockets.

"Then what's the explanation of the match on the rug? I have assured myself it was out—thoroughly out—when it was dropped. There's not a sign of the nap having been singed. My eyes and my finger tips told me it had not been. My belief is that Mr. Bishop died in the dark. It is not the man lighting a cigar or pipe or cigarette who lets a match burn so far down as you say this match was burned; the man who holds one until his fingers are scorched wants—*light!*"

Without waiting for answer to his question or comment on his deduction, Cloud tried several drawers of Homer Bishop's desk.

"Uncle Homer," the girl volunteered, "kept only one drawer locked. This one." She pointed to the top drawer on the right-hand side. "There's the key in the pin tray, I think. The police found it in his pocket."

Miss Bishop opened the locked drawer for Cloud. He had looked through the others and had found, Ted Herbert was certain, nothing of interest. Nor had Homer Bishop, plainly, kept anything of large importance under lock. A forward compartment of the top drawer held a miscellany of petty cash, papers clips, rubber bands, loose stamps and pencils. In a larger rear compartment were stacked sheets of the uncompleted county history in manuscript and a leather-bound diary with monogram in gold and a clasp of brass.

Carrington Cloud drew out the diary and passed it to Herbert.

"Look through it, Theodore," he invited. "Diaries have solved mysteries before." His eyes swept the room. "No safe, Miss Bishop?"

"Uncle Homer never had one here," replied the girl. "Burglars would surely have been disappointed. In the whole house they would have found little of value to them."

At that point Herbert lost track of the conversation. Idly glancing through the diary he had come upon a few sentences in Homer Bishop's fine script which seemed fairly to leap out of the page at him. Under a date of some three weeks before Bishop had written:

> For better or worse, I have taken drastic action this day. He begged me to shield him, above all to keep the truth from Martha. That must be done.

The thread broke there. Succeeding entries on the same page concerned

minor household matters; later there was recorded the discovery in the village library of a book throwing certain treasured new sidelights on the early trials and achievements of one of the first families to settle in the vicinity of the future Bayswater.

Herbert, his old newspaper instinct thoroughly aroused, went further back in the diary, withholding announcement of his discovery from Cloud and the girl until he should have learned more. After a minute or two of haphazard floundering, he set himself to the task of reading through from the beginning of the year's record. In January nothing of interest appeared. Then, on the third day of February, Bishop had written:

This day I have made a discovery which accounts for many things. To think that for so long he has had my absolute trust. Yet even knowing his true character, I hesitate to turn him away. I must not be hasty. The problem must be thought out.

That day Homer Bishop had written no more. But something less than two weeks later this appeared:

Had a long talk with Dever to-day, and was on the point of telling him what I knew. Somehow I could not bring myself to do it. The thing may yet come straight without the making of an open issue.

Herbert, whose fingers now trembled with eagerness as they turned the pages of the diary, found no other entry of the series until he came upon one written three days before that which had originally caught his eyes. This was:

It does not improve, but grows worse. I must act. Martha must be protected. She plans to spend the summer here. Can she do that and not discover the truth?

Only these four times had Homer Bishop written in his diary of the thing which was preying upon his mind. Assured of that, Herbert marked each of the pages with a paper clip. When he looked up Carrington Cloud's eyes were on him.

"You don't need to tell me you've made a discovery, Theodore," said Cloud. "What is it? Had Mr. Bishop been writing of his murderer-to-be?"

"It looks that way," Herbert told him. "But he seems to have left it for you to supply the name."

Cloud reached a thin hand for the diary and glanced rapidly over the pages which had been marked for him, a many-wrinkled frown furrowing his high forehead. When Miss Bishop would have read over his shoulder he slipped the book into his pocket.

"You'd get nothing from it," said he. "I must give the entries further study myself. They seem ambiguous."

Cloud's voice was gentle, and Herbert thought the shadow which swept the girl's face betokened an instinctive alarm. She bit her lip, and very shortly afterward left them alone.

"The diary makes it look rather worse for Dever, don't you think?" remarked Ted Herbert when she had gone.

"Do you think so?" asked Carrington Cloud, and relapsed into a silence that lasted an hour. He sat during that time in front of the fire which had been kindled in the library while her guests were at dinner with Miss Bishop. He gazed moodily at the diary held closed in his hands.

The log was burning low; and, with the lights switched off, the great room was in darkness except for a narrow circle around the hearth. The piano upstairs was silent; no sounds came to Herbert's ears save the cry of a distant owl and the occasional snappings of the dying blaze. He carried to bed with him an uneasiness of spirit born of the swooping of the back shadows in the room where Bishop had died; and he found the discovery that the keyless and boltless door moved soundlessly on well-oiled hinges of no particular assistance in composing himself for sleep.

CHAPTER V.

SECRET MEETINGS.

IN the morning Cloud awoke with a heavy cold. "Now, how the devil," he croaked, sitting on the edge of the bed and gingerly patting his chest, "should this be? The night was warm enough."

Herbert, who found himself with an incipient cough, recalled he had felt chilly.

"I laid it to imagination, though," he said. "The place is a bit on my nerves. It's spooky, Cloud."

The other laughed.

"I'm glad to hear you say it, Theodore. It means at any rate that you're being lifted out of your former state of ennui. Seeing that you enter so well into the spirit of your new employment, perhaps you'll look into a couple of small matters for me. I'm rather curious about that question of lights. Get in touch with the company, won't you, and find out just when they've had shutdowns within the last month. Then ascertain how the lighting system is controlled within the house. That's about all, I guess. I'll be going over to the county seat to talk with Dever directly after breakfast."

To Ted Herbert the assignment was a simple one. Cloud had not been gone a half hour when he had answered for the questions. The chart at the Bayswater power plant, he learned by telephone, showed not even a momentary cessation of service for many weeks back; and he had only to use his eyes to locate the switch box in the second-floor hall of the main house. Finding the door of the box locked, he circuitously broached the subject of lights to Mrs. Tucker, the housekeeper, and asked who had the key.

"Palmer," she said, and would have called him.

"Don't bother," Ted hastily begged. "The library desk light seems to be off, but I won't be needing it until to-night. Perhaps it's just the bulb that has given out, anyhow."

As he sat in the library later, with Homer Bishop's check book and a scratch pad filled with meaningless figures before him, Herbert turned this last piece of information over in his mind. And with each turning it seemed to him more interesting that the person who could plunge any part of the house into darkness at will—or all parts, for that matter—should be the spying butler. So he was speculating when the door opened. From the threshold where he stood tentatively, the gnomelike head with its heavy black eye shields swung a little to one side, the soft voice of Daniel Wade came to him.

"You are working here, Mr.—ah—Ross?"

Herbert, taken off guard, groped desperately in his mind for his own pseudonym. Never before had he had occasion to use a name not his.

"No, it's I—Arkwright," he said, when at length his vacationing memory came to his rescue. "Mr. Ross has gone to arrange for the appraisal of Mr. Bishop's local properties, I believe. Miss Bishop took him in the machine."

Wade had advanced with the sureness of one possessing perfect vision and the noiselessness of a phantom. He raised a hand as Herbert thought him about to walk into the heavy chair for which he had been heading, tapped its back and arms with deft fingers and dropped into it.

"And how," he asked, "are you progressing?"

"As rapidly as could be expected," Ted improvised.

Daniel Wade lifted his head at the sound of the voice.

"You have a cold, Mr. Arkwell," he said with quick solicitude.

"The name is Ark*wright,* sir," corrected Herbert. "Yes; I've picked up a cold, but it doesn't amount to much."

"Too bad," said the blind man; and then with a gentle smile lighting his face he added: "Too bad, I mean, that you should be under the weather at all."

At that moment Herbert coughed. Wade lifted a hand which, though large, was shapely and well cared for.

"Dear, dear!" he exclaimed. "This won't do. Unfortunately our furnace fire has been permitted to go out until another year, but I'll see there's a gas heater in your room this very night."

"Don't trouble," said Herbert. "It won't be necessary."

"Oh, but it will," Wade insisted. And then, after a little silence, he remarked: "I suppose your work takes you to some queer and unhappy places. Our last visitors were the detectives, you know. A ghastly and terrible business!"

"The detective business?" asked Ted innocently, permitting himself a smile.

"Yes, that, too. But I was thinking of the tragedy enacted in this very room. I have tried not to think of it, but that is impossible. You, of course, have——"

"I've read the newspapers," said Herbert.

The blind man shook his head sorrowfully.

"Will Dever—the secretary whom the police have arrested, you know—he seemed an estimable young man. By the way, Miss Bishop thinks him innocent, does she not?"

Now all the faculties which had combined to make Theodore Trent Herbert one of Park Row's best reporters were on the alert. He replied that his conversations with Homer Bishop's niece had been concerned only with the business which had brought him to Bayswater.

"Oh, yes!" cried the blind man. "I'm sure she believes him guiltless. And there will be more detectives. Be certain of that. Yet I had it from Homer's own lips that he was in deadly fear of the fellow. I never knew why, but what Homer told me was——"

Wade's voice halted abruptly, and abruptly he rose. The butler, whom Herbert again had not heard approaching, stood in the door.

"Miss Bishop and the gentleman are returning," he announced.

"And in that case I'll be going," smiled Daniel Wade, and in his swift, shadowy way he took himself out of the library and up the stairs.

Carrington Cloud, entering the room a few seconds after the blind man had vanished, listened with interest to Herbert's report.

"So Palmer has the key, has he?" he murmured. "Well, I can give you some information concerning the same person in exchange for yours, Theodore. Almost every week, for months past at least, our friend the butler has been meeting a flashy-looking man from the city at a pool parlor in Bayswater village. They usually met about midnight. There have been nights, I learn, when the man from town has failed to show up—and it would appear that the night Homer Bishop was murdered was one of them."

"Palmer was out of the house that night?" demanded Herbert.

"I know he was in the village at one o'clock, when the pool room closed. And the village is a mile from the house."

"You've seen Dever?"

"No; I think I found a more important use for the morning. Don't you? At all events I've worked up an appetite. Let's go in to luncheon now. Afterward I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to resume your vigil in here."

CHAPTER VI.

A CHASE IN THE DARK.

THROUGH the afternoon Ted Herbert had the library to himself. He passed the time with an examination of Homer Bishop's unfinished county

history, which he found soporific alike in subject matter and in style. Cloud, who had left the house afoot, did not return until a few minutes before Palmer appeared to announce dinner He made no reference to his activities of the afternoon. After dinner—Miss Bishop having gone to visit friends who had sent their motor for her—he again sat hunched in front of the library fire until the last glow was going from the embers. His thoughts he kept to himself until he was ready, and Herbert more than ready, to turn in.

"It's a ticklish problem of procedure, my Boswell," he said then. "I'd wager a year's fees that I know why Homer Bishop was killed, and another that I could name the murderer. But I've not a scintilla of proof."

"Don't you think," suggested Herbert, "that it's about time you were taking your staff correspondent into your confidence? I scarcely know more about the case than if I'd been sitting in the *Transcript* office waiting for you to call up with the yarn."

Carrington Cloud's smile widened into a yawn.

"I brought you along, Theodore," said he, "not as a consultant but to absorb atmosphere. The less you know of my reasoning before I've reached my conclusion, the better you'll be likely to serve the *Criminologist*. And just now it has become a problem for sleeping on."

He broke off with another yawn, which was succeeded by a fit of coughing. Over this he shook his head; and when he and Herbert were upstairs he immediately ripped back the covers of his bed and ran his hands over the sheets."

"Feel them, Theodore, and report," he directed. "Damp, eh? Yes, our coughs were made to order for us, I think. A little water sprinkled on the sheets is recommended highly for inducing pneumonia in the sleeper."

Herbert laughed. "Who has the nerves now?"

"I mean it," said Cloud seriously. "It's a device with which more than one homicide has been gracefully accomplished. I have the Crocker case in mind. But, of course, that means nothing to you; the affair never got into the newspapers. We can bank upon it, now that our presence gives annoyance to some one in the house."

His companion stared at him. Then, reassured that Cloud was in earnest, he became aware for the first time that the room held a drowsy warmth. Daniel Wade had not overlooked his promise to make his guests comfortable. The gas heater had been installed and lighted. To Cloud it suggested a way to dry the sheets, which he stripped from both beds and draped on chairs in front of it. That done, he switched out the lights and sat himself cross-legged on the floor beside the heater.

"We are complimented, Theodore," he said, "to have engaged the personal attention of so scientific an assassin. A bit more thinking is called for before we turn in. I haven't survived all these years to come to my finish in Bayswater, I hope."

It was not long before Herbert heard the drone of a motor, and the distant opening and shutting of doors; but at least an hour passed after Martha Bishop's return and Carrington Cloud still crouched there, wreathed in tobacco smoke and intently watching the play of the blue and red and yellow lights in the heater. Herbert had begun undressing when the rows of tiny flames started, at first almost imperceptibly, to lower. They went down little by little until at last they were pin points. Then even the pin points flickered out; and in an instant, with a thousand thin whistlings, the gas came on again.

"On with the light, Theodore!" Cloud called softly.

Herbert, who had been sitting on his

bed within easy reach of a reading lamp, gave the cord a jerk. The room remained in darkness. As he made for the wall switch controlling the other lights Ted barked his shin against a chair; and when he had found the switch and turned it nothing happened.

"No lights!" he sang out.

"Never mind," came Cloud's cheerful reply from the other end of the room. "I've got the thing turned off. Whew! Smell it already! It's a lucky thing for the Messrs. Arkwright and Ross that they didn't go to sleep this chilly night with their heater on. I doubt even an open window would have saved them!"

Herbert read the thought behind the words as they were spoken. The shutting off and turning on of the gas had been no accident. Some one—the same mysterious some one who had dampened the sheets—had been tampering with the gas meter. Ted's shoes were off, but in lightness of foot he was neither a Wade nor a Palmer. Cloud heard him as he ran for the door and called sharply: "What're you up to?"

"A dash of investigating on my own account," replied Herbert; and heedless of a protest he raced along the black hall. Pitch-dark though it was, he had every confidence in his ability to make quick time to the lower corridor and there to intercept any one coming from the cellar, where, of course, the gas meter must be.

Except for Herbert's own swift footfalls the house about him was still. Reaching the end of the corridor he leaped down the steps connecting the guest wing with the older part of the house, congratulating himself that instinct had told him just where he would encounter them. A dozen paces straight ahead then and another dozen or so to the left would bring him, he calculated, to the head of the main staircase.

But a rug on a polished floor of hardwood is a hazardous thing under running feet. An instant after Herbert had made the turn to the left his legs shot from under him, and he tumbled into a black and bumpy void. This was the staircase—and as he realized it, Herbert came into violent collision with another wanderer in the darkness, who recoiled, lost balance and thenceforth thumped along with him. He struck bottom with a leg doubled under and his fellow traveler on top of him. The pain in his leg was excruciating, and for a moment he lost consciousness. When he opened his eyes the hall light was on, and Carrington Cloud was bending over him. Herbert's arms still held the companion of his fall—Palmer, the butler. The man was struggling for speech, but apparently had not the breath for it.

Above him Herbert could see a head that was unmistakably Daniel Wade's extended over the railing of the stairwell. His distressed voice floated down.

"Is some one hurt? Dear, oh, dear, what will it be next?"

Herbert stifled a groan. Before the pain again conquered his senses he managed to gasp out:

"My leg, Cloud! I'm afraid I've bunged it up pretty badly."

The blind man at the railing caught the whisper.

"Oh, it's poor Mr. Parkwright," he lamented. "Poor, poor Parkwright! Are you there, Palmer? Is it serious?"

CHAPTER VII.

BLIND MAN'S BUFF.

SYMPATHY had been called for. Herbert's left leg had snapped between knee and ankle, and thus the high moment approaching found him flat on his back and no more formidable than a child.

It was daylight when the doctor arrived from the village, set the bone and put the leg in splints. The break, he assured Herbert, was a clean one and would mend surely and quickly. When

Ted dropped off finally into an uneasy sleep Carrington Cloud was still sitting beside his bed, entirely wakeful.

"We must bide our time," he had said soberly when Herbert demanded to know why he had not immediately taken steps to put the butler under restraint. "There's something hidden in the house here, I'm convinced, which would make me master of the situation if I could find it. Once I have it—well, then I may go to the officials with a clear-cut case instead of merely a fantastic theory. I'm only hoping I shall not have to invoke police power to bring a break in the situation. For one more day I'll go along on my own."

It was not Cloud but Martha Bishop who was in the bedside chair when Herbert awoke.

"Mr. Cloud had Palmer in the library for more than an hour this morning," she told him. "He seems to be making progress at last."

"This morning?"

The girl smiled.

"You've slept well. It's long past noon now. Aren't you hungry?"

She fetched a luncheon tray and all through the afternoon devoted herself to her self-imposed duties as nurse. It was she also who brought dinner, and for that Herbert was grateful. Pain had not entirely killed his appetite, but he felt he could not have partaken with gusto or even equanimity of food which had passed through the hands of the aberrant butler.

"You're not the only one on the sick list." Martha Bishop told him as he ate his second meal in bed. "The excitement of last night was too much for Mr. Wade. I've urged him to have the doctor, but he won't hear of it."

The girl went to join Cloud then; and when he came to the room after dining tête-à-tête with her, the face which he turned to his fallen Boswell was both sorrowful and grim.

"I've missed out on my one chance," said he. "We'll have to get a more powerful agency to work if the truth is to be established in a way to clear Dever and satisfy the law. I can tell you the man's innocent, and prove it morally; but my position has its limitations. I can go no farther as a free agent without unduly jeopardizing the one in whose interest I've been employed."

He would talk no more. Deep in one of those profound preoccupations which Ted Herbert was to come to know so well, he sat smoking with his feet on a window sill, watching the marshaling of the storm clouds in the east. It was an inky night, and rain was beginning to patter down in great scattered drops when he called a good night and climbed into bed. After he had switched off the lights the darkness of the room was absolute; nor did Herbert's eyes grow used to the gloom.

Cloud was soon asleep, as Herbert knew from his measured breathing, but for Ted there was no sleep. He lay harassed by dire imaginings. To be helpless in that house of cryptic death, wittingly under the cabal of its evil genius and to all intents and purposes as blind as Daniel Wade himself, gave him such a feeling of impotence and terror as he never before had experienced. He tried to imagine himself back in the life of the Row he had deserted. If he hadn't been ass enough to throw up his good old job he'd be walking from the office about now with two sound legs under him; then there'd be a couple of hours in the stud game at the club, and a bed waiting him in a hotel where a man's slumbers were decently safeguarded—where doors locked and every second guest wasn't under suspicion of cherishing the thought of murder in his heart.

A far-off clock struck midnight; then the half hour and the hour. Herbert was listening for it to strike again when a chill slap of air striking his cheek

brought the whole of his morbid train to swift focus.

Had the door—the door which had no key and made no sound—been stealthily opened? Was he still alone in the guest room with the sleeping Cloud? Was it some sentinel sixth sense, or only an overstrained and semidelirious imagination that warned of a new and inimical presence?

The impulse to pull the cord of the reading lamp became irresistible. Herbert's hand groped for it, grasped it; with a revulsion toward caution, and yet ready to laugh at fears soon to be proved foolish, he gently pulled it down. But the time for the laugh was not then. The current was off again.

Matches? There wasn't one in the room, Herbert knew, except for those in the clothing which the orderly Cloud had draped on hangers in the closet. And in the closet, too, as remote from him with his broken leg as if it had been in Africa, was the automatic pistol he had slipped into his pocket before starting for Bayswater.

Not in all his reportorial days, not even in his days in front-line trenches, had Herbert known another passage of time to be compared with that during which he lay in that insufferable silence and blackness, his eyes and ears futilely straining and his heart beating trip-hammer tempo. It was unendurable; it had to end. Herbert felt the dark was fairly choking him when a flood of light poured suddenly through a window. Later he realized that an automobile had just breasted the hill beyond the house; now the breaking of the gloom seemed a miracle.

The light did not touch Herbert's bed, but fell full upon Carrington Cloud's; and it revealed to Ted's startled eyes a tall figure moving fatefully along with one hand trolleying on the opposite baseboard. The flashing of the light did not halt the steady advance. Of that Herbert had the explanation before the beam swung away, for the last moving rays had struck fire off the ebon round deadwalls that were the eyes of Daniel Wade.

It was then Ted drew his first deep breath since the premonition of danger near at hand had gripped him.

"Cloud!" he cried. "Wake up!"

Absolute darkness reigned again, but Herbert was not kept in doubt that his warning had been too late. Cloud's faculty of leaping from deepest sleep to full wakefulness had not deserted him. Immediately came his voice:

"Hello!"

Then a grunt, a scuffling, a heavy thump—and again the voice of Carrington Cloud, quick and cool:

"The light, Theodore!"

"Off!"

A laugh from the blind man, more horrible for its lightness, greeted the answer.

"Can't you see?" mocked Wade out of the blackness. "Come, Mr. Prowler, and I'll have a game with you that's better played in the dark!"

"I've been thinking you'd played it before," replied Cloud. He seemed much closer to the other bed. Herbert could make out, he thought, the white blur of him.

"And I," said the blind man softly, "have been thinking you think too much. My ears served me well the day of your arrival. And I'll gamble that I have the better eyes of the two of us for a night and a place like this. And the stronger hands. That's from the pianoforte, you know. Playing's a splendid exercise for hands.

To Herbert, Wade's voice had a ventriloquial effect of seeming to come from first one part of the room and then from another. He judged the blind man was moving about, and fancied his big, soft, deadly hands groping through the tinker's-pot dusk. Nor did he need to hear more to know that Wade was completely and homicidally mad.

Cloud knew that, too. Unarmed, seeing nothing, knowing further words would serve only to signal his whereabouts to the sure ears of the sightless maniac, he held his position and his peace. Herbert was sure now that Cloud and the whitish blur were one, that his friend stood at the foot of his bed to protect him should the attack be diverted.

A few seconds ticked off in silence, seconds that to Herbert were æons each. Then Wade found Cloud and the two crashed together against the foot of Ted's bed, caromed off and fell to the floor. Herbert knew what had happened as surely as if his eyes had served him instead of his ears. There was only one way, he thought instantly, in which he could lend aid to Cloud—to shout and to keep shouting until the whole house had been aroused; to shout until people came with lights. But before he had gathered his breath the lamp at his side flared on.

Cloud and Wade then were almost in the exact center of the room. The blind man's hand was at his adversary's throat. Cloud, gripping Wade by coat and leg, was sinking slowly to his knees.

It came to Herbert that with light there was another way in which he might be a factor in Carrington Cloud's struggle for life. He struggled upright, gritting his teeth against the pain, and snatched up the heavy glass water pitcher which stood on the table beside the reading lamp. With all his force he hurled it at Wade's bending head. And then, to Herbert, darkness came once more.

CHAPTER VIII.

RESCUED ROMANCE.

SOME hours after the doctor had set Ted Herbert's leg for the second time and had gone his way, admonishing the patient to attempt no more athletics, Carrington Cloud sat at the bedside of his Boswell.

"Now," Herbert told him, "I'm comfortable enough to be curious—and devilish glad you've turned up at last. What happened? Was my aim fair?"

Cloud chuckled.

"Your arm was good, Theodore. The pitcher would have cracked Wade's skull if it had struck him. Look at the dent it made in the wall yonder!"

"I missed?"

"Don't reproach yourself. The man's head was a moving target. I'd just fastened onto him with a proper jujutsu grip. He went over my shoulder as the pitcher left your hand. That ended our scrimmage, for he hit the floor hard."

Herbert closed his eyes a moment, for his mind still was none too clear.

"What's happened to Wade?" he asked presently.

"He's on his way to the county hospital. He'll be technically under observation there, but a prisoner nevertheless.'

"And Miss Bishop?"

"She should be back in the runabout any time now—with her vindicated Will Dever."

"What's become of my own especial prize—Palmer?" Herbert wanted to know.

"It's to him we owe thanks for switching on the lights," said Carrington Cloud. "But he won't be serving the luncheon to-day, I'm afraid. The county officials have come to set great store by him in connection with the murder of Homer Bishop. They've taken him away for safe-keeping as a material witness. Oh, no, Theodore; they didn't take Palmer for the crime. You wronged him by your suspicions."

As he spoke Cloud had been caressing his throat, on which two angry red marks showed.

"Wade might have added when he remarked that piano-playing puts strength into the hands," he said, "that insanity quadruples the force of the grip. But the *Criminologist* won't be inter-

ested in that. Shall I give you a summary of the teachnical points of interest? Very good, then."

Cloud watched a curl of smoke mount lazily ceilingward.

"In the first place," he continued, "I had three fairly well-established facts and a guess to guide me—and in addition I knew that Palmer had been spying on us and thus was probably a party at interest.

"From the match on the rug, as you know, I gathered that Bishop had died in darkness. The information you were good enough to get for me from the power company made it quite certain that, my original thought being correct, the lights had been cut off at the switch box in the house. Then there was the stamp on the chair seat, of course. Obviously it had dropped there after Bishop rose, for it was curled but not creased. That led to the conclusion the murderer had been after something in the locked drawer. It held many loose stamps, as perhaps you noticed. This one found in the chair, I fancied, might have fastened itself to the sleeve of a groping arm and then fluttered off. Do you follow me, Boswell?"

Herbert contrived a nod.

"We might have known so much," Cloud resumed, "and never have found out more. I have to thank you for a suggestion concerning eyes. Palmer's eyes are peculiar—and I was rather surprised that a newspaper man of such experience as yours should not have read his story and his tragedy in them. The man's a drug fiend. I knew that at first glimpse of him; but oddly enough it took your question to set me wondering whether Wade might not be. Therein, I thought, might be found a solution of the murder which would free Dever.

"Now, those entries in the diary might have concerned Dever or Wade or Palmer, as you must see. Nevertheless, they were helpful by suggestion.

"My first point of attack was Palmer. I first got him away from the house to talk to him, and held over his head the information I'd picked up in the village. I was inclined to believe then that it was Wade who killed Homer Bishop. But I showed Palmer the noose was tight around his own neck. He had been the last person to enter the house that night, and I could prove it.

"The butler broke down. Of the actual murder he knew nothing, it developed, although he suspected the truth. Wade had been using narcotics for years; he was already an addict when Palmer came to Bayswater, and in the new butler he was quick to recognize a companion spirit. The misery that comes of dope, you know, loves company. How Bishop came to find out that his old friend was addicted to drugs we may never know. But he did find out, and eventually he confiscated Wade's supply. That was what was in the one locked drawer of his desk—the thing the murderer was after.

"The man Palmer was in the habit of meeting in the pool room was a dope peddler from whom he bought both his own drug and Wade's. That night of the murder the man had failed to show up. Palmer waited late for him, for Wade had been unstrug of nerves and physically sick through the day for lack of his morphine. But when he returned to the house, the butler found his blind fellow addict in a state of beatitude which could be explained in only one way. He knew that all the morphine in Wade's possession had been taken over by Bishop, who had doled it out to him in rapidly diminishing doses which failed entirely to satisfy his craving—and which, in the end, as you have seen, filled him with the madness of deprivation. When he went to bed, Palmer was sure Wade had found a treasure-trove of morphine somewhere; and when Bishop was found dead, the butler, knowing full well how far a man

will go to get the drug when he lacks it, performed a simple problem in addition."

Carrington Cloud paused to light another of the long-tubed cigarettes.

"Except for a few scattered incidentals which I shall not bother with now," he said, "I've given you the gist of your first article for the *Criminologist.* About Dever not being the man Miss Bishop thinks him, you need have no personal worry. I know from Palmer that Wade held an insane hatred of the young man, and for months had been trying to poison Bishop's mind against him. I imagine he had sensed that Dever had discovered his secret and feared a denunciation. Probably his accusation leading to the secretary's arrest was inspired in part by the old hatred, and in part, too, by an instinct of self-preservation.

"Concerning our own adventures—which, of course, should not enter into your report of the case—I know that both Wade and Palmer spied on us from the hour we arrived. Each had heard enough to know we were not what we represented ourselves to be. But it was Wade, of course, who evolved the clever little experiments with the dampened sheets and the gas heater. My guess is that he was stealing up the back stairs from the cellar after playing with the gas meter even as you and Palmer were tumbling down the front stairs. Palmer really had been in the pantry when the lights went out and was heading for the switch box. He knew that Wade had a habit when out for a night prowl through the house of throwing off all lights, for then he could wander unseen—the lack of light, of course, making no difference to him."

"But the key to the switch box, Cloud!" Herbert protested. "Palmer had that."

"You should have looked at the lock," Cloud told him. "A hairpin would have opened it. And I presume it was something of the sort that Wade used.

"Wade was out of his head the night he went down to recover his morphine—as crazy as he's been ever since, in all probability. But he had intelligence to reason that darkness would serve him and handicap Bishop in the battle he was prepared to give for the drug.

"Exactly what happened in the library we'll have to reconstruct by guesswork—although if I'd been successful in corralling Wade's morphine I believe I could have had the story from his own lips. That's what I was looking for, helped by Palmer—the thing I needed to give me power over him. So long as he had the stuff he was indomitable.

"However, you can see the picture as clearly as I. Bishop is sitting at his desk, when, without warning, the library is plunged into darkness. He waits a moment, let us say, for the lights to come on; and in that moment Wade has come down the stairs, making never a sound. Bishop reaches for the match stand. The box holds only one match. Can't you see him striking it—rising?

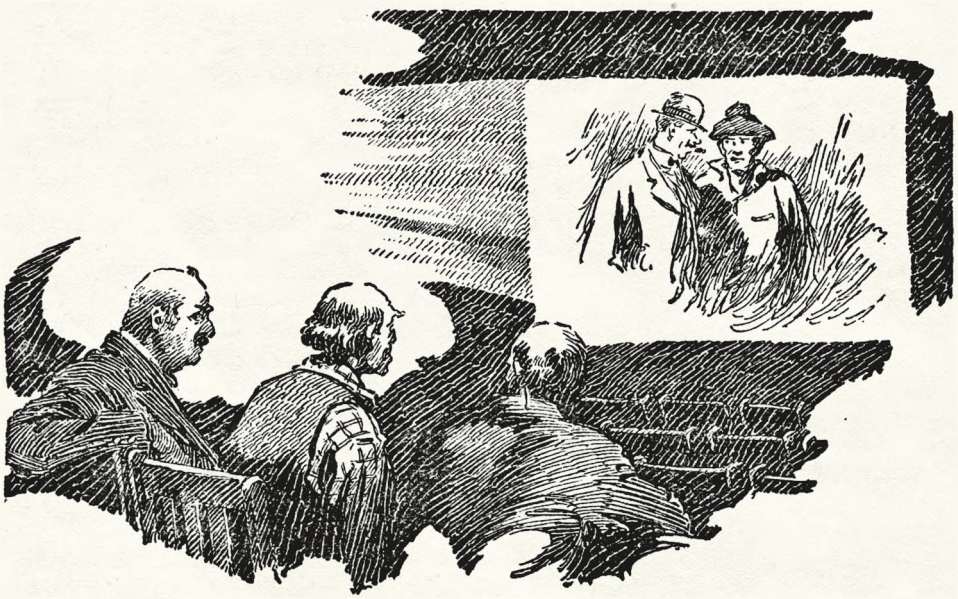
"Bishop holds the match as long as he can. It burns his fingers and he blows it out. The room is pitch dark again. But he has located the door. He walks toward it. And there——"

Carrington Cloud lifted his fingers to his own bruised throat.

"No, I don't think you should write it as premeditated murder, Theodore," said he. "I doubt that even in his madness Wade anticipated that. But he was at the door, the drug was in the locked drawer, and the key to the drawer in his friend Bishop's pocket. And the pianoforte, as we've ourselves been lately reminded, is 'splendid for the hands'!"

BAD BLOOD

By CHARLES NEVILLE BUCK



In Five Parts—Part IV—*The Story So Far:*

Gibney, a producer, who plans to make a native movie of Kentucky mountain life, goes there and finds a real-life drama in progress. Cawdon, stepson of Judge Bratchell, quarrels with young Jase McCaleb, a rascally mountaineer. Lakeery, a girl, is the cause. While the movie is being taken, Maynard Sample, a young camera man, pays attentions to Lakeery, arousing Cawdon's jealousy. Cawdon and the girl play the leads in the picture, and the love-making scenes anger young Jase to a point where he threatens Lakeery's safety. Thereafter, she goes armed.

Jase and Maynard are found dead in the woods. Evidence points to Lakeery, in the death of Jase, and Cawdon, to save her, swears that he did it. At this, his stepfather, the judge, steps down from the bench to defend Cawdon. It is a hard job because, centered in Lawyer Seely, the prosecutor, is all the opposition that has been pitted against the judge for many years.

CHAPTER XII.—*(Continued.)*

IT was after midnight and Muir Bratchell was pacing up and down his office in the courthouse. All day the county seat had sweltered and wayfarers along the dusty roads had stopped on meeting to mop their sweat-drenched faces and greet each other in the laconic words: "Hit's a hot time." The sun had set in a sky red and hard as burnished copper.

Now the judge was coatless, and in a chair by the open window, overlooking the sullen hulk of the jail house, the small sheriff sat fanning his pink and perspiring face with his felt hat.

"Hit's right hot in the jail house to-

night," he remarked. "I'm glad Cawdy ain't there now—but I wish Lacey was."

Bratchell nodded.

"Mr. Sample an' his Louisville lawyers kicked hard against grantin' bail," he made reminiscent comment. "It seems like in his country they don't often allow it in a capital case—an' like as not Alec Sarver didn't go any higher in his esteem by agreein' to it. God knows it was high enough, though. I put a mortgage on my farm an' my dwellin' house to fill it, an' yet"—he paused, and then his usually controlled face jerked to a spasm of sudden agony—"an' yet I almost wish the boy would take leg-bail an' run away."

The sheriff leaned forward and his lips set themselves.

"You don't wish nothin' of the sort, jedge," he offered categorical contradiction, and the other man wheeled on him almost fiercely.

"Tolliver," he exclaimed, "have you ever seen a man die in the electric chair?"

"No." The answer was deliberate. "I've seen some sev'ral men hung in the old days before electrocution came in, an' I've took some sev'ral to Eddyville to die. But Cawdy ain't goin' thar. We'll contrive to have him come cl'ar. The trial's a month off yet—an' we ain't quit fightin'."

"Night after night—ever since the grand jury indicted him," said Bratchell, "I've sat here till the sun ball came up through the mists on the mountaintops—studyin'—seekin' to reason out who did these two murders—an' why—because I know in my heart Cawdon didn't—an' somebody did. Night after night I've seen that lamp burn out till it began to smell and splutter—an' I haven't got anywheres. I clung to the Lacey theory for a while, but it didn't bring me to any conclusion. I reckon I'm tryin' to think with my heart; my brain seems outright cramped an' paralyzed."

"This business lays too close to you ——" began the officer, and the judge interrupted him.

"I slip into the same old grooves of thought, day after day, night after night, an' they all end up in blind alleys. Who else had a motive? What was that motive? The one chance is to pin the responsibility elsewhere—an' there's only a month left."

After lengthy meditation, Talbott asked:

"Where was Lakeery that evenin'—an' where was Cawdy? Can't we fix 'em both up with alibis?"

The shake of Bratchell's head was not hopeful.

"You can answer that question for yourself. It is through your deputies that we've gotten whatever information we have about the case the commonwealth is building. You tell me they have a circumstantial structure against the boy almost strong enough without the confession. Sample's array of legal talent is as able as it's expensive—an' if they need perjurers to fill in the gaps, Brook Seely will see to that."

Usually temperate and coldly analytical, Muir Bratchell now broke into vehement complaint:

"All these years I've fought here to build up some semblance of law. Throughout my lifetime I have seen guilty men go free because juries condoned homicide. Now, when for the only time in my life, I sit close to one accused, I find arrayed against my client all my old enemies—lawbreakers clamoring for the law's severest penalty—and the power of such wealth as was never paraded in this poverty-ridden land before this day."

CHAPTER XIII.

FANTASTIC "ABSURDITIES."

IN the bare office, Judge Bratchell and his sheriff talked on far into the night until Talbott suggested persuasively:

"Why don't you lay down now,

jedge. an' try to get you some sleep? You're frayin' yourself plumb ragged."

"I'm waitin' for Mr. Gibney," said the judge. "He's been down to Louisville an' he was gettin' in on the midnight train. He ought to be here soon. I reckon that's him comin' up the steps now."

As the door opened, Bratchell's greeting was apologetic:

"Mr. Gibney, I wouldn't have asked you to come so late—after a hot journey on the cars; but I've been rackin' my brains an' I wanted to ask you a few more questions."

The director nodded and lighted a cigarette as he sat down.

"I wanted to know," began Bratchell, "just how you first met up with young Sample. His father hasn't talked much to me of late—an' for two years past his father has known less of him than we have."

"It's odd," the lowlander made slow response, "how little we do know of some men we work with every day. In the picture game it's particularly true. Many of the lesser figures come and go like human drift. We never really know them."

"Had you known this boy long?"

"I met him first eighteen months or so ago. He was in a mob of job hunters about the lot—a mob eager for the ten a day that goes to the extras used in ensembles—in crowd scenes. I picked him out one day for a walk-on bit in a drawing-room scene. I saw he could wear evening clothes and not look like he'd rented them from a pawnshop."

"An' you've known him ever since then?"

"Interruptedly. I used him once or twice at that time and then he disappeared. I forgot him. A few months ago he turned up again on the lot precisely as if he'd never been away. He didn't say much. He'd drifted pretty near around the world, it seems. I used him in a pinch as an assistant camera man and he proved capable. When I decided on this experiment here, I was taking a heavy financial risk—and looking for the cheapest men who would serve my purpose. So I brought him along with me from the coast."

"You say," inquired Bratchell, "that he'd been across the water. Do you know where—or what he was doing there?"

Gibney shook his head.

"He always seemed to be doing whatever turned up next. All he ever told me were disjointed fragments of adventures here and there—Shanghai, Rangoon, Bombay. He was a faithful worker and gambling was his only fixed dissipation."

The sheriff nodded.

"He told me once that he'd bucked about all the games there was save only hoss racin'. I'm such a fool about the hosses myself that I couldn't scarcely understand a gambler that never went to a race track."

"Did he ever sit in at any of the poker games you had at the hotel?" inquired the judge; and both Gibney and Talbott shook their heads.

"No," declared the producer. "Our games were fairly stiff, and he never had much ready money. He occasionally played in the lower limit game at Brook Seely's office, and young McCaleb was sometimes a member of that group, I believe."

Judge Bratchell inclined his head.

"I was just wonderin'," he speculated, "whether he an' young McCaleb ever had any quarrel over cards."

"So far as I could gather," answered Gibney thoughtfully, "the two were on amicable terms. Sample held Jase in an amused contempt, yet bore with him because he was a natural-born card player."

"I don't suppose you saw much of Jase around the hotel, did you, Mr. Gibney?"

"No. I don't think he was very wel-

come there. He was a rough-looking customer, you know, and the new Bush Hotel is the Ritz of these parts. I only remember his coming there once, and I fancied then that he came to leave a flask or two—but, of course, I don't know. I assumed that his ready money must come from bootlegging."

"To the best of your recollection, when was that one time?"

"Come to think of it, it must have been very shortly before the killings. He passed through the lobby but didn't stay."

"I reckon this isn't leadin' us anywhere," admitted the judge ruefully; "but I'm grabbin' at straws now. Tell us about that time, Mr. Gibney, will you?"

The producer sat for a moment seeking to reconstruct with exactness a casual picture from memory; then he made his answer:

"The evening train had just come in and there was a small group registering at the desk—the usual run of traveling salesmen and coal-mining men. I was up in that little gallery at the back of the lobby—you know, a sort of sawed-off mezzanine where they have a victrola and a radio set. I had just finished my supper and was smoking a cigar up there, listening to the news flashes over the radio."

"An' you saw Jase come in an' go out?"

"I didn't see him come in. I just saw him appear from under the gallery where the stairway is, and go straight across the lobby and out to the street."

"He didn't stop to talk to any one?"

"Not that I saw; in fact, it struck me that he went out rather hurriedly. Maybe that was what put the notion in my head that he'd come to deliver liquor to some customer and wasn't anxious to be conspicuous."

"Was either young Sample or my boy about the hotel that night?"

"Not at that time. I didn't see Cawdon there at all that night. Of course, Maynard had a room there, but he didn't come in until later, and long before that time young McCaleb had gone."

"Up there where you were sitting, listening to the radio—who-all were there besides you?"

"That's hard to answer. As I remember, there was a small group of loungers—perhaps eight or ten in all. Also one or two traveling men and several of the town people who regularly eat supper at the Bush Hotel."

"I reckon it don't make much difference—but who did you know of the lot, to your best recollection?"

"Postmaster Mannitt was there and the lawyer, Seely. Then there were Gardner, my chief assistant and myself. The others were strangers."

Bratchell rose and paced the room.

"Well, that just brings us up in another blind alley," he made dismal admission. "But you say this was a short while before the murders, an' that gives it interest. Can you fix the time, any fashion?"

"I'll try. Why, yes—it was June 6th—the day the English Derby was run."

"The English Derby?" repeated the judge in perplexity; and Gibney answered:

"Yes. I recall that one of the strangers said: 'The sixth of the month is my unlucky day. I lose my bet.'"

Sheriff Talbott laughed shortly.

"I reckon," he volunteered, "that if it was any big race this side of the ocean-sea, I could tell you somethin' about it offhand, but when you talk about the English Derby you're takin' in too much territory for me."

"I know as little about it as you do!" exclaimed Gibney. "I only remember that the news flashes that day told of the winning of the race by some horse that was not a favorite and that paid a long price to his backers. That fixes even that much in my mind is that one of the traveling men was interested and

annoyed us all by interrupting the other news to talk about it. The rest of us wanted the baseball scores."

"If I'd been there, I'd have listened to him right willin'ly," observed Talbott. "But it don't help us none, save to give us the time Jase went to the hotel."

The judge came back and sat down again.

"These killin's took place June 8th," he said, "but one disconnected link doesn't make much chain."

It was almost dawn when the sheriff and the producer left the judge's chamber, but Bratchell himself sat on before his desk with his face stonily set and his eyes drawn in concentrated thought.

He was mulling over puzzles of theory which always ran out into elusive blankness, and as he sat there, the lamp guttered and burned to an evil-smelling exhaustion. The stars paled and at length a dismal streamer of murky gray streaked the eastern peaks.

Before noon Muir Bratchell mounted his horse and turned its head toward the road that led over to the house of Joe Castle, the novelist who had retired to so unique a hermitage.

Castle met him at the door, and the judge said simply:

"One time you told me that maybe some day you could help me. I'm in right sore need of help now."

Castle smiled quietly as he made his response:

"Call on me. What is your question?"

But Bratchell shook his head.

"If I knew what questions to ask, I'd have a start. I just wanted to talk. To start with, I wanted to get all you could tell me about the day you found the bodies."

It was a hot afternoon and the novelist drew chairs into the shade of a great hickory tree. For two hours the two men talked—discursively—sometimes fantastically. They were seeking, by loosing random streams of thought and imagination, to develop a trend or flow to some undiscovered objective.

"In a month, now," summarized the judge, "the case will be called on the docket. There's one suspect—who won't coöperate with his lawyers. Against him will be ranged, besides the force of close-linked circumstance, all the strength of a highly financed prosecution and all the elements of enmity outstanding against myself."

"Possibly," suggested Castle, "you have been so hard driven by anxiety that you are seeing one-sidedly. Perhaps you are even being too logical. It's the way of lawyers."

"Can a man be too logical? Juries want facts."

The writer of novels smiled.

"You must end in logic, of course, but you've exhausted that commodity in making your beginning—and you have no result. Now suppose you try starting from the fantastical—and working backwards."

Bratchell looked up with weary eyes.

"I feared I was doin' too much of that," he said. "I sought to figure out a way to trace the guilt to Matt Lacey. He seemed the one chance, but if there's anything in that, it's no good. We can't find the man."

"That wasn't fantastical. That was logic—and it's fallen down. Just one thing has developed in this case so far, judge, beyond suspicion and a false confession—and that was a thing which would never occur to my somewhat ingenious imagination when I was writing stories. It was too unusual."

"What was that, Mr. Castle?"

"It was a deaf man hearing what a man with good ears might not have heard—hearing it with his eyes."

The tired face of Muir Bratchell lighted to a renewed interest.

"Yes," he said slowly, "that wasn't a thing a lawyer would have been apt to think of, either."

"It might even get you out of your rut," went on the lowlander, "to cast about for the most unlikely motive—and assume it for experimental purposes. There must be a motive. Your adversaries have seized on the obvious one. Very well, take a remote and improbable one for yourself. I'm talking nonsense, perhaps, but a man may go stale on too much logic."

"I can see what you mean—but not just how it applies."

"Nor I—as yet. We're theorizing, pure and simple. But I'll illustrate. Here in your hills men are quick to kill—but slow to rob. A man may carry his life in uneasy balance but his pocketbook is safe."

"Yes, we don't have much highway robbery."

After a moment, Bratchell added:

"And moreover, even if these hills were full of thieves, neither of these boys had much to steal."

"Just so," agreed Castle. "So robbery becomes a most unlikely motive. Let us, therefore, assume it. Let us run wild in fancy, like a colt in the pasture, and then when we come back to our harness, our minds may be refreshed by their gymnastics."

"Cut loose," answered Bratchell, but his voice was not hopeful.

"Suppose, instead of having nothing of value to be robbed of, we assume that one of these boys carried about with him some coveted treasure."

"We might almost as well assume that neither one of them got killed," was Bratchell's matter-of-fact rejoinder.

"If it was one of them who had such a treasure, it was not McCaleb," went on Castle imperturbably, and his mood was so full of the humor of illogic that he seemed to be finding enjoyment in its sheer perversity.

"But with young Sample, it might be different. He comes from tramping the world. He has been in the Orient where writers of fiction revel in exotic crime plots. They love to have their characters rob some ancient temple, filch and conceal the priceless jewel from an idol's eye. They revel in the colorful possibilities of pursuit to the ends of the earth by an avenging high priest sworn to punish the sacrilege. Such a vandal does not hypothecate his treasure soon or readily; even when he is driven by poverty, he must await his time. To do otherwise would be fatal."

Bratchell rose slowly from his seat and his rigid lips bent into the ghost of a smile.

"If there were any Oriental high priests or their agents operating hereabouts," he suggested, "they'd stand out right conspicuous among our backwoods folks. But I begin to see what you mean. When you start out to be fantastic, you don't stop short."

Castle nodded.

"You recognize my *reductio ad absurdum,*" he smiled, "but even absurdity may serve its purpose. For one thing, you smiled—and I'll venture to assert you haven't smiled for some time before."

"Not much," admitted the judge; and his host went on:

"I don't need to expound my doctrine. Your brain can be trusted for the adroitness and the logic. What I advise, though, is serious. Cast out in a wider circle. Begin over and question the reaches of the unlikely—don't dismiss anything as too improbable until you've tested its possibility with acid. Look for the motive of this crime in some quarter as yet unexplored."

"At all events," observed the judge, "you've set me to thinkin' an' you've shown me another thing. I've been lettin' my feelin's blind me an' dull me. I've got to act as if I'd never known my client, Cawdon, before."

"You still keep harkin' back to Matt Lacey in your talk, jedge," said Tolliver Talbott.

The two men stood by the white fence palings at the front of the sheriff's house to Joe Castle. It was a pleasant place several mornings after Bratchell's visit in the early freshness, with a brave row of hollyhocks lifting tall in their bloom and the morning-glories still unwilted by the day's heat.

"You keep harkin' back to Lacey an' that seems like sheer folly to me. The man's done gone an' if he knew all we're seekin' to fathom, it wouldn't do us no good."

"The State wants him for murder," Bratchell reminded him. "Once found, he can be extradited an' brought back here from any place of refuge in the country."

"Once found," commented the small man, whittling idly at a fine splinter. "That's just two short words—but it denotes a lavish."

He lifted his eyes with a lazy slowness and stood studying the face of his companion. Then he added:

"But still I can't ever fathom what's brewin' in your head, an' I've noted this of late. The time's gettin' short, the prosecution is tightenin' round Cawdy like a snake round a rabbit—an' yet your face don't look as hopeless as it used to."

The circuit judge smiled faintly.

"Maybe it's all false hope, Tolliver. I haven't discovered anything tangible, an' yet ever since I sat in front of Joe Castle's house an' talked, I've had a new feelin' an' a fresher brain."

"What did he have to say? I 'lowed he was a silent sort of body, myself."

"For the most part," Bratchell said surprisingly, "he talked pure nonsense —an' admitted it."

"I don't see where thet could profit much."

"I'd begun to feel," explained the judge, "like a man picking at a jail lock with finger nails—finger nails already worn down to the quick—an' he brought me to realize that there might be other ways out than by pickin' the lock."

"All right. What was it you wanted me to tell you about Matt Lacey?"

"Everything you can—especially what seems least important: how you found him, what you did with him—everything."

"But you know all that a'ready. I found him at the Looeyville race track the day before the Derby—an' I fotched him back the day after the Derby."

"Yes, but in the meanwhile?"

"Meanwhile he was hampered in the Looeyville jail house, waitin' to come back home."

The sheriff stopped whittling and looked up as he absent-mindedly closed his jackknife, and his eyes took on a light of interest.

"It was right interestin', in a fashion, though," he said, "seein' how those city police did things. Finger printin' an' photographin' him an' the like."

"An' now, although he's still at large," Bratchell offered reminder, "those portraits an' prints are in the hands of the police far an' near."

"Yeah—along with a passel of others —an' the fellers they belong to goin' scot-free."

"That's true enough. How did you first recognize your man? You hadn't seen him for years—an' he'd changed considerably."

"I knew him by his scar."

The reply was laconic, yet having made it and relapsed into silence, the little sheriff remained for a moment with an expression of interested reminiscence, and that expression did not escape his companion.

"What were you thinkin' of, Tolliver?" he inquired. "It seems to bring a light to your eyes."

"Oh, pshaw!" Talbott spoke almost shamefacedly. "I was just recollectin' a matter thet ain't of no consequence. It just interests me because I'm such a fool about race hosses."

"I see." The judge's brief response was disappointed, but he persisted.

"Still, I'm dealin' with folly now. Do you mind tellin' me what the recollection was?"

Tolliver looked up and grinned.

"I was just recallin' that I'd have passed Lacey by a score of times an' never noted him—save for Old Nova Scotia."

"Who is this Nova Scotia?"

"An old tramp I run across there at the race track. Just a bum, I reckon, but I'd almost give my right arm to see all he's seed of the world down below."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE VITAL EXPERIMENT.

UNDER a casual and dexterous coaxing, the small sheriff told the story of sitting in the press stand and of listening to yarns of incredible gambling. His own interest was soon carrying him along with its momentum, but at its end he offered apology.

"I told you it was just foolishness—my bein' interested."

"Yes," answered Bratchell thoughtfully. "I don't see how we can make relevant testimony out of Old Nova Scotia's yarnin', yet it starts a line of thought. Once more I hark back to Lacey. Was he gamblin' there at the track, or just lookin' on?"

"I don't know as I can answer that ——" The sheriff broke off, and then a more definite expression came to his eyes and he corrected himself.

"Yes, I can, too. While I stood watchin' him an' Old Nova Scotia settin' there together, Matt Lacey was holdin' a bunch of tickets in his hand—an' he commenced tearin' 'em up an' throwin' 'em away."

"Tickets?"

"Yes. The tickets you buy when you bet—pari-mutuel tickets. He had a stack of losin' ones an' he tore 'em up. What's all that got to do with our business here, jedge?"

"Most likely nothin' at all. It just keeps comin' into my mind that the two dead boys an' this man Lacey were gamblers. It sort of groups them together in a fashion. But I confess I can't make any logical connection out of that. Certainly Lacey had no opportunity to gamble with the others."

"So am I a gambler," Talbott reminded him, "but yet I didn't kill those other two gamblers."

"No. That's one assumption I can eliminate," declared Bratchell, "an' so far it's about all I'm accomplishin'—eliminatin' possible elements of theory, an' the time's gettin' short."

"How is the gal—Lakeery—gettin' on?" demanded Tolliver.

The judge shook his head.

"She's still in Lexington, in a sanitarium. She may be able to testify, but I'm not sure she won't be rather dangerous than helpful to us."

"Why, jedge?"

"She seems shaky on an important point. She's not sure just when Cawdon first learned of Jase's frightenin' her. The prosecution would play that up as showin' how the story inflamed his mind. It would indicate premeditation."

The sheriff changed the subject:

"Where are you goin' now, jedge?"

"I'm goin' to the hotel to see Gibney."

"Reckon I'll walk along with you. I'm goin' thet a way myself."

At the street door of the Bush Hotel the two men met the picture producer and the three drew aside to the shadow of the wall to escape the strengthening heat of the sun.

"Mr. Gibney," began Bratchell, "when we were talkin' some time back about it's bein' harder to do your work here than it would be near a studio, you said a thing that I've been studyin' over since."

"What was that, judge?"

"You said that because you couldn't test out your film in a projection room

as you went along, you had to do a lot of extra photographing."

Gibney nodded.

"Yes, we had to make several times the usual footage as insurance against failure. You see, we couldn't tell at once whether it would be necessary to make retakes."

"An' what becomes of all the extra film, Mr. Gibney?"

"After it's been all cut and edited, the surplusage is destroyed. It's just expensive waste."

"But you've still got it all?"

"Yes. Until I can get back to studio conditions, I won't risk discarding anything."

Muir Bratchell's face was meditative, and his next question carried little meaning to any other than himself.

"What do your actors talk about—while they're goin' through their scenes, Mr. Gibney?"

The producer's response was prompt.

"Well, you've seen me at work. I direct them through the megaphone, and, of course, there must be facial expression—and action. I have them carry on something roughly equivalent to the dialogue of a stage play. They extemporize—say things in keeping with the action."

"Yes, I've noted that. But in the scenes where crowds are being used—sort of in the background, the extra ones just talk more or less haphazard, don't they?"

"Sometimes—yes."

The director laughed with a sudden memory.

"In the old days there was a story told of the taking of a bibical picture," he amplified. "It was all right until the thing was shown in an institution for deaf mutes. Then some of the onlookers complained that the actors had used profane language in sacred scenes. There was some cussing on the Mount of Olives. That audience could read the lips of the players."

Bratchell's eyes quickened into a brief smile.

"That's what I'm gettin' at, Mr. Gibney. If I get the use of the moving-picture theater, will you run off all the film you've taken for me for a deaf audience of one—for old Deadear Posen?"

The producer stood for a space gazing at the circuit judge, while the sheriff's eyes wore the blankness of pure bewilderment; then Gibney nodded his assent.

"It will take hours, judge," he demurred; "but for any undertaking whatever, I'm wholly at your service. Is your purpose a secret one, or may I understand something of it?"

"Mr. Gibney," announced Bratchell, "I'm just shootin' at the moon—but I'm shootin' to save a boy of mine from death or prison."

"Of course I'm with you, but how can——"

"Yesterday," explained Bratchell, "Deadear Posen came to my office. He explained that—to use his own words—he was in a 'swivet of worriment.' When he volunteered his information to Brook Seely, he imagined that he was helpin' Cawdon. He had heard the boy was suspected an' he thought his evidence might help to clear him. He did not realize that he was lendin' himself to an insincere effort to decoy Cawdon into a confession."

"And now he wants to make amends? Yet I still don't quite see——"

"It may be that there is nothin' to see." The judge's face twisted momentarily with tense emotion. "But, Mr. Gibney, I'm not leavin' any stone unturned. Don't you see that on those thousands of feet of celluloid is registered talk that went on among many persons—talk that is mute to all the world save old Deadear—but audible to him?"

"You mean something said there might give you a clew?"

Bratchell nodded.

"Somethin' said an' unheard by the

generality might have a bearin'; might set in motion a whole train of relevant fact units. Recorded on your film, besides what you meant to put there, is a cross section of the life of this community, during the time this tragedy was brewin'. If somethin' of value to us is so recorded, Deadear can read it."

The shake of Gibney's head was dubious.

"Judge," he said slowly, "every resource at my disposal is at yours. The idea is fantastic enough to appeal to a dramatist, but to my mind it proves how desperately you are fighting in the dark—and with what a forlorn hope."

"That," said Bratchell soberly, "is admitted without argument."

"Don't forget," the producer admonished, "that the two men from whose utterances you might hope for most, are not registered in this picture. The dead men themselves can give no post-mortem evidence. Neither Jase McCaleb nor young Sample were before the lens—both of them were always behind the camera."

"I've thought of that, too," the judge admitted. "At best, we can hope only for some stray word from an indirect source. Yet I want to try it."

"There is no show to-night at the local house," mused Carol Gibney. "If you can get your man, Posen, suppose we hold our private showing immediately after supper? It will be a long session. Does that suit you?"

"The sooner the better, Mr. Gibney. Every day that goes by without result is a day lost for me. Deadear is comin' to see me before noon, an' Mr. Castle is in town to-day."

"I suppose you want the house empty, except for ourselves—an' whatever others you need in your experiment?"

The judge bowed his head.

"That's vital," he declared. "I want Sheriff Talbott here an' Joe Castle, an' it's important that we shall be able to talk while it's goin' on. I'll have an electric torch with me so that Deadear can see our lips when we question him—an' I'd like an operator that can be patient—who will stop an' start up again, as often as I ask him."

"I'll be your operator," Gibney gave assurance, "and I'll be patience on a monument."

It was a strange showing in the small but gaudy picture house of the remote mountain town where a mining boom had wrought its sudden changes and died down. Four men sat close together in the body of the house, and Gibney himself was in the box aloft where the projection machine sputtered in the sounding emptiness, as it wound off its reels.

"I reckon," suggested Deadear Posen after the first few minutes, "this is like to be long an' lasty. I kain't handily foller but one body at a time—an' thar's some siv'ral standin' round talkin' all at onc't in these hyar crowds."

It *was* "long and lasty" and from the first it proved tedious and disappointing. As the flat voice of the deaf man droningly translated into sound the words of the pictured lips, one felt how vacuous is the casual small talk of back-country folk confronted with the need of maintaining a semblance of vocal action.

At first Deadear kept forgetting the limitations of his duty and giving sound to the words that passed between Cawdon and Lakeery; and the judge, as he listened to these passages, felt more than one poignant stab at his heart.

"This isn't just play actin' with me," declared Cawdon in one scene where he held Lakeery in his arms. "If I were to die right now, I'd die happy—because I'm holdin' you close like this——"

But such things were not what they had come to hear and they told their lip reader so.

"I'm absent-minded," he offered apology. "You've got ter tutor me how ter

be linkster fer ye." And he did not know that he used a word for "interpreter" which had been in good repute in the days when Chaucer wrote.

It was after long hours and endless interruptions that the man in the box above stopped abruptly and spoke out into the dark house:

"This is a queer thing. This patch of film doesn't belong here at all. It's accidental. It has nothing to do with the play."

"I thought you said that neither Jase nor Maynard showed in any of the pictures," Bratchell called back. "This is Jase talking to Lawyer Seely."

"Yes. That's what is puzzling me. This follows a scene taken at the end of a working day. I seem to have overlooked it until now." The producer paused, then added: "Young Sample must have gone on grinding the camera to amuse himself."

"Run that one slow," directed the judge, and both he and the sheriff bent close as the deaf man construed. Near the beginning he broke off:

"This hyar's like ter be sort of onhandy," he said. "Jase he's got his face turned too fur away—an' I kain't heer a man onlessen I kin see him either frontwise or sidewise. Es fer Lawyer Seely, he's es good as standin' with his back toward me."

"Do the best you can," urged Bratchell.

"I ain't caught but some two-three disj'inted words so fur," sighed Deadear. "I made out 'poker' an' 'cyards,' but I didn't git naught else ter show what they denoted."

"Yes," Judge Bratchell's voice was sharpened to a keen interest as he held the flash light on his own face. "Maybe you'll get more as it goes along. Start it up again, Mr. Gibney."

"Jase," began Deadear, "he started sayin' somethin' with his face full toward me—then he turned hit away suddintlike. I only heered two words: 'Cal got a——' Now I wonder who the hell is Cal? Red Ferguson tuck thet given name from his pappy—but I never heers him called aught but Red. Bid yore machine repeat thet part, jedge."

The reel was wound back a little way and the deaf man shook his head.

"Hit's 'Cal got a——' or 'Cal caught a——' I kain't make sure which—an' hit breaks off short right thar."

"Mebby Cal caught a straight or a flush," suggested the sheriff, "albeit unless it was a pat hand a body'd be liker to say he filled. Was Red Ferguson settin' in that game the night they cleaned Sample?"

"I don't know," replied Bratchell tersely. "He might have been. He's not likely to tell us. Let's get on."

The scrap of film was run again, and at the end Deadear sat for a few moments silent.

"They kep' facin' away from me an' I couldn't heer much," he made final report. "But right thar at ther end Lawyer Seely turned an' sort of laughed like, then he said: '——not worth aught I reckon—but let me have it as yore lawyer, an' I'll see.'"

"Some claim fer bootleg licker," growled Talbott. "Thar ain't naught ter thet, if you ask me."

Judge Bratchell settled back resignedly in his chair.

With eyes wearied from the flicker of a none-too-good projection, the men rose toward morning and went out into the silence of the sleeping street; but as they walked together to the door of the hotel, now dimly lighted, and paused there before separating, Joe Daly emerged from the dim lobby.

"Sheriff," he said, "I've done been a-sa'rchin' fer ye high an' low. I've got a telegram hyar fer ye thet come three hours back—they've got Matt Lacey in ther Looeyville jail house."

Muir Bratchell straightened his tired shoulders.

"I'll ketch the mornin' train," asserted Talbott, "an' go an' fotch him back straightway."

"An' I'll go with you," said Bratchell. "I've got it in mind to question this man while he's still in the custody of the Louisville police. They may have facilities that we lack here."

Yet for some two hours after that Bratchell sat talking to Joe Castle.

It is a tiresome journey from the county seat in the hills of Louisville, two hundred miles away, yet when the two men from the mountains reached the city, they paused for neither food nor refreshment, but went straight to the office of the chief of detectives.

"Your man," said the head of the plain-clothes force, "will be ready for you when you want to start back. Thanks to the record we made when Sheriff Talbott arrested him, Officer Kenny recognized him on the street yesterday and brought him in."

"I want to question him some here —with your help," Bratchell told him. "Besides this old indictment against him, he may figure in a newer case—in a double murder on June 8th."

The chief of detectives pressed a buzzer on his desk.

"Kenny," he said, "happens to be here now. I'll have him in before we go over to the jail."

The detective who had made the arrest came into the chief's office and listened to what the visitor had to say; then he shook his head in definite negation.

"So far as the June 8th job goes," he announced briefly, "that's out. You've got the old charge against Lacey, of course, but the new one won't wash. He was in Louisville on the day your last two birds got the works."

"In Louisville?" questioned Judge Bratchell sharply. "I thought it was yesterday you picked him up and brought him in."

"That's right," responded the detective. "But he slipped through our fingers once before that. I'll give you the facts."

Bratchell rose from his chair and stood waiting, while the small sheriff tilted back and gazed contemplatively out through a window at the white-painted walls of a bricked areaway.

"When this Lacey person was brought in here to be mugged and printed, the day before the Derby," went on the officer, "I gave him the once-over along with the rest of the boys. He was a common type, the kind of bird that looks like a lot of other birds. Only that scar was outstanding."

He paused and Judge Bratchell prompted him:

"Yes, officer. What next?"

"Well, on June 8th in the morning I was at the corner of Fourth and Walnut Streets. A bird came out of the drug store there and got into a car. He was a countrified-looking lad and at first he didn't strike me one way or the other. Then the car started and turned up Walnut Street. Just as it got well under way, I saw the scar—and I started, too."

"You mean that you lost him that time?"

"I'll say so. The car had made the turn when I got wise and the traffic signals were right for it. It had an Indiana number which I took. We picked up that car—stolen, of course—next day, but the men in it made their get-away. I commandeered a taxi—but it was no use. That's all there was to it. Of course, I made a report and the date is in that report. So we began watching closer than ever and yesterday we got him."

"You are sure," inquired Bratchell persistently, "that you made no mistake the first time? You are positive it was this same man? Couldn't you be wrong about that?"

"Sure I could be wrong. Anybody could—but I wasn't. Not this time."

He paused to relight the dead cigar between his teeth, then added:

"I'm sorry if I'm breaking down your case, but I'd have to swear that the man we've got waiting for you over in the jail was here in town on June 8th."

Bratchell rose wearily.

"I'm obliged to you-all, gentlemen," he said. "I reckon now, Tolliver, we might as well have something to eat."

CHAPTER XV.

THE MOOT COURT.

WHEN Talbott presented himself at the county jail the next morning and showed his papers to the tall guardian of the main door, a door as polished as that of a bank vault, Judge Bratchell was already waiting there.

The man in the chair outside the barred portal wore a diamond stud in a soft-green shirt and a gold badge on his exposed suspender strap. He yawned indolently as he listened to the quiet words of the short and chubby peace officer, then dispatched a messenger for the jailer.

"I reckon I won't go back home with you, Tolliver," said the judge. "I aim to spend the day here in town—an' follow you later on."

Talbott looked up but asked no questions. He knew that the information of Detective Kenny had struck a heavy blow at his friend's hope, and in his mind's eye he saw Muir Bratchell, of the steadfast purpose and the resourceful mind, starting out again in pursuit of some new will-o'-the-wisp. When his prisoner was brought out, he snapped the irons on his wrists without greeting, regarding him with hard eyes.

Muir Bratchell himself returned after two days in the city, and when his train had left the Beargrass and the Bluegrass far behind and was plunging through the tunneled grades of the hill country, a man came into the car whom he knew.

That was at a station only an hour or so from the judge's destination, and Bratchell laid down the paper he was reading. It had been his intention to ride out to this man's house on Squabble Creek in the near future, and now by chance meeting they were thrown together, and the conversation between them would have a casual seeming which better suited Bratchell's purpose.

"Howdy, Ira," he offered greeting. "Sit down here by me an' bear me company."

Ira Lile dropped into the seat. He was laconic and somewhat dour of visage, and for a time the talk ran meagerly. At length Muir Bratchell said:

"I hear you've sold your home-place, Ira. Do you aim to move away?"

The man nodded.

"Been aimin' ter go West," he said.

"Go West?" Bratchell put the question with a show of surprise. "You were born and raised here, Ira. Think you'll like it down below in the flatlands?"

"Mebbe. Mebbe not." came the brief response. Then the speaker amplified it: "This is too severe a land ter make a livin' offen."

The judge nodded

"Yes, it keeps a man busy if he aims to live off his crops."

"Soil ought ter be strong," complained the lank native after a pause. "Hit's strong enough ter holt up some right weighty mountings, but yet hit kain't seem ter suppo't a stalk of cawn." He sighed deeply as he added: "I'm plumb tuckered out. I aims ter call my dawg an' git hence."

"I'm just wonderin'," Bratchell suggested meditatively, "whether a mountain man can transplant himself late in life—an' stay content. I hope you got a good price, Ira."

"Jest tol'able."

"Seems to me I heard that Lawyer Seely bought your place, didn't I?"

"Kain't say—what you heered." A considerable pause—then: "He did, though."

"Didn't know he was buyin' land."

"Don't know as he is—gin'rally speakin'. He bought mine."

"You don't suppose, Ira," the judge spoke with a casual reflectiveness, "that Seely's really actin' as a go-between for the coal people, do you?"

"Kain't say."

After that curt response, the farmer sat silent, but his eyes took on a suspicious unrest, and finally he added:

"Wouldn't put hit past him. Lawyer Seely's as smart as a fox an' full as greedy."

"Still," the judge suggested reassuringly, "coal men aren't land-grabbing like they were. Does Mr. Seely know you aim to go West?"

Lile nodded moodily.

"He counseled me to go—an' yit a while back he 'lowed hit was folly fer an old man like me ter pull up stakes an' strike out among strangers."

"He's a friend of yours, isn't he? He'd be like to counsel you for your own good, wouldn't he?"

Muir Bratchell had a manner that inspired confidence. In this land he was held to be both wise and honest.

Gradually his companion's taciturnity melted and his tongue loosened.

"He ain't to say nuther my friend ner my enemy. I knows him an' onc't in a while I plays poker-cyards with him. So fur es his counsel about my movin' away goes, he's done give hit both ways. Both ways kain't handily be right."

When they had talked on for some time longer, Judge Bratchell asked with outright directness:

"Ira, do you aim to go to court in my boy's trial?"

"Me? No. Fer why should I go? I don't know aught of ther business save only what I've heered tell in gossip talk."

"I didn't know," answered Bratchell candidly. "I knew you'd been in poker games with Seely and the two dead boys. That's all."

"Oh, pshaw!" exclaimed Ira. "Thet don't denote nawthin'. Thar wasn't nothin' come ter pass any time I played cyards with 'em thet I ain't willin' ter give out ter each an' ev'ry."

"Then I can ask you some questions. I'm seekin' to have my boy come clear—an' it's a hard business."

"Ef I could holp ye anywise hit would pleasure me. I've always accounted ye ter be frien'ly with me."

Bratchell nodded gravely.

"In one of those poker games at Seely's office, when Jase an' Sample sat in, didn't Sample get right drunk along toward the tail end of the evenin'?"

The man from Squabble nodded and said:

"He kep' swiggin' toddies thet night till he got plumb foolish. He talked a heap of whisky nonsense."

"An' he lost all he had?"

"Down ter ther las' solitary copper cent."

When the whistle shrieked for the county seat and the locomotive was panting up the final mile of heavy grade, Muir Bratchell had asked a number of questions, yet so artless had been his manner that his companion had the sense of having led the conversation, and had it been suggested to him that he had undergone an interrogation, he would have snorted contemptuously at the witnesses of such an implication.

Lakeery came home from Lexington under the chaperonage of Miss Moreland, and as she stepped down from the car vestibule at the station, the ivory of her cheeks had the waxen translucence of long illness. The slender lines of her young body had lost their gracefulness of curve for the angularity of thinness, and to-day Carroll Gibney would scarcely have selected her for leading woman in a motion picture, re-

quiring the fresh yet vigorous beauty of mountain laurel in the rise of its bloom.

Cawdon Bratchell's breath caught in his throat as he saw her, and when he stepped forward with his arms outstretched, he forgot other things. He forgot that to-morrow when the ancient bell in the dilapidated cupola clanged out its summons for the opening of court, when Sheriff Talbott sang out, "Oyez, oyez, co'te is now in order!" he, Cawdon, would sit before the bar and in due time hear the indictment read which charged him with willful murder and put him on trial for his life.

And when that time came, Judge Bratchell would no longer sit on the bench, facing from an elevation the old courtroom where for years he had dispensed justice. Another would preside in his stead, and Bratchell would present the anomalous picture of a man sitting beside the accused.

But now Muir Bratchell was not in the courthouse at all. He sat in the rudely furnished law office in which he had begun his practice a score of years ago. Its shingle was weather-beaten, and its two rooms had the air of long vacancy—but to-day they were not vacant.

The manner of the man who stood by the plain deal table which had served as his first desk was still judicial as he looked into the faces of the group gathered there. There was a dignity in his bearing which was enhanced rather than discounted by his simplicity, and if his face had worn haggard anxiety for weeks before, he had banished that expression now, when he stood at the edge of his battlefield. His attitude was that of a man asking no mercy and revealing no fear.

"Gentlemen," he said quietly, "to-morrow this case will be called on the docket. It's not a usual procedure to ask a conference of this sort between the counsel and parties on both sides of a homicide trial the day before its commencement. Yet if you will bear with me a while, I think we'll all leave this room with a better understanding."

It was John Sample who answered that statement, and he rose somewhat nervously from his chair to stand facing the host whom chance had cast in the rôle of an enemy.

"Judge Bratchell," he said slowly, "I have come here unwillingly, and I fear I can foresee no result except an additional strain put on men already overstressed."

He paused and drew a long and self-controlled breath.

"That strain will fall heaviest on you and me," he added. "We are fathers—and we find ourselves engaged in a fight where our emotions are tangled in the oldest and deepest grievance known to man. I'm wondering if we can trust ourselves."

Bratchell met the eyes of the Easterner with a candid directness.

"I aim to deport myself," he said steadily, "as a lawyer this mornin'—not as a father—an' I pay you the respect of feelin' sure you will do likewise."

"Before we begin, then," said Sample, "let me take the opportunity of thanking you. I arrived here in your debt. If we were thrown into conflict afterward, it was the misfortune of both—the fault of neither."

Muir Bratchell nodded gravely.

"If I compass anything at this meetin'," he declared, "you will leave it more content than you came, Mr. Sample. What I seek to do here is to show you the truth." After a moment, he continued soberly: "At any rate, you gentlemen will be the judges of how far I succeed. You will determine the result and I don't see that you can suffer."

Alec Sarver, sitting at one end of the table, nodded his brief but noncommittal acquiescence, and the judge went on:

"I aimed, gentlemen, that we should hold a sort of moot co'te here among ourselves to-day—an' then let to-morrow's action rest with you."

Attorney Brook Seely spoke sharply from his chair:

"Mr. Sample may speak with authority concerning his son's murder," he announced, "but I speak for the McCalebs, and since the two trials rest on much the same evidence, I want to say this: I protest any proceeding which might tend to divulge in advance the line of the prosecution's plan or the nature of its evidence."

Bratchell did not turn to face the local lawyer. His eyes still dwelt on John Sample, but his voice was quiet and level.

"No," he answered. "I don't ask any of you to tip your hands to me. I aim to reveal all that's revealed here to-day, but I hope that will prove enough."

"Judge"—it was Alec Sarver who spoke next—"who are the people you have in the other room, there—the people besides us lawyers here?"

"They are some defense witnesses I mean to have appear informally before you—Mr. Gibney, Sheriff Talbott, Joe Castle and others."

Bratchell, for a moment, looked out through his window at the encroaching hills, and drew a long breath.

"Since you are to be sole judges of what this conference amounts to," he added, "and since you may, if you choose, leave here as though it had never occurred, I shall in turn, ask a certain latitude."

"Of what nature, judge?" inquired Sarver; and the reply came slowly:

"If I bring to your ears matters which at first seem irrelevant—even tedious—I ask that you will bear with me till I finish; that you will take my word for it that I'll make these things pertinent before I'm through and reserve judgment until I close. If I fail in my effort, you will go to trial knowing in advance our line of defense. I accept that handicap."

It was the Honorable Aaron Goldman of Louisville, possibly the most successful criminal lawyer of the State, who suggested suavely:

"We come here without obligation and without prejudice. It is understood that we may withdraw from this conference at our pleasure. And now, gentlemen, are we ready to begin?"

All nodded.

To be concluded in the next number.

THE SENATOR THROWS A HARPOON

T. H. CARAWAY, United States senator from Jonesboro, Arkansas, is a mighty flinger of the linguistic harpoon when he is roused to fighting mood. What was the cause of his indignation on this occasion is not revealed, nor is the identity of his luckless victim recorded, but this is the barbed and battering weapon which he flung from the Senate floor into the quivering flesh of a military gentleman: "He is so covered and bedecked with medals that he rattles like a tin peddler as he walks, the most of which medals were acquired here and awarded to him for his skill in balancing himself in a swivel chair in Washington, while others laid down their lives on the battlefields of France!"

There Are Crooks in the Coast Guard Too, but There Are More Honest Men to Nip Them in the Bud.

Subbin' At Sandy Hollow

By W. E. CARLETON

SIX husky, white-uniformed coast guards hauled the breeches buoy slowly along its sagging hawser. The man whose lengthy legs dangled from the clumsy rescue conveyance blew salt water from his nose and mouth, his sparse light-brown hair and white summer clothing drenched and dripping. For on its shoreward journey from the practice mast set up off Sandy Hollow station, the breeches buoy had dipped deep into the mild surf, and the leisurely effects of the crew dragging it had not hastened its progress.

When the rescued man was at last suspended over the beach, the coast guards rushed to him and extricated him roughly from his uncomfortably snug perch. Unceremoniously they lowered him to the wet sand, flipped him over a barrel, stomach down, thumped and banged him and vigorously worked his arms, going through the coast-guard manual's instructions for resuscitating the drowned—and then some.

But Ira Banks gritted his teeth and fought back his protests over such unmerciful mauling of his lanky, raw-boned body. For he knew that a new member of a coast-guard crew has to be initiated, and that such an initiation usually is performed at his first breeches-buoy practice. So he had not been ignorant of what to expect when the station commander, Cap Cole, selected him as the man to be "rescued" that August morning. But he had not expected so much.

He almost winced with pain when a mighty poke in his ribs was followed by a fiendish punch in the small of his back. He could stand pokes and prods from open fingers. But when a man deliberately struck him with a doubled-up fist, and he was face down in a position from which he couldn't strike back —only a coward would go so far as to do a thing like that.

"There, that'll do, boys!" he heard Cap Cole shout.

The thumping ceased. Ira stood up and worked the kinks out of his muscles, a sickly grin on his long, homely, smooth-shaven face. He was in the early thirties, but looked considerably older. His gaunt features were bronzed to a leathery texture by years of brutal exposure to the elements in the life of a bay fisherman. His nose was long, thin and humped, his chin sharp and over-prominent, and his ears stuck out like the wings of a wild goose poised for flight.

From under shaggy brows his keen blue eyes scanned the grinning faces of his new crew mates, who were vastly amused by his ludicrous appearance. And as he caught the insolent, gloating smile on one of them, his own grin narrowed, his lips tensed.

"Ho-ho!" mocked the thickset, medium-height surfman on whom Ira's questioning stare now rested. "That was more fun than a barrel o' monkeys, boys! Did ye see him wriggle an' twist when we give him the solar-plexus massage? He come nigh cavin' in then, all right."

"But he didn't holler for us to quit, like *you* did when *you* got the first degree, Handy," Cap Cole reminded the taunting surfman.

The smile vanished from Ansel Handy's square, sun-tanned face. He was about Ira's age, but chunkier in stature, with evasive brown eyes and a stubby nose. He turned away at Cap's rebuff and fell to with the other surfmen dismantling the breeches-buoy rigging.

Ira started to join them, too, but the squat, broad-shouldered and tremendously muscular commander called him to one side. In spite of his age—close to sixty—Cap's thick hair and heavy mustache were still jet black like his flashing, all-seeing eyes, and the glow of lingering youth tinted his plump cheeks. The veteran of countless Cape Cod nor'easters was still good for many more.

"Banks," he inquired pleasantly, "wa'n't they some trouble between you an' Anse Handy when you two was neighbors in the village?" The village was the little Cape Cod town of Howesport, four miles from the station.

Ira hesitated before replying. Had Cap Cole detected what Ira suspected—that it was Ansel Handy who had driven those bone-jarring punches into the initiate's ribs and back?

"Why, ye-as," Ira finally admitted. "Ansel owned an ugly dog that bit my oldest boy. I couldn't git no satisfaction from him, so I went to the authorities an' had the dog shot. Him an' me ain't been too friendly ever since." He did not mention that at the time Ansel had threatened that he'd get back at the complainant against his vicious dog some day.

"There'll be no fightin' at the station —jist keep that in mind," warned Cap. "I'm countin' on you to make good here, Banks, an' that means you've got to keep your temper under control. I saw that dirty look ye gave Handy a few minutes ago."

"Don't worry about me, Cap—" "I'll meet Anse any time more'n halfway," promised Ira. "No one wants to make good more'n I do. I never got nowheres bay fishin', an' the ninety dollars a month this substitute's job is payin' me will be a godsend to my fam'ly in Howesport."

"I cal'lated so when I offered ye this

substitute's berth," confessed Cap. "An' your wife an' young ones can count on that money permanent if ye make good, like you'd ought to, with your knowledge o' boats an' the Cape coast. They's always vacancies comin' up in my reg'lar crew—reg'lar men bein' transferred or quittin'. An' good men for their places ain't so easy to git."

"My heart's set on gittin' one o' them permanent berths, Cap, after Jenks comes back from his leave of absence," Ira told his commander. "An' if I do, I'm goin' to fetch my wife to the station an' have her cook you an' the boys as fine a chicken dinner as ever you set tooth to."

Cap smiled expectantly. "I've heard about what a fine cook your wife is, an' I cal'late I could do justice to one o' them chicken dinners, after thutty years o' station grub," he said. "But now give the boys a hand with the beach cart."

Ira lent a hand to the stowing of the breeches-buoy gear in the beach cart and dragging it to the station apparatus shed. How he wanted that permanent berth! What a blessing it would be to his wife and little Mabel, Irene, Johnny and Paul! Hard, uncertain work it had been, those fifteen years of bay fishing. And now no more skimping at home, no more depriving his family often of the bare necessities of life. That is, if he made good.

But he could not help entertaining a suspicion that Ansel Handy might resume his back-punching in some more sinister form. That was the only fly in the ointment.

Before Ira was through with his work in the apparatus shed, a thickening fog blew in from the Atlantic, obscuring the beach and reducing the vision of the man on duty in the station tower to a few yards. Cap had already assigned Ira to the midnight beach patrol in company with the veteran surfman, Harve Pierce, who held a coast-guard rating as boatswain's mate and was second in command at Sandy Hollow. Cap had looked for fog that night, and in thick weather he always doubled night beach patrols.

With the fog coming sooner than he expected, he also ordered two afternoon patrols. The noon one fell to Anse Handy. Ira, much to his surprise, was chosen for the four o'clock post. Ansel grumbled, muttering that Cap always picked the newest men for the meanest jobs.

Ira, however, thrilled with delight when at four o'clock he left the station, attired in black oilskins and long-legged sea boots over his coast-guard uniform. The automatic pistol holstered at his belt gave him a feeling of considerable importance—but he hoped he wouldn't be called upon to use it. And there was little likelihood of that, for smugglers only operated at night, not foggy afternoons.

But wrecks were not uncommon, either day or night, especially on Rocky Point, three miles down the beach. Pleasure craft of "summer folks" often piled up on that rocky ledge, and for that reason it was the most important and carefully watched spot on the Sandy Hollow shore during coast-guard beach patrols in the summer. A shack was located there in which a telephone was housed, so that the station could be warned quickly in emergencies.

Ira hurried around the shores of the Lagoon—a little harbor denting the coast, navigable for small craft, but not for vessels of any considerable draft. Cap had told him that he needn't waste much time at the Lagoon, that he could take the short cut across the upland from the rear of the little harbor, without visiting the beach at the narrow channel connecting the Lagoon with the open ocean.

But Ira's rangy strides had brought him to the Lagoon ahead of his schedule.

So, to familiarize himself with the route he would have to cover on night patrols —which then included the Lagoon channel as well as its inner shores—he walked through the fog to the northern side of the channel entrance.

As he came to the beach bordering the channel, he heard low voices. Moving faster with increasing excitement, he glimpsed the figures of two men in yellow oilskins, standing near a dory that was piled high with lobster pots. One of the men turned and stared at him.

"Hello, Iry!" he hailed. "Cap send ye out on post? Kinder off yer course, ain't ye?"

Ira felt his cheeks color at that reminder of his departure from Cap Cole's suggestion for him to take the short cut to Rocky Point. For he recognized the powerfully built, middle-aged pair as the Haskell brothers, Bill and Fred—two beach combers who lived in a shanty between the Lagoon and Rocky Point, fishing and raking sea moss for a hardy livelihood. And he also remembered that the two brothers stood in well with Cap Cole and the entire coast-guard service, owing to the assistance they had given the Sandy Hollow crew at several shipwrecks.

"I don't cal'late Cap minds if I git off my course a mite to git the lay o' the land," the homely surfman defended his digression from the short cut, wondering if the Haskells would report it to Cap and the latter call him down.

"Well, you'd better keep moseyin' along," growled Fred Haskell, "or some summer dude will be apt to smash his private yacht into Rocky P'int without you seein' him. An' then Cap would be on his high horse, an' you'd be back bay fishin' again."

Ira's eyes were on the lobster pots in the dory, with their red-and-white buoys which served as markers when they were set in deep water offshore. But what struck him as being strange was that he saw no bait in the little boat.

He did not stop for further conversation, however, but started off through the fog toward Rocky Point. Fred Haskell's hint of possible trouble at Rocky Point gave him a feeling of uneasiness. He was already wishing that he had avoided the channel entrance. But for any one to set lobster pots with no bait——

He had taken only a few steps when he stopped again. He heard the Haskells talking and laughing, then the rumble of their oars as they rowed the dory offshore. The surf outside the Lagoon was gentle, the wind had died down. Sounds carried quite a distance in the fog.

The rumble of the oars ceased. There was a splash, then the sound of rope scraping on the dory's gunwale. A moment later the oars rumbled again, then stopped. Followed another splash and the sound of scraping rope.

"The devil of a place that is to set lobster pots, so close to shore," the long-faced surfman muttered. "There never was a lobster ketched this side o' the sand bars a mile off the Lagoon to my recollection."

He listened for the rumbling of the oars again, but the dory was now too far out for the sound to reach him. So he continued his route along the beach at a brisk stride, and reached the telephone shack at Rocky Point on schedule time.

He looked off through the fog, but there were no boats in sight. A heavier surf than at the Lagoon was dashing over the stony ledge. Bits of wreckage still clinging to rocks high up on the beach mutely told of past disasters to small craft there. No wonder the coast guards centered their attention on that forbidding rocky barrier to small-boat navigation! Its record amply justified Cap Cole's eternal vigilance.

Ira called up the station and informed

the man in the tower that all was well. Then he continued his patrol to the Santuck halfway house, left his brass check in the safe, collected the one left there by the last Santuck patrolman, and turned back toward Sandy Hollow station.

At Rocky Point, he again looked off, and again telephoned that all was well. He was a little ahead of schedule, but that did not cause him to let down in his ground-covering gait as he stalked along the beach.

For his mind was on those lobster pots which the Haskells had set off the Lagoon. Why had the Haskell brothers —old fishermen as they were—put those lobster pots there, in a place where no lobster would ever migrate—and without bait? Were the Haskells crazy?

He found the Haskells' dory hauled up on the beach in front of their shanty in the upland, which the fog concealed. The oars were still in it. There was no sign of the brothers on the beach.

The homely substitute grinned and grasped the bow of the dory. A long shove slid its stern first into the water. Ira vaulted aboard, seized the oars and rowed toward the Lagoon mouth, taking his course by fisherman's instinct. He could easily lose himself in the fog, unconsciously turn the dory around if he stopped rowing. The distant roar of the heavier surf on Rocky Point, however, served him as a guide while he kept it off the dory's stern.

Yet he was beginning to think he had missed his course when he glimpsed over his shoulder a red buoy off the dory's bow. Rowing to it, he seized it and hauled in the lobster pot at the end of the rope to which the buoy was attached. As he expected, the lobster pot was weighted with stones, but not baited.

He lowered it where he had found it, looked seaward, and discerned another red buoy. He pulled the dory to the second one, and from there spotted a third. He rowed to that one, and found another ahead of it within easy eyeshot in the thickness.

"Godfrey!" he exclaimed, as he rowed from one buoy to another and discovered that they were arranged in a straight line from the Lagoon channel to a point in deep water fully a mile offshore. "A good-sized vessel could run in easy to this last deep-water buoy. Them buoys have been set to help some one make a quick run into the Lagoon without losin' precious time gittin' the course."

Smugglers had been captured before, running stuff into the Lagoon, with an automobile waiting on the main road behind the harbor to whisk the contraband away. Were the Haskells in with a gang of those smugglers, using their good name at Sandy Hollow to cover up their deeds?

"That's the way it looks to me," muttered Ira, as he rowed back to the red buoy closest to the Lagoon channel. "An' if that *is* what they're up to, it's time 'twas nipped in the bud."

While Ira was covering his four o'clock patrol, Ansel Handy approached Harve Pierce in the station tower where the veteran surfman was on duty. Harve was a big fellow in the early forties, with a humorous twinkle in his blue eyes and the nervous restlessness of a caged tiger as he paced the floor, his value on lookout blanked by the fog that enveloped the station.

"Harve," began Ansel, an expectant grin on his square face, his brown eyes avoiding a direct look at the older surfman, "I met Bill Haskell when I was on the noon beach patrol, an' we cal'lated we might have some fun with Iry Banks to-night. Iry's goin' to be scared to death on that first night patrol of his, if you ask me, an' if we staged a little fake smugglin' party, them long legs o' his would be apt to do some fast travelin'."

Harve chuckled. "I'd like to see how Iry would act if we did run into some excitement," he said. "But the way he took his initiation, I'm under the impression he's got more sand than we give him credit for."

"Well, he ain't," declared Ansel. "Leastwise, we'd soon find out if we *did* stage a fake smugglin'. Bill's idee is to pull it off at Rocky P'int, Bill playin' the part o' the smuggler. You'd be with Iry, an' you could hold him back if he upset our calculations an' got to actin' too rough."

"But Rocky P'int's the last place on the coast smugglin' would be pulled off," protested Harve. "Iry'd git wise."

"He ain't got brains enough," laughed Ansel. "He'd be so scared he wouldn't stop to figger that out. There'd be no harm in it—jist a little fun. In fact, I cal'late Cap Cole would favor it to give Iry a taste o' what *might* happen on patrol, an' find out jist where Iry stands when he's called upon to show his nerve."

Harve chuckled again. "There wouldn't be no harm in it," he admitted, "an' 'twould sorter give Iry his second-degree initiation into the service, seein's he's had his first. You say Bill's game to go through with it?"

"Bill's darned anxious to," replied Ansel. "He'll be expectin' my answer when I go out with Pete Collins on the eight o'clock patrol."

"Then you can tell him we'll go through with it," consented the older surfman. "Only there won't be no shootin'—make that plain to him."

"Oh, no," Ansel assured him. "Bill jist plans to make the devil of a noise an' do a lot o' runnin' around. An' 'twill be up to you to act sorter scared, like you might git a bullet put in you any minute, jist to make Iry think you're in a bad mess. Git the idee, Harve?"

"Sure do. Count on me to put the fear o' the Almighty into Iry, if it can be done," laughed the humorously inclined big surfman. "Fact is, I think 'twould be well to git Iry worked up before we set out on our patrol—tell him I've got a tip smugglin's goin' to be pulled off on the P'int, an' that we're in for a whole lot o' trouble."

"That's it—that's it!" applauded the square-faced surfman, slapping his thigh with glee. "Harve, you're a born actor—trust you for playin' *your* part! Then I'll tell Bill you'll go through with it. An' if you don't have a circus, my name ain't Anse Handy!"

It was dark when Ira hauled up the dory in front of the Haskells' shanty where he had found it. He covered most of the distance back to the station at a dog trot, taking the short cut through the upland and thereby missing Ansel and Pete Collins on their eight o'clock patrol. It was a quarter to nine when he reached the station.

"Where the dickens have you been?" Harve reprimanded him when he entered the mess room, where Harve was seated at the table, eating warmed-over beans and drinking coffee. "You're nigh an hour late. Cap will give you merry hell when he finds that out. You're supposed to stick to your schedule on patrol, unless you run into trouble, an' you didn't report none from Rocky P'int—the only place you'd be apt to run into it."

Ira gulped, stuttered, and started to explain how he had found the line of buoys. But Harve cut him off:

"I know, I know—you new men always have some fool excuse when you come in late from your first patrol. But save your explanations, eat a bite an' turn in for a few winks o' sleep. 'Cause if I ain't mistaken, you an' me are goin' to find plenty doin' on that midnight post of ourn."

Ira's eyes widened while Harve told him of the tip he had received that smuggling was to be pulled off that night on Rocky Point.

"By gosh!" the homely substitute exclaimed hoarsely. "Is that so? Why, I—I——"

But he did not finish. Were two smuggling parties going to take place that night—one at Rocky Point, the other at the Lagoon? Or could it be that Harve, too, was in with the Haskells, and that the lookout for smugglers at the Point was only a blind to hold the beach patrol there while the actual stunt was performed at the Lagoon?

So Ira, mystified, confused, said no more. If Harve was in with the smugglers, he knew about that buoy line to the Lagoon. But if he wasn't in with them, and the wool was really being pulled over his eyes in that smuggling tip he had received—— But it didn't seem possible that an old hand in the coast guard could be fooled so easily.

"I see you're nervous," commented Harve solemnly. "Well, we've got somethin' to be nervous about. Hustle a few o' them beans into you an' git a wink o' sleep before we start out." He rose from the table and went to the sleeping room.

But after Ira had turned in, he did not sleep. He hated to think that Harve was in with those smugglers, sacrificing his splendid record by accepting hush money. Yet he knew that many a coast guard with records matching Harve's had been found guilty of accepting bribes, even sharing in the profits from contraband successfully landed. The temptation was strong, and men like Harve and even Cap Cole were only human.

The alarm clock woke him from a drowse. He jumped up, dressed, and met Harve in the mess room, where they ate a few beans and drank a cup of coffee apiece. Ansel and Pete were just coming in from the eight o'clock post. They reported that all was quiet on the beach.

The fog was still thick when Ira and Harve set forth. A little wind had sprung up, and the surf was booming louder. At the Lagoon, they found all serene, as far as they could see through the thickness. The channel to the little harbor was washed by gentle surges rolling in from the ocean, but on the beach the breakers were pounding with steadily increasing violence.

Ira stayed close to Harve as they pushed on to Rocky Point. As they passed the Haskells' shanty, he observed that the dory was gone, but he made no comment about it, and neither did Harve. The older surfman was glancing about nervously. And Ira, quite unconsciously, was doing the same.

"Now keep yer eyes peeled," warned Harve in a low voice as the surf on the rocks off the Point boomed closer. "An' don't do no shootin'—we ketch our smugglers at Sandy Holler barehanded. We're apt to jump 'em any time now."

Ira's nerves were now jumpy for fair. He told himself over and over that Harve's talk about smugglers on the Point was only a blind. But that was poor consolation in the fog, with bullets likely to fly at them any moment if smuggling really were being pulled off there.

They were on the rocks of the Point now, the stunted pines wherein the telephone shack was hidden looming in an inky smear through the thickness. Ira's eyes shifted between the pines and the line of noisy breakers, his heart thumping, his nerves keyed up to their highest pitch.

Suddenly Harve stopped, tense, staring at the pines.

"There they go!" he cried. "Come on—put after 'em!"

Ira glimpsed a form racing across the rocks toward the pines. Harve was running after the fugitive, shouting and wildly waving his arm for Ira to join him in the chase.

But the lanky substitute remained where Harve had left him. Up and down the rocky shore line his round

eyes swept through the fog. He could make out no boat there, nothing to indicate that the smugglers' landing had been made from the water.

"Hey, Harve!" he yelled. "Come back here! The stuff ain't come ashore yit! That feller's only a decoy! He ain't the real——"

But Harve had vanished into the pines. Ira could hear him shouting above the rhythmic beat of the surf and the whine of the wind. But instead of responding to the older surfman's summons, Ira ran in the opposite direction—over the rocks toward the end of the Point, Harve's cries dying out as the distance between the two widened.

Close to the breakers splashing on the rocks, Ira suddenly halted, glancing nervously up and down the coast line, then looking back toward where he had last seen Harve. Once he started to run into the pines to join his patrol mate. But he turned back, irresolute, and gazed out into the offshore thickness again.

He strained his eyes, focusing them on a spot in the fog where a dark shape rose on the crest of a wave. As it washed closer, he cried out with joy and excitement. For that shape took on the definite form of a dory as it swayed up to the crest of another comber. A dory with a single occupant who was struggling desperately at the oars to prevent the little craft from being dashed upon the rocks!

Ira unhesitatingly plunged into the surf up to his knees, heedless of the slippery stone slabs under his unsteady feet. The boatman had entirely lost control of the dory now. Toward Ira it careened, broadside to the surf, its occupant in the bow, prepared to jump.

But before it rose on the last line of shore surf, the dory's bow providentially swung around toward the rocky coast. Up it shot in the last breakers' embrace. Down it came like a boat in a shoot-the-chutes, driving straight at the tensely waiting substitute!

Ira braced his feet on the submerged rocks—and grabbed the dory's bow gunwale as it shot past him. Holding it with all his great strength, he ran with it up on the rocks, steadying it through the seething white water that still fought to overturn it.

Over the rocks the dory's bottom scraped as Ira, with his running start, hauled it high and dry. The boatman had tumbled flat on his back during his rapid ride, his sea boots straight in the air, his hands gripping both gunwales.

But the instant the dory halted above the back wash of the surf, the oarsman was on his feet. He jumped out on the rocks, and for a moment he and his long-faced rescuer faced each other.

"Fred Haskell!" exclaimed Ira. And in a tone of authority: "Stand back! I'm goin' to take a look at what's in this dory."

"You will like hell! Git away from that dory!" roared the ungrateful boatman, bulking huge in his yellow oilskins. "Here—leave that alone!" as Ira bent over and seized the neck of a stuffed canvas bag.

But the lanky surfman quickly let go of the bag and stepped back. For with head lowered, both fists striking out, Fred Haskell charged down on him like an infuriated bull.

Ira, however, was ready for him. Planting his ample feet firmly, he let fly that elongated left arm of his. The knuckles of his doubled-up fist crashed against Fred Haskell's bulbous nose, even as the beach-comber's fists at the end of thicker but shorter arms whisked close to the homely substitute's chin.

Fred let out a bellow of pain and surprise, halting abruptly in his rush and reeling backward. Ira flung himself upon him and tripped him heavily to the rocks, going down with him and wrestling him to pin his arms against the hard, jagged surface.

"Hey, Banks! Where are ye? What the devil's the matter with ye?" came the angry voice of Harve Pierce out of the fog. "That smuggler got away! Wait till Cap Cole hears about this! Wait till I tell him——"

Then he spotted Ira and galloped over. Bill Haskell was with him.

"Why, it's Fred Haskell!" gasped Harve, bending over Ira's bloody-nosed prisoner. "Iry—what's the meanin' o' this?"

"I dunno yit," panted the substitute, holding Fred Haskell helpless on his back. "Look in that dory, Harve!" he shouted, his ungainly form rising, his hand darting to his automatic pistol and pulling it from its holster. "Git up," he ordered Fred. "Stand beside your brother. "An' then both of ye stand right where ye be!" He backed away, his weapon wavering between the two.

Fred lumbered up, and, wiping his nose on the back of his wrist, took his place beside Bill. The latter stood with legs braced wide apart, arms outthrust, fingers opening and closing, the picture of balked fury. Harve was ransacking the dory.

"Jumpin' Christopher!" he suddenly cried. "Why, here's dope in this can, sure as you're born! Can't fool me; I've seen too much of it on smugglin' raids. An' here's a bolt o' cloth—an' here's a fur coat in this canvas sack —an' another—an'—yes, by crinus, *four* of 'em!"

Leaving the dory, he confronted the dismal-faced Haskells.

"Fine pair, you are," he sneered. "Fine pair to use your standin' at the station this way. This ain't no fake. It's the real thing!"

"We was double crossed," growled Fred Haskell. "'Twas Anse Handy done it. I might 'a' knowed that shifty-eyed whelp was puttin' one over on us when he planned that fake smugglin' with Bill."

"Yeah—you've got us with the goods, an' I'm facin' the music with my brother," grated Bill Haskell. "All I'm askin' is to git my paws on Anse Handy —jist once! 'Twas him that drawed the map an' planned out our night's work on it, when we told him we could sneak some stuff ashore if we could throw you coast guards off our scent. But what I don't understand is——"

"Never mind that!" excitedly interrupted Ira. "Where is that map Ansel drawed up?"

"Right here!" replied Fred, fishing a folded paper from his pocket and handing it to Harve. "You might's well have it, now the game's up," he sighed dejectedly.

Cap Cole and the Sandy Hollow crew hustled out of bed and in scanty attire ran downstairs when Harve hailed them from the living room. There they blinked at the two Haskells and a pile of canvas bags and cylindrical tin cans reposing on the floor, with Harve and Ira standing guard over their night's haul.

Harve chattered out the story of the fake smuggling he had arranged with Ansel to test Ira's nerve, and the unexpected seizure which followed it. Ansel listened, cowering in the background, white-faced and trembling. Bill Haskell saw him, clenched his fists and started for him purposefully. But Pete Collins held the muttering smuggler back.

"Wait till I git you, you double-crossin' skulp!" roared Bill. "'Twas *you* that tricked us!"

"Ansel Handy tricked you? How?" innocently inquired Cap Cole. "He didn't do it to *my* knowledge. You know anything about it, Harve?" he questioned his second in command.

"Only about the fake smugglin', an' what the Haskells say—an' this." Harve drew out the folded paper which Fred Haskell had given him, and opened it. Cap Cole came closer, and he and Harve

studied it together. It was a crude penciled map of the Sandy Hollow coast, with names and directions scrawled on it.

"That's Ansel Handy's writin', sure enough," commented Cap. He pointed to a line drawn from a spot far offshore to the inner shore line of the Lagoon. "But this line don't lead to Rocky P'int, where ye say the smugglin' was pulled off."

"An' that's what *I'd* like to have cleared up, now my senses are beginnin' to come back," put in Fred Haskell. "How in thunder did I fetch up on the P'int, when I'd set the buoy line to the Lagoon channel from the buoy offshore where I was to meet the schooner that brought the stuff? How did ye fool me there, Handy?"

"I—I don't know nothin' about it!" wailed the bewildered Ansel. "I never even saw them buoys!"

"I cal'late I can straighten you out there," Ira spoke up. "On my beach patrol yistiddy arternoon, I found that buoy line to the Lagoon. But I hauled up them lobster pots an' changed 'em so's the buoys led to Rocky P'int instid. I figgered the smuggler follerin' them buoys could git twisted round in the fog easy, an' would be in such a hurry, he wouldn't stop to take compass bearin's. An' I reasoned us coast guards would have a better chance of nailin' that smuggler at Rocky P'int than anywheres else."

In the breathless silence that ensued, the living-room clock ticked audibly. Then Harve Pierce burst out:

"But why in torment didn't ye tell me about that string o' buoys that led to the Lagoon, an' how ye changed 'em, when me an' you went on our patrol together?"

"Because," the homely substitute answered unwaveringly, "I wa'n't sure you an' mebbe some o' the other boys wa'n't in with the smugglers, an' I knowed that before we got through at Rocky P'int, I'd run an almighty good chance o' findin' out jist where you *did* stand. That is, if them changed buoys worked like I cal'lated they would."

Cap Cole's arm shot out, and his hand seized Ira's in a hearty clasp.

"Put Anse Handy under arrest with the Haskells!" he ordered Harve. And while the unhappy Anse and the two brothers were herded into the spare room used as detention quarters, he gave Ira's hand another vigorous squeeze and shake.

"The permanent berth at the station is yours, Banks—in Anse Handy's place," promised the genially smiling commander. "An' the call-down I was plannin' to give ye for comin' back late from afternoon patrol will be laid on the table, indefinite. How about Sunday, Banks, to bring your wife an' kids up to the station for the celebration? I cal'late our teeth are all on edge now for that chicken dinner."

EXPLAINING RADIO

RADIO COMMISSIONER O. H. CALDWELL was trying to tell the somewhat bewildered members of the committee on appropriations of the House of Representatives the difference between frequency and power.

"What is the relation between frequency and power in radio?" he repeated a lawmaker's query. "Well, I'll tell it this way: A frequency is merely a channel. If I may illustrate by a building of so many stories, frequency simply corresponds to the story in which you are carrying on your conversation. Power is only how loud you shout."

No Show At All

By VICTOR MAXWELL

Terwilliger's Epochal Wild West Show Wanted to Come to Mill City, but Mill City Didn't Want It to Come.

MILL CITY was the most perfectly regulated town in the world, without a doubt. It was a veritable laboratory in which the forces of supply and demand were balanced against each other so exactly that there was never anything left over. The great industrial plants along the river bank paid out to their employees from ten to fifteen thousand dollars every two weeks; and upon this money, immediately diverted through various channels in the course of the semimonthly "settling up," Mill City found all that sustained it and its other activities.

All the stores in Mill City ran charge accounts. Most of them had signs prominently displayed to the effect that "all accounts must be settled the day after pay day." This, of course, didn't mean all accounts; it meant the accounts of those who worked in the mills. The other people had a different code of life, and this tale does not concern them at all. So delicate was the balance in Mill City between supply and demand, between income and outgo, between assets and liabilities, that a very little thing could throw the community into chaos.

For instance, when the scale in the mills had been two dollars a day, shaves had cost ten cents and hair cuts twenty cents, and pork roast sold for eleven cents a pound. Then came the fateful day when the scale was increased to two dollars and a quarter a day, and

at once Mill City became a seething maelstrom of tempestuous finance until the balance was restored by raising the price of shaves to fifteen cents, hair cuts to a quarter, and pork roast to fourteen cents. That took care of the surplus capital, and once again the town went on methodically and peacefully leeching the mill hands. And peace and quiet reigned until Terwilliger's Epochal Wild West Show billed the community, with a promise to give two performances on Sunday, the fifteenth.

It was the second day of the month when the glaring posters appeared unexpectedly upon the drab walls and thrilled Mill City from foundation to its tallest pinnacle. Not for years had a circus or a wild-West show or even a reputable road company of dramatists attempted to make a stand at Mill City; for the canny showmen had learned by bitter experience that the balance of income and outgo was so delicately adjusted in the great industrial center that there was nothing left over for the itinerant palm reached out to milk the public purse. Occasionally a "lyceum show" took a chance and invaded Mill City under the "auspices" of some church, but even these ventures were rare. Mill City had its three moving-picture houses, and they drained the last cent of amusement money to be had; in fact, there were murmurings from the other business men that the movies were "hurting trade almost as much as the speakeasies." There were seventeen speakeasies, so if the murmuring was true, the movies must have been doing a tremendous business.

And now came this circus thing. Its paper went up on the dead walls on the second, and it was billed to show on the fifteenth. Thirteen days yet; plenty of time for Mill City to manage things. Mill City had a way of managing. On the fourth the advance men for Terwilliger's Epochal Wild West arrived in the town, and commenced to learn things. The suave Jimmy Pittle, who was intrusted with getting the window cards up, found that Mill City merchants had a marked aversion to "brightening up their show windows with lively scenes," as Jimmy was wont to express it. Even the saloons and pool halls appeared not to care for half-sheet lithos depicting the buffalo prancing o'er his native heath. Nor did the drug stores or cigar stands welcome Jimmy and his offers of "one reserved seat, mister, if you'll just let this card set in the front of your case for ten days."

Bob Oakleigh, whose duty it was to look after the feed for the horses, secure the grounds, get hotel accommodations for the stars, and line up local concessions, also noticed that Mill City seemed to be strange to the ways of showmen. The only suitable site he could get for the big show was on the west side of the river, right at the city limits, and seven blocks from the interurban car line. And while the ground rent for this was not exorbitant, Tobias Butterworth, who owned the "lot," wanted it in advance. He wouldn't take an order on the show, he wouldn't take Bob's check, and so Bob had to come over to the hotel to cash a draft on Terwilliger so he could give old Butterworth the money.

"What's the matter with you folks in this burg?" he demanded of Cliff Henderson, the more-or-less-genial proprietor of the Merchants' Hotel. "Don't you realize what an educational advantage it is to the rising generation of your city to have a show like——"

"That ain't it, friend," interrupted Cliff. "It's a matter of money. Just that, and that's all."

Bob Oakleigh paused and looked at the hotel man closely. "Money? What you mean?" he demanded after a minute. "Ain't this town got a pay roll of nearly six thousand a week? And don't we show here the day after the

first pay day in the month? What you mean, money?"

Cliff Henderson selected a five-cent cigar from the case on the desk and bit the end thoughtfully. Then taking a purple-and-green match from the empty inkwell on the register rack, he lighted the thing and blew the gray fumes directly into the showman's face.

"You got it sized up right, stranger," he said. "This town has a pay roll of better than six thousand a week, and you show here the day after the first pay day in the month. That's what's the matter—there's going to be about thirteen thousand dollars in the public's jeans the night before your show gets in here, and the merchants and other fellows who want that thirteen thousand, and who feel they're rightfully entitled to it, they just naturally hate to have the public packing that money around and thinking of a circus."

Bob Oakleigh, almost overcome by the combination of this revelation and the smoke from Cliff's cigar, motioned the hotel man to open the case and sell him one. Then, armed with a counter-irritant, he leaned over the desk and thoughtfully watched Cliff put his nickel in the cash-register drawer.

"So," he said, "that's the idea! This show has come in on the preserves of the local highwaymen, eh? And they don't aim to encourage us none?"

Cliff Henderson hitched one fat leg over the gate that kept loungers in the lobby from wandering behind the hotel desk, and nodded his head. "You have an inkling, stranger—just an inkling—of the condition you're up against. Listen now, and I'll make it plainer. Outside of myself, every man in this town lives offn the mills. Either they get their wages direct in the pay envelope, or they get 'em secondhand. Outside of the mill hands, there's maybe a thousand people here, and half of 'em have got to be reckoned with. There's thirty-three lawyers, seven ministers, eight doctors, and a manicure, to begin with. Then there's two undertakers and two florists. There's two department stores, one millinery joint, one ten-cent store, three ladies'-goods stores, five drug stores, two hardware stores, one furniture house, six grocery stores, four meat markets, and a creamery. There's two bakeries, one automobile garage, three real-estate offices, and the local gas company. Also there's two water companies aside from the city plant, there's the electric-light company, which is a branch of the big one down at the city, and there's two clothing stores and a shoe shop. That's our principal business register. Aside from that, there's the speakeasies and pool halls, and some cigar stands and small stores that I forget the names of—and there's two livery barns. And, oh, yes, there's three movie houses, too. Now each one of these wants their bit of that pay roll, and they want it every pay-day night, if they can't get it oftener. So what you might call the mercantile interests of this town don't look kindly on interloping circuses and things like that; they sort of jeopardize the financial stability of the place, see? And then we got two banks here, and some mortgage sharks, and they're dead set against all amusement; think it's sinful. And then we got eight churches, you know, and your bills say you're going to give two performances on Sunday. Do you begin to see your condition, stranger?"

There was nothing unkind in the way Cliff Henderson said it. Bob Oakleigh realized that; Cliff was simply stating facts. Now that it was diagramed to him, he could see it all. And it didn't look good.

"I suppose these here public citizens of yours sit up nights planning how they'll cut up that pay roll," he said, with a bitter laugh.

"Take it from me, stranger," solemnly answered Cliff, "as an actual

fact, I have heard right here in my own hotel dining room, young Wessels, who runs the Emporium, tell old man Shaughnessy, of the Reliable Department Store, not to hold a special on shoes till next month because he was going to advertise silk stockings and white petticoats at big reductions this week. And I guess that is gauging things pretty close, ain't it?"

"Who owns the newspaper here?" asked Oakleigh. "The mills, I presume?"

Cliff shook his head. "Nope—this town don't go according to Hoyle. The paper is owned by a runt named Fealey. When the mills want anything they buy it, same as anybody else that wants anything from Fealey."

At this the wild-West advance man seemed to take new heart. "Good!" he exclaimed, with real feeling. "I know that kind; used to buy 'em myself. Guess you'd better save a room for me; I'll be here a coupla days, anyway. I'll probably have some wires from the boss, too, which I'll ask you to hold for me. And now, mine host, you peel your eye, for you're going to see something happen that you wouldn't have expected. Who's the foxiest attorney you've got in this burg, and where's his office?"

Cliff Henderson dislodged his leg from the gate, and shoved the register at Oakleigh. "Room'll be a dollar," he said. "Lawyer Hoskins, over the post office, is spoken of as a good feller; he handles some of the mill business."

Bob Oakleigh signed his name on the Merchants' Hotel list of notables, threw a silver dollar upon the counter, and, tossing the cigar he had been smoking on the floor, swung through the door and walked down the street. Cliff scanned the name scrawled on the register, and shook his head. "Mighty cocky feller, he is," he said to himself. "I'd like to see him make it, too. But I reckon Mill City will do for him, just as it has for the rest of us." And he swore, as many other people have done whenever they spoke of Mill City.

Almost an hour afterward, having first made several visits to the telegraph office in the depot, Bob Oakleigh climbed the creaking stairs over the post office and entered the office of the Honorable Lysander Hoskins, one of Mill City's legal lights. Mr. Hoskins was a smooth-shaven gentleman of about fifty years, thin-haired, suave in appearance, and well but quietly dressed. His stenographer abruptly left her desk in his office as Oakleigh entered, and she shut the door behind her as she went out.

"What's your fee for a legal opinion, sir?" asked the visitor.

The Honorable Lysander Hoskins observed that his caller was a stranger in Mill City and that he did not appear to be of the class that were looking for work. He also noted an air of energy and dispatch about the stranger that made him surmise the gentleman might have something to do with the coming circus or wild-West show.

"Fifty dollars," he replied.

Bob reached down in his pocket and tossed two twenty-dollar gold pieces on the table, following them by a ten-dollar bill that he extracted from another pocket.

"Mr. Hoskins," he said, "I'm advance manager for Terwilliger's Epochal Wild West Show. Is there any legal reason, any law upon your statute books, that will prevent us from showing matinée and night here on the fifteenth? The date is Sunday. We've showed in other towns in the State on Sunday, but I'm just fifty dollars' worth curious enough to know our legal rights."

The Honorable Lysander Hoskins tipped back in his chair, and, placing his hands, palms together, tickled himself on the chin with the twin points of his extended fingers. Looking at

the ceiling, he rendered his opinion as follows:

"There are no city ordinances governing Sunday amusements, save that there is a provision in the charter that no parade shall be granted a permit to march on the streets during the hours of public worship. So the matter of Sunday performances would be governed entirely by the State law, which is as follows: 'On the first day of the week, commonly known as the Sabbath or the Lord's Day, it shall be illegal to keep open any store or booth for the transaction of public business, or to present in any hall or tent an entertainment for purposes of amusement to which an admission fee is charged; provided that the provisions of this act shall not apply to doctor shops, apothecaries, undertakers, slaughterhouses in the months of July and August, and meetings of spiritists or other bona-fide religionists that might be regarded by unbelievers as being more entertaining than serious.' That, sir, is the law; passed in Territorial days, and since amended by the legislature in these words: 'The provisions of this act shall not be held to apply to theaters or the operation of public-service utilities.' You see, the law is rather unsatisfactory. However, it is easy to interpret in spite of that. Your performance, I take it, is not presented in a tent, but in the open air?"

"Correct, judge. And it isn't an amusement enterprise, either. We advertise that our show has great educational value."

"Well, then, sir, we have a hopeful situation. In the first place, your performance is not specifically forbidden by the Sunday-closing law. More than that, it is a principle of jurisprudence that a legislative body cannot pass a law governing activities of which it has no knowledge. When this law was passed there were no such things as wild-West shows, and there were no such things as baseball games. I mention the latter because the supreme court has already held that as baseball was unknown as a pastime when this law was passed, the statute could not be construed to apply to baseball games, and so Sunday baseball is permitted under the law in this State. Ergo, were the matter brought before it for consideration and review, the supreme court would probably decide that as wild-West shows were not in existence at the time this law was enacted, the law did not apply to them. I should very much like to take the matter before them, sir."

Mr. Robert Oakleigh felt much cheered, and, reaching into his pocket again, he produced a sheaf of contract forms. Filling out duplicates, he presented one to the attorney.

"Mr. Hoskins, Oakleigh is my name; Robert Oakleigh. I herewith hand you one of our contracts, calling for payment to you of the sum of one hundred dollars on the day of our performance in Mill City. You are to consider this contract a retainer, and are to regard yourself for the time being as local counsel for the Terwilliger Epochal Wild West Show. You are to protect its interests, and more particularly you are to combat by whatever legal measures that may be necessary, efforts that I strongly suspect will be made to prevent our showing here on Sunday. Is that agreeable to you?"

The Honorable Lysander Hoskins glanced over the contract, folded it up, and put it in a portfolio on his desk. "Perfectly satisfactory, Mr. Oakleigh," he said. "And now permit me to give you a word of advice; don't spend any money in this city. Give contracts. The hope that they will be able to realize upon them will make our citizens more lenient toward you. If anything occurs in which you feel that you need my help, pray call on me; evenings when I am not in my office I am usually

at home or at the Elks' Club. There is a telephone in both places."

Bob Oakleigh's next call was upon Francis Frederick Fealey, "the little runt" who controlled the destinies of the Mill City *Enterprise* and the job-print shop connected therewith. Mr. Fealey had heard that Mr. Oakleigh was in town, and had been waiting for him some hours. He greeted him cordially and offered him one of his three-for-ten-cents cigars, which Bob accepted in self-defense.

"Mr. Fealey, we are business men, both of us, so let's get down to cases," he said. "I want to do a hundred dollars' worth of advertising in your paper in the course of the next two weeks for Terwilliger's Epochal Wild West Show. Do you want the business?"

"Our amusement rates are forty cents an inch," laconically said Mr. Fealey.

"That will be about sixteen inches a day then," answered Bob Oakleigh. "I have a six-inch double electro I'll leave with you, and there'll be four inches of hand-set type which you'll keep standing below the electro. And you'll give us about half a column of press notices a day?"

Mr. Fealey, accustomed to the Mill City way of doing business, was rather taken off his guard by the contrasting liberality of this offer, and by the manner in which Mr. Oakleigh accepted his terms, which were about fifty per cent higher than he usually charged. With an approving smile he watched Bob write out one of the show's contracts, and took it with great satisfaction.

"Now," said Oakleigh, once the business details had been attended to, "I'd like to meet your editor and buy him a drink."

Mr. Fealey didn't patronize the Mill City speakeasies himself; his wife was in "society," and he couldn't afford to do it. But he introduced Oakleigh to Culbertson, the brainy youth who got out the *Enterprise's* four pages for him every day, and Bob led the editor to the best bar in town. After the formalities had been gone through with, Oakleigh gave the editor a fistful of passes.

"Now, son," said he, "I want you to realize that there's going to be news in this show playing here on Sunday. And anything you can do for us will be appreciated in a substantial way. I'll be back here about five days before we come to town, and I'll see you then."

There was "news" in the coming of the Terwilliger Epochal Wild West Show to Mill City. In the first place, it was the first show that had tempted fate in Mill City since the year after the Flood, and in the second place the fact that it was dated for Sunday at once produced an increasing stream of protests. The Ladies' Aid, of the First Church, brought in the initial protest, and they were followed by the Men's Brotherhood and the Knights of St. George. Culbertson saw the news value of each protest, and played it up on the front page of the *Enterprise*. Then Culbertson discovered that the Honorable Lysander Hoskins, perhaps the city's leading attorney, had some interesting views on the Sunday-closing law and its relation to the wild-West show, and there was a column interview with Mr. Hoskins in the paper the next day. The outside papers, for which Fealey and Culbertson were the correspondents, also came to know of the impending clash in Mill City; so in one way or another Terwilliger's Epochal Wild West Show got a good deal of advertising aside from the sixteen inches a day that Fealey's contract demanded.

On the Monday before the show was due to arrive in Mill City—the afternoon of the ninth, to be exact—there gathered several substantial citizens in the offices in the rear of the Mill City National Bank. There was Samuel L. Dickinson, the city attorney; David P. Dickinson, his brother and president

of the bank; George Wessels, manager of the Emporium; old Pat Shaughnessy, owner and manager of the Reliable Department Store; Abner Welland, owner of the Blue Front Clothing Store; and old Ezra Dickinson, father of the Dickinson brothers, and reputed to be the heaviest mortgage holder in the county. The gentlemen's faces were grave, and they were evidently facing a situation of the utmost seriousness.

"I've been thinking over what you said," commenced Samuel Dickinson. "and it seems to me that the easiest way out of it is to have the council instruct the chief of police to arrest the ticket seller as soon as he begins to sell tickets for the afternoon performance. He'll probably be yelling his head off, and we can hold him for disturbing the peace."

"We got to do something," said George Wessels. "Here I got about two hundred dollars out in charge accounts, and I'm not going to have any circus come in and scoop that money out of my hand. Business has been rotten lately, anyway."

David Dickinson, president of the bank, nodded his head. "I know what it will be if we don't stop it. There's maybe forty of the boys won't come in and pay their interest on their home payments. There's old Jim Partney, now; he's got nine kids. At two bits apiece, with him and his wife, that'll be two seventy-five he'll blow in at this here circus, to say nothing of what he'll spend for peanuts and lemonade. He'll probably blow all of three dollars there Sunday if we don't stop it—more than he'll make at the mill in a whole day. And there's lots of others like him."

"Jim, he owes the Blue Front eleven dollars ninety now," interjected Mr. Welland, referring to a notebook in his hand. "He was to have come in last pay day and settled, but he said one of the kids was sick, and he had to pay the doctor. I didn't dream there'd be no circus, so I let him off."

"I see by the *Enterprise* that Lysander Hoskins says the law can't touch this show," rumbled Pat Shaughnessy. "Lysander he usually knows the law."

This got a rise out of Ezra Dickinson, who looked proudly at his boy Samuel. "I reckon our city attorney knows as much law as Lysander Hoskins," he squeaked, in his high falsetto. "But that ain't all of it. We don't want to let this get into the courts, where maybe Lysander would pull some trick. We got to appeal to folks' common sense; we got to find some way to make them realize that this is a—a sacrilege to have a circus on Sunday."

"Fiddlesticks! It's no more sacrilege than the baseball games up at the capital," said David Dickinson. "And you know, father, last year you and I went to nearly all of them."

"It is, too, boy," replied Ezra, uncomfortable at having been so exposed before his fellow townsmen. "And I never have felt just right about them games we went to see last year, anyway. You notice I ain't gone to none this year."

"That sacrilege idea is a good one," thoughtfully remarked Samuel, the city attorney. "We got to play that strong. You people see your ministers, and I'll get my wife to feed it into Fealey's wife. Maybe she can make him put it in the paper."

"Fealey's getting a hundred dollars for what he's putting in the paper," said Wessels discouragingly. "He showed me his contract the other day. I was up there yelling for a cheaper rate, and he showed me how this circus was paying him forty cents an inch. Honest!"

"So you been trying to get a lower rate than me, have you?" bellowed Pat Shaughnessy. "Huh, just let that runt give you a cut under me and I'll put on a clearance sale that will ruin you,

so help me! And I'll advertise in circulars, too; so Fealey won't get a cent."

The other members of the conference hastened to suppress the budding quarrel between the two department-store managers, and then returned to the discussion of their problem. It was over an hour later when they adjourned, and Samuel Dickinson telephoned up to the *Enterprise* and asked Culbertson to step down to the bank for an important interview.

In view of the gravity of the occasion, Samuel gave the young editor a seven-cent cigar—wholesale price, the way he bought them—and then outlined the city's plan to protect its morals.

"After a conference with some of our leading citizens, Culbertson, you may announce that we are determined that Mill City's Sunday peace and quiet shall not be sullied by the braying bands of a circus, nor shall the rest of our people be disturbed by the ruffianism and hysteria usually coincident with a performance of this nature—the discharge of firearms, the charging of horses, and the like. The council will refuse to-night to issue a permit for a street parade to this show, and it will also instruct the chief of police to swear in extra officers to arrest any person or persons who may try to carry on the activities of this performance at the show grounds. The charge will be 'disturbing the public peace by behaving in a loud and boisterous manner in a public place.' I wish you would give this announcement prominence, so that the excitement that has already been created among our people may have a chance to subside. Believe me, Mr. Culbertson, feeling against the sacrilege of a circus performance on Sunday is running very high."

That was news, all right, and Culbertson did it justice in the *Enterprise*. The front page of the little paper fairly shouted in black type that there would be no wild-West show the following Sunday if the peace officers of Mill City could prevent it. The children, young and grown up, were vastly disappointed, and the city was more dismal than usual until the next edition of the *Enterprise* got upon the streets. Then it appeared that the children, young and grown up, had an unsuspected friend in the person of the Honorable Lysander Hoskins.

For Mr. Hoskins had gone before the circuit judge, and had applied for an injunction, restraining the peace officers of Mill City and the city officials from interfering in any way with the performance of that great educational and open-air spectacle, Terwilliger's Epochal Wild West Show, on the following Sabbath day. While the circuit judge had not granted the application for an injunction, he had issued a temporary writ, and had set Friday as the day upon which the application should be heard and argued. This was even greater news than the announcement of the city attorney, and the *Enterprise* and Culbertson did it fitting honor with black type and bombastic language.

That day, also, Mr. Robert Oakleigh returned to Mill City, and had dodgers distributed on the street, offering a prize of eight reserved seats at Terwilliger's Epochal Wild West Show to the boy or girl in each grade of the Mill City public schools who could write the best essay on "The American Bison." Promptly Professor Gordon, the city superintendent of schools, rushed to the *Enterprise* office and made a forceful statement to the effect that any child writing a composition or essay on the American bison would be summarily dismissed from class. Mr. Gordon was elected by the school patrons, who were also the leading merchants and taxpayers of the community.

Mr. Oakleigh, being informed of this

by the earnest Mr. Culbertson, thereupon wrote a letter to the editor of the *Enterprise,* in which he craved a small amount of valuable space to announce that at the Sunday afternoon performance of the great educational pageant of the plains, otherwise known as Terwilliger's Epochal Wild West Show, any boy or girl presenting an essay on the American bison would be given one free-admittance ticket at the box office on the grounds.

There was sure plenty of news in the *Enterprise,* and one of the more ambitious papers at the capital sent a special man down to cover the excitement at Mill City.

So matters went along until Friday morning, when Samuel Dickinson, city attorney, appeared early at the office of the Honorable Lysander Hoskins, and slammed the door behind him.

"Listen, Lysander," he said. "I'm not going into court and make a fool of myself arguing against your motion for an injunction against the city. I know you'll claim that there will be no disturbance of the peace and that the city and its officers will be prejudiced, and all that. And you'll get your writ, all right, in the end. You go over and tell the judge that you'll withdraw your application, and I'll give you my word as city attorney that no city officer will attempt to interfere with your blooming circus."

"It's not a circus, Sam, it's a——"

"I don't care what it is. You withdraw that application, and I'll quit. I'm not going to make a fool of myself, and have it heaved back at me next election."

"Oh, very well, Sam, if that's the way you feel about it. I'll do it now." And, reaching for the telephone, Mr. Hoskins called up the circuit-court chambers. "Judge? . . . This is Lysander Hoskins. I'd like to withdraw that application for a writ of injunction, if it's all right with you. . . . Eh, what's that? . . . Oh, yes, it was a good deal of a bluff. Much obliged, judge; good-by."

Having no business to keep him in Mill City, the circuit-court judge, with a sigh of relief, thereupon adjourned court until the following Monday, and departed for the capital, where he went out to the Country Club to play golf. And the *Enterprise,* when it heard the news, told in its blackest type how the city had withdrawn its objections to the Sunday performance of Terwilliger's Epochal Wild West Show.

This, however, is not the end of the story. Mr. Robert Oakleigh thought it was, but he was a stranger in Mill City. Mr. Cliff Henderson, proprietor of the Merchants' Hotel, and one of the two independent men in Mill City, hoped it was; but, knowing the community, he had his doubts. These doubts he tried to impart to Mr. Oakleigh, but the latter only laughed, and reminded Mr. Henderson that he'd promised him a surprise.

While the people believed the show victorious, and while the *Enterprise* was still fulfilling its contract as regards advertising and news, things were happening, however. Old Ezra Dickinson, dressed in his best coat, and playing the trump card of the Mill City rulers, was in the governor's office in the capital, nearly a hundred miles away. Ezra Dickinson, if you did not look too closely, was a venerable-appearing man of the stamp that incites respect—a sort of a good-grandfather type. He was looking at the governor earnestly with his rheumy eyes, and he was talking in as serious a tone as his falsetto voice would permit.

"Your excellency," he said, "the people of Mill City appeal to you to save them from a disgrace that threatens them through no fault of their own. Owing to the misguided zeal of a young man who happens at this time to be the editor of our one daily paper—a most

excellent young man, governor, but one lacking in an appreciation of the finer distinctions of life—we are threatened with the sacrilege of our Sabbath. An unprincipled itinerant showman has offered to bring to Mill City on Sunday one of these conglomerations of Indians, cowboys, and stockmen commonly called a 'wild-West show.' Against the wishes of the better element of our city, this man is determined to give his performance. And this young man, who is editor of our paper, not realizing the seriousness of the situation, but seeing only the spectacular side of the issue, has supported in the columns of our daily this showman's efforts to override the desires of our taxpapers and property owners. Our city officials are powerless under the law; we have refused this band of performers a permit to hold a street parade, but our charter gives us no further power. My son, our city attorney, unwisely let it be known in advance that he was planning to arrest the showmen for disturbing the peace, and, on learning of this, the circus people, through their attorney, applied for an injunction restraining the city officials from interfering with them. And so our hands are tied, governor, and we come to you. We do not know whether you can do anything for us, but we earnestly pray that you can.

"I have here, your excellency, an appeal signed by the seven ministers of our city; signed by our leading business men, and by our most substantial citizens. They ask you to do what you can to prevent this shameful thing happening to us, and I join my plea with theirs. Mill City, governor, has always looked up to you as the State's executive; Mill City gave you a majority of two thousand at the last election, governor, and now Mill City asks you to simply enforce the constitutional rights of its citizens and make it possible for them to enjoy the Sabbath without having it desecrated by this howling mob of Indians, cowboys, stockmen, and the riffraff that always goes with shows of such caliber."

The governor was a sincere man, and a busy man. The happenings in Mill City since the flaring posters of Terwilliger's Epochal Wild West Show had first appeared upon its drab walls had not been recounted to him. All he knew about the matter was the report that white-haired Ezra Dickinson gave him. He looked at the petition that Ezra laid on his desk, and he saw well-known names, and he saw seven names prefaced by "Reverend." He was a governor, and he hoped to be reëlected governor. What could he do? He had to know that.

Reaching for the telephone, he called up the attorney general. Rapidly he repeated to that official the report that Ezra had brought him. "What can I do?" he asked.

The attorney general, being a lawyer, had noted some of the reports in the papers regarding the Mill City situation. In particular had he noted the interview with the Honorable Lysander Hoskins, concerning the limits of the Sunday-closing law, and he knew the interpretation that the supreme court had put upon it in the case of the baseball suit. And he knew Mill City, where five-sixths of the population were more or less like dumb, driven sheep.

"I don't know, governor," he answered, "that you can really do anything. But you can run a bluff; you can threaten to call out the militia."

"I've done that three times this year," answered the governor, "and I don't want to do it again; not now, anyway."

"Well, why don't you go down there, and take along a bodyguard?" suggested the attorney general. "Probably the circus men won't shout 'Hey, rube!' at you."

Sunday, the fifteenth, dawned bright and fair, a perfect day. Two hundred small boys stood down at the railroad depot from four in the morning until they got hungry, waiting to see the show train come in. By nine they had all gone back to their homes to explain their absences as best they might, and to beg breakfasts of their mothers. At ten minutes after nine the passenger from the north pulled in, and the governor, followed by eight stalwart members of the State constabulary, alighted from the smoking car. The first man to reach the executive's side was Bob Oakleigh.

"Governor, Oakleigh is my name. I'm assistant manager of Terwilliger's Epochal——"

He got no further. The governor raised his hand. "I forbid you, sir, in the name of the State, to attempt to give a performance of your show in this city to-day," he said.

Somewhere beside the governor there was a clicking noise, and young Culbertson, editor of the *Enterprise,* hastily folded up his camera. "I got it," he said.

Oakleigh turned away from the governor on the run, and with the newspaper man sped to the Merchants' Hotel. It was some time later that one of the State constables succeeded in locating him and told him the governor wanted to see him. Oakleigh followed the constable to Ezra Dickinson's office in the rear of the Mill City National Bank, about which a crowd of idlers was gathered. Within, he faced the State's executive with a smile.

"Sorry to have rushed off so, governor," he said, "but I wanted to see if it was a good picture. If it hadn't been, I was going to ask you to pose again. But it turned out fine. We're going to use it on eight-sheets just as quick as we can get it made—picture of you forbidding me to give my show. Under it in big letters will be: 'This is the governor forbidding Manager Oakleigh to present Terwilliger's Epochal Wild West Show in Mill City. Come and see it and find out if he was justified.' It'll be the biggest piece of advertising we ever had."

The governor frowned. "Where is your show?" he asked.

Oakleigh laughed. "Oh, the show?" That's gone on to Greenvale, where we're booked to show to-morrow. Culbertson, our new press agent, got the tip last night that you were going to block us here, so we didn't even haul in. We always try to please the people, and as long as you didn't want us to show here, we thought we'd better humor you."

Monday morning Francis Frederick Fealey, owner of the *Enterprise,* was the first caller in the Honorable Lysander Hoskins' office.

"Lysander," he said, "I've got a contract here with the Terwilliger Epochal Wild West Show, calling for the payment of one hundred dollars for advertising. They didn't come here, and I want you to sue 'em for it. Attach their show, if you can, too; they stole my editor."

The Honorable Lysander Hoskins laughed. When he recovered from his mirth he looked at the owner of the *Enterprise,* and then gave him the shock of his life. "It can't be done, Fealey," he said. "The contract says that the outfit will pay you in silver or gold coin on the show lot upon the afternoon of their arrival. They didn't arrive, and you can't collect till they do. But cheer up; I've got one just like it, only mine reads 'due for legal services.' That boy Oakleigh was a wonder."

SNOW SHAPES

By Willard E. Solenberger

WHEN the Northland bows to storm winds
And a blizzard, sweeping down,
Piles snow deep in every gully—
Plasters spruce bolls white and brown—

When the silence lies oppressive
On the vast expanse of light,
As the midday sun slinks upward--
Then the snow shapes leap in sight.

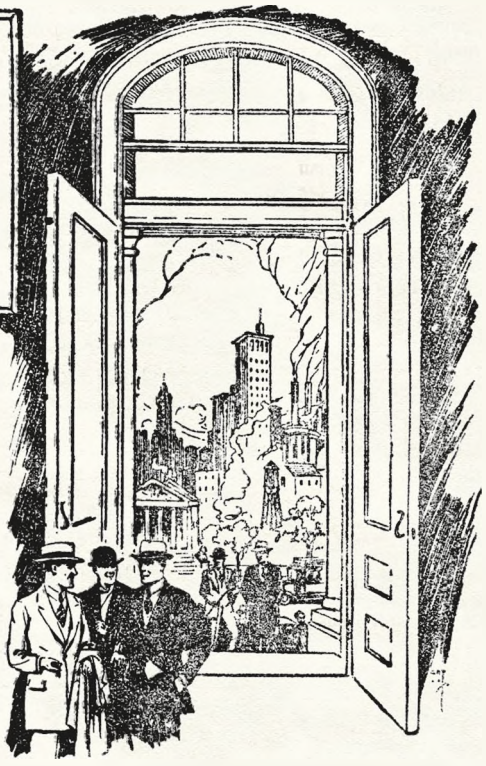
Nothing really there to awe you—
Only curlicues of snow;
Oddly sculptured bits, like statues,
Fashioned by some vagrant blow.

Yet the men who mush the out-trails
Bring strange stories home to tell—
Of a white and eerie driver
Guiding huskies with his spell—

Of the phantom forms of bushmen
Fleeting in among the trees,
Ever beckoning and twisting—
Were they only snow shapes—these?

Still the Northland and her challenge
Call to men, and not in vain,
On the trails the snow shapes travel—
Men who'll never mush again!

The POPULAR CLUB



Every reader of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, man or woman, qualifies as a lover of good stories and as a good fellow, and is therefore automatically and entirely without obligation elected a member of THE POPULAR CLUB.

FRANCIS LYNDE.

The Author of "The Earthquakers," in This Issue, Tells Us About Himself.

YOU want me to tell the readers of THE POPULAR something about myself and my experiences? I only wish there were something worth telling—something out of the ordinary, I mean—but there isn't. Like some thousands, or maybe millions, of American boys, I had to go on my own pretty early in life, getting such schooling as was to be had between gasps, and incidentally acquiring enough of it in mechanical engineering to land me, at my majority, as chief draftsman in a railroad shop. From that there were shifts and promotions in the railroad field that took me all over the lot, from coast to coast and from Canada to the Gulf, in different jobs in the motive power and traffic departments. In all of these jobs I managed to get by, but not without a growing conviction that there was something else I could do better—and like better—if only I could contrive to find out what it was.

The discovery came one summer night in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, while I was waiting for a midnight train. It was a good few years ago, when ice factories were still rarities in the South. To kill time, I went across from the hotel to the newly established freezing plant and fraternized with the night engineer. When he found out that I was, or had been, a fellow craftsman in machinery, he showed me through the plant, explaining the various gadgets and processes. Still having some hours to kill before train time, I went back to the hotel writing room and ground out, between battlings with a horde of hungry mosquitoes, an article on ice making in the South. It was sent to the *Youth's Companion*, and in due time I had a return in the shape of a piece of real money.

That was the beginning; and the end is not yet. Writing people die, but they never quit otherwise. Being at that time still a railroad man with a rov-

ing commission that gave me quite a lot of unusual time—unusable for the railroad—I began a course of reading and study to try to fit myself for the writing job, and at the end of three years of this I made my last trip as a railroad traffic agent, and settled down at home to work at something which was then—as it has been ever since—a keen pleasure rather than a burdensome task.

Pleasurable, but not so facilely easy as one who has never tried it might think. Perhaps the geniuses can rattle a typewriter for a few hours in the evening and mail the story to the editor the next morning; but not many of us are thus gifted. At least, I know I'm not. Half past six in the morning finds me in my study practically every week day in the year, and from that time until three or four o'clock in the afternoon I'm not at home to callers. Like Jack London, of hard-working memory, I try to get a thousand words of printable stuff out of the machine for a day's stint; but it is apt to be less than that number rather than more, what with the reading and study needful to make the scenery and the people of the play as real as they have to be, to be worth reading about.

Your readers of THE POPULAR have had the most, and the best, of the work that has come out of this literary shop in a long period of years. With a very few exceptions, all of my twenty-nine novels in book covers have appeared first in THE POPULAR. And I may add that in the many letters I have had from readers of the magazine, the few criticisms were from railroad men upon my railroad stories! Which, taking into consideration the fact that I served in a good many capacities as a practical and practicing railroad man for something like half of an ordinary lifetime, makes me think that some of my old-time fellow craftsmen must be humorists trying to get a rise out of me, now that I don't ride the cab, the caboose, or the varnished cars any more.

But that is all in the day's work.

GANGS.

WE recently heard from Mr. Converse Cleveland, of Asbury Park, New Jersey, and apropos of a discussion of one of our gang stories Mr. Cleveland inclosed a newspaper clipping of a published letter. The letter, concerning gangs and gunmen, was written by Mr. John Wilstach, the author of "Gang Ethics," a story printed elsewhere in this issue of THE POPULAR. Here's what Mr. Wilstach had to say:

Personally I have always been interested in those who think the most noble deed of all is to knock off a copper. Years ago I was a police reporter on the old New York *Sun*, covering Essex Market police court and Jefferson Market court. Since then, doing special newspaper work around the country, I have delighted in getting in touch with underworld types who, strange as it may seem, often appear quite as cultured and harmless as you and I.

Four years ago, when General Butler was running wild in Philadelphia, I was a reporter on *The Public Ledger*, and had some interesting police assignments.

In the last twenty years gangdom has changed from small stuff to big business. Nowadays gun mobs have backers and plan jobs with all the seriousness and forethought of a business campaign. The disposal of loot is even figured out beforehand. And fall money left with some great criminal lawyer in case of a slip-up. A responsible bondsman is on hand, of course, right on top of an arrest.

The real importance of the modern gang has come about through prohibition and the Harrison narcotic act, which forced dope smugging and peddling on a large scale. Big money then emerged, and the large handlers disdain talking in figures lower than "grands" (thousands).

I like writing about the underworld, and, interesting though the characters may be, I cannot force myself to speak about a "square" crook or a "right" guy. There is no halo about these birds to me. They have the morals and friendly attitude of wolves, who run in

the pack and devour the weaker as a matter of course. I have never heard of a dress-suit burglar and believe him to be a creature of the imagination. Also, the "big chief" is a man who rules by the "rod." Well, I guess that I have been chatting quite long enough. The subject is a hobby with me.

THE NECK CLOTH.

By Chauncey Thomas.

RECENTLY I read with a dry smile that one of the Grand Canyon guides—a bright angel, no doubt—said that "the neckcloth betrays the tenderfoot." I was riding these Rockies before that guide was born, and my father rode them before I was born. We both wore neck cloths, so no doubt we are softsoles, too.

The neckcloth is not a necktie, nor is it worn—when properly worn, I mean—as an ornament. It is one of the most useful items of a cowman's costume. Let me list a few things for which, in my time, I have used my neckcloth. Incidentally, the cloth is about a yard square, of any color you please. Mine is usually black, but of late years it is wise to have it as scarlet as running blood, when the deer season is on the hills—nowadays many hunters are hasty shots. Here is a partial list of my own neckcloth uses: One end knotted round the lower jaw of a horse for a bridle, ridden bareback to save many a weary foot-mile; stone tied in one end to make a four-foot sling, or sort of elongated blackjack, with which to kill a rattlesnake; berry basket; hat, when the Stetson lit out for Kansas forever and I was busy at the time; ear muff to prevent frozen ears; face wiper to keep sweat out of the eyes; handkerchief; horse hobble; quirt, with sand, dust, or small stones knotted in opposite corners; blindfold for mean horse; gunsling; coffee strainer; dish cloth; towel; pillow, stuffed with grass; mail bag; grocery basket; flag: to scare wild animals away from deer carcass; dog chain; for gathering chips, both of wood and the buffalo variety; sun shade, tied by the corners to bushes or to wire fence; container for deer liver and heart; cushion, stuffed temporarily with anything handy, when one has to sit on frozen rocks near timber line, to rest, about every fifty feet; lunch pail; bandage for wound—— Yes, the neckcloth is a sure sign of a tenderfoot. That's why I wear one.

ANNOUNCING:

SOME weeks ago we received an announcement which we believe will interest and amuse the many readers of Raymond Leslie Goldman's hilarious Jewish stories which have appeared in THE POPULAR. The announcement read as follows:

ANNOUNCING
The Season's Best Yeller
"Robert Lester"
By
RAYMOND LESLIE GOLDMAN
In collaboration with
HELEN H. GOLDMAN
First Addition
September 30th, 1929
STORK PUBLISHING COMPANY

BACK NUMBERS.

A reader from Missouri writes:

Some time ago in THE POPULAR I saw mention of the fact that back numbers of the magazine which you could no longer supply were in demand. At that time I thought nothing would tempt me to part with mine, but circumstances are such that I need money worse than I need magazines. Can you put me in touch with some one wanting old numbers? I have practically every issue from January 1, 1910, up to and including April 20, 1920, most of them in perfect condition. The stories will be a real treat to some one.

We shall be glad indeed to put any person interested in these issues in touch with the writer of this letter.

A Chat With You

IT is now 1930. The bells have tolled out the old decade and merrily jangled in the new—and now the noises have died away. Christmas is over, New Year's is directly behind us. We go about our accustomed tasks again, wondering what the new year, the new decade, will bring.

Now that the excitement of the holiday is over, and for a moment, before we all settle down to toil, it is a good thing to take stock of ourselves. You, like all of us, have in a sense finished a voyage—the passage from 1920 to 1930. What lies behind you? Are you satisfied with those years? Of course, you are not satisfied with the storms Fate wished on you—but how did you meet them? What efforts have you made to command the ship *Yourself?* Have you been a courageous, intelligent pilot? Or have you let the boat drift, wallow in the waves, or veer hopelessly off its course?

* * * *

HOW about it, now? What are you going to do with the good ship *Yourself* on this voyage? You're starting out now on the 1930-1940 Ocean. Whether you want to or not, you've got to bring your vessel in at the other end. When it docks, will it be a rudderless, unpainted, warped, miserable derelict—*towed* in? Or will you, with a gallant song on your lips, steer it proudly in with banners flying under the clear, blue sky? Will you hide when the storms howl, or will you fight? Figure it out, captain. You're headed down the bay right now for the open sea. Going to hitch up your belt, buckle on the old sou'wester and grip the big wheel? Attaboy!

TO speak of ships just now is very appropriate, for THE POPULAR is starting its next decade properly with a remarkably fine story by Captain Frederick Moore, who, you will feel, knows the sea and the men who follow it as well as Joseph Conrad did. The novelette, called "The Mate of the *Amy C,*" has a setting that is ever alluring, ever stirring—one of the far-away group of islands which include the Philippines, Borneo, Sumatra, and the scores of others that pepper the Oriental seas west of the Pacific Ocean.

* * * *

CAPTAIN MOORE'S story, which is handled in his usual deft, crisp, exciting manner, takes place on a schooner anchored in a small tropical bay. It is a tale of strangely assorted people and their violently conflicting desires. In more civilized parts of the world people have greed and desires, too, of course, but generally these are controlled and concealed beneath the veneer of good social deportment.

Take the same persons and place them for a time in the soul-doping heat of the tropics, and mysterious changes will come about in their ideas and habits. The social veneer will peel away, exposing the raw human creatures beneath.

* * * *

EXPOSE these creatures further to the insidious effects of those mystical nights, when the tangerine-colored moon makes shimmering ghosts out of the coral reefs and the natives moan unearthly chants on the pale, curving beaches, and the great white snakes slowly writhe in their jungle trees—and you will not wonder that people act dif-

ferently in that part of the world. For there, love and hate are deep words with underlying meanings of which we, in our comfortable homes, rarely dream.

* * * *

WE have chosen another big feature to start in the coming number—a five-part serial that will be a big treat. When you have read the first installment of Fred MacIsaac's "The Luck of Licania," you will be completely won over to the tale. A young American takes part in a royal intrigue concerning some richly valuable crown jewels—and the scene—or, rather, the scenes—are the turbulent and lurid Balkans and a multi-millionaire's summer home on Cape Cod.

There are all kinds of stories, and we like most every kind, but to our way of thinking there is none quite so intoxicating and thrilling as this—for here you have romantic adventure in its very essence, glowing and living *fully* with the genial, expansive spirit of sheer story-telling.

Targets for Sore Throat

YOU who work in offices or travel in winter are among sore throat's easiest victims.

Constantly present in even normal mouths are millions of disease germs. The most common are those of colds, sore throat and influenza.

When, for any reason, body resistance is lowered, nature no longer is able to withstand their attacks. They get the upper hand, causing disease.

Office workers and travelers constantly face conditions that weaken body resistance—overheated rooms, poor air, sudden changes of temperature, over-exposure, and contacts with people in crowded cars, trains and buses.

At the first sign of trouble, gargle with full strength Listerine and keep it up systematically. Also, consult your doctor. Listerine checks colds and sore throats because it destroys the germs that cause them.

Though absolutely safe to use full strength, it is fatal to germs—kills even the Staphylococcus Aureus (pus) and Bacillus Typhosus (typhoid) in counts ranging to 200,000,000 in 15 seconds. We could not make this statement unless prepared to prove it to the medical profession and U. S. Government.

Keep a bottle of Listerine handy in home and office. Tuck one in your bag when traveling. Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, Mo., U. S. A.

LISTERINE

The Safe Antiseptic

KILLS 200,000,000 GERMS IN 15 SECONDS

A thief in the night

that robs you of your rest

TROUBLED THROATS

When coughs or colds bring troubled throats to steal your hours of rest, remember that Luden's Menthol Action *gives quick relief.*

In the Yellow Package— 5c

ONE LUDEN'S AFTER EVERY 10 CIGARETTES IS THE NEW RULE FOR SMOKERS WITH TENDER THROATS.