JULY 7, 1924
VOL. LXXII No. 6

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The Popular Magazine

JULY 7, 1924

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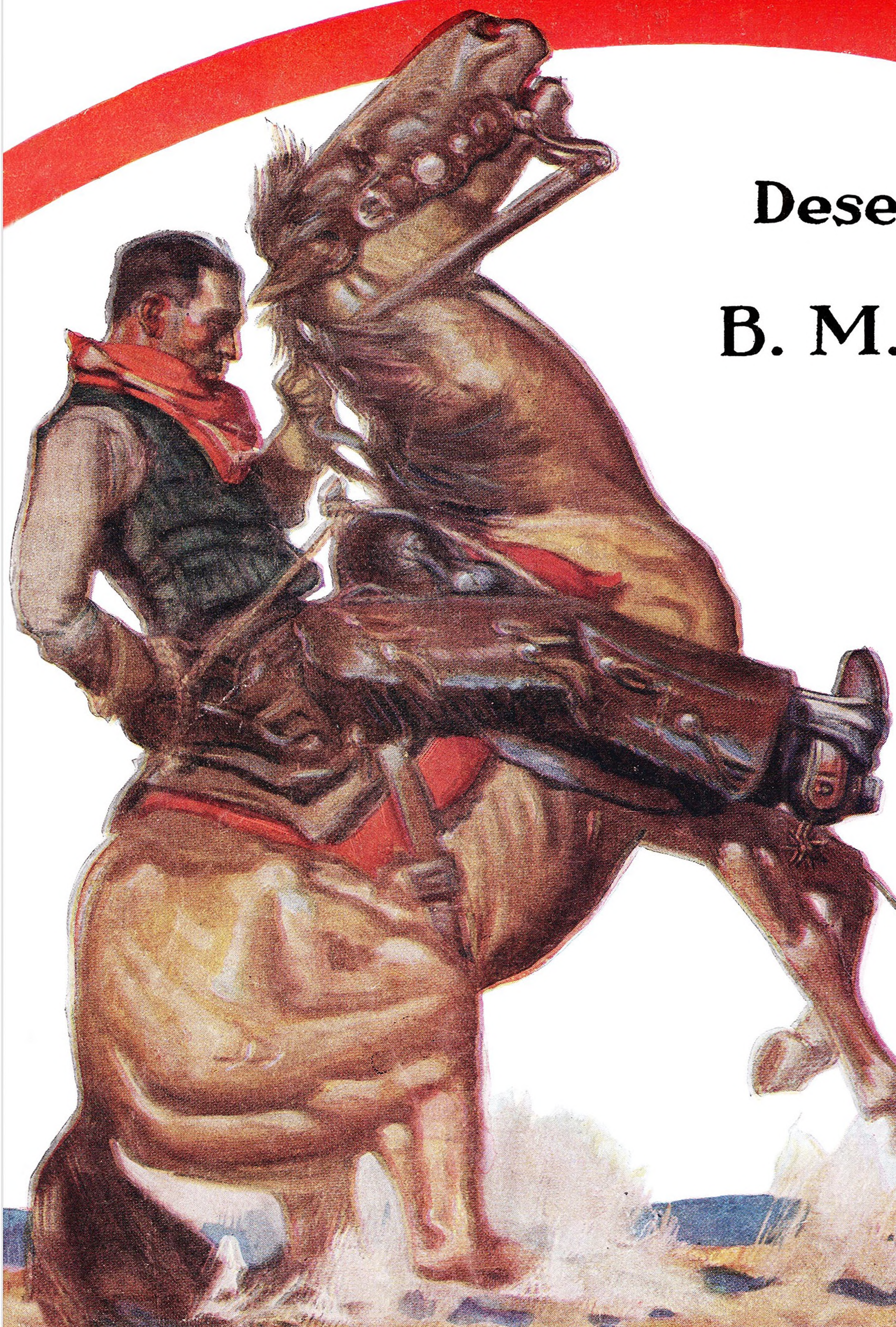
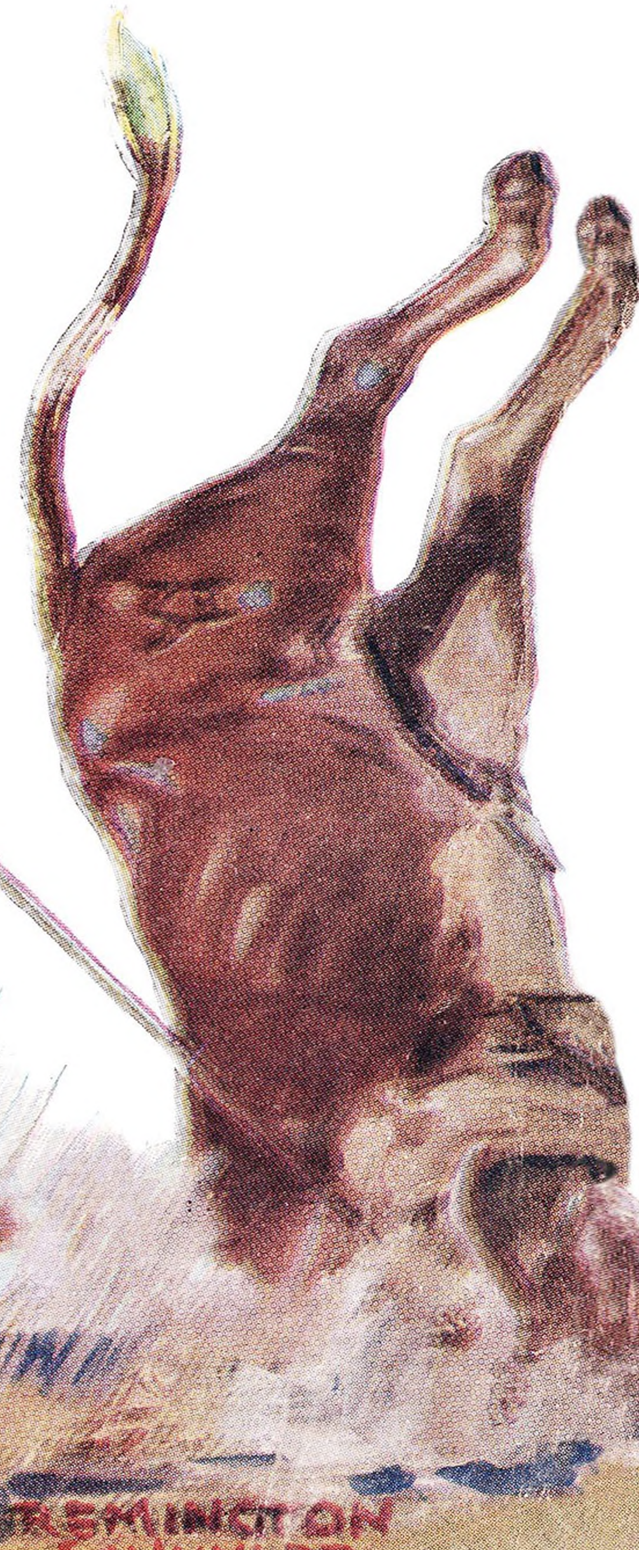


Desert Brew

By

B. M. BOWER



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Vol. LXXII JULY 7, 1924 No. 6

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Contest for this issue closes August 1st, 1924

Address Advertising Department
Street & Smith Corporation
79 Seventh Avenue New York City

Popular Announces the Winners of the April 7th Advertising Prize Contest

First Prize,	$15.00,	Harvey E. White, Norfolk, Va. *For letter submitted on Multibestos Brake Lining.*
Second Prize,	5.00,	Mrs. E. C. Croes, Box 651, Colusa, Calif. *For letter submitted on Eastman Kodak.*
Third Prize,	3.00,	E. R. Guye, 2116 First St., La Grande, Ore. *For letter submitted on Chevrolet Motor Co.*
Fourth Prize,	2.00,	Elmer C. Gray, Rhode Island Hospital, Providence, R. I. *For letter submitted on Lambert Pharmacal Co.*

The Advertising Department again thanks the many readers for their very kind interest

Winners for the May 7th issue will be announced in the August 7th issue

How three million more men discovered the "Priceless" Comfort of a Durham-Duplex shave

MARK any DURHAM-DUPLEX user—at any time. His crisp, clean-shaven appearance under all circumstances speaks volumes for the long DURHAM-DUPLEX Blades. More than *twelve million* such men today!

None appreciate this "Priceless" shave more than the men who have been introduced to it through the famous DURHAM-DUPLEX "Name-your-own-price" sale.*

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**The "Priceless" Sale—allowing the Shaving Men of America to purchase a genuine DURHAM-DUPLEX Razor and Blade at their own price. This sale is being extended throughout the country.*

EITHER MODEL—ONE DOLLAR
Interchangeable Blades
50c for package of 5

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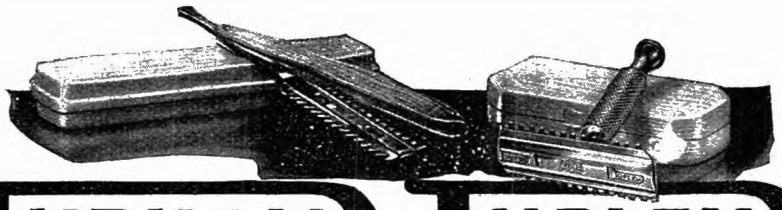

DURHAM-DUPLEX

The Razor of "Priceless" Comfort

Let this simple truth guide you to natural beauty

WE urge you not to overlook one simple truth—soap's function is to *cleanse*, not to cure or to transform.

Dermatologists agree on this additional important point, too; only by cleansing the skin thoroughly, yet gently and safely, can any soap help to promote beauty. And only pure soap can cleanse thoroughly and safely.

You know already that Ivory Soap is pure—that it contains no medicaments, no coloring matter, no strong perfumes. If we had felt that any additional ingredients would improve Ivory, you may be sure we would have used them long ago.

But perhaps it may surprise you to know that simple washing with Ivory is the very finest treatment you can give to your skin.

A face bath of Ivory and warm water, once or twice daily, followed by a cold rinse, gently removes the film of dust, oil or powder, thoroughly cleanses the pores, and brings a fresh, lovely, natural color. Unusually dry skins often need a small amount of pure cold cream.

* * *

The millions of friends of Ivory and the multitude of women who have been using much more costly soaps, have welcomed the new, graceful cake of Guest Ivory. Fashioned for slim fingers, this dainty white cake is genuine Ivory Soap—with all of Ivory's traditional purity and mildness—as fine as soap can be. Yet Guest Ivory costs but five cents.

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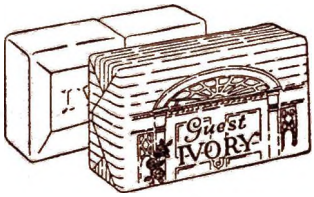

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LXXII JULY 7, 1924. No. 6

Desert Brew

By B. M. Bower

Author of "Bootlegger's Luck," "Goat Pro Tem," Etc.

Here is the opening of a typical B. M. Bower story—which means a story with a charm and a flavor that no disciple of this pioneer artist in the field of Western romance has ever quite equaled. We can tell you that the plots of Bower's yarns are as unusual as they are satisfying; that the settings are as beautiful as stimulating; that the characters are as striking as human. But you won't get the full import of our meaning until you have read a Bower story—and then you will know exactly what we mean. If you have never ventured into the back tracks of the West, if you do not know the lure of the desert at firsthand, here is your opportunity to travel that magic country with an old-timer as your guide. If you do know the West, here is your chance to renew old acquaintances and furbish up rare old memories dimmed, perhaps, by time and obscured behind the veil of forgetfulness.—THE EDITOR.

(A Four-Part Story—Part I.)

CHAPTER I.

"A RING, A VOICE, AND——"

"And the lean kioty yaps at the dawn.
And the stars grow pale as the day comes on,
And the dust devil dances in devilish glee
Where the sightless skull grins vacantly
By the bones sun bleached in the sand."

THE guest of honor closed his latest volume of desert verse and bowed with a faint smile for the club president. He sat down, exhaling a breath of relief carefully through his nostrils. White kid gloves spatted well-bred applause. The president rose and moved papers idly upon the desk while she groped for a graceful phrasing of her proposal that the club offer the guest of honor a rising vote of thanks. The president was acutely conscious of new slippers, subconsciously calculating the excruciating half hours until she might feel the heavenly relaxation of her oldest bedroom sandals in the sacred privacy of her own room. Squarely in front of her stood a scraggy branch of desert sage,

flanked on either side by a purple-blooming cactus, and a yellow, silent tribute to the reception committee's desire to pay the guest a pretty compliment. The president bit into the inner side of her under lip, smiled down upon the small sea of Easter millinery with attentive eyes staring back in pairs of varying hue and expression, and spoke.

"When I have cleared the dust and the drought from my mental throat, flung there by the grim realism of our master poet——" she began, and was thankful that the words came so easily to her lips. It was the game.

The poet's eyes went again to the decorations of sage and cactus. What in thunder did they bring that stuff into this sophisticated room for? It was out of place. It looked dragged in. It looked about as he felt, as he must look, here before all these women who didn't care a hang about the desert or about his verses. They had taken that last one without batting an eye—and they must know it was rotten. Grim realism! Hunh. Oh, well—— A small tidal wave of smartly gowned women rose engulfingly before him. His social training reacted automatically to the cue. It was the game.

A couple of hundred women, and two or three meek men, pressed forward to greet Woods Morgan, who stood head and shoulders above the eyes that smiled up into his. The voice that gave half the charm to his readings made an effective undernote in the humming of many voices pitched to the social key. Woods Morgan was so satisfying as a club guest! He could always be depended upon to say just the right thing, to make a lot of people feel pleased with themselves and with him. As he stood later, sipping tea in a gentle whirlpool of admiring femininity and speaking pleasant trivialities to this one and to that, remembering names with an uncanny sureness, giving to each woman a dazzling moment of flattering interest, not one of the two hundred guessed how he hated himself and them at that moment. Nor that their desert decorations had upon his imagination the effect of a spur jabbed into the flank of a restive horse.

He made his way to the side of the club president and gave convincing reasons why he must go. There was an appointment—he had tried to postpone it, but the man was leaving the city on the six-o'clock train and there was barely time now to catch him —and would she forgive him if he ducked out? She would, gladly and thankfully, but she would not tell him that. She could have kissed him for cutting short the dawdling and chatter, but she looked sorry, and thanked him again very prettily and convincingly for his presence.

She would have thought him an awful liar if she had seen him half an hour later. Half naked in a hired bathing suit, he lay on the flat of his back, inert, rocking gently as the water heaved beneath him, out beyond the first line of breakers at Venice. Gulls wheeled and dipped and screamed down at him as he floated and muttered disjointed sentences that were nothing more than the mental spindrift blown off the mood that had seized him there in the clubroom. Instinct for empty spaces and solitude had driven him straight to the ocean, which is not unlike the desert in some of its attributes and may upon occasion be made to satisfy temporarily that soul hunger which the city breeds in men of a certain type.

"Fine fat-headed fool you are!" he gritted alliteratively as he paddled with his hands like flippers to keep himself out of the rollers. "Great hulk—stand up and read your own drivel—your own—*drivel*, damn it! Rotten stuff. All of it. Sickening. Tea with lemon, you hairy-faced monkey! Pity the desert can't fight back. It ought to take *you* and bleach your damn' bones for you."

Floating half submerged like a six-foot length of log, he rested his hands and let the heave of a billow carry him smoothly into the slow pound of the breakers. He turned lazily upon his face, sent himself forward with a crawling stroke or two and permitted himself to be spewed upon the wet sand. Too bad. Much as one would like to do it, one can't remain forever upon the water. If it were desert, now—— Once more the pungent smell of sage was in his nostrils, quite obliterating in his consciousness the salty, dank odor of kelp. He dug bare toes into the wet slope, drew himself up the beach to where the sand was dry and gratefully warm under the slant rays of the hot April sun, and threw himself face down upon his folded arms to dream.

A small boy swinging a bucket and shovel that had cost his mother a dime, with sand on his knees and shins and a wicked little twinkle in his eyes, came up and inspected the poet's long, supine body calculatingly,

cast questing glances up and down the beach and knelt and began to ply his shovel furiously.

Having heaped Woods over like a new grave, leaving only his head and shoulders free, the small boy found another interest and took himself and his shovel elsewhere. The poet was drowsily picturing a high, barren valley he knew, rimmed with broken hills of amethyst shadows in the distance, when a girl spoke abruptly beside him.

"Still sulking, are you? Well, I've cooled down and thought things over, and I've made up my mind that I simply won't marry you, and that's all there is to it."

Woods shifted his head on his arms until he could peer with one eye between them. Within this narrow field of vision appeared a rounded, bare knee slightly sunburned and with a dimple in the side next his face. Even a disgruntled author who has gone stale at his work and with easy living may be classed as human. Woods looked at the dimple and forgot to correct the girl's mistake in his identity.

"I suppose you thought I'd do that sweet-Alice stuff again and 'laugh with delight when you give me a smile, and tremble with fear at your frown,' but you've played that record for the very last time in my presence, I'd have you know. I'm no sweet Alice, and there are plenty of other fellows in this town who drive a mean car and know how to put on a party. No man living can tell *me* I'm marrying his check book, and you did say that very thing and you can't smooth things over by denying it. I hate the very sight of you. Here's your darned old ring."

A small object dropped into the astonished young man's half-open palm as the girl sprang up and ran off down the beach toward the plunge. She was gone before Woods Morgan could heave himself up from under the piled sand and call to her through cupped hands. And a derisive, farewell wave of her arm was her only answer to his hail. Woods took after her, running at top speed, but the slight figure in the dark-red bathing suit and the bright-red silk bandanna disappeared through the little doorway fifteen seconds or so ahead of him.

Two hundred women who had lately listened to his suave reading of his own verse would have craned necks in absorbed interest at the way their pet poet ranged up and down the dank passage and out into the echoing space of the plunge where a few bathers splashed and spouted like decorous sea lions. Heads turned, as it was, when the gaunt figure in the sagged bathing suit went by, his eyes roving here and there eagerly seeking, his left hand clenched into a fist; but not the head of the girl who had said her say and run off, womanlike, before she must listen to a reply.

Woods Morgan finally gave up and retreated to his own little cubicle in the row of weedy-smelling dressing rooms. Within the bare cell he opened his hand and stared at the trinket thrust upon him. Of course it was a diamond ring, since it had symbolized the betrothal of a girl to a young man whose check book had become a bone of contention between them; a particular young man, who chose his jewels with care. Woods was no diamond expert, but he had bought a diamond or two in his time and he had gazed upon others with intelligent approbation. A two-carat stone if it was a point, he guessed the one in his hand. A beautiful, blue-white diamond, flawlessly reflecting hidden lights in the gloom. Woods turned it this way and that, mentally likening it to a prisoned star. The heavily chased platinum, beautiful though it was, did not interest him except as a means of identification. It should be easy to trace a ring of that kind, he thought as he peeled off his bathing suit, his glance still going to the ring carefully placed on the narrow shelf.

"A ring, a voice and a sunburned, dimpled knee," he murmured, whimsically giving the sentence the cadence of a line of verse. "I could write a story around that—if I had a plot that would stand up alone, and didn't have to do desert stuff and wasn't sick of the city." He drew the tip of his tongue reflectively along his salty under lip. "I can trace the ring through the jewelers, I reckon. Funny—a man wouldn't dare try to put a thing like that over in a story: girl runs up, hands a strange young man her diamond ring and a sizzling call-down and runs off before he can get his face open—nh-nh! Couldn't make that go down. Nice voice, she had, give it pleasant things to say——"

He was giving the last turn to his tie when he grinned suddenly, like a boy. His eyes lighted as they had not done in a month. He picked up the ring and tilted it back and forth again, watching it flash, his thoughts with the girl who had worn it.

"Little and slim, and she ran off as free and graceful as a kid. I'll bet she's sorry. Women are, when they have blown up their bridges. Bet those tears have got past her lashes, by now. I'll have to tell that to Sikes. He can write a corking love story around that. Out of my line, though. Still —a mystery story, if it were properly worked up——"

While he advertised in all the daily papers, and tramped from one jeweler to another, Woods Morgan played with the romance and the mystery faintly suggested by the incident. But he did not tell his friend Sikes, nor did he succeed in weaving a plot of his own. He was at that point of mental depression where plots refused to come forth from his sluggish imagination, and moreover, he had other plans and specifications for his summer's work and lacked only the proper environment and material. For that he must go to the land of Joshua trees and dust devils and general barrenness. It would take more than one diamond ring dropped into his palm to hold him to the city, he told himself while he sorted and packed his belongings. For that matter it would take more than one dimpled knee and one voice to hold his interest for long.

He called upon all the reputable jewelers in the city, and he ran his advertisements for a month in the personal columns, and he visited the beach as often as weather and his many engagements permitted. After that he did not know what more he could do, and so he presently found himself bored with the mystery and ready to let chance return the ring to the girl if it would. The only difference it made was a delay of three weeks in his departure, because he was a fairly honest young man and the first jeweler he consulted told him that the ring was easily worth twelve hundred dollars. I give the incident chiefly to account for that delay which did alter events for Woods Morgan; as we shall presently see.

CHAPTER II.

BILL WOODS.

THE postmaster at Gold Center lifted his hand toward the pigeonhole marked "W," turned again to stare, and pulled out four letters.

"Did you say Williams?" He fingered two letters whose flaps were messy, as if they had not been held altogether inviolate since leaving the hand of the writer.

"I did not. I said William Woods; or Bill Woods, or plain W. Woods. I don't suppose there's anything for me." Woods Morgan, who had dropped his last name at the desk of his hotel lest it prove to be burdensome in this particular quest of his, pulled his old brier pipe from his pocket and poured in tobacco from a flat can, the corners of his bearded lips twitching with amusement.

"You said Williams at first. Here's two letters been laying here for W. Williams. Sure they ain't for you?"

"Afraid I can't use any Williams mail today, thank you." Woods grinned and moved to one side, depositing a burned match in the coal hod that seemed to be doing a summer shift as wastebasket. "Here, let me take a look at those Williams letters," he reconsidered. There was the possibility that there had been a mistake made in readdressing his letters, though that was not likely. Woods Morgan always became plain William Woods when he went into the desert after the stuff stories and poems are made of, and his mail had never gone wrong. He glanced now at the letters and shook his head, the postmaster eying him with suspicion.

"You don't happen to have any mail for Hawkins, do you? H. E. Hawkins."

The postmasted looked from the Williams letters to the keen, Vandyke-bearded face of Woods and reluctantly put the letters back. Funny a man should change his mind so often about his name!

"Letter for Hawkins bin layin' here for a month pretty near. Want it?"

"No, I merely wanted to know if Hank had got his mail. You know him, don't you? Picturesque old prospector with a couple of burros. Looks like an apostle."

"Don't know him. Feller took out a bill of grub yesterday, but he was a Swede. Name of Oleson. You wouldn't mean him, I s'pose?"

Woods lifted his hands even with his hat brim, shook his head and walked out of the store. He sat down on the high platform that served as both porch and sidewalk, swung his long legs over the edge and smoked and stared at the conglomerate hills beyond the station. Presently the postmaster—a substitute, by the way—sauntered out and stood with his hands in his pockets.

"This feller Hawkins—you wasn't lookin' fer him, was you?"

"I expect to begin if he doesn't show up here by to-morrow." Woods cocked a speculative eye up at the man. "Hank located some claims for me two years ago. I grubstaked him, as a matter of fact. He was to meet me here and take me out to the mine. Anything funny in that?"

"No-o, not to me, there ain't." The postmaster let himself down to the edge of the platform and dangled his legs loosely. "If it's any of my business, whereabouts are them claims?"

"It isn't, but they're back here in the hills." Woods tilted his head vaguely toward the west.

"In the Grape Vines, aye?" The postmaster gave him a swift, sidelong look.

"Maybe." Woods remembered abruptly that he actually did not know just where the claims were located. He had been more interested in the man than in the mine, but he could scarcely explain that attitude; not to the postmaster, at least.

"Funny name for mountains," he said quizzically. "I wonder if they ever had a vine there!"

"What'n hell 'd they want with a vine?" the postmaster countered guardedly.

"They might want to grow a grape."

The postmaster stared at him, scowling suspiciously. He grunted as if the effort of speech was not justified, and looked away.

"Who would be likely to know old Hank Hawkins?"

"I dunno as anybody would." The postmaster chewed deliberately the three sticks of gum he had slid into his mouth.

"That old man tinkering with the wagon over there looks like one of these old-timers who knows everybody. I believe I'll go talk with him."

"You can't. He's deef. Got both eardrums busted in a mine." The postmaster chewed with his mouth open and a squeaking of the gum between his teeth. "He couldn't hear the crack of doom."

"Interesting." Woods slid off the platform. "I never talked with a man who had lost both eardrums."

He walked leisurely across the road and a littered plot of ground to where the old man was working with his back turned. While yet a rod or two away Woods stepped to one side and deliberately kicked an empty coal-oil can that had lodged against a bush in some gust of wind. The old man started and looked around, and Woods smiled to himself, wondering why the postmaster had lied.

"Looks funny to see a man tinkering with a wagon, these days. Cleaning spark plugs?"

"What say?" The old fellow tilted his head to one side and blinked up at Woods. "You'll have to speak a little louder, mister. I'm kinda hard of hearing. Lookin' for somebody?"

"Hank Hawkins." Woods leaned and spoke into the greasy palm cupped behind the old man's right ear.

"Hawk? Glad to meet you, Mr. Hawk. My name's Brown. Stayin' here long?"

Woods Morgan shifted his pipe back into his mouth, drew his notebook from his pocket and wrote upon an empty page:

"Call me Bill Woods. I'm looking for Hank Hawkins. Do you know him?"

The old man watched him, read the message distastefully and glared up at Woods, working his toothless gums with a violent chewing motion.

"Why didn't you say your right name fust? Go around with your mouth full of mush—mumblin' so a feller can't make nothin' out! What you want of Hank Hawkins? Snoopin' around tryin' to find out somethin', aye? Dang deetectiff, I s'pose. Well, you git! Hank ain't here and he ain't been here. Don't know 'im. Never heard of sech a feller. No use tryin' to pump *me!* This town ain't got nothin' to hide—and it don't want no snoopers hangin' around neither! You git. 'fore you're got—that there's my advice, mister!" He chewed and glared, then turned back to his work. The corded old hand that held the monkey wrench shook so that the tool rattled all around a rusty bolt without taking hold.

Woods laughed, glancing over his shoulder toward the store.

"Hank has some good claims back in the Grape Vines, hasn't he?"

"Grape Vines?" The old fellow jumped as if he had been hit. "Tryin' to pump *me,* aye? You git! I dunno nothin' about it, I tell yuh!"

Woods walked away, his hands in his pockets, his pipestem clamped between his teeth. Over at the store platform the postmaster was talking earnestly to a man who had strolled up and was standing with his elbows on the rough planking. They glanced

often toward Woods as they talked. A shack window across the road framed the weathered face of a woman who dodged back when Woods looked her way.

"Seems to be some mystery about this town," he mused. "Might dig out the makings of a good story if I had time and could get some one to talk. Moonshiners, maybe. But that field is overworked already. Better stick to Hank and the old boom days."

Woods Morgan had discovered that Hank was a mine of picturesque reminiscence, spinning yarn after yarn of the early days in the desert country. They might not be true yarns, but they were mighty good story stuff nevertheless, and Woods could count on getting plots enough to keep him going for a year, at least. He needed plots. With a fresh signed contract for fifteen short stories and two novels of the desert to fill, he hadn't an original idea in his head. That is why Woods Morgan slipped into plain Bill Woods and went to meet Hank Hawkins in Gold Center. Not for sake of the claims but because he wanted the hours beside the camp fire with garrulous old Hank squinting at him through the smoke and yarning about old times.

He had meant to worm a plot out of Gold Center while he waited for Hank, but that was impossible now. For some unknown reason Gold Center had withdrawn into its shell like any desert turtle and peered at him with hostile eyes. He saw two boys giggling and pulling at their chins as if they were smoothing whiskers, and knew that they were making fun of his Vandyke beard which he prized for the smart, professional look it gave to his otherwise humorous countenance. He went into the shabby pool hall and knocked the balls around, making some very clever shots that got him no attention whatever from the two or three idlers there. So presently he went out and hunted up some one who would sell him a couple of saddle horses.

That afternoon he outfitted at the store, where he was conscious all the while of the latent animosity of the postmaster and clerk, and the next morning he rode away from Gold Center to find out if he could what had become of Hank Hawkins. His old gray Stetson was tilted at a reckless angle to shade his cheek from the hot sun of late morning. His old brier pipe was clenched between his teeth, his legs hung straight to the stirrups like the cow-puncher he wished he might have been.

He was content. He was riding into the hills for which he had hungered in the town, straight into the land of enchantment where the red gods press to the lips of men the potion that breeds forgetfulness of the world beyond the mountains.

CHAPTER III.

AFOOT.

YES, I have no bonanza," sang Bill Woods. He turned in the saddle and looked back. He did not know why he should have felt all at once that another rode behind him on the trail, but the impression was keen enough to hold him there on the crest of a narrow ridge while he scanned as much of the path down the slope as lay revealed.

"Nerves!" He explained the conviction away in a tone of mild disgust. "By gosh, I didn't know I'd come to that!"

He prodded his brown horse in the flank with his unspurred heel as a hint to proceed, and pulled the slack out of the new lead rope that compelled the reluctant sorrel to follow him with the heavy pack. They went on, but Bill Woods forgot that he had been singing a foolish ditty in a very foolish way. A little while back, before he had burst into song of a sort, he had likened himself to an Argentine ant trying to crawl over a herd of dead elephants and wandering up and down and around in a maze of dry creases in the hide. Now he thought of it again as he gazed ahead at the hopeless jumble of peaks, ravines, long bare ridges and abrupt, tortuous little gulches breaking through.

Vague discomfort nagged again the back of his mind. On the next slope the brown horse twitched ears forward and back, sidled and half turned to stare back down the trail. It was not a good place for twitchings and sidlings, and Woods kicked him out of the notion and consciously refrained from turning frankly to look. It was not improbable, he told himself, that another rode that way. The trail wouldn't be there if men never traveled into the Grape Vines, and while a fellow being was neither wanted nor needed just then, there was no valid reason for objecting to the presence of a stranger. There was, he reflected whimsically, plenty of trail, measured lengthwise, and enough wilderness

to go around if the other fellow wasn't a hog.

A bit later he pulled up to fill and light his pipe. He had not smoked for an hour or two. He took his time about it, enjoying the wild beauty of the hills, pausing now and then to gaze; unconsciously pretending to himself that it was the view which pulled his eyes toward the east, and that his glance going seekingly to the trail behind him meant nothing more than a mild curiosity. The brown horse thought he heard something, that was sure. The sorrel dropped his head in a brief doze. When his pipe was going Woods rode on. He had seen no one, heard nothing.

The stillness of that high solitude pressed his mood down to a thoughtful silence. The air was quiet, the sun hot, even the stone crickets flat and listless in their strident song. The odor of the sweating horses set him to dreaming of swift adventure. He loitered, giving them plenty of breathing spells after each climb, conscious of waiting to be overtaken by him who came up that trail where his horses' hoof tracks lay unblurred by any breeze.

Toward noon the trail dipped steeply into a sterile basin where water stood in a rock-lipped pool; a tank, the desert men call such a natural reservoir of surface water. It looked clear and cool, and Bill Woods dismounted and drank his fill before he let the ponies near it. He watched them sink eager muzzles halfway to the eyes before they snorted and drank with dainty surface sips, one foreleg curved, ears working as each swallow slid visibly down their eager gullets under the sweaty hair.

He pulled off saddle and pack, careless of the extra work it gave him, hung new nose bags with a double handful of rolled barley in each over their ears. He talked to them, making friends. Then, yielding to the impulse that was growing more urgent, he got his gun from the pack; a Luger pistol that had brought meat to his supper fire on many a trip into the wild. That he had not weighted his body with the weapon when he took the trail told how well he knew the desert hills, and even now he was almost shamefaced as he slid it inside his waistband and climbed back to the ridge they had just left, and crouched there behind a ledge.

After a while he returned to where the horses were tossing the bags in hope of catching a last flake of barley in their lips. He sat down on the edge of the tank where he could watch the back trail, and ate a couple of hotel sandwiches. He was puzzled. He could not account for that feeling of being followed. A traveler would not slink along behind, yet he had given time to catch him.

Unable to guess who could be spying upon him there, Woods decided that his nerves—though he hadn't realized that he owned nerves—were beginning to play tricks on him. He repacked the big sorrel, saddled the brown horse and rode on, smoking his pipe for company. He was conscious of the Luger still pushed inside his waistband, but he left the gun there, excusing the weapon with the thought that he might run across a coyote or something.

That afternoon he reached the stunted timber and rode sometimes along high ridges where the wind blew half a gale and the desert stretched away to a far, broken sky line like a scene painted garishly for some gigantic theater.

Suddenly he turned in the saddle to scan the trail behind. He thought he had seen the brown horse perk his ears that way. The sorrel pack horse was concerned with his own affairs and gave no heed to anything but the difficulties of the trail; a morose, disillusioned beast bereft of curiosity by the pessimistic conviction that whatever happened would be something worse again. But the brown horse walked alert to small adventures, half-pretended alarms. Woods was beginning to like the brown horse which he had not yet found a name to fit. If they were being followed, if it was not merely a fit of nervousness—and he hated to admit that possibility—the brown would give him warning.

The trail meandered on, dipping into barren land, mounting again to the piñons and cedar growth that crowned the higher ridges and plateaus. Deep valleys opened enticingly beneath him only to be lost straightway as the trail twisted around some rocky crest. Woods forgot that he had felt dogged and watched by something sinister. The beauty thrown carelessly in a jumbled heap before him made the rest of the world seem insignificant and tame. He rode blithely, tired as he was, just glad to be alive and in the saddle.

"Now I wonder if they didn't name these mountains after they'd put all the kinks they had into the trail?" he pondered when he

had finished a bewildering switchback and won to the far side of a peak. "Straighten this trail out, and I'll bet I have come a hundred miles. Empty, too, thank God! It's my world while I'm in it, and it's all good!"

He spent an hour watching the shifting splendors of a sunset and camped that night in a clump of pines, scarce remembering his fancies of the day.

Three days he traveled so, seeing never a soul. Sometimes faint trails branched off toward distant deep basins or wound down narrow cañons, but he kept to the one that led northwest in its general course, thinking to meet old Hank somewhere along the way perhaps; or at least to reach some camp where he could make inquiries and receive fairly intelligent answers. He still felt sometimes that he was being followed, and the brown horse seemed to share his belief at times. But nothing ever showed on the trail behind him and he set it down finally to the peculiar effect of the unaccustomed silence after the din and confusion of town. It was as if any mingling of sound had ceased to be. The sneezing of dust from the nostrils of the pack horse behind him was a startling interruption to the stillness of the world. It was as if all nature stood poised, listening, her finger on her lips.

But during that third night came the clamor of a whooping wind. Long before it struck the sheltered hollow where Woods had made his camp he was awakened by the roar of it. Propped on an elbow, listening, he thought he heard a train rushing over a high bridge somewhere in the middle distance. It took him a minute then to orient himself with his surroundings, to realize that he was three days' travel from the last human voice he had heard, that in this wild land trains and bridges were not.

"Oh, it's old boreas making a night of it —or maybe his winged warriors having a spree with the maid o' the mountain. Let 'em alone. They aren't hurting anything."

He lay down again smiling to himself, and pulled a blanket over his head. Immediately he fell away into that deep, dreamless sleep which rewards one for making his bed under the stars.

But when he went for his horses, next morning, they were gone with the wind of the night. At first he thought they had wandered off in search of shelter, but later he discovered the print of a strange boot in the packed soil beside a huge boulder near the spot where he had left his saddle. The saddle was not there, and most of his outfit was gone. He took stock of the leavings and shrugged his shoulders at the meager outfit left to him.

He had his pipe and the can of tobacco which he had opened for the first time for his after-supper smoke. He had what coffee was left in the pot from supper, and a few scraps of cooked bannock and bacon. There was his bed—and because he had been using his little portable typewriter in a half-hearted attempt to start a story by describing a mountain peak painted rose and gold with sunset, the machine and his box of paper remained at the foot of his bed; just as his Luger was tucked under his pillow.

Woods counted his matches and decided that he could not afford to smoke between camp fires. He took stock of his ammunition and knew that he must shoot his game for its size, and wait until he was sure of hitting; six cartridges do not encourage careless hunting.

He ate the scraps of food left to him, drank warmed-over coffee and rolled his few belongings in two blankets, making a light pack. There must be a camp within a few miles, he thought. The trail looked fairly well traveled, although he had met no one in three days. It must lead somewhere, and by following it he would arrive at some destination. He had no desire to return to Gold Center afoot—he remembered too vividly the interminable twists and steep switchbacks.

At the last minute he realized that he had been left without a canteen, that vital necessity of desert travel. Whoever had stolen the horses had evidently meant to do his killing in an indirect way, by thirst and exhaustion. Bill Woods set his lips grimly, picked up the coffeepot and added that to his load, and started out afoot.

CHAPTER IV.

HANK HAWKINS.

BY noon the wind was again a howling fury that whipped the stiff branches of the juniper trees and cedar and watered the eyes that faced it. Bill Woods eased his pack to a rock and canted an eye toward a bare ridge round which the trail crept warily. He was tired of the infernal zigzagging and he made up his mind that here-

after he would cut straight across. He bent his shoulders to the pack again and began to climb.

The other side of the hill, when he attained to a point where he could look down, was steeper than he had expected, and much of the way was treacherous shale, but Bill was in a dogged mood that disdained to turn back. He slipped the pack off his shoulders and started down, sliding it alongside him. He had passed the first bad place and was digging heels into the second when a rock turned under the ball of one foot and threw him down. He arrived at the bottom of the ridge in a small avalanche of loose rocks and dust, with a badly twisted foot and a bruised shoulder. He sat for a while swearing in crude man fashion before he picked himself up, lifted the pack to his good shoulder and limped painfully down into a wooded basin where he broke a dead piñon branch for a staff before he went on, looking for the trail.

He did not find it, but instead was compelled to negotiate another steep descent which gave him a miserable hour, crippled as he was. It occurred to him that the trail had reason for turning aside from this place, but he did not dwell much upon that just then, his mind given mostly to the agony in his ankle and the gnawing hunger in his stomach. He sat down and massaged his ankle, and broke his self-imposed rule for saving matches by smoking two pipes of tobacco before he attempted to hobble on.

When he discovered that his boot would not go back on the injured foot he haggled a square out of his heaviest blanket and wrapped his foot as well as he could. He added the boot to his pack, got his bearings and went on to the west. In the next hour he had gained a short half mile. The sun was dropping at an alarming rate, but he could not hurry—it was all he could do to walk at all.

Another half mile and he cast about for a spot smooth of rocks and sat down, lying back against his blanket roll. He had reached the point where he must face his predicament squarely and figure out his chance of living through. Off the trail as he was, without food or water and with a crippled foot and a bruised shoulder, he would need to do some figuring. He could not expect a rescue now, and he refused to die. The only course left to him then was to keep going. Woods gritted his teeth and started on, with cold beads of moisture on his forehead and a dead-white line around his mouth under his beard. And God was good; for without having any definite plan save to keep fighting, Woods walked straight to a spring standing like an artificial pool just under a shelving ledge, with a whispery trickle of water stealing away down a gulch. His lips trembled with exhaustion as he let himself down awkwardly and drank his fill of the cold water.

Afterward he bared his swollen foot, put it under the trickle and pulled his pack apart, covering himself with one blanket and using the other for a pillow. He dropped into uneasy dreaming, to be called back in the dark by the beat, beat, beat of anguish in the wrenched annular ligaments. Wide awake, he lay with his teeth set and endured the torture until morning and beyond into the day.

He could not go on. He did not own that he was afraid to leave the spring. His head ached, hunger gnawed ceaselessly at his vitals, his ankle was a concentrated anguish in spite of the cold-water treatment. All that day he lay inert beside the spring and frightened away the wild things coming to drink, and wondered dully if the desert really meant to bleach his bones for him. Once or twice—twice to be exact—he held the Luger in his right hand and debated cynically upon the worthlessness of life as he had found it in the past and was finding it in the present. He finally decided that he would be a fool to shoot himself over a sprained ankle and a few missing meals. Then he dozed again and dreamed he was reading before a large audience how:

"——the lean kioty yaps at the dawn,
And the stars grow pale as the day comes on——"

And the audience laughed and shouted in a chorus, "Yess-a! We *got* no-o bananas!" to prove that they caught his meaning.

On the second day he awoke out of a heavy sleep and knew that he was going on if he had to crawl. His shoulder was better, anyway. The ankle was no worse, and he judged, from the fact that he had slept for hours, that it must be better; that, or he was growing accustomed to the pain.

He rolled his portable typewriter and his paper and other writing supplies in his two blankets, stood up on his good leg and wedged the bundle into a crevice in the rocks. Then he drank, filled his coffeepot

with water and plugged the spout, took up his piñon stick and hobbled slowly away from the spring, going down the gulch. He was so weak from hunger and the fever of his hurt that he staggered a little now and then, which sometimes threw his full weight on his ankle. Such times he went down in a heap of agony and barely saved the coffeepot from spilling all the water. After a time he would get up and go on.

He walked where the footing was easiest, avoiding small rocks and uneven ridges as he would rattlesnakes. So he did not observe much of his surroundings until he came face to face with a pole fence built up into a jutting ledge and barring his way. He looked up, then, and saw that he had come out of the gulch beside a corral. Just beyond the fence an old man was milking a cow, his head bowed so that the crown of his hat was crushed against the cow's flank. A girl in bib overalls and wavy bobbed hair was putting stripes on the cow's horns with colored crayons and giggling over the job. "Barby'll think they grow this way," she was saying gleefully, when she glanced up and saw Woods standing close to the fence and staring at her; a gaunt, wild-eyed figure in wrinkled, earth-stained khaki, with a blackened coffeepot in one hand and a crooked stick in the other.

The girl stifled a scream. started to run and then stood her ground. The old man lifted his head slowly, looked around and got up hurriedly, the milking stool in one hand and the bucket in the other. For several heartbeats they all stood motionless, staring.

Woods, having greater need than the others, took the initiative. He gravely turned the pot upside down and thrust it through the fence.

"I'd be obliged to you for some of that milk, Hank Hawkins," he said with harsh insistence.

"Why—why, hello. Bill!" Hank gave a weak, embarrassed cackle.

"May I have some milk?" Woods pushed the coffeepot an inch farther through the fence, his eyes going wolfishly from Hank to the bucket. He gave the girl no attention whatever.

"Why—why, 'tain't mine to give," Hank stuttered, dismayed astonishment still paralyzing his faculties. "You know, Bill, I ain't——"

"Don't be so dumb!" the girl commanded him sharply. "Can't you see he's starving? Give him all the milk he wants."

Hank complied, his eyes clinging so to Bill's face that he wasted milk, pouring as much outside as went into the coffeepot. Bill drank to the last drop, lowered the pot from his lips and stared hard at the discomfited Hank.

"Y-you ain't *afoot?*" Hank's voice shrilled with exaggerated concern, almost comical in its patent insincerity.

"Oh, no. I drove a four-horse team over from Gold Center!" Certainty of relief steadied Woods amazingly.

"Well, I'll be dogged!" Hank cackled unconvincingly, darting sidelong glances this way and that like a cat in a corner and wanting to escape.

"You go over to the house and tell the cook I said she was to feed you," the girl commanded Woods with youthful assurance. "Milk isn't much of a breakfast if you're real hungry. Go right around the corner of the corral and on around that point of rocks. You can see the roof of the house in among the trees. Don't talk loud—dad and Barby aren't up yet."

"Thank you." Woods turned, giving Hank a last searching look, and began hobbling painfully along the fence.

"What is he—a hobo?" He heard the girl quite plainly before he turned the corner. "You called him Bill, and he called you Hank, but he looks like a hobo. Is he?"

"W-well, I never heard him ast for a hand-out. b'fore." Hank's tone was disparaging. "Bill drifted into the country and stayed a while at my camp, a coupla years ago. Seemed like he had money, then—but he never earned it and I'll bet on that. Hands didn't look like a workin'man. Called himself Bill Woods, but he didn't always answer to it like he owned it. Funny feller. Set by the hour on some high peak and jest *look*. Never could git him to talk about hisself, but he was willin' enough to ast questions. Don't you go makin' up to 'im, Joe!"

"Maybe he's a stage robber!" Bill did not look. but he was sure that the girl clapped her hands together. "He's that ugly, Bill Hart type of outlaw and he's probably been hurt escaping and was hiding up in the hills till hunger drove him out of cover. Did you get that sardonic smile on his embittered lips when he said he drove a four-horse team——"

"That was milk on his whiskers," Hank corrected glumly. "I never seen him do much smilin'."

"Dumb-bell!"

Woods did not hear Hank's reply to that, but presently the girl overtook him.

"If you'd like to lie low till your lameness is gone, I can fix it with mother," she began in her abrupt way. "You don't have to explain—mother's perfectly gorgeous about understanding. Maybe you'd better stop at the bunk house. It's closer. I'll have Mary bring your breakfast down from the house. You look pretty well faded, but you needn't explain. This family minds its own affairs. This is the bunk house. You go on in and wait."

Woods nodded, muttered his thanks and hobbled into the rock cabin. Two iron beds stood opposite each other in one end of the room, one with tumbled blankets and the other smoothly spread. He limped to the smooth one, sat down and with both hands lifted his injured foot to the bed. He lay back on the pillow with a long sigh of relief. All at once he went slack in mind and body as his nervous tension, his sense of responsibility for his own welfare, relaxed with the consciousness that here were shelter, food, friendly protection. Even the pain in his ankle dulled to a sullen throbbing as if he had swallowed an opiate. A droning, humming sound filled his head and sent his thoughts scurrying here and there and away into vague visions that presently faded to blank unconsciousness.

A tall, square-jawed, shapeless woman entered the door, a full tray clutched in her widespread hands. She stopped, stared for a space and awkwardly backed out, bumping into the girl and her mother who had followed close.

"*He* ain't worrying about grub!" she snorted resentfully. "He's dead to the world already. Drunk, if you want to know what *I* think."

CHAPTER V.

HANK CHANGES HIS MIND.

WOODS opened his eyes and blinked rapidly, pulling his mind into gear. The distorted face and figure of Hank Hawkins sitting on the opposite bed steadied and drew down to a normal focus. Hank's apostolic appearance was somewhat marred by a look of discomfiture, and he was combing his long white beard with dirty fingers in a way that promised trouble. But his words were peaceable enough.

"Woke up, aye? This is a supprise, Bill. Dogged if it ain't a supprise!"

"Surprise that I'm awake?" Woods was beginning to remember some things which had been pushed into the background by his accident and its attendant miseries. His eyes veiled his thoughts and his face smoothed to the impassive look of the gambler.

"Supprise to see yuh."

"How's that? I thought I was expected to meet you, Hank." He shifted his shoulders so that he lay on his side, and got out his pipe. "I thought you were to meet me in Gold Center."

"Well, now—about that Gold Center deal—say! Didn't you git my letter, Bill?"

"What letter was that?" Bill flicked Hank's face with a glance that said nothing but saw much.

Hank twisted his whiskers into a loose rope, thrust them in between two buttons on his gingham shirt and pulled them out again immediately.

"Why, I wrote and told you, Bill, you better not come over to the claims. I got to thinkin' it over—and I hated to see you put any more money into them claims right now."

"Yes?"

"Silver's away down and likely to stay down, Bill, and it seems like a waste of good time and money t' go puttin' anything more—didn't you *git* my letter?"

"No," said Bill, when he had got his pipe going. "The last letter I got was when you wanted three hundred dollars for grub and powder. You wanted it sent to Gold Center by the first of May. You said you'd be there waiting for it and for God's sake don't fail to have the money there for you on time."

Hank squirmed and spread his whiskers into a fan which he closed at once.

"I got to thinkin'—and I sure wrote to yuh about my change of plans, Bill. I'm dogged if I see why you never——"

"Did you write after you got my letter saying that I'd bring the money and go with you to the claims?"

"*Now* what you drivin' at, Bill?" Hank eyed him, looked away, darted another quick glance at Woods. "I'll be dogged if I see what—— Sure, I wrote! Why'n hell wouldn't I write and say what I damn'

pleased? Ain't that what the mails is for? I sure did write, Bill. I didn't want to see you sink no more money where you wouldn't git nothing out, did I?"

"I thought the money was for assessment work," said Bill mildly. "I thought it was important to get it done before the first of July."

"Aw, hell! Why, I wrote and told you that wasn't necessary—dogged if I like the way you keep throwin' things at me when I wrote and explained all about why I was changin' my mind! Ain't I got my labor up agin' your money? Ain't I done all the hard, dirty work whilst you set back and kep' your finger nails clean——"

"And earned the money to buy the grub," Woods reminded him gently.

"Now I'll be dogged if I like that! Ain't my time and labor worth nothin', Bill? D'you think for a minute I don't want to git the most and the best outa my time and labor?" His prominent eyes of a washed-blue color and a staring expression turned upon Bill with reproach.

"I expect you do, Hank."

"Yes, and I don't want to throw none away, just like I wouldn't want to see you throw good dollars away. I wrote and told you we better not do nothing with them claims right at present and there wasn't no need of you comin' over. Then I hunted for some honest work that'd pay me a livin', and I got into a deal here that I can't drop right now. So I don't see but what——"

"What kind of a deal, Hank? Mining?"

"Well, now, I ain't at liberty to say just —m-m—yes, minin'. Sure, it's minin'! What else would it be if it ain't minin'?" Hank combed furiously at his whiskers and glared at Bill.

"Does it include milking cows?"

"M-m—well, you see, Bill, Mis' Marshall she's agin' mines. This deal I got is with Marshall. He wants a mine. Out here for his health, and he wants somethin' he kin take an int'rust in. Wants to pick up a little money of his own. She's agin' it—and you know how it is, Bill, when the woman wears the pants. Bosses him from mornin' to night. So I kinda chore around like—she don't know I'm a miner. Him and me, we got our own arrangement on the side. You'll be goin' back right away. But whilst you're here, Bill—say to-day and mebby to-morrow, seein' you're kinda bunged up—I'll take it as a favor if you don't go lettin' out that we been foolin' with minin' claims. You know how it is, Bill. Give a woman an inch—— Best not let on we're acquainted, Bill. She might git to pumpin' you about me."

"I see." Woods didn't, but he was going to before he was through with Hank, he promised himself.

"Yeah. Well, you kin let on like you come out on some projeck of your own, Bill, and you're goin' right back."

"I did," said Bill dryly. "But I don't know when I'll go back."

"You did?" Hank stared. "I'll be dogged if I see why you kep' on pumpin' me about them old claims of ourn, then. What's *your* projeck, Bill?"

Bill grinned tantalizingly and shook his head.

"That's just about as secret as yours is, Hank."

Hank got up and started for the door, hesitated, pulling at his beard. He came back and leaned over Bill and shook a finger under Bill's nose.

"I told you not to come. I wrote and said I couldn't do nothin' with the claims this spring. There ain't nothin' to keep you over here in the desert, Bill. There ain't a thing to keep you—not if you're a friend of mine. Secret business here, aye? I'll be dogged if I like the idea of havin' you snoopin' and taggin' me around after I've wrote and told you to stay where you're at! What you better do is git. I don't like it, the way you come trailin' me up. Looks mighty fishy to me!"

"By the way, Hank, I thought our claims carried gold. That isn't down, is it?"

"Doubtin' my word right off the bat, aye? I said silver. Mebby there mighta been a showin' of gold in the start, but it's silver now—and not too damn' much of that. Hell, what's the use of talkin' to a greenhorn?" He turned again and went out of the cabin, combing his whiskers and muttering to himself.

Bill pulled an extra pillow under his head and lay back, sucking at his pipe and reflecting upon this sudden change of heart and mind in old Hank Hawkins.

This appeared to be Bill's reception hour. Not ten minutes elapsed before a tall, thin man stepped in at the door and stood looking at Bill appraisingly for a minute before he advanced to the foot of the bed. Bill sat up, which was as much as he felt that

the occasion demanded of a cripple, and returned the man's measuring look.

"Oh, hello! I heard some one had wandered in off the desert, pretty lame and hungry. You desert rats do take awful chances, roaming around on foot the way you do. Just traveling through, Hank tells me."

"Not in any great rush, at that."

"No, I suppose you want to lay up here for a day or so. What's your name, my man?"

"Hank probably told you. Bill Woods."

"H'm-m—yes, I believe he called you Bill. Now, I believe in coming out open and aboveboard, Bill. Hank doesn't seem to know what your business is. That might mean one thing and it might mean another. You're not—not a bootlegger, by any chance?"

"No." Woods frowned slightly, but that was because of a twinge in his ankle. "I wouldn't corrupt the morals of the lizards and jack rabbits that way. If I wanted to peddle hooch I'd hunt a trade in the cities."

"H'm-m—yes, that sounds reasonable. Whisky's a curse to mankind. We find men enslaved to it even here in the desert. And one can't be too careful, living out away from every one, like this. If I thought you were in the business——" He broke off, eying Woods sharply.

"I give you my word I'm not." Woods grinned suddenly. "I walked in here and drank about a quart of milk. Nothing alarming about that, is there?"

"N-no—I dare say you are telling the truth. Where are you from?"

"New York, Denver and points west. I wintered in California."

"The hobo's paradise. And how did you get away off here, so far from the railroad?"

"I was hunting old Hank. I rode most of the way over from Gold Center, and walked the rest of the way." Woods could see no reason for lying to his host, even though he was not disposed to give a full account of his experience. He had a vague plan of his own and he wanted time to think it over.

"Hunting—Hank?" Marshall put out a thin hand and grasped the footrail of the bed, gripping it until his knuckles whitened. "You came here—after Hank?"

"Not that, exactly. I lost my horses and the trail, and sprained my ankle, all in the same day. I stumbled in here by accident. I didn't know Hank was here."

"What do you want him for?"

"Oh—nothing, I guess. I didn't expect to find him here working for you. If you can see your way clear to letting me stay till I can travel——"

"Of course you'll stay!" A rich, contralto voice spoke unexpectedly from the doorway, and both men gave a start of surprise.

"Oh, ah-h—that you, Henrietta? The man has sprained his ankle, he says." Marshall's manner was confused, oddly perturbed as if his wife's coming had somehow upset him.

"Yes, Joe said he limped as if he had a bad sprain. I've brought iodine and bandages." She turned her head and called, "Joe! You may tell Mary to bring the man's lunch in about ten minutes." She looked again at Bill with kindly solicitude. She would probably look that way at a lame dog, Bill thought.

"Have you been doing anything for it?" she asked when Bill had removed the clumsy wrapping of blanket from his ankle.

"Cold water is all I could do. But I had to walk on it afterward."

"I don't see how you ever managed to walk. Charles, will you hold his foot up off the blankets while I paint it with iodine? Let's see—what is your name?"

"Bill."

"Well, Bill, you won't do much walking for a while, I can promise you. I'll send down a pair of crutches so you can move about a little, but you must keep that foot off the floor. You're quite welcome to stay as long as it's necessary, and you won't be bothered by any one."

Bill's eyelids flickered at the slight emphasis she placed on the last word. Evidently Joe had passed along her conviction that he was an outlaw of the Bill Hart type and was hiding out.

"That's mighty good of you, Mrs.——"

"I'm Mrs. Marshall, and this is Mr. Marshall. Come in, Joe. This is my baby girl, Josephine. Say how do you do to Bill, my dear."

"How do you do, Bill," Josephine repeated obediently. And she added demurely, "Chow's coming up."

Mrs. Marshall, a tall, finely proportioned woman with an abundance of white hair waving softly back from her face, was deftly bandaging Bill's ankle. She straightened and stood studying his face with calm brown eyes.

"People very seldom come to the ranch, so you will have to amuse yourself as best you can while you are laid up. Do you like to read?"

"Sometimes, yes ma'am." Bill's lips twitched. He was beginning to enjoy himself.

"I'll send down some magazines. And you'll have Hank for company."

"Hank is going up to the claims, Henrietta," Marshall informed his wife deprecatingly. "We're anxious to get that vein opened up. It looks like good silver, he thinks."

Again Bill's eyelids flickered, but he did not look up.

"Well, he'll probably be down again before Bill is able to walk. Here's your lunch, Bill. You were asleep and missed your breakfast, you know."

"It's just as well," said Bill dryly. "They say it's bad luck to load up with grub after you've gone without for a few days. That milk was a pleasant surprise to my stomach and kept it happy for a while."

Mrs. Marshall looked at him curiously, took the tray from Mary's hands and signaled her husband to pull a box up beside the bed.

"You haven't always been a—a human derelict, have you, Bill?" she challenged him somewhat bluntly.

"N-no ma'am, I was brought up a Baptist," Bill admitted, his eyes on the ham and eggs.

"I've seen you somewhere before, but I can't think where," she continued, ignoring his reply, though Josephine giggled frankly. "You remind me of some one."

"Was you ever around the free wards of the city hospitals, ma'am?" Bill had almost betrayed how startled he was, but he went on doggedly. "In New York, I mean. When I was run over by a—a truck, a lady somethin' like you come through the ward."

Mrs. Marshall looked at him suspiciously, shook her head and walked out, gently shooing her daughter before her. Marshall had edged out of the room as soon as possible; to find Hank, Woods suspected. Bill stared glumly after the woman and sugared his coffee twice.

"Looks like a club woman, or a charity worker or something," he mused, and felt a distinct panicky fear of recognition. Then he pulled himself together and attacked the ham with keen relish. Sufficient unto another visit would be the embarrassment thereof. Maybe he could borrow a razor and get rid of those trademark whiskers before she came again, he thought, and felt better.

Outside in the path the girl was taking quick, ecstatic little dance steps beside her mother.

"I *know* he's an outlaw. Wasn't it just priceless, the way he looked when you thought you'd seen him somewhere? You knocked him for a goal that time, old dear. I could have shrieked!"

"Don't be slangy, Joe. I wish I could remember whom he reminds me of. He hasn't the look of a criminal—and yet there's a furtive look in his eyes that I don't like. Don't go to the bunk house alone, Joe."

"Don't worry. Bill's too old for me to get all fussed over."

"He isn't particularly romantic," her mother admitted placidly. "I could see that your father distrusts him, Joe. It might be best not to let him have crutches. That ankle will hold him down for a few days, though. There's nothing faked about that!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE SHADOW.

THE shrieking of a woman woke Woods that night, and he automatically swung his feet out of bed before he remembered that he was in no condition to race to anybody's rescue. The fierce reminder from his outraged ankle came at the exact moment when he heard the loud report of a revolver shot, and his ankle got the first notice. By the time he had stopped gritting swear words he heard the voice of Marshall expostulating, and a woman trying to explain and cry at the same time. The result was a clamor of incoherence, in the midst of which he caught the sound of some one running past the bunk house.

By the time Woods had got into his clothes, found the crutches and hobbled to the door the voices by the house had quieted to a confused murmur. He stood listening for a minute, then swung his crutches over the doorsill and went awkwardly along the path, acutely conscious of his uselessness but wanting nevertheless to know what had happened.

Five vague figures turned nervously to

stare at him in the starlight as he came hopping up to them.

"Here comes 'Wild Bill' to the rescue," he overheard Joe announcing in her youthful voice that carried far.

"It wasn't him," said the voice that had explained tearfully. "He was humped over purty near double when he bumped into me in the cellar door. Then I hollered, and took a shot at him."

"A bear," said Marshall in the tone of one who had been hammering away at a stubborn mind. "They always rise up on their hind feet when they are startled, and would look, in the dark, like a man with his shoulders hunched down."

"I never felt no fur," Mary insisted doggedly. "I woke up an' remembered I never set my sponge, so I got up an' went to the cellar for my yeast, and I seen the door was open an' somethin' was movin' inside, so I goes back an' gits the gun and comes back an' jest as I started in the door he come pilin' out an' knocked me over an' run. An' I up an' took a shot at him."

"Isn't that record about worn out? It's beginning to sound scratched, to me," a voice interrupted; a voice that made Woods start and turn toward her.

"It was a bear, I'm sure of it," said Marshall.

"If it'd been a bear I'd 'a' felt the fur. And I'd 'a' smelt 'im," Mary argued belligerently. "It wa'n't no bear, it was a man."

"It couldn't be a man. Bill, here, is crippled and couldn't run, and no stranger would come away off here afoot after food. There are bears in these mountains, and they are very cunning and very bold at times. The cellar contains honey, doesn't it? A bear will travel for miles after honey. And," he added positively, "once inside he would take anything he could get his hands on. I mean, of course, his front paws. They use them like hands, just as monkeys do. I'll have Hank set a trap in the hills, and in the meantime you girls must stay close to the ranch."

"I think it's a brutal hour to get up and have a lesson in natural history. Aunt Henrietta, I'm going to bed, if you'll disarm Mary. That bullet whistled past my window. I heard it." The owner of the disturbing voice turned and left the group to its futile discussion.

Woods stared after her. She was little and slim. He had an impulse to call after her and say, "Oh, here's your ring!" But the place was somewhat public for that, and he would need to explain a good deal. Besides, on second thought he was not absolutely certain of that voice. This girl had sounded like the girl of the ring, but he would not swear that the voice was the same.

"You'd better all go back to bed," said Mrs. Marshall in her calmly decisive way. "Man or animal, we won't be bothered tonight, and in the morning we can look for tracks. Bill, since you are able to get around we shall expect you to eat here at the house. Your breakfast will be ready in the kitchen at eight o'clock."

"Yes, ma'am," said Bill meekly and hopped slowly back to his bed. Let that haughty woman know that she had fed Woods Morgan in her kitchen and given him shelter in her bunk house? Woods knew too well how the incident would grow and spread and how his own little circle of friends would relish the yarn. Moreover, there was the matter of getting his story material out of Hank, if possible, and finding out where his stolen horses were to be found. There were no life-and-death issues at stake, but Woods felt that he had reason enough for wearing the mask a while longer. Whenever he pleased he could disappear, and the little comedy would be ended with malice toward none.

He lay awake for a long time, thinking mostly about the girl who had protested against getting up at midnight to hear a lesson in natural history. She must be the Barby who was not an early riser and who was expected to think a cow grew horns striped with red and green and yellow. If she were the girl with the ring and had left the city soon after she broke her engagement, that would account for his never receiving an answer to his ads. With an Aunt Henrietta over in Nevada it was not at all unlikely that she had slipped away from the neighborhood of the man who had wanted her to be a sweet-Alice type of girl.

Mary's encounter in the door of the outside cellar did not mystify him much. Some man had been foraging for supplies and had been surprised in the act. Those running footsteps told a plain enough story, and the theory of the bear was, he strongly suspected, concocted for the comfort of the women. "Though most women are more

scared of a bear than they would be of a man," he reflected sleepily. "They took me calmly enough, I notice."

He overslept and it was the vigorous ringing of a hand bell that woke him. He had meant to paint his ankle again before he dressed, but he decided to wait and do that after breakfast. Barby might not be up yet, but he wanted the story of last night again while it was fresh and under discussion. He was hobbling out to the path that led around the corner of the bunk house to the rock house when he met Mr. Marshall coming down the path, evidently looking for tracks. Bill stopped and lifted himself to one side of the trail.

"Good morning," he greeted respectfully. "You won't find any bear's tracks, Mr. Marshall. I heard a man run past here right after the shot, last night."

Marshall halted abruptly and stood peering at Bill with his watery blue eyes that shifted away from a straight eye-to-eye look, Bill noticed, as if his mind darted to other subjects without warning.

"Oh, you did? Might have been an animal—— Anyway, I don't want my wife worried about this little affair, Bill. I don't want her to get the idea that strangers are prowling around the place nights. It—she's very nervous about such things, though she tries to hide the fact."

"Isn't she afraid of bears?"

"Possibly—but a sneak thief of a man coming at night—I don't want her to know anything about it, Bill. Don't mention the subject to any one. I've got them quieted down pretty well and I don't want them all stirred up again. That fool of a Mary is dangerous. I didn't know she had a gun in her possession, but I've taken it away from her now. Shooting wild like that—it's the greatest wonder in the world she didn't hit somebody."

"Maybe she did," Bill suggested dryly. "That splash there on that stone looks to me like blood."

Marshall looked, stooped quickly and picked up the stone.

"Dripped off a chicken Hank killed and took to the house yesterday," he said, and threw the stone up into the rubble on the hillside. "I hope you are not given to making mountains out of molehills, my man. Go on to the house and get your breakfast—and remember, I don't want any tongue-wagging to the women!"

Woods' eyes flicked wide open, stared hardly and then his eyelids drooped with that veiling effect that hid whatever was in his thoughts. He swung one crutch forward and stopped, turning his head toward his host.

"I'd like to borry a razor, if I can," he said with a slovenly enunciation that would have shocked his acquaintances.

"A razor? Don't you always wear whiskers?"

"No, sir. Not after t'-day, I don't. Not if I kin git the loan of a razor."

"Ah-h—well, my wife will fix you up. Or tell Mary to get that old shaving outfit of mine in the cupboard of the bathroom. She'll know which one I mean. Tell her the razor with the broken handle."

"Thanks," drawled Woods, and hobbled on to the house, thinking how easy it would be to change Marshall's objectionable manner to one of eager hospitality toward a distinguished guest.

For that very reason he slouched down into his chair at the kitchen table and didn't take off his hat until Mary yelled at him to remember where he was and did he think he was in the stable. He ate in silence, after that, except when he asked her for the razor with the broken handle and the outfit that went with it. She looked as if she suspected him of wanting to cut their throats but his description was minute and his authority the command of the head of the house, so she brought razor, strop and mug and plumped them down beside him. He nodded his thanks and went off to make himself slightly more presentable and less easily recognized. He was rather glad, on the whole, that none of the women appeared in the kitchen. They were at breakfast, he knew. Mary's hurried trips into the next room and the click of dishes beyond the door told him that much.

In the bunk house he faced a small mystery. The four-ounce bottle of iodine and the gauze roll left by Mrs. Marshall for his use were gone from the box at the head of the bed. While he clipped and lathered and shaved he studied last night's affair more carefully and decided that Hank was at the bottom of it all. Certainly he must have taken the antiseptic, unless Marshall himself had carried it off—and it was unlikely to the point of idiocy that Marshall was an accomplice in robbing his own cellar. Hank, of course, would need supplies while

he was away at the mining which was emphatically not a secret, but he wouldn't have to steal them and run the risk of being shot.

There was more to it than that. The man who had run down past the bunk house had evidently needed iodine and bandages, and the stuff had been taken while Woods was at breakfast. It did look as if Marshall had got them, but why should any man known to him go into the cellar at night, and run when he met Mary in the door? Why hadn't he told her who he was and what he was after? And if some one familiar with the ranch had accidentally run foul of the cook, why had he waited until breakfast time before coming for the iodine? Or why hadn't Marshall explained to him that Mary had made a mistake?

"Of course, I'm just a crippled hobo that's barely eligible to the kitchen table," Woods answered the last point. "If I could run they'd be accusing me of raiding the cellar. There's an Ethiopian somewhere in the fuel supply on this ranch, and I'd like to take a crack at him, for luck."

At noon Mrs. Marshall came into the kitchen with half a dozen magazines, to one of which Woods Morgan was a regular contributor. She was coolly gracious—patronizing, Woods called it to himself and took refuge in crudity that would have shamed many a Russian peasant.

"And how is your ankle, Bill? Did you paint it again with iodine?"

"No'm, not yet I ain't."

"Well, you should. Iodine takes the soreness and inflammation from the muscles."

Bill looked at his plate and did not answer, and Mrs. Marshall went back into the dining room. If she had observed the change in his appearance she made no comment, and he hobbled away from the house with the magazines under his arm, wishing vaguely that he could get at his typewriter. Now that he was laid up he might be able to turn out some work, at night when the family would not hear the machine, maybe. Or with a pencil he could rough draft a story or two and copy the stuff later. There is nothing like enforced inaction to stir a desire for work.

The iodine bottle stood again on the box beside his bed. Fully half the contents had disappeared, and the bandage roll was still missing. Bill sat down on the side of his bed and stared hard at the bottle, which told him nothing whatever. It occurred to him that there was no time like the present, so he painted his ankle afresh before the bottle could vanish again.

He rebandaged the ankle carefully and lay back to smoke and read. But the magazines were old ones which he had read when they were fresh, so he took his crutches and hopped outside and began a slow, desultory tour of the trodden paths about the place. It had struck him as an unusual circumstance, this finding of a family of some apparent culture on a desert ranch so far from any town, and he was curious to see what sort of place they had. Hank had said that Marshall was here for his health, which might or might not be true. And in any case it was strange that no ranch work seemed to be going on.

He made his way slowly to the stable and corral, thinking that he could gain a fair estimate of the ranch from the extent and character of the farm equipment scattered about. There was a garage with a car inside, and a drum or two of gasoline and oil. There was a stack butt of alfalfa hay, and in the stable were three stalls for horses. Harness, a couple of saddles, odds and ends that will accumulate on any ranch in the course of time were scattered about with little regard for the well-being of the articles or the appearance of the place, but he saw no farm implements save a wagon.

Bill turned away and started for the cow shed built against the bluff just beyond the stable. He went slowly, not much interested but killing time with small details —as when he halted to observe a peculiar shadow that projected beyond the northwest corner of the shed; a shadow that bore a strong resemblance to the head of a man. As he stood looking at it with idle interest the shadow moved, the outline sharpened and added certain curious details. An arm lifted, crooked above the tilted head in a revealing pantomime that made Bill Woods grin in sudden amusement.

The shadow disappeared, bunched again into view, was drawn quickly to the corner of the shed and so out of sight. Bill waited for a minute longer and then returned the way he had come, in no mind to be accused of spying. Of one thing he was sure: The man who had made the shadow was not Hank Hawkins, because there was no beard to hide the outline of the chin; unless, in-

deed, Hank had tucked his whiskers inside his shirt, as sometimes he did.

The short journey had wearied him, the effort of lifting himself along with the crutches had become burdensome. He stopped in the shade of the stable to rest, and was sitting there on a box when Marshall came along, humming a little tune under his breath and swinging a stick as if it were a baton and he were leading a parade. Woods chuckled at the sight of him, and Marshall stopped short, his head drooping forward on his long neck, his watery eyes fixed questioningly on Bill's face. But just as Bill would have sworn he was going to speak, Marshall changed his mind and went on, swinging his stick as before and lifting his knees like a boy going forth to slay giants.

Woods looked after him, shook his head and laughed to himself.

CHAPTER VII.

TROUBLE AHEAD.

"BILL, are you busy?"

Bill sat up and laid aside his magazine. He had been reading the advertisements half-heartedly with his eyes while his mind went shuttling from one thing to another, as bored minds will do. Mainly he had been thinking of the nagging little mysteries that had come to his notice in the past twenty-four hours.

"No, ma'am, come right on in."

Mrs. Marshall came in, her fine face pale and her eyes anxious. She walked to the one chair, pulled it up near the foot of the bed opposite Bill and sat down. For the first time since yesterday she studied Bill's smooth-shaven face with attention, but her words concerned another matter.

"Bill, did you bring any whisky onto the place with you?"

"No, ma'am, I didn't." Bill gave her a quick look that betrayed his astonishment at her question.

Mrs. Marshall bit her lips, looked at him searchingly and turned her eyes away.

"Of course, that's a strange question for me to ask, but I have the name of being a blunt woman. You came here hurt and hungry and we took you in and have done the best we could for you. We haven't asked you who or what you are, Bill. We took you on trust. Wouldn't you think that trust deserved a little gratitude?"

"I'd say it deserves a lot of gratitude. And I'd say you're getting a lot—if you want to know." Bill looked at her again keenly before he drooped his lids.

"Well, I don't ask much, Bill. I don't want to know who you are or what you're doing in the country. All under heaven I ask of you, Bill, is to tell me the truth about this. *Did* you bring any whisky here, or near here?"

"No, ma'am, I did not."

She stared at him, her eyes wide and searching his soul. She opened her lips twice without speaking, then flushed and took what to her must have been a desperate plunge.

"Bill—do you know how Mr. Marshall got whisky to-day?"

"No, ma'am, I don't. I can tell you about where it's cached, though, if you want to know."

"You can? If you don't know how——"

"It's like this, Mrs. Marshall. I didn't want to read and I got out and walked down to the stable. I was just looking around for want of something better to do. I looked in the stable and then I went down to the cow shed. And because I didn't feel like hoisting myself over the bars I walked along the other side, opposite the corral. Just beyond the corner was the shadow of a man, and as I looked he lifted up a bottle and took a big drink. I'm guessing at the size of the drink by the time he stood with the bottle tilted up before his face. I turned and went back. I didn't want to get caught snooping into some other fellow's affairs so I got out of the way. I was resting my crutches in the shade of the stable when Mr. Marshall came along. He was feeling good."

"He's drunk," she stated bluntly. "I'm too desperate to mince words over him to-day. Bill, if I thought you could be trusted with——"

"I can be, with whisky," Bill stated frankly. "I never did fall for that sort of thing. A glass of wine, maybe, or cham——" He checked himself, biting the incriminating word off short.

"Yes? A glass of wine or champagne, you say? I can be trusted, too, Bill. You may safely tell me who you really are and what—no, never mind what your trouble is, and perhaps you'd better not say anything about yourself. That isn't what I came to talk about. You're a man of some education, so

please don't mutilate your words hereafter unless you make a better job of it than you have done so far. One thing—are you dodging arrest for anything?"

"Not a thing. I believe I'm harmless, Mrs. Marshall. I was on a trip for my own pleasure, mostly, and got set afoot and crippled, and wandered in here. That's the truth, I assure you."

She sighed like one who is wearied to the point of absolute discouragement, and stared vacant-eyed at the wall.

"Well, it doesn't matter. What I want is some man I can trust to keep sober. Bill, we are living here in the desert as a last resort, to cure my husband of drinking. Nothing else did him any good. I've tried everything, and this is my last fight. It's *got* to succeed, Bill. I thought, away out here, he couldn't get hold of anything, and the fine air and simple life would gradually do the work. He was willing to come—he promises everything I ask—and for a time it did work. Charles took an interest in making things grow, and we spent a good deal of money in getting this ranch started. It's our third year here, and I was beginning to feel as if I'd won the fight. And then a man who was working for us on the ranch brought in a jug of moonshine he'd got hold of somewhere.

"I started him traveling," she gritted, "at the point of a gun! Charles was half blind from the effects of the stuff. I pulled him through, but since then I seem to have lost my grip on the situation, somehow. Charles promised to leave it alone, to tell me the moment any whisky came to the ranch, but—I don't know. For a long time I've felt vaguely that he was getting a little pretty regularly. I found out from Mary that he helps himself quite often to coffee berries, and he never did that before. I've heard that they chew coffee——"

"They do. It kills the whisky smell," said Bill.

Mrs. Marshall nodded.

"Yes, it fooled me for a long while, even when my instinct told me something was wrong. I've let out the ranch to a man who lives by himself up the cañon." She waved a well-shaped hand toward the east. "I couldn't keep any hands here—I was afraid another demijohn might find its way in here. The man—his name is Nelson—who rents the farm land is perfectly straight, of that I'm sure."

"How about old Hank? I never saw him drinking, but——"

"I've watched Hank pretty closely. He got Charles to grubstake him in a mining venture, and he's back and forth, but I think Charles was getting stuff before then; at least, he was showing certain symptoms, and chewing coffee. I was glad to see him take an interest in the mining claims, because he had been growing terribly moody and discontented, and this seems to take his mind off things. I think he has been brighter and more normal since he went into mining with Hank. They expect to make their everlasting fortune with those claims." She smiled faintly.

"How about last night? I didn't tell you, Mrs. Marshall, but I heard a man run past here, after Mary shot. I was getting into my clothes at the time. I thought Mr. Marshall was very anxious for the bear story to get over—didn't you?"

"A bear," said she with a certain grim humor, "wouldn't have much use for canned goods. Half a dozen cans were taken, Mary says. I let the bear story stand. I want to keep all this from the girls. No," she explained, replying to Bill's questioning glance, "they don't know Charles is drinking again. Joe has just come home from school, and my niece came with her to spend the summer. I—I hope and pray they need not find it out. I have let Charles sleep out in a screened place under the trees, since the weather turned warm. His lungs are affected since he had flu, and the doctor advised it. It gives a sufficient reason for our being here in the desert. Joe wants us to winter in town, but I simply don't—dare. Bill——" She stopped until she had controlled a sudden trembling of her lips, "I'm going to need help—some one I can trust. I've *got* to stop this—and keep Joe from finding out, and Barby!"

Bill quite unconsciously straightened his shoulders.

"Don't you fret, Mrs. Marshall," he said quietly. "I'm with you all the way." He smiled hearteningly into her troubled eyes. "I guess I needed to have some one to think of besides myself. I've been a self-centered cuss running around in circles and seeing everything gray and dust dry and flavorless. I've been——"

"You're Woods Morgan!" Mrs. Marshall leaned forward and stared incredulously into his face. "I caught it in your

voice when you said 'gray and dust dry and flavorless;' a kind of deep, singing quality in your voice. And 'I'm with you all the way.' It flashed upon me then. That's the refrain of a poem you read before the D. A. R., four years ago when people had just begun to hear of you. Well!" She drew a long breath and smiled, her face lighting wonderfully.

"Don't shoot!" Woods threw up his hands in the time-honored signal of defeat. He laughed softly. "I wish you'd forget all about that, Mrs. Marshall. When I take to the tall timber I'm plain Bill Woods and as such I'm a harmless sort of lunatic. But if it makes you any more willing to accept me as reënforcements, just call me Bill and tell me what I can do to help." He sighed. "I hope you won't let it make any difference——"

"But it does. It makes all the difference in the world." She clasped her fingers together in her lap, still leaning forward with the glow in her eyes. "Not in the way you are afraid, I mean—Bill. But you must see that now I shall not be eternally worried about you, and wondering if I am a fool to trust you."

"No-o—you can't be *sure* you are! But seriously, I am going to ask you to keep my secret. I—I *like* to be Bill Woods," he added boyishly. "Besides, there's old Hank, and your husband. He wouldn't trust me an inch if he knew."

"He'd try to hide everything from you." she sighed, coming back to her trouble. "For his own good I'm afraid I must let you spy on him. And—I shall have to go on feeding you in the kitchen, I'm afraid. Do you mind? It's the custom, with—with the help."

Woods chuckled.

"I'll have to ask you for a job, as soon as I get my two feet under me again. Aside from that I think we can safely let matters stand as they are now."

"You're hired—but I'll bet you never milked a cow in your life!" Relief had brightened her wonderfully.

"Wrong. I worked for farmers during the summer to pay my way through college, just as every self-made man in America claims to have done. Give me a week to practice up, and I'll bet I can earn my board and keep."

"You'll earn more than you'll ever be paid," she said softly, trouble filling her eyes again with clouds. "I feel almost as if this time I'll win!"

"A man got wise nearly two hundred years ago and said the first and simplest emotion in the human mind is curiosity." Woods smiled whimsically across at the woman who stared at him with a wistful courage in her answering smile. "I always did admit I'm kinda simple. Anyway, I'm curious to know what would happen if that bottle cached by the cow shed should disappear."

"I can tell you what would happen," Mrs. Marshall said with grim certainty. "Charles would go prowling around like—like a cat hunting her kittens. Then he'd brighten up and I'd know at once that he had either found it or gotten hold of a fresh supply. In this particular instance he would suspect you of taking the bottle and he would order you off the ranch on some pretext; which would force an issue between my husband and me which I wish to avoid."

"All right—I just wondered. Well, now, I feel another simple emotion coming on. I'm curious to know what would happen if something—ipecac for example—got into that bottle. I've heard of accidents like that happening to whisky. I wonder what would happen then? They say it sometimes works a cure."

"I wonder if it does." Mrs. Marshall considered the matter and rose, biting her lips. The color was rising to her cheeks and making, all at once, an exceedingly handsome woman of her.

"At the far end of the cow shed," murmured Bill, staring straight before him. "Down low, according to the shadow."

Mrs. Marshall gave him a sidelong glance, nodded and left the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

JOE TURNS HER BACK.

"WHISHKY," said Charles Marshall gravely, fixing Bill with his watery blue eyes that were now slightly glassy, "is a curse to mankind! I know what I'm talking about, John. Doctors gave it to me one time as a stimulan'—and if I didn't have the stren'th of mind of Napoleon Borgia, I'd be a drunkard to-day! Fact, James, I'd be a drunkard t'-day. I tell you, Harry, a man that will yield to the wiles—er—er-r ——" A worried, incredulous look crept into his eyes. He hesitated, gulped once

and went hastily outside, and Bill buried his chortles of glee in the pillow.

After a while he heard Marshall go muttering weakly away toward the house and Bill saw him no more that day. Mrs. Marshall told him later that Charles had gone to bed. She looked hopeful, and Bill was glad and turned his mind now to other matters, principally to conniving some accidental meeting with Barby. He felt that it would be imprudent to confide the story of the ring to Mrs. Marshall, much as he liked her. He might be letting out a secret which Barby would not want to share with her aunt, or he might be making a fool of himself if Barby were not the girl. He would have to wait and be sure of his ground.

One thing was certain: Barby was not in the slightest degree interested in crippled hobos, smooth shaven or otherwise. The shaded yard and the porch where the family forgathered were on the side of the house farthest from the bunk house and Bill could think of nothing that would excuse a strange man in limping where he was not wanted. Even Joe did not think it worth her while to seek him out, and Mrs. Marshall herself was "playing politics" by keeping up the fiction that he was merely the beggar within her gates, so to speak, with no social claims whatever.

Left to himself, therefore, Woods had to find his own ways of passing the time. It occurred to him that it might not be a bad plan to go while the way was clear and find out for himself just where Marshall had hidden the bottle, just how much doctored whisky it contained and about how much damage Marshall's wife had done to what was probably good moonshine. In her zeal she might have dealt out misery with too generous a hand, as Woods told himself is the way of women since Eve. At any rate, he would hobble down to the cow shed and see for himself. There was no danger; Marshall was in bed and Hank was not on the ranch.

The bottle was ridiculously easy to find; so easy that Bill could gauge the degree of drunkenness that had permitted Marshall to thrust the beer bottle carelessly under a scraggy bush with neck and shoulders protruding in plain sight. He took it out and looked at it, shook it, pulled the cork and smelled it. And as he did so he involuntarily lifted his eyes and met the horrified, wide-eyed stare of Joe standing transfixed in the corral with the milk bucket hanging in the crook of her arm and her bobbed hair blowing in a soft, restless halo about her head.

Woods flushed, pushed the cork hastily into the bottle and made an instinctive movement to hide the damning evidence behind him.

"Er—g-good evening," he said lamely, the blood still pumping the crimson hue of guilt into his face.

"You ought to be shot!" Joe took a step toward him, her small teeth grating together and the milking stool balanced threateningly in her right hand. "Throw that bottle away before I brain you with this! If mother knew you brought whisky onto this ranch she'd kill you, just about. I'd tell her, too, only I hate to worry her. Drop that bottle!" She stamped her foot at him, and Woods obediently dropped the bottle into the bush where he had found it. "Hop out of my sight—you poison the air so I can't breathe!"

Woods drew in the corner of his lip, angry because he could not explain just how and why appearances lied. She was only a kid, and she mustn't know her daddy was drunk. He retreated to the bunk house and shut himself in to meditate upon the foolishness of following an impulse. Of course he'd have to be the goat now and let the kid turn up her small nose at him for a booze hound. He thought he had better tell her mother what had happened—and then he thought he had better let things slide along. Maybe Joe wouldn't say anything, and the matter would blow over. If she told her father there would be the deuce and all to pay; but she wouldn't do that to-night—not with Marshall sick as a dog—and by morning she'd probably forget about it. He comforted himself again with the thought that Joe was only a kid, which merely proved that he did not know Miss Josephine Marshall very well.

Mrs. Marshall gave him a nod and a smile, next morning, which Woods could interpret as he pleased. Joe did not choose to have the air in her vicinity further contaminated, and walked wide of the bunk house when she returned from milking and saw him sitting in the door. She would not so much as glance his way, which gave Woods the opportunity to observe her more closely than he had done heretofore. An attractive youngster, he admitted grudg-

ingly; going to look a lot like her mother, which meant that she promised to be a handsome woman some day. Even now he wanted to sketch her as she looked in those bib overalls tucked into diamond-patterned golf stockings with low tan shoes. Her slim young throat rose pink and satiny smooth from an old gym middy with the sleeves cut short, and her bobbed hair waved softly as if invisible fingers were lifting the locks in tender little caresses.

A cute kid, full of pep. She'd have fired that ungodly stool at his head if he had stopped to argue with her. There was a certain free swing to her shoulders as she walked—he could easily imagine her kicking through a drift of autumn leaves and whistling.

Mrs. Marshall came down the path to him, a bottle of liniment in her hands.

"I just brought this for an excuse," she announced with engaging frankness as Woods rose and stood aside for her to enter if she wished. "The girls have already accused me of warming a serpent in my bosom, or words to that effect. What have you done to my baby Joe? She insists that you are a dangerous character, Bill, and she assures me that I'll regret it if I fail to order you away from the ranch."

"Didn't she give any reason?" Bill gave her one of his swiftly searching glances.

"Nothing but her infallible intuition." Mrs. Marshall smiled. "Joe simply *knows* that you are beyond her power of description as a criminal. I suggested that you might be all right, and she gave the unanswerable retort of her age. She said, 'Apple sauce, old dear.' You know how children are, nowadays. What did you say to her, Bill? What *could* you have said to her?"

Bill's lips twitched.

"I said good evening. She offered to brain me with the stool if I didn't leave, so I left."

"Well, I hope you don't mind, because I really think we may accomplish more if no one knows who you really are. I'm a selfish old woman—but I'm fighting to save my husband and I have no conscience in the matter. Charles," she added with a worried look in her eyes, "is still in bed and I can't get him to talk. He seems to have something on his mind; more than that bottle, I mean."

Woods had nothing new to offer in the way of suggestions, but she lingered a while longer, talking of her struggle there in the desert and her hope that the fight could be won this summer without fail. She seemed to forget that Bill might possibly have affairs of his own to claim his attention, but swept him into her battle line as calmly as her hand would grasp a weapon made for her use.

"I wish you'd make peace somehow with Joe," she told him in the tone of one giving needed directions. "She's just a child, but it will be difficult to keep you on as a choreman around the place if Joe is set against your being here. She's her daddy's girl. If she doesn't like you, Charles will find some way to get rid of you in spite of me. If you can only win her over, somehow—she's a sweet, tender-hearted little thing and if you can win her sympathy I know she'll do anything in the world for you. You must have startled her, Bill. She'd never admit she's afraid of a stranger, but Joe really is extremely shy. I'm *sure* you can win her over."

"I can try, at least," Bill promised. And that night when Joe had passed with her chin in the air, on her way to milk the cow with the striped horns, Woods cuddled his crutches under his arms and followed her to the corral, making sure that she had started milking before he approached. Then, being warned by the nervous side glances of the cow, Joe turned her head and glared at him.

"Miss Joe, I didn't come to explain or—or try to sneak out of anything," Woods began with the deep, singing quality in his voice. "I came to tell you that from now on I am going to try and be a better man."

"Some job." Joe commented heartlessly, after the manner of self-righteous youth that has never known nor heeded the command to help the erring brothers of the world.

She turned back to her work, apparently unmoved. But Woods, who was an observing young man, saw that the two little streams of milk were shooting wide of the pail. He smoothed out a grin and went on, speaking humbly.

"I don't hope for such a thing as your forgiveness. What I want is to show you that I can be a man. I hate a whiner, and I ain't trying to make excuses. There ain't none. Your respect is what I'm going to work for. If I can earn that——"

"Make up your mind to overtime and no lay-offs, then."

Woods stared hard at the back of her head where the wind was lifting wavy locks in that maddening fashion of making each hair a live, sentient thing. He was thinking that the sweet, tender-hearted little thing was not behaving according to her mother's bland predictions. Still, she was milking furiously and missing the bucket more times than she hit it, and Woods went by that.

"I don't expect you to believe me; I don't expect anything."

"Oh, yes—you expect to get on the sunny side of me so I won't tell mother."

"I told her, myself."

Joe sprang up and faced him, breathing fast.

"You never dared! I don't want mother—oh, what did you go and tell *her* for?"

"I told her I hadn't always been the man I am now. I didn't tell her I drank. Just that from now on I can be trusted."

"Oh!" She looked at him uncertainly. "Is that all you told her?"

"I didn't mention—the bottle. That's up to you."

"Oh, is it? Well, I gave you a fair kick-off toward a better, nobler life. I busted that bottle with a rock."

"Did you? I haven't been near it since, so I didn't know. I did some hard thinking last night, Miss Joe. That look of horror in your eyes——"

"Made you want to be a better, nobler man. I *told* Hank you're the Bill Hart type. Well, you've exceeded your parking limit in this corral, funny face. You better beat it. I've got that tired feeling coming on."

She plumped down again on the stool, balancing like a bicycle rider with her glisteny hair pressed against the cow's tawny flank. The milk streams shot straight into the bucket with a pleasant thrumming sound. Woods hesitated, found that indifferent young back more baffling than the wiles of a spoiled beauty, and hobbled away feeling vaguely disturbed and resentful over his blunt dismissal. An artist in love-making, he had been called upon occasion; an experienced young man, certainly, a student of the varying moods of women—and sometimes turning those same moods into poems and effective bits of character drawing. And he had let a kid in overalls best him in a scene which he had rehearsed with care.

Woods didn't like it. He sulked, that night, and plotted ways of meeting the Girl With the Voice, and planned clever conversation that would soothe his hurt vanity.

CHAPTER IX.

A DEEP GAME.

OLD Hank Hawkins, with his whiskers tucked inside his open shirt collar to keep them out of his cooking, turned a scorched mess of fried corn into a basin and parked the frying pan under the stove.

"There's your one-handed supper, Thatch. Throw it into you. C'm' on, Chris. That there's expensive grub. You ask Thatch what it cost 'im!" Hank gave his customary cackle while he poured three cups of muddy coffee.

Chris, a big, rawboned man with the overhanging frontal bone that suggested monkey ancestry, grinned widely and pulled a box up to the end of the small, cluttered table.

"Yeh, Thatch was tellin' me. Gawsh, I'd give a nickel to 'a' saw Thatch pickin' 'em up and layin' 'em down when the old girl wung 'im. I know Mary—she's shore a pecky nature. I bet them cans bounced a foot off'n Thatch's back at every lope. I betcha a flea couldn't 'a' rode 'im a rod without grabbin' for hand holts!" The picture Chris had drawn tickled him so that he rocked back and forth, laughing until his eyes swam with tears.

"Laugh, you damn' fool!" Thatch eased his bandaged left arm in its sling and scowled at Chris. "Next time we run outa grub we'll give you the job of goin' after it."

"Yeh. Only yuh won't. The old lady shoots a damn' sight straighter than Biddy in the kitchen. She shore enough fanned my boot heels that time she ketched me with a demijohn and old Charley steppin' high around the place. I don't go there no more, you betcha."

"Hank coulda went back himself," Thatch complained. "Nothin' but damn' laziness that he didn't pack up what we needed. Come pokin' along up here with a little hunk of bacon the size of a half plug of tobacco, and a bottle of milk and a handful of coffee and a piece of butter I could put in my eye! *He* knowed I was outa grub—I give him a list of things to bring up."

"Yeah, but the old lady might wonder how I was goin' to eat all that grub m'self. You got to look at it from my side, Thatch. Her an' Mary fixed me out—look nice if I'd handed out that list like you told me

to! I'll be dogged if I'm goin' to set Mis' Marshall smellin' around to see where s'much can corn an' jam an' honey goes to, up here where I'm s'posed to be workin' alone! Charley, he said himself it wouldn't do t' pack off more'n what I'd natcher'ly use. And I don't eat honey. Them women *knows* it. Hell, don't I pass up the honey every mornin' I'm there? How'n hell do you expect I'm goin' to make 'em think I eat it up here by the gallon, by gosh, when the smell of it makes me sick down at the ranch? Chris, he coulda brung over some stuff from town. It's that or swipe it outa the cellar, nights—and I'll be dogged if I kin see how else you're goin' to figger it! It ain't my fault if you went blunderin' around and stirred up Mary. How was I to know she packed a gun? I never seen it."

"You knowed damn' well we needed honey to make up that bunch of champagne Charley give you the receet fer. Ain't you two got gumption enough to git the stuff out where I c'n come after it without stirrin' up the hull ranch? What's Charley doin' all this while—loafin' around, eatin' three squares a day and keepin' his hands clean, and I'm off up here livin' ketch-as-ketch-can and eatin' jest whatever you got a notion to pack up to me on that damned lazy back of yourn. I'm stewin' here over that damn' still——"

"Say, by gawsh, that makes me think! You wanta get the smell outa this camp, somehow. I set a dry officer afoot, back here on the trail. He was out huntin' you, Hank—quizzed around the Center, even went an' tried to pump ole man Brown! Name of Williams—that's how Bob got wise to 'im. Asked for Williams' mail, and then got scared off somehow, I guess. Bob's been posted t' look out for Williams. He's been nosin' around Vegas an' Pioche an' kinda workin' over this way. Coupla letters layin' there fer 'im, and Bob, he steams 'em open. Mebby Williams seen signs they'd been tampered with. Bob thinks so, b'cause he takes an' looks 'em over an' hands 'em back an' says he asked for William Woods."

"Well I'll be dogged!" Hank's hand went up to claw at his whiskers. "William Woods, aye? *Bill* Woods! He ain't no officer, Chris. I an' him was mixed into a minin' deal t'gether. He put up a little money on some claims, coupla years ago."

"Him?" Chris worked his scalp forward and back just as a monkey does when it begins to think. "Gawsh, he didn't look like no miner, Hank. Can't be him."

"Betcha it's the same feller. He *ain't* no miner. Couldn't tell limestone from granite, nor porph'ry from quartz. Show 'im any kinda iron-stained rock an' he'd think it was ore if you said so. Kinda simple-minded, t' my notion. Set an' gawp at nothin' by the hour, Bill would."

"What's his business in the hills, then?" Chris leaned forward as if he wanted to meet the answer halfway. "He never named none—'xcept he did have some claims with you, back here in the Grape Vines. An' hinted around to Bob, tryin' to find out if you was makin' anything back here. Asked if you wasn't *growin' grapes!*"

"Grapes?" Hank and Thatch both stared blankly. Then Hank gave a cackle.

"That's Bill, all right. Dogged if that ain't like 'im! Never comes right out—hints around and keeps you guessin' what 'n hell he's drivin' at."

"What's he do for a livin'—what I mean?"

"Dogged if I know." Hank goggled from one to the other. "He never said. When I'd come out an' ast 'im, he'd grin an' make some damfool remark there wasn't no sense to. Said he lied fer a livin', oncet."

"What's that make 'im if it ain't a pro'bition officer?" Chris demanded, working his scalp furiously. "You can't never git one of them to come out an' say what he is. Hum an' haw, an' not give you no satisfaction half the time. 'Tain't likely he'll find this camp a-tall. I follered 'im up an' took his horses away from 'im an' hazed 'em off over into the lower country. The devil 'imself couldn't find 'em, an' chances is they'll cave in for want uh water, tryin' t' get back home from where they're at."

"Ain't the horses that was after Hank, was it?" Thatch asked sarcastically. "Why 'n hell didn't you haze *him* off where he couldn't get no water?"

Chris licked his tongue along his lips and looked down at his plate.

"Aw, hell, I ain't bumpin' no men off if I kin help it," he defended himself. "I got caught out once with no water, m'self, an' I know what that's like, you bet. B'sides, somebuddy might pick 'im up an' take 'im in—nice thing for me! No, I swiped most the outfit—all he wasn't sleepin' on—an' left 'im high an' dry. He'd hit back for the Center, sure thing. Time he got there he'd

be ready for the hospital. Guess he'll make it, all right."

Hank was combing his beard and studying Chris disapprovingly. An uneasy sense of something hidden took hold of him.

"Funny, Bill never said nothin' about somebuddy gittin' away with 'is horses," he muttered. "I'll be dogged if I kin see through it!"

"Where'd *you* see 'im?" Chris looked up, alarmed. "I coulda swore he'd hit back for the Center."

"Where'd I see him?" Hank twisted his beard until it hurt. "At the ranch, where he come limpin' in yistiddy mornin'!"

"Oh, my gawsh!" Chris slumped. "An' ole Charley spillin' the hull works, I'll bet a nickel!"

"Don't you never think Charley'll spill nothin'! Bill ain't no pro'bition officer, nohow. I'll be dogged if he is. Nosey kinda cuss—set up all night askin' fool questions about this an' that, but it was all minin', minin'; boom towns that went dead, an' killin's an' claim jumpin's an' fights for water. Kep' me up night after night talkin' about them things, but he never done no pumpin' about makin' booze or bootleggin'."

"My gawsh, he wouldn't be worth nothin' to the gov'munt if he did!" Chris spat disgustedly toward the stove. "Gotta get 'im away from there, somehow, if we have t' drag 'im away!"

"Hoppin' on crutches, right now," Hank said gloomily. "Bill may be mean—he's an awnery cuss, I admit—but he ain't no Fed'ral officer, or I've missed 'im a mile."

"You don't know a damn' thing about it!" Thatch said carpingly. "You wasn't makin' it when you and him hooked up b'fore. I know all about that. He seen you wasn't makin' nothin', that's why he never broached the subjeck. I'd take Bob's word for that, er else why are we payin' him? He mighta took this gov'munt job sence then. It's been a coupla years, you said yerself."

They talked and talked, Hank repeating Bill's words over and over, Chris doing the same and the three weighing and comparing and placing a sinister meaning where Bill had meant nothing at all or had idly played upon words. Chris convinced them that the mere fact of Bill Woods coming crippled to the ranch was ominous; a deep-laid plan which the stealing of his horses had helped him carry out.

Bill, they decided, had played a deep game from the very beginning with Hank. His grubstake interest in the claims had given him an excuse for being in the country, a blind that hid his real business. His remark that he was over here on a project of his own was sufficiently damning, in their opinion. One of them quoted that comforting statement about being forewarned, and they thought it very lucky indeed that their plans had been lately changed and bettered until now they were flawless. And through all their talk ran a deep resentment against Bill Woods, who had practiced deceit upon a man who had trusted him.

"Played it slick, dogged if he didn't!" Hank grumbled self-pityingly. "Come to the ranch s'lame he couldn't walk hardly. Folks jest *had* to take 'im in. Ankle swole up big as your head, an' black as tar. He shore played that slick, if he done it apurpose."

"Well, that gives us time enough t' head 'im off," said Chris. "Bob thought I oughta bump 'im, but hell! I couldn't bump nobody. I'm too darn soft, I guess. How about you, Hank?"

"Who, me?" Hank pulled at his beard nervously. "Needn't think you kin make me solo this hand, Chris. I pass." He grinned slyly. "I'm nothin' but a fool prospector that went in pardners with Bill. Mebby I might have t' take 'im out to the claims, if he gits anxious about 'em, but I'll be dogged if I'm goin' t' git all het up over it." He looked from one to the other and cackled triumphantly. Let them do the worrying Hank himself felt safe enough.

To be continued in the next issue of THE POPULAR, *July 20th.*

The complete novel in this issue, "The Prisoner on Friday Island," by B. D. Lloyd, starts on page 55.

The Story of Dakea and the Charm

By H. de Vere Stacpoole

Author of "Gold and the Girl," "Ocean Tramps," Etc.

Dakea was no more than an ignorant Kanaka, yet he might have been almost anybody, for he was a symbol of all mankind on the male side of the human scales. As for Miriamu, she was one with her sisters of civilization—under the brown of her half-savage skin.

BETWEEN the islands of the western and eastern Pacific, between Malaita in the Solomons, for instance, and Mamu near the Low Archipelago, there is a difference great as between the East and West Ends of London.

Mamu and Malaita are covered by equally blue skies and the same sun shines on both, but in Mamu you do not find fever nor Solomon Island boils, nor the descendants of head hunters always liable to take up the old business for a change; you do not find that something in the air which turns a scratch on the skin into a virulent sore, nor that something in the atmosphere of life which comes from Asia close by and touches the health of the mind, not the health of the body—or only secondarily.

So when a man talks to you of the South Sea Islands favorably or unfavorably, as though they were all contained in a hat and all alike, ask him which South Sea Islands he means. Most likely he won't be able to tell you unless he has been east and west and sampled both.

Mamu is a French island and has a little coral-lime-washed town, Maitala, by the curved beach that fronts the broken reefs—the reefs where the blue Pacific thunders toward the graceful palms always bowing to the trade wind.

It has a hotel and an anchorage inside the reefs where B. P. boats put in and tourist steamers whose cargoes are generally American; a club over which the tricolor flutters on the breeze, a little church and a graveyard filled with Kanakas.

Fifty years ago Maitala was not there. There was no town, no club, no hotel, no French, no elephantiasis nor opium smoking; no Western diseases, no law and order, except the law of the trade winds and the ordered march of the sun.

Fifty years ago Mamu had a native population so healthy, so strong in vitality, so perfectly adapted to its environment that, but for the antique practice of infanticide, it would have overflowed into the sea.

All the same, the old healthy inhabitants have not altogether vanished.

Dakea, for instance, the son of Soseni the fisherman, was a perfect specimen of the old island type.

Untouched by opium, drink, clothes or the diseases of the West, Dakea would have been perfect in his way and perfectly happy only for education. It was not much of an education that he had received from the

missionaries, but it had made him think. It told him of a great world beyond Mamu and it told him that the lot of the fisherman was a poor one; that some men were rich and some in poverty, some powerful and others slaves; and this teaching was borne out by what he observed around him, by the Chinese dope sellers who never worked yet made more money in a day than he, Dakea, could make in a month; by Papineau, the hotel keeper, who smoked big cigars with red-and-gold bands on them, kept two horses and was buying land all beyond Huhahine and out there, and would yet, men said, own the island; by the American visitors who came with their womenfolks, and by the copra dealers. Kane and Voison who, by some trick unknown to Dakea, were kings of the coconut groves, lived sumptuously and neither fished for their living nor tilled the ground.

Dakea knew nothing of what makes some men rich and some poor, some powerful and some weak—do any of us really know the secrets of success and failure? I doubt it. Anyhow, Dakea didn't.

In his simple mind he came to the conclusion that success in life was due to some sort of magic influence. He knew nothing of economics or the power of capital, or the instinct some men have which enables them by honesty or trickery to get command of that powerful lever. Magic was good enough for Dakea, magic of the sort he had beheld when the American conjurer took sixteen coconuts out of a hat that would not hold three, and a watch ticking and going from the right ear of Taipu the net maker, son of Timu the One-eyed.

Magic akin to the magic that Ona, the witch woman, exercised—she who lived up beyond the cane belt where the flamboyants grew.

Thinking deeply on this matter, Dakea came to a grand decision. He, too, would be prosperous and happy and he would use the method others had employed: he would get the assistance of Ona, and for that he required money. With this plan in his mind he set to work and to save.

Only a few days before his main desire in life had been a gramophone that seemed hopelessly out of reach, for a gramophone cost ten dollars and the money he made from fishing and finds on the reef he never could hold—candy and seidlitz powders and attractive things like that to be bought at the little store run by Hop Sing the chink, had always been too much for him; to say nothing of cigarettes and peeps at the movie show where old junk films from Hollywood completed the education of the Maitalians in the æsthetic and ethical fields. Forswearing these delights, Dakea, in the pursuit of his new idea, started working hard and saving his money—and it was hard work. He sold his fish to a middleman who made all the profits, nearly, and ten dollars, which was the sum fixed on by him as a goal, seemed a long way off when he started to save. But the money began to mount up in a way surprising to him who had never saved before; it seemed to Dakea that the omens were with him and the gods propitious, and he worked and scraped all the harder till nine dollars were in the rag hidden in a hole in the wall of his room.

Meanwhile the business had got about. You cannot do anything in Maitala, or in any other small place, without the business getting about, and saving is the noisiest business in the world. Try it and find how folk will talk; servants, tradesmen, friends, every one injured, for saving in our tightly packed civilization is nothing more than the art of making money without working and at other people's expense.

In Maitala, it was just the same for Dakea as it would be for you in your village or small town were you to go in severely for economy. People talked. It was said on the beach that Dakea was in love and putting by in view of his marriage, and this statement very greatly exercised the mind of Miriamu.

II.

Miriamu had eyes dark as the reef pools at dusk. Her nose did not spread, a European great-grandfather—a Spaniard—had seen to that, and her face was one of the most charming in the island. She loved Dakea, whom she had known from childhood. They had played together in the shallows and quarreled and fought and made up again; they had followed the night fishermen on the reefs and had seen great flashing, struggling torch-lit fish brought up on spear points and flung to the women with the carrying nets; they had seen storms tear up trees and fling them miles; shark battles in the outer sea and rains that had poisoned the near-shore fish by turning the sea within the reef to fresh water, and

through the years and their changes and pictures Miriamu had grown up always fond of, and at last loving, Dakea.

Dakea was equally fond of Miriamu and love was just on the point of turning his head toward her when the fatal decision to be happy and powerful by means of magic came to him. From that day he thought little of Miriamu, for one big idea at a time was quite enough for the head of Dakea.

The girl watched him. She noticed the change that had come in his manner and his habits. She knew that he was thinking of something else than her and she knew that he was saving.

Now of what could he be thinking so as to make him absent-minded and forgetful of her like that? Only one thing possible, a girl.

Miriamu had come to this decision by the time Dakea had five dollars saved; by the time the eight-dollar mark was reached she was so frantically jealous that dreams of scraping the other one to death with a shark-skin scraper or beating her to death with a whip-ray tail filled her nights. But she could not find the other one, who kept close as the hermit crab of the rock pools when the little squid is rumored to be around. She watched him so that by no manner of means could he meet or have conversation with another girl without her knowing, and as a result she found nothing. Dakea would go and sit by the shore at night, or go and sit in the house of his friend Amathi, or stay at home—but she never saw him with a girl.

III.

One evening little Tibi, who did sentry duty sometimes for Miriamu, came running to her with the news that Dakea had left his house carrying something and going toward the old copra road that leads uphill into the interior and toward the village of Saiomana.

In a moment Miriamu was out amid the fireflies, following the path that strikes the copra road beyond Kane, the trader's, house. The night was filled with the scent of frangipanni and cassi and the great stars above the palm trees showed like lamps lining the great street of the Milky Way. Through the scented air the sound of a guitar came from the trader's house and as Miriamu stepped onto the road, there was Dakea before her making uphill with the light of all the stars on his back.

She had snatched up a Tuli knife in a shagreen case when little Tibi had given her the call; it belonged to her father and it was a sure enough Tuli, with the pig engraved on the haft and the groove running down the blade.

It was at the telling of the great-grandfather who had saved her from a spread nose that she picked up the knife, but the determination to dirk the other girl came from her own tumultuous heart.

She followed Dakea.

He left the copra road and struck into a track between tall canes shivering against the stars, a track crossed by runways beaten out by the wild pigs. Where it forked Dakea stood for a moment as if to make sure of his road, and Miriamu, half hidden, heard the shudder of the canes and the far-off barking of a dog against the silence of the night.

Then he went on, taking the left-hand path straight uphill toward the flamboyants where Ona, the witch woman, lived.

Miriamu, following, heard him knocking on the doorpost of the hut half hidden among the trees; then, crawling like a lizard through the grass, she lay watching and listening.

The moon had just risen and by its light she saw Ona come to her doorway shading her eyes against the moon. Then, as she watched, she saw Dakea beckoning the old woman out and the two taking their seats on the ground.

Miriamu crawled closer and listened.

"Dakea," Ona was saying, "you have come to buy a charm. You wish to be powerful like Keyhan—Kane—and rich like Papineau, who keeps the rest house for the papalagi and smokes cigars each with a little red ridi round its middle and whose wife looks after the business he is about and makes his money, just as Sipi, the wife of Keyhan, has brought him wealth, seeing that she is the daughter of Amati, who owns all the trees beyond Kola."

"I know nothing of women," said Dakea, "nor did I come here to talk of them."

"He who knows nothing of women knows nothing of success," said Ona, "for it is women, Dakea, who make men powerful and rich, and the charm I can sell to you will turn all women's heads toward you so that you may pick and choose; and you have

only to choose wisely, Dakea, and that which you seek will be yours."

"Truly," said Dakea, "this is a strange thing, for now that I consider the matter, all the men of power that I have known in Maitala are mated each with a woman, and some with more than one. I will buy your charm, Ona, for if it does not bring me success and power, it will at least bring me a woman. I have never thought of the matter till now, being so busy with my work, yet so poor that I have never looked for one, nor has one looked at me."

"You have at least sense," said the witch, "and now as to the price—what money have you?"

"Five dollars," said the crafty Dakea.

"My charge is fifteen dollars," replied the more crafty Ona. "Come back to me when you have them, but not before."

"Then I will not come back at all," said Dakea, making as if to rise.

"That is as you please," said the other, "yet since your father once did me a service I will do for you what I would not do for another man—I will cut the matter in two. Eight dollars, Dakea, and the charm shall be yours."

"Seven is all I have," said the fisherman, who had learned something of wisdom from the wiles of fish and the dealings of Muti, the middleman. "Seven as I live," and he spoke with such an appearance of truth that Ona, taking the money, went into her hut and, returning with a little bag of lizard skin attached to a length of liana, tied it round his neck.

"It is yours," said she, "and will bring you what you desire if you have told me the truth."

Dakea did not bother about that. He had saved three dollars and the charm was his. It would never know whether he had told the truth or not.

"For truth, Dakea," completed the old woman, "is what makes women bring success to men—for would Keyhan be successful were Sipi not true to him? Eh, Dakea, we old women have young eyes that see farther than the eyes of youth. So go with your charm, but remember my words."

Off he went, and presently Miriamu, leaving her hiding place, made her way home her head full of all sorts of new thoughts.

She had come in a fury of jealousy, prepared to do the business of one girl. Her jealousy had vanished, and now it seemed to Miriamu that all the girls of Maitala were her rivals.

Love had never come to Dakea; she knew that without hearing what he had told Ona. Well, it was coming now if there was any truth in spells, and she had as good a chance as another—or so she thought.

IV.

Next morning Dakea, with three dollars to spend and his amulet tied up in his girdle, came along the sea walk by the beach, his chin up, and looking around him as the white men look.

He was a different person from the Dakea of yesterday, and the women he met and whom he stared boldly in the face turned their heads to look at him in admiration, for the new thing that had come to Dakea and which was perhaps the power of the amulet and perhaps just confidence in himself had made—as I have said—a different being of him. There is nothing women admire more than self-confidence in a man, especially if he is not bad looking and carries about with him an amulet like that of Ona.

"Truly," said Dakea to himself, "I have not wasted my seven dollars," and scarcely had he thought the words than he met Miriamu face to face and she looked at him so lovingly that he could not but understand her meaning.

"Miriamu too," thought he, and with just a word for her passed on, making for the shop of Hop Sing to buy cigarettes. There he bought a drinking nut and a packet of matches and was going off with the lot to enjoy himself under the shade of the breadfruits when whom should he pass but Sipi, the wife of Kane, the trader.

Now Sipi was a faithful wife who had made the prosperity of this man Kane in a number of ways, but always, as Ona had said, by her truthfulness to him and his interests. But she was a woman and no longer quite so young as she might have been to please a young man's taste, and when Dakea, passing her, gave her a bold stare, the head of Sipi was suddenly turned—at least it was turned to Dakea and there was in her face something which told Dakea that the power of the amulet had made its hold on Sipi.

In the shade of the breadfruits he drank the nut, lit a cigarette and struck the remainder of the matches one by one in a

leisurely manner, so that the pleasure might be prolonged.

You might have taught Dakea much more than the multiplication table and made him wise in many ways known to schoolmasters without eradicating in his breast the love for striking matches. He struck them, and having chain smoked half the pink packet of French cigarettes with a picture of General Gallieni on the cover, he decided that Sipi should be the woman destined to bring him wealth and the power which is happiness. Her people were rich in coconuts and her husband in trade goods, and her husband she held in the hollow of her hand. Every one knew that, for Kane was one of those quiet, easy-going men who are putty in the hands of a native woman once she has made her clutch good on him.

Dakea, the child of nature, in choosing this lady had quite unconsciously adopted the method that has raised so many men to power and wealth in this society of ours, which we call civilized. Moreover he had picked out the "other man's wife" with rare skill and discrimination.

Pleased with himself, sure of a splendid future and wishing to taste some of it even now, he put the cigarettes in his girdle and came back to the town. There he stuffed himself with a baked fish and a yam, bought a mouth organ for twenty-five cents from Hop Sing and retired to a lonely part of the beach, where, fronting a flower-blue sea, he sat himself down to make music and dream of the gramophones to be, of the baked pigs that were yet unborn, of candy in boxes with pictures on their lids and fat cigars with red ridis round their middles.

V.

Now, in using women as stepping-stones to success, they are apt to slip, or one is apt to slip, which amounts to the same thing—as Dakea found to his cost in the days that followed.

With the remainder of his three dollars and his head in the air, there was not a prouder man on Mamu than Dakea. The fond belief that he was the most attractive person in the place gave him an importance that spread beyond his own periphery and there was not a girl who would not have followed him, after being stabbed by one of his brazen and impudent stares, if he had turned his head and whistled to her.

But he didn't. Nalia and Teafa, Kusi, Amama, Tulpi and Kaeia, the maid at the hotel, all of them were fish-scale pearls beside the pearl he had set his eyes on and who had reached the stage of meeting him in friendly converse by night and at the back door of Kane's house.

Miriamu ranked also among the fish-scale pearls. All the same she was a woman, and what is more a woman in love, as Dakea was to find to his cost; for a woman in love is all eyes and ears, she can keep a secret, she does not fear mice nor sharks, she will swim in any water and find her way through the thickest wood.

The affair of Dakea and Sipi was not older than a second day's moon when Miriamu knew all about it. Strange to say she was not jealous of Sipi, as she would have been of one of the younger women. Dakea was plainly under the spell of the amulet, and though Miriamu hated Sipi without being jealous of her, she was content to wait, watch and pay that lady out in her own good time. She had not long to wait.

VI.

One day a cruiser put in to the anchorage and Miriamu knew there would be a festival at the club that night. Kane would be helping to pop the corks, Sipi would know, lay her plans, and, while the club was making merry, in the house of Kane there would be baked chicken and yams for Dakea.

And that is just how it fell out.

Darkness comes at Mamu sudden as the closing of the lid of a box, and the stars had only just broken through the darkness when Miriamu, creeping between the trees, squatted among the bushes at the back of the trader's house to wait and watch.

She had posted little Tibi halfway between where she sat and the club, and in her hand as she crouched and waited was a length of bull liana, tough and strong as cuttyhunk line.

She heard a wild pig rooting in the bushes behind her; the refuse of the village flung half to the bushes and half to the beach brought the pigs and the scavenger crabs by night and as Miriamu listened she could hear the crabs as well as the pigs, robber crabs—and one had got mixed up with an old tomato tin or something of that sort. She could hear the click of the claws on tin, the rustle of the body—silence. He had escaped and the whole world and wheeling

night of stars seemed stopped, dead, listening for what next might come.

A great datura trumpet, milk white and blowing as if to the stars, swayed in the perfumed night above her, and in the starlight she showed like an image set beneath the flower. Ah, what was that? A thrill ran through Miriamu as a form moving with the stealthy silence of a shadow showed against the house wall, and stopped by the door.

Then came two or three soft notes on a mouth organ, the door opened and the form entered the house.

The door closed.

Miriamu waited, waited while her heart counted thirty beats or so. Then she rose and came to the door. She tied one end of the liana to the door handle and the other to a tree trunk and having made the door fast she struck a match and held it burning in the windless air.

That was the signal to Tibi, who rose and ran along the beach to the club, where in the veranda the white men were seated, drinking long drinks, conversing together and smoking.

The moon had just raised her brow above the sea when through the talk and laughter in the club veranda came the voice of Tibi, clear as the call of a laughing gull.

"O Keyhan, there is a robber in thy house!"

VII.

A moment later the whole population of Maitala, as though warned in some mysterious way, seemed to be on the beach to see Kane running for his house with half the club behind him; to see Dakea, who had failed to bolt by the back door, shoot from the front with Kane after him—kicking him, chasing him, till the pursuer of power and happiness by the aid of women took refuge up a palm tree, roosting there in the light of the moon.

Then, as the crowd dispersed, silence fell on the beach and the incident was closed so far as Kane was concerned.

Dakea knew that. He had a dog's instinct for character, and though Kane had caught him with Sipi on his knee and the drumstick of a chicken in his hand, he knew that the trader's anger would not carry him further in the business; but this thought brought little cheer to Dakea. He had lost his mouth organ, his supper and his dignity; his honor was tarnished, and upon its seat he could still feel the toe of Kane. He had also lost the amulet.

He crept down from the tree, and seated on the sand in the light of the moon came to the conclusion that the fault was his own. He had lied to Ona in telling her he had only seven dollars whereas he had ten. She had warned him.

If he had only told her the truth, how different things might have been. Dakea did not care a button about truth, but he deeply regretted not having told the truth to Ona.

Still he had had a great deal of fun out of those three dollars saved by a lie. He had lost the mouth organ, it is true, but he had enjoyed himself and there were still a few cents left. He would spend those promptly next morning before fate could stop him, and with this reflection for comfort he stole home and went to bed, slept the dreamless sleep of youth and came out next morning to find himself the laughing-stock of Maitala.

That was bitter. Ridicule to a Kanaka is worse than ridicule to a dog. The girls laughed at him quite openly, or, worse, in a giggling way among themselves; the men, the very children derided him and Dakea, going off by himself, thought it would be better to die and hide himself in the earth. He went to the reef and thought it would be better to die and hide himself in the sea.

Then hunger drove him home for dinner and food changed his mind, so that he went brazenly to Hop Sing's and bought cigarettes and a box of matches with his remaining capital, and went off to fish.

He did not see Miriamu; for days he did not see her, while day by day the ridicule against him seemed to grow rather than abate. Then the thing began to fade out, as things will, and Dakea to hold up his head again, only to find that though people no longer laughed at him, they no longer looked upon him as of old—girls especially. He had been marked by ridicule as men are marked by the dreaded smallpox and that was fatal.

One day, having saved up three dollars, he took the copra road and climbed the hill to where Ona lived, not knowing that Miriamu was following, not knowing as he talked to the witch woman that the girl was listening among the trees.

"Ona," said Dakea, "I played you false when I swore that I had only seven dollars. I had ten. Here are the three owing to you, and now take off this spell from me, for with it my life is no longer worth the living."

"Have no heed of the spell," replied Ona, pouching the three dollars. "Go your way and live your life. Search for a woman who has truth in her—you who have learned the value of truth. Find her and be happy."

That was not much for three dollars, but it was the making of Dakea, for next day on the reef whom should he see coming toward him with something in her hand but Miriamu, and her face was not cold like the faces of the other girls.

"Dakea," said Miriamu, "here is thy charm. Do not ask me where I found it or how I know that Ona gave it to you."

He took it and as she gazed in his eyes he threw the charm to the sea, having no more need of it; for as he gazed in her eyes he saw the love which is truth, which is faithfulness, the something which if a woman brings it to a man will make him happy—aye, and rich.

Dakea is a rich man now; led by the common sense of his wife Miriamu he no longer catches fish—he peddles them. Faithfully she saves his money and puts it to account, cooks his food, tends his children; bound to him by the love that sees no fault in him, nor the fact that in business affairs he is one of the biggest scamps in Maitala.

A fine new serial by Mr. Stacpoole will start in an early issue.

MR. MARSHALL AND THE INTERVIEWERS

ONE of the best things the average statesman does is to be misquoted in the newspapers. Being "misquoted" has carried more elections, saved more reputations, corrected more mistakes, prevented more embarrassment and concealed more mendacity, stupidity and asininity than any other one thing in politics. It is a poor lawmaker who, having given an interview and finding that the public disapproves of the views therein, cannot execute a swift and victorious retreat by declaring that the reporter who took down his remarks was the victim of paresis and amnesia.

History records the name of only one big politician who throughout all his career has never been misquoted or found it necessary to claim that he was misquoted. That man is Thomas R. Marshall, former Vice President of the United States.

"I've never been misquoted in a newspaper," he said during a recent visit to Washington; "and I'm rather at a loss to understand it because nearly every one I know has had more or less trouble of that sort, at least with papers opposed to his policies. But I've always been treated fairly and squarely by the writers, which has given me great pleasure."

Of course, in lauding the accuracy of writers, Mr. Marshall unconsciously paid a tribute to himself. He has never been "misquoted" because he has always known what he wanted to say and stood by it after saying it.

POLITICS AS A PROFESSION

FRANK H. HITCHCOCK has done a unique thing. He is the only man who has become famous in the history of this country as a professional politician. Once a government clerk in Washington on small pay, he managed Mr. Taft's first campaign for the presidency and later became postmaster general in the Taft cabinet. When big campaigns are not on the boards little is heard of Mr. Hitchcock, who goes into business in New York. But, when the biggest men battle for the biggest plum, his services are eagerly sought and lavishly paid for. He managed the presidential race of Charles Evans Hughes. He is now pilot of the ship of Hiram Johnson's White House hopes. Being a professional politician whose business it is to gather votes, he is not bothered by the different opinions of the men who retain him from time to time.

Face Value

By C. S. Montanye

Author of "The Tasty Tenderfoot," "'Arizona Ottie,'" Etc.

That antique gentleman, Paris, who picked the peaches when Greece was something more than a two-spot, had nothing on Ottie Scandrel when it came to pampering pulchritude.

IF you happen to be skeptical about believing that too much of anything is worse than none at all, pause a minute and let me relate to you a convincing incident. This documentary evidence submitted for your kind attention began shortly after the well-known Mr. Ottie Scandrel, "Tin Ear" O'Brien, his browbeaten amanuensis, and myself left Arizona flat on the mat and came back to the Only Town. The overcrowded East where men were Tired Business Men and nightshirts were pajamas made the same kind of an impression on Ottie and his former box-fighting secretary as the flames of Rome did on Nero.

They loved it!

The minute we hit town and docked, Scandrel, always an egg for the decades, had a quick relapse from what little sanity he ordinarily possessed. For two weeks or fourteen days Ottie did everything to a cabaret but sleep in it and the enchanted O'Brien was only a foot behind him in their combined nonsense. From the reports that drifted up to the Bronx, where I was lodging again, I gathered that the Benevolent Association of Head Waiters, the Chorus Girl Union, the Ancient Order of Jazz Musicians and the Lodge of Coat-room Crooks had all united and given the exuberant Scandrel the well-deserved title of Prince of the Boulevard.

You have no idea!

This state of affairs hit on all eight for another fortnight and then one dubious noon in a month that was crowded in between January and December I chanced across the world's silliest buffoon in a Fifty-third Street chop house where he had just finished ordering a luncheon for one. I took a vacant chair and made it two.

Ottie glanced up, wiped his hand-hewn chin off with the end of the tablecloth and smirked.

"Sit down and cut yourself a slice, Joe. I—now—called you up a couple of times but Central told me you didn't answer, and who am I to call a lady a liar? Ain't it sweet being back home again where you can expect your laundry Tuesday if they tell you it will be ready Friday? Pick something off the program and tell me what's new besides that eye-straining neckwear you've wrapped your collar around."

I explained briefly there was nothing dramatic to gab about and mentioned the only item of common interest I knew of. This was the fact that Looie Pitz, one of Ottie's worst friends, was in the throes of handling a "Hot Dog" Hobson, who was a

lightweight punching machine of some standing. I mentioned a few of Pitz's glowing hopes, but the information thrilled Scandrel the same as a handful of sand would a camel.

"To me them sluggers induce a nap," he yawned. "So Pitz is still at it, is he? If Looie's going to make the fight profession a life occupation why don't he get married and call it a day? He's a grin and you're another."

"Much obliged," I said. "I suppose you know what you are."

"I mean," he went on, "fooling around with the pugs never got anybody the big gravy unless they carried a champ—and count up the number of champeens there are. It's a sucker as well as a socker game, I say—it really is."

The waiter loomed up at this point with a pair of soup plates and Ottie gave the menu another tumble.

"Eggs, sir?"

"Not if I see 'em first," Ottie growled. "The last time I was in here you said the eggs were from the country. From the age of them I don't doubt they were—from the old country. Bring me a side of tripe and make it snappy." The waiter wrote something in a trick book and was turning away when Scandrel let out a bellow. "One minute! Help yourself to a close-up on this soup!"

The porcelain pusher dropped his napkin, picked it up and stared.

"I don't see nothing the matter with your soup, sir."

"Then you're blind about the eyes! There's a fly in it!"

To the waiter this statement might have been a pleasant bon mot. Straightening up he became all smiles.

"Mister," he said reproachfully, "how much can a fly eat?"

It appeared that Ottie wasn't overflowing with conversation and it took considerable questioning on my part to make him divulge the information he had taken a suite of rooms at the Hotel Synthetic, that O'Brien was still with him and that his firm of tailors had just finished stitching a suit that was certain to make the Prince of Wales spend half his income in cablegrams.

When the meal was over eventually a slow-moving picture had nothing at all on friend Ottie reaching for the check. He hid a tip for the waiter under a spoon, paid at the desk and led the way out into the street.

"If you ain't doing nothing and have a couple of minutes that are sheer waste, Joe, step down the line a way. I've got a little friend I want you to meet. Her name is 'Patsy' Pennington and just at present she's a decoration over at the Stanton Tonsorial Parlor. She ain't in the hardware business but she can tell you anything you want to know about nails. Er—follow me."

"Still at it?" I murmured.

He scorched me with a glance and laughed under his breath.

"What do you mean—still at it? Can I help the dolls going crazy over me? And who likes to eat, dance or taxicab alone? Honest, if sense was stale bread you couldn't give a sparrow its breakfast. Let me tell you about Patsy. She's something to talk about."

Cheerfully tossing the bull of conversation about, he piloted me safely through the dizzy currents of Broadway and down a side street to the barber shop mentioned. This affair, housed in the first floor of an office building, was a gilded den with twenty chairs, an equal number of scissor hounds turned out in white kimonos, a brigade of bootblacks, a quartet of charming manicurists who looked ready to go into a song and dance at any minute and a few other buccaneers who prowled around, waiting to snatch your coat and hat and go through your pockets.

From the way Scandrel breezed in I half suspected he owned the business or was capping for the dive.

Through an atmosphere heavy with the fragrance of shaving soap, hair tonic, garlic, shoe polish and steam, I was conducted directly to a cute little glass-covered table where a languorous Titian-haired young lady with eyes the same color as violets and as attractive as Paris sat reading a magazine. She was well if not swell dressed and a living definition of the word delectable.

Prancing up to the table, Ottie took the magazine away from her and killed her with a smile.

"Well, here I am again, Patsy. I brung along a friend I want you to meet. How's every little thing been since I seen you last?"

The red-headed vision lifted the violet eyes but failed to register any supreme excitement.

"Up until right now," she said in a voice

as cold as the tail of an arctic seal, "I've been feeling fine."

Scandrel turned a cough into a giggle.

"Meet Joe O'Grady, one of my dearest friends—if you don't believe it you ought to have seen the expensive lunch he ate. Joe's a dumb somebody who doesn't know whether you throw a manicure with a curry comb or not but he's young and willing to learn. Joe, this is Patsy Pennington. I met her the first day I ever fell in here to get scratched with a razor and we've been little pals ever since. For a fact, we get on as well as chili sauce and cold meat."

"Like fun we do!" the girl snapped. "Tell your friend the truth while you're at it. Personally," she went on, turning to me, "I think Mr. Scandrel is the greatest argument in support of capital punishment. He bores me horribly and pesters me to death with continual invitations to go places. If I ate all the candy he sends me I'd weigh a ton and he must think I'm sick or something because he's always telling the florist to leave roses here. I can't seem to discourage him at all. Oh, yes, another thing——"

"You'd almost think she didn't like me, wouldn't you, Joe?" Ottie interrupted. "But that's just a way of hers. She's a man hater because she tells me that when a mere girl some half-wit treated her mean or something. But wait. They say jealousy always wins and I'm ready to bet any part of five grand that in a week or two every good-looking gal over sixteen and under sixty will be chasing me!"

"What are you going in for—pocket picking?" I ventured.

"Here's one girl who won't be," Patsy Pennington stated decidedly. "I'm glad to have met your friend and I hope I don't see him again—or either of you. Now take your toys and run along. I'm half finished a swift-moving story in a magazine that's the confession of a woman who poisoned thirty people and I want to find out if it was arsenic or white lead."

"Hold the wire!" Scandrel yelped. "For the tenth time how about the three of us stepping out to-night? I know a kafe up the Alley where you get service. No fooling, baby. How's for you, Joe and me ankling up there to-night for a table d'hôte? Have a heart and say yes."

Miss Pennington sighed, looked up at me and shook her head sadly.

"Isn't he the limit? I really believe he could sell a hot-water bag to a man with a fever. If I go this once with you," she said to Ottie, "will you promise to cease annoying me in the future?"

"I'll promise anything," was Ottie's answer. "Be ready at half past seven and don't forget to wear your dancing shoes. Really, after to-night you'll change your opinion of me!"

"I couldn't!" Patsy Pennington replied promptly.

Eight o'clock the same evening found us surrounding a table in a Main Stem coop that was known to the nighthawks as the Club Algiers. This select tango tavern was smothered in gold leaf. You had to have a card to go in with and a bank account to get out on. It was guaranteed to make a wreck book out of anybody's check book and boasted nine Grade-A musicians, a dance floor that looked like ice and a crowd of well-dressed customers who had rings on their fingers and under their eyes.

All the patent-leather pinkies of the Big Street dropped in to the Club Algiers where they put on dog whenever they wanted to get a bite.

If Ottie had expected to make progress and arouse Patsy Pennington's liking I saw that he was doomed to disappointment. Our charming guest of honor was as cynical and as unkind to him as she had been during our call at the tonsorial carton that same afternoon. No member of the well-known knife family would have been more cutting in their remarks and no one more unenthusiastic in the face of a dinner that Ottie ordered with extravagant indifference to a price list that would have made a pauper out of a Pennsylvania steel merchant in town to blow his bundle.

The charming manicurist's indifference, however, couldn't dampen Ottie's spirits.

Thoroughly at home in the rôle of host and enjoying every minute of it, he had the airs and conceit of the Marquis of High Hat. He recognized and pointed out various celebrities that ranged from famous thugs to celebrated idols of the stage and footlight favorites. He pointed out a jockey who had horses so much on the brain that he had married a nag, he talked a lot but said little, danced frequently and did away with every course that was rushed in and thrown down.

In this fashion we fought a way through

to the demi-tasses. As we finished them, Ottie, looking around for some one else whose biography he could give verbally, glanced in the direction of the front door of the café and curled a lip.

"For crying out loud, Joe! Here comes Looie Pitz and some gimick in the night clothes. What a swell nerve Pitz has breaking into a class establishment like this. It never pours but it rains, ain't it so? Grab up the bill of fare and maybe he won't see us."

He picked up his own card but put it down as Pitz came across towing Hot Dog Hobson. His hard-hitting lightweight was a blond young man who seemed somewhat familiar with a dinner jacket and the trimmings that he wore with an air. Outside of a horn that had been broken twice, a jaw bent slightly out of true and a few missing front teeth no one would have ever suspected that Hobson was a pugilist.

I noticed he gave Patsy Pennington a quick stare of surprise and I noticed the Titian-haired young lady stared back with parted lips. But before I could notice anything else Looie Pitz had helped himself to one chair, had presented his protégé and was waving him into another.

"Yeah," the little fight manager began easily, "I told the kid this morning that if he shows the sport scribes four fast rounds I'll give him anything he wants. When he clicks he calls the turn and tells me an evening down among the bright lights won't give him a headache. So here we are!"

"How you got in is a mystery to me," Ottie mumbled. "You've got the wrong lay, Looie. Beef stew goes under a French name here, is a dollar ninety-eight a spill and they won't serve milk with the coffee if you're on friendly terms with a couple of cows."

"I take mine black, anyhow," Pitz grinned. "Try and get rid of us. If you can stand the overhead, so can we. The kid here has been paying big dividends. He's been cleaning up lately."

"I'll say I have!" Hobson muttered modestly, removing his fascinated gaze from Patsy Pennington with an effort. "Looie got me a match Friday a week ago with 'Red Nose' McCann and the last reports from the hospital say that he's able to sit up now. We get fifteen hundred for 'at fuss. I meet a bim operating under the name of 'Kid Stiff' the middle of next month and that means another piece of jack. You've got a real fighter looking at you, girlie," he added, turning back to Patsy Pennington.

"Prize fighters mean nothing at all to me," that young lady replied frostily. "I consider pugilism to be brutal and degrading, although Carpentier wasn't so terrible. And my name doesn't happen to be girlie—it's Miss Pennington."

When she stopped Ottie got going.

"Exactly!" he hissed. "Don't be getting so friendly around here, fellar! You're like all the rest of the boxing brigade—heavy about the head. A Tux, a clean shirt and a fancy vest don't give you no license to clown at this depot. Get me?"

"No, and I don't want to!" Hobson growled. "What are you razzing me for? I don't read your name in the papers every morning and nobody told me you were the fiancé of Miss—er—Pennington when I was knocked down to her. Don't try to push me around, guy. I'm a real fighter and you can——"

"Don't mind Ottie, kid," Pitz purred. "That's only a way of his and he don't mean a thing. We'll camp here and throw a party together. Is there any reason why we all can't be friendly?"

"Yes, two reasons," Scandrel cut in. "You're one and that half portion beside you is the other!"

From then until the manager showed up to suggest we take the argument outside in the street, there was a constant exchange of unpleasant repartee that started a fist fight three times. Actual blows were only prevented by Patsy Pennington's threat to leave. When we were given the avenue eventually Hot Dog Hobson and Pitz disappeared in one direction and Ottie hailed a taxi to conduct our red-headed guest back to her boarding house.

"Them two bolognies!" Ottie moaned. "Everywhere I go they go to bust up a perfect evening. Honest, I'm boiling over!"

"Hobson," Patsy Pennington murmured in a far-away voice, "reminds me of a young man I knew back home in Pseudo, Ohio. Wasn't he ugly?"

A day or two later when I stopped in at the Hotel Synthetic, which was a bottle's throw from Times Square, I discovered Scandrel finishing up some dictation he was passing on to the long-suffering Tin Ear O'Brien.

"Sit down and rest them things you call feet, Joe. I'll be all finished with this jazz in another minute."

"I hope so," O'Brien said. "I've got rider's cramp now."

"In about fifteen minutes," Ottie went on, "I expect a caller who dashes around under the name of Gordon Giddings. This party runs that little magazine you might have seen on the news stands. It's entitled *Gotham Gossip* and it sells out in a couple of days. Er—I just bought a controlling interest in the magazine and I've got Giddings working for me."

"A controlling interest?" I repeated.

"When he told me I laughed," O'Brien put in moodily. "Come on, boss. Let's finish the rest of them letters. This job is clouting me cold. I think I've got a touch of indigo —I feel so blue."

Scandrel picked up some papers, finished the dictation and was about to give me his attention again when there came a tapping on the chamber door and instead of a raven in walked the expected Gordon Giddings.

This number was a young gentleman whose tailored elegance failed to overcome the handicap of a couple of shifty eyes and a chin that was as weak as the fluid used to bathe in. He featured cloth-topped kicks, a tan-belted overcoat, a stick, a fancy tile and a cravat that looked as if it had been dipped in tomato soup. One glance was enough for me to detect the Rialto walk-around.

"Charmed to know you, Mr. O'Grady," Giddings said, letting me hold a couple of fingers after Ottie had made the introduction. "Scandrel, I verily believe our contemplated enterprise will be rolling briskly along by Saturday at the latest. I've just come from the office of the syndicate I suggest we place our advertising with. The opening gun is now ready to be fired. Then for the avalanche of feminine pulchritude!"

"Absolutely—no matter what you mean!" Ottie yelped. "Tell Joe all about it, Giddings."

The well-dressed young man coughed.

"It will be a pleasure. *Gotham Gossip,*" he explained glibly, "is preparing to hold the greatest thing of its kind that Manhattan Island has witnessed since the evacuation of the British. In a word, we're staging what we call the Great White Way Beauty Contest. This contest is open to any lady who resides or is employed anywhere along Broadway from Thirty-fourth Street down to Columbus Circle up. All she is required to do is to send in a photograph with her name and address and two dollars for a year's subscription to our magazine. The fortunate winner will be presented with a fifteen-thousand-dollar Royce-Rolls touring car. The second prize is a six months' trip abroad and the third prize a flexible diamond bracelet from one of our leading jewelers."

"While the judge who picks the lucky winners," Ottie snickered, "is myself!"

"There's a trip-up in it somewhere," O'Brien muttered over the typewriter. "A fifteen-thousand-dollar expense buggy, hey? There's got to be a catch in it!"

"I'll put a catch on the end of your chin if you don't pipe down!" Ottie hissed. "We'll hear from you when we ask for your opinion."

"Our profits," Gordon Giddings continued, "naturally come from the subscriptions received. It's sound proof and airtight. If you're finished with those letters perhaps we had better run over to the office, Scandrel. And give me your opinion on this new topcoat."

A few minutes later Ottie and the blithe Mr. Giddings departed leaving O'Brien to tear up two envelopes and mumble under his breath.

"What's ailing you?" I asked.

"The boss. Mr. O'Grady. This here Giddings guy oils him and Ottie's sold. You know how he is if you give him a puff. Beauty contest, is it? It might be as level as the Hudson but it don't look good to *me!*"

The morning newspapers blossomed out with the florid advertisements of the *Gotham Gossip's* competition for good looks shortly after that and created, among the cigarette-holder sex, what mildly might be termed a sensation. A cruise down the Rialto with Scandrel and stops at two or three shops along the way showed us that the majority of young ladies were highly excited. We picked up fragments of conversation on the pavements that verified it, saw that certain photographers had clipped the advertisements and had pasted them in the showcases together with a special anouncement of reduced rates for their product of the crankless camera to enter in the contest.

And no less than a half a dozen well-

known beauty shops were displaying placards that stated prospective competitors could have their tresses waved, their eyebrows repaired, their noses straightened and their double chins removed before sitting pretty for a picture.

"You ain't seen nothing yet!" Ottie chuckled. "Giddings tells me that all the musical-comedy chorines are almost in hysterics trying to figure out how many miles they'll get out of a gallon of gas once they win the car. You know how them dolls are—each one believes she's got Cleopatra looking like a washerwoman after a tough Monday hanging up clothes on the roof. I'll let you trail me over to the barber shop to see how Patsy is taking it if you'll promise not to tell her who's running the beauty contest. Er—right there is where I'm going to get myself across big. You have no idea!"

Once we crashed the gate at the Stanton Tonsorial Parlor we found Patsy Pennington up to her permanent wave in the newspaper advertisement of the contest. She tore herself away from it when Ottie announced our presence with a cough and gave him the sunshine of her frown.

"You here again? I thought you promised you wouldn't bother me any more. I must say I had an idea you were a man of your word."

"I am—and I want a word with you," the big eggplant grinned. "Don't pan me until you get the headlines. I'm here on business this afternoon, baby. If you don't believe me ask O'Grady, the gentleman on my left. You'll be surprised."

"Nothing you do can surprise me!" the redhead retorted in a zero voice. "What is it to-day?"

Given an inch Ottie took a chair. He indicated the newspaper with a flourish and dragged down his cuffs.

"I see you're getting acquainted with the Great White Way Beauty Contest. No kidding, if you're sending in a tintype I'm the well-dressed boy who is going to fix things for you."

"You talk like a mechanic," Patsy Pennington said but I noticed a gleam of interest in the violet eyes. "Of course I'm going to enter the contest. My mirror and my friends tell me I've got just as good a chance to win that automobile as any one else. What do you mean—you can fix things?"

For once Ottie was as serious as an operation.

"Just that. All I ask is that you squander a nickel, call up the office of *Gotham Gossip* and find out from Mr. Gordon Giddings who the judge who picks the lucky winner is. Do that before six o'clock because I want to take you anywhere to-night. Will you?"

The nice-looking manicurist pursed a pair of lips that made scarlet look gray and drew a little breath.

"If I find out anything on the telephone that interests me," she stated finally, "you can call for me at the boarding house after dinner. Some one sent me two tickets for a benefit over in Brooklyn this evening where there will be boxing exhibitions—or something. Don't forget—call for me after dinner."

"What's the big idea?" I inquired when we were out in the air again. "Do you contemplate using your job as judge to make Miss Pennington consider you in a more favorable light?"

Scandrel's grin was as twisted as a bent hairpin.

"You ought to be a detective, Joe—the way you find things out. Give me credit. Suppose I do pick Patsy as the winner? I'll stand here and take an oath now that *I* think she's the best-looking gal in the world. And I ain't got a beauty complex for nothing!"

Looie Pitz had two tickets for the Brooklyn benefit the same night but only one after I had a couple of minutes' conversation with him. It appeared that a big fight club over the East River was going fifty-fifty on the gate receipts with some charity that was aiding the starving victims of the epidemic of freckles that had swept over northern Europe. Planted in the center of a regular card was a four-round exhibition in which Hot Dog Hobson was to step with some soft prelim set-up. Pitz, for all of his faults, was as crafty as a mother fox. He knew as well as the next man that doing an exhibition for charity that wouldn't make his hard-hitting lightweight draw a quick breath was good for a million dollars' worth of publicity and a solid fall-in with all the sport writers who loved to see *any* pugilist do anything without remuneration.

Our seats in the temple were of the ringside variety—Looie, for once, giving up his rôle of chief second and allowing a couple of handlers to wave the towels. A couple of

rows to the left of us I spied the enraptured Ottie talking with the winsome Miss Pennington, who appeared to be giving him smile for smile and bluff for guff. Almost directly in front of us was another eye-arresting young lady, a home-brewnette who, in a dark way, was equally as attractive as the red-headed cuticle expert. This second Helen of Troy was gowned in a shade that matched her eyes, featured a hat with more feathers on it than a pillow and attracted as much attention as a street brawl.

As we sat down she turned a little and gave Pitz a smile and a nod.

"That don't mean I've sowed my rolled oats!" he explained. "The chicken is Laurine Lavelle and an old-time friend of Hobson's. I understand she used to be in the movie business but just now she's rehearsing for the new 'Bandbox Revue.' A looker, yes?"

There was no doubting the question and during the prelims that presently went on I saw Scandrel's gaze moving in the direction of Miss Lavelle once or twice.

"Wake me up when the kid takes his bow," Pitz requested, yawning at the activities in the roped arena. "Positively, Congress ought to pass a law making these pork-and-bean mills a felony. Some evils are necessary but ain't these the medicine?"

They were.

I don't know whether the card was worse than usual owing to Lady Charity having a drag on the receipts but the box fighters performing were on a par with dock sockers and mud-gutter heavyweights. Two bantams from the East Side won a laugh with a scuffle that was comedy for everybody but the referee who got in the way of a couple of wild belts and took the canvas—out like a society leader at a dinner party.

After that Hot Dog Hobson and the set-up were introduced and the four exhibition rounds got under way.

Similar to the majority of affairs of the kind it was all very harmless. Hot Dog Hobson stalled and clowned, boxed, showed samples of ballroom dancing and emerged from it with his hair-part undisturbed.

"That's the end of that. Are you staying?" I asked.

"Not so you could notice." Pitz replied as his bread and butter threw on a bath robe, gave his friends present a wave like a flag and steamed toward the dressing room with his seconds in tow. "What else happens around this siding won't ruin my complexion. And I see Ottie and Miss Doll pushing out too."

Once we reached the foyer of the fight club, Hobson's manager stumbled over the Laurine Lavelle who had sat in front of us and introduced me. He had hardly finished when Scandrel and Patsy Pennington showed up and were included in the hand-shaking. This over, Pitz looked at the boudoir clock he had chained to his vest.

"If you'll excuse me," he pleaded, "I'll slip down to the kid's dressing room and see how he's coming along."

"You're excused—pass out!" Ottie whinnied before he turned to the ladies. "Er—my car's parked around the corner and it holds seven people until they start an argument. Suppose I roll you back to town with O'Grady and us, Miss Lavelle."

The attractive brunette who had been eying Patsy Pennington superciliously, shook her head.

"Thank you, but I've promised I'd go back with Mr. Hobson and Mr. Pitz in their roadster."

"That pair?" Scandrel sneered. "The chances are you'll never get over the bridge. Some cop is likely to stop them on the suspicion of stealing the truck they're in. Forget it! The night's still in its infancy and we can pick up my friend Gordon Giddings in town and throw a party at some of the toe-and-heel joints up the lane. Why not?"

"Gordon Giddings!" Laurine Lavelle repeated thoughtfully. "He's the proprietor of *Gotham Gossip,* isn't he? On second thoughts I think I will go with you—if I'm not crowding you any."

While this was being arranged I noticed that Patsy Pennington was giving the other girl a dash of frosty eye work herself but she had little to say until we were across one of the bridges.

"If I'm not mistaken," she declared then, "I think I've seen you before, Miss Lavelle. Your face is very familiar."

The brunet member of the "Bandbox Revue" sniffed.

"That's very possible, my deah. Any one who purchases a ticket to the productions I'm in can recognize me across the footlights. What makes you think you've seen me elsewhere?"

"Somehow," Patsy said enigmatically, "I associate you with the movies."

The other made no further comment, and with the exception of almost running over a pushcart peddler who was returning home from nine hours with the fish scales, we reached Manhattan without mishap and steered for the hostelry where Ottie claimed Gordon Giddings could be found at any hour of the day or night.

The immediate response to the lure of the Great White Way Beauty Contest was both dazing and amazing. Like a gigantic snowball it grew larger as it gathered momentum. A tidal wave of photographs rolled in with so many subscriptions in real money that the shifty-eyed Gordon Giddings, made general manager of the enterprise, was kept busy dashing around town in search of new banking institutions where accounts could be opened. Tin Ear O'Brien, as happy as a child, with a two-dollar increase in salary and a police permit to carry a revolver, was Giddings' special bodyguard when deposits were made and the former welterweight flop champ was ludicrous in his new duties.

Not only did he almost shoot himself twice, but O'Brien was suspicious of every one who walked on the same side of the street used to visit the banks. He wouldn't ride in taxicabs because he claimed the chauffeurs were crooks before he hailed them and any one who looked at Giddings twice and who didn't wear a clean collar was a guaranteed bandit. Once Giddings had to hold his hands to keep him from using the artillery on an inoffensive stranger who stepped up to borrow a match and once when a young lady asked information he was certain she was a Brooklyn brigand because she had bobbed hair.

It was all amusement!

While the feminine flowers in the garden of Manhattan were busy enriching photographers along the way, the comic-strip cause of all the excitement was here, there and everywhere else with the radiant Patsy Pennington. Really, if conceit was salt no herring would have dared to look Ottie in the face. During this interlude I learned from Pitz that Hot Dog Hobson was being shaved almost daily in the Stanton Tonsorial Parlor but if there was any significance to the reason for allowing the attendants in the barber shop to practice their carving on him it was over the head of the fascinated Judge Scandrel like a drug-store awning.

By this time Ottie had confessed he had selected and had informed the marvelous manicurist that she was the first-prize winner. He had picked Laurine Lavelle to finish in second place and had decided to make it fair all around by selecting the show-money runner-up by the simple means of plunging a hand into the ten thousand or more photographs received and dragging one out.

Ottie played a system if nothing else.

A day or two before the final results were to be broadcasted I looked up the office of *Gotham Gossip*, waded through piles of more photographs than the rogues' gallery and was conducted into the private sanctum where my boy friend, his feet on the desk, was busy bawling out the patient Tin Ear O'Brien.

"Get this ridiculous parsnip, Joe!" was his greeting. "The janitor of the building comes up here to fix the radiator and Numskull finds him kneeling by the window and knocks him cold with that horse pistol he's supposed to protect Giddings with. For a fact, I hand him a job as watchdog and now I've got to hire some one to keep an eye on *him*."

"That's a lot of banana oil!" O'Brien mumbled. "I came in here and there wasn't no one around except a guy leaning over near the window with something in his hand that looked to me like a James——"

"A—what?" I asked.

"He means a jimmy," Ottie explained.

"And how am I to know it's only a wrench?" O'Brien whined. "Anyway, he looks like a tough tomato. I'll bet if you had his finger prints inspected you'd find out he's a pen bird at that."

"You ought to be deported!" Scandrel hissed. "You've got more crooks on the brain than Nick Carter. The next time I'm downtown I'm going to lay in a supply of muzzles for you, I really am."

"Don't bother," the ex-welterweight yelped. "Sea food always makes me sick."

"Put your gun in the safe and pay attention to what I say," his employer directed. "Chase yourself over to the hotel and tell Gus—he's the boy in charge of the boilers there—I want to see him at five o'clock. He knows what for. So long."

"Where's the well-dressed Mr. Giddings?" I inquired when we were alone.

Ottie chuckled.

"Him? Say, this is a hot one. Giddings is spending half his time and nearly all his money with and on that Laurine Lavelle frill

Pitz introduced us to that night. Just now he's out to lunch with her. After he gets through he'll be taking her out to dinner and after that to supper. The only reason he doesn't take her out to breakfast is because she don't eat any."

"And Miss Pennington?"

Ottie sighed.

"More attractive than ever—if anything This beauty-contest-judge stuff has promoted me swelegant. Now all I do is pick up the telephone, say 'Where?' and get service. I wouldn't be at all surprised if she turns out to be Mrs. Wife instead of Miss Pennington in the near future. I've seen them all but I like her the best and you know when I like a person I *like* them! That's about all, except don't forget to drop in here the day after to-morrow when the winners are announced. You'll see plenty excitement."

There was more truth in the statement than I suspected at the time.

Back at the gym I ran across Looie Pitz, who appeared on the brink of tears.

"It's Hobson," he explained when pressed for particulars. "Believe me, O'Grady, Kipling was right. A woman is only a woman but a box fighter is always a dumb-bell. The kid got a knock-down to that little barber-shop beauty Ottie knows and between her now and Laurine Lavelle he has no time for work. He's framed for Kid Stiff at a slap tournament shortly and he'd rather make hay than weight. This morning I told him that if he showed me a good day's work he could run down to the city to-morrow and play around. Well, I had to look in on my sister-in-law at Throgg's Neck and when I got back here an hour ago I found that Hobson has asked 'Shorty' Dolan to tell me that he's taking to-day off and will do the work I mapped out for him to-morrow. The first thing I know I suppose he'll be eloping."

"Cheer up," I said. "From what I understand you have little to fear. Miss Lavelle is giving most of her time now to the party Ottie bought his magazine from and Miss Pennington is a self-confessed man hater."

Pitz tried hard to smile.

"Yes, I heard that before. Some one broke a romance over her head back in her old home town when she wore her hair in braids and she's hated men ever since. Isn't that the tune? Pardon me if I laugh. I don't doubt she used to wonder where her wandering boy friend was to-night but she's gotten over that. *Phooie*—it's always something!"

Listen to what happened.

The Great White Way Beauty Contest ended with as much talk as prohibition and the final day arrived when Judge Scandrel was scheduled to name the fortunate winners. The side street on which the office of *Gotham Gossip* was located had the reserves out to handle the feminine throng when I reached it toward midafternoon. Getting into the office itself made Gettysburg look like a session of sewing school but I finally made it and found more of the loud-speaker sex holding forth in the hallway, on the stairs and in the antechambers. A trio of reporters were on their way out and a pair of office boys were trying to repair the same number of broken windows while three telephones had run a switchboard operator ragged telling the girls who called up that no information concerning the lucky winners would be given over the wire.

In Ottie's private office the same excitement prevailed. His coat was off, his sleeves were rolled up, his collar was as limp as a handkerchief in August and he was hurling words by the mouthful at O'Brien, who crouched at a typewriter that had seven keys missing.

"That's all!" he snapped as I entered. "Knock that out and make it fast."

"There ain't no T on this typewriter," O'Brien mumbled. "Will it be all right if I use the Z—they both sound the same?"

Ottie cuffed him and turned to me.

"Well, it's all over now and in a couple of minutes Tin Ear will have the honor of going out on the front steps and reading both the speech and the announcement of the winners I've just dictated. I've phoned the barber shop and Patsy will be up here as soon as she can slip on her hat and a little powder. Giddings left to go down to the theater where Laurine Lavelle is rehearsing to bring her back and this is the third prize winner I pulled out of the pictures sent in." He handed me the photograph of a ravishing blonde and smirked. "Notice the name—Magnolia Morton—and the address. There's one home I make happy to-night. But take it from me I'm glad it's over. I never knew that beauty could smack me for a loop!"

Tin Ear O'Brien finally staggered out to read the returns, as pale as paper, and the next minute we heard a roar from the street that sounded like exploding dynamite. This was followed by the crash of breaking glass and finally the appearance of the former welterweight, who tottered in looking like the remains of a dog fight. Just to help the confusion along the telephone on the desk began to ring like mad.

"I resign!" O'Brien moaned. "I read the first couple of names and then something hit me. Gimme that typewriter and I'll tap off my check-out!"

"Answer that telephone or you'll be carried away in splints!" Ottie roared.

"Yes, sir! Right away, sir!" the erstwhile pugilist replied, licking his lips.

He had hardly reached the desk before the door opened and Miss Patsy Pennington closely followed by Hot Dog Hobson made a slightly disheveled appearance. One glance was enough for Scandrel, who rushed over and began to shake the manicurist's hand.

"Baby, let me congratulate you! It ain't every day in the week good looks gets cars!"

Hobson promptly took a step forward.

"Make it congratulations for two. Pat and I have buried the hatchet and we're enemies no longer. Now that I look back I can see how dumb I was to have ever fallen for Laurine. Pat has forgiven and forgotten and——"

Scandrel changed color and interrupted hastily.

"What's all *this?* Buried the tomahawk? I thought you told me you hated men, Patsy—I mean, all other men except me. What has been going on that I don't know of? If this little four-flusher has been double crossing me he'll go out on a slat!"

Miss Pennington lifted a finger.

"I don't think you understand. Back home in Pseudo, Ohio, Hobson was one of my boyhood admirers. We were terribly fond of each other but we had some sort of a silly quarrel and to try and make me jealous he started to go around with the ticket seller of the only movie house in town. Her name then was Midge Brady but she changed it to Laurine Lavelle when she came to New York and went on the stage. I came too—before Hobson had a chance to make up—and I never saw him again until that night up at the Club Algiers. Isn't it a small world after all?"

The exterior decorator beside her tapped the astonished Ottie on the shoulder.

"Have that prize bus delivered Tuesday, fellar. We want to use it to throw a honeymoon in and——"

At this point Tin Ear O'Brien asked for and received attention.

"Are you all deef?" he bawled. "Listen, Ottie. Gordon Giddings is or was on the telephone. He's stepping aboard a fast express to ride the cushions to Somewhere. He says I should give you his best regards and tell you to waste no time going around to any of them banks because he has cleaned up all the accounts and has the jack with him in a satchel. Ha, ha! I'm crook crazy, am I?"

This amazing information was followed by the office door opening again to admit a highly excited and indignant brunette who was the same Miss Laurine Lavelle mentioned a minute or two previously.

"Somebody tells me you've just announced the winners!" the favorite of the "Bandbox Revue" cried. "When do I get my car and where is it?"

Wham!

"*Your* car?" Patsy Pennington, Hot Dog Hobson, Tin Ear O'Brien, Ottie and myself exclaimed in the same breath.

The musical-comedy star drew herself up.

"Yes, *my* car! That was all arranged long ago. Why do you think I bothered wasting my time and letting Gordon spend money on me if he hadn't promised to tell you to make me the winner? I demand my rights. Where is Mr. Giddings?"

Ottie had a sudden stitch of mirthless laughter.

"Somewhere between here and there. Listen, the whole lot of you. Since Giddings kicked out with the kale *he's* the party that will pay off the prizes! See him—not me! And fight it out between yourselves. I know where I'm going——"

He put on his coat and reached for his tile as the office door opened for the last time. There was a crowd of disappointed and noisy beauty-contest entries in the outside hall but we didn't pay any attention to them, for a rough-looking egg wearing a derby hat and a mustache marched in, slid directly up to my boy friend, laid a heavy hand on his shoulder and asked one question.

"Are you Scandrel?"

"The remnants," Ottie answered shortly. "What's the charge, officer?"

"Conducting a business that tends to incite riots and disorderly conduct on the part of the public. I have a warrant for you in my pocket. If you've got a quiet back door or a fire escape we'll get going."

Camera!

As I was unlocking the gym the following morning a taxi rolled smartly up to the curb and from it Scandrel, the pink of perfection in the suit that had made his tailors hysterical, alighted with a flourish and joined me.

"Then——" I began faintly.

"No, the Tombs haven't got me yet!" he snickered. "Charge me up with a little common sense. I know how the gals are and I figured I might run into a jam. So I fixed it up with Gus, one of the boiler-room men over at the hotel, and had him planted in the street ready to bust in if it looked like rough weather. He was the imitation fly-cop who did the pinch. But that ain't exactly what I came up here to talk about. Er—will you do me a favor, Joe?"

"What kind of a favor?"

Ottie pulled on a pair of custard-colored gloves and cut a figure nine with his walking stick.

"Would you mind running down to the *Gotham Gossip* office and looking up that photograph of Magnolia Morton? You know—the little peach I picked to finish third. The address is on the back of it and I forget what it is. Er—I want to tell her that third prize is going out to lunch with *me!*"

Another story by Mr. Montanye in the next number.

GOSSIP OF THE GREAT

SPEAKING of Washington——

An Irish boy who came to this ountry as an immigrant forty years ago became boss of Uncle Sam's big transatlantic liners. He is T. V. O'Connor, vice chairman of the Shipping Board. He got his start in life "dock walloping," rose to national head of the dockers' union, made his fame in the labor world as a conciliator and persuaded the dockers to bar all strikes during the war.

Senator King of Utah is father of a set of twins. So is Senator Frazier of North Dakota. Representative Free of California has two sets.

President Coolidge is not a "joiner." Excepting his membership in the Greek-letter fraternity, Phi Gamma Delta, he has never been in a fraternal organization of any kind.

Former Governor Cox of Ohio, one-time Democratic candidate for the presidency, has rebuilt the church in the Ohio rural community in which he now does a lot of high-class farming. His grandfather, by the way, burned the brick with which the original of this church was built.

Representative Nicholas Longworth, who has triumphantly made the grade from being "Roosevelt's son-in-law" to great power in the Republican party because of sheer ability and dominance, is a wonder on the piano and with the violin.

When Chief Justice Taft was solicitor general for the United States, he once threw a man bodily out of his office because of the fellow's impudence. Mr. Taft was champion wrestler when he was at Yale and to-day has tremendous physical strength.

The American Beauty rose was developed in the garden at 1623 H Street, Northwest, in Washington by George Bancroft, the historian.

EXPLAINING THE THING

THE two Georgia politicians were disputing hotly.

"You said in your letter to the paper," said the big man, "that I was bribing people to vote for me."

"I never said any such thing!" contradicted the little man. "I paid you a compliment. I said that, as far as could be found out, you were doing your political shopping early!"

The Pillar of Fire

By Percival Wilde

Author of "Tony Sits In," "A Case of Conscience," Etc.

Bill Parmelee, the Cincinnatus of gamblers, deserts the simple life for just long enough to let Mr. Wilde, who writes the best card stories we ever saw, write the best one he has ever written.

"BILL," Tony inquired suddenly, "do you believe in mind reading?"

It was Bill's twenty-fifth birthday, and Tony, nobly resolving to help him celebrate it, had invited him—urged him—plagued him to spend a week with him enjoying the many attractions offered by one of Tony's clubs. Bill had held out manfully—some sixth sense had warned him that a week in the company of his restless friend would be anything but a vacation—but even granite will wear away under the drip of water, and after the forty-seventh invitation Bill had capitulated. "I want it understood, however," he bargained, "that if I go with you this time you won't ask me again for a whole year."

Tony stiffened. "Don't you expect to enjoy it?"

"Why, of course——"

"You know I'll do everything in the world to give you a good time——"

"I'm a farmer," Bill had explained hastily. "My idea of a good time is different from yours."

Tony had grunted, and Bill, reluctant to offend his friend, had hastily packed a suit case. But once installed in the privacy of a stateroom on the train, Tony had welcomed the opportunity to ask questions. Now an inquiring youngster of six can propound riddles which even a wise man cannot answer, and Tony, being five and one half times that age, was as many times as inquisitive—and even more persistent.

For six years Bill Parmelee had followed the hazardous calling of a professional card sharp. He had reformed; had done much to atone for his past by unmasking those of his former colleagues who still insisted upon preying on too-trustful acquaintances; and while the train speeded southward along the Atlantic coast he did even more by attempting valorously to answer the deluge of questions hurled at him by his insatiably curious friend.

For some deep, mysterious reason, unexplained and unexplainable, anything that has to do with the subject of dishonest gambling is fascinatingly interesting to the average man. Tony showed himself no exception. Methodically, proceeding in orderly fashion from year to year, from month to month, even from day to day, he pumped his informant dry of every detail having to do with his much-checkered career.

Bill had nothing to conceal and met him in a spirit of complete frankness. He told how he had run away from home at the age of eighteen; how he had been introduced to the methods employed to make games of chance less chancy; how he had gradually become so familiar with those methods that he had qualified as a master of them. He

unlocked the door of his reminiscences, and dwelt upon its high lights—and its shadows; its triumphs—and its reverses; its brief periods of prosperity—and its long periods of adversity; and Tony Claghorn, like Oliver Twist, demanded more and more.

Time and again Bill leaped desperately for the end of his story, attempted to terminate his autobiography by explaining, in a few words, how and why he had finally turned a new leaf, become a farmer, and forsworn the devious ways of his youth. But Tony, enjoying himself hugely, would not permit this, and kept his friend busy describing and annotating the earlier episodes which he found so interesting.

Anything—even an autobiography—must come to an end, and at quarter past four in the afternoon Tony had asked and Bill had answered the final question. And then, while Bill, gazing out of the window, was mentally comparing a herd of Guernseys with his own sleek Jerseys, Tony opened a subject whose discussion might well prove interminable.

"Bill," he repeated, "do you believe in mind reading?"

Bill sighed. "Well, do you believe in it?" he countered wearily.

Tony settled himself in a judicial attitude. "Yes and no," he admitted.

"Meaning?"

"I'm a broad-minded man and I'm always open to conviction."

"And have you ever been convicted—I mean, convinced?" inquired Bill.

Tony nodded gravely. "Yes," he admitted.

Bill nodded with equal gravity. "Then there's nothing more to be said," he declared. The rhythmic click of the wheels was lulling him; he half closed his eyes.

But Tony had barely begun. "Bill," he commanded, "get your mind on this."

"I can talk just as well in my sleep."

"Not to me," declared Tony emphatically. "We were discussing mind reading," he recalled, somewhat superfluously, "and I was about to tell you that I had seen examples of it."

"Such as?"

"Well," said Tony reflectively, "there was a chap I met some years ago who could do a very wonderful trick with three cards. He'd show you the faces before he started—one of them was a king——"

Bill interrupted. "And then he'd shuffle them clumsily, and bet you couldn't locate it."

"Yes."

"You'd win the first time, and the second time, but the third time, if the bet was big enough, you'd lose. You'd think that was impossible, because you'd noticed that the king was dog-eared. You knew the back of the card as well as you knew the face. Only when you put your money on it, you'd find that the dog-ear had gotten straightened out, and that another card—not the king—had become dog-eared at the same time. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"And you called that mind reading? Tony, I'm ashamed of you!"

"He knew what was in my mind, didn't he?" persisted the clubman. "He knew I noticed the dog-ear. If that wasn't mind reading, what was it?"

"It was nothing but relying on an old, old maxim," retorted Bill.

"What maxim?" demanded Tony somewhat angrily.

Bill gazed innocently out of the window. "Tony, old fellow, it's a maxim to the effect that there's one born every minute."

"A sucker?"

"That word will do as well as any other."

Tony snorted. "Perhaps you'll say the same thing about the Marleys."

"Who are they?"

"Haven't you heard of them? The woman sits on the stage, blindfolded, and the man goes out into the audience——"

"And then the woman reads out what you've written on a piece of paper——"

"Yes."

"Or tells you the number engraved in your watch; or the initials on your ring; or the name of the maker of your hat——"

"Yes. Now that's mind reading, isn't it?"

Bill smiled wearily. "Tony, some time when we've got a few hours to spare I'll teach you how to do that with me. It might come in handy some time."

"You mean," gasped Tony, "that you know how it's done?"

Bill nodded. "I was taught by a tramp whom I met in a freight car. He had played the vaudeville houses with his partner. Then he took to drink, and got his signals mixed one night. That finished him. You see, when the sheriff's wife wrote on a bit of paper, 'Whom does my husband love?' something went wrong, and the blindfolded

lady answered, 'A beautiful young woman with blue eyes and golden hair.'"

"What of that?" queried Tony.

"Not much," said Bill, "only the sheriff's wife was so far from beautiful that she had no delusions on the subject—and she wasn't young—and, barring streaks of gray in her hair, she was a decided brunette. And she'd been having her suspicions about that husband of hers for a long time! The show stopped right there and the mind reader hopped on the first train leaving that town. He knew that the sheriff would be after him if he lingered."

"If he had been a mind reader," commented Tony, "a real mind reader, he would have foreseen trouble."

Bill laughed. "He foresaw trouble without the least difficulty, and he wasn't a mind reader! It didn't take a mind reader to do that—it needed nothing but plain common sense." Again he closed his eyes. "And now for a snooze," he murmured.

"What happened to the mind reader?" insisted Tony.

"Oh, he stuck to his trade and became prosperous again. We landed in St. Louis together. We were broke, both of us. He fixed that in short order. He'd walk into a saloon. He'd start talking about cards. He'd start talking about mind reading. Then he'd get into an argument with the best-dressed man in the place, and he'd invite him to pick any card out of a deck, call me on the telephone, and hear me tell him what card he held in his hand."

"It can't be done!" ejaculated Tony.

"There were lots of fellows who thought that way. In fact, they'd bet real money that it couldn't be done. My partner never went near the telephone, mind you. He'd say, 'Call such and such a number, and ask for Mr. Parmelee.'"

"And you would name the card?"

"Every time."

"By George," admitted Tony, "that's wonderful!"

"Quite so," drawled Bill. "My partner visited eight or ten places a night. We started off with small bets: we had to, because we began with only five dollars between us. But we split up over a thousand when we decided that it was time for us to make tracks."

"There was no reason that you should not have stayed there indefinitely."

"Oh, yes, there was! You see, the men who lost their bets might have found out that——"

"What could they have found out?"

Bill grinned reminiscently. "They might have found out that I had fifty-two different names! They'd call the same number every time—it was a public telephone in a cigar store—but once my partner would tell them to ask for 'Mr. Parmelee,' and once for 'Mr. Henderson,' and once for 'Mr. Bancroft,' and sometimes for 'Mr. Conroy' or 'Mr. Hanford.' Of course I'd be standing right next to the phone all the time."

Tony corrugated his brows. "What's the big idea?"

"Don't you see it yet?" laughed Bill. "Each name indicated a different card. 'Parmelee' was the jack of spades—that was my partner's idea of humor; 'Henderson' was the queen of hearts; 'Hanford' was the queen of spades. Nothing could have been simpler: the first letter of the name told me the denomination of the card; the first vowel told me the suit. We had memorized a code—that was all."

"Whew!" whistled Tony.

"We couldn't work it more than once on the same crowd. That was the only objection to the scheme," confessed Bill, "but in a good-sized town we wouldn't do badly—not at all."

He turned to his bewildered friend, who was gazing at him with open mouth. "Tony," he declared, "any time you hear of a mind-reading exhibition more wonderful than that, you let me know where it is—I want to see it."

"I'll remember that," Tony promised. And he was so impressed that he allowed Bill to go to sleep without a protest, not to be wakened until they reached their destination.

II.

When a man belongs to one club, he is likely to belong to another; and when he belongs to two, a third is nearly as inevitable as death and taxes. Tony belonged to the Windsor and to the Himalaya—had joined the first because it was the thing to do, and had joined the second in reaction against the oppressive respectability of the first.

The Windsor was rich, dignified, and exclusive; the Himalaya was rich, undignified, and the reverse of exclusive. By dividing his time between the two Tony convinced

himself that he was neither too respectable nor too disreputable, neither a prig nor a sporting man, and ambled along on a middle course which impressed him as being just right. A spree at the Himalaya was atoned for by a staid evening at the Windsor; and after sojourning a while in the highly moral atmosphere of the latter organization, a visit to the former would bring Tony back to the less exalted plane upon which he felt that he belonged. Membership in the Windsor alone would have branded Tony a snob; membership in the Himalaya alone would have marked him out as a rounder; membership in both qualified him far more congenially as a man about town, a true democrat equally at home in every society.

Yet a third club was necessary to the complete happiness of Tony and of other young men similarly situated, with the result that a select group of them, taking into consideration the frequent vacations which a lifetime of doing nothing demanded, founded that justly celebrated organization, the Riggs Island Association.

There were rumors that the association had been formed because Huntley Thornton, who had owned Riggs Island, a scrubby patch of sand off the South Carolina coast, had been anxious to sell it, and being in the real-estate business had painted its attractions to his friends in such glowing colors that he had been enabled to get out at a profit. This, however, was mere hearsay, and was never substantiated. Certain it was that Huntley Thornton had been a prime mover in bringing the Riggs Island Association into existence, and that his friends, oversupplied with money, and enraptured at the thought of an island paradise whither they might retreat to recuperate whenever so minded, had rallied loyally to his support.

To them it mattered nothing that the property consisted only of a few barren acres, a clump of discouraged scrub pines, and a billion gnats. The architect's drawings, prepared under Huntley Thornton's personal direction, featured a golf course, half a dozen tennis courts, a stone clubhouse, and a magnificent beach, and made no mention at all of the already existing features. Thornton's friends gazed upon the handsomely framed water colors, admired the details, commended the general plan, and dug deep into their pockets for the funds which presently transformed a dream into a reality. In the process the original subscribers nobly paid assessment after assessment, but, as Chet Moulton said, "After we've spent a fortune on the clubhouse we can't shy at the cost of a breakwater. Hang it all, if we do, the clubhouse will be washed into the Atlantic Ocean!" The breakwater had been merely one of the costly necessities which Huntley Thornton's architect had not thought it necessary to mention. There were others—many, many others.

When the clubhouse was finished, when the tennis courts had been rolled to a glass-like smoothness, and the golf course had been completed, Thornton's friends journeyed down in groups, strolled over the property, admired the perfection of its appointments, and decided that it would do. Tony Claghorn trod experimentally on the tennis courts, hazarded the opinion that they would be fast—and never played. Chet Moulton cast an appraising eye upon the golf links, opined that par on the first hole should be four and not five—and never teed up a ball. Steve Forrester inspected the billiard tables, cast a languid glance at the rows of gleaming cues—but did not remove his coat to click off a few caroms. By tacit agreement the older men—those over thirty—left all forms of exercise to their juniors.

But it was on the beach, a spotless white strip protected by the costly breakwater, that all members met. It was Chet Moulton who first donned a bathing suit, stuck an experimental toe into the water, and declared that the Atlantic Ocean, as sampled at Riggs Island, met with his approval. It was neither too cold nor too warm; there was neither too much nor too little current—this he discovered upon venturing in farther; and there was just enough tingle in the waves to make Chet—aged thirty-four—feel, as he himself expressed it, twenty years younger.

It was Steve Forrester, however, who discovered that the beach, gently sloping, firm, and warm to sit upon, was quite as suitable for games of chance as for more strenuous pursuits. "Think of it, boys," he exclaimed, "I'll go home tanned like a bronze statue, and if anybody asks me where I got it, I'll mention I got sunburned playing poker!"

The conception tickled Steve's risibilities mightily. To don a bathing suit imme-

diately upon rising; to proceed to the beach after breakfast; to remain there, with occasional intermissions for meals, a stack of chips at one hand, and a long, cold drink at the other, from morning till night!—the program was most attractive. His fellow members voted for it enthusiastically, and the demand for lotions to be applied to smarting shoulders was heavy for a few days. But after that the participants in the game became well hardened, and at nearly any hour a group of young men, tanned to a chrome-leather hue, might have been discovered squatting on the sand, listening to the plash of the waves, and debating mentally whether to raise or to call.

The tennis courts were often deserted, the golf links neglected; but the beach was patronized so incessantly that one could not walk across it, Chet Moulton complained, without stubbing a toe on a poker chip. "What are the wild waves saying?" inquired Chet. "Are they saying 'Splash?' Not on your life. They're whispering 'Ante up!'"

In games, as everywhere else, there is the struggle for existence, and the survival of the fittest. At the Riggs Island Association, beach poker, as it was quickly called, drove everything else to the wall. They all played—all except Huntley Thornton, who made up for his nonparticipation in the games by acting as a lone spectator at them. Attired in immaculate flannels, jaunty in a Panama hat, with a cigarette, in a six-inch amber holder, decorating his smiling countenance all day long, Thornton wandered from group to group, congratulating the winners, sympathizing with the losers, and sooner or later squatting down to give his undivided attention to the play in the steepest game.

Repeatedly urged to take a hand, he had as often declined. "It may seem funny to you," he admitted, with a smile, "but I've never sat in a poker game in my life."

"No time to learn like the present."

"I promised my old mother," said Thornton, "that I would never gamble. I have yet to break that promise. I kept it in college. I kept it after college. I intend to keep it now."

Chet Moulton, who had just seen the most lucrative pot of the hour pass to an opponent, grinned ruefully. "Huntley," he declared, "I wish my mother had exacted a promise like that from me. It would have saved me a lot of money." Chet's sentiments were sincere. He had shown unlimited faith in a full hand, jacks up. He had backed it magnificently, only to see it lose dismally to a quartet of five-spots held by Don Felton. "If I had made a promise like that," mourned Chet, "and if I had kept it, I might have been a bloated capitalist today. Who knows?"

"And if I had made such a promise," said Felton, carefully stacking his winnings, "I wouldn't be taking in this pot now."

"Never too late to start," suggested Chet. "You might give it back."

"I might—and then again I might not," murmured Felton. He glanced at his cards, grinned at the disconsolate Chet, and tossed a chip into the center of the little patch of sand about which they were sitting. "I'll open for the limit," he challenged.

It was into this atmosphere that Tony Claghorn brought his friend, Bill Parmelee, for a complete rest.

III.

"Your coming will be something of a sensation," predicted Tony, as he led the way to the launch which was to take them from the mainland to the island.

"How so?"

"You're a very well-known man, Bill. Everybody else knows it, even if you don't. I dare say that there's not a member of the club who hasn't heard of you."

"And you expect me to enjoy my vacation?"

"Why not?"

The ex-gambler shook his head. "I was never a great hand at advertising," he declared. "I'd prefer it—I'd prefer it greatly if not a soul knew me. Look here," he demanded suddenly, "have you told anybody I'm coming?"

"No," said Tony reluctantly, "I was saving that for a surprise."

"Well, suppose you save it a little longer."

"What do you mean?"

"Introduce me as your friend Brown—Bill Brown—that's a nice inoffensive name. Let me forget business—my peculiar kind of business—for a few days."

Tony's face fell. "I was rather set on introducing you to the boys. You see, I've told them so much about you."

Bill laughed. "Look here, old man," he inquired, "for whose pleasure did you get up this vacation? Theirs—or mine?"

"Yours, of course."

"Then remember my name is Bill Brown."

It hurt to do it, but it was under that name that Tony presented his friend to Huntley Thornton—and to Chet Moulton—and to Steve Forrester—and to the twenty or thirty other congenial spirits sojourning at the club. When, in conformity with established custom, the new arrivals donned bathing suits, and were promptly drafted into games of beach poker, Tony nearly burst in the effort to keep his secret buried in his bosom. Felton, indeed, had asked Bill if he played, and Tony, beginning indignantly, "Does he play!" had been reminded to keep silence by a violent dig in his unprotected ribs.

To his distress, his friend was separated from him. As a newcomer, Felton, who invariably played in the steepest game, invited Bill to sit in. Tony, being a regular, found himself seated some twenty feet away—and nearly broke his neck in an attempt to observe what was happening to Bill. From time to time voices reached his ear; from time to time he observed Huntley Thornton, the lone spectator, intently watching the game in which he never took part; from time to time the players in his own game invited him to pay a little attention to it. But it was not until darkness had put an end to the afternoon's play that Tony received any authentic news from the front.

He led his friend out of earshot of the others. "How much did you win?" he inquired eagerly.

"I lost," said Bill.

"W-what?" stammered Tony. "You—you lost?"

"I lost. I lost heavily."

To Tony it seemed impossible that such a thing should ever occur to his friend. Then an improbable explanation flashed into his mind. "I understand, Bill," he guessed, "you were afraid of making them suspicious. You lost on purpose."

Bill laughed. "Why should I lose on purpose?" he countered. "In any event, why should I let them get into me for more than five hundred dollars? And what on earth should they be suspicious of? No; I didn't lose on purpose? I'm not a philanthropist. I tried my darnedest to win. And I didn't win because another fellow played a better game than I did. That happens sometimes, you know."

Tony choked. "But—but it's impossible!" he sputtered.

"Thanks for the compliment," smiled Bill.

"It's impossible," Tony insisted, "and I know it's impossible because I've played with every man in this club. There's not one of them that's in a class with you."

"How about Felton?"

"Don Felton?"

"The big fellow with the sandy hair."

"Was he the big winner?" gasped Tony.

"The big winner and the only winner."

Tony swallowed hard. "I played with him in New York, at the Himalaya, only a month ago, and I cleaned him out."

It was Bill's turn to swallow. "You—you cleaned him out?" he stammered.

"Without the least difficulty," asseverated Tony. His brain was whirling. "Lord knows I'm no crack," he pursued, "I play a tolerable game—a good average game—and I've played with enough really good players to know just where I get off. I'm not an expert——"

"And Felton?"

Tony threw up his hands. "Felton's game is to mine as my game is to yours. A month ago he wasn't even near my class."

"Yet to-day he played better poker than I did. He outguessed me from beginning to end. If he called, his cards were just a shade better than mine. And every time I had a really good hand he didn't even raise. He'd drop."

"He must have improved," said Tony idiotically.

"I'll say so," declared Bill. "If the man I played with to-day wasn't in your class a month ago——"

"He must have improved lots."

The eyes of the two men met. Yet it was Tony who voiced the thought that both were probably thinking. "There are many cheating devices," he murmured, "but which of them could be used by a man sitting on a sandy beach, in blazing sunlight, dressed in a one-piece bathing suit?"

"None that I know of," said Bill.

IV.

Tony returned to the attack at the first opportunity and that meant immediately after supper. With great self-control he had refrained from alluding to the subject for ninety consecutive minutes.

"The cards might have been marked," he suggested.

"They weren't."

"Are you sure?"

"I gathered up three or four after our talk, Tony. I have them in my pocket this minute. They're not marked—and I've gone over them with a glass."

"Felton might have resorted to sleight of hand."

"Not with me watching," said the ex-gambler emphatically. "It's gotten to be unconscious with me, I suppose, but I always watch the deal carefully."

"Then how did he do it?"

Bill's blue eyes twinkled. "Maybe he studied some good book on poker."

"Be serious, Bill."

"All right, I'll be serious," Bill promised. "On my word of honor, old fellow, I don't know how he did it. But I mean to find out."

It was Tony's turn to smile. "Nice, pleasant way of spending a vacation, isn't it? This is how you get away from cards for a change."

Bill grinned. "If I learn something new I won't complain."

"And in the meantime the problem is how can a man cheat, without marked cards, without sleight-of-hand, and dressed in a bathing suit."

"That's all," assented Bill.

It is to be feared that Tony's night was far from peaceful. He tossed from side to side, a prey to weird speculations, racking his brains in an effort to discover some solution to the mystery. Dawn found him advanced not a step. In desperation he appealed to his friend.

"Bill, to-day when you play, let me watch."

"What for?"

"I might see something you don't."

Parmelee shook his head emphatically. "Tony, old fellow, you'd spoil it all. Felton's playing me for a sucker. It's an unusual part for me, and I'm enjoying it. But he'd stop like a shot if he thought I suspected. No, Tony, you can help me most by going about your own business and leaving me strictly alone."

Tony refused to be put off. "Look here," he insisted, "if you won't let me watch, you won't mind if I pass the word to Huntley Thornton?"

"What good would that do?"

"Huntley would keep his weather eye open. Huntley always looks on."

It spoke volumes for Bill's self-control that he replied civilly. "He knows nothing about cards. He told me so himself."

"Even so——"

"Tony, with what you know about me, are you really advising me to go to an amateur for assistance?"

"I don't know why not," ventured Tony.

"If you don't, then I do," said Bill decisively. "When I need a guardian, old man, I'll let you know. But for the time being I'll struggle on without help. And if you breathe a word to a soul I'll brain you!"

That threat kept Claghorn silent during the morning, but it did not prevent him from sidling up to Bill at noon to inquire, "How did it go?"

"Great?"

"You won?"

"I lost six hundred more."

"And you call that great?" gasped Tony.

"I call that most satisfactory," Bill declared. "For the first time I'm beginning to get my bearings."

Despite Tony's urgent questions he declined to add another word and left his friend in a condition bordering on collapse. Not once, but a dozen times, had Tony been an eyewitness of Bill's expertness at the profession which had been forced upon him: the profession of unmasking sharpers. Yet the memory of his repeated triumphs was less potent than the realization that for once Bill was facing an extraordinary situation, and had, so far, met nothing but defeat.

Pride goeth before a fall; and Tony's pride in his idol departed on wings. Twenty-four hours earlier he would unhesitatingly have wagered his last cent that no problem connected with the devious arts of dishonest gambling was too difficult for the man who had solved so many. The events of the immediate past had shattered his faith to such an extent that he had seriously offered his own help. That declined, he had offered, with equal seriousness, to ask Huntley Thornton—whose ignorance of cards was well known—to take Bill—whose knowledge of the subject was profound—under his wing.

The utter insanity of his proposals never occurred to Tony. Uppermost in his mind was the thought that his friend was in trouble, and that any straw was necessarily a promising straw.

During the afternoon Tony played so carelessly that for the first time in several sessions he found himself a winner. Had

he stopped to analyze his own game he might have made the instructive discovery that it was undoubtedly at its best when his mind was not on it. But Tony was far too much concerned with graver matters to indulge in any such reflections. Being a winner, he retired from the game after an hour, and nonchalantly strolled toward the group which included Bill. At a distance of fifteen feet he was greeted with a look so fearful that he beat a hasty retreat.

Somewhat offended, he strode manfully into the water, and splashed around for an unconscionable period a prey to disturbing meditations. How, he asked himself repeatedly, could a man cheat—attired only in a bathing suit? The answer was perfectly clear: it could not be done, and Tony was reluctantly forced to the conclusion that his friend's formerly invincible game had deteriorated sadly.

This decision was confirmed when at the end of the afternoon's play he made his way to Bill's side and hissed, "Well?"

The ex-gambler smiled cryptically.

"Well?" repeated Tony.

"Very well," said Bill.

Tony might have pursued his investigations further had he not, at that moment, discerned Huntley Thornton, immaculate as always, stealthily endeavoring to attract his attention from the other end of the beach.

V.

"Claghorn," began Thornton, "you don't mind if I ask you a few questions?"

"Not at all."

"Not even if they're rather personal questions about a friend of yours?"

"Why, what do you mean?"

Thornton wasted no time in beating around the bush. "Claghorn, I want to find out something about your guest: Mr. William Brown. Who is he? What is he? What do you know about him?"

Utterly astounded, Tony sparred for time. "Why do you ask?"

"Because he's a card cheat," said Thornton flatly.

Tony gasped. "W-what did you say?" he sputtered.

"He's a card cheat," Thornton repeated dispassionately. "How he does it, what methods he uses, I don't know. But the fact remains, nevertheless. I don't pretend to be an authority on cards. Quite the contrary, I am rather less than a novice; so I can't say how it's possible for a man—dressed in a bathing suit—to cheat."

The familiar words echoed in Tony's ears. "Possible?" he interrupted. "Why, it isn't possible."

"That's what I would have said in advance; but after what he did to poor Don Felton——"

"What he did?" Tony interrupted again. "Why, he lost five hundred to him yesterday."

"Yes."

"He lost six hundred more this morning."

"Quite so."

"And this afternoon I suppose he lost seven hundred."

"Your supposition is incorrect, Claghorn," said Thornton coldly. "This afternoon he got Don to raise the stakes, and he picked him clean."

"What?" gasped Tony. "He won?"

"He began by winning back the eleven hundred he had lost," said Thornton. "Then he won as much more from Don. Then he suggested raising the limit—which Don did, very foolishly—and it took your friend Brown less than an hour more to separate Don from every last cent he had in all the world."

Something in Tony urged him to cheer; to execute a dance of triumph; to shout his satisfaction aloud. But, for once, soberer second thought was with him, and he only murmured, "Isn't that too bad?"

"It's much too bad, Claghorn; it's very much too bad!"

"Tst! Tst!" clucked Tony.

"Don isn't a rich man."

"No."

"The loss of the money means a lot to him."

"Of course it does."

"If he had lost it fairly and squarely, now——"

"What makes you think he didn't?" Tony interrupted.

"Impossible!" Thornton snapped. "This morning your friend Brown—so Felton said—played like a beginner. This afternoon he was infallible. Now, a man doesn't improve that much in an hour or two."

Familiar words! Familiar words! Inwardly Tony exulted, but he remarked shrewdly, "It was all right, you mean, so long as Brown played like a beginner, but it was all wrong the moment he began to play like an expert."

"That's not what I mean," said Thornton, "and you know it isn't."

"Well, what do you mean?"

"I mean this," and in the gathering darkness Tony could see his fists clench, "there's something wrong—something very wrong indeed—somewhere. I want to find out what it is."

Tony smiled happily. "Why do you come to me?" he asked innocently.

"Because, like everybody else, I've heard of this Parmelee friend of yours, this man who makes it a business to expose cheats. I've heard how he showed up Graham in Palm Beach; and I've heard how he showed up others in New York. Now, if you will be so kind, I'd like you to wire Parmelee, and ask him to come here at once, at my expense, to investigate this man Brown."

Describing the episode afterward, Tony said: "I don't know how I stopped myself from breaking out into laughter. The idea was rich: asking Bill Parmelee to investigate himself! I was thankful that it was dark and that Thornton couldn't see my face. Never in my life did I have a harder time keeping it straight!"

Thornton repeated his request: "I want you to wire for Parmelee. He's the man for the job. I want him to watch Brown play; to play with him himself if he wants to. And then I want him to expose him."

It was at this point that a familiar figure approached through the darkness, and Bill Parmelee—alias Brown—fully dressed, joined the speakers. "I couldn't help overhearing what you just said, Mr. Thornton," he declared. "I'm a great hand at coming right down to brass tacks. Let's have it out."

To say that Thornton was angry would be an understatement. He was furious; beside himself with rage; and he began to speak in a tone which trembled with passion. Tony, listening, wondered why Thornton should take Felton's troubles so greatly to heart; and he wondered still more why Parmelee, sitting near him in the darkness, allowed the vitriolic blast to continue unchecked. Thornton was nothing if not specific. He did not hesitate to call names; to couple them with unpleasant adjectives; to express his opinions in the most elaborately insulting language.

To the torrent of invective, Bill answered not a word. It was only when Thornton ran out of breath, and stopped temporarily that Bill asked calmly, "Mr. Thornton, have you a cigarette?"

Utterly taken aback Thornton offered his case. Bill reached for it in the darkness, and found it.

"Have you a match?" Bill asked.

Tony had never seen his friend smoke. To his boundless astonishment, Bill now lighted a cigarette, inhaled a breath or two, and turned to his enemy.

"Go ahead, Mr. Thornton," he invited.

What followed, according to Tony, beggared description. Thornton, curiously confused, launched again into his invective. That it did not disturb Bill greatly was evidenced by the intermittent glimmer from his cigarette in the darkness. And then, in the middle of a word, Thornton stopped—stopped dead.

For a minute—two minutes—while Tony marveled—there was absolute silence. Then, in a curiously different voice, Thornton said, "I understand, Mr. Parmelee."

"Mr. Parmelee!" Tony felt his hair rising on end. By what process had Thornton discovered his identity? But he was speaking again:

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Claghorn," faltered Thornton. "I'm sorry I made such a scene in your presence." He paused—paused for another unearthly wait while the cigarette twinkled. "In the morning, Mr. Parmelee; yes, I'll leave in the morning. Felton will go too. I will answer for him. We are grateful, both of us, for your forbearance." Again an unearthly pause, while Tony clenched his fists and wondered what supernatural forces were at work. Then, in a broken voice, Thornton was speaking: "Do you insist, Mr. Parmelee?" Utterly crushed, he turned to Tony. "Mr. Claghorn, at Mr. Parmelee's request, I tell you that Felton cheated—and that I was his accomplice. Is that sufficient, Mr. Parmelee? Thank you. Good night."

Through the darkness came the sound of Thornton's retreating footsteps. Then, in a glowing arc, Bill's cigarette flew through the air, to fall with a gentle hiss into the ocean.

Again Tony felt his hair rising. He had been in the presence of something strangely mysterious, something so uncanny that it partook of the miraculous. He stretched out a trembling hand and seized his friend's knee. "Bill," he begged, "for Heaven's sake, what was it?"

Came the familiar laugh, and then, for the first time in many minutes, the sound of Bill's voice. "It was mind reading," he said.

VI.

It was not until they were again seated in the train, nearly a week later, that Bill consented to answer Tony's innumerable questions. Prior to that time he had maintained a stony silence. Even when Huntley Thornton and Don Felton had suddenly decided to go fishing in southern Florida, and had departed, bag and baggage, before daybreak, Bill had had no comment to offer.

"Surely you could have told me then," Tony protested.

"Why? You would never have been satisfied until you had told it to every man in the club."

"And why not?"

"You would have shown them up."

"They should have been shown up."

"I wonder!" said Bill. "They were amateurs—nothing but amateurs—and it's so much easier to ruin reputations than to make them. If I had spoken I would have branded those two men for the rest of their lives. As it is, they've gone off together where they can think things over, and they may decide that honesty isn't such a bad policy after all."

"Humph!" snorted Tony.

"In the bottom of your heart, old fellow, you agree with me. I've shown up a good many men—but they've deserved it. These two were in a class by themselves. They'd made a mistake. I've given them a chance to let it be forgotten. If they go wrong again—well, it won't be on my conscience." He smiled. "Is that so, Tony?"

"I guess so," Tony admitted. "In fact, I'll agree with anything if you tell me just what happened. To me it's all as clear as mud."

Bill laughed. "It began in a funny way. When I lost to Felton on that first afternoon I had no suspicion that anything was wrong. He played as if he knew every card in my hand. Well, that's what I'd expect of a really fine player. I thought Felton was one.

"Then you told me what you knew about him: that he wasn't even in your class, and I tried to put two and two together. Generally two and two make four—but this time they didn't, and it wasn't until the next morning that I began to suspect what was going on. It was really the simplest thing in the world when I once put my mind on it. The cards weren't marked; Felton wasn't doing any legerdemain—he wasn't nearly clever enough for that—yet he played as if he knew just what I held. There could be only one answer: he did actually know, and that meant that somebody was telling him.

"When you play indoors, your cards are dealt onto a table; you gather them together; you raise the pips just enough to read them, and you leave them right on the table. At any rate, that's what you do if you're a professional gambler—and I'm a professional. But playing on the sand you can't do that because it would take acrobatics. Instead, you take up your cards—and unless you hold them mighty close a man sitting behind you can read them.

"That's where Thornton came in. I'm not a stingy player, and the moment I started betting liberally Thornton plunked himself down where he could watch. Then he signaled my holdings to his partner."

"How did he do it?"

"It cost me six hundred dollars to find out. Naturally I couldn't face him. I watched him out of the corner of my eye: that was all I dared. Even then, it took me an hour to discover his system—it was so beautifully simple that you would never notice it if you weren't looking for it."

"Well? Well?" said Tony impatiently.

"Did you ever see Thornton without a cigarette in his mouth?" Bill inquired.

Tony could not control his vexation. "Bill," he pleaded. "I'm not a bit interested in Thornton's personal habits. And I'm very much interested in his method of signaling."

"You won't see a thing when it's right under your nose—or under his nose, I should say," laughed Bill. "That was how he did it. His cigarette, man! His cigarette!"

"What about it?"

"Well, it smoked, didn't it? It could produce short puffs, and it could produce long puffs—and it could produce any required alternation of them, couldn't it?"

"You mean——" gasped Tony.

"I mean Thornton's cigarette was sending perfectly good Morse. And I thanked my lucky stars that telegraphy was one of the things I picked up in my six years on the road. Of course Thornton abbreviated:

he didn't have to spell out, 'He's holding two pairs, kings up,' when it took no particular genius to condense that into three letters, and he didn't have to telegraph, 'Mr. Brown has just filled a straight, jack high,' when he could say the same thing in two letters. In fact, he didn't have to use Morse—a prearranged code would have answered just as well—and it would have given me no more trouble."

"How on earth could you beat such a team?"

"By playing straight poker," said Bill. "In the afternoon, instead of sitting up, I lay down, held my cards so that I could barely see them myself, and played the great American game just as well as I knew how. One of the peculiarities of beach poker," commented Bill, "is that you can play it lying on your stomach. I did—and for twenty-four hours afterward I had a crick in the neck to show for it.

"I won back the eleven hundred I had lost in short order; and then Felton made the mistake of losing his temper. He had whipped me so easily that morning—and the day before—that he couldn't quite reconcile himself to the sudden change in the state of affairs. He got angry, and when I suggested raising the limit, he got angrier but he didn't decline." Bill sighed reminiscently. "It was quick work after that, and toward the end I had Thornton telegraphing, 'Stop! Stop! Stop!' That was all he could telegraph, and it only made his partner more furious than ever." He chuckled. "I enjoyed that game: 'pon my word, I did!"

"And then?" said Tony.

"What do you mean?"

"How do you explain what you did to Thornton? I never saw anything more wonderful in my life. He started in to abuse you—to call you every name he could think of—and you stopped him, you crushed him, you made him confess without saying a word. And then you insisted it was mind reading!"

Bill laughed. "Tony, old fellow, my artistic temperament is to blame. I hadn't thought of it until I walked back to the beach, but it suddenly struck me what a masterly touch it would be to pay Thornton out in his own coin—to tell him what I had to say with one of his own cigarettes!"

"You mean—you telegraphed?"

"I did."

"With puffs of smoke?"

"Not in the dark, old fellow. I remembered the good book: the 'pillar of cloud' and the 'pillar of fire;' I said what I had to say with the burning tip of my cigarette, and believe me, I didn't mince matters!"

He smiled as Tony gazed at him open-mouthed. "I am not ordinarily a profane man," said Bill, "but if you had been able to read what I said to Thornton, even you would have blushed. I'll bet he did."

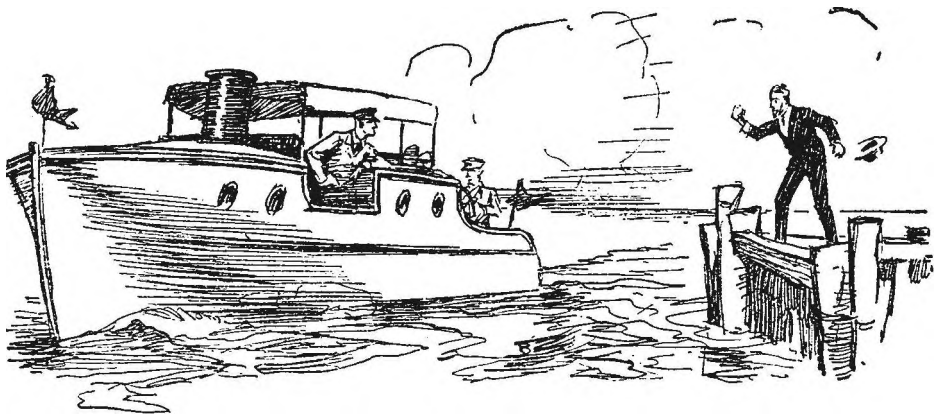
He paused, to witness Tony shaking in the throes of Homeric laughter. "There's something about it," Tony gasped, between explosions, "something about—the idea—of swearing—profanely—with the end—of a cigarette—that strikes me—as being awfully—awfully—funny! Spark! Spark! 'You —— —— ——' Spark! Spark! 'How do you like what I'm handing you now, you dirty dog?'" For an instant he mastered himself. Then he was off again. "To think—to think—that he asked me to send for Bill Parmelee—to investigate Bill Parmelee!"

"It would have been awkward, wouldn't it?" Bill admitted. He grinned as his friend went into spasm after spasm of uncontrollable laughter.

But the final question came later. "Bill," asked Tony, long after, "did those fellows—Thornton and Felton—actually think you cheated?"

Bill chuckled. "They did, Tony, and that's the chief reason why I forgave them. I didn't cheat. Of course I didn't cheat. But they thought I did. They were sure I did. They were such awful dubs, such hopeless amateurs, that they didn't recognize really good play when they saw it.

"Tony, old man," Bill concluded, "in my long career I've had compliments—many compliments. But to be accused of cheating because my game is so good! I'll never ask for a finer one than that!"



The Prisoner on Friday Island

By Beatrix Demarest Lloyd

Author of "Cock Robin," "The Hostess Woman," Etc.

This is the story of one of the best-laid plans we ever heard about. That it did not succeed is a tribute to the perspicacity of the Scotch poet who wrote the prophetic line about mice and men. There is also implicit in this bright and exciting recountal of criminal operations a warning to those who would counterfeit the appearance and personality of wealthy financiers afflicted with the pince-nez. There is, in addition, a suggestion that a girl may be very wise and still not know her own father.—THE EDITOR.

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

TOM GARRABRANT TAKES FIVE CARDS.

THE few and exclusive householders on Friday Island in the lower bay made a sporting event of catching the morning train into Boston. What had been first an individual desire to take young Tom Garrabrant down a peg had developed into an open race. Any one of these men might have risen a quarter of an hour earlier and taken his motor boat across the water at a leisurely rate, in full security of being the first to set foot upon the pier at Quincy, but as a daily fillip to their interest in life they now rushed to their waiting coracles at exactly seven forty, and the six speed boats, more or less abreast, would proceed to stripe the blue water of the bay with long, intensely agitated ribbons of foam.

Needless to state, no domestic, however long in service, who had matters of importance to communicate to the head of the house would dare select the hour of seven thirty-five for a bid for attention. Yet Mr. Garrabrant's middle-aged Jane Alethea did, one morning in early June, astonishingly delay that young bachelor's departure at this intempestive moment by calling to him from his doorway and waving an arm like a semaphore toward the next house.

That is, the house to the north. Possibly had it been the house on the other side Garrabrant would not have been deflected from his course. But the house to the north was another matter. It had the distinction of sheltering the loveliest girl Tom Garrabrant had ever seen and not spoken to.

Nevertheless, he swore a little, for he could see along the water front, even as he turned his head, five intent rivals scrambling with agility varied by their ages into their boats. What could the woman mean by pointing so at the Murchison house?

Murchison never went to town. Garrabrant swung on his heel. The released roar of motors ripping out in unison made it impossible to hear what she was calling to him.

But then indeed he saw that something extraordinary was going on, something that excused her unprecedented behavior. He stopped, staring at the house next his own.

His engineer, in the *Dart*, had risen, the boat throbbing beneath his feet, and was looking back too. The others in the little fleet of competitive commuters had already put many yards of salt water between themselves and Friday Island, and if at first they had paid any attention to Garrabrant's failure to get away they were now each wholly absorbed in the genial intention of beating all others to the mainland.

"What the devil?" said Tom Garrabrant, not very brilliantly.

On the lowest brick terrace of Murchison's house was Murchison himself, engaged it would seem in a struggle with a younger man. There was more exasperation in the encounter than any very grim determination. In fact, though Murchison's face showed a distortion of temper, the younger man seeking to detain him gave through his evident annoyance some flashes of amusement.

Behind them, on a rising stair, poised as if halted in mid-flight after them, was the slender brilliant figure of a white-clad girl. She was quite as lovely as Garrabrant remembered her to be, for since their coming a few days before he had seen her about the place with one or both of these men. But even this face that had pleasantly tormented his thoughts these several days could not in this moment hold attention against the drawing interest of the tussle staged midway between beauty and the eye of the beholder.

Phillips, the engineer, had allowed his curiosity to overwhelm his displeasure at the spoiling of his morning's sport, and had shut off his engine to join his employer on the pier. With a lamentable poverty of invention, he made the same remark as had Garrabrant, for neither of them seemed capable of deciding just how this unexpected activity next door included them. And this was perhaps excusable insomuch that nothing remotely approaching this sort of thing had within memory ever disturbed the well-conducted calm of Friday Island: Friday Island, with its eight or ten handsomely spaced homes, being indisputably the last place on earth where violence even of this minor degree was to be expected.

Both men engaged in this unseemly encounter were known to them by name if not much more intimately. For the Murchison household was a new member of the small community, a mere renter among owners, and so far not even the first formal preliminaries of acquaintance had been gone through.

But it was not in human nature to turn a back upon this scene.

"A later train will do," said Garrabrant, eliding all other explanation of his act as he stepped forward. At this moment Murchison wrenched his arm free from the protesting clasp of the young man, and marching hurriedly, if with a slight limp, down the terrace, cut diagonally across the jealously induced grass to meet his neighbor.

The defeated one shrugged his coat more neatly about him, and followed. There was an amiable absence of resentment about him.

Mr. Murchison was a plain, solid-looking man with a nicely trimmed Vandyke beard. His pince-nez, which had, not unnaturally, come off in the struggle and, hanging by a black ribbon, was bumping against his convex waistcoat with every indignant step, had left red marks at either side of his nose.

"Mr. Garrabrant?" he said. "My name is Murchison. I must get to New York without delay. It will save time if I explain to you in your boat. Will you be kind enough to take me to—to the mainland with you?"

Tom Garrabrant's eyes flicked past him to the oncoming young gentleman who came to a halt at Murchison's elbow, and met a tolerantly amused glance, as of one boy smiling with another over the crotchets of middle age.

"Well," he said uncertainly, "we've missed my usual train."

It was not an adequate remark, but he followed it up with the more pertinent query, "What's it all about?"

"I've been brought here—it's a scheme to keep me from my office, God knows why! And God knows what is going on there in my absence! Don't waste time talking here. Get me over where I can use a telephone, where I can get a train!" The man's voice crackled like a wireless sending out a call.

Garrabrant was not used to this sort of thing, but as he stood a moment irresolute, Phillips, whose mind was fully attuned to plot and counterplot by his daily indulgence in the movies, turned back promptly to the *Dart* and stepping into the cockpit set the engine to throbbing anew.

Tom noted, as an older man might not have, that the girl had disappeared.

"Don't listen to this fellow," said Murchison hotly, as the other started to speak. "You saw him. He's trying to prevent me —oh, damn! Don't stand there wasting time. I must get in touch with my office."

"My name is Carver," said the young man politely. "Really, if it's not too much trouble," he added with an engaging sort of nervousness, "I think you would better do as Mr. Murchison suggests. I'll go along. Sorry you missed your train."

"Well——" Garrabrant gave up trying to understand it. He led the way down the stringpiece, and they all got into the boat. "Let her go, Phillips. We can make the eight twenty-four."

The debonair Carver dropped into a place beside Phillips. "Loafing will do it, easy," he remarked comfortably.

Phillips made no reply. His wary engineer's eyes were snatching impressions of his two unexpected passengers.

Murchison, as they coughed away from the pier, lurched into a wicker chair beside his host, and heaved a sigh. "I owe you an explanation, young man," he said. "I'm not given to injecting melodrama into the lives of my neighbors. And yet here I am caught up in this preposterous situation. A very neat little conspiracy was very nearly successful in keeping me a prisoner on that island."

"The deuce you say!" said Garrabrant incredulously.

"You think I take it calmly? Well, I am not a young man and I have learned not to expend my energies uselessly. Fifteen minutes ago I was the center of a very busy little group. I got away and here I am. Thanks to your having waited for me! I am on my way to a long-distance phone, and as hell is probably popping at the other end I must reserve such strength as I brought out of that outrageous scrimmage."

Tom Garrabrant felt his wits hopelessly prostrated by these confidences. He neither saw nor had seen any sinister determination in the young man Carver's attempt to dissuade Murchison from leaving the house. The only possible explanation that occurred to him was that his guest was mildly insane, but that in itself did not tend to put him at his ease conversationally. He could think of nothing to say in response to this calm statement of unbelievable happenings, and merely stared in front of him.

The boat bore ahead with an airy doggedness. Carver managed to light a cigarette, but found there was no pleasure in smoking it in the wind and tossed it overboard. Apparently he paid not the slightest attention to Murchison, but gave himself up to enjoying the run across the bay.

It was when the *Dart* was rapidly approaching the landing at Quincy that Tom Garrabrant was further bewildered by observations from his two passengers. Murchison drew a deep breath of satisfaction, and remarked that it was a pleasant way to begin the morning. Carver turned and said, "You wanted first thing to get a hair cut, didn't you?" And the older man passed his hand over his hatless head and assented.

Phillips, even in the act of bringing his boat alongside, indulged himself in a look at these two. Nothing he had ever seen in the movies seemed to suggest any explanation. He held on to his neatly thrown painter, as the men stepped to the concrete pier, and then followed to make the launch fast.

Murchison smiled at his host agreeably. "Mighty kind of you," he said, placidly. "I must get me a boat like that. Thanks very much." He half turned, and then said to Carver over his shoulder, "Come along, young man, whatever your name is."

This was quite too much for Garrabrant. He sat down on one of the ledges of the stringpiece and nodded a silent farewell to his guests. They moved away amicably together.

"Well?" said Phillips elaborately, cocking an eye downward at his boss.

Garrabrant pushed his hat back from his forehead. "I'll take five cards!" he returned helplessly, and sat there staring.

CHAPTER II.

ENTER MR. MURCHISON.

HE might have been still further mystified had he been able to hear Murchison remark as the two turned a corner and disappeared from his sight, "You don't want me to get a hair cut, do you?"

And Carver's reply, "You cut an eighth of an inch off that hair and you'll wish you'd died when you were in short pants."

But nobody overheard these odd bits of conversation. Indeed, the elder had an accomplishment of peculiar fascination—that of being able to speak without moving his lips and in a tone that ceased to vibrate beyond his hearer. The other well knew where he had perfected himself in this art, and though he envied it he would not have cared to acquire it under similar conditions.

Two months before, Carver, on one of his nocturnal prowls in parts of Manhattan where the odor of sanctity was perhaps the only one that never greeted the sniffing sleuth, had seen his present companion for the first time. Carver was getting slowly to the bottom of a glass of so-called whisky in a dairy lunch room off Pell Street, when there entered this man, who drew from him the involuntary exclamation: "Who the devil is that?"

The waiter took it upon himself to answer. "Don't mind him. He's just a bum."

Carver finished his drink. "Then I can buy him a drink that just matches him," he said. "What's his name?"

The waiter sought to protect a good customer from his charitable impulses. "Say, you don't want him. He'll panhandle you for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Why, his name's Mayberry. He's a ham. Least, he used to be. Been up the Creek for his health, too."

"That so? Humph, funny thing, faces. He——" Carver let his voice die away.

"Look like somebody you know?"

"No," said Carver a shade too quickly. "An old-time ham, eh? Well, steer him over here. I'm good for the price of his breakfast to-morrow, but I'm none too certain of my own lunch and dinner."

The waiter eyed Carver's goodish clothes and laughed. Then he beckoned Mayberry. "Here's a young man wants to buy."

"Two of the same, William," ordered Carver.

Mayberry approached in wonder, yet willingly. It was some time since any one had expressed such intentions toward him. But his manner was quite dignified as he slightly bowed and took the seat opposite Carver at the oilcloth-covered table.

"You are very good, sir."

Carver nodded and looked at him intently. "Out of a job?"

"I have not been able to make a satisfactory connection in my profession for many years. The stage is a fickle mistress."

Carver looked unimpressed. "What have you done besides act and misbehave?"

"Sir!"

"Don't be touchy. Here's your drink."

Mayberry raised his glass and drank. "Is there perhaps something I can do for you, sir?" he inquired.

"You can let me look at you," said Carver. "There's some wild inspiration floating around this buckwheat cellar to-night, and if you sit quiet it may light on us."

Mayberry had no idea what he meant and very little interest. The bootleg liquor was passable and paid for. Beyond that he did not care. Possibly this generous young fellow was a snow frolicker, though, indeed, he looked particularly shrewd, even with his eyes half shut in his cigarette smoke—eyes that never left Mayberry's face except once to brood keenly at his hands.

Carver bought another drink, and then another. Then he sighed, looked at his nickel watch which he carried when he wandered into regions such as these, and rose. "You be here to-morrow night," he said, well knowing he need not put his wishes in the form of a question.

"Yes? Well?"

"I want to look at you some more."

Mayberry waited until his host had gone away before he spoke to William. "Stack of wheats," he said. "Is that young man quite—er——"

"Y'mean is he honed? Don't make any mistake about that one. He's one of them Wall Street wolves, and files his teeth. Comes down here now and then to look at the other dips, I reckon. Stack o' wheats."

Mayberry turned this information over. Vanity might be common to all actors, however humble, but his was not in vigorous health. Why should his new friend find his face so interesting?

There was little doubt that he did, for he came the next night to "look some more." This time he ordered food with the drinks, it being about dinner time, and was not so silent. But he began with questions.

"Got any family?"

"Well——" Mayberry lingered on the word.

"Tut-tut," said Carver.

"You mistake my hesitation," said Mayberry, with his ridiculous dignity. "It is

true I have some relations, but none I have seen in several years. When my wife died, fifteen years ago, her sister took the little girl, and I have not seen her since. That is all the family I have."

Carver nodded. If what the waiter had told him was true it was not likely that any respectable people would have exerted themselves to get in touch with this unfortunate.

"He ravels the faster who ravels alone," he remarked. "And here's your sleave of care all tangled around your feet. How much damned cheek have you got, or how much would you have if you were well dressed and had money in your clothes?"

"I could satisfy you on that point," said Mayberry, ingratiatingly sly, "if I had a chance to prove it."

"Look here," said Carver suddenly. "The Loud Noise fired me this morning. I was expecting him to, and damned if you didn't show up last night like an engine answering an alarm. I don't quite get how I'm going to use you, but it will run into money. What about it?"

"You say I showed up. Why myself, particularly?"

"That," said Carver, "will appear after the intermission."

Carver, indeed, was not overconfidential, but Mayberry was not one to forget his admission that he did not see how he was going to use his material and shrewdly suspected that Carver had told him about as much as he knew himself. He felt he should not make himself cheap, for all his shabbiness. "I'd want a fair share," he put out.

Carver regarded him severely. "You'll have to be contented with what you get. You're only a super, whatever you do, a sort of figurehead." He stopped suddenly, smashed his open hand on the table and rose. His face went oddly red. "See you again," he said, his voice trembling with some excitement, and rushed out. William came over to see what was wrong.

"Nothing, nothing at all," said Mayberry, grinning. "The lad got an inspiration."

"Where'd he get it?" William looked about him as if for some change in his surroundings.

"I rather imagine I gave it to him," was Mayberry's modest answer.

Inspired or no, Carver did not show up at the dairy lunch room for at least a week, and Mayberry, who had traded, if gingerly, on the strength of his adoption by a man with credit, had fairly slipped back into his hopeless, friendless condition when one evening Carver reappeared. Mayberry was lounging on short sufferance near the door, being no longer allotted a table, and indeed even admitted only on his representation that his friend would come at any moment, any night.

But Carver did not want a table himself.

"Come on," he said shortly. "Going to take you somewhere."

"For some one else to look at me," thought Mayberry as he followed the other out. "I must look like somebody, I suppose, and this is going to be a case of mistaken identity. Let's hope it's not passing a check; had enough checks in mine. Funny the jobs a man can get on the shape of his nose: I couldn't get twenty a week in the sticks with this nose above a toga, but it may be worth money to me right here in the big time."

This last he murmured out loud, hoping for some enlightenment, but all that Carver said was, "Your nose will fit into a better glass of whisky than you get down there. We'll take this car."

It seemed to Mayberry, when they got to the substantial brownstone house near Fifth Avenue in the Forties, that the game might have run to a taxi or even a limousine, but they went humbly enough by surface car and bus, and Carver was nervously silent all the way. The house was a womanless house, one could see that, heavily, hideously, and expensively set forth with the stereotyped furnishings of a certain class and date—the class and date of the free-champagne gambling house. They were not ceremoniously ushered into the room they entered, but merely passed the manservant who admitted them with an informal announcement from Carver that Mr. Bliss expected them. The air of the room was stagnant and smelled of many recently smoked cigars, but there was only one man there, a man whom Mayberry regarded with some surprise, being not at all the type of man he had expected to see.

Mr. Bliss was short, slender, expensively but severely dressed. His gray hair was as respectable as any butler's, and his skin fine and well shaven. His manner was exceedingly cool to Carver, though courteous. At Mayberry, he merely nodded without introduction.

The callers remained standing, as did their host. Carver had an unwonted air of meekness, yet Mayberry felt that he was confident, and but for Mr. Bliss having been many cuts above him, might have presumed to be more familiar.

"This is the man I said I would bring, Mr. Bliss."

"Quite so. Oblige me by switching on the upper lights. The button is there by the door."

Carver, not having gone far from the threshold, had but to stretch out his arm to obey. Three great inverted domes of lamps, chained to the high old-fashioned ceiling in a widely spaced row, flooded the room with electric radiance. Mr. Bliss shifted to the other foot, put one hand in his pocket, and surveyed Mayberry with no show of interest. Mayberry had been quite right in supposing he had been brought there to be looked at. He was inspected with a more rigid scrutiny than he had ever before been subjected to, not even when owing to bygone indiscretion he had been finger printed, photographed and stood at attention before a group of the city's police.

Mr. Bliss opened a humidor on the table near by and offered Carver a couple of cigars. "All right," he said urbanely. "You can take him away."

Carver accepted the cigars with some diffidence. "I ventured to promise Mr. Mayberry a drink," he said softly. He was quite a different Carver from the king customer of the Pell Street establishment.

"You can both get a drink in the dining room. Harper will serve you. He is in the hall. You may come back to-morrow, Carver. There is an infinite amount of detail to arrange."

Mayberry's amour propre moved him to a faintly expostulatory speech. "I should really like to know——" he began.

"I am afraid you will know singularly little," cut in Mr. Bliss, so evenly as not to seem to be interrupting. "Carver will tell you what you are to do and you will be paid for doing it. You are at liberty to refuse if you see fit. Good evening."

Carver took his exhibit by the arm and led him out without a word. But his eyes were shining with excitement. He showed little interest even in the prewar Scotch which they drank standing in the dark dining room. It was evident that Carver's mind was on greater things.

Outside the house he paused to bid Mayberry good night. "You'd best give me your address," he said, with a faint reflection of Mr. Bliss' authoritative manner. "That is, if you live alone. I shall want to talk to you privately."

"I have a room alone," said Mayberry, and gave the address. "When will you be around?"

"Not for a day or so. Perhaps longer. You heard what Mr. Bliss said. There is a mass of detail—but, good God, what a game!" He looked past Mayberry into an apparently shining distance; but obligingly returned to the present to give his underling a few dollar bills. "Don't get drunk," he said. "You'll need your wits."

Mayberry did get drunk, notwithstanding this excellent advice, and was but feebly recovering when Carver, some days later, climbed the stairs to his shabby skylight room. He had a letter in his hand, a letter which owing to Mayberry's recent isolation had been lying neglected on the rickety table in the dusty front hall. He took in Mayberry's condition with a glance devoid of surprise.

"Here's a letter for you I found downstairs." He tossed it on the bed and looked about him. There was no provision for cooking in the room. Carver picked up a small white pitcher from the washstand. "You can read it while I go out and get some strong coffee for you. There's a place on the corner. Yes, I know you'd rather have gin, but you don't get it. Put your feeble face into some cold water, old thing. Your job's about to begin."

Carver came back to find Mayberry, the open letter in his hand, sitting on the edge of the bed. He poured a quantity of the hot black coffee into the tooth mug and held it out. But he half drew it back on looking more directly at the invalid. "What's up?" he asked.

Mayberry passed a shaking hand over his head. "Is this Thursday or Friday?"

"Friday. Here, drink this. It's not the thirteenth, anyway."

"Then my daughter will be here to-morrow," said Mayberry. "I guess that's torn it."

Carver swore quickly. Then he frowned. "Now look here," he said, "we can't allow that to interfere. You'll have to send her back."

"Back?" repeated the other, gulping cof-

fee. "Damn it, that's just the trouble. She can't go back. Matilda's dead."

"Well, something can be done," snapped Carver, sitting down beside him and picking up the letter without ceremony to glance it over. "You just tell me what it's all about. Who's Matilda—oh, I see, Aunt Matilda. Your sister?"

"My wife's," said Mayberry. "Confound her. Though I must say she never annoyed me much till now. You see, she never liked me, didn't approve of Mollie's marrying me, and never had anything to do with us. She could have helped us too, when we were hard up, but she didn't even answer my letters. She was a dressmaker, lived in Oswego, had several women in her shop—successful, Matilda was. Then when she got enough to live on she sold out, bought a small house and quit work. It was just about then that my wife died, and she came down to New York and took Lois home with her. She wrote me she'd always give Lois a home if I would agree never to show up. Well, I had no choice."

"Don't spin it out. She 'wrote' you? Where were you?"

"I was not in the city."

"When your wife died?"

Mayberry shook his head. Carver gave him a quick look. "I see," he said. "Have some more coffee. Well, now," he added, flapping open the letter, "your daughter has sold the house, collected her little inheritance, and is coming to live with you. She doesn't know——"

"No. Matilda told her I was an actor and could not make a home for her, moving about as I had to. She let me write Lois from time to time——"

"Yes, yes, I get it. You shut up a while. I must think. I don't know but I can fit Lois in——" His voice trailed off as he rose and walked up and down the dingy little room. Mayberry, engulfing coffee, followed him with his eyes. He interposed no objection to his daughter's inclusion in what, little or nothing as he knew of it, he was aware was not an honorable affair. More than anything, he was absorbed in admiration of Carver's mental flexibility. Instead of wasting time regretting the demolition of the plan with which he had come equipped, he had promptly set his wits to work, not only to readjust his plot to include this unexpected addition to his dramatis personæ, but actively to make telling use of this new member of the cast. Also he dimly perceived—the realization had been growing, even during his mental fogginess, ever since that brief moment in the presence of Mr. Bliss—that the "game" was of far greater importance than he had guessed when first Carver had routed him from the buckwheat cellar.

Carver walked on, stopping for a moment now and then, and meditatively biting a finger. "Well——" he said finally, and came to a stand before Mayberry. He was evidently uncertain. "The question is, how much does your daughter know about you? How long is it since you wrote her?"

"Months," said Mayberry, vaguely.

"Make it snappy," prodded Carter. "How many months?"

"Well, a long time. I guess it's a year, nearly, more or less."

"Good! Now did you bleat to her of your empty pockets? Ever?" Carver spoke the last word so sharply that Mayberry saw much depended on his answer. But he was able, gratefully, to reassure his deliverer.

"Never!" said he, and would have shaken his head had it not been so productive of discomfort. "As a matter of fact, I rather gave her the idea I was doing very well."

"Then you must have been certain Matilda was not one to weaken," said Carver promptly. "So we may be fairly sure she died without changing her mind about telling Lois the truth about you, may we not? Especially in view of the tone of this letter—it's affectionate, and confident."

"I guess that's all right," agreed the other.

Carver straightened a bit, and all his assurance bloomed again. "Then I've got it," he said cheerfully. "Of course I'll have to see what Bliss has to say. And we've got our work blazing well cut out for us to be ready for your daughter when she blows in." He stood looking at Mayberry in that impersonal way to which the erstwhile derelict actor had become accustomed. "You," said Carver, "could do with a Turkish bath. And that will leave me free for a few hours to see Bliss, and get us our new quarters. We didn't expect to do this at once, but Lois has got to believe in all this from the start, I can see that. She's a conscientious party, and must not be an objector."

He cast a brief look about the room. "We'll pay here and get out. Leave everything: I'll fit you out with new clothes, and

you can take some along to change at the bath. You'll get no drinks there, don't believe it. I'll see to that. From now on you are going to make Volstead look like an old soak. I'll call for you, and put a good meal into you, and install you in your new home. And God help you if you're not a quick study, for you've got to learn your part before to-morrow. I'll give you one bit to practice on now. Your name is Murchison. Don't let go of that even in your sleep."

Mayberry was appalled. "But Lois?" he stammered.

"I've got that all doped out," said Carver briskly. "I'm going to meet Lois at the train, and tell her a lot of things. I'll not bother to explain it to you now. But don't you worry. There's not a loose stitch in this bit of knitting, old dear. All you've got to do is to steam this daze out of your perishable frame, and be ready for teacher when you come to. Keep your mind on two things—your name is Murchison, and you're not to let a barber get near you."

With this Carver left him and went below to find the landlady.

CHAPTER III.

LOIS.

CARVER, according to his plans, met Lois at the station. With commendable good sense she had appointed the exact spot where she would await her father, not taking it for granted that after a lapse of fifteen years he would immediately recognize her in the milling groups of travelers.

Lois had been eight years old when she had been transplanted by Aunt Matilda to an atmosphere of regular schooling and the security of three meals a day, and so complete had been the change that it had helped more time to blur the outline of memories of less well-ordered living.

Carver paused a few steps from her, and looked her over. She was unexpectedly attractive, with yellow-brown hair and delightful eyes. He noted exultantly her air of breeding, her fastidious assurance. She was going to lend the affair a most desirable emphasis of unquestionable seemliness.

He took off his soft hat and approached her. "You are Miss Mayberry?" he said, with a slight, grave smile. Her look of surprise was immediately followed by an anxious gathering of her forehead, which made her slender dark brows draw up appealingly.

"Your father is not ill, Miss Mayberry. But I came to meet you. I really must talk with you a few moments before I can take you to him. I know it sounds odd—perhaps alarming. But won't you please let me explain?"

She made no answer, as he picked up her coat case, merely giving acquiescence by following him to a bench near by. Carver sat beside her, holding his hat in his hand, not turning it about with any show of nervousness, but throwing into his engaging appearance of dependability a quite masterly touch of calm.

"I don't know which you want to know first: who I am, or why your father isn't here. But I am a friend of his, and I assure you, you need have no alarm about him. My name, by the way, is Carver. I'll tell you the whole story as quickly as I can. About a year ago, when your father was in the West with a traveling company, he happened on a poor devil who was down on his luck."

She did not stir impatiently, but she looked at him with a change in her eyes he immediately interpreted. "You think I am going rather far back, but I am really taking the shortest way to give you the whole picture. This fellow's name is Haverford. I've known him for years. He'd taken an option on the lease of some land where he was certain he would find oil, and had spent all the cash he could raise at that moment. Your father, you know, like most actors, could never save money, but he did happen to have a little then, and poor Haverford's distress—these prospectors all have their feverish moments when they can smell fortune just around the corner—poor Haverford's distress got it right out of his pocket. It was against all common sense, but your father is one of the most open-handed, generous men that ever lived. Well, Haverford insisted on giving your father an interest in his projects: nobody had any idea it was anything more than the usual dream. But he went ahead and, by jinks! he struck oil! I was there at the time, clerking in the Boston Store. You've probably read about such things, but I can tell you, Miss Mayberry, for sheer delirious excitement there is nothing on earth can touch it.

"Your father had long ago gone on, was in fact back in New York, but Haverford

wired him to come back at once. By Jiminy, it was a thrilling time! But I can tell you about that any day. Haverford—straight as a plumb line, that chap is!—held to the letter of his agreement with Mayberry, Mr. Mayberry, I should say. And we organized the company. I came in as a sort of secretary—that's where I come in. Your father canceled an engagement in a new play and joined us. I didn't realize it at the time, but of course he is a much older man than the rest of us, and the excitement came at a time when he was tired at the end of a long season and was weak from an attack of influenza. It really was enough to tip a man off his base: I don't suppose Mr. Mayberry had ever expected anything but a death in harness or perhaps at the worst an old age in the actors' home. He spent days in our offices, days at the wells, could not sleep—just wore himself out. I was the first one to notice he was in bad shape. We had a very good doctor out there, and he told me straight from the shoulder that Mr. Mayberry could not stand up to it. And he had no more than told me when your father collapsed."

She sat quite speechless, listening to every word and not doubting one of them. But her hands were clasped in her lap tightly in nervous entreaty for him to go on as rapidly as possible.

"I brought Mr. Mayberry on East, and got the best medical sharps in the city on him. You must talk to Doctor Bliss yourself. He's in charge of everything. I must say some of it seemed weird to me, but then I know nothing about such cases. Your father's health is excellent, never was better in his life, I fancy. And his mind is all right. But it needs a rest. The doctors decided on a complete change of environment. We even bought him new clothes, everything new, moved him into different quarters. And we don't even call him by his own name. That seemed the oddest part of it to me, but after all, it's simple enough. 'Mayberry' meant 'Mayberry and Haverford' to him, and the mere suggestion of business is taboo. It shows how utterly his mind has relaxed its hold on things that he has never noticed it. He made no comment on any of the changes. Once in a great while he insists that he must go to his office, that there is a conspiracy afoot to keep him away. But the mood vanishes in a few moments."

Carver faced her more squarely. "You mustn't be frightened by all this," he said kindly. "There is not the slightest occasion for alarm. Mr. Mayberry—we call him Murchison, it was the first name that popped into my head—will be all right in a little while. I suppose then you'll both go West together. I hope you don't mind my staying with him? He's rather attached to me. When he gets better I'm going to take charge of our New York office. But in the meantime, with your permission——"

"I think you are very kind," she said. Her voice was very gentle and just now a little tremulous. "I can't quite take it all in," she added after a long pause.

"That's natural enough," he returned, rising. "You'll find it comes easily, I think, once you are with him. I suppose I shall be having to call you Miss Murchison." He smiled pleasantly. "Shall we go now? I'll get a taxi. Oh, one thing more," he added. "Doctor Bliss strongly urged my taking your father away from the city, and recommended sea air. I've practically closed a bargain to rent a house on Friday Island, in the lower bay, near Boston. It's an ideal spot—pleasant neighbors and not too many of them. I hope you don't mind. You see, I had no idea, of course, that you were coming. If there's any other place you would rather go——"

"I am sure your plans would be better than any I could make. I know nothing about this part of the world. You must not let my coming interfere with anything that is being done for my father." Her utter confidence in him was evident.

He stood a moment with her coat case in his hand. "Well," he said slowly, "we can talk it over again. Your coming puts me, you know, quite in second place as regards all such decisions. I'll show you the agent's photographs of the house; it's a big, handsome place. And now I'm sure that's all. Have you attended to your trunks? No? Well, we can do that as we go out."

She followed him without speaking.

It was to a modestly luxurious family hotel on upper Madison Avenue that Carver took Lois Mayberry to join her father. And all the nervousness that had been distressing her during their short drive thither vanished when she faced this pleasant stranger, who welcomed her so calmly and with such evident affection.

Their comfortable suite of five rooms was

sunny, and the capable Carver had mitigated their stereotyped appearance with plants, books and a masculine selection of sofa pillows. He introduced her with an agreeable diffidence to her own sitting room, hesitating on the threshold and giving her a whimsical look that apologized for his clumsy efforts to make it homelike. Then he stepped just within the door and drew a bank book from his pocket.

"I haven't done much to brighten this place up, as we will so soon be going away," he said. "But you will be out a good deal, shopping. Your father gave me this five hundred dollars to open an account for you. I keep track of all our expenditures, but I'd like to have you look them over. We don't think it best to talk finances with him, and indeed there is no need. The money is just rolling in."

"I'm sure there is no need for me to keep the accounts," she said, cheerfully. "I'm not good at it, anyway." Womanlike, she found it very easy to adapt herself to wealth, and accepted her first pass book without a flutter.

CHAPTER IV.

AN EYE FOR DETAIL.

WHEN he had seen her safely on her way to the bank Carver returned to his pupil. "Now, Murchison," he said, "all play and no work is not the object of this association. So far you and your daughter have cost us a couple of thousand dollars." He produced a short letter in longhand, which he laid before the other. "You've done a bit of this before," he added quietly.

"Look here," said Mayberry, as he glanced the page over. "I don't like this. You want me to fake a check."

"When I do, you'll just about set to it, my lad. As a matter of fact, I want you to get that writing so pat your hand would work that way in the dark. I've got other signature jobs for you, but this one is more than that. I am fitting a personality on you, son, and you are even going to breathe the way I tell you."

Mayberry read the letter over. It was signed A. J. Murchison, and was a mere office memorandum. "This was written with a number-three fountain," he said.

Carver looked at him approvingly. "I'll get you one. In the meantime you can practice with this. And notice—the M is made on one swoop from the A, and the pen goes back to make the J."

"Get out. Do you think I am a fool? I'll write you a letter so like this, you'll think you're drunk and seeing double."

"Well, lock the door after me," said Carver.

"What for?"

"You don't want Lois to come back and find you giving yourself a writing lesson, do you? And with your glasses off?"

"Well, confound the things. I never wore any before. They hurt my nose."

"You seem to fancy your nose—and well you may, since it led you into this."

"Look here," said Mayberry again. He laid down the letter and sat back to look up at Carver. "I'd like to know just what it has led me into. This Murchison was your boss, who fired you when you meddled once too often with his private papers, and I look some like him. That's the scare head. But what in time are we going to Friday Island for?"

"Most office memoranda are signed with the initials only," said Carver politely as he went out.

In the few days that they remained at the hotel Lois was happy and busy in the shops, and Carver found himself looking forward to the evenings with an interest that very soon became too eager to deceive him. In all his plans he had not counted on falling in love with his first dupe, but turn it over in his mind as he would, there was no argument against it. After the big coup he could more easily take a wife away with him than go alone; even in a get-away his identity could be more thoroughly concealed as a man of family. He knew himself to be a personable fellow, and he had no rivals—none at least so far. And their comparative seclusion on Friday Island in a house of their own left him a clearer field than in any other place he could have selected. He took her to the theaters, and taught her to dance, at supper clubs, taking pride in her beauty, now, in her better dress, more obvious. Unfailingly he presented to her a deferential if adoring attention, and was complacently aware that she found him a companionable pal. Her father accompanied them sometimes, sometimes they went alone. But his manner never varied, and his intention to win her affection, increasing to passionate determination as it did, was never brought too boldly forward.

During the day she was free for her own devices, as he took even the responsibility of engaging the servants for their summer sojourn on himself. He had not after all brought Doctor Bliss to see her, but was not sorry when one day they met in the hotel lobby. Doctor Bliss was impressive, and he counted not a little on Lois' feeling that her father's security and her own rested in his hands with the consent of this eminent medico. Bliss looked after her as she left them, and his eyes traveled back to Carver.

"She's as good as nine trumps in this game," he said. "You going to marry her?"

"If I can," said Carver.

"I guess you can," mused Bliss. "Don't get moony."

Carver gave a short expressive laugh. Then he asked with some pride, "What do you think of your patient?"

Doctor Bliss lighted a cigarette. "He's so damn' good you'd better get him out of town right away. If you hadn't registered here under his old name——"

"We'd have had reporters here in half an hour."

"I know it," said Bliss. "You've got a level head but not a flat one. Get him away now. Any questions?"

"Not any. I'll get him to write that letter for you before we go. I wish we could put a date on it."

"Well, we can't. We can't even guess what day Murchison leaves on this cruise. It's the only flabby spot, but that pin-hole trick in the signature will fix it probably."

"If not——"

"If not," said Bliss grimly, "the history of Wall Street will be minus an interesting chapter."

Carver, after a moment, jerked up his head. "It's got to work!" he said. "The letter refers to a private matter anyway—Murchison doesn't know I ever saw the letter I got that out of. He'll not be suspicious anyway. Who'd ever think——" He drew breath and smiled.

Bliss, it appeared, never smiled. Indeed his face was one of those old-time poker faces that express nothing but a polite acquiescence in the present. "Your hard work here is over. Keep drilling your man all the time though. He's got to pass muster under the devil's own eyes."

"I'll have him perfect to the way he sneezes," said Carver, "before he leaves me."

Bliss nodded. "Give him time on those checks. You've got two or three weeks, anyway. But mail them to me as soon as you can. They've got to go to Denver and back, some of them."

"It's beautiful," said Carver in a reverent whisper.

"It's the most perfect thing of its kind," assented Bliss. "Our chaps leave here this week—for Denver, Detroit, Syracuse, Springfield, New Haven, Worcester, and one down to Wheeling. We're all set. But, Carver, drill your boob!"

Carver grinned suddenly. "He's getting right into the spirit of the thing," he said. "Do you know, he put up with wearing a nail in his shoe till he got the trick of favoring that leg, and now, by George, he even hitches it to get into the bathtub."

"You have an excellent eye for detail."

"Detail!" said Carver proudly. "I've even torn the lining of his wallet."

Characteristically, Carver announced their immediate departure to Mayberry without mentioning that it was hastened by orders from higher up. He thoroughly enjoyed his vicarious authority. With the air of a man who has never put bow in a dinner tie with his own fingers, he ordered the valet to pack for them, and sent a maid to do the same for Lois. Various stacks of empty pasteboard boxes being carried out gave evidence that domestic isolation was not going to curtail Miss Mayberry's sartorial latitude, a feminine development that met with his entire approval. Indeed, Lois did nothing that did not please him. Her gentle and compassionate solicitude for Mayberry was perfectly in the picture, while to hear her candid voice refer to "my father, Mr. Murchison" was to identify him indubitably with that personality. Carefully enough, Carver had made no acquaintances in the hotel, had done what little talking was done at the desk himself, and had paid for everything in cash. Foreseeing, as he had told Bliss, the importance of keeping the Murchison name in the background while in New York, he nevertheless insisted, without seeming to bring it in too often, on their using it among themselves. He even made plausible his warning to Lois that there be no mention later of the name of Mayberry, by explaining gently that to have a suggestion of her father's mental condition leak out might lead to disastrous conclusions among their "stockholders."

So by the time the party reached Boston they were Murchisons committed, and the servants who had gone on ahead had never known them as anything else. The house on Friday Island was ready for them to the last detail, and they sat down to a well-cooked, perfectly served dinner the night of their arrival, slipping into the smoothly running household as if they had lived there for years.

To Mayberry now his part was second nature. He kept it up by Carver's orders, even when they were alone together, and was careful more than once to try his sketch of a victim of conspiracy on Lois, before he staged his more public performances. The first of these was that one in which Garrabrant took signal if bewildered part.

CHAPTER V.

TWO LETTERS.

PARTLY from his natural dislike of gossip, partly deterred by his poignant sense of the presence of the radiant girl, Tom Garrabrant made no mention of the morning's episode, but Phillips was less discreet, and the story of the oddity of the new ménage spread rapidly if quietly among the other residents of Friday Island. He was made aware of this by an increase of visitors to his always popular threshold, and the fact that the once-sought sun room to the south was deserted for the western paved court where a sidelong view might be had of at least the approaches of Murchison's house made the matter certain. But all day Saturday the watched pot did not boil, and Sunday, when he saw two white-flanneled figures approaching from the far end of the vista along the water front, leisurely enough in the enjoyment of Sabbath cigars, he slipped quietly through a French window on the north side of his library, and only lingered long enough under Jane Alethea's pantry window to tell her brazenly that she understood he had gone fishing, before he lost himself to view in the formal garden with its many evergreens. It was not merely to avoid his visitors, and to evade an unpleasant feeling that he was allowing his vantage to serve as an annoyance to his new neighbors, that he did this. This wing of his grounds spread toward and joined the southern boundary of Murchison's domain, and nothing more separated them than a breast-high hedge of privet. He had already planned to spend the morning there, where a long rectangular pool marked the end of his parterre. It had the advantage of being flanked by a comfortable group of chairs under a bright umbrella, as well as the further usefulness of being, in its beauty, a spot that might naturally attract the glances of a person on the other side of the hedge.

Garrabrant carried a magazine—the Sunday papers did not arrive until later when one of the power boats, each week a different one in turn, made the agreed trip to Quincy. He settled himself in a corner deck chair, invisible from his house and obliquely facing toward the pool. A stand at his elbow held cigarettes. He adjusted the pillow behind his head, let the open magazine lie upon his knees, smoked peacefully, and eyed his lotuses. He appeared utterly innocent of any interest beyond his immediate comfort.

He did not mean to waste this impression, and maintained his attitude even at the sound of light footsteps on gravel, much flutter as it caused him internally. He waited until an almost inaudible intake of breath assured him the newcomer had seen him, and then with a turn of the head and a smile, he rose quickly. "Good morning," he said pleasantly.

"Good morning," said Lois. She hesitated and cast a look away from him. This was not what he intended. He walked toward her, treading his cigarette underfoot. "Won't you come in, Miss Murchison? Neighborly charity is especially in order of a Sunday."

She seemed to start faintly as he spoke her name, but he thought it was more in thought of his proposal. Then she smiled. And in that moment, young Tom Garrabrant gallantly laid his unseen heart and fortune at her feet. Lois had a smile that began in her eyes, twinkled there a moment, slipped down to set a dimple near the corner of her mouth, and lastly curved her lips. "But how does one get through the enchanted hedge?"

"Well, it's difficult, of course," admitted Garrabrant. "I found a certain amount of magic was necessary to protect my azure lilies."

"Lovely things," she murmured.

"You must say 'A friend enters,'" he instructed her, and with a sweep of his arm he thrust back the privet.

She repeated the words with a mock

seriousness, and came through the barrier. With a delightful sense of shutting her in with him, he let the bushes spring back into rank.

"I never saw water lilies like these before," she said.

"They are lotuses. I should have an ibis or two!"

It was a pity to remove her from the sunlight which brightened the gold of her hair, but he established her in a hanging chair beneath the sheltering umbrella awning, and sat down near her. If she was a bit distrait at first, it was only that she felt the affair of her father's trip in Garrabrant's boat to lie uncomfortably between them, in their not speaking of it, but he did not refer to it—as indeed he could not without seeming to force her confidence—and presently she banished all thought of it.

It had been heretofore his impression that Sunday mornings were of a wearisome length, but this one was to rush rapidly on to noon and thence to luncheon time, most incredibly. They sat and talked and laughed, and on Garrabrant's part, continuously looked. He would have taken her to see his flowers in the south sunken garden, but he knew the move would expose them to inquisitive eyes and perhaps intrusive companions. So he kept her jealously to himself. He was a pleasant chap, Tom Garrabrant, with the gift of charm, let him be never so moody, and this day being in all the radiance of the first glow of love, he was more than usually talkative and merry. She for the most part listened, being aware that her quiet life had fitted her with few experiences as interesting as his own, but she was appreciative and her subtle sense of fun was delicious.

When at last she went back, through the hedge again, with her lawn skirts gathered in above her gray slippers, he remained standing looking after her and forgetting for some moments to release the privet. Had she but been aware of it, she could have counted on her two hands the list of things she bore away with her: his freedom, his plans, his future, his selfish hopes, his dreamless sleep, his unperturbed days, his idle thoughts, and all the things that had been his before she came.

One reason why Carver did not see, as the days went by, that Lois was a good deal in Garrabrant's society was that for many hours a day he was intently schooling his pupil. Sincerely in love with the pupil's daughter though he was, he never lost sight of the task he had undertaken, nor of his stupendous responsibility. He knew of course that she had become acquainted with her nearest neighbor, and through him with the other families on the island, but it was part of his plan that his household should seem as normal as possible, to throw Mayberry's occasional seizures into clear relief.

These moments were varied enough. Once when Lois and her father were entertaining two or three ladies on the terrace, Carver overheard Mayberry telling Mrs. Thurlow as a great secret that he was being kept a prisoner by an unscrupulous Wall Street ring, and he was highly gratified to hear the confidante reply soothingly, "I shouldn't think too much about it, Mr. Murchison."

"I see you don't believe me," said Mayberry. And then he added more loudly, "But what is going on there in my absence? My God, what are they doing?"

Lois who sat near him laid her hand on his arm. "Father," she said softly.

"I am not your father," cried Mayberry, shaking her off. "I never saw you before, young woman. It's a plot and you are in it."

Carver, with an inner desire to applaud, forced himself to break in with a rapid chatter as if he were covering the invalid's lapse, and was approvingly aware that Mayberry stared at him wrathfully, a look which he held through its changes to despair, glumness, stolidity, and at last into amiability again. For the rest of the visit Mayberry was a cordial host, quite untouched by his illusion.

Mrs. Thurlow took Lois' arm as they were leaving, and gave it a friendly little pressure. "You mustn't be too uneasy about your father, my dear. I wanted to tell you, I have an uncle who once got an idea his family was trying to poison him, but he is as right as rain now."

"The doctors say my father will recover," returned Lois calmly, but with a grateful glance. "He merely needs rest."

Rest, however, was what Carver privately denied him. One of his courses of study centered about a meticulous map of Murchison's offices, minutely setting forth every detail from the number of the floor to the push buttons on his private desk. Mayberry learned to keep an unlighted cigar between his teeth, to walk up and down

with a slight limp while he held his quite respectable beard, the other hand laid palm outward across his back. Carver would sit by, watching, and giving stage directions, such as: "Now you've decided. Good! Go to your desk. Ring for Briggs. Look at the door he'll come in by. Tell him what to do. Do that again—you've got to get that sharper." At other times, Carver stood over him while he signed Murchison's name or initials, over and over again. "It's one thing to do it alone, quite another to do it unhesitatingly with some one at your elbow," said the keen trainer. Painstakingly, he went over with Mayberry the list of his friends, and enemies, the way to his luncheon club, his characteristic order, his waiter's name—there was nothing he overlooked. "You'll dine with Bliss that one night, so you need not confuse yourself with home detail. Now ring for Miss Purcell to telephone your house you won't be home."

"You'll get me to believing this myself," grunted Mayberry.

"I couldn't do better," was Carver's comment. "When you do, my job will be well begun."

If he congratulated himself on his original find in Mayberry he lost no time at that either. But indefatigible as he was, he had no fault to find in the other, who, ungrumblingly for the most part, slaved at his study, realizing now that one false step might bring the whole card castle about their ears.

While this went on, Garrabrant was giving his time to the teaching of Lois a more usual lesson. He had realized after the first week of their acquaintance that, in his present state of mind, a daily trip to Boston was out of the question. And luckily for him the Garrabrant estate could get along with its efficient working staff quite serenely without him. He had for several years planned to take a year in Europe, and he assured himself that this was a no less worthy reason for his absence from his office. So he put himself and Phillips, and the *Dart*, and even Jane Alethea wholly at her disposal, and whether they went with a luncheon basket exploring in the *Dart* the waters for miles around, or whether he served her with tea in the garden, he managed to secure her for as many hours of the day as he could.

It was not coquetry that kept Lois so continually just beyond his reach. She was quite unused to men's society, Aunt Matilda having had no friends of Lois' age and few indeed of her own, and Carver's attention to her Lois had accepted as part of his friendship for her father. She was utterly unaware at first that she was coming to look upon Tom Garrabrant as necessary to her happiness, perhaps because in the way of youth she took each day as it came, well knowing it would bring him to her, and never stopping to consider what a barren thing it would be without him. But she was far from being a fool, and her innocence of love made her the more keenly aware of its presence when it came. She liked his tall supple figure, his clothes that had that indescribable thin flatness of well-shaped garments upon a well-shaped man, his spatulate long fingers that seemed to do all things so easily, his browned clear skin, his frank and penetrating look, his crisp hair, his voice, his laugh, and everything that was her neighbor's.

Two mutually attractive "young persons of the opposite sexes," as the singularly outspoken books of Victorian etiquette refer to them, being thus pleasantly thrown together, true love made itself evident in time to justify the sudden change from a smooth course. And this change came with the appearance of Carver at the hedge, when one afternoon, after a long happy day in the *Dart*, Lois and Tom were taking tea together near the lotus pool. How long he had stood there when they became aware of him neither of them knew, but he brought an inexplicable sense of guilt to Lois, who looked at him silently with a rising color. This flush of hers Carver noted as fortuitous, since he felt sure that Garrabrant would not forget it. At present, Garrabrant, quite undisturbed if somewhat annoyed by his breaking in upon them, nodded calmly and invited him to join them. But Carver, quite as placidly, refused the invitation with a smile. He had come merely to deliver a message, he averred, but as this message was a desire of Mr. Murchison's for his daughter's attendance it very effectively put an end to the tea party. This in itself was nothing. But late the following day, when Garrabrant had hung about unsuccessfully hoping to see Lois on the terrace as usual, he was rewarded by having his neighbor's house man bring him a letter which promptly shattered his attentive calm.

The letter was worded inoffensively

enough, had he been in the mood, after taking in its purport, to recognize its delicacy, but as it gave him to understand that the engrossing friendship of the past fortnight was at an end he was not inclined to find any points of commendation for the style in which his congé had been given. The most destructive phrase of the whole composition was one in which his correspondent referred to Carver, and gave him to surmise an understanding of sorts had, previous to their coming to Friday Island, existed between that gentleman and Lois. Garrabrant had no reason to doubt that this letter had been written by her, as its purport was, never having seen her handwriting, and not knowing that even if he had had a dozen letters from her there was in her household a versatile penman who had reproduced her characteristic hand in a way to puzzle an expert.

He landed, from a serenity that amounted almost to bliss, in a fine rage, and his anger grew instead of decreasing as the lonely hours of the day gave each its emphasis to the deprivation he was to endure. Having oscillated between his landing and the paved court the remainder of that day, and the better part of the following morning, hoping still to see and speak to her, he went off finally with Phillips in a black mood of despair, so new was he to these assaults of love that he saw no possible hope in however long a future.

He never dreamed that Lois watched him go, nor that there would be as much resentment as grief in her adored eyes. For Lois too had had a letter, from the same facile pen, a letter brilliantly calculated to stimulate a proud woman to denying him all further association, for it informed her awkwardly that he was engaged to be married, though his fiancée was then abroad, as if he feared for her possible peace of mind. And yet it was subtly done, as if an honorable man had forced himself in a dilemma of supreme embarrassment to make his situation unmistakable. Carver had put every shred of his finesse to the drawing up of these two documents, and had been at some trouble to persuade Mayberry to give them being; for Mayberry indeed was not so sure he did not prefer the other as a possible son-in-law. But he had come so to depend on Carver as a fellow crook that he gave in at last, with some reluctance, admitting that his future safety lay in his keeping on good terms with his accomplices, and was not likely to be secure in an atmosphere of utter honesty.

"Let this thing go awry," said Carver, "and that son of Boston's first families would give you up with both hands. You stick to me. Besides, she does not care much yet. And I'll make her happy. My plans don't encompass her loss of belief in me, you know." So the two letters were written and the result was all that Carver could have wished.

On his part, he feigned unconsciousness of any change in her daily routine, and took up the duties of making himself agreeable in the absence of her other admirer, as if he had spent as many hours heretofore in her society. Unlearned as he knew her to be in the ruthless art of reprisals in love, he foresaw his advantage in her willingness to prove herself well occupied in spite of one cavalier's defection. Carver did not neglect his daily drill of Mayberry, however, but that individual was almost letter-perfect in his part, and they could only now wait for the expected move from Bliss.

CHAPTER VI.

INTO THE ENEMY'S CAMP.

SUBJECTED to an irritating succession of moods, each one more heart-rending than the last, Tom Garrabrant yet could not bring himself to leave the locale of his distress and return to work, but ranged about his place in restless torment, much to the interest of his fellow dwellers on the island, and particularly to the anxious concern of Jane Alethea. Shrewd old maid as she was, she understood his behavior, even to the loss of appetite, and indeed in all he did he ran so true to the accepted forms of loverdom that if La Rochefoucauld was right in saying few people would ever "fall in love" if they had never read about it, he must have spent his literate years in exclusive study of the recorded habits of affectionate man. Phillips was annoyed by his frequent changes of plan, it not being unusual now for his employer to start off a half dozen times a day with the avowed intention of a long run only to retract after a mere half hour in the boat and order a return home.

Garrabrant saw Lois every day, Carver saw to that, for he took her for a sauntering walk daily around the island, following the promenade which encircled its ellipse.

And twice he encountered her father. The first time, Mayberry came down to Garrabrant's pier to talk amiably with Phillips about his projected purchase of a power boat, and when Tom joined them, miserably seeking any society that held a connection with Lois, Mayberry consulted him as to the acquisition of a dependable engineer. Mayberry was on this day so free from any touch of his hallucination that Garrabrant remarked it to himself, and fancied the old lad was on his way to mental health. And was therefore the more astonished, a couple of days later, to have reënacted almost to a gesture, the original rendition of the Great Abduction Scene, with the exception that this time Lois did not appear.

Carver and Mayberry, involved in a strenuous embrace, finally fell apart and the latter, pursued by Carver's gentle, "I say, sir, don't annoy Mr. Garrabrant!" came, as he had the first time, straight across the grass, his glasses bumping at the end of their black ribbon against his well-filled waistcoat. But after a moment's hesitation Tom felt a sudden distaste for playing his part again, and with a mere motion of the hand, more to Carver than to Mayberry, turned away and stepped into the *Dart*. As the boat bore him away, his deluded neighbor ran shouting to the stringpiece, and down to the very end of it, giving every evidence of supreme astonishment at this desertion. But Garrabrant took his accustomed place in the cockpit, and with his back to the landing saw no more of his neighbor's hysterical antics.

His heart ached unselfishly for Lois in that moment, and the only feeling that came to him as he pondered on the possibility of her father's never recovering from this obsession was the realization of her need of sustaining help, and the conviction that he alone in the world could give her the unstinted sympathy and devotion that she should receive. Carver, he felt, was a little inclined to see the matter superficially, merely as a thing that would pass, and not at all appreciating the distress it must cause Lois, be it never so temporary an affliction. Ungrudgingly as he tried to see Carver at his best, since he so genuinely loved the girl that he must perforce hope all things of the man to whom she had intrusted her happiness, he nevertheless found Carver oddly wanting in depth and dependability. Well, of a truth there was little happiness in it all for Tom, be he wrapped in his own trouble or selflessly concerned in hers.

But persuaded as he was that he had suffered the most grievous anguish his heart could ever know, there was yet the twist of the knife in the wound. This was given him the day following, for as he lay inertly in his deck chair by the lotus pool, as supine as a broken plaything tossed aside by careless Fate, Lois and Carver appeared at the hedge side with the evident intention of accosting him. He rose and removed his cap, but his face was quite unsmiling. His left hand in his trousers pocket bid fair to cut itself with the bunch of keys it clenched upon. That she should pause there in that spot so sacred to him, with this man for whom she had cut him adrift, seemed to him the final stroke of cruelty: could he have known how reluctantly was she there at all, and for what reason her white face tried to look so proud and unfeeling, a very riot of delight would have set him tingling to his finger tips.

Carver had sought her in her sitting room; and the gravity of his face had first alarmed her, but he quite promptly reassured her though admitting he came to speak seriously. "It's a small matter," he said gently, "and one I should not give two thoughts to were I alone with your father. I mean that I think for your sake as well as for his, we should perhaps make it less easy for Mr. Ma-Murchison to—well, frankly, to bother other people when he is not quite himself."

She looked at him with a sudden intensification of her look of distress. But he met it with a quick smile. "Don't take it so much to heart," he added even more gently. "I should indeed not be accomplishing my wish if I succeeded only in making you feel badly. Your father is really getting better —you can see for yourself the—er—intervals are longer. But when the—er—attacks do come, isn't it rather a pity that he should be, as it were, on exhibition?" He waited a moment, as she winced, and then brought a vivid blush of emotion to her face by adding dexterously, "Now, only yesterday, he pursued Mr. Garrabrant all the way to his boat, and Mr. Garrabrant had positively to get aboard and run away from him. We don't want that sort of thing going on."

She shuddered, though her head went up sharply. "What do you think we should do?" she inquired after a moment, during

which the flush faded even while the shame and depression of her heart increased painfully.

"I could be more on the alert for it, and manage somehow to keep him in his rooms. He's made a scene or two before the servants, but they are getting extra pay, and anyway it was all explained to them before they came." He appeared to look away rather than receive her grateful glance. "But—for the rest of the world——"

"Do you—do you mean to lock him up?" she fairly whispered.

He came nearer her, and laid his hand by hers upon her desk, as if he would gladly have touched it instead. "Miss Mayberry," he said in a very low voice, using her name as if it would be more quieting to her, "you trust me, don't you? You know your father would receive from me only the most considerate and filial treatment? Then leave that slight detail to me. If necessary, yes, I will lock his door. I think, my dear," he said, a certain huskiness in his tone drawing her attention from his unprecedented use of such a phrase, "when he is fully recovered he would be more than grateful to us to think we had shielded him from —from making an exhibition of himself." He brought the cruel word out again as if against his will. "Forgive me," he said, "I am so fond of him, and yes, so proud of the dear old fellow——"

Quick tears of sensitive accord filmed her eyes. "Yes—you are right," she murmured.

"Thank you," he said with superb simplicity. And lingered.

She wiped her eyes frankly, and then noticed that he stood as if he had not finished. "Is there something more—about my father?" The last words came almost suddenly, as if an abrupt and unwelcome idea had come to her and she had wished to forestall anything he might say that was concerned with more personal matters.

"There is only this: I think we owe Mr. Garrabrant an apology, or rather an assurance that the rest of his summer will not be broken into by innumerable unpleasant encounters."

She went quite white under his skillful torture, and when her lips moved it was with a visible effort. "Pray do so assure him," she said harshly.

"But I cannot take this upon myself," he returned with an accent of pity. "It is a matter that must come from you. If you would but just come with me, I would speak to him for you."

"Oh, please, please——"

"I understand you cannot bring yourself to talk of this matter, but surely we owe it to your father that this assurance should be given by your authority."

"You are very good," said Lois, with a stricken sincerity. "I will go with you."

So had they come to stand by Garrabrant's enchanted barrier, for Carver well knew he was in the garden at the time.

"Mr. Garrabrant," said Carver, "you will permit me to say for Miss Murchison as well as for myself that we are sincerely sorry Mr. Murchison has seemed to single you out to deliver him from his imaginary difficulties."

Tom Garrabrant was appalled by this crudeness. He muttered a miserable disclaimer, and found his wretchedness infinitely increased by one quick glance at Lois' set face.

"It will not happen again, we hope, and it is our intention to see that it does not. However, in case we should not be uniformly successful in preventing it, your attitude of yesterday will help us most. Just pay no attention. And we on our part will watch and ward."

Garrabrant flung out an angry hand for silence, but not soon enough for Lois, whose rigorous restraint broke under these brutal repetitions, and who turned incontinently and sped away.

"You're a ramping fool," said Tom Garrabrant, with blazing rage. "You've made her cry."

Carver was however not a fool, and he had no interest in quarreling with this carefully handled witness, though deep had been his delight in showing him his place. He shook his head and stepped back a bit. "Lois is a bit upset, these days," he said. "I wanted to come alone when she asked me to tell you this, but she insisted on coming with me to be sure you understood you need fear no further encroachments upon your patience—by—by any of us." With that, and perhaps at a judicious moment as indicated by the expression of Tom's twitching face, the Machiavellian Carver went away full of the honors of the field.

But his victory over Garrabrant had been too complete. For that by-no-means-inastute young man found, on thinking it over, that its very immensity and glitter raised

suspicion of its genuineness, as one might dubiously regard a gem too large for mere human belief. Tom had not spent two weeks in Lois' company without learning a good deal about her, and an unpleasant conviction took possession of him that Carver was using his position as friend to her afflicted father to strengthen, through her gratitude, his hold upon her. As he reflected upon Carver's speech he could not but see that it was worded very differently from his deserts. Had Lois come alone, he could easily picture the gentle way she would have made a plea for forgiveness of Murchison, and how her sensitiveness in perceiving her father to be an undesirable neighbor would have impeded any such glibness. To say nothing of the hostility. What, after all, had she to reproach him with? Granted that she had become aware that he had fallen in love with her, and had felt it incumbent upon her to warn him she was not free to accept his love, the apparent resentment that accompanied her withdrawal smacked far more of the coercion of his rival than of her own reaction. Chivalrously as he had striven not to hate the man he had her own assurance she had given preference over him, there was no denying this late interview had destroyed all possibility of such quixotism. He hated Carver, and, what was worse, from this moment acknowledged his repressed distrust of him. It was Carver's one error. And a fatal one.

That afternoon while Garrabrant was trying without much hope to read himself out of a mood too bloodthirsty for comfort, he came by chance upon a pertinent succession of paragraphs in the book of a clever Englishman for whose opinion he had a grave respect. The matter dealt with insanity in reference to freedom of thought, and it was amusingly postulated that if a man who believed himself to be a poached egg, or a victim of conspiracy, could but be induced to laugh at himself instead of being vainly reasoned with, he might suddenly break out of the imprisoning circle of his mania, and find himself free to think as other men.

This, more or less, was what he gathered from his reading, and it made him wonder if Carver were not perhaps doing an unwise thing in keeping Murchison so isolated from healthy incredulity.

"It's worth a trial, anyway," mused Garrabrant, half smiling. And then suddenly from that came a revolutionary idea to disregard Carver entirely. On the spur of that notion, he tossed down the book, whipped a stout knife from his pocket, and kneeling by the pool cut a bunch of what lilies he could reach. With not the slightest hesitancy, he stepped through the hedge and carried his offering into the enemy's camp.

Nothing could have suited him better than to see Lois as he did, alone upon the side veranda of her house. And if she looked amazed to see him, he was disregardful of that entirely. Like a man assured of his welcome he came smiling up the steps.

"I've brought you some of the lotus," he said, "but they are too wet even to lay at your feet. Do get something to put them in, like a good girl." This was quite in the tone of their earlier days, he flattered himself, and not a flicker of apprehension did he permit to show in his eyes. Lois rose without demur and went indoors, to reappear with a wire-mouthed green-glass jar of water. Still, she had said nothing.

Garrabrant managed to take her hand as he gave her the flowers. "Look here," he said boyishly, "there's no reason why we should not be friends, is there?"

"Oh, no," she answered. And he was left to wonder if it were embarrassment or lack of interest that made her voice so cold. "I'll promise not to bother you by coming too often," he told her, smiling. And aware that this was the moment of all others to go, before anything disastrous could be added to her acceptance of his occasional presence, he ran lightly down the steps and went back to his own house, happier than he had been for eight-and-forty hours.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STRANGER.

THE following day he went to ask the entire Murchison household to come for a couple of hours in the *Dart*, and though the invitation was refused by a suave Carver, in a perfectly pleasant way, Garrabrant was cheered by a belief that Lois looked as if she would have liked to go. He had never been in the establishment since it was occupied by the newcomers, and was vaguely surprised to see no fewer than four menservants at various duties about the rooms. Was it possible that Murchison at odd times became violent and were these

footmen there as Carver's auxiliaries? "I'd like to get a medico of my own choosing down here to see him," he thought as he went his way homeward, "but beshrew me, if the next time I clap eyes on him, I don't up and cheek him. And see what comes of it."

What came of it was not in the least any one of the things he might have expected. It was the following Monday, a day that dawned so unremarkably, so like its predecessors that no one could have predicted it was destined to be remembered by a black date so long as memory itself should live, by many men and women.

Garrabrant, coming out in the serene matinal enjoyment of an after-breakfast cigarette, strolled down to his boathouse with the idle intention of having Phillips take him to Quincy in search of a box of chocolates worthy of Lois' acceptance. Phillips was busy in the *Dart* cleaning the spark plugs, and Garrabrant sat down on the edge of the stringpiece, swinging his legs and keeping one eye on the Murchison house in the hope that Lois might appear. He weighed the possibility of daring her refusal to go with him against the pleasure of anticipating her possible agreement.

"Greetings," said Phillips with an upward glance. "Seen the leviathan?" He waved an oily paw to the offing, where Garrabrant, shifting his attention for a moment, saw a large white yacht, with steam getting up, lying at anchor.

"Very fair," commented he.

"Very odd, I call it," said Phillips idly. "She must have gone to bed pretty late last night, but she sent a boat ashore and back."

"Go on, little one. What's odd about it? I dare say she's a friend of the Carrolls'. How do you know she sent in a boat?" he added with no great interest.

"Unfamiliar voice," said the engineer with a slight grin. "I know the cough of every one of the cockles hereabout."

"You're a poetic cuss," retorted his employer. "Maybe she's run away with old man Carroll. Anyhow, she's on her way. Cork up and let's get going. We'll run a circle round her on our way to the village."

Phillips stood wiping his hands on a fistful of waste. "I see your friends are practicing jujutsu again," he remarked, glancing back at the shore. "Haven't seen the old bird for a day or two."

Garrabrant twisted to look. Surely enough, on the terrace there was Carver with his arms wrapped about the burly form of Mr. Murchison, but this time with more grimness than heretofore, as if indeed he intended never again to allow the sick man to carry his complaints afield. As Garrabrant watched, Carver called over his shoulder to a couple of menservants who were standing in the doorway of the breakfast room.

They moved forward, none too eagerly, and the prisoner at this moment suddenly, in the midst of a desperate contortion, drove his elbow viciously into Carver's midriff. With a grunting cry audible almost at that distance, Carver helplessly let fall his arms, and Murchison pushed him violently away. He thereupon turned and came hurrying across the front lawn, waving a tempestuous summons to Garrabrant, and calling aloud.

Garrabrant suddenly laughed. "Now for it!" he said, unintelligibly to Phillips. With that he swung himself upon his feet, and went smiling to meet the oncoming man. Murchison was in a purpling rage, and his eyes glared through his glasses almost as hotly as the sun struck upon them from the other side.

"Now listen," said Garrabrant genially, as he met the open-mouthed, angry man. "Don't begin that silly old story, Mr. Murchison."

The other came to a violent stop and caught his breath.

"It's too absurd an idea for a man of your good sense, you know. But let it all be so, if you insist. Only try to forget it. If you tell me those drear details again I shall scream."

Murchison's face had undergone no change during this speech except an intensification of his expression of utter astonishment. He looked at Garrabrant aghast.

"Are you insane or am I?" he panted.

"Well, since you mention it, you are a bit, you know. If you'd only get one hearty laugh at yourself they tell me you'd be all right."

"But, good God, man——"

"Don't do it, don't do it," Garrabrant rebuked him. "Even if you have been abducted and held a prisoner and you can't get to your office, what the blue-velvet Hades do you suppose we care? Just try to get our slant on it."

Murchison snatched Tom's arm into his grasp. "You're in it, too! How do you know I've been brought here and kept——"

"Second verse," laughed the other. "How do I know? Well, man alive, you've told me often enough."

Murchison released his arm suddenly, and lagged back a step or two. His face went gray.

"Here, steady on," said Garrabrant more kindly. He moved quickly to the other's support. But Murchison, with one blank and yet wild look about him collapsed, and slipped heavily through Tom's arms upon the grass.

Carver and the two footmen came up at this moment. And Phillips leaped from the boat and also joined them.

"What's wrong?" snapped Carver, with a long look at Garrabrant's perturbed face.

"I'm afraid I made him angry. I'd no idea—I was just chaffing him," said he uneasily.

Carver drew breath. "You'd have done better to have followed my advice and paid no attention to him," he said frigidly. "I thought Miss Murchison and I had made our wishes clear on that point. May I suggest now that you leave this to me?"

Tom turned away, angry and bitterly regretful. "Lend a hand there, Phillips," he said shortly, and walked off cursing his egregious folly.

Although his action had been founded upon sympathy and a genuine desire to help Murchison, he was apprehensive that, given no opportunity to explain, he would seem to Lois an incredibly callous brute, especially as, he felt sure, Carver would present the matter to her in the most damning manner possible. So there was some trepidation mixed with his delight at the chance thus given him to speak to her, when, having abandoned his trip to Quincy, for a morning of self-reproach in the garden, he was suddenly and most unexpectedly confronted with the lady of his thoughts.

She was flushed and bright of eye, but not in the least nervous, as she faced him. "When you asked me if we could be friends," she said forthrightly, "you really meant it?"

"Please don't doubt that," he answered.

"I meant it, when I said we might," countered Lois. "And because I did mean it, I came over to tell you that I am absolutely certain you did not vex my father with any unfeeling intention."

Garrabrant became radiant. "You heavenly thing!" he gasped. "I've been in hell all morning wondering what you'd think of me."

"You give me credit for very little sense if you think I could imagine you so depravedly cruel as to have laughed at my father —Mr. Carver said they saw you laughing— with any shallow motive. I dare say you hoped it would do him good, perhaps make him laugh with you."

Garrabrant gazed at her with humble adoration. "It is exactly what I did," he averred thankfully. "I was appalled at the way he took it. You don't need me to tell you I've been fearfully anxious ever since. How is he now?"

She looked away a moment, gravely. "Well, I hardly know. He came in with them, you know—your nice Phillips helped him. He seemed dazed and weak then, and he stared at me as if he had never seen me before. He often does. But later I heard him talking furiously and calling, 'Carver! Carver!' So physically he seems no worse. But the mood is lasting longer than it usually does."

"I'm sorry," said Garrabrant from the bottom of his heart. "Still he must be better. The first time I saw him so, he did not remember Mr. Carver's name."

"Oh, he usually knows him," she answered inattentively. "I suppose it will pass soon, but I have never known him so violent before. It's really awful when he does not recognize me." Her voice faltered and she partly turned away. In a moment, Garrabrant was close beside her.

"Lois, Lois, don't cry," he begged her tenderly. "You brave little thing. My dear, don't cry." He barely touched his hand upon her shoulder, but even that slight caress broke down his resolution. His voice came with an unfamiliar husky tremor as he burst out, "Look here, Lois, you know I love you. Is there anything I can do? Are you sure Carver knows what he's about? My darling girl——"

"Oh, don't!" she cried, starting away from him. "Oh, how can you?" A swift angry light came into her eyes, drying her tears. "I came here trusting you—to prove I trusted you! And now what am I to think of you?"

He stepped back, his hand falling like a

dead thing. "I'm sorry," he said, his lips stiffened with misery.

She jerked up her golden head with angry pride. "I'll go," she said, coldly.

But Garrabrant intervened. "I'm hanged if you go like that!" he cried determinedly. "You must hear one word in my defense. I'd sworn never to say 'I love you,' but by the living God, I do, and the look of your dear face in tears was more than I could bear. That's all that I can say, except forgive me, Lois. In pity, dear, forgive me."

She looked at him, her mouth aquiver. "I cannot understand you, but I do forgive you," she said at last. A pause hung between them which he dared not break, but was amazed to see a slow hot color rising to her very brows. "I must in all honor then, forgive you," she said abruptly, forcing the words. "Because I am in no better case than you. Wrong as it was of you to say it, it was as wrong that I was glad to hear it."

For one moment, her honest eyes looked straitly into his. And then before another word could be added by either, she moved away.

She left Tom Garrabrant in breathless bewilderment. His blood began to pound in his ears, as he stood looking after her, his hands clenched at his sides. She had been glad to hear he loved her! She had been glad!

In two strides he had caught up with her. "Lois," he said, his voice ringing with a determination that would not be denied, "think of me what you will. I am not willing that this should be the last word. Oh, believe me, I shall not distress you now. I want you to feel sure you can count upon me for help in these hard hours. Come to me confidently, for I will not say one word of this until your father's better. But speak of it then I will. I must!"

She made one gesture, leaving him to interpret it as he would, and ran away. Tears of contradictory sorts seemed to be suffocating her. How could she be at once so heartsick and so happy? She never faltered in her flight to sanctuary, flitting like a blown leaf through the corridor, and up the stairs to her own room, without passing a soul. She locked herself in with her incomprehensible emotions and fell sobbing on her bed.

Luncheon time came and passed, and she denied entrance to her maid who knocked, saying she had a headache, which was true enough, and that she would rest, which was not. Even had rest been possible to her, the afternoon brought its own disturbing puzzlement to thwart it. For she became aware—after, it seemed to her, the noise had been going on some time without its having fixed her attention—of an odd scraping sound in the wall, which she finally located as in back of the chimney. This was dos-à-dos to the fireplace in her father's den. What could he be doing?

She pondered this a good hour, wondering if she should go tell Carver. For some reason Garrabrant's question: "Do you feel sure Carver knows what he's about?" had released in her mind imprisoned doubts of the man. She had taken him so much for granted when she had come to join them, yet after all what did she know of him? When her father was himself, it was quite natural that she should accept his friend, but under these conditions was not the responsibility more her own? Should she insist on getting an independent opinion upon the proper treatment for him?

The scratching in the chimney ceased whenever footsteps passed along the hall. He must be locked in, she knew, but what did he think to gain, if he were, as she supposed, loosing the bricks in his fireplace? Was he indeed demented?

Once Carver knocked upon his door, which flashed to her, before he spoke, the realization that the door must be fastened within as well as without. Murchison growled an answer to Carver's call, which seemed to be all that young man wanted, as he went away again. Evidently, he felt no more anxiety for her father on this occasion than on any other, yet she was conscious of his nervous prowling to and fro about the house all day. But she was resolved, without reason, to let her father work his will in his own way. Little as she knew him she felt not the slightest fear of him. Fascinated by the diligence of his work, she sat all afternoon by the hearth, listening.

A change in the noise he made was thus promptly remarked by her. "He's taken out a brick," she said to herself. And almost immediately after, two gentle raps sounded against his side of the chimney. Instinctively, she lifted her little brass tongs and tapped an answering pair of knocks. A low exclamation of satisfaction was audible to her straining ears.

"Poor dear!" she said softly. "Poor unhappy old thing!"

She thought of waiting till the hall was clear and then going to his door to be let in by him, but one look from her threshold showed her his outside key had been removed, and she went back, locking her own door again, to her hearth. The scraping had begun again, and presently she gave an exclamation of impatience. "Stupid!" she said, softly. And began searching about the room. Evidently it was the intention of the prisoner to get secret speech with her, and grotesque as it seemed she was minded that he should be gratified in his own fantastic way. A moment later she was working at the plaster on her side, around the brick she guessed he had rapped upon. Another prompt two knocks acknowledged his appreciation of this maneuver, and his scraping proceeded more eagerly.

"It's like Monte Cristo," thought Lois, half laughing. But she did not give up the task for all its absurdity. With the two of them at work the brick soon was loosened, and he pushed it into her hands. She put it down, and sitting tailorwise on the tiles faced his eyes, peering from behind his glasses through the aperture.

"I thought it was you," he said, in little more than a whisper. "I heard you crying."

"Oh, I'm sorry."

"Well, I was not, in a way. I felt like crying myself."

"And you were satisfied so long as some one did?" she humored him.

"Not at all. I thought you might have a fellow feeling for me. What are they doing to you?"

"Nothing. Really nothing."

The eyes stared at her behind their glasses. "But you don't belong in this galley," he said, half angrily. "I thought when I saw you in the hall downstairs: 'There is an honest face.' I made sure you would help me. Won't you?"

"You may be sure of it," she said fervently.

The eyes lighted, yet he was still concerned with her presence. "But how do you come to be here?" he wondered. "You are not, by any malignant fate, that snake Carver's wife?"

"No, no," she assured him quickly.

"Who the deuce are you?"

"I am—Lois Mayberry," she said, watching his eyes. They showed no gleam of recognition. "Murchison, then," she hazarded.

"Murchison!" He exploded so loudly on the word that he drew back, expecting the sound might bring some one to his door. While he remained invisible, she felt her heart sink with the evidence he had given her of his continued mental subnormality. When his eyes came back to the peephole, she could see that they were perplexed and impatient.

"I don't understand this business at all," he said. "How long have you been here? You must certainly know I don't belong here, that I was brought here last night?"

"Well——" she hesitated.

He seemed to take it as an acknowledgment. "I've been, you might say, shanghaied. Let that go. We can't undo it. But these men have had three days to do whatever it is that they are up to—I can't seem to think it out. But you said—you will help me? In the first place, where the devil am I?"

She told him. "Friday Island, near Boston."

"Never heard of it. Boston?" He pondered. "Now, can you help me get away?"

"I'm afraid not," she answered slowly. Never before had her father appealed to her for help, and she found it hurt her to refuse him. Yet of what avail to promise what she could not carry out? In one of his more usual lapses from sanity, she would have cheerfully assured him she would get him off without delay, knowing that in half an hour he would have regained his rational poise, and have no memory of either request or promise. But this seizure was lasting so long, and she could not be sure it would not excite him to a hurtful pitch if having agreed to effect his deliverance she failed to do so.

"Why not? I'm sure you have no interest in keeping me here. We could arrange something so they'd never know you helped me, if you are afraid of them."

"We have no boat," she said, seizing upon one saving truth.

"But what about the neighbors? They can't all be in it, like that chap next door. It's incredible that they are all in this game."

She sighed helplessly.

A long silence fell between them, a silence broken by his bursting out into a vehement

whisper. "But damnation! I can't understand it! I offered Carver a good fat bribe to let me go, but he wasn't even interested. Even if it were Steel Rail, and they wanted me off the floor for a few days," he argued, more to himself than to her, "how does it happen that nobody in this remote spot finds it peculiar I should be incarcerated here? That man next door thought I was a joke, but he knew all about me! And here you sit talking to me as if it were the most natural thing in the world to have a strange man push a brick out of your fireplace and talk to you through the hole! Is this a lunatic asylum?"

She shook her head gently. "Tell me one thing," she ventured. "You say you don't know us, but you do know Mr. Carver?"

"Of course I do. He worked in my office."

She looked at him despairingly. How strange it was that he should be so lucid about some things, so hopelessly befogged on others.

After a short pause he returned to the attack. "What do you mean by 'You say you don't know us?'"

"Well, Mr. Garrabrant——"

"Garrabrant?"

"The man you spoke to this morning. He knew you."

"Well, did he? He could easily have been told my name. I certainly do not know him, or you." He seemed to think of something new. "What did you mean by saying your name is Murchison? It's not, is it?"

"Not really," she faltered.

"But you said it was! Good Lord, what is it all?" He peered at her more closely. "You're crying," he said.

"I can't help it," she murmured, and wiped her eyes upon a handkerchief she caught from her pocket.

His eyes watched her gravely. "I'm not often mistaken about people," he said at last. "I was wrong once, about Carver. But crooks, my dear young lady, don't cry—not habitually. I'll swear you are as straight as—as the shortest distance between two points." His lids narrowed and she knew he was smiling. "I take great encouragement from your tears, though I'm sorry to find you somehow involved with these people. Come, you see how helpless I am. You know something about all this and you are sorry. That's how I size you up. You just tell me about it. I'll help you get rid of this crew, my dear, or my name's not Murchison. Trust me; I'm old enough to be your father."

"But you are my father!" she sobbed out, breaking down.

At this his glasses fell from the bridge of his nose, and his eyes, so different without them, seemed to freeze in his face.

And now an extraordinary thing occurred. Lois was looking into the eyes of an utter stranger.

A cold penetrating look, like a probe of chilled steel, seemed to thrust into her inmost being. There could be no secrets hidden from the searching spirit that plumbed her. A mind more powerful than any she had ever come in contact with, one quite the antithesis of Mayberry's rather formless intelligence, sensifically gathered her very self into its clutch, weighing, sifting and assaying her, grain by grain.

With a little cry she started back.

"Blackmail, eh?" said he in a voice that ground itself from between his teeth. But she did not heed him.

"You're not my father!" she whispered, mouth agape, her face whitening. "Why, who are you?"

"Ah!" It was a mere breath, but it carried triumph and sudden hope. His look softened, and she leaned forward to peer at him.

"But now you look like him! Oh, tell me the truth. I don't understand. Where is my father? You were he—I mean—why, yesterday, all these days, all these weeks——" Incoherently she tried to put her baffled memories into words.

"I am telling the truth, and so are you, you don't need to assure me that. We neither of us understand. But we will. Now, to business. Never mind anything but my questions. You thought your father was in this room?"

She nodded, seemingly struck dumb. Her eyes were round and marveling.

"If he were, how could he get out?"

She recognized the disciplined keenness of the brain that could refuse itself all speculation, supreme as must be his desire to fathom the depths of the riddle. She gathered her own straying wits. "He was always free, when he was himself." She frowned, trying to concentrate on thoughts that seemed to slip from her. "But don't you see? That wouldn't do you any good."

"Clearly. You have a good head, my

girl. Wait one moment. Take my questions! Who is your father?"

"Martin Mayberry."

He saw a sudden rise of horror in her eyes, and forestalled it by a quick word. "Don't begin thinking things yet," he swiftly commanded. "You do not know anything against him yet. Keep to what I say. He looks like me?"

"Incredibly."

He stared a long time into her face. "He's been known as Murchison?"

She nodded, and could not keep the agony of her apprehension from her look.

"How long?"

"I don't know. But ever since I came to live with him. That was five or six weeks ago."

"You've lived with him only six weeks?"

"Yes."

After a pause, he said more sharply: "Let that go!" as if he thus called back his wandering attention. "Carver. That's the main peg. Carver. I've got to get him to let me out. I must think." She felt that he ceased to see her, as his mind withdrew into itself, though his fixed gaze still held hers. Presently he said slowly, "If any one had ever asked to see your father, would Carver have refused?"

"I don't think so."

He made a movement, and glanced downward. "It's ten past four. Put in your brick, my dear, and go find one of the neighbors. That chap next door. What about him?"

She blushed. "I'd rather go to him than any one else in the world," she said bravely.

"I see," he returned kindly. "Good. Get him to come here and tell Carver he wants to see me. Now, one word." He put on his glasses again to see her more distinctly, and with them on he looked so familiar to her that she felt her heart leap in revulsion almost to her original belief that he was Mayberry.

"You'll be thinking about your father," his voice went on. "Now, I can have no doubt he's evilly concerned in this stupendous hoax, and if you are as sensible as you look you'll make up your mind to bear that blow as bravely as you can. You won't be the first young person to learn that there is such a thing as 'the sins of the fathers.' Just keep that young man in your immediate plane of vision—and me!" He gave one emphatic nod, and wasting no more time, closed the aperture on his side with the brick.

Lois sat, scarcely breathing, a few moments, and then replaced her own. "I can only do as he says," she said, half aloud, to spur her inert limbs to action.

Concerned at first merely with the desire to get out of the house unobserved, she closed her mind to the babel of clamoring thoughts that distracted her. She stole down the stairs, meaning to make for the breakfast room by a back way, hoping to pass any servants she might meet without attracting attention. But alert for any sound, Carver heard, or felt, her coming, and stepped out into the hallway. In her guilty preoccupation she had overlooked the fact that she was more formidable to him than he to her. She caught this, however at one glance, and it calmed her. Indeed, it took no very sharp eye to see that he was haggard, though she did not comprehend the devouring suspense that had fairly fed upon him. As she said nothing, he ventured a propitiatory: "Your headache is easier?" His feverish eyes sent one look up the stairs.

"A little," she replied. Try as she would to keep her voice natural she feared some tone of it would rouse his suspicion. It came to her that she must say more than this if he was to be caught later in his own admissions. "My father is better?"

"Oh, very much," he answered, as she hoped he would.

She saw her chance to get him out of the way while she made her escape. "He's awfully quiet," she said uncertainly. "I wondered—perhaps you would better go up and see if he is all right."

"Well, I will," he said slowly. He passed his tongue over his dry lips, and held the lower one between his teeth. Then, with an effort, he smiled at her and went up the stairs.

The instant he was out of sight she fled the house, making her way through the shelter of their shrubbery straight to the hedge. Garrabrant was not in sight. She slipped through into the greater security of his garden and hurried toward his house. As she ran the length of the paved court he appeared in the open doorway, surprise and satisfaction in his welcome.

"Let me come in," she panted.

"*Let* you come in!" he echoed, standing at one side of the threshold. But he held back further expression of cordiality, seeing

her in no mood for trivial conversation. She went no farther into the house than to sink upon the first available chair.

"Something gone wrong?"

She opened her lips as if a torrent of words had parted them, eager to rush forth. Then, oddly, nothing came. She sat looking at him, a curious expression of despair upon her face. He spun a chair in front of her, and sat down, leaning forward to take her hand. Nothing more than her passiveness in yielding it to him could have made him feel how submerged her personality was in her momentous tidings. He asked her no further question, but sat waiting.

When she did speak at last, in a sort of desperation, what she said was: "He says he's not my father." Between them, in the light of their common experience, it sounded a mere banality. "No, no, I don't mean that. At least I do mean it, and he's not."

A flicker crossed his face. He laid his other hand over hers. "Steady," he said, quite quietly.

"Oh, I know how it sounds. It is all like a bad dream. He says he is not my father," she repeated, but with a different inflection.

"Well," he suggested, half smiling, "who does he think he is?"

"Murchison."

"But, my dear, isn't he?"

"Yes—but my father's not."

Garrabrant fairly jumped. "What on earth do you mean?"

She drew her hands from his, still unaware of his touch, and passed them over her eyes. "I'll tell you all about it," she said half wearily, "beginning at the beginning." As rapidly as she could she told him the story of her brief acquaintance with her father, from the death of Aunt Matilda down to the present day, and remarkable as he found it, not the least fantastic part of it to his mind was the fact that her father had been until so recently an utter stranger to her. He listened to every detail of her conversation with the prisoner, questioning her sharply at every step of the narrative.

When she had finished he sat regarding her fixedly and in silence. At last he shook his head. "It's too large an order," he said. "How could it be any one except your father, my dear girl? You're awfully nervous and strung up, you know, and you couldn't see him very well through a little hole like that. Why, when I was a youngster we used to play a game, cutting strips from a sheet for people to look through. We could see nothing but their eyes, and half the time we couldn't say who was who. You hadn't the slightest doubt it was your father till he overpersuaded you. Come, it's beyond my power of belief! Remember, I saw him myself, and talked to him. Of course it's your father."

She looked at him, her brows in a knot. "I know," she faltered. "I can't believe it myself. If he isn't—where in the world is my father? And yet——"

Garrabrant thrust his hands deep in his pockets and sat back, surveying his boots. "Carver, of course, would be more naturally mixed up in anything crooked than straight. But, my dear girl, put it to yourself—this extraordinary resemblance, this same story that he has been abducted! Why, how the deuce do you suppose a man like that would be run off with, against his will? It's preposterous."

"I know," she said again.

He raised his eyes to her. "Now, I'll tell you, Lois, what I suggest. You let me send to Boston for a chap I know, Ben Bigelow. He's a psychoanalyst, and a specialist in mental troubles. He'll come like a shot. And we'll just 'call the watch' and relieve Carver of the wheel. Are you willing?"

"Perfectly," she said.

"Do you mind if I ask you something?"

"Anything," she answered quietly.

"Are you actually engaged to Mr. Carver?"

"Good gracious, no," was her feminine disclaimer. "Of course not. What ever made you think that? I don't even like him."

He sat motionless under this information, looking straitly into her candid eyes. "If you had anything to say to me," he said at last slowly, "anything that perhaps was difficult to say, would you rather write it to me?"

She shook her head. "I can't imagine it. I like to have things right out, face to face."

"You never felt an impulse to write me?"

She flashed scarlet. "Not even in answer to your letter," she retorted sharply.

"Ah," said Tom Garrabrant. "Not even then. I suppose you remember what I said in that letter?"

Her color did not fade. "Certainly."

He nodded, his lips pursed. "I dare say I told you I was engaged to be married."

"Well, don't you remember what you wrote?" she not unnaturally demanded.

Garrabrant let his head go back on a ringing laugh. In spite of all other troubles, life had assumed a rosy tinge. He went abruptly into the library, leaving a wide-eyed Lois staring after him, and returned promptly with a letter which he put into her hand.

"I never wrote you," he told her. "Any more than you wrote this. I'm afraid our friend Carver is a bit more oblique than I thought. For a swindler he did not look very far ahead."

She read the letter in amazement, but she found they were looking at one another with a fixed gladness when she finished.

Garrabrant wheeled and took a blithe turn of the width of the hall and back. "I made you a promise, and I'll keep it," he said, but his voice trembled.

She got up too, and stood, the letter falling from her hand.

"I'd rather you didn't," she said.

CHAPTER VIII.

GARRABRANT STRIKES.

IT was Lois who, a little later, reminded herself and Garrabrant that they had more to do than was to be accomplished by any amount of pleasant love-making. And as soon after as she could get him reluctantly to release her, she went back to communicate the news through her Pyramus-and-Thisbe channel that he would be over in the morning, with a friend. Murchison was too occupied with regrets that he could not hope to get the midnight train from Boston to New York to realize that Lois looked at him with all her old uncertainty. He seemed confidently to have expected that Garrabrant would come immediately and effect his delivery.

"This inaction," he said with a grave restraint, "is enough to drive me insane. I have nearly gone mad trying to imagine what is going on."

She evaded this familiar plaint by asking if he had had anything to eat.

"One man carried a tray, and two guarded the door," he told her grimly, and shut himself away again. He opened almost immediately to add, "I found on the desk in here a floor plan of my offices." His eyes blinked at her. "That's Carver's work. I can only think they've planned to rob the place." With this sinister conjecture he withdrew.

Garrabrant, meanwhile, had made the trip to Quincy, in even better time than in the days of his inclusion among the daily racers. He called Doctor Bigelow on the telephone and got his promise to be in Quincy at eight in the morning, and was leaving the booth when he encountered Heber Thurlow, a roll of newspapers under his arm and the look of him who bears unwillingly tidings of evil overspread upon his usually cherubic face. They fell into step together.

"Here's an ordeal!" said Thurlow heavily. "You seen the papers?"

"No."

"Wall Street went mad to-day. You can hardly believe the dispatches. They say it was all a gigantic swindle! And poor Carroll had a stroke in his office. I've got to tell his wife; got to get Alice to go with me."

"That's tough," said Garrabrant, sincerely pitiful.

"We got him to the hospital, but he's unconscious. My golly, what a day it's been! When the Exchange opened things just went rocketing, like a fireworks factory burning up. And then, by gum! it turned out the orders were fakes and everybody started dumping back the stuff, and the panic was on. I thank God I sold out last week, what little I was carrying. But poor Carroll! I am afraid he's badly hit." He shook his head. "I'll run across with you, if you don't mind," he said as they reached the landing. He seemed to want company.

"There's only one hope I can see," he went on as he settled himself in one of the wicker armchairs of the *Dart* and unfolded one of his newspapers to let Garrabrant see the front page. "Things are bound to recover, and maybe Carroll can hold on. God knows. Well, thousands of other people have been shaken out of the basket to-day. Just look at that!"

Holding the journal down firmly in his lap out of the whipping wind that caught them as they left the pier, Garrabrant read:

BIG FORGERY PLOT WITH FAKE ORDERS RIGS STOCK MARKET.

BROKERS AND SPECULATORS DEFRAUDED OF MANY THOUSANDS BY COLOSSAL CONSPIRACY. BAD CHECKS FROM SIXTEEN CITIES TOTAL TWO MILLION DOLLARS. PRICES BREAK AFTER DISCOVERY OF

FORGERY IN BUYING ORDERS. BUCKET SHOPS SUSPECTED. REPUTABLE FIRMS VICTIMIZED. POLICE, FEDERAL AND EXCHANGE INQUIRIES BEGUN.

"My sainted grandmother!" said Garrabrant in the hushed tone of reverence. "They didn't do this thing by halves."

"Look at the list of banks, my boy: sixty of 'em. And every check a forgery. All over the country, from Denver to Worcester." He took the newspaper from his companion and with some difficulty turned the flapping pages. "Listen to this," he said.

"There is no possibility that the schemers expected to get control of the stock they ordered, because if any of the stock had been delivered it would have gone to out-of-town banks, or their New York correspondents, and not to the swindlers. Whoever the manipulators are, it is obvious they must have had behind them a thoroughly organized system with plenty of financial backing. They also must have had the assistance of professional forgers and counterfeiters, for the letterheads of the banks were counterfeited in addition to the forging of the signatures of bank cashiers and presidents. Couriers in plentiful supply also must have been at their disposal, for they were able to mail letters from so many widely separated cities at approximately the same time.

"The orders were mailed last week to be received this morning just in time to be executed at the opening of the market. The letters were typewritten on paper with engraved letterheads, showing that no pains had been spared in their preparation, but the checks were more crudely done, being not only uniform in size and appearance, but apparently signed by the same hand in many instances, although purporting to come from different bank officials. However, the letters and checks impressed some bankers sufficiently to cause them to execute the orders."

Thurlow looked up to gratify his vicarious sense of importance by noting the expression of Garrabrant's attentive and incredulous face, and saw with double regret that they were slipping into his dock, his own motor boat left far behind.

"We're in," he said, his round face clouding. "Now for the most unpleasant job I ever tackled."

"I'm confoundedly sorry," said Garrabrant. "Leave me one of your papers, will you, if you can spare it? I'd like to read the whole account."

Thurlow relinquished the paper he held and disembarked. Garrabrant went on in the *Dart* to his own pier, glancing over the columns of fabulous doings. But he did not read it all. Perhaps if he had, matters in the Murchison household might have come more quickly to a climax, for tucked away on one of the pages devoted to this sensational story was a dignified statement given out by the head of one of the largest brokerage houses, to the effect that although the fraud had been discovered barely fifteen minutes after the opening of the Exchange, the resulting panic had seemingly reached many distant investors, and that the heavy selling done through his firm had been, though directly contrary to his advice, in fulfillment of peremptory orders. This statement was signed "A. J. Murchison."

But Garrabrant, still running true to form, spent the first evening of his bliss as an accepted lover sitting out under the stars of heaven and giving but little thought to any one but his radiant maid.

He was astir early, for all that he went late to bed, taking a mere cup of coffee from the forewarned Jane Alethea, with the understanding that he was to return bringing a guest to breakfast. Jane Alethea labored under the delusion that Doctor Bigelow was a minister, and that expeditious nuptials were in order, for even had she not glimpsed a lovers' parting the previous afternoon she would certainly have been apprized of the change in Garrabrant's fortunes in love by the gratifying return of the vigorous appetite she had ministered to at dinner.

He met his friend at the train, and on the way over and all through breakfast he imparted details of the affair next door. Bigelow took the information as diligently as he did his breakfast, and almost without interruption.

"Tell me," he said as he finally lighted a cigarette to be smoked with his ultimate cup of coffee, "just how these attacks come on."

"I never saw one coming on. Alice Thurlow told me he had a very brief touch of it one day when she was there at tea. He just began without preamble to tell her he had been abducted from his office——"

"Did he say how?"

"I fancy not. Even a lunatic, I should imagine, would boggle over the details of binding and gagging a gentleman of near two hundred pounds and conveying him unremarked to a distant habitat."

Bigelow seemed to make a mental note. "Tell me then how these attacks pass off."

"Don't know that either, except from Mrs. Thurlow again. He just let the mat-

ter drop after he had declared he never had seen his own daughter before and didn't know who she was. He sat and glared at them all impartially, and gradually it wore off, and he was himself again."

"And when you say 'himself?' Is he intelligent, normally quick?"

"Oh, yes. He chats along."

"Ever show unfamiliarity with his surroundings?"

"I never saw it."

"Did you ever see him in the house?"

"No. He comes boiling out when he sees me getting into my boat."

"Know anything about how he sleeps, and eats?"

"Not a thing. Lois would tell you."

"What interests him when he is himself, as you call it?"

Garrabrant thought it over. "I've only talked to him a few times. He wanted to buy a boat."

"A boat? To get away?"

"Oh, no—he asked me if there was a reliable agency in Boston that could supply him with a first-class engineer for the summer."

"Well, let's go." Doctor Bigelow got up and drew a breath. "I haven't eaten so much breakfast since we were camping. We might as well go over. I'd like to get that eleven ten train back."

They ambled over to Murchison's house with every appearance of being casual callers. It was early for visitors, but Garrabrant had been there before at as unseasonable an hour, and he intended to make this gambit on the same lines. So he took Bigelow around by the brick terrace to the morning room, and hailed Carver with an airy ingenuousness. "Want to come for a run in the boat?" he asked. "This is a friend of mine—Bigelow, Mr. Carver."

Carver acknowledged the introduction easily, but his hands were unquiet and a muscle in his jaw twitched continuously. He looked ten pounds thinner than the day before. "Well, not this morning, I think. I'd like to take a run to Quincy this afternoon. I was going to ask you."

"Glad to take the whole family," assented Garrabrant. "How is Mr. Murchison?"

Carver gave a plausible glance at the stranger. "He's about the same."

"I came over to see him," pursued Tom Garrabrant calmly. "You know, I think you're wrong to feel so sensitive about him. I'm awfully sorry for him, but he doesn't bother me a bit. And I've got an idea it's bad for him to be under too much restraint. I won't chaff him again."

Carver was doing some very rapid thinking. Murchison was to be allowed his freedom that afternoon in any event, after Carver had made his get-away. He had been instructed to get the afternoon train out of Boston for a certain little town in the Maine woods, where one of the group possessed an isolated shooting box. There guides were expecting him and his more elderly friend, and there Lois would be summoned by wire. Unavoidable as it was that she should know Murchison had succeeded in leaving the island, it would all be explained—that Carver had caught him providentially in Quincy, accompanied him on this wild jaunt away from the suddenly detested salt air, and found himself with a miraculously recovered Mayberry in the mountain camp. If she found it hard to believe, there would be the evidence of her own eyes to substantiate the most important part of his story. In the meantime, Murchison's hallucination was so firmly established that let him rave as he would, he could give no more impassioned reading of the part than had already been staged. Besides, here again was the evidence of Garrabrant's own eyes: he had seen him before, he saw him again. They had expected him to be seen.

But Carver was not the same steel-nerved creature of a few days back. The strain had taken heavy toll of him. He had that morning given Murchison permission to walk out of doors, with a sinking sense of nausea, although he knew four stalwart gardening spies hemmed him securely in. He had intended to get the prisoner back into his room before Lois came down, and now here was this meddlesome Garrabrant come to force a wearying scene upon him, a scene that he, after a sleepless night of frenzied thinking, felt himself shrink from, knowing the exigencies of the part he must play, and play faultlessly.

Abruptly, he wondered how long he had hesitated. "I was just thinking I'd tell Miss Murchison you are here," he found himself saying to cover the pause. "If you'll excuse me just a moment."

Bigelow raised an eyebrow at his friend as Carver left the room. "You said that young man had just been loafing around,"

he said inaudibly to any other. "Man, he's cracking under overwork. What's he been doing? He's got all the earmarks of a man too long at the throttle."

Garrabrant could only shake his head in mystification.

"I don't find Miss Murchison," said Carver, coming back. "She is not coming down yet, I imagine. Mr. Murchison I think is in the garden." He said this without any of the appearance of a man who had recently locked the other into a prison. "Let's go this way." He turned admirably at the open French window to say, "I suppose you've told Mr. Bigelow——"

Tom Garrabrant nodded. "You don't mind?"

"Oh, no. And then besides, we can't tell. He may be in a very different mood now. The changes come very quickly."

He went out with a smile, and they followed him. But Doctor Bigelow was not smiling. He was looking very intently at the back of Carver's head.

Garrabrant, knowing that Lois would be on the lookout for him, was not cast down by Carver's inability to find her. Naturally a buoyant young gentleman, and having consigned his only burden to Bigelow's professional portage, he went into the garden, a man without a care. He saw the four gardeners, who had a few days before been house men, idling about at strategic points, and presently he saw Murchison, bareheaded, one hand at his beard, one laid palm outward across his back, limping to and fro near a semicircular stone bench in the sunlight. He spun around sharply at the sound of their concerted footsteps and stood waiting for them.

"Good morning," said Tom Garrabrant cordially. "We just dropped in to say nothing. My friend, Bigelow—Mr. Murchison." He had twice evaded the announcement of his friend as a physician. He wished the interview to proceed without either the keeper or the invalid being aware of the authoritative quality of the witness.

Murchison took a savagely bitten unlighted cigar from his mouth and tossed it into the shrubbery behind him. "You are Mr. Garrabrant, next door, I believe," he said calmly.

"Well, well," murmured Carver, standing near Bigelow, not a little astonished at hearing Murchison call Garrabrant by name. "To-day, you see, he recognizes him." Doctor Bigelow merely nodded briefly, with a slantwise glance at the speaker.

"I'm very glad you've come and brought your friend. Now perhaps we can get at the rather important matter of my release. The waiting has been very hard for me." He spoke slowly and in rather a low tone. To Bigelow he gave one sharp scrutiny. "You may think I take this stupendous outrage very calmly," he said more directly to him, "but I've had one warning that excitement is not good for me, as Mr. Garrabrant can testify."

Bigelow said "Certainly, certainly," in a noncommittal way. He was constrained to keep to his secondary rôle. "Let's sit down and smoke over it." He dropped into one end of the stone seat as he spoke, and opened his cigarette case. Murchison declined, but not impatiently. He had taken, from his experience with Lois, full measure of the ingenuity with which he had been snared, and he knew he could not hope to prove his case by any hasty words.

"It's a long span for any stretch of imagination," he said dryly. "But this fellow here"—he indicated Carver—"was employed in my office in a position of considerable trust, until one day I caught him red-handed at my private papers and discharged him." Carver did not protest. He merely glanced from one face to the other with a faint smile that cost him much. It was on the tip of Garrabrant's tongue to ask where these offices might be, thinking that perhaps to recall their location and use would put Murchison in train for a full recovery of memory, and had he done so, the prisoner would have had earlier news of Wall Street's convulsion of the day past. But he held back, leaving the matter in hands he acknowledged to be more competent.

"He does not appear, however, to have left you," remarked Bigelow, putting a prompt finger on the discrepancy between narrative and manifestation.

Murchison saw the point, and chose his words carefully. "I have never seen him from the day he left my office, in disgrace, till night before last, when I landed here."

Garrabrant started suddenly at a touch on his arm. Phillips had come up across the grass behind them, as they sat with their backs to the shore. The others turned to look.

"Could I speak to you a moment, sir?"

Tom Garrabrant, about to send the man away to wait a more convenient moment, checked himself. When Phillips addressed him as 'sir' something was in the wind. "A moment, yes," he said, and stepped aside with his engineer.

"I beg pardon for interrupting," said Phillips privately. "But I've heard a good deal about this business, you know, and seen a good deal. I just wanted to remind you of the steam yacht that sent a boat ashore."

His employer stared at him.

"The old gentleman may be as nutty as a hickory tree, but there's this to be said for him: somebody could have landed here night before last. And he was saying just that, as I came up to you."

For an instant Garrabrant felt his heart stand still, but it soon resumed an even beat. "Get out," he said good-humoredly. "You don't think Mr. Murchison is twins, do you—one on sea and one on land?"

"What I think you don't care, Mr. Garrabrant, unless it's about gasoline. You say I go to the movies too much! But I'd back Friday Island to beat the screen this day." He gave his employer a fierce grin, and walked away. "Whistle if you want help," he said casually. "There's a lavish lot of horticultural activity hereabouts."

Garrabrant gave a short laugh, and went back. He returned to the bench in time to hear Bigelow say, "This is an agreeable place you've got here, but a bit out of the way."

"It is," assented Murchison with meaning. "But I have not so much got it, as it has got me."

"Really, gentlemen," said Carver, pitching his burned-out cigarette into the moist earth near by, "I hate to bring up unpleasant matters, but I think Mr. Murchison has had about enough of this. It's not in line with the instructions I received from Doctor Bliss, and I'm responsible to him."

"Doctor Bliss," said Bigelow ruminatively. "Specialist, I presume?"

"Partner of Doctor Carl Bryson's," said Carver glibly.

"Oh, indeed," said Bigelow admirably. "Well, of course—we mustn't—if you think——" He hesitated. "I would have liked to ask Mr. Murchison how he got here." He gave Carver a slight sly smile, which seemed to be well received, for Carver leaned to him to whisper quickly, "You never heard such a yarn! Of course he came with his daughter and me. But really I wouldn't question him long. It's not kind."

"I never thought. I'm sorry," muttered Bigelow, in evident contrition.

"I'll tell you how I got here," said Murchison, crossing his legs. "There was a plan, partly formulated several months ago, between myself and three other men, whose names I am not at liberty even now to mention in this connection, for an amalgamation of certain interests. I can't go into that detail and it is not germane to the matter, except in that we had agreed, when affairs permitted, to get off without exciting comment, for a week-end on the—a week-end on a yacht where we could be unobserved. It was necessary to the success of our plans that speculation should not be raised by publicity concerning this conference."

"Delusions of grandeur," said Carver, under his breath. But Murchison heard him and flung an angry, "Be good enough not to interrupt me!"

"I'm sorry," said Carver, all good nature. "I didn't mean to speak aloud." He played a cool card. "Get on with it, Mr. Murchison. I forgot to tell you. Mr. Garrabrant offered to take us all for a sail."

"I fully intend that he shall take me, at all events," retorted Murchison, more quietly. "Last Friday, gentlemen, I received a note from one of these associates, which I now believe to have been a forgery, although there was a certain identifying mark in the signature, a pinhole through the paper at a particular spot, which I automatically observed. If it was a forgery, it reflects great credit on this gentleman's powers of observation, it being a bank-check trick of the signator's, unknown to many of his intimates; if it was not a forgery the secret of our plan must nevertheless have leaked out. For when I obeyed the summons, and went down to the Battery, I was met by a coxswain in charge of a launch, who—mark this!—wore the name band of my friend's yacht on his cap. He and a common sailor ran me out to a large steam yacht, and I went up the companion ladder and down into the cabin under his direction. Those were my last moments of freedom."

"Quite so," said Carver. "Very clearly put. Now, gentlemen——"

Bigelow and Garrabrant exchanged a quick look. The latter appeared fairly floored by the extreme altitude of this story,

but Bigelow, who was quite accustomed to hearing narrations of this sort yarned off by lunatics far more evidently at loggerheads with their surroundings than his present interlocutor, showed little or nothing in his face.

Murchison saw this and for a moment his heart sank. "You don't believe me." It was half question, half assertion. "Let me go on. Two nights ago we dropped anchor here and I came willingly to land, knowing I had far more chance in any place however lonely than on board my floating jail. I saw not one person in authority whom I knew by sight, but I was never unguarded. Here I found to my amazement I was known and accepted as a familiar presence. It very nearly unsettled my reason, I believe. For one ghastly moment when Mr. Garrabrant assured me I had told him my story long ago, of an abduction that had just taken place, I doubted my own self."

He gave that young man a look with an unexpected change to a flash of humor. "That's a tribute to you, Mr. Garrabrant. It was partly because I could not look at you and not see you were an utterly honest man that I was so far overset as to question my own sanity."

"But, Mr. Murchison," demurred Bigelow slowly, "if you were held so safe a prisoner on this yacht, why were you transferred?"

"I was safe enough to have them even discuss that matter before me. At least, I heard that she was wanted at New London to pick up some other passengers—not passengers under duress, you understand. She lay here the night I was brought ashore, to have her name changed." He turned back to Garrabrant. "The matter is simple to put into words, though almost incredibly difficult to have translated into reality: they had my double planted here."

Carver, rising, gave a sudden short laugh. It was perhaps the most remarkable achievement of his whole career. "All right," he assented. "That's the lot, is it, Mr. Murchison?"

Murchison did not answer. The four men remained motionless in a long pregnant silence. Then abruptly, Garrabrant became extraordinary.

He took in his breath with an audible parting of his lips, sat leaning forward for a moment looking at or through Murchison, and then in one remarkable movement went straight to him and took the glasses from off that astonished person's nose. There was a barely perceptible pause before he swung a competent fist to the point of Carver's jaw, and as that individual went over full length on the grass, Tom Garrabrant sat down calmly upon his chest, put two fingers gaminwise into his mouth, and blew a piercing whistle shrill into the air.

Lois Mayberry, coming from the house, heard it and broke into a run. But the four gardeners heard it too, and came closing in upon the group about the bench.

"You'd better get up, Mr. Garrabrant," said Murchison, cool in the midst of his triumph. "I fancy your man is good for some moments, and they are four to three."

"Not by a jugful," remarked Phillips, coming in like the rescuing party of one of his favorite screen dramas. "Hang on, gentlemen. Let's get 'em all together."

Garrabrant was on his feet in an instant beside his friends. "Keep an eye on Carver, Lois," he called, enlisting his woman in his fray as naturally as any raiding Ugrian Hun.

"We'll cover you, Mr. Murchison," said Bigelow. "Tom and I can hold them easily, while you get off with Phillips. You'll make the eleven ten quite comfortably."

Phillips, however, had other plans. "That's all right, Doctor Bigelow. But the *Dart* will hold the lot of us. I aim to hand these botanists over to the police. There's a Federal launch over at Quicy hunting bootleggers, that will come in very handy for us."

Partly the fall of their leader, and partly the very composed front of the invaders, brought Carver's auxiliaries rather slowly forward. It was an uncertain advance at best, and came to a complete conclusion on the silent and effective appearance of a revolver from Phillips' corduroy pocket. "Hands up, if you please. Mr. Garrabrant, are there any more at home like these?"

Tom Garrabrant gave a chuckle. "You take the pot, Phillips. That's all I ever saw."

"I'll just see them comfortably aboard, sir," said he. "And between you and Doctor Bigelow I guess you can get the groggy one along. I'll make that train for you, Mr. Murchison, don't worry about that. You might just be writing out a message for me to phone the New York police. Their number is Spring three one hundred."

Murchison for the first time laughed. "That man should be endowed," he said appreciatively. "I'll just about do it, too."

But Phillips had one last remark to make. "No need for you to come all the way to Quincy, Mr. Garrabrant," he called back as he shepherded his sulky, frightened crew of subordinates toward the terrace steps. "Miss—er—the young lady won't care to be left alone in this gruesome spot." He went on light-heartedly, delightedly about his congenial labors.

Garrabrant looked at Lois and smiled. But Carver, sitting up weakly, claimed his attention. "Here, Ben, help me to get this daisy into our bouquet. And then I'll trust him to your especial care."

"You're taking Phillips' advice then, eh?"

"I hate to be absent from the final tableau," grinned Garrabrant, "but I obey the stage manager."

"You made a quick decision, old man, and you moved quicker. I am glad to find my Lombroso no empiric, after all. The nape of this fellow's neck is of a pellucid criminality."

With a laugh, the two men pulled the sagging figure to its feet, and locking their arms firmly in his, one at either side, they guided him none-too-solicitously away from his Waterloo.

Murchison and Lois were left alone together.

"My dear," he said, holding her hand close in both his own, "you see my fears for you have come true. And it will be my own message that will cause the arrest of your father. He is without doubt playing the part of A. J. Murchison in New York, though he must be a good actor to get away with it among my friends!"

"But—why, he is an actor!" she said, breathlessly.

He had no time for interest in her father's past. "For your sake, and for that chap Garrabrant, I shall do what I can to keep your father's name out of this, his real name. He can't hope, and you can't expect him, to go unpunished. But I'll do what I can. Trust me. He doesn't deserve much, my girl, not nearly so much pity as you'll give him. And I have no fears he'll bother you much, later on. He'd get short shrift from your husband, even if he is your father. I'll be seeing you again. You might in all fairness come on to New York and be married from my house. I want to talk to Garrabrant, and I won't have time this morning. But in pity for my bewilderment, you might write me an explanation of his explosion of energy just now, when he so actively became convinced that I was telling the truth."

He dropped her hand with a warm pressure. "Now for God knows what!" he said. "Good luck to you!" He turned, and bareheaded as he was, hurried away to the landing.

It was some days later before Murchison found the time, in the midst of Federal and police-court activities and an appalling pressure of work at his seething offices, to dictate the following letter:

My Dear Garrabrant: The telephone message of your notable Phillips to the New York police resulted in the successful arrests of several of the plotters. One Bliss, whose record proved him a one-time proprietor of a gambling house of dubious reputation, was the only name that we could get direct from the man Mayberry, poor Lois' father. It was Carver and Bliss who obtained his services, and he was, as I surmised, impersonating me actually in my own office. It was, of course, a frenzied time of pandemonium, with the market tumbling about one's ears, and I dare say the confusion was an efficient ally. I am told it was a remarkable performance, however. He had been painstakingly drilled, even to certain personal idiosyncrasies of diet—my waiter at our luncheon club was utterly incredulous of the story that he had served another man in my place. I saw Mayberry in his cell this morning, and the likeness is enough to take one's breath away. I have a curious feeling of having dreamed it all, when at rare intervals I get a moment to realize what caused the extraordinary tangle it is now my labor to straighten out.

The financial backers of the hoax are headed by that scoundrel, Jim Acker, who made millions out of this long-suffering city when he was comptroller. This time, thank God, we've got the goods on him, and if he escapes serving his sentence it will be because I am dead and buried. They must have cleaned up a fair pile on the breaking market. Nothing, of course, could be realized on the fake orders, which naturally merely led to the detection of the fraud, the news of which was to start the selling. It was a behemoth of an idea. The police have, with the Federal service, laid their hands on fourteen of the men planted in other cities, who mailed the buying orders and the counterfeit checks, and skipped immediately to other towns to telegraph the panicky selling orders to my office, which kept the market crashing down hour by hour. It is going to be some trick to unravel the snarl, for bona-fide sales are mixed almost inextricably with these others to a distracting and confounding extent.

I am taking time for this letter, as indeed I feel my great indebtedness to you, my dear Garrabrant, for, although I understand we anticipated only by a couple of hours my planned

release, we should perhaps never have been able to lay our hands on so many of the gang if the police had not been warned in time to forestall the get-away. There is little doubt that some will turn State's evidence, and thus we may bag the entire crew. Having seen Mayberry, and having met with almost the same incredulity at this end of the line as I encountered on Friday Island, I can well understand how slim were my chances of persuading anybody to credit my astounding claims. This brings me around to a question, which, as I have a surfeit of perplexity at present, I beg you to answer. Why the dickens did you so suddenly decide in my favor, after having jerked off my glasses and peered into my face? I have seen Mayberry and he wears none, but the resemblance is passing belief. I have, by the way, arranged that Mayberry shall be known during these trials as "Martin"—his first name, if I remember rightly.

My sister is, I know, writing Lois to-day, to urge your coming to our house for a simple wedding.

And two days after the dispatch of this letter, as A. J. Murchison was making his way toward the offices of the district attorney, a messenger from his own office came pressing and scuttling through the crowd in the street to bring him a telegram, a message which puzzled him in his preoccupation. But in a moment, and for a moment only, his face cleared with a laugh. He read it again, before he tucked it away in his pocket, to remind him to buy a diamond bracelet for a bride:

Mayberry's pince-nez left red marks at either side his unaccustomed nose. Nature is indeed wonderful.

The complete book-length novel in the next issue will be "The Silver Obelisk," by Roy Norton.

HELP THE POSTMAN

THE "Better Mailing Week" recently promoted by the post-office department was an effort to reduce a useless waste that has bothered that department ever since Benjamin Franklin held the position of postmaster general—a waste caused by the incorrect or incomplete addressing of mail matter. Just how much this has cost us since the post-office department was organized we don't know, but now it is costing almost a million and three quarters dollars a year. That is the cost to the government—and therefore indirectly to the taxpayers—but if the loss to private business from delayed mail, wasted advertising matter and lost parcel post were added the cost would be multiplied several times.

This preventable waste is the fault of the people who use the mails, not of the post-office department. It is estimated that 200 million pieces of mail are given "directory service" each year—which means that post-office employees must take time from their regular duties to hunt up correct addresses for misdirected matter. Of course they can't always find the correct addresses, and 20 million pieces of mail find graves in the dead-letter office each year.

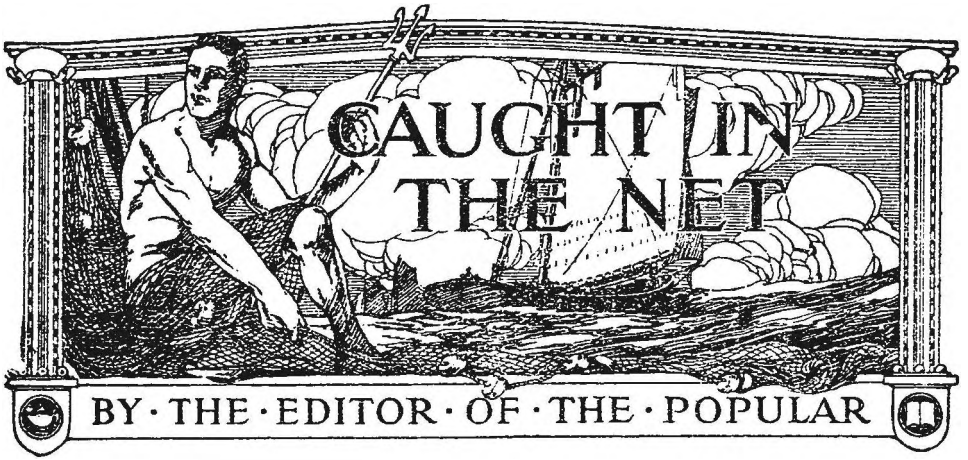
The department has been trying to educate big business, as well as the general public, in the importance of addressing mail correctly and completely. "John Smith, Newark," may carry your message to the right John Smith in the right Newark, but the chances are against it and the process is costly. If you will take the trouble to add John Smith's street address, and the State in which he lives, you will prevent delay and save the government and yourself money. Large business firms often have out-of-date mailing lists, and another cause of incomplete direction of mail is the practice of some business houses of not including their street addresses in their advertising matter.

HIS JOB

DOCTOR JESSE CLORE of Madison, Virginia, was drifting around in Washington one evening not long ago seeing the sights with a friend, a member of Congress. A little after eleven o'clock they went into a restaurant.

"Who is that fellow over there?" asked the doctor, pointing to a young man with long hair, flowing tie, supercilious stare and a generally swelled-up air. "Is he an artist, a painter or sculptor or something?"

"No," explained the congressman; "nothing like that. He has a most important and picturesque calling—keeps himself busy being the son of an ambassador."



AN UNPOPULAR PROFESSION

A NUMBER of obtrusively respectable citizens are laboring under a mistaken notion. They seem to believe that the elusive essence known as "salvation" has suddenly acquired a market value and become a more or less vendible commodity. Acting on their belief they have gone into the business of selling the public salvation. They have become professional reformers.

After all, why not? The public pays handsomely for the services of men who dispense butter and eggs, ready-made clothes, coal and ice and lodging and transportation, and civil government. Salvation is more important than any of these things. Why not reward with rich gifts the men who dispense the most important, the only imperishable, commodity? The man who runs the railroad from coast to coast receives a fortune every year for his work. Shall we deny the man who points the air line from here to the hereafter?

The present trend of public opinion indicates that the answer is "Yes." In fact, the trend of public opinion has never been otherwise. Men have paid gladly in the past, and will gladly pay in the future, for all manner of nonessentials. But they have never willingly bartered and traded in ideals.

The last decade has seen the burgeoning of a bumper crop of professional reformists, men and women who make their livings from the dispensation of morality at a price. The public does not like them. The public suspects them of insincerity. The public is beginning to have an uncomfortable feeling that they are tawdry opportunists, whose interest in the ideals they preach is in direct ratio to the amount they receive in return for their activities.

In a sense it seems illogical, unjust, that the man who furnishes food for the spirit must go unpaid while the butcher and the grocer count their profits. Yet, on consideration, it is plain that it cannot be otherwise. The prophets and the preachers of uplift deal in wares that have to do with the life hereafter. Their creeds instruct contempt of earthly considerations. If they themselves evince too lively a concern with their earthly state, what are their disciples to think?

Thus the public reasons. The public has no quarrel with wealth, as such. It will accept the moral leadership of rich men, at a pinch, providing the leaders have not amassed wealth through the propagation of a creed. But it will not long keep patience with the deliberate exploitation of ideals. It rejects the notion of reform as a business enterprise.

We can fancy the composite voice of the public muttering to itself, "What next! The way things are going it won't be many years before we read of the incorporation of 'The National Chamber of Commerce of the Latter-day Prophets.' And the next thing we know there will be a 'Reformer Journeymen's Union' and we shall find ourselves being charged time and a half for extra hours devoted by the moral laborers to the salvation of our souls!"

Our advice to the professional advocates of the blue laws is to buy a job lot of umbrellas and overshoes. This fair spell isn't natural. The weather is due to change. And when it starts to rain it is going to rain long and hard.

SLAUGHTER

THE vanity of woman and the greed of man have doomed to extinction the fur-bearing animals of the world. Doctor William T. Hornaday, the director of New York's zoölogical park, predicts their extermination within twenty years if the present demand for pelts continues. The day of the legitimate use of fur seems to have passed; fashion now decrees that it shall be worn in summer as well as in winter and in ways that have no connection with its rightful function of protecting its wearer from winter's cold. Fur on sunshades, fur on fans, even fur cases for wrist watches—these are a few of the more bizarre methods by which next year the French fashion makers intend to waste animal pelts. Our scientists and naturalists hope that American women will refuse to follow such ridiculous fashions, but they are doubtful. The Blue Cross Society has written to thousands of prominent people asking them to indorse the sentiment: "I protest against the cruel and senseless craze for summer furs as being contrary to good taste and humane feeling," and undoubtedly many women will refuse to wear furs except for warmth. But to many thoughtless people the lure of the latest mode is strong—and the fur trade is a profitable one. So far there has been no sign that the men who control it—and who could control the use of fur—are far-sighted enough to realize that the future of their business lies in their own hands and that the wild life of the world cannot stand for long the present drain of thirty million fur bearers killed each year.

Not only fur-bearing animals are in danger of extermination. Professor Henry Fairfield Osborn, president of the American Museum of Natural History, thinks that all wild life is threatened. "Nothing in the history of creation," he says, "has paralleled the ravages of the fur and hide trade, which, with the bone fertilizer trade, now threatens the entire vertebrate kingdom."

The remedy? In a great measure it is in the hands of our women. Their refusal to wear the feathers of song birds helped the Audubon Societies in their fight to save our birds; their refusal to use fur except legitimately would help save our animals. The schools can help by teaching the youngsters that our wild life is a heritage that should be protected, not wasted. Sportsmen can help, too, by making things hot for the game hog and the pothunter.

HOPE TO STAMP OUT TUBERCULOSIS

MEDICAL scientists are now engaged in a campaign to show what can be done toward stamping out tuberculosis in a large industrial center as an experiment, in view of a wider campaign later. Many people at present believe that the time is near when tuberculosis, the "great white plague," will be a thing of the past.

It was announced recently that the city of Syracuse, New York, has been selected for the experiment and all the resources of science will be used to stamp out and prevent tuberculosis in that city. An effort in a smaller way to the same end was made on a smaller scale in the last year or two in Framington, Massachusetts, resulting in the death rate from tuberculosis being reduced by sixty-seven per cent.

Syracuse, however, is a much larger city, with a medical college, an official health department and unusual coöperation between public and private agencies. The demonstration for which Syracuse has been selected as the center has been invited by many cities. They proffered the coöperation of local agencies and also the support of labor, industrial and mercantile corporations, city officials and newspapers.

It is believed by many that the experiment will be a success in these days of advanced scientific knowledge and that tuberculosis will eventually die out like a number of prehistoric plagues which once had myriads of victims and which are never seen now. A "summer cold," which is seldom a serious complaint, is a faint reminder

of one of the deadliest of these plagues, from which in its old deadly form people are now immune, through time, heredity and the spread of medical knowledge.

It is now believed by a large proportion of medical scientists that the time is fast coming when the practical extinction of the "great white plague" following on the Syracuse experiment is among the possibilities of the campaign against it. It has already through growth of scientific knowledge been robbed of some of its terrors. Even incipient tuberculosis was looked on not so long ago as incurable, yet it is cured in many cases at our sanitaria and the patients are discharged in normal health.

THE WONDER GIRLS

WHEN Miss Helen Wills of California and Mademoiselle Suzanne Lenglen of France step on the court for the final match of the women's singles in the Olympic Games tennis tournament, that very considerable part of the world's population that is interested in sports will be able to enjoy a contest of skill and stamina between two of the most proficient women athletes yet developed and a clash between two of the most interesting personalities of sport.

Miss Wills, dubbed "Little Miss Poker-face" by the sporting writers because of her coolness under fire, last year, at the tender age of eighteen, defeated the world-famous Mrs. Molla Mallory for the American women's championship. She had been thought the coming champion ever since her first appearance in the East, but she surprised the experts by dethroning Mrs. Mallory at least a year before those in the know thought it possible. A winter of practice in California, much of it against men of the caliber of Billy Johnston, has improved her game greatly.

Mademoiselle Lenglen, older than Miss Wills, but far from being a veteran in years, has won for herself the reputation of being the greatest woman tennis player who ever has trod the courts. Several years of big-tournament experience, marvelous skill with the racket, fleetness of foot, an aggressive spirit—these are the weapons she will use in her battle to retain the proud title of the world's best. She also will have the advantage of playing in familiar surroundings and before a friendly gallery.

Who will win? If Suzanne starts well probably she will. But if the French star gets away poorly and Miss Wills establishes a good lead, the girl from California will have a royal chance. We don't agree with those who think Suzanne a quitter when the going is hard, but her tightly strung nerves are likely to land her into errors that the placid and businesslike Miss Wills would convert into an American victory.

We said "when" Miss Wills and Mademoiselle Lenglen meet. To be safe we should have said "if." There are other players in the tournament and it is possible that either or both the stars will be eliminated in the earlier rounds. But tennis runs truer to form than any other sport, and a final match between the French girl and the Californian seems a certainty.

It will be a match that is likely to establish a new high standard for women's tennis.

POPULAR TOPICS

THIS time we are going to start by talking about New York. New York is a real popular topic. Lots and lots of people don't like the Big Town, but we've never met any one who wasn't willing to talk about it.

Some years ago O. Henry called it Bagdad-on-the-Subway. Since then C. S. Montanye has christened it Paris-on-the-Hudson. Another good name would be The Alexandria of To-day. Take your choice. New York has in it something of every other city—which doesn't keep it from being itself.

There are two sorts of non-New Yorkers—the sort who are glad that they aren't, and the sort that wish that they were. There also are two sorts of New Yorkers—the sort who are glad that they are, and the sort who wish that they weren't.

Once we knew a native New Yorker who was compelled by his business to live

permanently in Chicago. We asked him which city he would rather live in. "Chicago," he said. "Living there I can look forward to coming to New York. If I lived in New York I couldn't look forward to going anywhere."

And once we knew another native New Yorker who boasted that he never had been on Broadway after dark.

HALF of the million and a half people who enter or leave the United States in the course of a year pass through the port of New York.

This means that each year three quarters of a million people have a chance to view the greatest man-made wonder of the world—downtown New York's sky line.

There are two best ways and times to view these battlements of Manhattan. One is from a boat coming up the harbor early on a bright spring morning. The other is from the deck of a ferryboat just after dark on a crisp winter evening. Either way, the panorama of skyscrapers built for the strictly utilitarian purpose of housing business offices is a thing of striking beauty.

FEW people realize how big New York really is. Its extreme length is thirty-six miles; its extreme width twenty-five miles. Its total area is three hundred and fourteen square miles—over five and one-half million acres.

Six million people live in New York City, and the population is increasing so rapidly that transportation facilities can't keep up. The city has a railroad system that would do credit to any trunk line—if it were untangled and stretched out in a line of single track it would extend across the continent.

New York's underground railroads rank high with the best in the country for efficiency and safety. Subway railroading is figured to the second. A ten-minute delay means thousands of impatient passengers and very likely a story on the front page of the evening paper.

In some other parts of the country a train only ten minutes late would be likely to be the subject of a front-page article, but for another reason.

To live up to their reputation New Yorkers have to hurry, but sometimes they slow down long enough to wonder how all the other people who crowd the streets earn their livings. There are 16,000 bankers and brokers in the Big Town, and 18,000 barbers. There are 243,000 clerks, 72,000 girl stenographers, 33,000 schoolteachers, and 21,000 telephone operators. There are 10,000 doctors, 11,000 lawyers —and as many policemen—15,000 musicians and teachers of music, and 19,000 plumbers. There are 42,000 carpenters in the city—three of them women—and almost 50,000 chauffeurs drive taxis and private cars.

NEW YORK'S most valuable building is worth thirty million dollars; its most valuable hotel, eleven and one-half millions: and its most valuable apartment house, five millions.

A MILLION electric lamps burn in over ten thousand advertising signs on Broadway.

In Greater New York there are 184 theaters and 578 motion-picture houses, with a total seating capacity of 677,000. New Yorkers, and visitors to New York, like to be amused.

They also like to go to church. There are over 1,600 churches in the city, attended each Sunday by over a million people.

THE government has succeeded in the courts in restraining the poultry dealers' from fowl price fixing. Too bad that this ruling applies only to poultry.

IN France they are trying to get each political party to adopt a flower as its emblem.

We have a better system here in the United States.

We hand our political candidates the raspberry.

Dragour, the Drugmaster

By Bertram Atkey

Author of "The Trap for Vampires," "'Little Boy Blue,'" Etc.

VII.—THE BEACH OF ASSASSINS.

Courage akin to that of Salaman Chayne enters the quaking hulk of Kotman Dass for a little space. And in that brief respite from his besetting weakness the lovable coward overwhelms Dragour, the curse of society, with an invincible combination of brawn and brain.

OUTSIDE of battle zones and places where mankind practices the arts and crafts of war, few men have escaped a swift and ugly death by a narrower margin than that by which Messrs. Salaman Chayne and Kotman Dass, of No. 10 Green Square, London, were preserved on the occasion when Dragour, the Drugmaster, contrived that a high-explosive bomb should be placed in the house of the oddly assorted partners.

They were saved by a fraction of time only. Had the bomb been discovered twenty seconds later than it was nothing could have saved them.

But, unlike Kotman Dass, Mr. Salaman Chayne was the possessor of that particular kind of nerve which seems incapable of being affected by the passing touch of the somber wings of the Dark Angel.

The fierce-eyed Mr. Chayne had very little imagination with which to fret himself, and within a second of sending his badly scared partner upstairs to the bird room, there to tranquilize his quivering nerves, he was at the telephone demanding most urgently to be put through to Scotland Yard, criminal investigation department. He wanted to get into touch with Mr. Gregory Kiss, the detective with whom he had entered into whole-hearted coöperation in the matter of tracking down the drugmaster.

Not more than a quarter of an hour had elapsed since Mr. Chayne had assisted the detective in depositing at Scotland Yard three captured assistants of the master scoundrel who, like a secret vampire, an unseen leech, had fastened on so many victims.

Mr. Kiss had not yet left and Salaman was quickly put in touch.

He spoke urgently, describing with his usual acrid brevity the affair of the bomb.

"It's done no harm, you understand, Kiss—except to make a gravel pit in the Square garden and to break nearly every window in the Square. But what gets me is that it nearly frightened Dass foolish. He was a badly scared man—and what I fear is that if he gets much more of this sort of thing, his brains will jib—jib, you understand. We can't afford that at this stage. Just as soon as he comes back to normal he is going to start his biggest panic yet. I want to stop that before it starts. And that means

I've got to get him out of this—and get myself out, too—into a safer place, while there's time. Dragour means cold business, that's clear enough now, and he knows where to find us. So the sooner we get out the better. I want to know your ideas about a fresh dugout from which we can operate. What do you suggest? . . . Yes, go on, I'm listening."

He listened for some minutes, nodding and muttering half-audible comments.

As he began to speak again his quick ear caught the sound of an opening door behind him and the shuffle of his bulky partner's carpet slippers.

"Yes, yes, Kiss, an excellent idea. Glad you thought of that—very. My partner, Kotman Dass, is upstairs in the bird room at present, but he will be glad when I tell him that you have suggested a place of perfect safety to which he can move at once. I am glad that Scotland Yard practically guarantees that on no account shall a hair of Dass' head be hurt."

Mr. Chayne was talking now purely for the benefit of the remarkable man behind him—and, since Salaman, rightly or wrongly, was a person who never hesitated to expand the strict truth a little when he conceived it necessary, the remainder of his conversation with Mr. Kiss was extremely cheerful hearing for Kotman Dass.

But Mr. Dass had been wasting very little time himself. Even as his partner had anticipated, the visit to the tranquilizing room of many birds had helped the timorous Mr. Dass get a grip on himself—and also a grip on his hat and hand bag.

Salaman, leaving the telephone, noticed that at once. With the exception of his boots Kotman Dass was ready to leave. He held his boots in his hand and was clearly intending to put them on then and there.

"Ha, Dass, that's right! Not letting the grass grow under your feet before you flit, are you?" said Salaman with a peculiar blend of sarcasm and sincerity in his voice. His admiration of his mountainous partner's mental powers was as profound as his sour and disdainful contempt for Kotman's excessive and uncontrollable timidity. "He's afraid of everything that moves and much that doesn't!" was one of Mr. Chayne's more acrid descriptions of his partner.

"Yes, dear mister, leaving house forthwith immediatlee," quavered the fat man. "The shocks and terrible alarms of existence in this place have reduced nerves to condition of warm jellee!" he continued. "I am in serious state of shocking fright, and, trusting you are agreeable to same, proposing straightway deserting sinking ship!"

"Sinking devil!" snapped Mr. Chayne viciously. "We're not sinking—we're shifting our ground. Any fool of a general knows enough to vacate an untenable position."

The face of the dusky Mr. Dass lit up like a smoking lamp.

"You, too, my dear mister!" he said. "That is veree pleasant news for me."

"Well, you didn't think I intended to stay here until Dragour felt in the mood to hand me mine, did you?" inquired Mr. Chayne waspishly.

"Oah, noa, certainlee not," agreed Mr. Dass hastily.

Within the next three hours they were more or less comfortably installed in a set of chambers in Clifford's Inn. With them was Salaman's piping bullfinch, Kotman's talking starling, their manservant, Tollerton —and the macaw recently presented to Mr. Dass by Salaman.

No. 10 Green Square was left in charge of caretakers recommended by Mr. Kiss—an old soldier and his wife.

That Dragour had detailed one or more of his jackals to watch them closely was made evident as their taxicab was leaving Green Square. The driver, crisply instructed by Salaman to make haste, roared his engine up too quickly and achieved a ringing back-fire as he snaked the taxi violently round the corner. At least that is what Mr. Chayne at first thought the sharp report he heard as they slid into the street leading from the Square, but Kotman Dass, shuddering, pointed to the glass of the closed window nearest himself. There was a neat round hole in the center of that window, with innumerable cracks radiating away from it as the spokes of a wheel radiate from the hub. It was a bullet hole—and one freshly made.

"A man fired from across thoroughfare at moment of turning corner," said Mr. Dass with chattering teeth.

"Oh, did he?" gritted Salaman, thrusting his yellow head out of the open window to peer back.

"No sign of him now——" he began, but Kotman pulled him into the car again.

"It is matter of great importance to avoid

receipt of bullet through head," said Mr. Dass, nervously. "I beg thousand pardons for tugging at coat tails, dear mister, but bullet in brains is veree undesirable contre-temps!"

So Salaman had relapsed, snarling softly.

But the comfortable appearance of the chambers took the keen edge off his wrath, and a generous and well-earned whisky and soda completed the soothing of Salaman.

Tollerton, with the aid of supplementary supplies from a Fleet Street restaurant, achieved a quite attractive dinner for the partners and when Mr. Gregory Kiss called in at perhaps ten o'clock his welcome was rather unexpectedly warm.

"So you like these chambers?" he greeted them. "Well, I'm glad of that. It was the only place available in a hurry that I know of just at present."

He leaned forward, cutting off the end of the cigar which Mr. Chayne had given him.

"Now, Mr. Dass, if you'll give me the facts about the attempt on you by bomb, and you, Mr. Chayne, the truth about the shooting as you left Green Square, I can promise you that I'll be listening."

He chuckled a dry, sparse chuckle and prepared to listen.

He did not speak again till both had finished. Then, staring absently at the bullfinch which, being "nervous in new quarters" explained its owner, was perched on Salaman's finger, he spoke very seriously.

"Dragour is becoming anxious," he said. "We three are getting on his nerves and he's hitting out. We shall have to go carefully. He hasn't been ignoring me altogether, either. Look at this!"

He took from his pocket a small round paper-wrapped package. Carefully removing the paper he disclosed a red apple of medium size. It was cut in two, but the halves were skewered together with a splinter of wood.

"It's a regular habit of mine to eat an apple when I get home after a day's work. It seems to clean my palate and improve my appetite—just as many men take a whisky and soda every night for the same purpose. There was an apple on my sideboard when I got home some time ago, and, without thinking, I took it up. I had my mind on Dragour and I was just about to bite into the apple when it struck me that it felt moist—sticky. I had eaten one of the same kind after breakfast and it had been firm, clean and, on the outside, dry. This was the first of the last lot my housekeeper got which was not dry. I wondered why—just as I have long had the habit of wondering at any unusual or unexpected thing—even so small a matter as a sticky apple. I put the apple down, divided it with a knife into halves—like this—and smelled it! Smell it yourselves!"

He proffered a half to each.

"Nothing wrong with it," said Salaman, sniffing.

"You smoke too many cigars, Mr. Chayne. What does Mr. Dass say?" asked the detective.

But the actions of Mr. Dass were sufficiently eloquent.

He sniffed carefully—then suddenly thrust the half apple away from him with a gesture of terrified aversion. His dark skin blanched and his eyes dilated.

"The fruit is not good!" he said, his jaw hanging. "There is faint smell of bitterness——"

Gregory Kiss nodded.

"Faint enough for a careless man to ignore—or attribute to an unnoticed speck of rottenness," he said carefully reskewering the halves. "But the apple is poisoned—eh, Mr. Dass?"

Kotman Dass shuddered.

"Highlee probable, sir, mister," he stammered.

"What poison?" snapped Salaman.

"I don't know—but it will be analyzed to-morrow," said Mr. Kiss. "How Dragour got it put on my sideboard is a mystery at present—my old housekeeper knows nothing of it, of course. But she usually takes a nap in the afternoons and sends the maid out for a walk. But we can trust Dragour to use an obscure poison—probably as quick as it is obscure," stated Mr. Kiss.

He put away the apple.

"I don't want to startle you, Mr. Dass," he continued quietly. "But it's come to the point when it's a race who gets who! If we don't get Dragour soon—he will get us. Just as he's got a good many others before us, no doubt. If you've got any fresh ideas, Mr. Dass, or you, Chayne, now is the time to produce them, for things are getting too finedrawn for delay! I confess I don't know where to start. We can't get at him through his victims—we've worked that plan out. He covers his tracks too well."

Mr. Chayne shook his head, scowling.

"Show me the scoundrel and I'll pull him down, if it's my last action," snarled the little man venomously—but softly, for sake of the bullfinch. "But don't ask me for theories or ideas!"

Mr. Kiss was watching Kotman Dass.

The fat man made an uncertain gesture.

"I beg to say I am weaving new theories—fresh plan of action. Listen, if you please."

He spoke for some moments with an earnestness clearly inspired by fear. His plan was simple in the extreme—but it sounded promising.

The fat man agreed with Mr. Kiss that it was almost impossible to track Dragour through his victims. He explained that it should have been obvious long before—and profusely apologized for not noticing it earlier—that the very first precaution against discovery Dragour probably had taken would be to guard with fastidious care the most likely means of detection and approach.

"He is like officer in fortified camp who guards most obvious and weakest part first, making it perhaps the strongest part. He is crafty snake, and he would know well that some day, from one or more of great variety of conceivable causes some of victims will tell tales. Therefore, Dragour would take great precaution that no victim has anything to tell—that none of them shall have seen him ever nor know where he has his lair—except only few trusted jackals. Soa, that means of attack is veree means above all others most carefully nullified by precaution."

The fat man sighed heavily.

"It is better plan to attack along less guarded approach—to attack weak spot of scoundrel in question, ignoring strong, dangerous approach. His onlee weakness known to us is passion for collection of antique things."

The others were following intently.

"It is veree highlee probable that he is possessor of magnificent collection rare things—for he is undoubtedlee veree rich, veree unscrupulous, and he has special means of stealing, of taking, from victims what cannot be purchased. Certainly such man as that is good customer of antique dealers—sufficiently good to be man well known in that trade. But it is not a trade such as draper—grocer—such business. There is not antique seller at every street corner like public house. The big firms one can count on the fingers of hands—and they are discreet, and well accustomed to inquiries. The police and detectives——"

He nodded his heavy head, forgetting his tremors in his interest.

"I will suggest set of useful questions for you and Scotland Yard friends to use to dealers, if you wish, dear Mister Kiss."

Mr. Kiss appeared to wish it very much indeed, and forthwith the huge Mr. Dass, taking pencil and paper, for he trusted no man's memory but his own, fell to work.

II.

It is true that antique dealers are well accustomed to receive curious inquiries, but it is also true that they are equally well accustomed to exercise a certain business-like reserve and care in answering such inquiries. Few men build up a big business by talking indiscriminately about the details of that business to any casual inquirer.

Consequently, the progress made by Messrs. Chayne, Kiss and, in a hesitant and extremely cautious way, Kotman Dass, was slow. Kotman Dass was keeping his own counsel and to the persuasions of Mr. Kiss returned the same nervous and evasive replies as he gave to the acrid inquiries of Mr. Chayne.

Then, quite unexpectedly, a clew fell into the hands of Mr. Chayne.

The caretaker, left at 10 Green Square by the partners with instructions to report concerning all callers, arrived at the place where he usually reported to Mr. Chayne—an obscure restaurant off the Tottenham Court Road—announcing that a girl had called that morning urgently asking to see either Mr. Chayne or Kotman Dass.

She was in a condition of great excitement and considerable distress and said that she had called to beg their help against an enemy "of whom they knew."

The caretaker explained that her pleadings had been so urgent and pitiful that he had told her to call again an hour later, by which time he would have seen Mr. Chayne and received instructions. Ex-Private Clarke was not a man to act without orders. Many years of prewar army life had very effectually taught him never, on any account, to think for himself.

"What name did she give?" demanded Salaman.

"Elmere, sir. She said she had once been

maid to a Lady Barford and had left her service when she became engaged to Lord Barford's valet, a man called Everitt."

"Humph, we'll test that," said Salaman, and forthwith telephoned to Lady Barford at the great house in the West End which Kotman Dass' friend Doctor Babbaji Chunder Ghote now controlled for the benefit of the drug patients, victims of Dragour, living there.

Lady Barford corroborated the statement, though she added that she had believed the girl to be happily married to Everitt long before.

"I'll see her, Clarke—bring her round here," decided Mr. Chayne, and lighting a cigar leaned back, evidently pleased with himself for showing such caution and restraint.

"A month ago I would have gone round and interviewed her without a thought of possible traps," he said. "But—that won't do with Dragour!"

But ten minutes' conversation with the girl convinced him that his caution had been wasted. She was a little fair-haired thing, who once had been pretty, but now was too thin and worn to be attractive. Her eyes were red and she wore no wedding ring.

She told her story with a quiet despair. It was quite simple.

Her name was Rosalie Elmere and she had left Lady Barford expecting shortly to marry George Everitt the valet. But there had been a series of postponements. Everitt had given up his situation with Lord Barford in order to start a rather mysterious business connected with horse racing—some system of selling information or "tips" to betting people. He was a great friend of Frank Sover, the jockey, who once had been retained to ride by Lord Barford. Gradually Everitt had drifted away from her, said the girl, and then one day she had discovered by accident that he was a victim of the drug habit. Distressed and frightened, she had consulted her uncle, who was butler at Barford House, and he had told her the truth about Sover.

"Yes, yes—Sover was one of the jackals of a certain drug seller," said Salaman. "No doubt he got Everitt started on the habit. What do you want me to do?"

"When the racing business failed George Everitt went back to his work. He got a berth as valet to a gentleman who—takes the drug too!"

Her tired eyes widened.

"George let that slip when I saw him last. I asked him why we couldn't get married—and he said his wages were too low. It was then he let slip that his master paid him partly in money and partly in drugs for his own use. He seemed afraid of his master and——"

Salaman felt a thrill of excitement.

"What's his master like?"

"I have never seen him. I asked George about him. He is very rich. George spoke about his harsh face and black eyes being enough to frighten any one when he is angry."

Salaman's fingers clenched.

He had seen Dragour once for a few seconds—and Dragour's face was cruel and hard and his eyes, too, were black.

Was this employer of Everitt by some fortunate chance Dragour?

"What's his name—the master's?" he asked keenly.

"Sir John Lestern."

Mr. Chayne shook his head.

"Humph! Never heard of him! Where does he live?"

"George said that he had several houses but now he is staying at one of his country houses near Bournemouth—at a place called Studland, at Poole."

"Sir John Lestern, at Studland, Poole—yes, yes," muttered Mr. Chayne, his yellow eyes glittering. "Well, what do you want me to do for you?"

"My uncle told me privately that you and your friend had been able to help Lady Barford against a man who gave her drugs through that jockey, Sover, and—and—I thought you could help me get George Everitt away from Sir John Lestern and into that—that place where the drug takers are cured. I am sure he is a wicked man—he sounds wicked and I am sure George knows it, only he is afraid of him."

Her thin hands trembled over her shabby bag.

"Oh, if only you would, please. I—I have a little money and I would be glad to pay the expenses—to save him."

Salaman stood up. He was convinced now. He was *sure*. This was Dragour's work—and Sir John Lestern was Dragour.

"Put away your money, my dear," he said. "We'll attend to that part of it. And come with me."

"Oh! You will—help me?"

"We will fetch your sweetheart away today!"

She began to cry softly.

Mr. Chayne left her and went again to the telephone. He wanted to get in touch with Mr. Gregory Kiss at once.

She had recovered herself when he returned and there was in her eyes as she entered the taxicab with him a new light—the first faint gleam of restored hope.

It was not to Clifford's Inn that the fierce-eyed little Mr. Chayne rode—nor to the office of Mr. Kiss. He directed the driver to go to Hammeyers'—the biggest antique dealer in London, for he had been advised by one of the assistants at the detective's office to try to catch Mr. Kiss at that place—where, explained the assistant, his employer had an appointment that morning.

Mr. Chayne did not trouble to notify Kotman Dass of this new clew.

It was, he realized, a case for quick action, and, in any case, the mountainous Mr. Dass would never have courage enough to accompany them to Poole, should Mr. Kiss agree that the trail to Sir John Lestern was worth following up.

Mr. Chayne was just in time to catch the detective. He was standing at the door of the antique shop, talking with the younger Hammeyer—a dark, quick-eyed, well-dressed man.

Salaman did not need to leave the taxi. Mr. Kiss saw him as the cab drew up, realized from the little man's imperative beckoning that he was in a hurry, and so left Hammeyer, with a nod, and came to the curb at once.

"Good!" said Salaman, with a vibrant excitement in his voice. "Get in, Kiss. I've got some news for you!"

They directed the driver to go to the offices of Mr. Kiss and drove off, the dealer watching them curiously. But his eyes were on Rosalie Elmere, not on the men.

His eyebrows were raised as he turned back into the shop, and went to a showroom on the upper floor where, in order to interview Mr. Kiss, he had left a customer who had seemed promisingly interested in a pair of K'ang Hsi vases which Mr. Hammeyer had for disposal at the modest figure of three thousand pounds.

The customer was Kotman Dass. And though he did not actually purchase the vases he got on so well with Mr. Hammeyer, in his innocent nervous way, and was so evidently an authority on Indian ivories and goldsmiths' work that he and Hammeyer had been enjoying quite an interesting chat when they had been severed by the arrival in the shop below of Mr. Kiss.

But the dealer's face was absent as he rejoined the fat, dark-faced gentleman studying the vases. He was puzzled. Twice that morning the name of Sir John Lestern—his best customer—had seemed to crop up insistently in conversation. First it had been this dark-skinned student of Chinese porcelain with whom he had found himself discussing, among other matters, the truly enormous purchases of really good things by the wealthy baronet. Then, quite oddly, the name of the same big buyer had seemed to glide unobtrusively into his chat with the detective!

It was almost as if these men had been adroitly leading him on to speak of Lestern.

Hammeyer had been unaccountably uneasy on that point even before that truculent-eyed little man had driven up and beckoned the detective so imperiously—but what made matters far more complicated, he mused, as he topped the stairs, was the identity of the woman accompanying the yellow-bearded little stranger.

The fat, dark-skinned man, awaiting him cut into the dealer's thoughts.

"Pardon me, if you please, dear mister," he said anxiously. "But gentlemen who have just been driven away by taxicab were veree good friends of mine—Misters Gregory Kiss and Salaman Chayne. But they were in company of lady strange to me."

Hammeyer laughed.

"I shouldn't worry," he said. "She was no stranger to me, though I've never before seen her dressed so quietly as this morning. I will answer for *her*—that was Lady Lestern, wife of my best customer and the biggest private buyer of antiques in this country! Your friends are in good company, Mr. Er-um-um, I assure you!"

But the jaw of Mr. Er-um-um had fallen, a look of stark terror had dilated his eyes, and he began to tremble.

"But, sir, mister, this is veree tragic, appalling thing—Sir John Lestern is Dragour! I have sure instinct, result of many inquiries and investigations crying that loudly to me! Oah—where do they goa now?"

He was quaking.

Hammeyer stared.

"And who might Dragour be?" he said coldly, and shrugged. "Aren't we rather gossiping, Mr.—Ah-er-m? What do you think of this Ch'ien Lung incense burner?"

But Kotman Dass, his face ghastly, was lumbering heavily toward the stairs, muttering wildly.

He ignored utterly the dealer—who, after a word, let him go.

"What was that maniac muttering as he went out, Lescher?" he demanded of a slick young assistant.

"He was saying something about somebody being in the jaws of the trap, sir."

Hammeyer shrugged again.

"Mad!" he said and turned into his private office.

Kotman Dass was running clumsily toward a taxicab.

"Oah, they have brains of little children," he complained as he went. "They walk like little innocent things into every snare that is set for them!"

Truly the new line of inquiry suggested by Kotman had proved effective.

During the past few days the industrious investigation and inquiries effected by Messrs. Kiss and Chayne working together, and Mr. Dass, working alone. had gradually inclined them all to the opinion that few, if any, of the private buyers or collectors of antiques in England conducted their collecting on the same lavish scale as Sir John Lestern, or bought with a more reckless disregard for price. That he must be a man in control of very huge sums of money was evident. Yet he was comparatively unknown as a collector—except to the antique dealers and auctioneers. He appeared to detest publicity—and nobody quite seemed to know where his money came from—which is unusual in England, where almost any one of the really rich can be readily labeled with the source of his wealth. A gets his money from coal; B from newspapers; C from shipping; D from finance; E from insurance, and so forth.

But nobody seemed to have the least notion of the source of the huge sums spent by Sir John Lestern.

And, bit by bit, too, it had become clearer that this man resembled in several physical points the man whom Salaman Chayne had seen full face for a minute or so at the secret flat in which Lady Argrath had watched the husband she had ruined commit suicide.

Already looking a little askance at the big buyer of antiques, it needed only the surprising and unexpected confirmation of the girl who called herself Rosalie Elmere to send the impetuous Salaman Chayne and the eager Mr. Kiss as quickly as possible along the new trail.

They were sure that at last they were on the right track.

But Kotman Dass had progressed a little further—working alone.

He was already sure that Sir John Lestern was Dragour—his visit to Hammeyer's that morning had been solely for the purpose of clearing up a small point necessary to complete the complex and almost uncannily obscure chain of reasoning which had led him, well ahead of his partner and Mr. Kiss, to the same conclusion concerning Lestern. And he would have announced his discovery to the two bloodhounds within a few hours.

So that the shock of witnessing Mr. Chayne drive up to Hammeyer's, snatch Mr. Kiss away, and instantly drive off in company with a woman whom Hammeyer said flatly was the wife of Sir John Lestern was stunning.

Entirely in ignorance of the story devised by the woman, as he was, nevertheless Mr. Dass had no doubt at all that Messrs. Chayne and Kiss had been deliberately angled for by one who was probably Dragour's ablest, most cunning aid, and that they had swallowed the bait.

And the sight of both men leaving swiftly in company with this woman was quite enough to convince him, now that he knew her identity, that they were en route to what they believed was likely to be a successful attempt to capture Dragour—but which Kotman Dass knew was far more likely to end tragically for both Mr. Chayne and the detective.

"They goa to pounce upon the tiger unawares, they think—but the tiger is lying in ambush for them!" he gabbled to himself over and over again, as he was driven to the big house for the treatment of drug cases established by Lord Barford and Mr. Leahurst, the millionaire, and conducted by Doctor Babbaji Chunder Ghote.

Kotman Dass was just in time to catch Barford and Leahurst as they were leaving the house. and he poured out his story, almost incoherent with anxiety.

"Sir John Lestern!" Lord Barford was amazed. "You say *he* is Dragour. But I

know him quite well. I have dined with him occasionally—he has visited us!"

He scowled, thinking.

"Yes, yes—it *could* be so! It would account for several things. I remember Sir John had rather an extravagant admiration for the Barford carved rubies—which were stolen and found in Dragour's secret flat!"

He stared with startled eyes at Kotman Dass. Leahurst, the American, broke in sharply.

"Later for that, Barford—forgive me, but we've no time to spare if Mr. Chayne and Kiss are hurrying off into this ambush."

He turned to Kotman Dass, his eyes blazing.

"Where is Lestern?"

Kotman Dass had gleaned that from a dealer the day before.

"He is at a place named Poole, by Bournemouth, either on his yacht or at sea-beach house he possesses at that place," said Kotman.

"We'd better follow at once," snapped Leahurst, and ran down the steps to the great car which stood at the curb awaiting him.

"How far to Poole, Carse? Quickly, man!"

The chauffeur, a taciturn, hard-looking man of middle age rapped out the answer instantly: "A hundred and nine miles, sir!"

Leahurst scowled.

"Too far—it will take too long to go by car. We may fail to overtake them. We must try for a plane."

He ran back into the house and spoke earnestly to Babbaji Chunder Ghote, who nodded.

"I will telephone to airdrome and arrange," said the little doctor imperturbably. "Does Kotman Dass go with you?"

"Yes. He must come—we may need him!"

The knees of the fat man sagged.

"Noa, if you please, dear mister, I am seriouslee unable on account of grave affliction of cowardice from birth——" he began, but Babbaji Chunder Ghote checked him.

"Come into office, Kotman Dass, if you please," he said.

Gratefully the mountainous one did so.

"Pull up your sleeve Kotman Dass. I shall render you temporarily courageous as elephant." His small brown hands were busy at his desk. He dabbed iodine on the fat man's forearm.

"This will not hurt—*stand still, Dass!*" he rasped imperatively.

A second later he had injected what he said, smiling dryly, was "courage to point of ferocity" into the arm of the shrinking Mr. Dass, dabbed the puncture again with iodine, and took from a drawer several objects like glass balls, some green, some red, speaking quickly. Then he rushed the fat man out to the car.

Lord Barford and Mr. Leahurst hustled him, trembling, dazed and apparently bewildered, into a seat and the big machine stole forward. It stopped for a few moments at Leahurst's town house to take up several things the American needed, and then headed swiftly for the passenger airdrome.

The doctor had lost no time.

A machine was awaiting them, her engines warmed up, the pilot on board.

Leahurst glanced at Mr. Dass as the car raced up to the airplane.

"Well?" he said.

The face of Kotman Dass was set like dark iron, as the face of one of those strange and terrible carven gods or idols to be seen in certain temples of India.

"Babbaji Chunder Ghote is wizard—master of strange medicine!" said Kotman Dass deeply. "My brain is clearer than crystal and I am without one tremor of fear! This is how I have prayed ever to feel."

His great hand closed on the American's arm with such unconscious strength that Leahurst winced.

"Dragour has come almost to the end of rope! He is like dying man!"

"Dying——"

Kotman Dass nodded ponderously.

"He will never be taken alive, that man. When he is at bay he will coil and strike like snake. So, like snake, we shall kill him," he said in a hard, equable voice, wholly foreign to him in normal conditions—but none the less dreadful for that.

III.

The fast, droning airplane launched itself southwest like a colossal dragon fly at a speed that promised to wipe out the miles long before Gregory Kiss and Salaman Chayne, by any other form of locomotion, could get halfway. But halfway themselves, a leaky gas-line joint delayed them badly, and to add to the delay the pilot eased

the machine a little as she scythed swiftly over the moorlike plain off the southwestern end of the New Forest, for rolling in from the sea there was a belt of wet white fog. Within a minute he would be maneuvering for a landing, and he was anxious to make no error. Leahurst had quietly whispered of a reward in his ear at the airdrome which sounded extremely well to him.

He landed them well, in a big field some distance north of Poole, but as near as the fog allowed him to land with safety, and after more delay they were running seaward in a car hired at a ramshackle garage in the nearest village.

At the beginning of that long and narrow horn of land known as the Sandbanks, which juts out to form one of the natural protections for the harbor, and is dotted everywhere with bungalows and more pretentious holiday houses, they dismissed the motor and moved forward on foot.

The white fog muffled the sound of their footfalls like wool, and it thickened at every yard of their advance.

The driver of the hired car, well tipped and incuriously willing to help, had given them minutely exact particulars of the position of "Eyrie"—the name of Sir John Lestern's house.

"You'll have to ferry over the channel at the end of the Sandbanks—there's a motor ferryboat there—and land on the end of Studland Beach. Follow the beach right round about a quarter of a mile, and you'll come to the house. It's a lonelylike place—the only house for a mile along the sands. Sir John's yacht is lying just inside the harbor—leastways it was till this mist come in," the man had said, and they found the ferry without difficulty, chugging across a narrow channel where the tide ran in fast but silent under its cloak of fog, showing only an occasional flicker of flying white foam, like a flash of teeth.

The fog was thicker than ever on the opposite bank of the channel and it was not possible for them to distinguish each other more than a few feet away. It was Kotman Dass who turned to the ferryman as he took his money.

"There will be more passengers for you soon, feree man; yellow-bearded one with hot eyes and angree ways—and a lean man, silent and tall. Give them this note when they arrive."

He handed a scrawled warning that the woman was leading them into a trap, proffering a coin with it. The ferryman took both, chuckled and faded away into the fog on the breast of the tide—lost to sight instantly.

Elbow touched elbow as they moved slowly along the sands.

"What arms are you carrying, misters?" Kotman Dass asked softly.

"An automatic," said Lord Barford.

"A Luger pistol and a hunting knife, a thing I learned to use long ago in the West," replied Leahurst.

Kotman Dass chuckled uncannily. He was like a man who is fey—dangerously enchanted.

"Ah, that is good," he said softly.

"What about you? Are *you* heeled, man?" whispered the American, his voice light and taut.

"I am not expert in matter of firearms," said Mr. Dass. "Soa I carry onlee one species weapon—glass tear shells and prussic-acid bombs. Be careful, if you please, not to crush same! It is special invention designed for me by Doctor Babbaji Chunder Ghote!"

They heard Lord Barford shiver in the clinging wet fog.

"Good God! What——" he hesitated. "Let's get on! I'm wet to the skin in this filthy fog!"

They moved on in silence.

But fifty yards on the silence was broken.

A dark shadowy form loomed on the mist before them—and checked, sniffing loudly. It was a gigantic dog, seeming well nigh as big as a pony—and savage, as the low, vibrant, ferocious growl which rolled out instantly, warned them.

They were in touch with the first of the guards of Dragour!

"Quiet! Leave him to me!" said Leahurst softly as the dog came on, and the blade of a long knife glimmered with a faint and livid sheen in his hand.

A low whistle shrilled from somewhere ahead as the dog flew at the throat of the American—and a fraction of a second before the big beast, carefully trained to blind ferocity, transfixed itself. There pierced the fog from close behind the long wild wailing cry of a woman—fog thinned, so that it seemed like the cry of a ghost-woman!

"Dragour! Dragour! Dragour!"

And instantly a man's voice harsh, fierce, imperative!

"Ah, stop that—be still—be st——"

The rest was lost in the death howl of the great dog.

But Kotman Dass was glaring behind him.

The voice of the invisible man in the blank white fog banks behind had been the voice of Salaman Chayne!

The ghostly cry of the woman shrilled out again, this time with a touch of despair.

"Dragour! Dragour! Dragour!"

Then silence.

The three men stood by the writhing body of the dog, staring—listening.

But the beach was blank and blind and there was no sound now but the low beating of little waves on the flat sands.

Leahurst called deeply into the fog.

"Chayne! Kiss! This way—this way!"

Somebody muttered a few yards away and then the fog loosed upon them three more figures—those of Salaman Chayne, Kiss, and Lady Lestern, the woman decoy who, claiming to seek the aid of the two, had all but succeeded in leading them into the waiting grip of Dragour.

But on the very brink of success, as it must have seemed to her, the precautions of Kotman Dass had balked her.

Salaman Chayne and the detective had crossed the narrow channel dividing the Sandbanks from Studland Beach, still fully believing that she was Rosalie Elmere, a ladies' maid and an enemy to Sir John Lestern.

But the ferryman had not forgotten to hand to Salaman the note which Kotman Dass had left—the hasty scrawl warning Mr. Chayne that the woman they were trying to help was Lady Lestern, decoying them to Dragour. They realized instantly that they were on the edge of an ambush.

Somewhere, in the fog-draped, sandy waste ahead Dragour and his people awaited them.

They landed without giving a sign that they had discovered the treachery of the woman, then, well clear of the boat, they gripped her and almost before she realized that she was unmasked the detective had handcuffed her. It was then that she had screamed for Dragour.

But the only answer that came was the sharp death howl of the hound—and, a few seconds later, the voice of Leahurst.

So, with one prisoner, the trackers of the drugmaster joined forces.

The ferryman lurched across from his boat as they grouped.

"Hey, what you doing to that lady?" he demanded gruffly. "That's Lady Lestern and if——"

Gregory Kiss tapped him on the shoulder.

"All right, all right, my man. I am a detective and Lady Lestern is arrested."

His eyes were intent on the ferryman.

"What for? What you arresting her for? She ain't done any harm," continued the man aggressively. Probably well tipped in the past he was in the mood to champion the woman.

But Mr. Kiss turned to the others.

"We can't take this woman with us—she must go back across the water! One of us must go with her, put her in safe hands and come back and follow you up."

"Yes, yes," agreed Mr. Chayne, his eyes on his enormous partner. "You, Dass—just the man."

But Mr. Kiss had other ideas.

He drew Salaman aside, whispering his suspicion that the ferryman appeared to be so inclined, in his ignorance, to champion Lady Lestern, that he might not be quite reliable.

Salaman saw that.

"Yes, Kiss. Two of us will take this traitress across the channel—you and I—put her into safe custody at that hotel on the sand banks—and nip back here. Come on! Get back to your boat, ferryman—unless you, too, want to be arrested for obstructing a detective in the execution of his duty—or half killed for obstructing me!"

Mr. Kiss arranged with the party of Kotman Dass to follow them swiftly, and forthwith he and Mr. Chayne, together with the muttering ferryman and the resolutely silent woman, moved back to the landing stage, entered the ferryboat and instantly were lost in the fog.

"Do not forget the man who whistled for dog," muttered Mr. Dass warningly as the three retraced their steps along the beach. "Highlee probable that he is lurking in fog close at hand listening—it is almost matter of certainty that he overheard screaming of arrested lady—or clamor of man-killing dog!"

"That's true," agreed Leahurst, low-voiced. "Keep clear of each other—walk a yard apart. No use bunching in this fog for the benefit of some hired marksman of Dra——"

Something thudded loudly behind the white bank of vapor and a bullet cracked past them, perhaps a few feet ahead, and went whining out to spend itself at sea.

Somebody was shooting—aiming at sounds.

"Highlee probable onlee one there—the man with late dog," said Kotman Dass, glaring in the direction from which the thudding sound of the pistol report had come. "If there were more they would rush upon us!"

"Well, let's draw his fire and try for him!" whispered the American. "Lie flat—watch out and listen!"

They dropped to the wet sand and Leahurst's voice rose to a shout.

"Ah! On your right, Dass. Quick—there he——"

Thud! Thud! Thud! came the dull reports of the pistol and three bullets ripped over the crouching men. Whoever it was firing from the ambush of the fog, he shot like an expert.

Leahurst gave a sharp cry, as of a man hit.

"Oh-h! I'm done! Look out—*ah!"*

He smacked heavily with both hands on the wet sand, and two more bullets flicked overhead.

"Six shots gone. Now run for him—quick!" breathed Leahurst.

They were up, racing into the fog. Lord Barford almost tripped over the lurking marksman. He was lying flat on the sands fumbling furiously to reload his pistol. Without hesitation Barford dropped on him. They rolled over struggling.

The would-be assassin must have been immensely strong and agile, for in an instant he was uppermost, gripping Barford's throat murderously.

Kotman Dass swung his huge fist against the side of the man's head in a queer, ponderous blow that knocked him senseless onto his side.

Leahurst let out a curt yelp of harsh mirth.

"A bear could have hit him no harder, Dass! That must almost have broken his neck."

"I am veree strong man—onlee unpracticed at art of blows," muttered Mr. Dass.

"Nothing wrong with that one, anyway," said Leahurst with a hard chuckle.

They corded the wrists and ankles of the senseless marksman, drew him under the low sand bank which rose steeply just above high-water mark, and pushed quietly on along the beach.

"A good start," said Leahurst, "but if I know anything about Dragour we're still a long way from the finish!"

He was right.

IV.

"It's a big white house well back from the beach—and halfway to Studland! The only house—you can't miss it if the fog thins!" was what the motor driver had said, and added after a pause, "Friends of their'n, gents?"

"Noa—calling on business only!" Kotman Dass had replied, swiftly.

"Oh, business. Well, they're a queerish lot living there. You want to mind your step!"

And now they were minding it.

A little way on Kotman Dass stopped them.

"If you please, pay heed, dear misters!" he said in a low, level voice. "This is my hour! For little while onward, if you please, obey all that I say. I am fey! That is to say, I am inspired—charmed—I can do no wrong for short space of time. Believe that. There is not time for full explanation. It is gift of gods to me—commonly pusillanimous comic fat bloke—but now fey! It has been permitted that great illumination flares inside skull—my mind is lit up. There is terror prowling, like restless tiger, in the fogs ahead; and death lurking. Dragour is awaiting—and he is anxious. He is in grip of fear—and fear is father and mother of inexorable cruelty and deadlee cunning. Be careful if you please instantlee to obey. Question nothing that I do—I shall not make mistake for I am—possessed. Do not forget, Mister Leahurst—Lord Barford. The fog is like white darkness—and full of traps and perils. Dragour is at bay—to fight for millions and his life—against us who fight for sake of justice. Listen!"

They stood, straining their sense of hearing. But all they heard was the snap of their huge comrade's teeth.

"The ferryman and Lady Lestern have contrived precipitation of Mister and Gregory Kiss into channel!" he said.

"Overboard, d'ye mean, man? I heard nothing!" rapped Leahurst.

"Nor I!" said Barford.

"Nor I," added Kotman Dass. "Nevertheless they are swimming in icy water. Presently you shall see! *I* know. For little space of time I am veree invincible!"

He chuckled cavernously in the sound-muffling fog.

"That is Law of Compensations, misters. Even meanest slug leaves silver trace, as the poet Hodgson has written!"

He broke off, facing along the beach. Leahurst, near to him and watching him closely, saw that for a moment both his eyes were tightly closed.

"There is old-seeming, pallid graybeard approaching. I will deal with this man. Do not move, if you please, dear misters!"

Uneasily, Leahurst and Barford waited—staring at each other and at Kotman Dass. There was that about the huge partner of Salaman Chayne which was uncanny.

A minute later the fog gave up a slender, creeping ghostly form—which, limping painfully, drew close to them, halted with a start three feet away, and began to cough.

They peered close.

The newcomer was an old gray-bearded man, coughing in the wet fog.

"Gentlemen, for the love of God, tell me where I am," he begged, in a cultured voice. "I have been seeking the ferry back to the hotel at the sand banks for the past hour in this fog. I fear I have lost my way."

"Oah, yess!" said Kotman Dass and swung a crashing, dreadful blow to the side of the graybeard's head. He dropped, flaccid and senseless.

"But—*man!* Why hit this poor old creature?" revolted Barford, stooping.

Kotman Dass chuckled and drew them closer to the still, crumpled-up form on the sands.

He lifted the deep wings of the dark Inverness overcoat which the man was wearing, and gripping each of the arms at the elbow raised them so that the flaccid, gloveless hands were lifted for the inspection of Leahurst and Barford.

"Look well!" said Kotman Dass. "This is veree devilish device that once was used by assassins and liers-in-wait in India!"

They peered at the hands and saw that each was fitted with a horrible steel arrangement of four long, needle-pointed, curving talons—so designed that the fingers passed through rings that slid down to the knuckles enabling the four fingers to curve naturally over the steel claws fitting in grooves on the convex side of the claws. With one of these fearful weapons fitted to each hand a man was transformed into a human tiger, lacking only the full strength of the tiger.

"I have seen things similar to this in museums," muttered Leahurst, reaching out to slide off one set of the talons.

Kotman Dass knocked his hand away.

"Oah, be careful if you please, mister!" he said. "These claws are as much fangs of cobra as talons of tiger. Oah, yes. They are poisoned!"

With the nicest care he slid the things off—and pointed out the rubber sac with which each was fitted at the base.

"Full of poison which passes through channel along center of claw to tiny hole at tip! When villain wearing these strikes, the force of blow and action of closing hands squeezes poison jet from sac into deep wounds. Veree abominable device—one little scratch to each of us and there would be three dead men on the sands instantlee!"

With the minutest care he pierced with a penknife the rubber sacs, allowing a trickle of yellowish, oily-looking stuff to drain into the salt-water-soaked sands.

The claws he wrapped in one of his brilliant, bandanna handkerchiefs, and dragging the senseless man to the sand bank above high-water mark, buried the handkerchief, save for one corner, close by.

"Tie his hands with cord, if you please—tightlee, tightlee, behind back, also ankles."

He chuckled.

"You think this is old man, veree aged, because of beard. But he has muscular forearms of man in prime of life, yes, indeed!"

Cording the wrists, they saw that it was indeed so.

"Dragour is striking for life, veree desperatlee, you see, misters. Thoase killers with whom we have soa abruptly dealt were lying in wait for Misters Chayne and Gregory Kiss, to whom decoy woman was leading them. We have saved lives of gentlemen referred—veree much alreadee! But we must trust nothing, nobodee—neither old men—nor women—nor even little child—who seem to stand between Dragour and us three men!" explained Mr. Dass as they moved on.

"But how did you *know* this beast was armed—how could you *tell?* You couldn't see him—even if you could your eyes were closed when you said he was approaching!" said Barford softly.

"I am—possessed—for short space of time," said Kotman Dass gravely. "And it has been granted to me that I should possess curious, inexplicable power to see clearlee sometimes. More clearlee than most men—to be able to see or to sense what other men see not and do not suspect. Perhaps it is matter of intellect—or of knowledge, for I am man of great knowledge—working in subconscious fashion. Perhaps it is peculiar faculty of my brains, my mind, to tune itself unconsciouslee correct for reception of thought waves from minds of those upon whom my brains are concentrated. I do not know. It is whollee conjecture. Sometimes I have thought perhaps it is special gift of God to compensate for the terrible affliction of shameful cowardice that haunts me all my days!"

They had nothing to say to that.

A little way on Kotman Dass halted again, fronting the fog with closed eyes.

"There is no fresh danger lurking between house of Dragour and this place," he announced presently. "Let us make haste."

So they went on steadily, guided through the fog by the glassy tinkle of little waves breaking on the wet sand away to their left.

Ten minutes' walking brought them to a place where the fog seemed thinner and, on their right hand, was faintly tinged with gold.

Kotman Dass stopped them.

"Here is house of Dragour. The radiance of fog is due to illumination from windows. Now we must go veree carefully, if you please."

He took from his pocket two of the glass balls which he had called bombs—one green, one red.

Their pistols gripped ready for instant use, the others followed the fat man toward the yellow glow that lightened the thinning fog.

"It is impossible to wait long or to maneuver slowlee—for the woman with fereeman will telephone from hotel other side of channel to warn Dragour," murmured Mr. Dass, peering anxiously through the swirling scarves of thinning fog.

On their cheeks now was the chilly impact of a little breeze blowing in from the sea, freshening at every moment.

They felt the yielding sand underfoot give place to short, springy turf.

Once the thorns of a tall rosebush caught at and detained Leahurst for a startled moment. They were passing across the garden before Dragour's house.

Guided with uncanny precision by the fat man they reached a flight of low, broad, graystone steps, went softly up these, and found themselves at the front entrance to the house—a long, low stone-built place facing the quiet sea.

As they paused something came padding clumsily but swiftly round the corner of the house, and, swinging through the mist, resolved itself into another of the monstrous dogs, which, without a sound, leaped bloodthirstily for the throat of Kotman Dass.

Two shots shattered the silence as Leahurst and Lord Barford fired almost simultaneously and the big beast dropped, rolling over at their feet.

For a second the trio stood listening in the golden haze. Then the door immediately before them was thrown open and a man peered out.

"Who's there?" he cried sharply, in a voice that was shrill with suspicion.

Mr. Dass slipped his prussic-acid and tear-gas bombs back into their padded cases in his bulging pockets, moving with surprising speed, and shot out a great hand, gripping the man by the throat.

"Be still," said Kotman Dass and dragging him out, beat him heavily with a clenched fist between the eyes and threw him back to the others, limp and unconscious.

Barford took him, running his hands swiftly over the man's pockets for weapons. Leahurst, with Mr. Dass, stepped into the house.

At the end of a big electric-lighted lounge hall, wonderfully, amazingly furnished with antique things so rare, so costly, that they would more fittingly have been in a museum, a man, dressed in a yachting suit, was standing by a table. He was in the act of hanging up a telephone receiver, as Messrs. Dass and Leahurst entered.

He turned to them quickly—to find himself facing the black muzzle of Leahurst's pistol.

Yet it was not at the automatic that he stared. His slightly oblique eyes, dark and glowing, set in a lean, gloomy, wrinkle-engraved face, under a big, bulging unnaturally wide forehead—the brow of a madman or a genius—were fixed on the glass bomb in Kotman Dass' raised hand.

Dragour!

They recognized him instantly from the description which Salaman Chayne had often given them—and a second later Lord Barford, staring past them, corroborated the recognition.

"That is Sir John Lestern!" he said, and swung up his pistol, his genial eyes suddenly hard and ruthless.

Slower witted, less accustomed to handle men of all kinds, and less quick to make decisions than the swift-witted American, yet he was of that slow, stubborn nature which once roused goes coldly, inexorably berserk. He meant to press his trigger immediately he was fully satisfied that his bullet would kill the man at whom it was aimed. That nightmare journey through the fog had set his temper into the cold, iron-hard and utterly complete disregard of everything but his purpose which is characteristic of his race.

But Leahurst and Kotman Dass were thinking a step further than Barford. Though they were as competent as Barford to kill Dragour instantly they desired, if it were possible, to take him alive. There were many victims of his deadly drug to be considered—many of the drugmaster's private records to be secured—if possible the whole history of his crimes against humanity to be learned.

They wanted him alive—for a little while—if they could get him.

And it seemed that they would achieve this. For, even as Lord Barford's automatic swung up, Dragour stepped forward to within a few feet of them, and stopped, facing them with a pallid smile, his arms thrust out before him.

"I had hoped to see my people announcing the death of all you meddlers!" he said, in a flat, metallic voice of resignation. "But it seems that the men I paid to guard me have failed. You need not shoot—or be melodramatic. I surrender!" He laughed sourly. "Are you equipped with handcuffs?"

He shook his outstretched, dangling hands a little, sneering.

Leahurst sprang toward him.

"Noa!" screamed Kotman Dass wildly and snatched at the American even as he seemed to launch himself bodily into a black pit which yawned suddenly at his feet.

A big square of the marble floor had shot silently open, probably impelled by powerful springs, released invisibly by a trigger catch.

But Dragour had acted just a fraction of a second too soon. If he had waited an almost infinitesimal space of time longer he would have had certainly Lord Barford and Leahurst—and, probably, Kotman Dass, snatching to save the others, would have been dragged down by them.

As it was, only a violent effort, impossible to a weaker or smaller man, saved Leahurst. For a ghastly second he leaned over the black gulf, held up only by the grip of Kotman Dass on his left arm. Then, as the fat man clenched his huge fingers tighter, and, leaning back, put forth his whole strength, slowly Leahurst pivoted on his heels and was drawn back to safety.

Twice Barford's pistol roared deafeningly close by them, the bullets spattering against a marble faun at the end of the hall, and they heard him swear softly as all three stepped back from the jaws of the trap.

They hung for a second, in angry hesitation, staring at the pit in the floor.

It was deep, like a well; the dank, salt smell of sea water came up from its depths; and they could hear, far down, the surge and suck and hollow regurgitation of moving waters—as it were some chained, uneasy beast, growling cavernously at its disappointment.

Kotman Dass shut his eyes.

"There is no end to evil devices of Dragour!" he said.

A haggard man, in the prim clothes of a valet came softly from behind a wonderfully embroidered portière curtain, smiling that odd, contented, dreamy smile which characterized the more advanced victims of Dragour's drug. But at sight of Lord Barford, his eyes widened.

"Everitt!"

It was the man who had once been valet to Lord Barford—and whose name and plight had been used by Lady Lestern to ensnare the sympathy of Salaman Chayne.

"Everitt!" said Barford. "Where has that man gone? Quick!"

Everitt smiled slowly, seeming to recognize through his dreadful dreamy indifference, his old employer.

"Sir John has gone to the yacht," he said carelessly.

"Where's the yacht?"

"Lying in the harbor across the sands at the back of the house," said the valet. He

yawned, smiled again, and lounged away—wholly lost in his drug dreams, completely without interest in anything or anybody but himself.

"We must follow him veree quicklee at once," said Kotman Dass, a queer note in his voice. He moved forward round the edge of the pit, the others at his side.

V.

They passed out of the house by a side door left open.

"It is veree good for us all that Dragour expected to-day only two men coming blindly into jaws of trap—instead of three men forewarned and forearmed, as proverb says," panted Mr. Dass as he hurried forward. "If he had suspected trick of Lady Lestern to be discovered he would have prepared differently for us—nothing could have saved us, in the fog. We should have been veree dead men."

There was a note of anxiety in his voice, and a shrill uneasiness. He was moving through the wisps of fading fog very quickly—lumbering at his full speed.

"Oah, misters, hurree if you please," he exhorted them. "For if we do not pull down this man-eater soon then I shall be useless—the power of drug given by Chunder Ghote is waning low in my veins, my heart, and my undeniable hitherto courage flickers like fading candle flame."

It was almost a wail.

Stumbling over the low sand hills, one on each side of him, Leahurst and Barford, both men of that grim stark courage which only sets more stubbornly at every check or reverse, endeavored to cheer him.

"Forget that, Dass—you've been a brave man to-day—nothing can change that. Keep your teeth in it for a few minutes more and we win!" shouted Leahurst. "We're all in it together—three of us—and we shall get this devil yet!"

"Stick it, Dass, man—you're doing fine, man, fine! Stick it!"

A dim memory flickered into Leahurst's brain as he ran—something Salaman Chayne had once mentioned.

"You've played a sahib's part to-day, Dass—a pukka sahib's part! Don't lay down on it now!" he cried.

Strange, how that spurred the failing spirit of the fat man.

"A sahib's part! Oah, yes! Hurree, then—hurree!"

Somebody was shouting out of the mists ahead—and there was a splashing of oars.

Then the pursuers of the drugmaster came out on the edge of the gray waters of the wide harbor.

They pushed out one of several light boats which lay on the sands and rowed fiercely after that sound of splashing oars, peering over their shoulders. They seemed to tear the light boat through the water and almost instantly they caught sight of Dragour alone in a smaller boat pulling fiercely for the long, low bulk of a white-painted steam yacht not far ahead, and momentarily looming larger through the dissolving fog.

From the raked smokestack of the shapely yacht poured a column of thick black smoke. She was lying with steam up, ready to dart for the open sea at an instant's notice.

Leahurst threw away his oars and poured a magazine full of bullets into the boat of Dragour.

But he was too late.

The drugmaster's boat shot alongside a lowered stage and he gripped the rope rail, swinging himself out of the boat onto the step, while the boat of the pursuers was still twenty yards away.

Dragour paused for an instant to make the phantom of a derisive gesture at them, then turned to run up the steps.

But he never moved—for even at that instant there came swaying to the head of that path to safety a bloodstained, yellow-bearded, spectral figure in soaked clothing that clung to its lean frame—a figure that thrust before it two rigid arms, each with a pistol at the end of it.

"Stand! *Stand,* Dragour! Damn you, you're done at last!"

It was the voice of Mr. Salaman Chayne, edged with triumph, bitter with rage.

But the drugmaster was quick.

Deliberately he let the muscles of his legs relax and went crumpling backward into the sea.

"Watch your side!" shouted Mr. Chayne, recognizing the occupants of the boat that jarred bows on to the yacht a second later, and ran across the deck to shoot should Dragour appear on the other side.

But it was many seconds before the drugmaster appeared again on the surface—quite close to the boat.

He did not resist the fierce hands that

drew him to the side—for he was quite dead, though he was not drowned. He had taken some strange sharp poison under water—probably he had been holding it ready from the moment he knew his boat to be pursued.

But this they learned afterward.

Even as they stared at the white face, cruel and evil even in death, the voice of Mr. Chayne, jarred, fiercely triumphant, down to them.

"Stand by! I'm coming down to identify that scoundrel!"

"He—he is dead!" wailed Kotman Dass most tremulously, for the virtue of the stimulating drug was gone out of him. He was himself again—and a terribly frightened man.

"I am glad to hear it!" said Mr. Chayne, with acrid composure, and came down to satisfy himself that it was really so.

For a few moments he surveyed the lax body of the drugmaster in thoughtful silence.

"This will mean the saving of many lives," he said, and turned to the others. "Kiss and I had a narrow escape though," he volunteered with a hard grin. "That ferryman must have been in Dragour's pay. Halfway across the channel he managed to knock me overboard from behind. Kiss guessed that I was unconscious and followed in after me. He got me ashore on the other side, but the woman and the ferryman had got there first. Kiss followed up and got them. He winged the ferryman and caught the woman at the hotel telephone—with the handcuffs still on her! They're both locked up in a room at the hotel awaiting the police. Kiss telephoned to Poole for them."

"But how did you get to the yacht?" asked Leahurst.

Salaman grinned.

"Kiss overheard the woman tell somebody to make for the yacht at once. He guessed she was ringing Dragour—and he picked me up on the beach, just getting my senses back. We took a boat lying there and rowed straight for the yacht. Some of the hands put up a fight—brisk enough to make it enjoyable—but we calmed 'em down. Kiss is no novice with his hands and feet or his firearms either. And I—— Well, we calmed 'em down! They're steady enough now they've realized that they were risking their liberty for a criminal, Dragour, instead of the decent employer which they thought Sir John Lestern was! That's all! I think we can do worse than nip back to the house and see what is to be seen while we've got the chance. The police will be all over the place before long!"

And that is what they did.

The fiery Salaman, his fighting hunger for once temporarily assuaged, was in a cheery mood.

He slapped his mountainous partner on the back as the boat headed back to the beach.

"And how about you, Little One—I'm glad to see you in the thick of it for once!"

"Oah, yes," stammered Mr. Dass. "But I shall be veree grateful, veree happee man to enter fast train leading to home! I have had veree disconcerting afternoon to-day, dear mister."

"Yes, that's so," interrupted Leahurst dryly. "I am ashamed to say how many times he has saved our lives in the last hour or so! But nothing is more certain than the fact that we should have been dead men—and probably buried—long ago but for Mr. Kotman Dass!"

And Lord Barford corroborated that.

"Nevertheless, misters, I am veree uncomfortable now and wishing veree much to goa home to quiet life with birds at Green Square. At hour of lunch time I was extremelee brave—but now I am shocking coward once more—veree sorree and ashamed for that, but totallee unable to continue bravery, if you please!"

"That's all right, Kotman—*I'll* take care of you, old man," said Salaman, wholly genial, even slipping a friendly arm round the fat man's shoulders. "I guess you're all right. I—we all think a whole lot more of you than we tell you—in spite of your—um—affliction!"

"Thank you veree much," said Kotman humbly. Salaman turned to the others.

"So you had a rough journey along the beach, too, hey?"

They described it briefly, Salaman listening in silence. At the end he nodded, visibly impressed.

"Yes," he said quietly, even a little subdued. "You are lucky to be alive. Why, Kiss and I had a joy ride in comparison!"

He sprang out on to the sands.

"But all's well that ends well! Still, I should like to see those poisoned claws! What an appalling weapon! What an escape!"

They headed for the house.

Except for a few servants—all of whom showed signs of being slaves of the drug—nobody was there. Evidently Dragour had expected that his assassins would easily dispose of Messrs. Chayne and Kiss.

Salaman found a change of clothing which he used, and some wonderful champagne, which he promptly commandeered, and conveyed to the big luxurious library where Kotman Dass was nervously watching the others going through the drugmaster's papers.

"Well, Dass, we've got the mainspring of the gang. The rest is nothing—just ordinary police work, rounding them up. Let the police do that, hey?"

The face of the fat man lighted up with relief and happiness.

"Oah, yes, highlee commendable suggestion!"

"As soon as the police arrive we'll hand over to them and—get back to the quiet life in Green Square," promised Mr. Chayne. "Meantime, have a drink. Dragour knew good champagne. It will cheer you up—though there's nothing to be afraid of now."

Kotman Dass obeyed with a marked air of relief.

The wine strung his relaxed nerves. As he replaced his second glass on the table, empty, he was able to muster up a quiet chuckle.

"What's the joke, man?" snapped Salaman.

"Onlee curious reflection occurred, dear mister. Veree funnee thought," said Kotman, laughing outright as the humor of his thought appeared to expand.

"Well, get on—what's the idea?" commanded Mr. Chayne.

"Oah, small matter onlee—it occurred to mind how excessivelee comical that I, Kotman Dass, of all men on earth, should have led soa efficientlee the little expedition of trio along fog-blinded beach of assassins to successful finish!"

His laugh deepened, then broke off abruptly, as another thought struck him.

A look of extraordinary wistfulness came into his dark mild eyes.

"It was veree high, veree wonderful and glorious feeling—not to be afraid of any peril—to invite danger gaylee, to defeat dangerous enemies in spirited fashion. Courage! It is most glorious of all thee gifts of gods!" he said hungrily.

"Yes, maybe—and another glorious gift is brains and the art of using 'em, Dass. You've got that! And I admit that I haven't!"

The hot-eyed, yellow-bearded little man sighed deeply.

"But you have the courage of lion!" Kotman Dass reminded him. "Whereas I am onlee just cowardly fat man—no good!"

He sighed not less deeply than his partner.

Silently they refilled and emptied their glasses.

"Soon the police will be here and we shall be free to return home to Green Square—and the books," said Mr. Dass more cheerfully.

"And the birds!" added Salaman Chayne.

They nodded solemnly to each other, good friends in spite of their failings, comrades in spite of their differences—and above all, a combination which to their enemies must ever be crushingly formidable, but which to their friends could never fail to be a tower of strength.

More stories by Bertram Atkey in future issues.

PASSING UP A BUSHER

LEWIS WOOD, the newspaper correspondent, was secretary of the Columbia, South Carolina, baseball club some years ago. One day the directors of the club asked him to accompany them on an inspection tour. They wanted to take a look at a player whom the Augusta, Georgia, club had offered to sell them for seventy-five dollars.

The inspection over, they would have bought the player but for the violent objections registered by Wood.

"I guess I know a ball player when I see one!" he declared hotly. "This boob will never be more than a third-rater if he lives to be a thousand."

That settled it; the rooky was not bought. And, just to show how good Mr. Wood's judgment was, the "boob's" name is given. It was Ty Cobb.

Dead-loss

By Calvin Johnston

Author of "The Headlight Across the Flood," "Outlawed with Honors," Etc.

About a railroad man whose luck set the law of averages at naught.

THERE had been trouble down the line that pouring April night, and, with eastbound traffic held up, the yard crew came flitting, yellow-and-black ghosts, across the beam of the flooded headlight for a dry hour in the shanty. The last one slipped and fell, and came limping, to be greeted with anything but sympathy, for he was a notorious casualty.

"There is some liniment in the locker," admitted the foreman reluctantly in answer to his lament, "though you will likely fall down and cut your hand on the bottle."

The casualty complained bitterly of his incessant hard luck, till Denny, the old switchman, having taken time to fill his pipe, protested. "You can't sell me on sympathy, y' groaning auctioneer," he said, and added: "Besides, there is a law which makes it unnecessary."

The foreman, polishing an old conductor's lantern which he generally put on sale during dull nights in the shanty, paused, interested. "I have felt there is some reason for not committing myself to sympathy for a Jonah," he said, "but divil a law covers the case that I know of."

The patient with the arnica raised a snarl of ridicule, and stated their attitude toward suffering was general only by hardness of heart, but the foreman silenced him with a peremptory wave of his fist. There was evidently more to this argument than he had supposed.

And as a case in point old Denny cited the experience of "Dead-loss" Carrigan.

During the administration of Hanon as train master on the old P. D., the headquarters town of Barlow was little more than a village. A time of great misery it was for all, the line being new, with a ballast said to be quicksand, so that the track was sometimes off the right of way in slippery weather. In dry weather the division looked like a dust storm three hundred miles long, with here and there a train shaking itself to pieces over the loose ties, and the crew like a troup of Bedouins. And there were not only the bad wrecks, but the bad men to contend with. 'Twas a time of misery in Barlow, but unreasonable as it may seem, the very headquarters of misery was not at the railroad office at all, but at Mrs. McGee's.

"The grief of the road I could stand," Hanon would tell himself at his desk, piled high with reports of accidents or acts of Providence, with maybe a holdup thrown in. "I am not a weakling to turn tail to cyclone and earthquake, if it is in the day's work. But slow assassination," he said, "is undermining my strength."

And husky as he was, the train master

would pale at thought of Mrs. McGee, and seize with joy on the day's disasters in hope of forgetting himself in them.

'Twas at this period, in close connection with wrecks by act of Providence—which caused otherwise would have cost the road-men their jobs—that a man began to appear on the carpet before Hanon with the regularity of clockwork. At the first and second appearance Hanon paid no attention to his name, but, convinced he was not to blame, waved him away. But the third time he took notice.

"The first time you were called in your hand was tied up," he said. "The next time it was your arm. Now you have progressed as far as a crutch—and how do you explain the smashing of an engine pilot and part of a car——"

"Act of Providence, sir," explained the man, who was tall and rawboned, with a long, mournful face.

"So he is still acting for you," said Hanon. "Don't you think you would do better to look out for yourself? I see your name in the conductor's statement is Dead-loss Carrigan."

"It should be De Loss," explained Carrigan, but Hanon said it was as it stood, and Carrigan resumed: "'Twas this way, y'r honor."

"A police-court bird," thought the train master. "Well, I would engineer a jail break to secure trainmen on this road."

"We were picking up a car at Woodgulch," said Carrigan, "and I was on the pilot to make the coupling. And I had lifted the pilot bar when my foot slipped, and I fell between the car and the engine."

"Is that all?" said Hanon with sympathy, and wondering if 'twas not the ghost of the man he was talking to.

"No, sir," said Dead-loss; "the engine rolled me under the brake beam and then hit the car and knocked it off me."

"But the engine was still moving," said Hanon.

"Yes, sir," said Dead-loss, "it came up and rolled me back under the brake beam."

"And you are here to tell the tale?"

"Yes, sir; though it seemed to sprain my ankle some," said Dead-loss.

"All right," said Hanon, "I'll let you off. But get it out of your head that all these accidents are by the act of Providence. That is old stuff to an official. 'Tis carelessness or incompetence."

"I only say act of Providence because it is in the rules," said Dead-loss; "but 'tis hard luck and nothing else."

"Don't argue with me," said Hanon, and yet, when he had sent the man out, he missed him. "Faith, it is a comfort to have some one around in as much misery as myself," he reflected. And it being the hour of six o'clock, when he had to report at Mrs. McGee's, he tried to keep the spectacle of Dead-loss in mind to console him.

A handsome figure of a woman was Widow McGee, still in her thirties, with snapping black eyes and a toss of the head for any one who might think it beneath the best fashion to keep boarders.

"Sure, I feed and lodge the train master and his clerk as a matter of politeness," she told her friends; "for where else could bachelor men find a home in Barlow?" In fact, there was no one else to take them in, and when Hanon came this evening she thought best to remind him who she was for reasons he was not slow to suspect.

"Again she is making a front," he groaned bitterly. "The beef or chicken will be tough, the potatoes half baked, the lettuce wilted." But nevertheless gave her a bow like the King of Spain, and a glad smile.

"You are always too late or too early for your dinner, Mr. Hanon," she said, though he always came promptly on the arrival of number four, "and have only yourself to blame if dinner is too done or too cold. But I am a guest for dinner myself at a neighbor's, and though I should perhaps remain in the kitchen till you are ready to order, still the McGees have their pride, Mr. Hanon, and 'tis not their native courtesy to keep a hostess waiting her meal. So I will invite you to make yourself welcome to the dinner, and for dessert is a peach pie which I made with my own hands as a delicacy for yourself alone."

"A thousand curses," thought Hanon, smiling her a grand good-by, "on the delicacy," and, going inside, sank down at the table, with his head between his hands. He had not even company in misery, his clerk having gone home with a section hand to dinner; of course, the official dignity and necessity for discipline forbade that privilege to the train master.

"I am worse off than Dead-loss Carrigan," reflected Hanon, "who only gets rolled by the pilots of the engines. But I will need more than a crutch to help me around after

this kitchen poisoner has completed her crime."

At that he heard a thump on the porch, and then a knock, and found Carrigan himself at the door. "I have been living with another brakeman who moved away to-day," explained Carrigan, "and wished to see if the Widow McGee would take me as boarder till my ankle gets well."

"I see misfortune intends to refuse you nothing," replied Hanon. "I do not suppose anything I might say would stay your curse." He invited Carrigan in, who, after he had eaten, replied:

"No, sir; there's no use trying to sidestep hard luck. If it is not hash and fried pie, it would be something else like this."

"Such hardihood;" thought Hanon, "makes me ashamed of myself," and bolted his own meal as a man should, and hurried back to the office, leaving Carrigan on the porch.

Only after making her stand in the matter of taking boarders thoroughly understood did Mrs. McGee consent to an arrangement with Carrigan, who for a week thereafter ate his way through the meals with a resignation which was an example to Hanon. At the end of that time he threw away his crutch, and approached the train master on business.

"With the ankle still a bit too stiff for riding the freight cars, I thought you might let me brake on a passenger," he said.

"I will give you the transfer, but remember," said Hanon, "that whatever hard luck has in pickle for yourself, you are not called on to share it with the railroad or passengers."

"I will be the only one to get it," said Dead-loss, and the following week showed up on a stretcher and was carried from the baggage car to Mrs. McGee's. What had happened was this: While switching the passenger train, a switchman had cut the coaches, but not the bell cord, which, whipping through the train like the lash of a black snake, had looped around Carrigan's neck, and hanged him at the end of the car.

"He is better off at McGee's that he is not able to swallow," thought Hanon when he heard of it. "I have often wished for courage to hang myself."

But he was a man of sympathy, and that evening had some consolation sitting by the couch of a man more miserable than himself. "You must be careful that you do not come to a violent end, Carrigan," he warned. "But if you persist after all my warnings, do not involve the P. D. by hanging yourself on a train."

"I wonder what it will be next time," said Carrigan when he was able to talk.

On a wild, wet night about like this Carrigan reported for duty, and deadheaded west to catch his run. As the express messenger on the train was the one who had lent him a stretcher and looked to him on the road, after the last accident, Carrigan climbed into his car and sat talking while the other worked his packages. Near Woodgulch, about fifty miles west of Barlow, the air went on and the two of them pitched along the car with an avalanche of express. "Sure, it is the violent end," reflected Carrigan with curiosity as the train jolted to a standstill. And there was only time to draw breath before there were shots, and again the car started.

"Cut off," said Carrigan. The express messenger did not answer; tumbled down the car along with Carrigan, he had been killed as dead as a stone by the flying lid of the water tank.

"A violent end," repeated Carrigan, puzzled. "Sure, it was meant for me." He straightened up from his friend's body with the latter's .45 and cartridges; the sawed-off shotgun had been thrown from its rack under a ton of express matter.

Carrigan tested the revolver as the engine slowed, and unlocked the doors on both sides; then he put out the lamps, which had held in their brackets. On one side of the car came a shouted command to come out, or be blown out, and Carrigan dropped from the door on the opposite side. Only one of the robbers was there, just rounding the end of the car. Carrigan brought him down and, running clear under the car, stood in the open, shooting it out with three others in the starlight. One robber was still answering when Carrigan had fired his six and was reloading; then he killed this survivor with one shot.

It is not likely that the most beautiful features they ever saw made so big a hit with the paralyzed engine men as the long, bony face of Dead-loss Carrigan showing up in the gangway. "'Twas a violent end," he said, and returned to the express car to lay out his friend, the messenger, decently. They backed to their train, and the dead

robbers were picked up, Carrigan shaking his head in answer to questions, with an air of puzzling over a problem too deep for him.

At the terminus of the division he waited a day for his run, and on his return to Barlow slept for nearly another, reporting to Train Master Hanon that afternoon. When he began again about the violent end, Hanon called attention to the fact that Carrigan himself was not at an end, and for the first time he seemed to believe it.

"Now," said Hanon, "I admit that the cause of your escape lies deeper than I can fathom. 'Tis not enough merely to say that your luck has changed."

"Sure they must have been shooting at me with blank cartridges," said Carrigan.

"I will call your attention to the evidence," replied Hanon, and led him across the tracks to the express car on a siding. "Now," said Hanon, "you will notice the outline of a man, head and shoulders, sketched on the side of the car; it is sketched in lead, and if you will take up the position you held when facing the robbers—— That is it. Now you fit exactly into the pattern of bullets fired at you during a fight in the dark. How do you account for it all?"

Divil a bit could Dead-loss explain, and Hanon resumed: "First, we will go into the problem with logic: your escape might be accounted for because you were born to be hanged. But you have already been hanged once, so that eliminates logic," he said.

"If that is logic, 'tis eliminated as far as I am concerned," agreed Carrigan.

"Have you been doing anything that would deserve the working of a miracle in your behalf?" asked Hanon. "You have not. And I repeat that your escape is not to be explained by change of luck; it was beyond the power of luck, or chance, to protect you. Here is a mystery," said Hanon in a whisper, "but I will solve it. I will watch, for somehow I feel it concerns myself as well as you." There was, in fact, a secrecy and disturbance in his manner that Carrigan commented on.

" 'Tis the food I get," said Hanon in confidence. " 'Tis undermining me; sometimes I do not know whether I am coming or going, but can still run trains on the P. D., where they come and go as they please. And I will watch your career in detail; if more marvelous escapes happen to you, I will have a lead; if you are killed, of course I will know it was all a flash in the pan, and need not bother."

With that he went back to his office, and though not bringing up the subject again when they met, he glanced significantly at Carrigan, as though in possession of a clew.

So he was, too, but keeping it profoundly secret. The clew had come to him while working late at night, with a gasp of astonishment; and he built up his theory, but said with wisdom: "I will analyze and develop this theory, and at the same time wait for still another test; it is only the law of averages which can rescue Carrigan from the jaws of death once and again. And though he has had some misadventures, to be sure, his luck has not been so low that he should now be practically immortal in order to strike an average. No, he must have some dreadful experience at hand which would reduce his luck to zero if the average was not raised by near miracles. And the dreadful experience waiting Carrigan can be no other than marrying the sexton of the kitchen, Mrs. McGee."

Point by point he developed his theory, recalling that the widow had sympathized with Carrigan for his lame ankle in the first place, and had later supported his head when he brought it in nearly wrenched off by the bell cord. "And now they laugh and talk together on the porch in the evening," thought Hanon. 'Twas the laughter of Carrigan he resented, and the expression which had ceased to be mournful and taken on one of hope since his escape without injury from the robbers.

"And I let him get away with his act-of-Providence excuses for accidents, and let him into my boarding place because of his companionship of misery," thought Hanon. "Now he has turned against me, and laughs even over the McGee dinners. He is going to marry her."

After that he kept a clouded eye on the couple, and sat on the porch along of them in the summer evenings. And Carrigan, with not an injury in weeks, was full of jokes, Mrs. McGee laughing her soft laugh with a note of sentiment which Hanon was not slow to interpret. 'Twas little he said as he leaned back and smoked, though by peering he could sometimes catch the messages darted at Carrigan by the bright black eyes.

"I believe Carrigan is in love with her,

and does not know what he eats," reasoned Hanon, and reflected with satisfaction that a short six months would bring him down with a galloping dyspepsia. "And I can take pleasure in his company again as a man more miserable than I am," said Hanon. " 'Tis certain if they are to be married I may soon expect the law of averages to give some brilliant exhibition of good luck in his honor."

'Twas not long till he had due notice of such an exhibition in his office one evening. It happened Carrigan was on the road, and he had purposely lingered on the porch to sound Mrs. McGee diplomatically on the situation.

"I trust," said Mrs. McGee after Hanon had craftily introduced the name of Dead-loss Carrigan into the conversation several times, "that Mr. Carrigan will not meet up with more accidents while he still limps on his ankle, and his neck is hardly knitted after the lynching by the bell cord."

" 'Tis not likely. I may assure you, in fact," replied Hanon, "that he is positively immune from railroad accidents. Nothing can happen him more than what is already destined."

"Is it a riddle?" asked Mrs. McGee with interest, but was strangely impressed by the solemn gesture of Hanon.

"I am not one to examine with impudent curiosity into the secret laws of human affairs," he answered; "but the destiny of Carrigan has been revealed to me. He will escape bruised bones and broken necks; as for the other troubles in store, he may survive them also, being a strong man who has no more internal organization than a crocodile. He can eat anything. 'Tis little we know."

Mrs. McGee did not pursue the subject, but instead observed: "I am thinking that yourself does not eat enough, Mr. Hanon; you look run down; your nerves twitch and your face is haggard. I wish you would build up an appetite before body and brain give way entirely. And now you are seeing things in the destiny of Carrigan."

"To build up an appetite here would be the death of me," reflected Hanon, but only answered politely lest he be turned out in the street. After he had returned to his office to forget in work the pangs of indigestion the first hint arrived that his theory of Carrigan's immunity from injury was being put to its supreme test.

The dispatcher came in and stood before him, tearing off a bulldog bite from his plug of black Navy. "Far be it from me," he said, "to interfere with the operating policy of the P. D., but I rise to a question of order, when, after I have checked number two with seven cars out of Norton, six cars arrive at Climax, and the station in between reports one car on fire from end to end, hitting up the back track down grade to Norton at sixty miles an hour. By luck no train had left Norton after number two, so the fiery chariot has clearance. But what I want to know," asked the dispatcher with indignation, "is how I am to dispatch one train in two directions. And, mind you, this is not a car dropped or broken loose from the rear of number two, but a baggage car from the head end."

"It is Dead-loss Carrigan," said Hanon, putting his hand to his head, and in that moment gaining a reputation for second-sight that became a legend. " 'Tis Carrigan running back—perhaps he has forgotten something." And, his body and brain ready to give way as Mrs. McGee had predicted, he hurried in to the dispatcher's instrument to piece together the reports from conductor and agents as they came in.

That night number two, eastbound passenger, Carrigan brakeman, had left Norton, with Climax next stop, as the dispatcher had said. Passing the intermediate station of Woodgulch, fire was discovered at the head end of the second car from the engine, having caught from the waste packing of a hot journal, and a stop was made, but too late to control the flames, now spreading under the floor and to the end. This car was a special baggage carrying four blooded horses, who were already excited by the smell of smoke, and had crippled the groom in charge; he had crawled out of the stall where he had fallen, and opened the end door, which Carrigan had shut after dragging him out, to prevent a draft.

The conductor was up in the air, for he could not try for Climax without streaming the flame along his train.

"There is only one thing to do—cut out that car front and rear," he decided at once, "and open the side door for the horses to jump."

"And break their legs and necks," said Carrigan. "Listen; seconds count." In ten seconds he told what he had in mind and

when the conductor threw up his hands the engineer gave him a curse and jumped for his cab.

"I'll back you, Carrigan, conductor or no conductor," said the engineer. Job or no job, he was not a man to see four horses burned alive or jump from the car down the embankment with the certainty of broken legs. 'Twas only a few turns of the wheels to back the train into the wood siding above Woodgulch, and cut it off from the burning car; then out again on the main with an almighty kick to send the car with the screaming horses and a trailing red burst of flame rocketing down the long grade.

Carrigan, leaning on the brakehead, saw the Woodgulch operator at his table already reporting him to the dispatcher. "Has another train already followed out of Norton?" grinned Carrigan. The engineer said not. "'Twill test the law of averages for Mr. Hanon," said Carrigan.

Though the smoke and flame were at the rear of the car, Carrigan heard one of the horses scream, and peering in, saw a crimson tongue licking through the corner. "Shut up!" he roared, going in. "I am with you, and did you ever hear of a Carrigan that was burned?" He slapped their flanks as the car rocketed on, and stamped his coat down over the flame in the corner. "Three miles—we will make it with ease," he told them and, stepping out, peered at the landmarks which he knew as well under the stars as under the sun. Far off he saw the ghastly shine of a headlight, and began tightening the brake chain; the car rolled out onto the old, narrow wooden bridge spanning the Tarantula River, and stopped. And as it did so, the west wind caught up with it, sweeping the flames up and along the length of the car, a red winding sheet for those within.

Carrigan threw open the side door on the downstream side and leading one of his wild charges up, ran him to the door with a kick in the ribs. Rearing, pawing like one of the monsters of the old days which magicians rode in Ireland, the great black body shot out and disappeared. "I have heard that horses led from a fire will run back," said Carrigan, "but I arrange better than that." Two others followed. The fourth cowered on his haunches, terrified; divil a step would he take toward that door with the sparks blowing past; even with his eyes bandaged he poked his muzzle under the man's arm, trembling.

"Well then," said Carrigan, "death loves a shining mark, and I will give him something to shoot at. I have a fair average at being wrecked and hanged and burned; I am game to try the drowning." And, clinging along the horse's back, dug his heels into the quaking ribs. "Wurroo!" he yelled in its ears, and the man leaning from the engine which had been sent down from Norton to kick the car back from the bridge, saw the double monster shoot from the flaming wreck and sink, pawing down into the blackness of the pit.

All the rest of that night did Train Master Hanon wait at his office in suspense to hear the result of this test—whether the law of averages would save Carrigan, or whether it had drowned him, and there would be no necessity to bother about it.

At daylight came a wire from Norton that a passenger brakeman leading four horses had showed up looking for breakfast.

"It is settled; they are to be married," said Hanon, and went home, where body and brain gave way, and he sank down on the porch.

"Sure, I knew how it would be," the Widow McGee was saying when he came to on a couch in the parlor. "But how foolish of you, my dear man, to fight shy of the question till you were worried out of your wits. If my hearing had not been so sharp on the question," she admitted with a blush, "I might not have understood at all when you came babbling of marriage and fell down on the porch. Now if you will please let go my hand I will cook you a big breakfast, and see you eat it."

"No!" exclaimed Hanon, now roused to apprehension by the threat. "No food; eat I cannot!" But Mrs. McGee stood back, laughing, her hands on her lips.

"'Tis little I could pretend to knowledge of the world if I did not know that a man troubled in love has no appetite. But peace be with you." And 'twas wondrous to see the laughing look change to one of tenderness. "I love you, too. Why, I could not," she went on, changing to laughter again, "see so fine a gentleman become a dead loss."

Hanon listened to her busy in the kitchen. "Dead loss," he repeated. "'Dead-loss' Hanon! Can it be true?" He found that he did not have to pull himself together, but

rose lightly to his feet, and presently she caught him peering into the kitchen.

"So soon?" she laughed. "Well, there is no way keeping a man away from the cooking," and chatted on till Hanon in peace of mind had eaten like a starving man.

"The idea," said Mrs. McGee across the table, "of a big, strong man like you being so bashful."

"Well, I paid for it in misery," answered Hanon, "and expect to make up for it in happiness. 'Tis the law of averages."

"Ye were saying of Mr. Carrigan last night when I interrupted?" she asked with some curiosity.

"'Twas the raving of famine," interrupted Hanon. "It is not myself—Bedelia——"

"Biddy, Michael," she interrupted.

"Mike, Biddy," he responded with the first laugh in months. "As I was saying, 'tis not myself would try to explain the luck that fellow has. Listen to this," and he told as gay as any tragedian the last night's adventure of Carrigan.

"'Twas only his saint saved him," she said when he ended.

Hanon nodded, but in the secret mind of him considered Carrigan a dead loss to himself.

Another story by Mr. Johnston in the next issue.

A GREAT MERCHANT'S ADVICE

REPRESENTATIVE MARTIN B. MADDEN of Chicago, one of the most powerful men in the national councils of the Republican party, is also one of the most successful business men who ever went to Congress. He began his career at ten years of age as water boy in a stone quarry, and he is now head of several big business concerns in Illinois.

He is always interested in young men who are trying to get to the top of the ladder. Speaking of ways to go up, he said recently that he had never seen better advice than that embodied in a few sentences of an address delivered to a graduating class by the late Marshall Field. Here it is:

"If you are going in for business careers, young men, secure positions with the largest concerns you can find. Then give yourselves as little anxiety as possible about salaries or wages, and do not allow yourselves to dwell too much upon the probability of a quick rise to the managership. Let your every impulse and every exertion be to acquaint yourselves fully with the methods and system of the house. Study its policy and its accounts, as far as they are accessible to you, for the purpose of understanding the profit-and-loss accounts and how they occur. Then, in five or six years, unless you are convinced of a live, open prospect ahead of you with that house, look for a job with a small, growing establishment; for that is where you'll find the heartiest appreciation of your knowledge of up-to-date systemization and enterprise, which your few years of experience with the great establishment ought to have given you."

BIG MEN HARD UP

SENATOR WILLIAM E. BORAH of Idaho rides from his Washington home to the capitol and back again every day in a treet car. On a senator's salary of $7,500 a year, he says, no man with a family can keep an automobile and stay out of debt.

Senator Robinson of Arkansas, who had lived with his family in a modest hotel, started out last fall to find an apartment in an apartment house. When he was asked $225 a month on a year's lease for a five-room affair, he retired to his old hotel accommodations, breathing mighty denunciation of inflated rentals in the city which he helps to govern.

There are, however, a great many wealthy men in the Senate who own automobiles and buy or rent Washington houses. The late Franklyn K. Lane, secretary of the interior in the Wilson cabinet, used to insist that no man should go into American politics without first having laid by a competence. Most political positions in this country are grossly underpaid.

The Sable King

By Burton L. Spiller

The story of a fox who fought for freedom and won it with the help of his enemy.

WITH his hand upraised to snap the patent lock on Number 17 Yard, Jim McElwood paused and listened intently.

From the little hut in the center of the twenty-foot pen came faint whimperings and subdued mewings not unlike the cry of very young kittens. McElwood deposited the basket of chopped meat on the ground and leaned forward as he tried to separate the sounds into their component parts and guess thereby at the number of the new arrivals.

Be it known that Labrador Queen VII., winner of firsts at each of the numerous shows in which she had been entered, accredited by fanciers, furriers and sportsmen throughout the land as being the most perfect silver-black fox in existence, had whelped during the night. The whimperings were the hunger cries of her offspring, crawling blindly about her beautiful body, taking their first lesson from Mother Nature in the rugged school of life.

"Sure, 'tis a whoppin' litter," McElwood whispered. "Will ye hear *that* feller growl now? It's a buster he is, I'm thinkin'. He's got his meal ticket and he's goin' to hang on to it in spite of hell and high water. It's lookin' at 'em I would be in a minute if it wa'n't against the rules to disturb her. She might take it into her head to kill 'em all. Well, Queen, it's nothin' you get to eat till night, but you'll be gettin' a plenty then."

Picking up the basket he tiptoed softly away and stopped at the next yard. Opening the gate he stepped within the inclosure. A magnificent black male fox advanced daintily to meet him, pointed ears erect and delicate nostrils sniffing for a hint as to the contents of the basket. McElwood deposited the allotted portion of meat in the pan and stood back while Labrador King ate. "A beautiful boy ye are," he crooned, "and it's a happy one ye ought to be, seein' as how you're a father several times over this mornin'. It's a shame ye can't go in and see the missus and the kids for a few minutes, but rules is rules, me boy. You, bein' a heathen, might decide to gobble up about five thousand dollars' worth of tender young meat for your breakfast so, father or no father, here ye stay in your own pen."

Labrador King paid no attention to the words but after the Irishman had left him he listened to the sounds emanating from the neighboring hut. McElwood was right. It was a "whoppin' litter." The fluffy balls of rusty black squirmed and struggled fretfully about their recumbent mother and snarled puny battle cries as they were pushed away by others of the family.

But one pup neither fretted nor snarled. A full third larger than any of the others he had already secured the best position and no amount of pushing by his brothers or sisters could move him from it. To him life was already a serious business and now, with ears flattened back, forepaws diligently kneading the warm breast, his little jaws

steadily drew forth the fluid that meant life itself.

Not only in size did he differ from the others, but in color as well. Their coats were a dull, lifeless black that, while giving promise of the beautiful things they might become, yet lacked beauty in themselves. His fur glistened even in the semidarkness of the hut. It was a rich, luminous black with all the sheen and luster of the fur seal combined with the velvety softness of the sable. This was enhanced and accentuated by a mere pin point of white at the very tip of each hair. He was a thing of beauty even at birth.

McElwood had spent a long apprenticeship in black-fox farming. In the four years he had spent in charge of the Maine State Fox Farms he had seen hundreds of pups, yet he gasped in surprise at the sheer beauty of this animal when, three days later, while Labrador Queen had slipped out into the yard for her double portion of meat, he had cautiously lifted the hinged cover of the hut and peeped in at the litter.

"It's a fine-lookin' pup ye are, me boy, and a credit to the old folks," he crooned. "Not that they're carin' a cuss whether it's red, white or blue that ye are, bein' uneducated as to the merits of the primal colors. Sure, and I'm telephonin' the directors this very mornin' to come up and have a look at ye."

The next day they came: sleek, well-groomed men of affairs. They enthused over the litter and especially over the sable pup.

"A freak," they pronounced him, "but one that might well become the progenitor of a new and valuable strain. Give him every attention," they told McElwood, "even if it becomes necessary to sacrifice one or two of the others in order that he may receive proper nourishment."

"Sure, it's little need ye have to worry about *him*," the Irishman answered. "That boy has a seat at the head of the table and stays with it from soup to nuts every meal and to the divil wid the expense. Look at him, will ye? Look at the coat of him, for all the world like a black setter trailin' a pheasant through a frosty brier patch. When he's a year old ye can name your price for him—and get it, too."

Which prediction came nearer to being the truth than are many prophecies. The following autumn, in company with others, the sable pup was exhibited at many New England fairs and drew the attention of fox fanciers throughout the whole country. "Maine's Sable King," they called him, and a king he was through every fiber of his magnificent body. With all the grace and beauty of the wild, yet with none of its furtive shrinking, he faced the ever-changing throng before him, clear eyed and calm, giving glance for glance with a dignity that made him regal.

Thousands of women, passing by the cages that contained his brothers and sisters, accorded them only a brief glance, but they stopped involuntarily before the Sable King. Invariably their eyes filled with tears and as invariably they made the same exclamation: "Oh! The poor, dear thing."

But the Sable King heeded them not. Despite the fact that behind him were seven generations of ancestors that had been raised in captivity he was as much a creature of the wild as though his nostrils had never scented man. Healthy, well fed and physically content, there had come to him from other generations the heritage of the open spaces. When the north wind blew he showed signs of restlessness. With head held high, ears pointed forward and sharp nose outthrust, his delicate nostrils drew in the crisp air in long, wistful inhalations.

Then, after a time he would curl up in a ball and lie unmoving, his somnolent eyes opening occasionally to gaze, unwinking, toward that far, unknown country of his dreams. And, of all those that saw him thus, only the Irishman understood.

"Sure, boy, it's seein' the snow-covered hills of the North, ye are, and feelin' the wind sweep down across the barrens while the trees snap and bend to the breath of it; while I'm thinkin' of a little cabin in the County of Cork with a bit of a pig rootin' round it and the chickens and geese not mindin' at all which side of the door-sill they're standin' on. There's green shamrock on the hills and lakes a-gleamin' in the sun down in the valleys. Ah, me boy, home's where the heart is and you an me's a divil of a long ways from that place, I'm thinkin'."

Then the King would turn his head majestically and look into the man's face. Creatures apart were they by every tradition, by the hundreds of years of enmity in which man was the hunter and the other the quarry. Despite the inbred instinct of

the wild that taught its children that the scent of man was the harbinger of death, there yet existed between them an indefinable, intangible bond. Neither recognized it or admitted it even to himself yet each was aware of its existence and, as time went on, the bond grew stronger.

Of the seventy-two foxes in the yards at the farm the Sable King was the least domesticated and yet it was he alone that McElwood dared handle with impunity. The lightninglike fangs of the others had left many livid scars on the knotted hands that had inadvertently strayed too near their shrinking bodies but the King had never yet snarled fear or anger at the hand that fed him.

Nevertheless the King had one mortal enemy. One of the incumbrances wished on the farm by its zealous directors was a big, brindle brute of a dog whose ancestry, though known, would have found little favor in the eyes of a dog lover. His father was a cross between a timid pointer and a big, Southern hound that had been sold North because of his varmint-hunting proclivities, making a detestable mongrel with the dull, heavy head of the hound and the slim, graceful body of his pointer mother. He, in turn, had mated with an outlaw shepherd who had so far forgotten the sovereign power of man that she made a practice of killing his sheep at regular intervals.

There could be but one possible outcome of such a mating, and this dog was the exemplification of it. A full fifty-five pounds in weight and every ounce concealing a different streak of meanness, he tried the very soul of the Irishman whose assistant he was supposed to be.

No man could look at the dog without an open sneer and this had gradually shown its effect on his already vile disposition. Man he hated, collectively and individually and, had it not been for the yellow in him that was considerably more than a streak, he would have been a real menace to the human race.

He had cultivated a snarl that was blood-curdling and a ferocious bark that could be heard for miles. Using these at the slightest provocation, he had created his sole recommendation for the position he now held. If hideous threats of mayhem, decapitation and other equally unpleasant operations would frighten off midnight marauders, then this particular fox farm was amply protected.

"Satan" was the name the fat director had given him when he had brought him, securely muzzled, to the farm and given him into the Irishman's charge.

"Satan, is it?" queried the irate McElwood. "Sure it's an appropriate name you have given him. He looks like hell. And what breed do you call it?"

The fat man chuckled. "It is a—er—recent importation we have made as an additional insurance on our investment," he announced. "He is a new strain."

"That's what I'm thinkin'. A new strain on me that's already got more than I can stand. It's a strain on the nerves just to look at him. Take it away, please. Take the divil back to his home."

Again the director laughed. He was too good natured to take exception to the implied suggestion, but he was obdurate and, in the end, Satan stayed.

Immediately he became the terror of the farm, and the half-tamed creatures that inhabited it fled in wild alarm at the sound of that bellowing roar. Even the King trembled, but he did not run. He alone detected the false note in that mighty volume of sound.

Satan might indeed be a demon to the smaller and weaker creatures but he was a mongrel cur and his was a mongrel's cowardly heart. In the wilds, when that craven note entered into the voice of one of Nature's children, whether that creature were the tiniest mole burrowing in darkness below the grass roots, or the biggest of bears treading heavily above him, it meant death. Nature had no place for a weakling. Always there waited some valiant-hearted enemy, listening for that craven note and, when it came the end was swift and certain. For only thus, by the prompt elimination of the weakling, could the race survive.

The meeting between the dog and the King was memorable in that it caused an incident which neither ever forgot, nor did McElwood, who witnessed it.

On the second day of his stay at the farm, Satan entered the main inclosure, a nine-foot, woven-wire fence that encircled the smaller yards. As he trotted belligerently down the lanes between these individual yards he was quick to note that the inmates frenziedly rushed into the safe shelter of their huts at sight of his awesome form, and

his cowardly heart thrilled at the sight. When one old dog fox, nearly domesticated, hesitated for a moment he flung himself bodily against the restraining wires and emitted a bloodcurdling roar. Its effect was instantaneous and every fox, save one, fled precipitately.

That one exception was the King. He stood in the center of his yard with head erect, an alert tenseness in every muscle, poising as lightly on his feet as a runner waiting the starting signal, every nerve and fiber atingle, and yet gloriously unafraid.

It was thus that Satan saw him, and the stout fence quivered with the fierceness of the impact as he hurled himself against it, while the air reverberated with his unearthly clamor. Surprised and chagrined that the weaker creature did not flee before his vituperative threats he thrust his coarse muzzle as far as it would go through the woven meshes of the fence and emitted a series of snarls that had often proven effective.

McElwood, searching frantically for a fence stake or some other weapon equally familiar to the hands of an angry Irishman, paused abruptly as he caught sight of the King.

Slowly, calmly, with never a hint of threat or displeasure in his manner, he was advancing regally toward the raging dog. Instantly the snarling became more vehement but now even the man could detect the uneasy note in it and his wild, Irish heart jumped ecstatically.

"It's your number he's got, ye domned yeller cur," he cried. "Ye've called him all the fightin' words in your dictionary and now that he's comin' over to ask ye what ye mean by it, ye're scared. Look at the tail of ye! Bechune your legs, already. Ye'd like to run but ye dassn't."

McElwood was right. Satan was worried but he had gone too far to withdraw and he still had a measure of confidence in the efficacy of that fierce growl to avert disaster. Too late he discovered his mistake. The King's head was within a foot of that ugly muzzle, and still advancing, when the dog suddenly decided it was time to retreat. And in that instant the King struck.

With a deadly accuracy and speed that nothing but a rattlesnake could have equaled, his head flashed forward and his needlelike teeth closed over the nose and lips of the brute before him. Satan had already started his backward leap and, as those white teeth drove their length in his tortured nose he gave that leap new impetus. The effect was all that the Irishman or the fox could have desired. The momentum of that backward surge drew the King's slim muzzle through the mesh of the fence half the length of his powerful jaws. His fangs were still deeply imbedded in his adversary's nose, and now the restraining wires, pressing firmly about his upper and lower jaws, prevented his opening them even had he been so inclined.

The dog, in a perfect frenzy of fear and pain, redoubled his efforts to escape. Something had to give way. The wire fence would have held an angry bull; the teeth of the fox were only a little less powerful than tempered steel and so it was the tissues of nose and lips that parted.

Satan fled precipitately, clamoring his woes vociferously to an unfeeling world. The Irishman jeered at him openly as he ran promiscuously about, seeking some cover where he might hide from those countless pairs of eyes that were now watching him from every hut entrance.

"Maybe now that'll be teachin' ye to keep your nose out of other folks' business," McElwood called after him. "It's close ye come to losin' it altogether and divil a bit would I cared if ye had. Ye'll not try that trick again, I'm thinkin'."

In this, too, he was right. Satan's nose never again, by any chance, came within a foot of the wires and an even greater distance than that marked what he considered the safety zone when he passed the King's inclosure. Always when he saw that regal animal his eyes widened and glowed with a baleful light. In his cowardly heart he knew he would never dare wage a battle against that adversary when the odds were not decidedly in his favor but if opportunity ever offered, when he could catch this particular fox at a disadvantage, he would know in full measure the sweetness of revenge.

And, despite the fact that each runway was inclosed with a woven-wire fence nine feet in height and the entire colony surrounded by another fence of the same material, the time came when the King stood outside, as free as the glorious north wind he so eagerly sniffed. That time came, and, later, came the opportunity of which Satan had often dreamed in his hours of restless slumber.

It happened on a night in late September. One of those terrific thunderstorms, that are so characteristic of northern Maine in the early fall, swept over the valley. Driving low over the western mountains it came in cyclonic fury. The rain was torrential. Crash after reverberating crash shook the earth while the echoes beat back and forth deafeningly between the towering hills.

Nearly all the other foxes crept tremblingly into their huts, but the King sprang lightly to the top of his and stood there, statuelike, watching the storm. His was an outer yard and but a scant four feet separated it from the outer fence. Between the two fences at this point a lone pine tree stood, its mighty, storm-tossed branches beating rhythmic time to the wild, staccato music of the tempest.

Standing alone on the little man-made hut, in the wild fury of the gale, the King knew a calm, satisfying content. The hammering blast of the wind, the sting of the rain, driven slantwise with bulletlike velocity, the creaking of tortured branches and, dominating all else, the blinding, incessant flare of the lightning with its nerve-shattering accompaniment of thunder filled him with wild exultation.

This was nature as he knew it; as he had known it for countless ages past. Nature in an exuberant, boisterous mood it is true, but a kind, loving mother notwithstanding. And the King, despite the encompassing strands of steel, despite the seven generations of captive forbears, was still Nature's child.

Suddenly, as he stood gazing upward, there came a swift, bluish flash—a blinding redness as if the world were wrapped in seething flame—a rending crash above him as of wood riven asunder and then, in that instant, quietness and darkness: the quietness and darkness of eternal night.

It was the cool north wind that revived him and for a time he lay panting, drinking in the sweet oxygen in deep, thankful inhalations. He was aware of a peculiar numbness in his muscles, an extreme lassitude so out of keeping with his usual vital energy that he struggled to his feet in alarm and looked about him. The storm had passed. It still rumbled faintly in the east but overhead the stars were shining. In the west the low-hanging moon sailed in silvery splendor over the treetops.

Gazing at it, the King was dimly aware of a change in its appearance. Always before, unless nearly overhead, its face had been crisscrossed by heavy wires—the wires that barred him from freedom. Now it was unmarred. Its soft white rays fell calmly on the surface of the yard and left no zigzag pattern of prison bars.

Then the King saw what had hitherto been unnoticed; cleft cleanly from the trunk by the lightning bolt, one of the giant branches of the old tree had fallen across the wires beneath, crushing them to earth. To the King, only, Nature had bestowed this boon that was more to him than life itself. He stepped daintily up on the fallen limb, traversed a part of its length until he was outside the inclosure, sprang softly off on the dripping grass, free, as Nature had intended all her children should be.

For a time he stood there, scenting the air for a trace of his one known enemy, but Satan had noisily begged for admission at McElwood's door at the first heavy crash of thunder and was still hidden beneath the calmly sleeping Irishman's bed, tremblingly aware of the faint, grumbling mutter of the departing storm.

As silently as a shadow the King crossed the long meadow that lay between him and the heavy wood instinct prompted him to seek. Halfway across, a fat meadow mouse, foraging for beetles, fled, squeaking in fright. Without conscious thought the King sprang sidewise and snapped up the fleeing rodent. He was not especially hungry but the morsel of warm flesh awoke vague, dormant memories and gave him a pleasantly contented feeling.

Reaching the timber at last his attention was instantly arrested by a faint nibbling sound and an odor that was strangely familiar. McElwood raised Belgian hares as a hobby as well as for the considerable profit it yielded and, when the wind was in the right quarter, the King had often had their scent wafted to his nostrils.

This particular odor had an added hint of the wild in it but the fox placed it instantly as something highly edible and he turned toward the sound. A few feet away he espied the quarry. The tremendous wind had broken the top from a thrifty young poplar and hurled it to the ground. A fat, old, snowshoe rabbit had found it and now sat nibbling contentedly at the tender tips.

Stealing a step nearer the King cata-

pulted forward. There was a frightened squeak, a lightning snap of those slim jaws and again silence. But, as the King stood over the limp body, he knew a perfect happiness. For him life had no terrors. He was free, the master of his own destiny. Food there was in plenty for those with the skill to acquire it and he had proved his ability.

He ate the rabbit leisurely, then hunted out a decaying stump. Springing upon this he sniffed the wind for a moment, turned about several times and then curled up in a compact, furry ball. In another minute he was asleep.

When McElwood found the broken fence, in the early morning, he made haste to telephone the directors. That they were annoyed by the loss was evident. They arrived, some three hours later, in a big, high-powered machine and brought with them a man truly remarkable by the contrast between himself and these sleek, well-groomed men of affairs.

He was a little, shriveled old man with the most remarkable set of white whiskers McElwood had ever seen. They seemed to defy the law of gravity, standing straight out from his face, hiding every feature but the very tip of a particularly red nose and two little deep-set eyes that darted furtively here and there and saw everything while apparently seeing nothing. His clothes were overalls and frock that once had been blue but were now the dull, lifeless gray of weathered oak. Under his arm he carried a burlap bag and the contents, although not bulky, appeared heavy. When he moved about they gave forth a metallic, clanking sound.

"Mr. Sims, Mr. McElwood." The fat director did the honors. "Mr. Sims is rather a celebrity where fox trappers congregate. The best in New England, you know. We have arranged with him to catch the Sable King for us."

McElwood laughed. "It's an airplane you'll be needin', Mr. Sims, I'm thinkin'. Them pipestem legs of yourn ain't equal to it. He's farther away now than you could walk in a week—and still goin'."

"You're a liar," said Mr. Sims, so matter-of-factly that McElwood, hot-headed Irishman that he was, believed it implicitly. "That fox ain't two miles from here and won't be for a month. He's got to get used to bein' free; learn to take care of himself before he leaves the country. He'll come back to the yards more than once, most likely. He'll be lonesome for a while. I'll have him in less than a week."

"Do that," said the fat director, "and we'll add another fifty to the hundred we promised you. It will be cheap at that. We value that fox at five thousand dollars."

"I'll get him," Mr. Sims informed them, "but it'll take about a week. I want to make sure of him. Get him takin' my bait reg'lar and then I'll nail him. Don't want to make a slip up on it. Just pinch his toes a little and he'd light out of here as if the devil was after him. Well, I'll look round a bit."

Forthwith Mr. Sims deposited the burlap bag on McElwood's steps and then divested himself of his faded frock, thereby exposing to view an undershirt that would have put to shame a tropical sunset for vividness of color. He went directly to the yards and surveyed the broken fence for a moment, noted the position of the fallen limb and other, seemingly unimportant, details. Then, turning, he surveyed the distant landscape.

"Um-hm," he said. "Followed that swale to the meadow, of course; easiest walking. Then across the meadow in a straight line; that's the way they travel. Hit the woods about there, I reckon. I'll look it over a bit."

Mr. Sims entered the wood within thirty feet of the spot where the King had killed the rabbit. His diligent eyes noted the little bundles of torn fur instantly and he crossed over to them. He regarded them idly for a minute, stirring one with a toe, then poked it tentatively with a clawlike finger. "Um-hm," he breathed, "Um-hm." Then, so silently that he might have been a thistledown, he drifted cautiously down wind.

A hundred yards he floated, then turned obliquely deeper into the woods. Again he turned and now, like a shadow, he glided back into the wind, his little eyes seeing everything in photographic detail.

A moment later he stopped. The midday sun, riding high and clear in the heavens, struck full in a large, weathered stump a hundred feet ahead. The stump was crowned with a furry ball; a glistening ball that reflected the light with all the sheen and luster of the fur seal. Mr. Sims watched it intently for a long time. Then he breathed a long sigh; a sigh of satisfaction. "Um-hm," he whispered. "Um-hm."

Two hours later the King awoke. There was a faint, pleasurable odor in his nostrils, suggestive of some hitherto unknown delicacy. He uncoiled himself deliberately and rose to his feet, stretching as he did so, much as a cat does when rising from its bed. The King was not especially hungry but as he sniffed the freighted air he felt a little anticipatory thrill.

Straight to a little juniper bush he followed the scent and located it immediately as coming from a newly excavated hole beneath a sheltering branch. Then, instinctively, he paused, tensely alert. His nose told him that here was some inanimate thing that was distinctly edible, a dainty titbit that required no delicate stalking and lightninglike spring to capture. It was his for the taking, and yet—elusive, almost imperceptible, there was the slightest taint of man smell in the air. He could distinguish it as a separate entity from the more engrossing odors into which it had miraculously merged—but it was there.

Another hour of clear sunshine and it would have vanished forever, and the story of the Sable King would have been not worth the telling.

Hitherto, with the exception of the last few hours, since he had been weaned, he had known no food other than that prepared by the hand of man. It had been served to him in dishes handled repeatedly by human beings. The taint of their bodies and breath had polluted the very air he breathed, yet he had eaten the things they placed before him, eagerly and without fear.

Now, in less than twenty-four hours since he had become free, he found himself rigidly alert, instinctively hesitating to accept a tempting delicacy to which clung the almost imperceptible odor of man. Man! The only species of the animal kingdom that might, by the wildest stretch of imagination, be called a friend.

It was the wraiths of a thousand ancestors, long since returned to the dust, crying to him to shun this scent that meant death. And, strange as it may seem, the King heard.

He side-stepped gingerly and approached the bush from another quarter. Pausing on a little knoll he peered sharply at the small mound of new earth from whence came that engrossing smell. Strips of salted fish, roasted over an open fire and rolled in comb honey, to which a few drops of oil of anise had been added, was the lure that enticed him. The saliva dripped from his bright red tongue as a flaw in the wind brought the delectable odor home more strongly to his nostrils.

The King advanced, cautiously, scanning every bit of ground before he ventured to set his dainty foot upon it and, at last, came within reaching distance of the prize. Delicately he raked one of the tempting morsels toward him and ate it with avidity. Another and another followed and nothing happened, excepting that his appetite was increased rather than satiated.

He stepped out boldly now and devoured the delicacies as he found them, even pawing the dirt away from one piece which his sensitive nose told him was buried in the freshly turned earth.

When the last fragment had been devoured he hunted, assiduously, in that vicinity for more but, failing to locate any, departed, with the coming of night, to the meadow. Here he stalked mice, with fair success, until the eastern sky grew pink. Back in the woods again he found another stump and was soon asleep.

He awoke at dusk, and memory surged, instantly, within him. Again he went to the juniper bush. Like the widow's cruse, the supply was again replenished, and again the faint, man odor was discernible, but the King paused but momentarily. The spicy tang of the savory fare was in his nostrils and he advanced boldly. Again he ate it all and nosed among the leaves for a few scattered crumbs.

The next night and the night immediately following, he gathered his bounty from the laps of the gods. On the morning of the next day it rained, a steady, cold downpour that drove him from his unprotected stump to the shelter of a crevice in the rocks far up on the hillside.

In the early evening the rain ceased; a light westerly wind lifted and scattered the clouds, and bright stars twinkled in the rifts thus formed. As the first one peeped forth the King emerged from his lair and paused to sniff the clean, fresh air.

Instantly his ears snapped forward, the heavy brush of his tail lifted and increased in size perceptibly. He stepped forward eagerly. There was a mincing, springy lift to his forefeet, an electric quality in his bearing that enhanced his natural beauty a hundredfold.

He was not only a King but a lover for, borne on to him on the wind, mingled with the spicy aroma of the fallen leaves and the freshly scattered pine needles, came the age-old message of another Eve strolling in the Garden; the age-old vision of a fairy-footed vixen dancing enticingly before him over snow-covered, moonlit barrens: dancing evermore alluringly and drawing him ever on and on.

Thus, boldly, unquestioningly, the King followed the Lorelei to the juniper. The scent was stronger here and with it was mingled the odor of honey. He paused a moment, sniffing, and then advanced. A slender twig, hitherto unnoticed, was looped across his path. Unhesitatingly he lifted a delicate forefoot and stepped over it.

There was a sharp snap, a shrill tinkle of moving chain, a wild, futile leap to elude the trap: another and another, each more frenzied than the one preceding it, until the flying grapple hooked securely on the springy branch of a stunted hemlock, and progress suddenly ceased.

The Sable King was no longer free. A number 2, double-jawed trap gripped his right forefoot well above the toes, and no power within himself could shake off that thing of steel that instinct told him meant death. Poor King! How many of your kind have felt that sudden sting. How many, many thousands, have waited, like you, through the interminable hours of a never-ending night; waited for the coming of dawn—of man—and of death!

In the early half light of another morning the fat director was awakened by the insistent ringing of his telephone and, in answering it, heard McElwood's voice on the wire.

"It's a doctor we're needin' up here this fine mornin'," that cheerful Celt informed him. "That professional trapper of yours caught one damn' fine cold yesterday, paddlin' around in the rain all day, and it's pneumonia he's got this mornin' or I'm a fool. He's that hot I could fry me bacon and eggs on him and save washin' me skillet if I had the time to do it. He's crazy as a bedbug, hollerin' for some one to help him bring in his fox and frettin' for fear ye won't pay him the hundred and fifty ye promised him. He'll be needin' that same to pay his funeral expenses if ye don't be after gettin' here quick with a doctor."

The director's question informed the listening operator just how that party felt regarding capital and labor.

"Has he got the fox?" he asked.

"Sure, he says he has. He's ravin' about never missin' one in twenty years. A divil of a mess it is if you're askin' me, what with him flat on his back for a couple of weeks, most likely, the King with his foot in a trap somewheres and me not knowin' whether he's in this county or the next. It's reinforcements I'm needin'."

"I'll be there in two hours if I can pry a doctor out of bed at this time in the morning. We will find the King easily enough; let Satan hunt him up. Be ready when I get there."

McElwood fed his foxes, swearing methodically the while. "Shure, it's several kinds of a domned fool you were, King, to stick around here when the whole world was before ye. For why didn't ye get out of here? Serves ye right, if it's caught ye are, for not havin' brains enough to beat it. Now you'll be losin' yer liberty, and a foot, too, most likely."

Back again, in the cottage, he swore as steadily and with even more fervor at the delirious trapper. Swore, even as he applied the hot fomentations to the laboring chest and cold compresses to the fevered brow.

"Domned if I know why it's pourin' more water on you, I am, and you that soaked only yesterday that you looked for all the world like a kitten that had fell in the rain barrel. Still, I suppose if I let you dry out, and a sudden breeze should spring up, you'd blow out through that window as easy as a leaf out of the dictionary. Sure, you're that thin that I'd set your weight somewhere between six and seven pounds lighter than a straw hat. How you could catch a cold of that size, and bring it home, is more than I can understand. I wonder, now, how would a good, stiff, shot o' whisky suit ye? Sure, I'd give it to ye in a minute if I dared to—and had it."

Thus he attended the sick man, pausing momentarily to snatch a bite of cold breakfast and to carefully wipe the oil from the rifling of a .303 Savage, his one prized possession and a weapon that was inconceivably accurate in his steady hands.

"You're wonderin', I suppose, what I'm takin' a rifle for to bring in a trapped fox," he told the tossing trapper. "For your information I'll tell ye that it's open season

on deer now. I never get what I'm huntin' for, so maybe if I start out lookin' for a deer I'll find your domned fox. The old darlint shoots a bit high the first shot, with the oil in her, which you know as well as me if you know anything, which you don't this morning. Where's that hellhound? Come out from behint that stove, ye black-faced son of the Old Boy himself, and eat this breakfast that ye don't deserve."

When the fat director arrived with the doctor McElwood's cottage was in order and the hot cloths had not once grown cold on the patient's chest or the cold ones warm on his brow. The medico nodded approval as he shook his thermometer. "You have adopted the proper method," he told the Irishman. "I would say, offhand, that we will pull him through very nicely. Now, go get your fox. That seems to be the all-important thing just now with the three of you."

Twenty minutes later, Satan, making a long cast well ahead of the puffing director and the silent McElwood, suddenly paused and swung about to face a low juniper a few yards to his left. For a moment he hesitated, the hair rising stiffly on his back, then, with a villainous bellow, he plunged toward it.

McElwood saw him as he jumped, and snapped out an order to his employer. "There's your fox, I'm thinkin'. Get a move on ye now, or there won't be enough of his hide left to make a flyin' jib to a wheelbarrow." The last words were flung over his shoulder for already he was running in long, springy, strides toward that distant point where he felt a tragedy was about to happen.

But, to the King, the tragedy had already occurred. When the double-jawed trap had snapped about his delicate forefoot the instinct implanted in him from a thousand progenitors had whispered that this thing was death. His first frantic plunges had told him there was no escape. The upper jaws had bedded themselves in the soft pad of his paw, the lower ones fitted gently over the toes and prevented any possible chance of gnawing off these members when they had become sufficiently numb to render the amputation painless.

The King was a captive. That he knew, and no power within himself could remove this thing that spelled an end to his existence.

Through the long hours of the night he waited, inactive, denied either movement or the luxury of curling into the warm ball that retained the bodily heat, and when at last the sun crept over the horizon he was stiff and cramped in every muscle, weakened by the night's interminable hours and the unaccustomed fast, yet when he heard that malevolent roar from his old enemy he was instantly alert and whirled, like a flash of light, to face the oncoming charge.

It was thus that Satan found him as he surged in that mad rush through the tangled juniper brush. In that moment the King was majestic. Facing death, fettered by the trap, cold, cramped and weakened by exhaustion, he yet faced his sworn enemy in what he knew to be his last battle, with a cool, calculating calmness that was superb.

In the instant that Satan saw him thus he hesitated and again the old thrill of fear flashed over him. Then, by some unexplainable sense, he knew that the King was at a disadvantage and, with another roar, he hurled himself forward for that revenge he had waited so long to attain.

Nothing but the very fierceness of that charge saved the fox from instant death. The grapple, attached by a short chain to the trap, had anchored itself firmly in the hemlock and there was but a scant yard of chain. When, at the end of his mighty leap, the wolfish jaws of the dog crunched down on the bone and tissue of the fox, the heavy impact of that swift-moving body accomplished that which the King's weight alone could not do: the paw slipped, unharmed, from the clinging jaws.

Instantly Satan regretted his hasty attack, for those needlelike fangs were everywhere about his body, cutting to the limit of their length at every lightning stroke; but his own jaws were clamped, crushingly, over the back and short ribs of the fox, and he knew if he could but maintain that hold for a minute the victory would be his.

He was not alone in this knowledge. The King became suddenly aware of that deadly, numbing pain and, doubling back on himself, buried his teeth in that nose that, although healed, was still very, very tender.

A thoroughbred would have borne it for another moment while he crunched the harder, but Satan was a cur and he whimpered with the agony of it. Then, at a twisting wrench at that tortured member, he opened his jaws and howled even as he

had howled that other morning when the King had punished him thus.

When those jaws relaxed the King gave another vicious twist and leaped free. He had no desire to continue the battle. His hind quarters were as leaden weights and only sluggishly obeyed the brain that willed them to move. One forepaw was badly swollen and ached excrutiatingly now that the blood once more circulated through it. He was exhausted and well-nigh done to death, yet he faced the big dog fearlessly, ready to resume the battle if that vicious brute advanced an inch.

At that moment there came to his ear the crashing of brush under the feet of hurrying men and a quick glance showed him McElwood running toward him and, some distance behind, another larger and badly winded runner.

Man! Man the killer! All the old primal instinct flashed back upon him. Man! Death! The Sable King turned with what speed his spent muscles would lend him and fled.

Had they been alone Satan would never have risked another encounter but the proximity of man gave him courage and he dashed toward the slow-moving fox. When his huge jaws again closed on the quarry the end would come quickly and he rapidly cut down the intervening distance.

It was then that the fat director looked up. What he saw was his famous fox, free, running away from a dog that frothed and drooled in his eagerness to be in at the death and, as that glorious fox made his last, gallant effort for life, all the director saw was so many dollars slipping from his grasp. Gone were the chances of raising a new and valuable strain: gone also the thousand or more dollars the pelt would bring. All gone!

But no! Not quite. There was one chance left. "Don't let him get away," he gasped and the Irishman heard. "The rifle, man. Shoot."

McElwood stopped, square-footed, and the rifle leaped to his shoulder in the graceful flash of the accomplished snap shooter. The flat crash of dense nitro snapped on the frosty air and, fifty yards away, Satan somersaulted cleanly as 165 grains of lead tore through his heart.

"Nice work," McElwood whispered as he turned to face the director, then, lifting his voice he shouted. "It's a bum shot I am, this mornin', what with the runnin' and all. Sure, it's the dog that I killed. Now what do ye know about that?"

The fat man stopped and wiped his perspiring brow. "I don't *know* anything about it," he shouted back, "but there's no law in the United States to prevent a man from thinking what he damn' pleases."

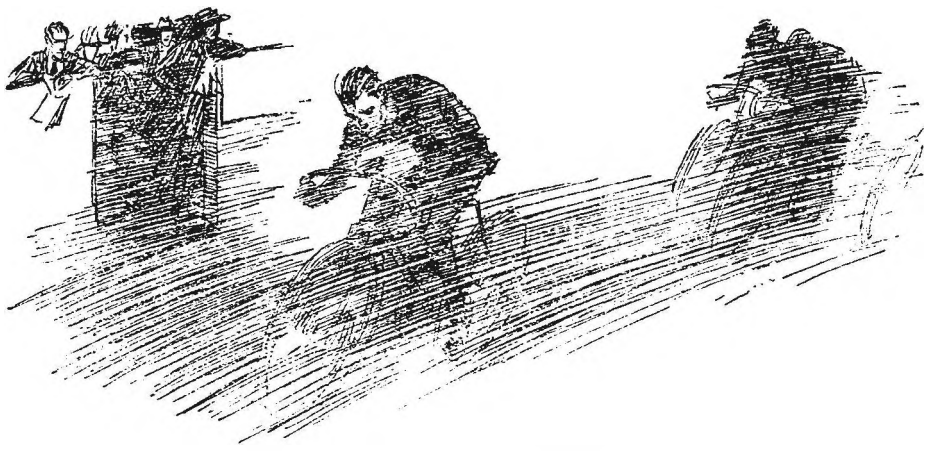
Out of sight among the trees the Sable King paused and listened. There was no sound of pursuit. As he stood there he could feel the blood pulsing strongly back into those numbed legs as his heart pounded energetically from his exertions. Then a breath of wind fanned him. He turned and sniffed it eagerly. It was the cool north wind.

A CONGRESSMAN'S REGRET

A. J. MONTGOMERY is a twenty-four-karat, burr-accented, blue-ribbon, canny, money-respecting young Scotchman who has not been many years out of his native highlands. He was whiling away a hot afternoon last summer in the National Press Club in Washington playing bridge whist, with Congressman Albert Johnson of the State of Washington, as his partner. Johnson was the father of the anti-immigration law which forbids any country to send into the United States more than three per cent of the number of its people listed here in 1910.

As the game progressed young Mr. Montgomery's spirits sank. The congressman's poor playing, he claimed, was costing him much money. The lid blew off when, on a bid that was doubled and redoubled, Johnson made an egregious misplay. Montgomery, his Scot's burr more and more pronounced as he talked, was unrestrained in his denunciation, addressing his lawmaking partner as a dumb-bell, bone and moron, winding up with a violent stream of pure Gaelic.

Johnson, who had listened silently several minutes to this tirade, finally interrupted. "I can see now," he said, "I didn't make that immigration bill strong enough."



According to the Dope

By Raymond J. Brown

Author of "The Wise-cracking Champ," "The Red-coated Horseman," Etc

A great many people who have never seen a six-day bicycle race erroneously imagine it a dismal, monotonous grind. The author of this story knows better, and has proven it ably in fifteen exciting pages of sporting romance.

LONNY ADAIR had trouble in his eye, and any time that was so, trouble was scheduled to spread far, wide and handsome.

I caught the storm signals when I spotted him coming down the street, and I'd have ducked him if he hadn't seen me before I had a chance to lose myself in the crowd. He swooped down on me and backed me up against a store window.

"Do I look like a sucker?" he demanded, poking my chest with his forefinger in time with his words.

"*I* ain't said so," I told him, trying to be diplomatic without being untruthful.

"Do I look like a guy that was born simple?" he went on, proving that he wasn't looking for answers but just had a load on his chest that he wanted to talk off. "Am I a soft slob that any feller can twist around his finger? Am I the kind you can tell to roll over and play dead? Am I a mark?"

He had a voice two tones lower than a foghorn and twice as powerful. Folks passing along the street began to walk slow and to turn their heads to get an earful. Of course they all knew Lonny—the "Biking Viking," the "Handicap King," the champ of champs at the grand old game of pushing a racing bicycle around a wooden saucer. Pretty near everybody in the world knew him, leastwise everybody that ever saw a sporting page here, in Europe or in Australia, and he was broadcasting his questionnaire, remember, in the city of Newark, which is the center of the bike-racing world and where he was as familiar a sight as the Abe Lincoln statue in front of the courthouse.

"Well," declared Lonny, paying no attention to my efforts to have him soft pedal and so keep whatever it was that was eating him from becoming public property, "well, that's what Eddie McGee thinks I am—all them things. A boob, a sap, a dumb-bell, a fathead, a simp! That's what he takes me for, dog-gone him, the bull-necked, tobacco-eatin' bum! Big, fat spider! Sittin' around all day with nothin' more to do than smoke two-bit cigars and admire the di'monds on his dirty mitts, and then havin' the nerve to tell them that's makin' his bread and butter for him what *they're* to do!"

"You've had another row with Eddie, eh?" I murmured, beginning to see some

light. Eddie McGee was the big boss of cycling, general manager of the tracks and the guy who signed the checks. Him and Lonny got along swell—about like a prima donna and the manager of an opera troupe.

"I'll *kill* him!" bellowed Lonny, proving he could do it by taking me by both shoulders and shaking me till my eyes popped. "I'll—I'll quit ridin' and put his game on the bum! I'll—I'll—— I just been up to his office," he told me, calming down a little as he ran out of threats. "He sent for me; said he wanted to talk about the New York six-day race. I figgered he wanted to talk money, so I breeze in all set to turn the screws and squeeze him for a decent contract, but—oh, my glory!—what do you think he tries to hand me?"

"I couldn't guess," I said. "I know Eddie's pretty tight, but——"

"Oh, hell!" wailed Lonny. "It wasn't a matter of money. It was a partner he had for me."

"Partner?" I repeated, puzzled. "Why, I thought that was all fixed. I thought you——"

"So did I!" he cut in savagelike. "I'd picked Peary la Roche, that swell Belgian boy I win with in Paris last year. I thought I wouldn't have to do nothin' but tell Eddie I wanted Peary for a partner and that he'd say, 'O. K., kid. Go to it.' Why, Peary and me would stand the race on its ears! We'd make a runaway of it. But, darn Eddie McGee's hide, what d'you think he had framed up for me? He wants me to ride with young Christy Bunting!"

"Christy Bunting!" I yelped, seeing at last the reason for Lonny's balloon ascension.

"Can you beat it?" he demanded. "Expectin' me to ride with that skinny-legged, half-dyin' kid! Where do we *fit?* Why, the boy wouldn't last a day! He's a nice kid as far as I know; maybe he's willin' and game enough; but where's he gonna get the beef and the backbone to go the six-day route? He'd prob'ly die on my hands—even if I did all my own ridin' and most of his. He looked fast enough in the amateur races last season, but he's green, and he ain't got the strength. Why, he's only eighteen years old and still an amateur. Where's he get off to be ridin' with me? Mind you, 'Windy,' there ain't a thing I got against the boy personally—but why does Eddie McGee wish him on *me?*"

"Search me," I said.

"Do you wonder I'm sore?" Lonny asked me.

"No," I said. "But what's Eddie McGee's idea? What in Pete's name is he thinking about?"

"Huh!" grunted Lonny. "He handed me a great spiel. He said the bike game's goin' sour for lack of drawin' cards among the riders. He said the public's gettin' tired of seein' me and Kramer and a couple of others chase each other around the tracks and is howlin' for some new blood. Christy Bunting, he said, is the best prospect he's seen in years, because everybody remembers what a great rider Tom Bunting, his pop, was years ago, and the kid's got personality—whatever that is."

"Eddie McGee knows something, at that," I murmured thoughtful. "The kid *has* got something that makes him stand out like a white lighthouse in the fog. It ain't his riding, but remember how the crowd used to hurray him last summer whenever he'd sprint——"

"That don't win no six-day races," growled Lonny. "The bird *I* want to ride with is the one that's got personality in his *legs*. But anyway Eddie McGee figgers if the kid can make a decent showin' in the Garden grind he'll be all set to be flashed as a new star on the outdoor tracks next season."

"And he's picked you to make the showing for the kid?" I said. "Eddie McGee's full of prunes! I thought he'd been in the bike game long enough to know you can't build up your star performers by press-agenting them, like in the movies. You may get away with it for a time, but the old stop watch picks out the stars in the end."

"Just what I told him," said Lonny, "only, of course, not so polite. But he wouldn't listen to me."

"What are you going to do about it?" I asked.

"What can I do?" Lonny asked back. "The only choice he gave me was take it or leave it—ride with young Bunting or stay out of the race; and after all, ridin' a bike's the way I make my livin'."

"Oh, what do you care?" I asked him. "As long as Eddie McGee pays you for your trouble——"

"Huh!" interrupted Lonny. "That's just it! The bloated-up bloodsucker ain't even

goin' to do that! Listen to what he offers me: If young Bunting and me win the race —get that, Windy, it's the year's best laugh —if we win, we get five thousand bucks—two for him and three for me. If we finish without winnin', we get a thousand apiece. And, if we don't finish, we get nothin'. That's outside of the prize money, and you know how much of *that* I'd ever get with young Bunting tagged onto me! Can you picture it? I ride my head off for maybe three days, and then, if young Bunting quits, or dies, or somethin', as he surely will, and there don't happen to be another team split up so's I can grab a new partner, I'm through! Ain't it sweet!"

"Eddie McGee's one tough bird," I remarked, shaking my head.

"It ain't the money that gets my goat either," said Lonny. "But I did want to cop that race and bust 'Swede' Hansen's record of six six-day wins. It—it's pride, I guess. I'd hardly have raised a kick if Eddie'd insisted on me teamin' up with some guy that might have a chance—but this Bunting kid! Phew! He might better make me ride the race—alone!"

"That just about sizes the situation up," I admitted. "Christy Bunting can't ride fast enough to keep himself warm."

"Come on," said Lonny suddenly, grabbing me by the arm. "We'll go up to Eddie McGee's office. Maybe the both of us can do somethin' with him."

II.

If there were any names that Lonny forgot to call the big chief of cycling in the next five minutes they were names I never heard of. I dropped in my oar when I got a chance, but to all of our ravings Eddie McGee listened with the air of a man who'd spent his life hearing insults and had learned to like them. A queer duck, that same Eddie McGee! A little, fat, moon-faced, bald-headed, pink-and-white guy, with tiny hands and feet and a fondness for sporty clothes, loud neckwear and jewelry. He looked soft as mush and as open as a ten-acre lot, but was really a hard, cool and slick proposition. I've known him for going on thirty years, and I haven't fathomed him; nor has anybody else that I know of.

He listened to Lonny, blinking at him with his mild blue eyes, puffing at his cigar and shaking his head to indicate that there was nothing doing about his changing his mind about Lonny riding with young Bunting.

At last Lonny lost his goat.

"All right!" he roared. "You're gonna make me go through with it, huh? Well, I'll fool you! I'll ride with that Bunting kid—and I'll win the race with him! I'll win, by gum, I will, if I've got to go without sleepin' and eatin' for the whole week! I'll do it if I've got to pick the kid up and carry him around on my back! I'll do it if I drop dead over the finish line! Get that? You ain't gonna down me, you swell-headed chair warmer, if it takes my life!"

At which crash of oratory, Eddie nodded his head and took the cigar out of his mouth long enough to say sweetly:

"That's the kind of fighting spirit I like to see in a young man! It does you credit!"

And, before Lonny could recover from that one, a fountain pen had been thrust into his hand and he'd signed up for the race at the terms Eddie McGee had laid down!

Well, Lonny was pretty well cooled off by evening when he dropped around to my place with his car. We rode out into the suburbs and stopped at last in front of a rather swell-looking house on a side street.

"What's the idea? Who lives here?" I started to ask him when he stopped his motor, got out of the car and motioned me to follow him to the house. But he shut me off.

"We're goin' in here to see some folks," he told me. "I'm gonna pull somethin' on them and you've got to help me out."

"Pull something?" I repeated. "Like what? What's the plot of the piece? If I'm to help you out I ought to know——"

"All you got to do," said Lonny, "is 'yes' me. No matter what I say to them you're to vote with me—and make it strong. Get the idea? No matter what you think yourself, you're to back me up."

All of which, of course, was about as clear as mud to me. But I followed him up the steps and waited after he'd rung the bell until the door was thrown open by a plump, middle-aged, gray-haired woman in a neat house dress. Something about her looked familiar to me, and I was trying to place her when she suddenly rushed right past Lonny and grabbed me by the hand.

"Why, Mr. Bush!" she exclaimed, her face lighting up. "I'm so glad to see you!

It's years and years since we've met. All of Tom's old friends that I used to know so well seem to have drifted away from me."

Then I knew her! It was Tom Bunting's widow. Kind of shocking it was to see her gray-headed, fleshy and with her face lined from sorrow and trouble when I remembered her as the bright-eyed, slim, stylish little beauty that used to watch Tom's races from the grand stands twenty years and more before!

"You're looking well, Mrs. Bunting," I told her, that being the only thing I could think up to say.

"Thank you, Mr. Bush," she smiled. "Come in, won't you, you and your friend?"

"This is Mr. Adair, Mrs. Bunting," I said, nodding toward Lonny.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, backing away and surveying Lonny like he was a curiosity. "The great Lonny Adair? I *am* honored, really! Mr. Adair, you're my boy Christy's greatest hero. He does nothing but talk about you—day and night!"

She gave Lonny a bright smile that you couldn't exactly call motherly. It seemed to take twenty years from her face. Women, young and old, always smile at Lonny like that. Those big, handsome blond boys, you know! But anyway——

"Well, Mrs. Bunting," said Lonny easy-like when we were seated in the parlor, "I sure got a kick out of hearin' that your boy has took a shine to me. By gum, you couldn't tell me a thing that would please me more; because I think the world and all of the boy. Don't I, Windy?" he asked me.

"Er—yes," I mumbled, trying to make the line he was handing out fit with what he'd said about the boy to Eddie McGee and me.

"Yes, *ma'am!*" chuckled Lonny. "I was sayin' to Windy, just ridin' here to-night, I said, 'Talkin' about bike riders, that there kid Christy Bunting is the goods. He's the slickest little rider there is on the tracks. Just like his pop was!' Ain't that so, Windy?" he asked me.

"Sure!" I lied, wondering where Lonny Adair come off to say anything about Christy Bunting's pop. Lonny was twenty-six, which would have made him about four when Tom Bunting retired from cycling and about eight when poor Tom died.

Mrs. Bunting was eating his stuff up, sitting there with her hands folded in her lap, her eyes shining and a big smile of pride on her face.

"Well, Mrs. Bunting," Lonny continued, "there ain't no use of me beatin' about the bush. I might as well get right down to brass tacks. You wouldn't have no objection, would you, if Christy turned pro?"

I looked at Lonny in amazement. One thing *I* never could accuse him of was being dumb—but where was the sense in this chatter of his?

"Why," replied Mrs. Bunting with hesitation, "I don't know. Christy has talked that over with me since he won the amateur championship last season, but—but—well, to tell you the truth, Mr. Adair, if I thought he'd be successful there is nothing I'd like better. We—we're not so well off as we might be—financially, I mean. Christy is a good boy, but he's young, so of course he can't earn as much at the job he has now as he could as a rider if he was successful. But I haven't been able to convince myself that Christy rides well enough to——"

"No question about it!" declared Lonny. "All the boy needs is experience to make him the biggest star in the game! Ain't that what *you* think, Windy?" he asked, turning to me.

"That's what I've said all along," I nodded. If Lonny wanted me to "yes" him, I was going to make a good job of it, even if I perjured myself into jail!

"See?" Lonny demanded of Mrs. Bunting. "That's the way your boy stands with the folks who know—ace high! And I do declare, here's the kid himself!" he yelped, jumping to his feet as the door opened and Christy stepped into the room.

Now, I know Lonny hadn't done more than nod to the boy a couple of times at the tracks, but the way he greeted him that night, you'd have sworn they were long-lost brothers. He grabbed the kid by the hand and fetched him a crack between the shoulders that near knocked all the breath out of him.

"Well, Christy, you old son of a gun, how are you?" he grinned. "We just been talkin' about you—me and Windy and the mother. I'm tryin' to put somethin' over, kid, and I want you to help me out."

"Hey?" gasped Christy.

Personally Christy was a high-class youngster. As Tom Bunting's boy he had to be. Tom, as you'll remember, was the Lonny Adair of his day—the king-pin of all

cyclists in the 'nineties when I was pedaling for a living myself. The public still remembers Tom, just as they'll always remember John L. Sullivan and the other supermen of the sport world. I could see why the name of Bunting, attached to a pedal pusher of the first rank, would be a big asset to the game for the value it would have in pulling the public to the ticket windows, but as a cyclist I confess I couldn't see young Bunting with a telescope.

He was a medium-sized kid, and so slim that he looked delicate, especially when compared with the husky lads who get their board and clothes by riding their bikes. Unlike his daddy, who was a red-headed, brawny, freckled battler, young Christy was a dark-haired, dark-eyed, pale-skinned boy, quiet spoken and polite and no hunter of trouble. He was neat as a pin in street clothes or track gear, and, as I've mentioned before, there was something about him—that personality thing, I guess—that caught your eye the instant you saw him. Lonny had it, too. So did Kramer and MacFarland and Walthour and Goullet and other big guns of the cycling game. But they had something else as well, something that's as important to a bike rider as a voice is to an actor—legs.

"Well, Christy," said Lonny, smiling at the boy's astonished face, "I might as well speak my piece and get it over with. I'm lookin' for a partner for the six-day race, and I want you to be it!"

"Me!" gasped the boy, eyes popping and jaw dropping.

"I'll say I do!" laughed Lonny. "I had a tough time tryin' to get Eddie McGee to agree to it, but I finally made him say yes. Fixed up somethin' handsome for us, too, kid," he whispered, grinning, winking and poking Christy in the ribs with his thumb. "Five thousand bucks if we win—two for you and three for me, because I'm the oldest. Eddie McGee yelled murder when I held out for that much, but I wouldn't take a cent less and he had to come through at last. Well, kid, is it a go? What do you say?"

What did he say? He couldn't say anything! He was struck dumb—almost paralyzed. John D. Rockefeller or Henry Ford handing him a signed check with instructions to fill in the amount himself would have given him only a mild shock compared to what he got when the great Lonny Adair came to him begging him to ride as his partner in a six-day race.

"B-but—but——" the kid managed to stammer at last. "But why——"

"Why?" cried Lonny. "I'll tell you why! Because I want to win the race, and you make it a sure thing! Ain't that what I told you, Windy?"

"The exact words," I declared, hoping that Heaven would forgive me.

"You're the greatest young rider in the world to-day," chirped Lonny, patting the kid's shoulder. "There's nobody knows how good you are—except me, because I been watchin' you, and Windy here, because I told him. Say you'll ride with me, kid, and I'll get Eddie McGee to fix up your contract in the mornin'. 'Tain't nothin' to be sneezed at, what I've fixed up for you—two thousand bucks and an equal split of the prize money! Well, what's the verdict?"

"Why," stammered the boy dizzily, "I hardly know what to say. I didn't think I—— What I mean is I hardly thought you——"

He stopped, put his hand to his head and looked about him like he was dazed.

Lonny dropped his hand on his shoulder again and was about to speak when there came an interruption. It was Mrs. Bunting.

"Oh, Christy," she cried, "say yes—please! Why, it's a godsend; Heaven has answered my prayers! Mr. Adair," she told Lonny, "Providence has sent you here. A month from to-day I shall need three thousand dollars to—to save our little home. You have brought me the means of getting it—through Christy. How can I ever thank you!"

Wow!

It ain't easy to get a rise out of Lonny Adair, but that one sure hit him below the belt! Whatever his idea was in shooting all that oil over the landscape, he certainly hadn't figured on raising any false hopes in any poor widow's heart. As Mrs. Bunting finished, Lonny looked like a guy who'd just been caught walking out of a house with the parlor clock under his coat.

"Hey?" he asked. "You're gonna need three thousand to—to save your home? You—you got a mortgage fallin' due, or somethin'?"

"Yes," said the widow. "This house is all that is left of what poor Tom earned on the track. He was well fixed when he quit

riding, but—you'll remember, Mr. Bush—he lost nearly all he had in that automobile factory he started. He started in that business a few years too early, and his failure broke his heart. This house was about all he left. I've done my best. I've worked. I've taken in boarders. I—— Oh, I don't want to bother you with my troubles, but my heart is so full, after what you've done for me to-night, that I *must* speak. Five years ago—foolishly, I know it was now—I mortgaged this house. It was to make an investment, and I lost the money. I've reduced the mortgage to three thousand dollars, now, but——"

"But it's comin' due and you can't get it renewed," suggested Lonny, still looking awful sheepish.

"Yes," nodded Mrs. Bunting.

"Who holds it—a bank?"

"No," she said sadlike. "I got the money from a man who I thought had been a good friend of my husband. I can't understand what he has done! He had always seemed so kind and so anxious to help me. But a few days ago he sent me this," she said, drawing a letter out of a pocket in her dress.

"Mother!" cried young Christy, rushing across the room and trying to grab the letter before she could hand it to Lonny.

The boy, though, was too late. Lonny had spread the letter out and glanced at it. I saw his cheeks suddenly flush a deep red. Little, angry glints of fire shone in his blue eyes. The muscles of his jaws swelled.

"The dirty skunk!" he growled fiercely, handing the letter to me.

I didn't read it. I didn't need to, for the first thing that rose from the paper and hit me in the eye was the familiar, flourishing signature of Eddie McGee!

"Him?" yelped Lonny, pointing to the letter. "He's the guy who's goin' to turn you out of home?"

Mrs. Bunting nodded.

"I'm damned if he is!" roared Lonny. "Excuse me, ma'am, if I seem to cuss some, but that there letter don't call for no parlor talk! Why, the fat, filthy toad! That's the kind o' stuff he pulls, is it? That's one of the 'little business deals' he's always talkin' about and advisin' the riders to make so's they'll have a nest egg for the future! Why, curse his black heart, I want to go to the poorhouse if the only way I can get a nest egg is like—that! Say, listen, lady. He ain't goin' to foreclose no mortgage on you! Listen here—if Christy don't bring home the bacon in the race—if there's an accident or anything and we've got to quit—I'll give you the three thou' you need right out of my own pocket! And I'm gonna hunt down that fat-jowled crook—right to-night—and I'm gonna tell him——"

"Oh, no!" cried Mrs. Bunting. "You mustn't!"

"Why not?" demanded Lonny. "I owe him a couple and——"

"Please don't, Mr. Adair," she begged. "Think—you and Christy must keep Mr. McGee's good will if you're to continue riding. You mustn't antagonize him. Isn't that so, Mr. Bush?"

"Sure!" I declared, kind of woozy myself from the turn things had taken. "You'd better keep your head, Lonny. Bawling out Eddie McGee would do more harm than good."

"Oh, all right," growled Lonny. "I'll lay off if you want me to. But I don't see——"

"Listen, Lonny," I butted in. "I don't like to bust up such a pleasant party, but you know we've got that other place to go to."

"What place?" he asked. Then he caught my wink. "Yeah, that's right, we have," he agreed. "Well, good night, ma'am," he said to Mrs. Bunting. "Pleased to meet you. So long, Chris!" he sang out to the kid. "Me 'n' you are goin' to get the mother out of all her trouble. Be up at the track about ten in the mornin'. I want to do a little road work with you."

"Well," I said to Lonny when we reached the sidewalk, "I'll say you've shoved your hoof into it pretty nice this time! What's the big idea? Pretty sweet scheme you've got there, offering to lift the family mortgage! Of course, I wouldn't want to see Tom Bunting's widow lose her home, but who told you your name was Santa Claus? And where do you get that stuff about Christy Bunting being the greatest young rider in the world, and the only one who can help you win the six-day race?"

"Oh, shucks," growled Lonny, "I was just handin' them some salve."

"Salve!" I repeated. "I'll say you were! And that stuff about you picking Christy Bunting out of all the riders in the world, when you know Eddie McGee rammed him down your throat! And forcing Eddie McGee to give you a contract to your liking! What's the idea of that apple sauce?"

"Oh, the idea was all right," insisted Lonny as we stepped into the car. "I thought, as long as I was havin' this kid forced on me, that I'd josh him along—hop him up, you know. I figgered if I told him how good he was, often enough, that maybe he'd get the same idea in his bean and try to live up to it."

"You've been reading that 'every-day-in-every-way' dope," I accused him. "But if you keep on the way you've started, offering to pay off mortgages and thatlike, you'll find yourself getting poorer and poorer!"

"What else could I do?" he demanded. "I certainly never figgered on gettin' the old lady mixed up in this thing to-night. When she hopped out of her chair that time, with the tears in her eyes, and told me that Heaven had sent me there and all that—honest, I felt like a horse thief!"

"And you looked like one, too!" I assured him. "I'd give ten bucks for a picture of your face when she was thanking you for all you were doing for her and her boy! Oh, well! It just shows what happens to people who don't tell the truth."

"Aw, shut up!" growled Lonny. "I know what I'm doin'."

"Not when you call young Christy Bunting a bike rider you don't!" I denied. "I've been in the game since before you were born and——"

"I wouldn't care if you invented it," Lonny told me. "The kid may surprise you."

"Yes," I grinned, "and I may get out my old bike and win the race myself! Just as much chance!"

"But what do you think of that dirty rat Eddie McGee?" he asked. "Takin' the roof from over a widow's head is bad enough, but why does he want to kid her along by makin' her think young Christy's goin' to make everything jake by winnin' the race?"

"Well, ain't he?" I asked innocentlike. "I heard you say to-night that——"

"You shut up!" he growled. "Another crack from you on that subject and I'll pop you right on the nose—gray hairs and all!"

III.

About forty-five years ago, when I was a kid in school, there was a teacher who used to make us feel good by telling us that confidence was half the battle. If that schoolmarm had the right dope, then young Christy Bunting on the night the Garden six-day race started had half the winners' share right in his pocket!

Honest, I never saw a fellow so cocky in my life! Of course, he admitted he had six days and five nights of bike riding to do before he collected, but that was a mere detail! So sure was he of copping that he'd have bet his chance of heaven on it if anybody had offered to take the wager. And, mind you, he was an eighteen-year-old kid, who'd never pedaled a bicycle more than twenty-five consecutive miles in his life, riding his first professional race against the toughest competition that the world could produce!

Lonny had done it. Sometimes I'm inclined to think that big ex-farm boy had the hypnotic eye! Anyway, he'd sure pepped up Christy Bunting. Not that the kid could ride any better than he did as an amateur in the outdoor season, but, for the three weeks preceding the race, Lonny had hardly let him out of his sight and had fed him up with so many assorted lines of bull, bunk and hokum that the kid was ready to admit he had the world licked.

Besides feeding him the oil by word of mouth, Lonny had eased him a line of high-class con in ways that were dark, mysterious and ingenious. For instance, picture them in an orgy of road work. After pedaling along at a snail's pace for ten or twelve miles, Lonny, to whom a fifty-mile dash at top speed over hilly country was hardly an appetizer, would suddenly display what seemed to be unmistakable signs of being all in. He wouldn't say anything, but he'd begin slowing up, and after a while Christy would wake up to the fact that the grand duke of the six-day riders was a quarter of a mile or so behind him. Being both polite and curious, Christy would slow up, and, when Lonny was beside him again, the youngster would have been more than human if he'd refrained from offering an inquiry as to the reason for the delay. That would give Lonny the chance he'd been sparring for.

"Well, by gum, Chris," he'd say, "do you mean to tell me you can keep goin' along like this without it gettin' you?"

"Why, of course," the kid would tell him. "I could ride along like this all day."

Which he probably could. I could have done it myself, or anybody else that wasn't a cripple.

"Well, say!" Lonny would exclaim. "I'm here to state that you're a wonder! Guess I made no mistake in pickin' you out for a six-day partner! Now, don't say nothin' to the other riders about this, but I'm all in. I can't stand no such pace as you set." And so forth.

To Christy the implication, as the saying goes, was plain. If he could set a pace on the roads that had the great Lonny Adair calling for help and gagging for breath, what was he going to do to those other plugs he'd meet in the Garden grind?

So it went. Three weeks of it, morning, noon and night. No wonder the kid's black knitted skullcap had to be stretched to receive his head!

And so Christy went into the race, not only certain that he'd win it, but suffering from a strong suspicion that the great Lonny Adair was a much-overrated bike rider whom he'd have to nurse along during the week in order to keep him in the race toward the finish.

Opportunity for confabs and executive sessions between the members of a six-day team are rare once the race has started, one of the riders, of course, having to be on the track all the time, so just before the start of the race Lonny took the kid aside to give him one final jolt.

"Christy," he said, "it's up to you. I'll do what I can to help you, but you're the works of our team. You're gonna feel tired at times—maybe you'd like to quit—but what you got to remember at such times is how much worse the other guys are feelin'. There ain't one of 'em classes with you as a rider. I *know*, because I've rode against 'em all and I've seen what you got in you. So just keep on thinkin' of the mother and how much the big pay-off at the end is gonna mean to her. Think, too, that you owe one to that blinkin' crook Eddie McGee and that winnin' this race is your chance to get hunk with him. Win this race and Eddie McGee will be comin' to you, ready to eat out of your hand. All right, kid; let's go!"

They shook hands, me meanwhile turning the face aside to hide the grin caused by such a touching scene. You could see from the look in the kid's face that Lonny had him hopped up to one hundred and eighty degrees, but winning six-day races requires speed, gameness and endurance in other parts of the body than under the skull.

Like in other years, I'd taken a week off from my duties as agent for the Arrow bicycle to act as a sort of head bottle holder in Lonny's camp. It was me hoisted Christy to his bike and held him at the starting line, for Lonny insisted that the kid be given the honor of appearing in the flash-light pictures of the start of the race. The Adair-Bunting team had the pole position at the start, and when the gun popped I gave Christy a shove and he jumped immediately into the lead.

Then I went back to the trackside and sat down on a camp stool alongside of Lonny.

"Lonny," I said, "I hate to say it, but something tells me that I'll be back selling Arrow bikes about Wednesday morning. In other words, I'm afraid your boy phenom won't do. Any bets?" I asked him.

"Five hundred even he goes the route!" snapped Lonny. "And I'll take two to one for anything up to a thousand that we cop the race!"

"Oh, you're crazy!" I told him. "Save your dough. You'll be needing it to pay off Mrs. Bunting's mortgage."

IV.

I was wrong. Wednesday morning found the kid still in the race. At any rate, the team of Adair and Bunting was still on the track and tied with six others of the eleven teams that were left according to the mileage figures. In the point score, though, made in the daily sprints, not so good! They stood sixth, and such points as had been rung up for the team were due almost entirely to Lonny's efforts.

For the thing that I had feared had happened. Christy Bunting had cracked. Monday night saw him the tiredest, most worn-out specimen of a six-day rider that ever turned a sprocket wheel. The smoke and bad air of the Garden, the dizzy pace of the race, the loss of sleep, the rough tactics of the other riders, all of whom were giants in size and weight when compared to Christy, the new experience of having to go out and do better than his best when every nerve and muscle in his body was aching and screeching for rest—all of these things had got in their deadly work. The kid's eyes were bloodshot and their lids red from the smoke and loss of sleep. His knuckles, wrists and elbows were swollen from supporting his weight on the handlebars. He

was saddle sore and his knees were lumpy and stiff from driving the pedals. His disposition was all frayed and blistered from broken rest and from the shock it had been to him to learn that there were other guys in the race besides himself capable of pushing a bike. The unaccustomed quantity of exercise he'd been taking had given him such an appetite that his digestion was shot from the huge piles of food he'd taken into his system.

The self-confidence he'd obtained from Lonny's back patting of the three weeks before the race was all gone. So was his stamina, and he was staying in the race entirely on his nerve.

We had petted him, kidded him, massaged him, used every scheme we knew of keeping the human body working after natural strength is gone. The newspapers were playing the kid up big. The fact that he was Tom Bunting's son, only eighteen years old and had lived through the first couple of days of a record-breaking six-day race without being lapped a half dozen times was enough for the papers. They spread him all over their sport pages—pictures and articles. We read these articles to him as he lay on his back at the trackside, and we explained to the press boys who were bothering him for interviews and picture poses that the only reason why he hadn't lapped the field or done anything else sensational was because he was saving himself for the last part of the week. They believed it—anyway they printed it, and it helped. So did the way the crowd handled the kid. Every time he'd show in front of the field they'd whoop it up for him, whistling, roaring his name, clapping their hands and pounding their feet, begging him to go out and steal a couple of laps.

And so, with the aid of everything, we managed to keep Christy in the race. Wednesday morning, though, my more or less sharp and experienced eye began to detect signs of the beginning of the end. Not that the kid said anything about quitting. That I've got to hand him. He was game, as Tom Bunting's boy was bound to be. He grumbled and he grouched, as even the best of riders do when they're woke out of a sound sleep and asked to do a turn on the track, but he got on his bike and went to it, saddle sores, inflamed knees, dead legs and all—and you can't ask more than that of a champion. But the old stamina was ebbing fast, and to me it seemed like only a question of time when his nerve would start leaving him also.

Lonny had caught the signs, too, and was worried. It was Monday night, as I said that Christy had started to fade, and since that time Lonny had been almost living up to his promise that he'd go without food and sleep to bring the kid through the race. In a day and two nights Lonny had done more bike riding than at any corresponding period in his career. The effects were to be seen on him, too—and still four days to go!

"Windy," he said to me, as he rested on his trackside bunk after a three-hour hitch on his wheel during which Christy had been sleeping, "somethin's got to be done."

"Like what?" I inquired, pausing in my work of trying to reduce the knots in the calves of his legs.

"The kid is slippin'," he murmured as if to himself. "He's game, and I think more of him every day this race lasts, but he ain't got the weight and the strength to stand off these other rough boys."

"Exactly what you said three weeks ago," I reminded him, speaking rather nasty, too, for I hadn't been getting all the sleep that was coming to me.

"Can it!" he warned me, his sunken eyes glowing. "I'm ready to take a swing at the first guy that looks at me cross-eyed. Better lay off. But we got to do somethin' for that kid. Unless we do, I don't give him much more than another day at best in the race."

I continued rubbing his legs. There were several funny cracks I thought of making, but I kept them to myself.

"If we can carry the kid through today," said Lonny, "we've got a chance. This is the toughest day of the race, even for us old-timers. Most of them birds out there on the track are ready to lay down and die right now. Peary la Roche and that Italian pair are the only strong guys on the track right now. But to-morrow everybody'll have his second wind, includin' Christy. So, if we can keep him goin'——"

"How's it to be done?" I asked. "Even the home-and-mother stuff don't reach him any more. He called me an awful bad name about ten minutes ago when I tried to interest him in a pretty word picture of the gray-haired mother sitting at home and praying for him with all her hopes pinned to him."

"Couldn't we get the mother to come over?" asked Lonny suddenly.

"A good idea," I admitted, "but you're about two hours too late with it."

"Too late!" he exclaimed.

"Sure," I grinned, "I sent Danny Smith over to fetch her here."

"You're a good old fox at that!" laughed Lonny, reaching over and grabbing my hand. He sat up and began to look about the arena. "Did she come yet?" he asked as he studied the rows of seats.

"Not yet," I told him, "but I expect any——"

I stopped, for Lonny had suddenly jumped up from his bunk and was waving his hand and bowing in the direction of the boxes. Following the signs he was making, I spied a heavy-set, prosperous-looking gent in a center box. He was leaning over the rail and bowing, smiling and saluting even more eagerly than Lonny.

You could see that this party was a real big leaguer in some line, but it didn't surprise me to see him tickled to death to be receiving such a hearty greeting from the king of bikers. For Lonny holds one other title besides any he's won on the track—he's the world's champion mixer and numbers among his friends some of the most prominent men on both sides of the Atlantic, including at least one king.

I was surprised, though, when Lonny suddenly darted away from me, shot up the track, hopped the rail and pushed his way through the first row of seats until he'd reached the stout man's box. Six-day riders as a usual thing have more to do with their spare time than to spend it making social calls.

The stout man shook Lonny's hand, pulled over a seat for him, and the next instant, their heads were together like two women panning a neighbor. Lonny was doing most of the talking, and I figured from his motions and gestures what he was saying had to do with the race and especially Christy Bunting's part in it. The stout man was listening like he was interested, nodding his head and every now and then butting in with a question. When Lonny wound up his lecture, the stout man sat looking at him for a moment with a frown on his face. Then he suddenly smiled, nodded his head as if agreeing to something, fetched Lonny a slap on the shoulder and the two of them left the box and slid down to the track.

"Doctor Farrington, Windy," Lonny introduced us. "Guess you've read about the doc in the papers. He's the boy that makes the—what d'you call it, doc? Sirup? Anyway, he's the lad who's got pneumonia on the run. I been tellin' him how Christy's gettin' a little tired of the scenery round here, and he says he'll look the kid over and find out where his pep's disappeared to. Well, call the kid in and let the doc start poundin' his chest. Me for the old merry-go-round again until the prescription's wrote. And make it strong, doc—double dose! The kid's in bad shape!"

"I can't guarantee, Lonny," began the doctor, "that——"

"Bunk!" interrupted Lonny. "Any bird who can wrassle pneumonia to the mat can fix up one damaged bike rider! Go to it!"

So Lonny, having been off the track pretty near five minutes, hopped on his bike again and rejoined the whirling pedalers.

I took Christy down to the basement for the doc to examine him, not wishing to make the spectacle any more public than it was already.

"Well, son," the doc told the kid after he'd finished comparing his heartbeats with the tick of his watch, "you could do with a little more sleep, perhaps; otherwise, I'd say you were fit as a fiddle. How's his weight?" he asked me.

"He's been gaining," I said quick.

"Ahem! Ahem!" the doc coughed, looking around him suspicious. "Er, Lonny," he said with hesitation, "has asked me to do something that I don't exactly care to do, and that is prescribe something for you which will—er—supply the strength which you are losing on account of your unusual efforts during the race—supply it—er—unnaturally, I might say."

"Dope?" breathed the boy, who, as I may have hinted before, was no dumb ox

"Sh-h!" cautioned the doc.

"Doctor," said Christy half hysterically, "give me anything! Anything at all that will help me keep up! I'm—I'm suffering torture, and I've got to keep going! This race means so much to——"

"Yes, I know," interrupted the doc gently. "Lonny told me. You'll promise, though," he asked, "you'll promise, if I do as Lonny asks, that you'll keep silent about it? That you'll never tell any one what——"

"Yes! Certainly! Of course!" cried the kid. "I'll never——"

"And you, Mr.—er—Windy?" the doc asked me.

"Compared to me," I said, "a granite statue is a radio-broadcasting station."

"Very well," nodded the doc, "I'll do it."

V.

About an hour later I met the doc by appointment at the main entrance to the Garden and he slipped me a package about the size of a shoe box.

"Careful with that now," he cautioned as I took it. "Give young Bunting a couple of tablespoonfuls every time he goes on the track and every time he comes off. No more and no less. If you have any left at the finish of the race, promise me that you'll destroy it. And, above all, remember your promise that you'll tell no one about it."

When I got back to the trackside I shucked the package and found inside a large bottle—about quart size—containing a gold-colored liquid. Lonny was lying in his bunk and woke up as I took the bottle out.

"Here's the stuff," I whispered. "Lonny, I hope it's all right; I mean feeding this sort of dope—whatever it is—to a growing boy who's just keeping up on his nerve. Of course, if a big guy like Doc Farrington handles the stuff, it must be O. K., but he was so slow about giving up at first and had us make so many promises about keeping mum about it that I don't mind telling you I'm scared—especially since I'm the lad who's got to give it to the kid."

"You'll do as the doc told you!" barked Lonny.

"All right," I agreed. "But, if anything goes wrong, we're left holding the bag—that is, I am. This stuff ain't got no label on it, and, if the doc wants to say he don't know anything about it——"

"Aw, you make me sick!" growled Lonny, getting up from his bunk, shedding his bath robe and grabbing his bike.

After Lonny had relieved him, Christy dived into the mattress and I gave him a finger or so out of the bottle in a glass. He looked kind of scared as he downed it. Then I thought he was about to take a fit. He coughed and gagged, tears came to his eyes and he screwed his face up into a knot.

"Ugh, what stuff!" he shuddered. "If it doesn't kill me it ought to do some good. How often did the doctor say I had to take that——"

A sudden roar from the crowd cut him short. I jumped up and craned my neck over the top of the bunk to see across the infield. I caught sight of a red-white-and-green streak shooting along the opposite side of the track. One look was enough to tell me that something which every trainer and rider at the track had feared since the race started had at last happened. Doma, the crack Italian rider who had won the last Paris race, had grabbed his chance to go out after a lap. He'd timed his try to a second too; caught the whole bunch asleep. He'd jumped them from the Madison Avenue turn, and was out in front by the length of the back stretch before anybody in the field realized what was up. Then, so far as chasing him was concerned, it was a case of let George do it. None of them wanted to start after him. Making pace for a six-day field in a dash after a lap-stealing bandit is no swivel-chair job. Doma was around the Fourth Avenue bank and shooting through the stretch a third of a lap or so in the lead before the bunch went after him in earnest. Then it was Lonny who led the pack.

"Well, young man," I yelled at Christy, trying to make myself heard above the roar of the crowd, "if that magic tonic's got anything in it, it looks like now is the time to show it!"

I grabbed him under the arms, lifted him to his feet, and before he knew what it was all about, he was sitting on his bike, strapping his feet to the pedals. Every other rider in the place who wasn't on the track chasing the Italian was also in the saddle at the trackside. This was a real jam. Doma had taken the right moment to start it, and, hard as Lonny was riding, the boy from sunny It' was getting farther to the front with every revolution of his pedals.

Four laps he went at top speed, getting a half lap, all but a few yards, on the van of the field before his partner, Pinella, was sent out to relieve him. Riders were being pushed out for relief on both sides of the track. The crowd was going mad, for it was the first real action that had been shown since the race started, fast though the average pace had been. Riders whirling around the board saucer at the Garden usually produce a sound like a continuous roaring of near-by thunder, but there was nothing to be heard then but the yells, shrieks and whistles of the customers.

Bracing Christy up on his wheel, I kept my eyes glued to Lonny, waiting for him to flash a distress signal. It came at last, not because Lonny wanted to give it, but because human flesh can do just so much and Lonny had reached the end of his string. The hump on his back which always stood out like a little mountain when he was doing his best began to fall. You could see that the drive on his pedals was becoming weaker. I gripped the kid's saddle and handlebars, ready to shove him out to the track to make his relief when I happened to glance up into the arena seats. I forgot all about the orders to do his best which I had intended to shout into Christy's ears before I pushed him off. I just took my hand off the handlebars and pointed up into the first row of seats, and he turned and saw her—his mother.

His teeth snapped together, he sank his head down and I could see the tendons in his slim forearms jump as he gripped the handles. I pointed his bike toward the track and gave him a shove.

The kid made a beautiful pick-up. He started pedaling just at the proper time, seemed to feel rather than see when Lonny was beside him, hunch himself down over his handlebars and went to it. You'd have thought from the sprint he uncorked that, instead of having three days of hard riding ahead of him, he was making a quarter-mile time trial. He shot to the front of the bunch as though the rest of them were tied, and gradually open daylight began to show between him and those in the rear. For a couple of laps it looked as though Christy was going to lose the rest and catch the flying Pinella all alone. Then the others caught him, tagged on to his rear wheel and the chase went merrily on.

It took six laps in all for the kid to pull the bunch up even with the Italians. Considering the start Doma and Pinella had, it was about the quickest work I ever saw at a six-day race. Lonny himself in his palmiest days had never shown a classier brand of cycling. And that was the kid who ten minutes before I wouldn't have backed in a mile match race against a steam roller!

I swear the yells of the crowd made the roof shake as the kid's bike rolled off the track onto the flat. Few of them appreciated just what a wonderful thing he'd done —how fast he must have traveled to make up all that ground on a first-class rider in so short a time. But the wise boys in the riders' camps—trainers and so forth—they knew, and they almost mobbed the youngster as I grabbed his bike and helped him off. Christy, though, gave none of them a tumble. He had eyes only for one spot in that big building—a certain seat in the center of the arena where a gray-haired, stoutish woman sat, waving a handkerchief at him when she could spare it from the more necessary purpose of dabbing at her eyes. He waved his hand to his mother, threw her a kiss; then he flopped into his bunk.

"How do you feel, kid?" I asked him.

"I'm sitting on the world!" he panted back. "That—that medicine has some strength I'll say!"

VI.

I'm hopping over three days and as many nights. That brings us up to Saturday night, to the closing hour of the race. The greatest crowd that I ever saw in the old Garden jammed the place to see the finish. The seats and boxes had all been filled for hours. The infield was one solid mass. About eight o'clock the police had to order the doors closed and drive away a crowd in the streets that was big enough to have picked up the building and set it over in Madison Square Park.

Six teams were tied for the lead in mileage. Of these Lonny and Christy stood fifth in the point score, but not so far behind the leaders as they'd been on Wednesday morning when Doc Farrington's bottle of dope had put the youngster back on his feet. I'd pumped the stuff into the kid ever since. He'd gagged and coughed over it, but I'm here to state it had done the trick. From the first swig of it, except for his skinny legs and neat appearance, you couldn't have told him from a regular bike rider. Anyway, he'd ridden like one, and that's what counts, the result being that, with a little more than their share of the breaks in the last sprints, he and Lonny had to be handed a swell chance of copping the pot. There was a gill or so of the elixir of life—whatever it was—left in the bottle, and I was saving it for the last hour. If that was the fuel that made Christy Bunting's engine run best, he was going to have plenty of it to burn up when it was most needed!

There's no sense of me annoying you with statistics. I forget what the figures were at that, although I had them down in black

and white at the time. At all events, it looked like Lonny and Christy had to grab about all the first places there was to be had if they were to get their prize money out of the big end of the horn.

At nine o'clock I sent the kid out to relieve Lonny and when the big boy had flopped into his bunk he asked me:

"Windy, how much you got left of the doc's pizen?"

"A good four fingers," I told him.

"Look there," he whispered, pointing up into the arena.

I didn't bother to turn. From the direction in which his hand went out I knew who was sitting there.

"We got to do somethin' for her," said Lonny. "Get this now. About ten minutes from now you're gonna call the kid in, and you're gonna take all the dope you got left and you're gonna give it to him—all in one drink."

"But I was saving it——" I started to tell him.

"Shut up!" he told me. "About the time that the kid's got it into his system, you're gonna see a tall guy in a red shirt about half a lap ahead of them birds out there. That tall guy's gonna be me. About the time you see that tall guy showin' signs of dyin' in his saddle, shoot the kid out, and tell him to give it all he has for as long as he lasts. About that time I'll be ready to go out again and——"

"You're going after a lap?" I exclaimed. "To-night? Why, Lonny——"

"It's our only chance," he said. "If we get the lap we can stall them birds off until the race is over, and, bein' a lap ahead, we cop every point sprint automatic. If we ain't got the lap, we ain't got a Chinaman's chance of pickin' up enough points to do us any good. Am I right?"

"You are," I admitted sadlike. "But going after a lap at this stage of the race—it ain't being done. It ain't according to Hoyle."

"All the more chance of gettin' away with it," declared Lonny. "Them bird's out there are all ridin' sleepers, restin' up for the final sprints. I'll be a quarter of a lap ahead of them before they're sure I'm not just kiddin' 'em. By the time they wake up to what's doin' I'll have another quarter lap, and, if the kid can do his part——"

"He gets the rest of that bottle if it kills him!" I promised.

Lonny called the turn. When he went out to relieve the kid, the other riders, just loafing along, never gave him a tumble. He worked his way down toward the front of the field, and, the next thing they knew, he was up the Fourth Avenue bank, down again and off flying.

Even the crowd didn't take him seriously at first, but, when they saw him stealing along into a lead that was always growing longer, they hopped to their feet with a roar that would deafen you.

Christy, rolling down the flat looking for me or one of the helpers to grab his bike, looked up startled when he heard the roar. He, less than anybody at the track, had any idea what was doing. One of the boys around the camp stopped him and held his bike, and about at the same moment I hopped out and shoved the bottle into his face.

"Down that," I told him, "every bit of it. And get ready to get going! You and Lonny are going after a lap!"

The stuff went down with the usual gagging, coughing and shivers. These hid his surprise, if he had any, at the message I'd just shouted into his ear. As I took the bottle away, he bent down over his handlebars, but I could see that his head and his eyes were up—lifted in the direction of an arena seat in front of which a gray-haired woman was standing, waving a program and shouting instructions to a red-shirted, blond-haired, long-legged guy who was whirling around the track, nearly half a lap in the lead of the maddest, most surprised string of cyclists that ever rode a track.

I let Lonny go about six laps. Then I shoved the kid off onto the flat and left him to fate, Doc Farringon's dope and whatever was left of his own speed and stamina.

Mrs. Bunting near went wild when her boy made his pick-up and started off where Lonny finished. The program went flying. Her hat was cocked over on the side of her head. She rode every inch of the way with the kid, and she rode harder than he did. And I might as well remark while I'm on the subject that it was some ride the lad turned in. The field was well warmed up to the chase when he took the track and they were desperate. The leaders were swapping pace every lap or so. Reliefs were shooting out from all sides of the Garden. I was standing at the trackside, stretching my old neck and whirling around like a pinwheel as I

tried to follow the riders around the saucer. Bike races are an old story to me, and I'm getting kind of set in my ways anyhow, but I'll admit without any apologies or excuses that I jumped and yelled like any Harlem boy that had paid his eight bits at the gate when I saw that Christy was gaining on the bunch.

Round and round he circled—two laps, three, four—and no sign of faltering. They were making wireless pick-ups behind him, and the hardiest pedal kickers of two continents were after his scalp and his goat, but the kid was—there! I don't know how many laps he went—seven or eight maybe—but when Lonny went on the track again, the worst was over. He could see the trailers of the field in front of him, and he was gaining on them every time his pedals went round.

Three or four laps and Lonny had caught the stragglers. A fair percentage of the mob that was crammed into the building must have been respectable, law-abiding citizens, but you never could have proved it that night as Lonny started a triumphal march down the string of tired riders to the head of the parade. Hats, programs, newspapers—I think even a few seats that didn't happen to be nailed down—were tossed around in the air. If ever there was a convention of lunatics, that was it. And I'm telling you that two middle-aged, settled persons who'd been mixed up in the bike game since before any of the riders and the majority of the spectators were born were as bad as the rest. I was one of them and a fleshy, motherly looking woman who bore all signs of just having been put through a steam laundry was the other.

And the race was won then and there. The other five leading teams made efforts every now and then from that time until a pistol shot declared the official end of the contest to get back the lap that Lonny and Christy had stolen, but the attempts were half-hearted, and the team of Adair and Bunting just naturally nipped them before they were under way.

The final sprints were a farce, unless you happened to be interested in anything but the winning team, and I can name four people in the building who weren't. Two of them I've just mentioned as being among the most prominent rooters during the lap stealing that won the race. The other two, of course, were the winning team themselves.

VII.

When Lonny hurled himself off his bike after he'd added insult to injury so far as the other riders were concerned by leading them over the line in the last sprint of the night, he hopped over to Christy's trackside bunk, gathered the kid up in his arms and hugged him till the boy squealed.

Then he grabbed the kid with one hand and me with the other and hustled us out and up the track.

"Come on," he said. "I got to see a guy—and I may need witnesses."

I had a fair idea where he was going and who the guy was, but there was no use trying to argue him out of what he intended doing. He'd been saving up a bunch of stuff to tell Eddie McGee for three weeks, and it was best out of his system.

Eddie we found in a little coop out toward the front of the building. He looked happy, for he was surrounded by his best friends—great heaps of green and yellow bills, bundled up into neat packages.

He looked up as we crashed in, and over his moon face spread a wide smile as he jumped up and rushed toward the boys holding a hand out to each of them.

"Congratulations!" he cried. "You certainly came through in——"

"Why, you fat crook!" roared Lonny. "You cut that kind of bunk out, or I'll hurl you right through that window! Well, we fooled you, didn't we! Thought you'd made suckers out of us, didn't you? Figgered you'd have a swell laugh on me and the kid, didn't you? Thought we'd ride our fool heads off for a week and get nothin' for it! And you were goin' to get another good laugh, weren't you, when you turned the kid's old lady out of house and home? Well, I guess you know now, you ain't goin' to get away with it! I guess——"

Eddie McGee made a dive forward and closed the door of the little room. Lonny stopped talking as he moved and stood looking at him in a puzzled way. For the grin had never left Eddie's face. There wasn't a sign of scare in him either, though Lonny, covered with sweat and grime, hollow-eyed and hungry looking after the long grind and wearing a scowl that would have stopped a train, appeared capable of committing murder.

"Better have the door closed," said Eddie pleasantly. "No use letting the whole world know our business. Besides," he pointed to

the bills on the table, "all this money might tempt——"

"Say, if you think I'm goin' to let you stall me——" began Lonny, but Eddie interrupted.

"Listen, Lonny," he said, "I know what's eating you. And just now is as good a time as any to tell you that you're all wrong. If you really thought for a moment that I intended turning Tom Bunting's widow out of her home——"

"I seen the letter!" blazed Lonny. "I seen——"

"I expected you would," nodded Eddie. "In fact, I had you in mind when I wrote it. I know the kind of a soft-hearted squash you are—with all your loud talk and battling—and I figured that if you thought you were helping a poor widow out of a mess you'd ride just about the kind of race you did. Of course, it was kind of tough on Annie Bunting for a while, but she's known all week that——"

"Are you stringin' me?" demanded Lonny, looking like a guy that's just been beaned with a brick

"Ask Annie Bunting," grinned Eddie. "And you, too, kid," he said, turning suddenly to Christy. "I guess it was just about the spur you needed—thinking you were saving the old home—to make you go out and ride your legs off. Without the thought of your mother in your head, I guess you'd have quit the race, wouldn't you, say about Wednesday?"

The kid nodded.

"Well, this last week's made a bike rider out of you," Eddie went on. "I reckon I'm the only guy in the world who realized you had it in you. Don't believe you even suspected it yourself, did you?" he asked.

"Why," stammered the kid, "I—I mean—well, to tell you the truth, Mr. McGee, if it wasn't for the stuff——"

He got no further, for I butted in right about there with a loud whoop. I'd have been a fine simp, wouldn't I, to have stood by there with my teeth in my mouth and let him tell Eddie McGee that the reason he'd lasted out the race was that for nearly four days we'd been loading him full of dope!

"Now, look here, boys," I said, "we're having a fine time and all that, but it's up to us to blow out. Eddie McGee's got his dough to count and you two bike straddlers ought to be in bed. Good night, Eddie," I sang out, pushing them both toward the door.

It wasn't until Lonny and I were piling into the hay in the hotel room we took on a side street near the Garden that Lonny assembled his thoughts well enough to put them into words.

"Well, what in blazes do you think of Eddie McGee?" was the crack he made.

"Huh!" I grunted.

"Would you believe it?" persisted Lonny. "And me thinkin' all the time that——"

"Oh, Eddie McGee's too smart for you," I told him. "But he ain't as smart as he thinks. He's certainly pulled a boner in sizing young Christy up as a real bike rider. Why, if it wasn't for that dope that Doc Farrington gave us——"

"Maybe," interrupted Lonny in a peculiar voice, "but I'm stringin' with Eddie in considerin' the kid the real, eighteen-carat goods!"

"All right," I said. "I ain't looking for an argument. But say, Lonny, I wish some time you'd try to get the doc to give you the prescription for that stuff. I know a lot of trainers and thatlike who could use it in their business."

"I can give it to you now," said Lonny. "It was lemon juice and peppermint—half and half. Oh, I guess young Christy's a bike rider all right. Say, turn out the light, won't you? I'd like to get to sleep!"

More stories by Mr. Brown in future issues.

WASHINGTON'S BEST MIND

SENATOR GEORGE WHARTON PEPPER of Pennsylvania, who knows more than any other man in the world about the laws affecting baseball, is reputed to possess the best-trained mind in the national capital. In addition to his knowledge of the classics, modern literature and law, he is an intensely idealistic and religious man. When it came time for his children to be educated, he completely rearranged his daily life in town and country, making his work a secondary affair so that he could give a lot of his own time to their schooling.

The Voice from the Dark

By Eden Phillpotts

Author of "The Red Redmaynes," "The Gray Room," Etc.

(A Four-Part Story—Part IV.)

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DINNER PARTY.

THE detective welcomed the few hours that separated him from the coming entertainment. Plans had to be made and a course of action laid down; but in so far as action was concerned, he could do little more than leave Lord Brooke to take the initiative. What John Ringrose desired to happen might very easily be frustrated by the other, though since he suspected that he and his adversary would prove of one mind on the crucial point, he permitted himself to pursue its possibilities on the assumption that it would happen. He wrote and posted a brief letter to Ernest Considine, indicating that Lord Brooke was at Lugano.

In the domain of theory also John pursued his inquiries, for it was essential before they met that he should be approximately clear in his mind on two issues. He wanted to know what Lord Brooke was thinking and still more he wanted to know what Lord Brooke imagined he was thinking.

The extent of the enemy's personal mystification occupied him first. Brooke now knew that, for the period of nearly nine months, an unknown man—obviously an inquiry agent, or professional detective—had been busy about his affairs. This man understood the past relationship of Arthur Bitton and himself, and he had in some way, impossible to discover, apparently hounded Bitton into his grave. He had then appeared at Brooke-Norton and, under pretense of selling an ivory, improved his knowledge of Bitton's master. The accident of the Barthel carving must, in the light of subsequent events, have assumed enormous importance to Lord Brooke. It linked the unknown visitor with Bitton's vanished friend, and it showed an astounding knowledge of past incidents in connection with Bitton and the dead child. That "Alec West" and "Norman Fordyce" were one, Lord Brooke now knew, and that the man who posed, first in the former name and secondly in the latter, had learned certain very important facts from William Rockley he probably also knew. But, however much or little he had gleaned from Rockley, it was certain that Considine's letter completed the evidence against the stranger.

In reply to that letter Lord Brooke had impressed Considine with the fact that he was going to do nothing and attached no importance to the incident; but in reality he had come instantly to Lugano, that he

might meet the inquisitive unknown face to face and arrive at some understanding, or take steps to cut short his activities.

Lord Brooke must be both alarmed and intensely curious. The unknown was "getting hot." He certainly knew a great deal concerning the death of Ludovic Bewes, though it appeared equally clear that, unless possessed of information hidden from all living men but Lord Brooke himself, he could know nothing concerning the death of the child's father. Doctor Considine, in writing to Lord Brooke, had made it clear that he had told Fordyce no more than what was publicly announced concerning that death. Therefore the unknown could only imagine that the late Lord Brooke had met with a fatal accident. Against that supposition, however, the enemy would remember that his opponent, being familiar with particulars concerning the boy's end, and evidently associating them with Lord Brooke, might argue that the man who caused Ludovic to be destroyed would not have hesitated to treat his own brother in the same way. To inquire into this matter, therefore, the unknown had probably come to Italy.

The minor problem, as to why this stranger was pursuing an inquiry so arduous, would also greatly puzzle Lord Brooke; and Ringrose suspected that he might first seek light upon it; for John's connections in the outer world and the extent of his touch with them would certainly be a consideration. Lord Brooke would want to know, not only who he was, but for whom he was operating. That he was working single-handed and entirely on his own account would not occur to his lordship. This view, that the real opponent lay behind Ringrose, might breed caution in Lord Brooke which was the last thing that the detective desired to provoke. Yet it was impossible for himself to proclaim the true facts. He could only maneuver in such a way as to tempt the other to strike: he could not make him strike.

Then followed the second issue. Brooke would be deeply anxious to know exactly what the unknown was thinking. His opponent still posed as "Norman Fordyce" and evidently meant to continue doing so. "Fordyce" was apparently powerless, but he might have sources of information concealed from Lord Brooke. He had evidently, by way of Bologna, traced him to Lugano at the critical date, for Lord Brooke would recollect the letters forwarded to him there. Yet what more could the enemy possibly know? To learn what more would surely be Lord Brooke's object at their approaching dinner. But how to gratify that curiosity, while himself playing the part of an innocent man, John Ringrose did not as yet see. It depended entirely upon the line of attack, and concerning that he remained in ignorance, for Brooke's mentality was still incalculable. The detective could only hope that a simple ruse, which he had designed for their meeting, would fulfill its object, and add to Lord Brooke's information, though, with such a man as his opponent, the snare might be spread in vain.

He had engaged a private sitting room at the Hotel Victoria, and designed that in this apartment the momentous dinner should be served.

He was seated at a writing desk in the window, engaged upon a letter, when the hour for the meal arrived. He had written one page of his communication, on hotel note paper, and was halfway down the next when his guest was announced. He thereupon started up with some slight show of surprise, and ostentatiously dropped a piece of blotting paper over the unfinished note.

"Welcome, Mr. Bewes, welcome!" he said, shaking the extended hand; then he turned to the waiter.

"An apéritif for Mr. Bewes, my son, and dinner in five minutes."

Then he chatted with the visitor until two cocktails had been brought, drank one, and begged the guest to excuse him.

"I didn't know the time," he said. "Just a wash and brush up. You'll excuse war paint, Mr. Bewes. I'm traveling light."

He left the room, after the waiter had done so, went to his bedchamber, put on a black coat and black tie and brushed his hair. In seven minutes he returned and went to the writing desk. Meanwhile his guest had perceived the little indications that John was disconcerted at his sudden entrance, and had noticed the action with the blotting paper. Subsequent conversation before he left the room may or may not have led Lord Brooke to judge that his unfinished letter had escaped John's mind. At any rate that was the idea Mr. Ringrose had desired to convey. Alone in the room, Lord Brooke had lifted the blotting paper carefully and read the unfinished communication. Thus it ran:

HOTEL VICTORIA,
LUGANO.

MY DEAR WIFE: The astounding discovery begun with Arthur Bitton at Bridport is now on the way to its end. I have little doubt that Lord Brooke murdered his brother, and the details will yield to my methods. He is alarmed and he is here. We have met and he dines with me to-night. He is an amazingly clever devil and I shall need to handle him in my best manner. The beauty of it is that nobody on earth knows that he's the biggest blackguard unhanged, or that I'm after him! The Yard will wonder! I go to-morrow to The Eagle's Larder—a spot in the mountains where the crime——

Lord Brooke replaced the letter carefully and restored the blotting paper with scrupulous exactness. Its contents had in no way astonished him and he felt no doubt whatever that it had been intended he should read it, because it contained an essential item which he knew to be false. He laughed silently, walked out onto the balcony of the apartment and was gazing over Lugano when his host returned, hastened to the desk and, putting his papers into a drawer, locked it. John then rang the bell for dinner and emerged onto the balcony. He revealed just that slight flutter of perturbation proper to one who has committed an act of extraordinary stupidity. But would not the other read through it? Was it not too transparent? Had Brooke even troubled to look at the letter? John's only hope was that the other would underrate his ability and believe the letter. At any rate, whether he believed it or no, the detective judged that its contents must have startled him. Nothing in Lord Brooke's manner, however, indicated that he had been startled and it remained for John to learn, through subsequent conversation, that he had indeed read the letter.

"How heavenly Lugano is from here," said the visitor. "The dusk and the vast purple shadows, after the sun has set, make it infinitely beautiful."

"I suppose they do. I'm a bit fed up myself. I'm for home in a day or two. Come and eat, my lor—Mr. Bewes, I should say."

A very perfect meal had been prepared and his lordship did justice to it; while John, playing a part which involved the most delicate shades of pretended distraction, drank pretty heartily, but declared Italian cooking was getting on his nerves. He had to act the retired commercial traveler before a man who knew perfectly well that he was acting; but he strove successfully to recreate the "Norman Fordyce" of Brooke-Norton.

They chatted on the subject of Lord Brooke's hobby, and he declared his visit to Lugano had not been in vain. Then his lordship inquired concerning Mr. Fordyce's travels and John sketched an itinerary the other must know to be inaccurate. They told each other entertaining stories and played their parts with immense skill, each waiting for an opening.

Then Lord Brooke asked a question:

"When you were on Como, did you happen to meet a medical man, a doctor called Considine?"

"At Menaggio—yes. I did meet him, and I guessed he must have been the chap who turned down your niece. I thought I was sick there—a chill—and he looked me over and found I was all right. A decent sort of bird—so he seemed. Of course I didn't allude to Miss Bewes."

"Was he married?"

"Can't say. I only saw him once."

Lord Brooke nodded thoughtfully.

"A mystery that. I shall never understand it."

"I hope the young lady is going strong? She was a charming girl, if I may say so."

"She's all right—at Florence just now. If I can get a little bargain presently I shall return there in a day or two. I have, however, a pilgrimage of sentiment to make before I go back."

John pricked his ears but showed no interest, and the other did not immediately pursue the subject. By gradual degree, from a spirit of genial friendship, he became apparently more self-absorbed. There were pauses between the intervals of talk and Lord Brooke appeared to be communing with his own thoughts. From these reveries he would emerge, listen to his host, or himself make conversation, and then retreat, as it were, behind a cloud again.

Ringrose became curiously conscious that he himself was living over the past again. He remembered those periods of hesitation when Arthur Bitton, tempted and inspired by John's sentiments, trembled, not once but many times, on the brink of confidences, yet resisted making them. And now, though he could hardly trust his ears, it seemed as though the guest was also reviewing hideous events of the past and considering whether to enter upon those dark experiences hidden in his heart alone.

An impression so improbable kept Ringrose alert and incredulous. He waited to hear more before pretending to appreciate Lord Brooke's meaning. Indeed he made it clear, by his replies, that he failed either to appreciate or respond to any such drift in the other's mind. The idea that this man was obeying those psychological promptings that had moved Bitton, when the past was impressed so dreadfully upon him; the notion that Lord Brooke, in the shadow of peril, would react to primitive human instinct and seek a confidant, was just possible, though improbable to a degree; but that he should indicate cowardly desire for more friendly relations with a known enemy, the detective rejected as a development contrary to character and therefore false.

Yet Lord Brooke continued to harp on this string, with notes so clear that at last he left no doubt of the extraordinary impression he desired to convey. From a certain pensive attitude, combined with general reflections on the fallibility of human nature and the illusory hope of happiness, he became personal.

"You and the rest of the world, Mr. Fordyce, think I'm a jester," he said, "but few men have less to jest about than myself. Life has probed me pretty thoroughly, and none has more to lament and less to satisfy him when he looks backward. I am a curious being. A ruling passion, if nature has provided no counterweights or controls, is about the most terrible endowment; and I, who speak to you, have lived to experience in my own person the fearful consequences of being possessed and dominated by an idea."

John responded mechanically.

"It depends on the idea, my lord."

They were now alone smoking their cigars and drinking coffee and liqueurs.

"A dominant idea, or ruling passion, as we call it," continued the elder, "may no doubt be a very noble inheritance, or endowment. Men of one idea go the farthest, and if that idea is on the line of progress and destined to advance the welfare of humanity, then such men become the salt of the earth."

Lord Brooke agreed.

"Very true indeed," he said. "But if, as in my case, the driving instinct, while not actually unsocial, is none the less useless; if it becomes the sole rule of life; if it attains such infernal mastery that it distorts reason and duty and—and every rule of conduct——"

He broke off and sighed. He presented a man given to reflection—a being temperamentally different from himself, as Ringrose had known him up to the present.

"Then, of course, it may well become a curse and land the sufferer in grave difficulties of conscience," admitted John.

More and more the unreality of this conversation impressed itself upon him; and yet, if his opponent were playing a part, he certainly performed to perfection.

Lord Brooke broke off now, made general remarks on character and confessed that he had never in his life contracted a close friendship.

"It is a fact," he said, "that I have neither liked nor disliked my fellow creatures. Such reputation as I may have acquired as a good fellow is the result, not of a warm heart, but a cold one. Thus such men as I am, often get a measure of credit we don't deserve. Men I regard merely as useful or useless, and as common sense reminds me that the useless of to-day may be the useful of to-morrow, I never quarrel with anybody. Women have not entered into my life, save on the rare occasions when they could be useful. With only one woman did I ever interfere from altruistic reasons—for her own sake, not my own. I may tell you that story if you care to learn it; but what for the moment I am coming to is this—that my indifference to mankind received a curious shock when I met you. Don't laugh. I know it sounds absurd, but it is none the less a fact, that when you came to Brooke-Norton—a man not in my narrow and circumscribed sphere—a man whose life and activities had doubtless led him to take a different and larger view of life than mine—a man, who, as it were, crossed my own path at right angles for the infinitely brief space of time represented by a few hours only—then something in you, or something in myself rather, responded to the clash, and I felt in you a puzzling interest, and felt toward you a friendly sentiment which was absolutely outside any former experience."

"You do me much honor," said Ringrose, doubting if he waked or slept.

"Not in the least. It rather bored me, if anything, when I realized it. Who were you and what could you be to me? Frankly

I was glad to see the last of you; and I doubted not that I should very quickly think the last of you when you had gone. But it was not so. I found you sticking in my mind, like a burr, and asked myself a hundred times and with gathering impatience what the deuce there was about you unlike other people, to create this extraordinary interest. You think I'm talking nonsense?"

"Indeed, no. Why should you say these remarkable things to me if you don't mean them?"

"When you had gone, it is a fact that I wanted you back. Why, I could not conceive at the time. Perhaps I hardly know yet; but I did; and when I saw you suddenly and unexpectedly this morning, beside me in the open street, an emotion of something very like delight overpowered me. I cannot conceal my feelings, as you will have discovered, and I did not attempt to do so. There is, however, a great deal more in this than meets the eye. I have thought much since we met a few hours ago. But I bore you?"

Ringrose considered before replying. It was now that he perceived a likeness in the speaker's attitude of mind to that he had awakened in Arthur Bitton; but while in the former case it had been genuine, here, seeing what Lord Brooke knew of John, it could not possibly be. The mind of the detective ran on to his companion's motives. He believed that he guessed them, and he essayed to make the way a little clearer for Lord Brooke by changing the subject. He indicated bewilderment on his face and a sense of embarrassment.

"I'm an everyday sort of man, your lordship, and, of course, anybody like you is out of my experience. I liked you naturally, for nobody—none of the big wigs, I mean—had treated me in such a friendly way as you. But, you see, our paths in life are widely separated. I shall be going home the day after to-morrow, I expect. And, if it were ever in my power to do you a service—though it sounds absurd that I could—gladly I would do so."

He stopped. The hollow absurdity of this talk made him impatient. What on earth was the use of going on pretending in his own case, while as for the other, any desire that he might have for closer relations could only be sinister. And surely he must know that Ringrose knew it?

He then gave Lord Brooke his opportunity.

"For my final trip," he said in the silence that followed his last remark, "for my last trip, I thought to take a steamer and go over to Santa Margharita to-morrow. They tell me there's a climbing railway there that will take me up to a place called the Belvedere di Lanzo, where you get a wonderful view."

John looked straight into the other man's eyes as he spoke; but Lord Brooke betrayed nothing. He nodded and indicated that he regretted the change in their conversation.

"Yes—yes—a grand view. You can't do better, I dare say."

"I'll try it then," declared John and lit another cigar. For the next speech he waited with infinite interest.

"I'm going afield to-morrow too," said Lord Brooke after a pause. "I intend to visit one of the most beautiful spots in this district—and one of the saddest on earth to me. Have you heard of La Sporta dell' Aquila, or The Eagle's Basket, or Larder, as we call it in English?"

"Never," said Ringrose, and his answer provoked not a flicker. Even now he could not be positive that Brooke had read his letter.

"It's a tongue of ground under Monte Galbiga, some miles to the north of the little lake of Piano, which you pass in the train between Porlezza and Menaggio. From that place you can see both Como and Lugano, and enjoy a marvelous view to the north over Val Cavargna to the mountains, and to the south across the range that separates the lakes."

"It sounds all right."

"I spoke of a pilgrimage just now," continued the other. "At La Sporta dell' Aquila my brother lost his life, and something always draws me there. I have visited the place every year since his fatal accident. I should have been a better and a cleaner man, Fordyce, if he had lived. His death in a sense ruined me."

Ringrose appreciated the terrific truth of these words, but pretended not to do so.

"An elder brother can be a good influence no doubt, my lord, if he's the right sort."

Lord Brooke regarded Ringrose with a strange expression.

"Sometimes I wonder if you know more of me than you let appear in your answers," he said. "It's a curious sensation. Perhaps

the wish is father to the thought. I want you to know more of me, and in a way it puzzles me that you do not; yet how can you?"

Again bewilderment covered the detective's features. He made as though to speak, but only stared.

Lord Brooke continued.

"There is a strange desire in my mind that you should know more of me. Strange, because I never felt such a desire before in the presence of any human creature—not even my own brother. Probably it's pure selfishness. Everything I do and think is selfish. But it exists. There has come over me a want—a need—a hunger to talk to you about things so unbelievable that I dare say you won't believe them. Yet they are true. Can you humor me in this matter and accept a confidence? A confidence is often an impertinence, and I shall understand if you desire no such thing and don't reciprocate my feeling. Indeed, I see by your face you don't. Yet you are a man of tremendous human sympathies—I, that have none, can recognize them in another. Will you listen to me?"

"Why, of course, my lord, if you think I can help you."

"Do you *want* to help me?"

The point was made with such terrible intensity and earnestness that it seemed a hard question to answer with a lie. But John experienced no sense of hypnotism before this appeal. He clove to the reality underlying the pretense and believed that all must be a pretense. He knew what was coming.

"If it's in my power, I'll be proud to listen to you and help you too," he answered with seeming cordiality.

"It may be in your power. At least it's in your power to join my little expedition to-morrow and come to Monte Galbiga. Then I could tell you what I feel so impelled to tell. It's a mystery, Fordyce; but, by God, it's a reality!"

"I'll come with pleasure, if you honestly wish it, my lord. I'm no great walker, though."

"You do not need to be. We take steamer to Porlezza—there's one at ten o'clock from here—and thence the climb—on an easy, hairpin road for the most part—is not much above five miles, I think."

"I'm good for that."

"It is unspeakably kind. I appreciate your concession far more than I can tell you."

"I'll look out for the ten-o'clock boat then."

Lord Brooke nodded and indicated a deep sense of the other's good will. For a moment he seemed too moved to speak. Then insensibly he returned to a more conventional frame of mind, dismissed his own preoccupations and spoke on indifferent subjects. But the newly developed friendship apparently permitted to him a certain warmth and absence of reserve already. With returning animation he showed an instinct to be confidential—an almost ingenuous pleasure at finding in John Ringrose one who had opened portals in his heart that none, as yet, had ever opened.

The evening ended after eleven o'clock and the guest went his way, leaving a man who indeed much desired to be alone, to measure the significance of all that he had heard.

John never was a niggard of praise where he held that it had been earned, and he felt an immediate, professional instinct to commend his adversary's general opening of the attack. But it was necessary to reflect somewhat deeply before even praise might be accorded Lord Brooke's strategy. He could not yet feel sure that the other had been so very astute.

He examined the line taken. Lord Brooke had acted on a certain preconceived plan. He had pretended that he knew nothing of Ringrose's activities before Ringrose went to Brooke-Norton, and nothing of his researches after he left Brooke-Norton. He had proclaimed a strange sentiment of attraction to John, an inclination to trust him and even confide in him. He admitted that no such prompting had ever touched his heart before; and yet a stranger had awakened it. He had spoken as if, after John's departure, he had desired his return; and he had certainly shown great pleasure at meeting John in Lugano. He had also exhibited extreme surprise when they came together. Then, awakened by the meeting, Lord Brooke's emotion had quickened, until his tone was altered and he revealed an intense satisfaction at the other's presence—a satisfaction which puzzled Lord Brooke himself—but which none the less speedily developed into the desire for closer relations and confidence—a confidence of deeply significant character.

But what was the truth? Lord Brooke's knowledge of John Ringrose and his activities must of necessity be far deeper than he pretended. It was impossible that he knew nothing more than he had asserted to Ringrose, and impossible that he could suppose Ringrose would believe him. What had brought him to Lugano at this moment? It was true Considine's letter had told him Ringrose was at Lugano; but it had told him much more than that, and William Rockley must have at the least made it clear that Fordyce and Alec West were one. Lord Brooke, then, certainly knew all about him. And thereupon John followed a very curious train of thought. Suppose that on the morrow, among the peaks and precipices, his opponent, instead of seeking to destroy him, were to confess his crime? Suppose that this man, faced with the fact that he was discovered, should make a clean breast of it? Was it to that his recent conversation paved the way? If so, where stood Ringrose?

"That would be devilish clever—up to a point," thought John. "But he can't regard himself as in such a tight place yet." The detective considered what would follow such a step. If the confession fell on his ear from a man wakened into terror and remorse by circumstance, what rôle must the confessor play afterward? To ask the question was to answer it. No pity for Lord Brooke stirred in the heart of Ringrose. Indeed he delayed but a moment on this aspect of the problem. Dust might be blown in his eyes; but it would not blind him now. The murderer of little Ludovic Bewes would cringe in vain to him.

In any case a confession, if indeed Brooke contemplated such a thing, could now be no honest one. Only the criminal's situation had inspired such a thought, just as only under the torture had Bitton wavered. Yet, none the less, Ringrose half suspected that some such design harbored in the mind of his opponent; and in that event he did not think twice concerning his own future actions. But the more he reflected upon Lord Brooke, the less he was disposed to believe that, once on The Eagle's Larder, he would waste time in any more theatricals.

"I've got him where I wanted him, and where no doubt he wanted me; and to-morrow proves all," thought John as he turned over and swiftly slept, leaving the issue to the proof of the morrow.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE EAGLE'S LARDER.

MAN rises early on the Italian lakes and every hamlet glimmering at water level, or bowered among the mountain crags above, was engaged upon the unceasing task of earning its existence while yet the morning sky glowed with honeysuckle colors of dawn and still the misty surface of Lugano lay deep in shadow. But presently the sun, burning away these vapors, flung a glory of gold and turquoise upon the lake, where crept out the little boats; and white steamers, like water flies, sped over the surface leaving threads of light behind them. From the shores thin bell music ascended, while gentian blue against the dark forest gorges there rose the smoke of morning fires. The air was already trembling with heat when Ringrose set out for the landing place, and he had scarcely boarded the sturdy little paddle boat when she cast off and steamed upon her way.

Lord Brooke was aboard. He wore dark-gray knickerbockers and a Norfolk jacket; and he carried a pair of field glasses slung in a case over his shoulder. He sat aft, but rose from his seat as John appeared, and shook hands with him.

"I feared you had changed your mind," he said. He was subdued and in an abstracted and melancholy mood despite the splendor of the day.

John Ringrose expressed regret at cutting it so fine.

"To tell you the truth," he added, "your lordship gave me a good deal to think about last night."

"Call me 'Bewes.' What a rare morning! I have seen dawn in every country of the world save the Far North; but I think here it is most beautiful of all."

"Natural scenery interests you; you understand it, Mr. Bewes. But I'm afraid these things don't mean all they should to me. I gather that it is going to be devilish hot."

"A good day for the mountains. If you look up there to the southeast you can see the head of Monte Galbiga."

He pointed and John showed concern.

"Great powers! You don't mean we're going up there on our own legs!"

"No, not to the top. Our goal is more than two thousand feet below the actual summit. It's easy going if we strike a slow

rate of progress. I'll make you forget the road."

At Porlezza they disembarked and Ringrose saw that the other had picked up a little brown woven square basket.

"What's that?" he asked.

"My luncheon."

"By Jove, I've brought none! I thought there would be a hostelry or inn up there."

Lord Brooke shook his head.

"An inn on The Eagle's Larder would have few clients but the birds of prey," he answered. "However, I shall have enough for both."

"Then I must do my part and carry the basket."

"We'll take turns at that. You shall do your share."

They had soon left the landing stage, and Lord Brooke, to whom the way was familiar, proceeded by a short cut easterly. A couple of miles brought them above the farmhouses and cultivated ground, and presently they emerged upon a mountain road which the detective recognized. It was that by which he and Considine had traveled on their mules when first he visited the aerie above. The last wayside home of man was now beneath them and they proceeded at a slow but steady pace along the gradual gradient. Then, at a knee of the road, where it turned at an acute angle from east to west upon the immense bosom of the hills, Lord Brooke spoke suddenly.

"How much, or how little, of what I am going to tell you is already known to you, I cannot say," he began. "But that a great deal is known, I am sure. And first let me reveal that, while your real name and your ultimate purpose are hidden from me, this much is not. You are not called 'Fordyce,' any more than, when you stopped at Bridport in the winter, were you called 'West.' "

They eyed each other, but Brooke's expression was dull and his voice indicated indifference rather than vexation. John did not pretend surprise, though the opening was other than he had expected.

"Go on," he said.

"You are not astonished that I should tell you this? I only do so to strip the situation of absurdity and come to the truth, if you are as willing to divulge the truth as I am. The difficulty for me is enormous, because in the light of reality, since you have in a sense conquered and I stand before you defeated, it may be impossible to make you believe my assurances, or indicate to you even a shadow of what my life has been during the past two years. It has been something so infernal, so horrible, so filled with mental torment that I do not exaggerate when I tell you that I am thankful the tale of my sufferings is nearly told."

Lord Brooke stood still for a moment, passed a silk handkerchief over his face, and looked with haggard eyes into the depths beneath, where Lago Piano, like a jade-colored cat's eye, glimmered from its lashes of green rush.

"You are thinking," continued the young man, "that an evil-doer, run to earth at last by your unsleeping genius, is going to confess his crime in hope that you will be touched with compunction and permit him to escape your hand. You are saying to yourself that here walks a craven and a coward, who finding his secret sin in the keeping of another man, now confesses it and begs for mercy. That would be a natural assumption for you to make; but you wrong me if you make it. Many a terrible month before you sought the society of my late valet, Bitton; and long before you came to Brooke-Norton as Norman Fordyce, I had sickened of the torture in my soul. And I ask for no mercy now. I am not even concerned to know how you discovered the accursed thing that I have done. You are right in your surmise as to the poor child; but you are mistaken as to your further suspicion that I destroyed his father. I had no hand in my brother's death and may tell you, in confidence, that he destroyed himself. This fact, concealed for his children's sake, and the credit of his family at the time, can be substantiated by Doctor Considine, who was the man that found the body. Certain incidents made it clear that poor Rupert took his own life; and it was from the place to which we are now climbing that he willed to throw himself and perish."

Lord Brooke stopped again, but still Ringrose did not speak. John cast a look, neither of scorn nor anger, upon his companion. His expression was one almost of sympathy. His head seemed bowed, as though part of the weight of the speaker's sin rested upon it also. He uttered one deep sigh and no more.

"I will speak of you first," proceeded the younger man. "Justice to myself demands that I should declare how remorse and unspeakable mental suffering were already

tearing my heart before I knew of your existence; and that I state before my God as truth. I do not, however, expect you to believe it; but so it was. Thus it stood with me when I was suddenly confronted with the death of my accomplice under very mysterious circumstances. I knew Bitton through and through, as intimately as one man may know another; and when the terrific temptation came to me to remove my invalid nephew from my path and inherit the wealth he represented, I turned to this man. I did so because he had showed me, in many minor rascalities concerned with my hobby, that he had no more conscience than myself. But who can escape the possession of a conscience? We fondly imagine, while our hands are still clean, that we are not as other men, and that we stand on a plane above good or evil; but, my God, let us act upon that assumption, let us commit a crime before which the moral sense, inherent in every man is violated, and though we are hard as steel and slippery as ice, yet we shall surely suffer. I, at least, did not escape the furies. I committed a damnable crime and I endured a punishment so damnable that I am thankful my conflict is ended and the sequel now in other hands. Death would be a feast after starvation now, and so it will be. Surely it must have been with Bitton as it is with me! He too, hard-hearted and cunning devil though he was, must have found himself faced at last with such a horror and remorse at the thing he had done that his life was no longer bearable. And, in his case, I conceive that you were the instrument of justice—as you intend to be in my own.

"Whether he felt, before you entered into his life, as I have felt for the two years that stretch behind me now like an eternity of hell, I do not know. Whether it was you who in some manner familiar to yourself alone quickened a conscience that would never have wakened but for your goading, I cannot tell. Your friendship and sympathy may have won his confession and so proclaimed him the vilest of men, to your surprise; or you may have gone to him actually aware of his horrible secret and determined to get it out of him. Probably that is what happened, and through channels, unknown alike to me or to him, you discovered what we both believed was hidden till doom. It does not matter how you found out; it does not matter who you are, or for whom you are working. I neither know nor care. What does matter is that now you stand to me as you doubtless stood to Bitton. You have learned the truth. At the touch of Ithuriel's spear, I am revealed. And I am immeasurably thankful that it is so. I came to Lugano two days ago to find you if it were possible; and why I guessed you might be here, I will tell you at the end of this story."

He spoke in a dreary, monotonous voice; but there was none the less a suggestion of relief in his tones as the narrative proceeded. He was breathing rather hard, and Ringrose suggested that they should stop for a little while and rest. Unconsciously Brooke had quickened his pace as he talked; but John felt no desire to be hurried.

"Sit down for ten minutes," he said. "I am following you very closely and I do not want to miss anything. What you say about me is true enough, Lord Brooke. But how do you know who I am?"

"I do not know who you are, save that you are the messenger of an outraged God," answered the other quietly. "What I have to ask from you is not your name, or your authority for the thing you have done. I shall put a very different request presently. For the minute I will tell you how I found out that I was under your scrutiny and how I associated you with the man mentioned in connection with Arthur Bitton's suicide."

They sat on a broad stone by the lonely way, and Ringrose listened while the other continued.

"When I first saw you in the hall at Brooke-Norton I felt no intuition of evil to myself, no sense of danger. Perhaps, had I done so, I might have welcomed you more warmly than was the case. But I did feel a subconscious sense that I had seen you before. I experienced the dimmest and most shadowy suspicion that I had met you—where, or when, I could not determine. I puzzled over it, for a man with my evil conscience looks out at his fellow man through very different eyes from most of us. But the impression vanished on closer acquaintance and I ceased to wonder. I found you amazingly attractive and a type of perceptive and understanding humanity that had the art to charm me against my will. It is strange to say so, but I have seldom been happier in my life than during the hours you spent with me at my English home. What I told you last night is the truth: my

heart responded to you and, for a time, I forgot my own misery. I was amazed afterward to think how cheerful I had been.

"Then, shortly before you left, while I was contemplating a future meeting, the veil suddenly lifted and an action of your own, like a flash of lightning, revealed to me the truth about you. I came into my gallery unheard by you, found you there and discovered that you were carefully studying the Barthel ivory. What it meant to you, or how you associated it with Bitton or with me, God only knows; but what it meant to me was a terrific revelation—a thunderbolt out of a clear sky! It told me that you associated that hideous carving with larger issues, and it acted as a sudden and violent stumulus to memory. In a second I knew where I had seen you before. It was walking with Bitton in Bridport High Street. You had left him instantly as I stopped him and I had not seen you again; but I had asked him who you were and he had told me you were a new friend of his. And then I knew that the dead boy, Ludovic Bewes, was in your mind.

"You were now just about to leave Brooke-Norton, and to obviate any suggestion that I associated you with the Barthel ivory, I decided at the last moment to buy Mrs. Campbell's piece—the Goldoni—and present you with a check. Thus I hoped, for the moment, to hide from you that I had discovered you and Bitton's friend were one. You departed, leaving me with my thoughts; and if I could have willed you back to me and seen you again I doubt not that I should have told you the story I am telling now. There is a time in a criminal's life when he hungers horribly to share the knowledge of his wickedness with a fellow creature; and that time had long come to me. But, until then, I had met no man in whom I could confide, or to whom I could confess. Then I knew you were such a man.

"I do not need to be told that this is the strangest experience you have met with. It must be so. I do not even now ask to know your name. I know right well you doubt my honesty. But you will at least listen to the end."

"I am listening," answered the other. "It is perhaps my strangest experience, as you say."

"There is really little to add. I heard, on reaching Florence, that you had been there; and I quickly perceived, from old Rockley's gossip, that you had associated me with another but an imaginary crime—doubtless suspecting that the man who destroyed his nephew did the like for his brother. William Rockley was, of course, easy to interrogate. You learned from him certain facts concerning my movements and they tended to verify your new suspicions. You traced me from Bologna to Lugano, by letters forwarded from the Hotel Cavour, and it was that circumstance which brought me here, because I guessed and hoped that I should find you. After all it matters little, and you may believe that I killed my brother if you will."

"You deny that?"

"Absolutely. It was the death of my brother that put the thought of the subsequent crime into my mind."

"But you were at Lugano when he died?"

"That is true—about my ivories."

"And you have a final request to make to me, Lord Brooke?"

"I have—when we reach our destination. It is not much farther."

The mind of Ringrose was not revealed in his face. He had assumed such an expression as might be summoned by the narrative. He was gloomy, cast down, laconic and thoughtful; but natural, physical symptoms under the arduous climb declared themselves and could not be concealed. The sun and the exertion had made him very hot. He mopped his head as they reached the plateau, set down the basket which he had been carrying, and sought the shade of a thicket.

"Come with me a moment before we rest," said Lord Brooke, "and I will show you where my brother ended his life."

He walked in advance and presently stood at the edge of the precipice—so perilously near it that John warned him.

"You urge me to be careful," answered the other. "Why? Have the things that I told you moved up so little that you can still only regard me as a victim for the gallows? When I failed to find you, I resolved to come here a few days ago. I had already made up my mind to destroy myself, as my brother did. Now, in some strange way, I realize, since meeting you, that with my confession to you has gone a sort of responsibility. I have put it upon you and feel committed to hear you before I act. That, at least, is how I feel about it. I am in your power, though I know you not. There was

no obligation to place myself in your power. I might have fought you secretly; I might have conquered; and had you been any man than the man you are, I should have fought and I should have conquered, even though I followed Bitton into the unknown afterward. But you have altered all that. You are not my enemy. I have done you no wrong. You are not concerned with a sinner, but his crime. I understand that and, therefore, I have made my confession and related the truth. And I ask you now, in sober seriousness—petition you—implore you—to let me do as I wish and take my own life in my own way. You have not inspired me to this resolve. You have not driven me to die, as you must have driven my accomplice. I had already come within an ace of self-destruction and resolved long since to cut my own life short; but you have brought the thing close and, as I say, if I did not feel under a curious sense of obligation, if I did not entertain for you a most sincere and inexplicable regard, I should not ask your leave, but jump over this precipice in your sight."

"I understand the request—to permit your suicide—and I appreciate your attitude to me," replied the other. "When we are faced with an experience such as this—a proposition unique on the earth perhaps—it is impossible to speak without the deepest consideration. It is true that I was the cause of Bitton's death. You have been so frank with me that I will be frank with you. How I discovered the truth concerning that child's end is no matter; but my purpose in associating with Bitton was to win from him the confession that I have now heard from you. I erred in my estimate of character, and the conditions that I created to reach his secret ended in my driving him to his death. Now you have told me what I expected to learn from him; and you say that you feel life no longer tolerable, even as he felt it. You ask me to let you do as he did and to take my secret discovery to the grave with me."

They had strolled away from the cliff and into the shade. Ringrose sat down, took off his coat and threw it beside him. Then he mopped his face again. The other slung off his field glasses, turned to the luncheon hamper and opened it. He displayed a simple meal.

"You are hungry," he said. "Eat and drink and forget me for half an hour."

He drew his field glasses from their case, stood up and strolled twenty yards to look into the valley. Their road was clearly indicated, zigzagging over the steep ascent beneath.

"May I help myself?" asked John, and without taking his eyes from the lifted glasses, Lord Brooke begged him to do so. When he returned a few minutes later, his companion was cracking walnuts, and an empty tumbler stood at his elbow. The mark of the red wine was on his upper lip. A sandwich or two had also disappeared.

"I've never been so thirsty in my life," he said. "Don't think I'm forgetting for a moment what you have told me, Lord Brooke. I'm only human and, God knows, I have plenty of sins on my own conscience. We'll go into your terrible story presently. But physical needs must come first. I am a good deal distressed with such a climb. May I take another glass? We must drink fair, though."

"Go ahead. I'm not hungry or thirsty."

Ringrose poured himself more red wine from the bottle and his companion reclined and peeled an orange listlessly. John made an effort to be cheerful, but evidently impressed with the situation, soon relapsed into silence. Brooke was also very silent. Gazing down the acclivities, he noticed a movement far below and jumping to his feet again used the field glasses.

Not men but a dozen goats were wandering on the road a mile beneath. He returned and cast himself down beside Ringrose.

"What wine is that?" asked John, whose glass was empty again.

By way of answer the other prepared to fill it once more, but Ringrose refused.

"No, no; it's your turn. I've had my share."

But Brooke insisted.

"You need it," he said. "It's only Chianti."

He filled John's glass again and then his own. For a time there was silence, while Lord Brooke broke a roll of bread and ate a little.

"Tell me," he said suddenly, "if I could have done otherwise than I have done, seeing the extraordinary influence you have exerted over me?"

But Ringrose did not reply and, after he had lifted his glass and set it down empty, Lord Brooke turned to see a transformed

companion staring at him. Once more John's glass was empty; but he had flung away his cigarette and was shrinking into himself with curious, unnatural gestures. His face had grown pale and his eyes stared. His hands were fumbling about his neck.

"What the devil's amiss with me?" he said, trying to smile. "That Chianti's strong!"

And then the other in his turn suffered a sudden, complete transformation. His misery seemed to roll off him like a garment, and while Ringrose paled and appeared to sweat uneasily and press a hand, first to his bosom and then his stomach, Lord Brooke's round face flushed and his eyes sparkled like polished gems.

"It's gone home—eh? Your thirst is quenched? The Chianti wasn't out of the common, but it contained a lethal dose of hyoscine, strong enough to settle a dozen busy rascals—John Ringrose—the great detective—among them!"

The other glared and strove to rise, but sank back again.

"I chose hyoscine, because I wanted to talk to you before we said good-by," continued Brooke.

Then from his pocket he brought out a photograph.

Meantime the other's head already fell forward drowsily. He made strenuous efforts to keep his senses and stretched for his coat, but Brooke drew it out of his reach.

"You'll be insensible in five minutes," he said, "and then you'll sink into coma and in half an hour, or less, you'll die. Quite painless. And then the pride of Scotland Yard will go over the cliff—to be found at some future time and doubtless lamented by the good wife you were writing to last night for my benefit—the wife who doesn't exist!"

John Ringrose flashed back looks of futile fury and his mouth opened, but only inarticulate grunts and gasps issued from it. There was a tremor beginning in his lower limbs. With a struggle he got on to his knees and remained for a few moments in that position. Then he rolled over upon his side inert.

"Look!" cried the murderer. "Open your eyes once more and look at this picture of yourself, my good John. When I went to write Mrs. Campbell's check for the excellent Goldoni, I knew you were a wrong un, and I snapped a picture of you from my study window. Then I had it enlarged and sent to London; and a private inquirer there—such was your deserved fame—had no difficulty in letting me know my antagonist. You'll guess the rest, how I——"

He broke off, for he was speaking to one obviously beyond reach of his words. The detective lay half upon his stomach, his hands clenched in the grass. He breathed stertorously and his legs still twitched. Lord Brooke approaching the unconscious man, watched symptoms already familiar to him, then he kicked his conquered enemy in the side. Next he looked at his watch and, picking up his glasses, strolled down the plateau.

He smoked a couple of cigarettes, satisfied himself that no fellow creature shared that vast and sun-scorched loneliness, and presently returned. But John Ringrose had vanished, though evidence of his actions did not lack. It was clear that he could not stand; but he had crawled on his hands and knees behind the sumac trees, where the men had sat together, and so tumbled, or deliberately flung himself down the slope behind them. Here the ground shelved steeply over barren steps of the limestone that, like a dragon's scales, covered the scree. Only a low juniper or two nibbled by goats and tufts of hoary lavender clothed this naked space, and it fell swiftly to the edge of the precipice. Beneath, the cliffs caved inward, and below them, after a sheer fall of five hundred feet, the glen beneath was full of spruce firs, reduced to the appearance of dark moss when seen from above.

Here was evidence of the thing Ringrose had done. Clear marks of his passing were indicated in the grass above and on the slope that sank from it. A dark trail showed in the patches of soil between the stony plates of the declivity. The line was clearly marked to the edge of the precipice, and through his glasses Brooke could trace every yard of it. Near the boundary he saw John's Panama hat a few yards from the edge of the cliffs; but the bruised earth showed farther yet to the brink. He crept down with infinite care, for the place was treacherous and each foothold of withered herbage as slippery as glass. The sloping stones were fiery hot under the sunshine, but no doubt existed as to the evidence of the victim's last act. He had gone over while

alive—whether consciously or by accident could not be known. Regaining the plateau, Brooke again used his glasses and raked every yard of the glittering slope. Once he saw a movement at a small juniper, but it was only a great hawk, that flew off into the void as he focused upon it. He returned and examined the jacket of Ringrose. It contained only a hotel key, the key of the detective's kit bag and a pocketbook. This afforded the searcher one item of interest. A receipted hotel bill from Menaggio, a small address book and a dozen Italian stamps were all that it contained. But among the directions in the little book appeared one that held the investigator. He read, "Mr. J. Brent, the Old Manor House Hotel, near Bridport." The last address to be entered was that of the Cavour Hotel, Bologna.

Leaving the coat and its contents where John Ringrose had thrown them beside his cigarette case, Lord Brooke carefully cleared up the débris of the meal. The remains of the food he scattered; the two little drinking glasses he restored to the basket and having emptied out the remaining wine, put the bottle with them. On his descent he dropped the bottle and the glass used by Ringrose into a cleft of the rocks. His own glass he cleansed carefully. Then he went on his way, his position secure in any event, since the wine meant death, whether Ringrose had fallen over the precipice, or found some hiding place beyond reach of sight from the plateau above.

Lord Brooke made some haste, that he might catch a homeward steamer from Porlezza. He succeeded, dined at Lugano and caught a midnight train for Milan.

CHAPTER XX.

CONCERNING HYOSCINE.

DOCTOR ERNEST CONSIDINE found it impossible to sleep. The young man's affairs were becoming insupportable and he began seriously to consider whether Ringrose's last instructions could be expected to weigh with him. A thousand growing dangers presented themselves, and for many hours the vision of Nicholas Tremayne came between him and repose. In the brief communication from Lugano, John had merely recorded the arrival of Lord Brooke and directed Considine to sit tight until they met; but this sedentary part, under the circumstances, proved almost impossibly difficult. A thousand plans succeeded each other interminably in the doctor's imagination, and love whispered—illogically as love will—that delay must be dangerous. On learning that the girl's uncle was at Lugano, Considine's instinct had been to set out instantly for Florence; but his duty to his profession and his obligations to Ringrose alike prevented any such unreasoned course. A very sick woman was upon his hands, and he knew that, in any case, to disobey the detective at this critical pass in his operations might do the gravest harm.

Then he determined to write a letter to Mildred, which she would receive during Lord Brooke's absence. Indeed, he spent two hours on this composition; but only to destroy it when completed. Under the strain some native irresolution declared itself; but reason fought and conquered impulse. After the dreadful past, and seeing the circumstances which had insured their separation, Considine finally and justly determined that nothing less than a personal meeting was to be considered. Moreover, a letter from him at this juncture might create unknown dangers for Mildred and throw her off her balance in a way to arouse suspicions. In fine, the doctor was constrained to sit tight as he had been directed. And worn out in mind, Considine at last slept. It was nearly three o'clock before his anxieties vanished in unconsciousness; but he had not slumbered for a quarter of an hour before his night bell wakened him. He sat up, aware that a sound had broken his sleep, yet not positive that it was the electric bell. He waited, therefore, until silence should send him to sleep again, or a repetition of the summons bring him out of bed. And then that happened to rouse him instantly.

At an earlier time, when Ringrose feared that they were too much together and their meetings might create a challenge, John had arranged to visit the doctor by night in a certain event. The need did not arise; but it was understood that when he came he would signal by three short notes on the bell. And three short notes did Considine now hear. In his pajamas he descended as swiftly as he might, opened his front door and stood face to face with a wayworn and haggard but contented mortal. So exhausted was his visitor, however, that he could only ask for support.

"Help me in," he said, "and get me food."

It was Ringrose—hatless, coatless, bedraggled and unutterably weary. But his mind triumphed over his body. He sat in Considine's armchair and stretched his legs in their torn trousers; he yawned and rubbed his aching muscles while the other turned on light. Food and drink were soon before the visitor, who had not as yet spoken. He devoured the flesh off a chicken wing, picking up the morsel in his fingers; he then disposed of a slice of fat ham, ate a roll and poured out half a tumbler of whisky, to which he added soda from a siphon.

The doctor watched silently. He had brought in a basin of hot water, soap and a towel, which waited John's attention, and now, while he washed his face and hands and cleansed his weary features from sweat and dirt, the wanderer spoke.

"I'm the most contented man on earth, doctor."

"Glad; but you don't look it."

"A little more time and you shall hear. Get me a pair of trousers and some socks and slippers. My feet are awful."

When Considine returned with the garments, John had divested himself of his ruined clothes and was sitting with his feet in the hot water.

"All's well, Considine. I've got him!" he said.

"'Got him!' Where?"

"Where I want him. Only a few details; but I know the result of them. Nothing more but infinite care is needed. At this moment I have very little doubt that his lordship is pretty nearly home again; but if you asked Lord Brooke where John Ringrose was he wouldn't answer so accurately. A cigarette, and then listen. You kept your nerve and didn't write to her, or do anything mad?"

"I kept my nerve—somehow. And I did write to her; but I tore it up."

"The best thing to do with half the letters we write, doctor. If we tore up two letters out of every three instead of posting them we should find it pay us very well."

He smoked with shut eyes for five minutes and gently paddled his wounded feet. Then he began to talk and, from his meeting with Lord Brooke at Lugano, to the journey up the mountain and the confession, Ringrose gave his listener a vivid and exact account of recent events. Then he continued.

"The devil was so amazingly brilliant, and his remorse and all the rest of it—coupled with his apparent conviction that in me he had at last met his second self—all these influences, and the true ring of the broken voice in which he uttered them almost got me guessing for a time. I believe that I was genuinely sorry for the brute—saw the paramount difficulty which faced him—and, in those moments of emotion, almost forgot the crime in interest for the criminal. That was exactly what he wanted to happen. Yet it seemed so amazingly real for half an hour, that I found myself frankly wondering if it could be true. But I had only to ask that question to be answered. The cleverness was so obvious, and the situation into which this move had thrown me was so subtle and calculated. And, then, of course, as he proceeded, I saw the naked truth. Two vital things I grasped tramping up that infernal mountain; and the first was the real purpose of this confession.

"His object was to distract my intelligence, weaken my will power and get me into a state of deep and purely intellectual interest before the problem so suddenly set. If a man comes to you and tells you that he has committed a murder, and feels that you alone must know what he has done, it is obvious that such a tremendous announcement is going to take you a little off your balance, shut your mind to all lesser considerations, and leave you to a considerable extent unarmed. Some men it would flatter, almost any man it must deceive. In fact, if an enemy intended to murder you, he could hardly plan a better way of leaving you open and defenseless than by filling your mind with such a terrible admission and posing before you as a contrite criminal, who throws himself on your sympathy and mercy. That is what our friend planned and that is what he did. And it mattered not a straw how many crimes he confessed, or how honestly he gave the details. Why? *Because he was talking to a dead man!* He was confiding in one whose lips would never again open to any other human being! The better the story and the deeper my absorption the weaker my own guard and the surer my own fate. To tell me what I knew already for truth was a masterly touch.

"And yet he didn't admit his brother's murder, you see. There was no need. He explained the carefully kept secret, that it had been a suicide; and that it was only

the late Lord Brooke's death which inspired his own crime! Quite neat, and psychologically likely. Yet then it was, and only then, that the light shone suddenly and I knew, without possibility of doubt, exactly how he had killed his brother, and how he meant to kill me. He was going to use the same means again! I had of course suspected: but now I was sure: the thing I longed for, he meant to happen.

"I murmured commonplaces and created in his mind the impression that I was deeply moved. I had been up to that point, but now I woke up. I led him to suspect that he had really weakened my guard. He pretended that the greatest service I could do him would be to let him destroy himself; but he indicated that, by some genuine affinity or attachment to me, he now regarded me as arbiter of his future, and that he would do nothing I did not sanction and direct. He implied that he was in my hands and thankful so to be. Wonderful bunkum it was! He stood at the edge of the precipice, so near that instinctively I bade him get out of danger. He obeyed. And then we came, quite naturally, to the bottle of wine. I was dying of thirst and he knew it. He spread the contents of the lunch basket. And what do you think I saw then, doctor?"

"God knows," murmured the other.

"I saw another luncheon party on the same spot in the past. I saw the elder brother laugh and leave his own frugal lunch for the dainties the other had provided. I saw the bottle of wine opened and the big man take deep drafts, while the little man looked on. And then I saw the big man die and the little one remove his scarf, then drag him across that fifty yards till he got his burden over the cliff. Next I saw Burgoyne Bewes blindfold the horse with his brother's wrap and send the steed after its master. Next I saw him clear up the fragments of that luncheon to the last walnut shell. That's what I saw.

"Lord Brooke set out our last meal together, then took his field glasses and sauntered away. He was so positive. I asked him if I might help myself and that made him more confident. We both were striving to be cheerful under his confession and my great mental perturbation on hearing it. We each did the right thing. It should always be remembered as a classic bit of double crossing, doctor. Anyway it ought to be. He thought he had created the needful distraction in my mind, and I knew he thought so.

"When he came back my glass was empty and my lip stained with red wine. The two little drinking glasses he'd set out were of different patterns. What did that mean? That he'd bought one on the way to the boat. He gave me that one. It wasn't going back. The people at the hotel were not aware that Brooke intended to have a friend on his ramble. I gasped and indicated thirst. Lord knows that wasn't acting. He filled my glass again presently for the third time. You see the first glass had gone into my pocket handkerchief, and that into my trousers pocket."

"Poison! The handkerchief?"

"Just so. Here it is, you see—dry now; but that doesn't matter. The poison's there. I filled my glass and he filled his own. Something challenged him just then—Providence in the shape of goats. He thought it might be mountain men coming our way and resented the chance of company. But his mind was quickly relieved. He found my second glass emptied and filled it again. 'We must drink fair,' I said. But he'd peeled an orange and preserved his pensive attitude. His back was turned to me and I saw him lift his glass presently and appear to drink. I could only see the gestures and his head thrown back and his empty glass put down; but of course he'd emptied it into the grass before he lifted it—just as I had myself. Then I ate a walnut and took a sandwich into my hands. While he was looking through his field glasses the first time I'd hidden two sandwiches, thinking the poison might possibly be in them also.

"And then I had to begin my performance. I didn't know the poison, but I knew, as well as I know my feet are raw, that the wine was poisoned; and if you drink three glasses of poisoned Chianti you must act according. I indicated general uneasiness and misery, and he was so sure now that he didn't wait to see if my reactions were all correct. Those are the tiny details—almost inhuman—that escape even the greatest crook.

"He threw off his melancholy, grinned in my face, nearly cut a caper and told me that my wine included a generous dose of hyoscine. It was foolish of him, because, if I'd chosen the poison myself, I couldn't have hit on a better for my own purpose.

He now let me know exactly how to behave. He enjoyed himself immensely. But so did I. I know what every poison does—part of my business, doctor, as it is part of yours—and when I understood that I was now dying of hyoscine—why, very properly, I began to die of hyoscine!

"He knew I shouldn't be conscious another five minutes, so he made hay while the sun shone, told me who I was and how he had found out who I was. He'd trailed me all right, doctor! He'd snapped me through a window with his camera just before I left Brooke-Norton, and he'd had it enlarged and identified. So then he understood I meant business. But I couldn't hear any more. I disappointed him there! I rolled over, dead to the world, and began a tidy imitation of a death rattle, and he perceived that I was beyond the reach of any more earthly information. Then the gentleman kicked me. If he had kicked me again, I'm much afraid I should have taken the law into my own hands; but he happily didn't. Once was enough—a natural little triumph. He played my game from that minute in a way for which I can never sufficiently thank him. He looked at his watch, noticed the tremor in my limbs gradually subsiding, then strolled to the other end of the plateau and left me to die in peace. That was a little delicacy of feeling I had hardly hoped for. But not knowing what might happen on La Sporta dell' Aquila when the time came, and always sanguine, as you will remember, that it would come, I had studied the place and every stock and stone on it during the previous visits I made after our first one. I knew the spot no doubt far better than anybody living but the eagles themselves; and now I availed myself of that knowledge. I had to act the part of a dying man in his last paroxysm. If I had really taken all that poison, what I now did would have been impossible; but a little medical detail like that was not going to destroy the illusion for Lord Brooke. I knew every hole and corner, remember, and I knew that immediately behind our resting place and the sumac bushes the ground shelved steeply to another precipice. I had risked my neck there before, little thinking that certain painfully acquired knowledge was to prove so valuable. Now, the moment our friend had removed himself. I got to my knees and crawled heavily through the shrubs and down the slope. I took pains to leave a spoor that would be easily followed, and I left my hat near that awful, abrupt edge of the cliffs, where they bend in underneath. From this spot I went forward on my feet and avoided anything but hard stone, till I reached the shelter of a small, flat juniper bush whose arms swept the ground. It was but two feet high—an object barely large enough to conceal a man; yet able to conceal him in every particular. I was fast under it, curled up and invisible, exactly three minutes after I left the plateau. Lord Brooke would follow the tracks; he would assume that, with my last fading instinct of mind and impulse of body, I had crawled away from him and either chosen to die by my own hand, or already half blind and semiconscious, fallen unwittingly to my death. Whatever he thought, it was certain that my disappearance was not going to vex him. It matters little what action a man may take who has consumed a lethal dose of poison beyond power of antidote.

"For twenty minutes I waited, then he appeared at the top of the slope. He raked it with his glasses, then himself descended very cautiously and followed my track to the brink of the precipice. It satisfied him. He studied the place again when he got to the top and looked at my juniper bush carefully. He had seen a movement; but it was that of a hawk sitting a foot above me and unconscious of my presence. A stone was not more still than I. The bird flew away and presently his lordship disappeared. No doubt he returned to the scene of our entertainment and studied the contents of my coat; but there was nothing in that to interest him save an address in a little address book. My handkerchief he might possibly have missed: that was in my trouser pocket soaked with his wine. But the government expert will have something more than my handkerchief to interest him—eh, doctor?"

"What do you mean?"

"Do you need to know? Among the properties of hyoscine is one peculiarity invaluable to us. You're not a toxicologist. Considine?"

"Not a skilled one."

"Every medical man ought to be. Poison symptoms should be as familiar to you, in all their delicate differences, as any other symptoms."

"Hyoscine is a product of henbane," said

the physician, "a hypnotic. We used it a great deal in the war. It was good for cerebral excitement, mania and shell shock."

"It's rather famous stuff," explained Ringrose. "With some vegetable poisons they find it practically impossible to discover chemical evidence after death; but in the case of hyoscine, that can be done. So you'll judge that I was rather gratified to get his lordship's information."

"Chemical analysis would find it—but after how long?" asked Considine.

"After years," replied the other. "Crippen is the classic case. So now you see what I meant when I said I'd got him."

The doctor nodded.

"And he thinks you're dead?"

"Yes; and it is vital that he should continue to think so. The secrecy that needs to be maintained to the finish must be absolute. In fact I almost despair of maintaining it. I can trust one man and one only. The average official, even in the secret service, doesn't know the meaning of secrecy; but now and again you run up against somebody in power who appreciates it."

"Can I help you in any sort of way?"

"You must. I want clothes and I want to get back to England by a roundabout route—starting to-morrow."

"You might take my motor boat and go up to Colico. The rail is only six hundred yards from the lake. From there you go to Chiavenna and Splügen Pass; and so through the Engadine."

"Good. That would do well. Can you run me up after dark to-morrow?"

"Yes; and meantime?"

"Meantime I'll stop here and sleep. You have no staff—only your old woman who comes presently to do your chores and make your breakfast. Can you put me somewhere out of her reach?"

"Not here. She might poke about anywhere; but there's a good snug hole in the roof of my boathouse where you'd be all right and absolutely safe. We'll take rugs and get cushions from the boat. I'll bring down plenty of food later, and you'd better have a suit of my clothes. They'll only be a bit tight in the waistband and long in the leg. I've got a complete Sunday outfit."

Ringrose nodded.

"That will do. Then I can drop into the boat to-morrow night; and if you have a time-table I'll take it with me and go into the journey. Boots you'll have to buy for me. Yours are too small and I shall want a roomy pair. Pack this handkerchief in a piece of oiled silk. I'll take it with me."

The day had broken and, groaning at his feet, John limped off beside Considine to the boathouse, distant but a quarter of a mile. Nobody stirred as yet and a fog wandered in billows over the lake. The doctor carried rugs and spoke as they went.

"You say there's one man you can trust in England? May I ask who?"

"My old chief—still in command at the Yard, thank goodness. Red tape might ruin all, for we've got to do some things that mean officialdom; but when Sir James has heard my yarn he'll put it over the home office. The director of public prosecutions, Sir Hubert Matherson, is a pal of his, and between them they'll give me a free hand—at least I hope and pray so."

In the boathouse, while Considine arranged a soft and comfortable bed, Ringrose indicated his intentions.

"What must be done you know without my telling you. It's often done, of course, but always with a lot of fuss and publicity. The papers make the most of it and reporters go to the scene and the illustrated rags photograph everybody concerned. In this case, for mighty good reasons, I want to conduct the operation so privately that Brooke-Norton itself will know nothing."

"It ought to be fairly easy."

"It ought—if the secret is kept. As we are concerned with a vault and not a grave, our job is simple. Half a dozen of us go there by night and get into the mausoleum, and shut the door behind us. We open the late Lord Brooke's coffin, remove what is necessary and put all shipshape in half an hour. Then back to London in a motor car. In a fortnight, or less, the government pathologists find their hyoscine, and the warrant is issued. But the whole point is still the secrecy. I don't want any extradition trouble and delay. The rascal has plenty of friends in Italy to help him give us the slip even after arrest. My idea is to have him shadowed until his return to England, and then nabbed at Dover."

"Good luck. Now you must sleep, Ringrose. You've asked yourself to do a good bit more than a man of fifty-five has any right to attempt."

"Waiting is hard for you," answered the other kindly, as he stretched himself and

yawned. "I haven't forgotten all this means to you, doctor. But you have no need to be anxious. Tremayne was a gentleman, and nothing will happen at earliest until the parties go home. I'll watch your end for you. If the young man's in England, I may get into touch; if he's in Florence, then we mustn't move till Brooke is arrested. Nothing till then. You may hear that a Mr. Fordyce is missing at Lugano and so on, but take no notice. I hope they'll publish the fact. When I left the hotel I said I was going to Santa Margharita, so that's where they'll inquire. You're all right, and the moment he's in quod, you're free to go your own way—perhaps sooner. Trust me."

His words came dully from the edge of sleep, and before Ernest Considine had left the boathouse and locked it behind him John was unconscious.

After noon the doctor returned with food and drink and a bundle of selected garments. Ringrose still slept profoundly, and though Considine removed his slippers and dressed his bruised feet John did not wake. Seeing that the sleeper's watch had stopped, Considine wound it up and set it by his own. He then wrote a few words on a piece of paper, indicating that he would return at ten o'clock that night, and once more departed, after seeing that the motor launch was ready. A train left Colico for the north at half an hour before midnight.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE GHOST AGAIN.

IT wanted but a fortnight of the date on which he last visited the Old Manor House Hotel when a motor car containing John Ringrose, drew up at that ancient porch. Exactly as he had done a year ago, John alighted briskly, looked to his luggage and his gun case, and was about to enter when the mighty bulk of Mr. Jacob Brent filled the entrance. The innkeeper extended a solemn greeting and declared his pride at entertaining Mr. Ringrose once again. He held the visitor's hand and gazed into his face with awe.

"A marked man before," he said, "but you've grown that famous you'll never conceal yourself now, John Ringrose—not even here."

"I told you to keep your mouth shut, Jacob."

"So I did; but murder will out, you know."

"And how's Mrs. Bellairs?"

"Fine. They took her evidence, you know. Came up here to do it—a great affair."

"But she's none the worse?"

"Only terrible excited to see you."

"And the shooting?"

"There's a score of men—quality included—will be proud for you to go among their pheasants."

"I want nothing of that sort. I'm here to work."

"Work! My wig! Haven't you had enough work?"

"Writing, Jacob—penmanship, my boy! I was always hankering for something a bit out of the common to finish with, so that my readers should get their money's worth."

"Well, now they'll have it, and good measure; but mind you mention the Old Manor House, John."

"Fear not, Jacob. The yarn begins under your roof; and I wish it ended there."

"You're going to give me a leg up, you know, when that book comes to be read."

"Don't you be too sure of that, my friend. What about the ghost? There are plenty of people who don't like haunted houses, let me tell you."

"You can leave out the ghost. Maybe you'd better."

"Leave out the ghost! Why—the ghost is the backbone of the business. All turned on the ghost."

"Well; you laid it."

"How do I know? You've given me the same room as before?"

"Of course, John. As you commanded. Nothing's changed. A score have slept there since you did; but there's been no talk of ghosts, I promise you."

They drank tea presently and discussed various topics.

"Since this affair," declared Mr. Brent, "our tea business has increased out of knowledge. You've made a lot of money for me and I won't deny it. And you'll stop here as my guest, and not my customer, just my honored guest for as long as you've a mind to do so."

"We'll not quarrel about that, Jacob."

John Ringrose was back in the old room half an hour later, and he surveyed its simple details curiously.

"A queer starting place for the adventure

of my life," he said to Brent. And then, after the landlord had poked the fire, drawn the curtains and gone his way, the new arrival repeated the actions taken on his former visit. He disposed his garments, stowed them in the chest of drawers and hanging cupboard; he placed his cartridges and gun case at the bottom of the cupboard; he arranged his books, dispatch box and leather desk upon a table opposite the window. Two hours later, at the rumble of a gong, he went to dinner, and when the trim shape of Miss Manley appeared pushing the invalid's chair, John greeted both mistress and maid with exceeding friendship.

"Not an hour older—neither of you," he said. "And, if you please, I'll come and talk of our mutual interest with you in the drawing room presently."

"We really do deserve to hear, don't we?" asked Mrs. Bellairs, her eyes bright with genuine emotion as she looked at the man. "We know much—all that the rest of the world knows; but we want to ask a thousand questions."

"And perfectly justified—perfectly justified," declared John. "But for you, madam, and you, Miss Susan, there would be nothing whatever to tell; and I shouldn't have known how to finish my book."

Other guests were stopping at the inn, and for that reason John agreed to spend a part of the evening in the private sitting room of Mrs. Bellairs. He arrived half an hour after dinner and found every preparation for his comfort.

"There is but one condition," declared the old lady. "You must smoke your cigar while you talk."

"You understand," he said, "that I consider I owe to you and your friend the first and fullest and most complete account of everything. Miss Manley must listen too. It has stretched out into a pretty long tale, ma'am, since I came and left the Old Manor House this time last year; but unfortunately it's not the best sort of tale, because, though it's got a good beginning and a nice middle, there isn't any end. My work's not done—perhaps it never will be. But you'll never hear all I've got to tell you in one night, or two either, for I'm going over every mortal thing that happened to me and those two men, from the time I left here to the drop of the curtain at Dorchester."

"We well knew you'd remember us, Mr. Ringrose," answered Mrs. Bellairs. "Susan and I were very certain indeed."

"And right to be."

Then, while the women listened to each syllable, Susan with her hands in her lap and Mrs. Bellairs holding her smelling bottle, he began his story.

But, with John's remorseless memory for detail and infinite care to state, not only events, but also the thoughts and theories provoked in his mind by them, he did take a very long time. It was clear that several evenings must elapse before the tale was told; and on this first evening he had only finished with Arthur Bitton by midnight.

Mrs. Bellairs lamented his need for delay, but Susan approved it.

"It's like the beautiful moving pictures that go on for a week, till you know the heroes and heroines as well as you know yourself," she said.

On the fifth evening of the narrative, Mr. Ringrose brought it to an end.

"I left off in Doctor Considine's boathouse last night," he began, "and what's left you shall hear before you go to sleep, Mrs. Bellairs—though the most of it, of course, is public property now. I slept like the dead all that day—so sound that I didn't know the doctor had been looking after my feet till I woke up and found he had. And I'm supposed to be a detective, that never sleeps but with one eye open!

"To Colico he brought me through the dark, and from there, by way of Chiavenna and the Splügen Pass and the Maloga Pass, I said good-by to Italy."

"I know it all—I've been that way, Mr. Ringrose."

"It was a good bit wasted on me—the scenery was," confessed John. "But home I came with my plans pretty well shaped. I didn't go to my own diggings, nor yet to the Yard, because, though safe enough, there was a right and a wrong way for every step. I didn't forget his lordship had set a private inquiry agent after me in the past and might, to make all sure, be just interested to know if my ghost was in its old haunts. No; I went to a pal and lay doggo, as we say, and wrote to my old chief, Sir James Ridgeway, and told him I must have a mighty long talk with him and mighty soon. I explained that I couldn't come to the office; but begged he would see me some night at home. Well, he knew me, and he knew I knew what his time was worth. I

went to dinner with him at his orders the very next night and you'll believe I interested him a great deal. And I went to dinner again three nights later, and there was a third party there that time. Sir Hubert Matherson, director of public prosecutions, it was, and between 'em they got what I wanted from the home office, and all secret—secret as the grave! In fact never was there such beautiful secrecy before, ladies—a triumph over the criminal and the public and the newspapers and everybody!"

Mr. Ringrose gloated at this essential detail.

"Five went down," he continued, "and we took the needful. Four picked men, including myself, and Professor Murgatrode, the government pathologist, who insisted on coming—such was the learned man's zeal. We were outside Brooke-Norton at one o'clock in the morning on the last day of August, and happily it was a rough and dark night. I knew the family mausoleum, because I'd seen it when I was down there. It stood but two hundred yards from the house, in a glade of the park lands. Our car was left up a lane outside the village with the driver—a policeman—to guard it. At the tomb we picked a simple lock and got inside and shut the door behind us. Then we saw the last coffins of the Bewes folk—a big one, made in Italy, and a little one, made at Bridport. And we knew that the murdered child slept beside his murdered father. A solemn moment for me, and I felt it I do assure you when I stood beside those dead.

"The point was to leave all as we found it to a hair; and it may interest you in the ways of the police to hear that, among our outfit, was a pail of water and a couple of towels. Why? So as we should cleanse the marble floor of the place after we had finished. Didn't want any muddy boot marks, you see, for any chance comer or caretaker to mark, and perhaps make a fuss and communicate about with Lord Brooke. Not a grain of dirt, or a pinch of sawdust did we leave behind us.

"The coffin was soon opened and what the doctor needed he was able to gather in his jars. And then and there he sealed them under our eyes in the light of the electric torches. The body lay on a shelf, waist-high, and we never moved the coffin. The fine dust I gathered off the lid before we opened it, I shook back again when we had screwed it down. No doubt if an understanding man had known what was done that night, he might have found many signs of it afterward; but to the casual and unsuspicious sight we left not a trace.

"We were back at the car in an hour and a half, and in London by dawn. Then came the analysis; and since his lordship had been generous of his poison, the truth was laid bare.

"Only nine men in England knew it till the day after Lord Brooke landed at Dover. That was three weeks later; and I stood among the party that took him. When he saw me, he was very wonderful. A good bit surprised without doubt, but never for an instant did he lose his nerve. 'You didn't drink?' he said. 'No, your lordship, I did not,' I answered. He held out his hands quite quietly for the bracelets. But he was only interested in me. 'Where were you?' he asked. 'Under one of the little juniper trees on the slope,' I told him, but he felt doubtful. 'They wouldn't have hid a rabbit,' he said. 'One hid me, your lordship,' I answered him, 'the one the big hawk flew from.'

"He knew the game was up then, and it says a great deal for the intellect of the man and his lightning cleverness that, even in a terrific moment like that, he could follow the argument and see the logical process that had landed him. 'An autopsy on my brother?' he asked. He'd seen it in a flash. 'Yes, your lordship,' I said. 'Hyoscine.'

"'You've hanged me, Ringrose,' he said.

"'I hope so, your lordship,' I answered.

"Then they took him away."

"But the poor girl," cried Mrs. Bellairs. "Do break off and tell us about that unhappy child. She was with him at Dover; but we know no more about her."

"That was rather sad—decidedly sad, ma'am," answered John.

"Sad? Don't say that!"

"Not for her, nor yet for the good doctor; but for young Mr. Nicholas Tremayne. I couldn't get to him, though I tried. He was away from his home and I judged he must be in Italy. But he wasn't. He happened to be in Scotland. He was on the quay at Dover waiting for the boat, however. And so was Doctor Considine you see. I'd telegraphed to him at Aix, where he was by now. I bade him come, out of friendship to them both, because I reckoned

that Mildred Bewes might want a friendly hand just about then. So he came over and ate his heart out till we heard from the man we had sent to Florence that Lord Brooke was homeward bound. Joe Ambler we sent—a rising chap. He came back in the same train and wired from Paris that the party was on the way.

"Well, the boat was sighted, and there was Considine, and there was Tremayne, and twenty-five minutes to wait. So I introduced them. The doctor told me afterward in London that they brought back. Miss Mildred Bewes between them by a later train and took her home."

"And it was all right?" asked Susan.

"Very right indeed for the lovers, ladies. They are going to be married some time next spring."

Mrs. Bellairs sighed and smelled at her salts.

"I'd like to see that dear girl," she said. "Go on, Mr. Ringrose; but we know the rest."

"Not all—I don't myself, worse luck. And I never shall, I fear. As for the trial and the defense, of course you do know. In a way it was only my word against his; but there happened to be such a powerful lot behind my word. His counsel's argument was ingenious, but it couldn't hold. He said, what is true, that it is well known a suicide will use two means to kill himself. There are examples of a man cutting his throat and then jumping over a bridge, or flinging himself under a train; and some have drunk poison and then blown their brains out, and so why not drink poison and then jump off a precipice? But, against that supposition, there was the hyoscine in my pocket handkerchief as well as in the dead body. And the fearful story of Bitton and the boy—that couldn't be got over. He was the first peer of the realm who has met his death on the scaffold for more years than I know. They're a law-loving class as a rule—the peers of the realm.

"He died like a gentleman, but declined benefit of clergy. He asked for a book, written by somebody of the name of Gobineau, and read it very steady to the end. He confessed after the usual appeal failed. It's always pleasanter with circumstantial evidence when they are graciously pleased to do that. I don't think he much minded going, myself. Life had given him pretty near all the ivories in the market. But one very amazing thing he did—the most amazing that any of my murderers ever thought of doing. He made a codicil to his will and left a memento."

"To whom?" asked Mrs. Bellairs.

"To me, ma'am!"

John took something out of his pocket—a jeweler's case. He opened it and laid it before Mrs. Bellairs.

"Prepare for a shock," he said. "It's the Barthel ivory."

The old women bent their heads over the curio with horrified ejaculations.

"'To John Ringrose, in recognition of his genius, from a genuine admirer.' Those were his written words. Handsome—eh? The sentiments I mean, not the ivory."

"It's that awful thing again; and none the less awful for being so little," murmured Miss Manley.

"Worse—worse, if anything!" declared her mistress.

"Yes, there's a snap about it that neither your picture nor my puppet ever had."

Mr. Ringrose shut the ugly object out of sight.

"So there I stand—and the mystery as far off solution as ever," he said. "Surely there never happened a stranger thing. I get through a fairly tough proposition, and the people are pleased with me; but I'm not pleased with myself—very far from it. Because the starting point, the egg of the whole affair is not hatched yet. I mean the voice of that unhappy little child. Either I've got to get to the bottom of that, too, or else I must frankly confess there's no bottom and go over, like a lamb, to the spiritualists. They're claiming me already, for that matter. I hear that scores of people since the trial have become believers. And I don't want to join 'em—every instinct in me kicks against it, ladies!"

"Have you heard the voice again?" asked Mrs. Bellairs.

"I have not. I hope I never shall."

"You might, however."

"Please God, no, ma'am."

Then Mrs. Bellairs looked at her companion.

"Shall we, Susan?" she asked.

"Now or never," answered the other shortly.

The elder put down her smelling bottle and her white, beautiful old face took a delicate tone of color.

"My friend," she said, "listen to me and

carry your thoughts back a whole year. After the death of little Ludo and the attitude his terrible uncle took to our intervention, Susan and I felt that we could do nothing. We were old and unimportant, and unimportant old people don't get a hearing very easily. Time passed and our suffering was dulled, but we never forgot. I prayed about it—yes, indeed, often I did; and when I heard that you, of all men, were coming to stop under this roof, I felt that my prayer was answered. It's true that you had told Jacob Brent not to say anything about who you were; but you know him. The truth was much too wonderful for Jacob to keep to himself. You were his greatest hero even then, and he let out your identity to Susan—in profound secrecy. So of course I very soon learned it. And then I surely knew that you had been sent! And God helps those who help themselves; so Susan and I set our wits to work."

John's eyes were fixed upon the speaker and his iron memory began to revive every detail. He gravely doubted, but kept silence while Mrs. Bellairs continued.

"I knew the chatter of an old woman wouldn't interest you; but I did think and hope that a ghost might. My idea was that if the ghost came first, and I was presently able to offer a dreadful reason for the ghost, then you'd listen. And you can judge of my feelings when I found you were quite prepared to do so."

"But wait, wait, ma'am! Details—details!" cried Mr. Ringrose.

"You shall have them. The first night that you were here, when we knew you must be asleep, Susan wheeled me into the room next your own and I cried loud and clear from the wall cupboard. Between the cupboard and your room, the wall is of no thickness at all, as you know, and to you the voice sounded as though it was actually near you. Instantly Susan wheeled me away again; therefore when you examined the passage, the room next your own, and the cupboard, we were safely gone."

"That's sound; but what about the second time? I had the key of the room and the door was locked."

"There was another key, which Susan secured without anybody knowing she had done so. Brent has duplicate keys of all the rooms. The second time that Susan wheeled me into that room, she deposited me safely on pillows in the cupboard. Then she trundled my chair away and locked the door after her. There was a dreadful risk, but we took it. When she was gone, I gave my imitation of the little dead boy and hoped for the best. You came presently, unlocked the door and flashed your torch round the room, but you made no examination that time. If you had, you would have found me lying quite helpless but well wrapped up at the bottom of the cupboard. But you didn't; and when you had gone and locked the door again, Susan waited till you were asleep and then brought back my chair and took me away."

"And how did she know that I was asleep?" inquired John, sternly regarding the old maid.

"Nothing like honesty, Mr. Ringrose," she said. "You snore very loud, sir."

He looked at her.

"That's bad—a detective oughtn't to snore, Miss Manley," he confessed. Then, still troubled, he turned again to the elder lady.

"But the voice—the child's agonized voice—the throb and frenzy and tingle in it that made my blood run cold? And, afterward, the amazing acting, when I told you my experience and you were so astounded to hear it that you nearly fainted?"

The old woman smiled at him.

"Do you know who I am?" she asked. "You've told us it's so vital to begin at the beginning of a case, Mr. Ringrose; but you never thought to begin at the beginning of me—that was too far back perhaps?"

"I did suspect you—till I saw how you took my story."

"But you would have suspected a great deal more if you had begun at the beginning, wouldn't he, Susan?"

"He'd have done it, madam. I dare say he's come back to do it now, if we knew the truth."

"And who are you, Mrs. Bellairs?" asked John rather blankly.

She answered by indirection, with another question.

"Do you remember the palmy days of burlesque at the Momus Theater, or are you too young? Did you ever hear of Minnie Merry, who played the street boys and ragged gamins, and made such a study of children, and won kind words for her *Jo* in 'Bleak House?' Dear Susan was her 'dresser' then—and still is."

"Good Powers! I fell in love with her in my teens," said the detective.

"And you're rewarded, you see. I played my very last and saddest part for you alone."

Mr. Ringrose jumped to his feet impulsively and took the ancient actress' hand between his own. His eyes shone.

"You plucky wonder!" he said.

"And there won't be no need for you to believe in ghosts after all, sir," remarked Susan.

THE END.

A short story by Mr. Phillpotts will appear in the next number.

YOU CAN'T LOSE YOURSELF

HAVE you ever wished to drop out of sight? To get away from people—and things? Don't try it. That is, don't try it if you are carrying insurance. The company which gave you a policy will find you.

One of the most baffling cases in the history of accident insurance in this country had for its original setting the city of St. Louis, Missouri. A young man, carrying $50,000 in policies, was engaged to be married. He disappeared two weeks before the date set for the wedding. He was last seen going to his stateroom in a Mississippi River steamboat. It was late at night.

The following morning his clothes, his valuables, papers—everything, apparently, were found in the stateroom No one had seen him leave the boat at any of the various landings and he was given up as drowned. The Mississippi is treacherous in its eddies and snags and a body could easily be lost in it.

But the insurance company was not satisfied. It sent its investigators to various clothing shops and found that a young man answering the wanted youth's appearance had purchased a suit and had ordered it delivered at the boat on the day in question. But nothing could be found. Months passed. Finally the attorney for the "dead man's estate" twitted the accident-insurance company's attorney about not paying the claim. The company lawyer responded that he would not pay.

"Why not?" laughed the other lawyer. "You haven't a defense in the world once you get in front of a jury."

"I've got the best defense in the world," bluffed the other attorney.

"What is it?"

"The day this case comes to trial I'll walk your man into the courtroom—alive!"

It so happened that the executor of the estate was with the other lawyer. He was worried and frightened. The following day he approached the company's representative and asked for an audience. It was refused.

"But I must talk to you—here is a letter I received this morning and if there's any scandal I don't want to be mixed up in it."

He threw a letter on the lawyer's desk, but the attorney picking it up tossed it back—but not until he had made a quick mental note of a return address written in the corner of the envelope. He dismissed his visitor, wired to St. Paul and the address he had noted, and learned, in the course of a few hours, that a man answering the description he had given had left St. Paul for Cleveland.

The missing man's parents were residents of the Ohio city and after their home had been watched for a couple of weeks the wanted youth was found. He confessed, saying he had been drinking aboard boat, didn't want to get married and took that method of getting out. He did not remember, so he said, what had happened to him after leaving the boat and he came to his senses while working as a farm hand in the wheat fields of North Dakota. He drew what money he had coming and went to St. Paul, where his father had friends. This was the address he had sent to his friend, the executor.

The Wooden Leg of Destiny

By Ernest Douglas

A little venture in the publishing business south of the Rio Grande leads to certain startling adventures hereinafter detailed.

OF course I ought to have had better sense than to go down into Mexico with Joe Bonner. Lord knows he had got me into enough scrapes on this side of the line, and to let him steer me into the very heart of the revolution zone was next thing to suicide. But we had gone through most of the tidy little pile we had cleaned up with "Leading Citizens of the Great Southwest," and when Joe proposed that we compile a similar volume to be entitled "Heroes of Mexico," he made the scheme sound mighty attractive.

"That country's just swarming with generals and colonels and such that have hung medals all over themselves for distinguished service in the revolutions they have down there every week-end," he argued. "Don't tell me there's one of those birds that won't be tickled as pink as a baby's toes to have his picture in a nice book with gold letters on the cover, along with a flowery write-up of how he risked his precious life and saved the nation at the battle of Chili con Carne.

"Now, we both talk the lingo. I'll sell 'em on the idea and get the coin while you take the photographs and write the slush. Easy pickings. How does it listen to you?"

"But what if we happen to be around when they pull one of those Chili con Carne battles?" I objected. "I'm told that it's not dangerous to be a participant but they're mighty fatal to innocent bystanders."

"Oh, we can dodge the places where there's actual fighting. There's room enough in Mexico for us to keep out of the way of the bullets."

"Then we may be held for ransom," I went on. "Two stray gringos running loose around the country. It has been done."

"Why, the joke'll be on them, sure," he wheezed through recurrent explosions as he wiped tears of laughter away from those innocent baby-blue eyes that as much as his curly red hair and his blarneysome tongue were responsible for making his life one long series of easy conquests among the fair sex. "They'll wait quite a while before any of our rich relatives dig up a ransom to get us out of the hands of the brigands—eh, Petey old boy?"

I agreed with him as to the latter part of the statement but was not so sure that the joke would be entirely on the brigands. We had been talking of getting out a history of the city of Phoenix—on subscription, of course—and I reverted to that.

"Nothing in it," he averred. "Not in comparison with what we can drag out of Mañana Land, anyway. Besides, I want to get away from Phoenix. Everybody around

here knows that I'm afflicted with a wooden leg."

I looked at him in surprise and asked: "Oh, are you sensitive about it? I didn't know that it was any deep disgrace to have lost a leg fighting at St. Mihiel."

"Oh, it's not that. I'd go back and let 'em shoot the other one off if necessary. But I don't want people to pity me. I'm no baby and it hurts my pride. Since I got this new leg I'm a better man than ninety per cent of the folks that have their full complement of original pins. Why, Pete, I can even dance."

To prove it he jumped from the hotel bed on which he had been reclining and waltzed across the room with a barely perceptible list to starboard.

"Let me show you how it works," he said as he dropped upon the bed once more, rolled his trousers leg far above the knee and began to unlace a corsetlike affair of leather that fitted closely around the thigh. "As you know, I had this made to order. I don't suppose that anybody in the world has a finer wooden leg than mine. The foot, you see, is rubber. It works a whole lot better and is more lifelike than the old foot I had, with all its hinges and so on."

He removed the shoe and sock and showed me how the rubber foot was attached to the wooden leg. An iron rod ran down through it and was secured by a nut under the instep.

"Look at this," he continued, touching a small brass plate on the calf that I had taken to be metallic reinforcing. "Little idea of my own."

With a blade of his pocketknife he removed some tiny screws and took off the plate, revealing a dark hole. "Lots of space here and I thought I might as well have it fixed so I could use it," he explained. "Big enough for a roll of greenbacks or quite a little silver."

"That's some leg, Joe."

"It certainly is. I've shown you that it lets me dance about as well as I ever could. But suppose I went to a dance here. The girls would laugh at me behind my back, and if they danced with me at all it would be out of sympathy. By gum, Pete, I'm tired of sympathy! I want to go somewhere and be a regular man again. Let's grab the stake that's waiting for us below the border, buy that mining-camp newspaper you've been crying for all these years, and settle down to civilized life. What say?"

I told him I'd go. That's the way our arguments always wound up when Joe had his inspirations. If he dropped around today with a proposal that we sail for Papua and get up an illustrated directory of the head hunters, I'd start to overhaul my camera.

We had gone no farther than Naco, the border town that we had selected as our port of entry into Mexico, before I wanted most desperately to turn back.

El Lobo del Norte—The Wolf of the North, as the peons called Palemon Salazar—was then right at the height of his spectacular career. Salazar was nothing more than a particularly bold and successful bandit chieftain who, posing as a patriot struggling for liberty, robbed whomsoever he could and murdered those whom he suspected might be able to give him trouble later. At that time he controlled a big slice of the State of Sonora.

When we arrived at the border the newspapers, both American and Mexican, were boiling with stories of the Zeckendorf jewel robbery. "General" Salazar, easily slipping past the Federal soldiers that were supposed to keep him confined to the Sierra Madre mountains, had made a swift foray clear over into Chihuahua, then supposed to be peaceful. There he held up a train. It happened that among the passengers relieved of their valuables was Meyer Zeckendorf, a Mexico City jeweler on his way home from New York with something like a hundred thousand dollars' worth of extra fine diamonds ordered by leaders of the faction that had been victorious in the latest revolution. Rather than trust the stones to the Mexican express or postal services, Zeckendorf carried them in a belt around his waist, under his shirt. One of Salazar's men found the belt while Zeckendorf's arms were reaching for the stars, and turned it over to El Lobo.

Salazar dashed back to his headquarters at Lagarto and General Roberto Oropeza was dispatched to Sonora with orders to bring in the bandit dead or alive, preferably dead. Oropeza had plenty of incentive to put forth his best efforts. The reward offered by the government for the capture of The Wolf of the North had been increased to fifty thousand pesos, and Zeckendorf was willing to part with twenty-five

thousand gold dollars for the return of his jewels.

I pointed out to Joe that the time was not propitious for our enterprise and begged him to wait until things became calmer below the international line.

"Petey," he returned impatiently, "sometimes I almost lose hope for you. You can string words together but you haven't any more brains than a secondhand chew of tobacco. Don't you see that we'll never get a better chance than the one that's being shoved at us right now?"

"No, I don't."

"Why, this Oropeza bird's pretty near the biggest general in Mexico. They think he's the goods, and he may be, for all we know. He's with his army down there at Casa Loma, not over forty miles away, getting ready to go out and slap Salazar's wrist or something.

"All we've got to do is to sell this big gun on our proposition; offer him some concessions if we have to; then the little fish will break their necks to get in. Why, it looks like the president sent him up here just to do us a favor. The situation's made to order for us."

It was no easy matter to get across the line in those troublous times. The American authorities didn't want to let us go and the Mexicans didn't want to let us in. We finally made it, though, and early one morning caught the little jerkwater train out to Casa Loma.

Ordinarily Casa Loma is a combined mining and cow town of a few halfway respectable business blocks and perhaps two hundred adobe shacks; but now it was swollen out of all proportions by the advent of the military force that General Oropeza was assembling and equipping there to go in pursuit of El Lobo. The streets were swarming with soldiers in high-crowned, broad-brimmed hats, soft shirts of various bright colors, and white pants. Most unmilitary looking was the uniform, which Joe insisted was really a suit of pajamas.

There was no trouble about seeing Oropeza. He welcomed us with open arms and a bottle of aguardiente, showed us all thirty-seven of his medals and contracted for four pages in "Heroes of Mexico." Half our charges he paid in advance.

After that, just as Joe bad predicted, it was like shooting fish in an overcrowded puddle. We stayed around Casa Loma two weeks and sold all of Oropeza's officers who had any money.

Inevitably, though, we reached the end of the string. Joe, who had once worked in a gold mine, observed that the high-grade ore had pinched out. I looked forward to a quick and safe return to the States, but my partner had another surprise for me.

"Well, I guess we're through here," he yawned. "Now for Salazar."

"What?"

"Go and get El Lobo and his crew into our book. Ought to do pretty near as well there as here. That bunch must be loaded with money, especially if they've been able to dispose of those diamonds."

"Man, do you seriously suggest that we place ourselves in the power of that bandit?"

"Bandit? It's all in the point of view, who's a bandit down here. Salazar no doubt claims that he is the patriot and that Oropeza is the outlaw."

"But how are you going to get to him?"

"That ought to be a cinch. He's over there in the mountains at Lagarto—everybody here knows it and is talking about going after him some fine day when the cock-fighting season is over. We'll just ramble along that way, send word ahead by some native that two famous American authors are on their way to write a book about him, and we'll be as welcome as ice cream in a kindergarten."

Joe's program had panned out so well thus far that I could marshal no effective argument against his latest scheme. So we went to Lagarto. As I intimated before, we always went wherever Joe suggested.

We left Casa Loma in a decrepit old car, headed toward Naco. But by offering fifty pesos, then a hundred, in addition to the price agreed upon for the trip, we persuaded our bare-footed Yaqui Indian chauffeur to turn off on a trail that led eastward across a cactus-studded mesa toward the mountains and Lagarto.

When we reached a cattle ranch that lay right at the base of a towering blue-and-purple peak, the driver refused point-blank to go any farther. There was no passable road beyond, he said; besides, we were getting into rebel territory and he had no ambition to meet up with El Lobo. It was plain that he thought his gringo passengers were a pair of reckless fools, and privately I thought so too.

As it turned out, we could have chosen no better base than Las Palomas Rancho for our assault upon Lagarto. The owner, a courtly old Mexican, made us welcome and fed us well on fiery, mysterious dishes. We drank wine and smoked brown cigarettes with him that evening in the pomegranate-bowered courtyard behind his house, and Joe delicately led the conversation around to Salazar's so-called revolution. He represented that we were journalists in Mexico to investigate and learn the truth about her internal dissensions.

It was very unfortunate, sighed Señor Rubalcaba. The government at Mexico City no doubt left much to be desired but it was questionable if another revolution would help matters. Thus far he had avoided taking sides, had remained friendly to both factions, and he hoped that by the continued exercise of diplomacy his herds would be spared from depredations. Yes, he and his men often visited Lagarto.

This was what we most wanted to know. Before we retired he had promised to send a messenger to El Lobo for us.

The vaquero left on horseback early the following morning, carrying a flattering letter to Salazar that Joe and I had composed very carefully. In the afternoon came a squad of a dozen cavalrymen who looked like ordinary Mexican cowboys except that they were heavily armed and each boasted at least one item of an army uniform. One wore an American infantry hat; several had puttees; some had laced breeches without the puttees.

Their leader ceremoniously introduced himself as Captain Pecina.

"My general will be delighted to welcome you to the humble capital of our noble cause," he said. "A very great man, my general. He is the savior of Mexico."

As we planned to take along practically no baggage we were soon ready to mount the extra horses that had been brought along for us. Pecina stepped forward and with profuse apologies stated that he must search us for arms.

"My general gave me very strict orders on that point," he explained. "A very great man and a careful man, my general. He is the savior of Mexico."

We laughed and told him to go ahead, for we had no intention of trying to smuggle arms into the rebel camp. His search was extremely perfunctory. He merely patted our clothing lightly and professed himself satisfied.

So we thanked Rubalcaba again for his hospitality and rode away with the insurrectos.

"See how I hopped on this plug?" Joe boasted to me in a low tone. "And I sit as straight in the saddle as any of them, even if I do have a wooden leg. Do you think that any of them suspect?"

"I'm sure they don't."

The trail skirted the southern side of the big peak and then dipped into a deep, waterless cañon. It led up this defile for perhaps half a dozen miles without a sign of human habitation. Then we passed a brush hut festooned with the inevitable strings of red peppers; near by were a pigsty, a pack of lean and vociferous dogs, and several burros standing in the boiling sun, too lazy or too indifferent to seek the meager shade of surrounding mesquite trees.

"Lagarto," said Pecina at my elbow.

I supposed that this was an outlying dwelling and that we would come to the town in a moment. But we kept on for at least two miles more with no indication of a settlement except similar huts perched wherever there was a bit of level ground.

"When do we reach Lagarto?" I asked finally, for I was unaccustomed to the saddle and now weary enough to fall off among the rocks.

"This is Lagarto," replied the captain. "Lagarto is a long reptile."

Reptile? I had forgotten that *lagarto* meant lizard. Certainly an appropriate name for a town strung out like this one.

The cañon widened slightly. Along the southern wall there was a strip of ground perhaps fifty yards wide, thickly crowded with adobe buildings. But we could not yet see all the town, for it staggered around another curve a quarter of a mile farther east.

We halted in front of an unpretentious structure marked "Hotel de España." Pecina took us inside and introduced us to the proprietor, who said that a room with two beds had been reserved for us.

"Ah, yes," the captain interjected smoothly. "My general had that attended to. He is a very great man, my general. The savior of Mexico."

"When are we due to see the general?" Joe asked.

"Mañana," replied Pecina.

"Good! We're here and this is enough for one day. To-morrow will do fine."

In the evening, after a meal of enchilades, chili con carne, and other Mexican delicacies, we set out to see more of Lagarto. But we were closely followed by two or three armed men whose pretense of casual loitering was painfully unconvincing.

"You see, we're really prisoners," I muttered. "This makes me nervous. Let's go back to the hotel."

Another day came but no summons from Salazar. We fretted through long hours of inactivity, sitting at a window and watching the sluggish tide of Mexican life flow by. Every one seemed to have all eternity at his disposal. The few soldiers that we saw were laughing and chattering as though on a glorious holiday.

Toward evening Captain Pecina called and announced that the general was ready to receive us. He led us farther up the cañon to a fairly imposing two-story building that sat on a knoll a little detached from the rest of the town and was loopholed for defense. Above it fluttered the red-and-green flag of Mexico. We passed several ragged sentries and entered a room scantily furnished with homemade chairs and tables.

El Lobo del Norte sat behind one of the unpainted pine tables. He did not rise nor give any sign of greeting but regarded us steadily through eyes that were very piercing, very dark, very suspicious. His only movement was to curl one of his extraordinarily long mustachios around a finger. He was not even smoking, though it is seldom indeed that a Mexican is without his cigarette.

Salazar was young, probably under thirty-five, and an unusually striking figure. His picturesqueness was accentuated by a short leather vest ornamented with silver embroidery. Under the table his long-shanked, gold-mounted spurs clinked faintly on polished boots.

The captain set chairs for us, saluted and left. We sat down uncomfortably and murmured a few commonplace politenesses that drew only nods from the general. Joe spread before him several letters of recommendation given us by Mexican citizens residing in Arizona; El Lobo did not even glance at them.

Knowing not what else to do, Joe plunged into an explanation of our importance as historians and publishers, and our business in Lagarto. At great length he dwelt upon the vast numbers of Americans who were thirsting for accurate information regarding the brave General Salazar, so often spoken of as "the savior of Mexico." Millions of people all over the world, he estimated, would read "Heroes of Mexico."

So far as we could judge, all this impressed El Lobo not at all. Finally he drew out a jeweled gold watch and said:

"I have been called away and must leave in a few minutes. You will excuse me now. When I return, in three or four days, I will speak with you further."

"But General Salazar, can you not now give us some data regarding your eventful and heroic career, so that we may prepare a biography for your approval?"

El Lobo drew himself up proudly, flashed just the suspicion of a fatuous smile, and replied:

"You may write that I am the man who defeated General Oropeza in battle, overthrew the tyrants who were pressing the very lifeblood out of Mexico, and was elected president by my grateful countrymen. It will all be true in a very short time now."

That evening Joe insisted that, guards or no guards, he was going for a walk. We passed along narrow streets flanked by tiny butcher shops and doll-size groceries. From windows here and there floated the seductive strains of lazily plucked guitars. It was all so peaceful, so exotic, so beautiful. But I wished I had never seen Lagarto. Its peace I knew to be a sham. My instinct whispered that Joe and I would soon be involved in some desperate entanglement.

The rhythmic shuff-shuff of many feet on bare boards came to our ears. Through an open doorway that was flush with the sidewalk we looked in upon a dance. The hall was full of swaying couples; most of the men were El Lobo's officers. At the farther end, on a slightly raised platform, sat a guitarist, a violinist and a mandolin player in embroidered black-velvet costumes.

"Come on," I urged Joe. "There's no place where a gringo can get into trouble quicker than at a Mexican baile."

"Do you know," he said unheeding, "that I haven't been to a dance since I lost my leg?"

At that instant Pecina arrived and in-

vited us to accompany him inside. Joe accepted eagerly before I could say a word.

"But we do not dance," I interposed hastily. "We will merely look on for a few minutes."

There was a row of chairs around the room. Pecina found us seats and then a partner for himself.

The music had that peculiar dreamy swing that I have never heard except in Latin countries. Involuntarily my body began to sway in time. I felt Joe actually quivering. What he had said about being able to dance with his new leg recurred to my mind. Next thing he would be two-stepping with some señorita and would get himself knifed by a jealous caballero. I must drag him away immediately.

With a suddenness that was startling the dancers ceased their measured gliding and stood immobile in various attitudes that denoted surprise and amazement. The musicians faltered and "La Golondrina" trailed off into nothingness. All eyes were turned toward the door.

A lane was formed and the figure of a woman, dressed all in scarlet, swept into our range of vision. Her gown, of some foamy material, came barely below the knees and flared out above silk stockings of a deeper carmine shade. It was cut low in the neck, revealing exquisitely modeled, gleaming shoulders. At her breast blazed one large diamond. She was rather tall and a mass of blue-black hair piled high above her head gave her an air of stateliness. Her features were almost too regularly chiseled for perfection. No trace of rouge or powder marred the delicate olive tint of her skin.

Pecina stepped into her path and bowed very low. "Señora Salazar——" he began.

She brushed by him without a word and he fell back. At the base of the musicians' platform she turned, tossed a light scarf to a shriveled old servant who trotted at her heels, and surveyed the assemblage with a proud, imperious gaze.

Again Pecina started toward her. "Señora Salazar, my general——".

"I am not Señora Salazar," she denied in a clear, cold voice. "Not to-night. This evening I am again 'La Amapola,' the dancer who in happier days had all Mexico at her feet."

"'The Poppy,'" whispered Joe. "Doesn't it fit her, though? What a woman! What a beauty!"

She had paused for a moment. Once more her voice broke the deathly silence.

"To-night I am again La Amapola, the dancer. And I shall dance for you, my friends. Why? Merely a whim. Perhaps because it is forbidden. But our lord and master, The Wolf, ranges far afield to-night. Let us be gay while we may."

She turned to the musicians and spoke two or three words that I did not catch. The instruments began to pour forth a weird, wild melody that to my ear sounded more Hungarian, or Gypsy, than Spanish.

The woman began to dance, slowly at first and then more rapidly as the tempo of the music was accelerated. Her dress swished as she pirouetted with fairy grace, and shimmered in the dull glow of the oil lamps swung overhead. Soon her feet were moving with marvelous, incredible speed.

Joe sat up rigid, his nostrils distended, and ejaculated:

"I remember now. 'The Dance of the Butterflies.'"

"The what?"

"'The Dance of the Butterflies.' Remember that little half-Spanish girl who kind of adopted me at St. Nazaire, right after we landed. She taught me that dance. We danced it a dozen times. I know every one of those steps. She's leaving out some because she has no partner."

The twinkling slippers at last were still. As La Amapola bowed to her delighted audience a crescendo of handclapping and vivas arose. She smiled sadly, reminiscently, as her breast gently rose and fell.

"Very well, I will dance for you again," she said when the applause had subsided. "What shall it be?"

"'The Butterflies!' 'The Butterflies!' 'The Butterflies!'"

She nodded to the perspiring musicians and they started again at the beginning.

I was suddenly aware that Joe had leaped from the chair at my side. He was standing before the dancer, bowing.

"May one so humble and unworthy as myself presume to beg the priceless privilege of dancing as your partner, señorita?"

She inspected him deliberately from his glistening auburn curls, clustering close against the head, to his clumsy and dusty shoes. For only an instant her surprise caused her to hesitate, then she held out her arms.

With pounding heart I looked on dumbly

as the strangely assorted pair began to weave through the complicated movements of "The Dance of the Butterflies." Joe and his wooden leg were doing nobly. Of course, knowing that his right leg was artificial from an inch or so below the knee, I could perceive that he sagged ever so slightly on that side. La Amapola, noting that the pace was too swift for him, called to the musicians to moderate their tempo.

Captain Pecina stood glowering and fuming, scandalized at the performance of Señora Salazar with this gringo stranger in the absence of his idolized general. Suddenly a crafty smile overspread his face. He waited until the dancers were within half a yard of him, Joe bent so far back that I was sure he must topple. Then Pecina aimed a vicious kick at my friend's foot and knocked his right leg out from under him.

Joe went down, pulling La Amapola on top of him in a quivering heap. A shoe with a rubber foot inside flew across the room. A bright metal rod projected from a leather puttee.

I made a dive and retrieved the foot. When I turned I faced a sea of Mexican faces frozen with astonishment. Pecina's aspect of stupid bewilderment was comical. All that he had expected to do was to trip Joe and perhaps to provoke a fight, not to dismember him.

As I reached the fallen ones a gale of laughter swept through the crowd. "Bravo!" some one shouted, and the cry was taken up. "Viva el Americano!" It was borne in upon my consciousness that Joe had suddenly become a hero. These mercurial Mexicans were consumed with admiration for the one-legged man who had proved himself such an expert in the art Terpsichorean.

I pulled the woman to her feet. Joe scrambled up on his one good leg and stood there, blushing angrily, balancing himself upon the iron rod. La Amapola looked at him, at the rod, at the shoe in my hand, then threw back her magnificent head and laughed heartily, musically.

"Come on," I growled, seizing Joe's arm. "Let's get out of here before the going is too rough."

But the Mexicans would not let us leave. They shouted and clapped and insisted that the dance so bravely begun be properly concluded. Pecina slunk away unnoticed.

"Hook that thing up again," Joe told me, lurching to a chair.

Quickly I unlaced the shoe, took out the foot and bolted it back to the wooden leg. The nut under the instep I tightened with a tiny wrench that he fished from his pocket.

"What happened?" he whispered.

"Pecina kicked you."

"Humph! What I'll do to that duck when I get around to him! But the nut must have been loose or that foot never would have come off."

I laced the shoe and Joe stood erect once more. La Amapola smiled and held out her arms. The orchestra began a third time to play "The Dance of the Butterflies." Joe waved a joyous hand and they were off again in the intricate maze. I saw her whisper to him and he nodded an eager assent.

As the last note ebbed away, La Amapola gayly called, "Buenas noches!" and slipped through a back door that was opened for her by her ancient servant. Joe stood alone, bowing his appreciation of the tempestuous applause.

He threaded his way through the excited throng, met my eye and jerked his head toward the entrance. I was vastly relieved for I had feared that after his triumph he would want to stay there and dance the night away.

We broke away from the crowd at last. We were not even followed by the three privates who had watched us early in the evening; doubtless they had thought us safe in the dance hall and slipped away for a bottle of tequila or a game of *con quien*. I was for hurrying straight back to the hotel, but Joe evidently wanted to idle aimlessly along. He turned perversely into a dark side street, a mere alley, and dawdled, talking the while about giving Pecina a thrashing. It was on the tip of my tongue to suggest sarcastically that he challenge his enemy to a duel; but I refrained, for Joe Bonner was capable of doing wilder things than that.

A humped little figure materialized out of the darkness. "This way, señores," a voice quavered from the depths of a mantilla.

Joe started to follow her. "Here, what does this mean?" I demanded. "Where are we going?"

"This is her servant. We're going to see her."

"Joe," I entreated, "think for a minute what you're doing. That woman is Salazar's wife. El Lobo will hear of this and then

there'll be a firing squad and an adobe wall for us."

"Come on. We've got to see her. There's some sort of a mystery about that dancer."

"Yes, and there'll be a mystery about what became of us."

All this time we had been moving swiftly after our guide. She turned in at a gate in a high wall and carefully locked it behind us. While we waited I plucked nervously at an oleander bush that made the air heavy with the perfume of its flowers. I thrust a leaf into my mouth, then spat it out with a shiver as I remembered that the oleander is poisonous.

Through a door we entered a long room, resplendent with the rainbow hues of serapes thrown over easy-chairs and sofas. The walls were decorated with tinted pictures, some creditable reproductions of famous paintings and some mere chromos. Near the door stood an upright piano of German make.

La Amapola advanced toward us with a radiant smile. She had changed her dance costume for a lavender gown that could have come from some New York or Paris shop. Her hands were outstretched to both of us but her glowing eyes were all for Joe.

"Ah, my friends, it was so good of you to come. That was a thrilling adventure we had to-night, was it not? Tongues are wagging in Lagarto now. I must compliment you, my partner. I never—I never suspected."

"And you never would have known had it not been for our kind benefactor, Captain Pecina," Joe boasted.

"Pecina! He is an idiot. Though he is a mere captain he takes it upon himself to be responsible for everything that goes on in Lagarto while El Lobo is away, even for my conduct."

"And will El Lobo be displeased when he hears about this evening?"

"Pouf! Why not talk of pleasanter things? Here, let us sit down. I must tell you again that I never had a more perfect dancing partner. A victim of the war, no? That must be a wonderful artificial limb."

"It is perhaps the finest of its kind in the whole world, señora. It is practically my own invention, for I had it made to my order. It even has a compartment in the calf, concealed by a brass plate, for carrying money or other valuables."

They chattered on and on, those two. Now and then, by way of politeness, Señora Salazar threw a word in my direction. I was most uncomfortable and wishing fervently that we were away from there.

Once she asked me how I liked Lagarto. I replied truthfully that I liked nothing about it except her dancing and the music that I had heard that evening.

"You like music, Señor Wayland?"

"Almost as well as Señor Bonner likes to dance."

"Then you shall hear some real music. Serafina! Serafina!"

Her aged servant slipped noiselessly back into the room through some side door.

"Play for the gentlemen, Serafina. They are lovers of good music."

Without a word the wrinkled little woman sat down at the piano and struck the first chords of the "Moonlight Sonata." I have heard Beethoven's haunting sonata played by Paderewski, Rachmaninoff, Gotthelf, but never as it was played by that bent, barefooted woman in the garb and position of a menial. It was the wail of a soul utterly without hope. There was a mystery, I decided, about La Amapola's domestic as well as about the dancer herself.

As the last bar died away my mouth was open to voice an enthusiastic compliment; but before I could speak she had dashed into some composition of Bach's, the name of which I had forgotten.

I do not know how long I sat there listening to Tschaikowsky, Chopin, Verdi, Rossini, even MacDowell; listening spellbound and fascinatedly watching the brown, bare foot that at intervals flashed from under the ragged skirt to depress the pedals of the instrument. I was not even conscious that Joe and La Amapola had moved to a sofa at the far end of the room, where they could continue their tête-à-tête undisturbed.

Above the notes of the piano I heard the beat of horses' hoofs in the street at the front of the house. A lurid Spanish curse crackled through the atmosphere. Serafina's emaciated hands left the keys to clutch fearfully at the rusty mantilla wrapped about her head.

"El Lobo!" she moaned.

With one bound I reached the door by which we had entered. Joe and La Amapola were close behind me. Her face was very pale.

"Farewell, my noble American friend," she breathed.

Joe hesitated but I shoved him ahead of me through the door. Serafina unlocked the gate and we stumbled out into the alley. We walked as rapidly as Joe, with his wooden leg, could travel; we would have run but feared that the noise would be heard or that our haste would arouse the suspicions of some late prowler.

"Where's your hat, you chump?" I demanded as soon as my eyes became adjusted to the moonless darkness.

"Where's yours?"

I clapped my hand to my head. It was bare! In our haste we had both left our American cowboy-style hats in the Salazar sitting room. I laughed weakly, mirthlessly.

"We might as well have left our cards for El Lobo," I lamented. "If she didn't find 'em and hide 'em before her husband came in, we——"

"He's not her husband!" Joe hissed, theatrically shaking a clenched fist in the air.

"Not her husband?"

"No! No! He virtually abducted her. He captured a town where she was filling a stage engagement, and took her by storm. I suppose he dazzled her, as women are often dazzled by a villain of that kind. Asked her to marry him and she consented. She thought, of course, that he meant a regular church wedding. But he took her before a jefe politico—a civil marriage. She's a strict Catholic and doesn't regard that as a marriage at all. When she asked to be married by a priest he laughed at her. He's been fighting the clergy, seizing church property and all that, so I suspect that he couldn't have found a priest who would perform the ceremony. Now she hates him, and he holds her a prisoner."

"She didn't seem to be very closely confined to-night."

"Oh, she's at liberty to move around Lagarto; but she doesn't stand a chance in the world to get away from this town, where he is an absolute monarch, without help. None of these Mexicans would dare lift a hand for her.

"Pete, we've got to help her. I told her we would and she's depending on us."

"The devil you say! What can we do?"

"I don't know—yet. I haven't thought it out. But we've got to do something. We can't leave her here. Where's your chivalry, Pete? Besides, common humanity demands that we at least make the effort to free her. Can you imagine what a beautiful, educated, highly strung woman like her must go through with such a brute?"

"Humph! We'd better beat it back to the States and make a report to the war department, or somebody."

"Lot of good that would do! We might just as well complain to the board of foreign missions. No, Pete, it's up to us. Besides——"

He dropped his voice to a faint whisper:

"She has the Zeckendorf diamonds."

"Wha-a-t? How did she get them?"

"Salazar gave them to her. He's crazy in love with her and will give her anything but a religious marriage or her freedom. Maybe he thought that by giving her a hundred thousand dollars' worth of stones he would square everything."

"I don't care if she has all the diamonds that were ever mined at Kimberley—it's plain suicide for us to mix up in El Lobo's affairs."

"But——"

We were still arguing when we went to bed. Hardly had we blown out the light when there was a great clatter in the hallway outside and some one pounded heavily on the door. I pulled on my trousers, turned the tin lock, and faced Captain Pecina.

"I arrest you by order of General Salazar," he barked, a triumphant gleam in his beady eyes. "Here, you with the leg that flies to pieces—get your clothes on and come with me to jail."

"What's the charge?" I asked, speaking as calmly as I could.

"What does it matter? General Salazar returned unexpectedly and after he heard about what happened to-night he gave me instructions to lodge you both in the cuartel. Where are your hats? Ah, yes, he said something about finding them in his home. You dogs of gringos will find that it is dangerous to steal a man's wife away from him in Mexico."

The captain and several men crowded into the room. He picked up Joe's wooden leg from where it stood by his bed, examined it scornfully and dashed it to the floor with a villainous leer. Joe reared to his knees and would have smashed Pecina on the jaw had I not pushed him back.

"Won't do any good to fight," I admonished. "That would be just giving him the excuse he wants to shoot you on the spot."

"Speak Spanish," warned Pecina.

The tramp to the jail was a long one. We had not previously seen the cuartel, which was a big adobe building right at the east end of the town. There we were insultingly searched by Pecina, deprived of our watches, money and everything else we had in our pockets, and herded into a foul-smelling cell with no furniture except a straw mattress and a filthy blanket on the concrete floor.

There was no sleep for us that night. We sat on the mattress and dismally discussed the possibility of bribing some Mexican to carry a message to Naco. Joe, a congenital optimist, was inclined to be hopeful, but I could see no prospect for anything except an early execution.

"We're in Dutch," I gloomed. "Mexican Dutch, which is the fatalest Dutch there is."

At sunrise a turnkey brought us water and two tin plates of beans so highly spiced with red pepper that we could scarcely swallow them. An hour later there was a rattle of spurs in the corridor and El Lobo's mocking face glared at us menacingly through the bars.

"Take off that fellow's leg," he snapped, pointing toward Joe.

"What do you want with my leg?" Joe howled.

"My wife takes an interest in such toys, it seems. I desire to make her a present."

So! He thought to humiliate her by handing her the artificial leg of the man whom he doubtless regarded as his rival. An eccentric idea, to say the least.

Joe sullenly removed his right puttee and handed over that precious wooden leg.

"You'll suffer for this," he threatened. "You can't treat American citizens like this and get away with it. Not when my uncle is secretary of war of the United States of America."

"Ah! So your uncle is the secretary of war? He must be very rich and will be glad to pay a large ransom for the release of his nephew."

"Each one of you knows that the other is bluffing," I commented as our visitors stamped away.

I grew tired of hearing Joe moan and curse over being deprived of his liberty and his leg, chiefly the latter, and tried to sleep, but with only indifferent success.

The only other incident of that long and anxious day occurred in the afternoon, when Pecina called and thrust in a battered peg leg that evidently had been fashioned from the limb of a mesquite tree.

"My general thinks that this would be a more suitable leg for one of your vile gringo manners," he sneered. We refused to reply to his taunts.

Joe examined the leg with disgust but finally put it on. It was suspended by straps from a leather belt that fastened around the waist; both belt and leg were too short by a couple of inches, but Joe was enabled to hobble around the cell and get a little exercise.

Along toward midnight we fell asleep from sheer weariness. There was just a ray of daylight peeping into our cramped prison when we were awakened by the staccato pop-pop of rifle fire.

"What's that?" Joe grunted, sitting straight up.

"A battle of some kind, evidently. Listen! There's an attacking party somewhere off there on the south rim of the cañon. And it sounds as though the defense is centering around this jail. Somebody is firing from the roof. Hear those yells! I've read that Mexicans fight with their vocal cords as much as with guns. Joe, maybe this is the battle of Chili con Carne that we were going to dodge when we came to Mexico. We ought to be safe enough in here, at any rate."

"Shut up and listen. Maybe it's the Federalists storming the town."

"Here's hoping they take it—and empty the jails."

We could tell from the shooting that the attackers were approaching very near. A panic seized those on top of the jail. We could hear them swarming down a ladder somewhere; some of them did not wait for a turn at the ladder but dropped to the ground and ran.

The firing became intermittent. Then there were loud cheers without. We knew that the jail, at least, had been captured, and we began to yell.

A lieutenant and several Federal soldiers gathered around the door of our cell and peered in curiously. We told them hurriedly that we had been imprisoned by El Lobo for upholding the cause of the government—there was no time for detailed explanations. The officer went in search of a key. He returned soon with an ax that he

handed to one of his men. One smash on the flimsy lock and we walked forth free.

"Now to get my leg back," was Joe's first remark as he teetered along the corridor on his worn old peg.

"They come! They come! The enemy!" It was a cry of terror that broke from the troops crowded into the jail.

I got to a window and saw, far down the street, a column of mounted insurrectos approaching at a swift gallop. At their head rode El Lobo del Norte, waving a revolver in one hand and calling to his men to follow him.

"We are outnumbered! We must retire!" blubbered the young lieutenant, obviously in a pitiful funk.

"You're not," screamed Joe. "You can hold this jail against those peons. We'll lick 'em to a frazzle and make 'em give me back my leg."

But the Federalists were already rushing pell-mell up the hillside down which they had charged a few minutes before. We went with them—there was nothing else to do. Joe was violently and profanely denouncing the soldiers for milk-livered cowards, but they paid no heed to his maledictions.

Bullets began to pepper about us. A man went down. Joe seized his gun.

"It's a machine gun!" he whooped. "A light Browning, just like we used in France. And with a full clip, too. Here's where I get my leg back."

He whirled, almost upsetting on his peg, and began to pour lead into our pursuers. Half a dozen of the insurrectos were laid low. Some of the fugitives paused in their flight, saw what was happening. Heartened as quickly as they had been demoralized by the counterattack, they turned once more upon the enemy. Their cheers rang out above the roar of battle.

Horses and riders began to drop by wholesale. The cavalry column broke and fled. El Lobo, untouched by the hail of bullets, pulled his horse to a halt, hurled a curse in our direction, and followed his men.

Shouting "Viva el Americano!" the Federalists rallied around Joe. As he jerked himself along he shouted for more ammunition for his Browning gun, but there was none to be had.

A stray bullet shattered Joe's peg leg and he dropped in the dust. A moment's examination showed me that he was unhurt. I spied a burro and rickety cart half hidden behind a hedge of prickly maguey plants, where their owner had abandoned them when the fighting began. I loaded my friend into the vehicle and then dragged the reluctant animal along behind me, to the vast amusement of the soldiery.

Suddenly our advance was halted by another fusillade. The insurrectos were not going to abandon their capital without one more stand. We sought cover and returned the fire.

I peered around a hut behind which Joe and I had taken refuge. Half a mile away a rabble of revolutionists, on horseback and afoot, were darting across the open space that lay between the town and El Lobo's headquarters.

Our friend the lieutenant was fumbling with a pair of field glasses that he did not know how to use. I yanked them from his hand and got them focused just in time to identify El Lobo as he urged his gray horse through the maelstrom of frightened humanity fleeing for the big adobe building. In the saddle before him he held a woman —La Amapola, beyond a doubt.

Quickly I told Joe what I had seen. He paled. "My God, we mustn't let them fire on that building," he exclaimed. "When I stopped that rout I hoped that the Federalists would rescue her, but I've placed her very life in danger. Just like that beast to drag her with him instead of leaving her where she'd be safe."

He broke a pole to a length that would serve for a crutch and went stumping about in search of officers. Finally we located Colonel Alvarez, who was in command of the expedition sent to launch this surprise attack upon Lagarto. Yes, he had heard something about the disappearance of the dancer, La Amapola, who was supposed to have gone with the bandit, Salazar. If she were in yonder building it was unfortunate, but there was nothing that could be done. El Lobo must be killed or captured before nightfall gave him a chance to escape. The colonel was most appreciative of the heroic service that Señor Bonner had performed for Mexico that day, but his military duty forbade him granting this most singular request.

So we looked on helplessly while Alvarez brought up two small cannon, emplaced them and pounded to pieces the walls behind which El Lobo and his followers had

taken refuge. The defenders had nothing except rifles and two Maxim guns of an ancient type, and the Maxims soon went out of commission.

Just before noon the flag of Mexico that waved serenely in the soft breeze was replaced by a flag of white. Alvarez sent a squad forward to reconnoiter cautiously, for he feared a trap. But it was a genuine capitulation. When he was convinced of this the colonel invited us to accompany him and witness the surrender of El Lobo.

"It is a great day for Mexico, and the president shall hear about the part you gentlemen played in the battle of Lagarto," he said with a broad grin of elation. "Horses will be here for us in a moment."

As we approached the entrance of the ruined fortress Pecina rushed out, unarmed. Both his hands were extended toward Colonel Alvarez.

"Thank God, you are here!" he exclaimed piously. "The honor of Mexico is saved. Long live the republic! The traitor, Salazar, who has held me prisoner these many months because I would not be false to our noble president, has at last met his just deserts. And is General Oropeza here? No? I am sorry. He is a great man, is General Oropeza. He is the savior of Mexico."

Pecina caught sight of Joe and me and his face went white. "These lying gringos!" he spat. "One cannot believe a word they say."

Alvarez laughed and we went inside, Joe's hand on my shoulder and my arm around his waist. Dead and dying were lying about the blood-soaked floors in grotesque attitudes. We pushed through a crowd gathered about the lifeless body of El Lobo del Norte. A bullet had drilled through one of his lungs.

"Where's the woman?" Joe asked, looking around. No one answered.

In a corner we found the old servant, Serafina, weeping softly. She clutched to her breast a clumsy parcel done up in newspapers. I touched her on the shoulder. She looked up, recognized us, and silently led the way to a room where the cold, still form of La Amapola lay under a flaming serape.

Joe lifted the covering, gazed upon those proud, lovely features for a long moment, and replaced the serape reverently. His eyes were misted with tears.

We had difficulty in understanding just what had happened. Serafina told us the story piecemeal, between sobs, that racked her bony frame.

It appeared that El Lobo's wound had not been immediately fatal but he had soon realized that he could not possibly live. La Amapola bent over him, trying to stanch the flow of blood. He shouted hoarsely:

"Don't think that I am going to die and leave you behind for that wooden-legged gringo!"

Then he shot her through the breast with the revolver at his belt.

La Amapola crawled away to this room, where she died in her serving woman's arms.

"Her last words were of you, señor," Serafina said, gazing tearfully at Joe. "She gave me this and made me swear by the Blessed Virgin that I would deliver it to you."

She thrust the package into his hands.

"My leg!" Joe exulted, poking a finger through the wrappings. "But did she leave no message for me, little mother?"

"I do not know. There may be a letter. She sent me out of the room for a time."

We sought another room, where we could be safe from curious eyes. Joe tore the newspapers away from his leg and shook them carefully, but the note that he hoped to find was not there.

"Perhaps she put it into your secret compartment," I suggested.

"That's so. Say! The screws have all been taken out and only one put back."

He removed the brass plate. But there was no farewell message inside his leg from unhappy, ill-fated La Amapola. Only the Zeckendorf diamonds.

SMOKING UP

NEW records for tobacco consumption were hung up at the annual Paris smokers' competitions recently held. The winner of the cigarette-smoking speed contest finished his cigarette in fifty seconds; a railroad fireman who never had smoked a cigar before won that event in one minute and forty-eight seconds; the pipe-smoking event was won in five minutes and fifty-five seconds.

Talks With Men

By Martin Davison

G. T. S., a successful and prominent business man in an up-and-coming, modern city in the South writes me, in part, as follows:

"Your advice is altogether so fine that it is hard to take any exception to it, but you invite it, hence this letter. You mention in your comments regarding the case of Charles S., 'the glib hand-shaking sales manager.' Perhaps the 'glib' referred really to the man's manner rather than to what the hand-shaking may have expressed. The writer has published for nearly twenty years a monthly bulletin for the benefit of his own men, and has had articles meant to be of service to them like yours. Some years ago I collected a little booklet of 'hints and helps' particularly for the instruction of new men entering the business. I hand you herewith a copy of the booklet with a marked article, 'What's In a Handshake.' Read it and you will see how I figure as to its value."

I read the little article. Here it is:

"Did you ever shake hands with a party who held his hand out to you without bending the fingers even, who just let the hand lie limp in yours? Didn't you feel instantly that you were up against something weak, and that the hand was inert to the point of laziness even? Didn't you really feel like turning away? On the other hand when you meet a fellow who grips your hand hard, don't you instantly look up to see the same force in his eye, don't you really know from the pressure of that fellow's hand that there is something worth while about him? Don't you feel somehow from the magnetism of that grip that you have met something worth cultivating?

"Keep this in mind when you call on your prospect. Just grip his hand strongly, look him straight in the eye, and he will feel as you do when you meet the fellow who treats you the same way.

"Many a man who has made up his mind to turn you down when he has consented to give you an interview will change his mind and think the other way if you will make him feel your personality and some of your own enthusiasm over the goods you *are going* to sell him through the pressure of your hand and the determination in your glance. There is a whole world of influence in the proper handshake. Try it."

I HAVE never met Mr. G. T. S., but we see from his letterhead that he is a successful executive in a large way, and we know that a great deal of his success must have come from his ability to train young men in the most effective methods of selling life insurance—a difficult and trying business indeed, as any one who knows will tell you. So there must be something in what he says—it works. All the same, we think that the strong handclasp and the straight look in the eye may be a little overplayed. If they come naturally—if, as the prayer book says, they are the outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace—they will be so spontaneous and unforced as to have a charm. There is nothing more contagious than enthusiasm. But they can be overdone. I confess that it is dampening in its effect on the spirit to grasp the limp hand that feels like a dead fish—but there is something worse than this. It is the bone-crusher grip. I am a man of average strength, good temper and stoicism. Yet there have been times when I have been shaken by the hand so heartily and violently that if I had followed my impulse, my response would have been a left to the jaw. However, G. T. S. knows a lot about salesmanship and there must be something in what he says.

A SALES manager for a big concern is a general who uses different troops for different purposes. I have before me the literature of a trust company which is out on a campaign to sell two and one-half million shares of preferred, with another two and a half million common thrown in for luck. It was my fortune to meet three of the salesmen. They picked the salesmen to suit their prospects. For instance they tackled one friend of mine who has about two thousand in the bank with a salesman who drove up in a Ford car, specialized in a youthful, happy-go-lucky air, and talked the same line of stuff that was on the prospectus.

Another man, middle-aged, with more money, was approached by a hearty, middle-aged, golf-playing person who had a lot to say about good conservative investments and the wonderful character of the names on the board of directors.

A third person they had down on their list was a really wealthy man. If he fell for anything it would probably be for a hundred thousand at least. The salesman they sent to him was a wonder—a special de luxe salesman, gray haired, dignified, urbane yet reserved. He looked like everything the ideal bank president ought to be—you would trust him in anything. He exuded wealth and conservatism. There was no strong-arm handshake in his line of work. Instead there was a quiet talk, in softly modulated tones. His main argument was the list of friends and acquaintances of his prospect who had invested in the trust company. This sort of thing is selling generalship. The individual salesman should use generalship himself. He should study the man he is trying to sell. There are some who delight in being shaken by the hand and slapped on the back. There are some who detest it. There are some men who can be bullied and shoved into buying a thing—but as a rule these men have not much money to buy with. There are others who do their own buying. Many an aggressive fellow has talked himself out of a sale. It is the wistful, gentle salesman who often sells the big orders.

I GOT a really good salesman talking about his technique.

"Give me a chance," he said, "and I can sell anything. The more they argue the better I like it. Once I get a man arguing with me, I've got him going."

"How about the man who doesn't argue?" I said. "The man who listens and agrees to everything you say and then tells you he will think it over."

"A dead loss," said the salesman. "I know there's no use with that bird and so I stop wasting time on him."

To go back to the hand-shaking thing—if you want to sell insurance or anything else to an ex-President of the United States, or indeed to any high public official, don't shake hands with him, either firmly or otherwise. The chances are he has far more than his share of hand-shaking and wishes the custom had never

been invented. To shake hands with two or three hundred people is quite as fatiguing and not nearly so enjoyable as playing three fast sets of tennis.

HERE is another letter from Henry Martin, who lives at present in Minnesota.

"I represent," he writes, "a bunch who have been reading your advice with great interest. I am presenting a definite, concrete problem. We are all men in the early forties who need to begin living an open-air life as soon as possible, but we find it impossible to get an unbiased and authoritative statement as to the possibility of making a living on a small farm, down in the region of Florida for preference. A self-supporting home rather than a money-making farm is what we are looking for as we are not afraid of a fair share of work but we want to enjoy the amenities of existence. I may add that we are not enthusiastic back-to-the-landers, having all had experience in our youth of real dirt farming.

"We have enough reserves to enable us to get by for the first two years. In the farm-land catalogues one is told of great returns and wonderful bargains but we know that overproduction and low prices are generally the lot of the original producer. Still it is possible that the chances in the South have been underestimated in the past and that it offers a chance to many people like ourselves who are not really financially ambitious but for all that are keen enough to expend considerable effort. Apart from the amenities of life—the lack of which has been the cause of most desertions from the farm—if our prospective venture did not demand all our time and energies many of us would frequently be able to turn our spare time into financial profit either by a paying side line which is primarily a hobby, or by keeping up, to a limited extent, with our old occupations."

ON the whole, we would say that the prospects looked not so bad for Mr. Martin, to whom we have already written in detail, and his group of friends. The best thing in his letter is the fact that he scarcely expects the farm to pay big returns. No farm pays well for the work and energy and worry that is put into the business. It is not the lack of amenities that drives people away from the farms. It is the lack of profits or chance of profits. If farms promised the rich rewards of cities or gold fields, men would flock to them just as eagerly.

I know three farmers in Florida, all competent men. They are all self-supporting in the sense that in each case there is enough on the farm to feed and clothe the family. But that is about all. The bumper crops are there. The earth and the sun and the rain all do their work honestly and there are carloads of celery, asparagus, grapefruit and oranges. It is getting the car off and the contents sold that offers the problem. Somehow, the farmers of this country are at the present writing up against it. Probably no individual agency is to blame. There are too many go-betweens, the system of transportation is antiquated and expensive, the price in the city is too high, on the farm too low. At the same time a man can make a living on a farm. He can make a better living loaning money on good real estate. Interest rates are higher in the South. On the whole, were I in Mr. Martin's place, especially as I had a paying side line, I would plan to spend a vacation in Florida at least and look things over.

There is an ease, a comfort, a leisurely naturalness about life in the South that is worth a lot. It reflects itself in the manners of well-bred Southerners. One does with fewer things there, the houses are not so well built—they don't have to be. As a set off, which is a wonderful thing after a northern Minnesota winter, it is nice to be in a land where one can stay outdoors practically all the time.

The Walled Garden

By Robert H. Rohde

Author of "The Honest Dollar," "The Master Key," Etc.

The Great Macumber, specialist in stage materializations, materializes a real-life crime out of the air.

"A MAGICIAN'S paradise," said Oscar Hewlett. He grinned maliciously. "Doesn't the sight make the artist in you cry out for a tall hat and a wand and a little soft music?"

The fat and fidgety inhabitants of Hewlett's wired-in acre aroused no enthusiasm in the Great Macumber.

"Rabbits!" he scoffed. "And you venture to speak the sacred name of Art! Why, man, the animals are passé. Amateurs still make use of them in Sunday-school entertainments, perhaps; but I can see you're not keeping up with vaudeville. Audiences demand more formidable live stock with their magic these days. And I don't know where their demands will end. Only last week I caught a callow matinée audience yawning in the face of our man-eating tiger. Rabbits! Tush, Oscar! Now if you were breeding diplodocidæ, and I could find a stage big enough to materialize 'em on, I might——"

Hewlett appeared entirely pleased with the success of his factitiously innocent remark. He winked at Seth Gifford, the chubby little county attorney, who with Macumber and myself made up the rear guard of a late-autumn house party at Willowbrook Manor.

"The bunnies fail to inspire you, then, professor?" he queried.

"They do," replied the Great One. "But"—he plunged an arm over the braided wire and brought up a wriggling rabbit—"but *here's* an interesting beastie. The shape of him, I mean. He looks as if he might be stuffed with Easter eggs. Ho, Hewlett, here's a mystery of Willowbrook solved for you!"

Macumber had shaken his prisoner, and now as he held him head down an even half dozen golf balls dropped one after another from the rabbit's mouth.

"Curious!" murmured the Great One, examining the balls solemnly as he picked them up. "They all bear my mark. Do you know, Oscar, I could have sworn I'd driven—— Hello, what's the idea of the dance?"

A gong somewhere about the manor house had sounded; and on the kitchen porch, more than a quarter mile away, a tall figure with long flapping coat tails was indulging in a series of violent gesticulations. I followed Macumber's glance and recognized Blodgett, the butler.

Our host laughed.

"It's our Willowbrook wigwag," said he. "Saves a lot of steps on a big place like this.

It's you they want, Gifford. Probably a phone call. Hold on! We'll walk back with you—if Macumber's through roughing the rabbits."

The lawyer stopped to light a cigarette while we were overtaking him.

"I don't know who the devil would be calling me here," he grumbled, falling into step. "My wife's visiting in the city, and I phoned the office the first thing this morning to say I wouldn't be in until to-morrow."

The Great One ventured a suggestion which brought a laugh from Gifford.

"Official business! Huh! There isn't any such thing. I haven't had to be in court three times since last spring. The honors which my fellow citizens have heaped upon me are empty ones. This is a county that might as well be saving a prosecutor's salary. Don't worry, Macumber. There's no danger our foursome will be broken up."

But when he came from Oscar Hewlett's library a few minutes later, Gifford no longer wore the look of good-humored unconcern which he had carried to the telephone.

"What's the trouble, Seth?" Hewlett asked.

The prosecutor frowned.

"Damned if I can make out! Seems to have been some sort of rumpus down at the old Quarrendale place—a shooting."

"I'll be damned!" said Hewlett softly. "Always was sure there was something queer about that fellow Haverley. So he's been done——"

"No. Haverley hasn't been shot. I don't know that anybody has. Reilly is a good constable on night-patrol duty, and fair enough at either end of a speed trap, but the telephone baffles him. He was hardly what I'd call lucid. I gather he got a report that something had happened during the night, and hasn't been able to push his investigation beyond the outside of the Quarrendale garden wall. Now he wants me to come down and represent the majesty of the law. Just why he insists on breaking in on the weary prosecutor's rest I don't make out; but I might as well go and see what's up, don't you think?"

"Reilly's at the Quarrendale house now?"

"In the vicinity, anyhow."

Hewlett glanced at his watch.

"Plenty of time to be there and back before luncheon," he said. "We'll all go together, and keep the foursome intact for the afternoon. Rustle out the phaëton, Blodgett, will you?"

We were speeding along a smooth white highway flanked by great estates when Hewlett, who had hopped into the front seat alongside his chauffeur, turned to face us.

"By the way, Gifford," he said, "if this turns out to be a really heavy case you can count yourself in rare luck. You didn't happen to know, did you, that Professor Macumber's a shark when it comes to crime? He works with mysteries, and plays with 'em, too. Remember the Ketterling case over on the north side of the island a couple of years ago?"

"Oh, bosh!" sighed the Great One. "Gifford doesn't stand in need of assistance from any of us. And the Ketterling affair is a long way back. Let's hold our conversation in the present tense, Oscar. A while since you let drop a remark that interested me—for I like to hear about queer people. What's out of ordinary about the man Haverley?"

"He's an odd sort of character, that's all. Lives by himself in a house pretty near the size of mine, and spends half his nights prowling around the countryside."

"An unsociable cuss," put in Gifford. "He's got a temper like one of those retired Indian-army majors you read about. At one and the same time he's retiring and bellicose. Rows with his servants and tradesmen, and the neighbors as well."

Macumber smiled.

"So that's what constitutes a queer bird in the eyes of you rustics, eh? You mean to tell me that a person who prefers his own company, and has a bit of pepper in his make-up, and——"

"I'd rather say dynamite than pepper," interposed Hewlett. "I could cite instances, and so could Seth. But Haverley is our official man of mystery in these parts. When he first showed up in Southport five or six years ago he was cruising in a motor car, looking for a likely spot to light. The Quarrendale house took his eye—the sort of place that would. Next day he was moving in. Young Luke Quarrendale had been glad to get the property off his hands at any price, considering its reputation hereabouts, and Haverley had bought for cash."

"Ah," breathed the Great One. "Another strong count in the indictment. Our extraordinary man buys a home and pays cash!"

"But," Hewlett protested, "no one's ever

learned where Haverley gets his money, or where he goes when he flits out of Southport. Most of the year the house is deserted. Haverley spends two or three months here at the outside; then off he goes. But you'll be able to size up the man for yourself soon enough. See the high wall ahead—to the left? The Quarrendale place lies behind it."

"Yes," said Gifford; "and there's Reilly patrolling the lawn across the road. Why the devil hasn't he walked in?"

II.

We weren't long finding out why Constable Reilly had not invaded the Quarrendale premises. The wall inclosing house and garden was ten feet or so in height, and was topped with spikes and broken glass set into cement; and the iron gate was secured by a padlocked chain.

"What's the idea of the wall?" demanded the Great One, before we were out of the machine. "The place looks like some sort of prison."

"A prison is what the place was," Hewlett told him. "The wall was intended to keep Ralph Quarrendale out of mischief. He spent the last ten years of his life behind it, with three huskies standing guard over him in relays. Had a well-developed homicidal mania. Finally got hold of a pistol, potted one of the guards and then killed himself."

"Thereby putting Mr. Haverley in line for a bargain in real estate," Macumber remarked. "But the gentleman doesn't appear to be at home."

"Nope," said the lanky constable, who had crossed the road and draped himself over a tonneau door; "Haverley ain't in. I seen him myself early this mornin', walking east."

"And no servants about?" asked Gifford.

"Not a soul. Old Haverley sacked his last people—a couple of Japs, they say—day before yesterday. I rang the bell alongside the gate until my fingers was sore."

"Yes, yes," said the prosecutor impatiently; "but what's all the fuss, Reilly? Why should *I* be dragged over here?"

"It was Mr. France, that lives next door. He said I'd better call you. Here he comes now."

A thin-faced elderly man in golfing tweeds was hurrying along the walk.

"By heavens, Gifford!" he said breathlessly, "I'm not harboring any animosity because Haverley pulled down my aërial—no, I don't want you to think that for a minute. His violent objections to radio entertainment have no bearing. It's simply my belief that a crime has been committed, and it's certainly my duty as a citizen to report that belief to the proper authorities. Am I right?"

"The procedure is perfectly proper," said the prosecutor dryly. "May I ask the basis of your belief, Mr. France?"

The man in the knickers rubbed his hands nervously together.

"In the first place, there was a shooting somewhere inside the Quarrendale wall last night—well, between two and three o'clock this morning, to be precise."

"A shot was fired, you mean?"

"Well, yes. But there'd been some sort of commotion just previously. I don't know what it was, exactly, but it was sufficient to awaken me from a sound sleep. Almost immediately I heard the shot. I had been fully aroused, and there's no doubt of where it had been fired. The report didn't seem to be muffled; so I'd say the shooting was outdoors, in the garden.

"A few minutes later lights began to appear in the upper windows of the Quarrendale house. Then I heard a stirring in the garden, and saw the glow of an electric flash lamp. It was pitch dark, mind you, and the beam of light was all I could see. After perhaps ten minutes it flickered out, and presently the house itself was in darkness. I couldn't sleep again. At daylight I dressed, and a while later I saw Haverley passing—walking fast. I called to him and asked if he'd heard a shot. All I got from him was a snarl. He said I'd better mind my own business and then flung back some scurrilous remark about my radio set; but he kept right on going."

Seth Gifford looked from one to another of us.

"*I'm* stumped," he said dubiously. "I hardly think, Mr. France, that the circumstances would justify us in forcing an entry. The gate's chained up, you see."

"It always is, whether Haverley's at home or away. And it wouldn't be necessary to break any lock. I've a couple of long ladders that would get the constable over the wall with no danger to his uniform."

"Don't you think," asked Macumber as the prosecutor hesitated, "that it might be

well to wait until Mr. Haverley has returned from his walk?"

"Do we know that he *will* return?" demanded the neighbor. "It's plain you're not acquainted with the man, sir. He's a menace, and nothing less. Upon my word, I had more peace of mind with crazy Ralph Quarrendale living at my elbow. No less than three times my aërial——"

"I don't think that will happen again," put in Gifford hastily. "Haverley has been warned that further interference with the wires would lead to his arrest. But so far as the present matter is concerned I don't think we need wait for him to put in an appearance. Just what you expect us to find in the garden, Mr. France, I frankly can't imagine; but if you've ladders handy, bring 'em on!"

"I'd not be surprised by anything we found," said the other darkly.

A faint smile came to the Great One's face at that; and it had not wholly vanished when, the ladders having duly been supplied, the six of us stood in the Quarrendale garden.

"Now that we're here," he said cheerfully, "the question of what to do next comes up. Mr. France—Gifford—come, it's for you to say. You're the leaders of the expedition."

The little prosecutor, standing shin-deep in unkempt grass overlaid with fallen leaves, looked about him with a disapproving frown.

"A gardener hasn't been one of Haverley's extravagances," said he. "Gad! He's let the place run wild. In a few more years he'll have a private jungle instead of a garden."

And it seemed to me that the acre or two within the walls was jungle enough then. Weeds even had overgrown the walks and the road running back to the unused stable; and, although the many great trees stood gaunt and bare, their branches interlaced so thickly that only a twilight soaked through from the sodden November sky.

Hewlett shuddered.

"Pleasant place for a murder," he said. "Well, France, Gifford appears to leave the lead to you. What do we——"

At that moment came a shout from Macumber. He had rambled off alone toward the stable; and now he stood in the half-hidden roadway, pointing to a high pile of leaves heaped beneath a clump of trees a few yards away from him.

"What do you see? What is it?" chattered France as the rest of us arrived at the Great One's side; and I judged from his sudden pallor that he had no stomach for further leadership.

"Just a shoe—an old shoe!" cried Hewlett, first to perceive the object toward which the pointing finger directed our eyes.

"On the contrary," said Macumber quietly, "it's quite a new shoe. And a shoe, I think, with a foot in it."

He leaped over the low hedge that bordered the road, and began to kick away the leaves and the broken branches scattered above and through them.

With the first kick another shoe was revealed, with a few inches of trousers leg above it; and in a half dozen seconds more, scooping now with his hands, the Great One had uncovered the body of a man who lay sprawled out on his back among the crisp leaves with his arms flung wide and his two gray eyes staring up at the hazy sun.

III.

This man whom the Great One had exhumed from the grave of leaves was clad in a stout and costly coat of leather, fleece lined and much scarred of outer surface. Beneath the overgarment he wore a suit which, although the cloth was of fine quality, was of pattern and cut that would have been the choice of few persons of his years. He was certainly past forty, perhaps fifty; and he looked as if in life he might have been a rather formidable citizen. His blue jaw jutted upward at an angle in which there seemed to me to be a measure of ugliness as well as strength, and his close-cropped hair was a grayish and belligerent bristle.

Gifford read the face as I did.

"I might have found use for a gun myself if I'd had a quarrel with that fellow," said he. "He has a sort of criminal look, don't you think, professor? I wonder if a motive of robbery brought him here."

Macumber, on his knees beside the man in the leather coat, shook his head.

"It would more likely have been the other way about, Gifford." He tapped the front of the dead man's surtout. "The coat's been opened and buttoned again—buttoned by a clumsy and hasty hand—since he was shot. He may have had something of value in an inner pocket. Do you not see that the buttons are not in the buttonholes intended for them?"

"I'd noticed that. But you say *since* he was shot?"

"Certainly it was after he had the bullet in him," said the Great One impatiently, and put a finger on the little round black-edged hole in the leather. "You can be sure from this that the coat was closed when its owner was shot. And it will tell you also that the pistol from which the bullet came was not many inches away from the leather. Note the powder marks, man."

Gifford. straightening after an inspection of the bullet hole, turned to France.

"Do you recognize this man?" he asked. "Ever see him in Haverley's company.

The neighbor hesitated.

"No," he conceded, a little reluctantly, "I can't say that I ever did."

"How about you, Reilly?"

"He's a stranger to me, too, Mr. Gifford," replied the constable. "It's certain he don't belong anywhere around Southport."

"Anything on him to identify him, Macumber?" querried the prosecutor. "Have a look through his clothes."

"Just what I was about to suggest," said the Great One. "There's a queer sort of bulge here that—— Well, by Christopher! Here's an odd sort of weapon!"

He had opened the surtout as he spoke, and now he tossed at our feet a thick bar of metal which he had taken from an inner pocket of the suit coat. Gifford picked it up.

"A window weight!" he exclaimed. "What the devil would he have been carrying that around for?"

Macumber offered no opinion. He was rummaging through other pockets; and, when he had finished, his search had revealed no more than another sash weight—this one sawed in half.

"Build your theory to suit yourself, Gifford," he invited. "There's not another blessed thing in the clothes. Some one else was through 'em before me, sure enough. Half the pockets were inside out. By the by, you fellows, look about and see if you can find the man's hat. That may tell us something."

We found no hat, but the hunt for it led to another discovery. It was France who made the find. He came to Macumber gingerly holding between two fingers and a thumb a rusted revolver which had lain hidden under the leaves within a few paces of the body. The Great One broke the gun and a moment later held up an exploded cartridge.

"An exhibit, Mr. France," said he, "which corroborates the evidence of your ears. I'd intended earlier to apologize to you for the harboring of a few unspoken thoughts. Pray accept——"

The rest of his sentence was lost, for seized by a sudden thought he had turned his back upon us and was making for the ladder. Nimbly he climbed it, and vanished beyond the garden wall. Before he returned a quarter hour had elapsed.

"Well," queried Gifford, twirling the gun which the Great One had thrust into his hand on making his abrupt departure, "would you mind telling us what you've been up to?"

"Of course I'd not mind," Macumber assured him. "It simply occurred to me that this poor chap might have got into the garden as we got into it. But I'm satisfied now there's been no other ladder than ours laid against the wall since yesterday's rainstorm."

"An excellent point!" cried the prosecutor. "That means, of course, he was let in through the gate by the only man who——"

"Yes," said the Great One; "either he came in through the gate or he flew in. And the one to tell you which it was should be coming toward us now—unless there be duplicate keys to the padlock on the gate. Good morning, sir. I've the honor of addressing Mr. Haverley, I believe?"

A red-faced man around whose thin-lipped mouth curved a carroty mustache streaked with gray had come striding across the shaggy lawn. He held his stout walking stick militantly before him, gripped below the middle, as he stared at Macumber.

"Yes; I'm Haverley," said he. "And who the blazes are you? How did you get in here?"

His eyes had not found the man in the leaves, for Hewlett and I stood between. Gifford showed himself possessed of that sense of the dramatic which in some degree the trial lawyer must have. He waved us aside, and pointed toward the body.

"I'll ask you to explain, first," he said coolly, "how *he* got in!"

Haverley took a step forward and slapped a pair of glasses onto his nose. But rather than shock or fear, he appeared to register a rising choler. His cheeks grew redder,

and puffed out alarmingly. His voice went up in pitch.

"Get him out of here!" he screamed. "If you're friends of his, get him out of here! And get out yourselves, the lot of you! What's the use of walls and iron gates and locks, I'd like to know? I ask you quietly —for the last time—to leave!"

Gifford raised an enjoining hand.

"I happen to be the district attorney of this county, Mr. Haverley," said he, "and I do no more than is required of me by law when I warn you that you may make a mistake by having too much to say. As for leaving the premises, permit me to say that none of us will go until the coroner has been here. No, Mr. Haverley, not even yourself!"

IV.

We missed our foursome, after all. When the coroner arrived it was after noon; and Seth Gifford, with his first murder case on his hands, permitted the lawyer in him to dominate the golfer.

Careful examination of the body that had been buried in the leaves brought to light no more than Macumber had found. The pockets were empty; the clothing bore no marks to simplify the problem of identifying the victim, and though the walled garden was combed over from corner to corner the missing hat was not turned up.

The coroner, a pink-cheeked young chap who had come in an unprofessionally sporty roadster, ventured the opinion that our man had been dead "more than eight hours"—and that, on the technical point, coincided closely enough with the story we had had from the neighbor, France. Later we had a report of the autopsy, in which we were informed that the bullet had not penetrated the heart but had gone off at an angle on being deflected by a rib. The report made subsidiary mention of injuries to the leather-coated man's left hand. There was an abrasion across the palm, and two of the knuckles had been broken.

From all of us Gifford took depositions rather longer than I saw any need for. But his attempt to examine the irascible owner of the Quarrendale place was wholly without success.

"Why the devil ask me about anything?" Haverley demanded, when the little district attorney presented the first question of what might have been entered into the archives as a formal examination of the accused. "I stand on my rights as a taxpayer."

Gifford threw out a significant hint that there were other inalienable rights upon which a man in such a situation might choose to stand.

"Perhaps if competent legal advice were available to you," he said, "you'd see things in another light. Have you a lawyer?"

"I have," snapped Haverley. "But there isn't what I'd call a lawyer within a thousand miles of this hole. If I should happen to need one, I know where to get him. Don't worry."

"You've made up your mind not to talk?"

"Try to make me!" invited Haverley, blowing out his red cheeks and pounding the floor of the prosecutor's office with his stick; and with that the examination came to an abrupt end.

I had half expected that Gifford would be tempted to make a formal charge against the man, but he proved himself too wise in the law for that. Eventually he had Haverley before a local justice of the peace, who obligingly set up court in the district attorney's office, and asked that he be held as a material witness.

Redder than ever, but silent, the opulent man of mystery made his bond in the same fashion in which he had acquired his house, counting it in prodigious bank notes out of his wallet. That done he stalked out, with a parting glare for all hands.

"Jolly person," murmured the Great One when he had gone. "Do you know, Gifford, I'd enjoy achieving a better acquaintance with him. A most interesting type."

"You're welcome to him," said the prosecutor grimly. "And there'll be plenty of time for you to get to know him, if you care to stay on with us in Southport. *He'll* be staying, too, I'll guarantee!"

Macumber did elect to stay on at Southport. The night before he had been sighing for the Rawley, impatient to be back to his beloved Broadway. But Oscar Hewlett, who maintains an establishment as big as a hotel and expends more energy and ingenuity scouting up guests than most hotel managers do, found him unexpectedly hospitable to the suggestion that he make a full week of it at Willowbrook Manor.

For the next morning Hewlett had projected a gunning trip on the bay, but the Great One had breakfasted and disappeared before we were stirring. He left an unsatis-

factory note containing nothing but a perfunctory apology and the information that he probably would not return before evening.

Hewlett—although I told him the procedure was entirely characteristic of Macumber—was inclined to sulk. He decided to let the shooting go over for another day, and the two of us made a dismal round of the club course adjoining his estate. A couple of cocktails before luncheon brought him to a better humor.

"Did you ever hear of my lightless lighthouse?" he wanted to know; and my admission that I hadn't provided him with an inspiration for filling a couple of hours of the empty afternoon.

On the farther edge of the desolate marshland back of Willowbrook Manor rose a round tower which I had taken to appertain to some gigantic windmill, long dismantled. This, it developed, had been intended by Hewlett to house a powerful lamp which would wink back at the flashes of the government lighthouse on Fire Island across the sweep of the wide and shallow bay.

"But Uncle Sam," he complained as we climbed the winding iron staircase within the tower, "wouldn't stand for private competition. Within a week after I'd embarked on the beacon business I was firmly requested to hide my light under a bushel. And I've had to keep the lighthouse dark ever since."

From the railed platform to which the twisting stairs brought us the green glint of the ocean could be seen beyond the narrow ribbon of sand separating the waters of Great South Bay and the sea. I was astonished when Hewlett told me the sand spit was nearly ten miles away.

"If I'd thought to bring my binoculars," he said, "I could show you an interesting picture out to sea. There'll be anywhere from a half dozen to a dozen vessels riding at anchor just outside Mr. Volstead's jurisdiction with cargoes richer than ever came out of the Indies. There may be a few scattered ships lying off the Jersey coast and farther along south, but the real official Rum Row is straight across the beach yonder." He pointed out a couple of big high-bowed dories scooting across the bay. "There go two boats of the rum-running fleet now, making for the Fire Island inlet. They'll be bringing in a fortune in Scotch after nightfall, and probably twenty more boats of the same kind will have come in loaded to the gunwales before dawn. These are great days for Southport, I can tell you—the merriest since whaling went to pot. It's no trick at all for a man with one boat to keep two cars."

I mentioned having heard that airplanes were largely employed in the operations of the rum smugglers, and called his attention to a flying boat skimming over the water a mile or two to the east.

"Not here, they're not," said Hewlett. "Planes can't carry enough. Occasionally a case or two may sail in over the air line, but that sort of smuggling will be a matter of private speculation. The booze barons have their business highly organized, and aren't interested in small lots. You'll see plenty of flying boats along the bay, though. Three or four friends of mine have them, and there are others that can be hired by any one who cares to risk his neck for a bird's-eye view and a third-class thrill. That's one of 'em out there now, I think."

My ears just then caught a creaking below.

"Listen, Hewlett!" I said. "Sounds as if we were going to have company."

And company we did have a few seconds later—the Great Macumber's. He had crossed the marsh unsighted while our faces were turned toward the bay, and the bland expression he wore as he climbed out onto the gallery betrayed no penitence for his desertion.

"Did I hear something said about airplanes for hire?" he inquired. "It gives me a thought, lad. We must have a flight before we return to town."

Oscar Hewlett eyed him with disfavor.

"You're the deuce of a guest, Macumber," said he. "Where did you run off to?"

The Great One grinned.

"To the side, Oscar, of a brother in distress. In brief, I've spent a most enjoyable and instructive few hours at the Quarrendale place."

"Haverley let you in!"

"Oh, indeed he did."

The master of Willowbrook Manor shook his head.

"I'm afraid you're trifling with the truth. I'll swallow any other explanation of your truancy but that."

"There is no other," said Macumber. "The one difficulty I experienced in finding

my way to the man's heart was getting his hand in mine. I knew he'd read sincerity in my grip." He burst into a laugh. "No, I've not gone daft, Oscar. Did you not notice the tiny pin which the man wore on his lapel? Haverley and I are members of the same gr-r-rand lodge!"

V.

We saw little of Macumber for the next day or two. He had arranged with Hewlett for the use of the smallest of the Willowbrook Manor motors, a mouse-gray runabout, and would be gone in it for hours at a stretch. I was sure on his return from one trip that he had been in to New York, for he brought an armful of final editions of the evening papers which I knew were not on sale in Southport.

Beyond the admission that his flittings in the runabout were in connection with the tragedy of the walled garden, the Great One told us nothing. Nor could the combined cajolings of Hewlett and Gifford and myself win from him anything like a comprehensive account of his visit to the Quarrendale place.

The district attorney was at especial pains to extract some inkling of what had passed in Macumber's conversation with Haverley, but he made small progress.

"On information and belief," the Great One told him, "I'm satisfied that the man we found in the leaves wasn't killed by Haverley."

"But Haverley, of course," said Gifford, "knows who did kill him."

"I'd not be so sure of that," counseled Macumber.

"If he hasn't a guilty knowledge, why doesn't he talk?"

"Perhaps he has talked. Indeed, Gifford, I don't mind telling you I'm satisfied the man has told me all he knows. I think you'd have had better luck with him if you'd followed my advice the other day and waited for Haverley to turn up. He resented the intrusion. I find he has an extraordinary feeling on the question of property rights."

Gifford had been pacing the Willowbrook Manor billiard room. He halted beside the Great One and put a persuasive hand upon his arm.

"Come, now, professor," he said earnestly, "let's come to terms. You can realize the situation I'm in. No one has come forward to identify the body, and there's absolutely not another step I can take unless Haverley abandons his policy of silence. But you, I'm convinced, hold the key to the whole problem in the hollow of your hand."

A glimmer of a grin came to Macumber's lips.

"Oh, no!" he protested. "It's not to be found in the hollow of *my* hand, I assure you, Gifford."

Then he picked a cue from the rack and applied himself so assiduously to the execution of a series of brilliant massé shots that the little district attorney gave him up and wandered away disconsolate.

Before we turned in that night I tried a questionnaire of my own on the Great One. To my surprise I got a nod from him when I asked him if it had not been Haverley himself whom France had seen prowling in the Quarrendale garden with the flash lamp.

"It was an afterthought with him, then, to hide the body among the leaves?"

Macumber chuckled.

"You can't pull me into deep water, lad," he warned. "But I may as well tell you that Haverley hid no body. He had no trouble convincing me of that."

"And Haverley did no shooting, you say?"

"I'm positive he didn't. He hasn't exactly a prepossessing personality, but if the man's ever contemplated murder it would have surely been the radio enthusiast next door he had in mind."

Another question had been puzzling me. I brought it up.

"How do you think the man's knuckles were broken? Wouldn't that indicate he'd been in a fist fight before he was shot?"

"It might. But I've taken occasion while burning Hewlett's gas to have a look at the injured hand. The knuckles appear to have been beaten repeatedly with some heavy instrument—perhaps the butt of a revolver. Apparently our friend in the leather coat possessed an amazing amount of vitality."

"You mean he had a grip on something that——"

Again the Great One nodded.

"That's it, lad. And they found a cruel but simple way of making him let go of it."

"*They?*"

"Oh, yes; I'm certain there must have been more than one person concerned in the crime."

"Then Haverley let quite a crowd into his walled garden?"

"Have I said he let any one in?"

"No; but who else could have?"

"Nobody," said Macumber serenely, and I was constrained to veer off on another course.

"Have you learned anything about Haverley himself?" I asked.

"All I care to know."

"You don't doubt he has a guilty knowledge of the murder?"

"Tush!"

"Why doesn't he tell what he knows?"

"Didn't Gifford and Hewlett both tell you he was a peculiar person—and haven't you seen the man for yourself?"

"At the least, he's obstructing justice by his attitude."

"On the contrary, he's serving the ends of justice. It's on my advice, if I must come out with it, that he continues silent. I've been seeing more than scenery in my travels in the gray runabout, I promise you—seeing a deal more than I'd be likely to see were Haverley to take steps to clear himself."

"Has he told you who he is—where he gets his money, I mean to say?"

"That he has, lad. There's no more mystery about Haverley than there is about Gifford or Hewlett. The man owns oil properties in Oklahoma that bring him in more in a year than the two of us will handle in our lifetime."

"Then what brings him here?"

"Precisely the thing that's responsible for his crabbedness—ill health. His doctors sent him here from Tulsa for the sake of the iodine that blows in on the breeze from the bay. Iodine's what his system lacks. Six or eight months in the southwest is all he's able to stand at a stretch. Then he must spend at least that many weeks in exile until he's built himself up again. Do you wonder he resents Southport and its people when he's made up his mind long since that there's nothing for him here but the air?"

"So that's the mystery of Haverley?" I sighed. "Why, it's no mystery at all!"

Macumber blew out a lungful of acrid smoke.

"Few things are, lad," said he complacently, "when you come to look hard enough at them."

And that remark provided me with inspiration for a question which I thought would prove a poser.

"Is it possible you've been looking hard, maestro," I asked, "at that other little mystery presented by the contents of the murdered man's pockets? Are you ready with an explanation of why he should have been lugging a cargo of thirty or forty pounds of cast iron?"

The Great One puffed away for a moment in silence.

"Well, youngster," he said presently, "you've singled out a pretty point. But would you seek far for an answer if the setting had been different—if the body had been hidden under water, say, instead of under leaves?"

VI.

The next morning—it was the fourth, as I recall, after that memorable one which witnessed our intrusion in force into the walled garden—the mouse-gray runabout stood idle. Macumber, his curiosity concerning the countryside apparently satisfied, once more was the perfect guest. Paired with Oscar Hewlett, he spent the morning gloriously trouncing Gifford and me on the links; and he put in the first couple of hours after luncheon at billiards with us. He was making a beautiful run when Blodgett announced the arrival of a caller.

"A Mr. Hawkins to see Professor Macumber. Seemed to think you'd be expecting him, sir."

"Oh, yes, show him in here, please," said the Great One; and when the butler had gone he offered a word of explanation to the rather astonished Hewlett: "Hawkins is a young friend of mine from the city with a predilection for the air. *You* put me in mind of him the other day with your talk of flying boats, Oscar, and when I heard of one for sale secondhand at what seemed to me an attractive figure I sent him a wire. Ah, Hawkins, come in! Think the plane might interest you, eh?"

It was a serious-faced young man, tall and strongly built, who had joined us.

"Shouldn't be surprised," he replied briefly; and when I had taken a closer look at him I had a feeling that for him surprises would be few and far between. He appeared a phlegmatic and unimaginative sort. As Macumber introduced him he shook hands all around with a deal of vigor and formality, loudly repeating: "Happy to

make your acquaintance!" Then he relapsed into silence, his steady eyes on the Great One.

Macumber, abandoning the unfinished run, put away his cue.

"We'll concede you victory by default, Oscar," said he. "To round out the afternoon, what'd you say to a flight with Mr. Hawkins?"

"Thank you, no!" was our host's swift and emphatic retort. "Not for a thousand a minute. I leave the sky to the clouds and the birds. Solid earth suits me. I like the feel of it under my feet."

"You, Gifford?"

"Count me in. Where's your ship?"

"At Bartonville. Acquainted there? Know a fellow of the name of Kane?"

"Never heard of him," said Gifford. "And that's not strange. I haven't been in the place for five or six years. But let's be moving, Macumber. It's a ten-mile drive, and the days are short this time of year. Come along. My coupé'll hold us all."

Hewlett's resolution to remain on the ground was not to be shaken. We couldn't persuade him even to make the trip to Bartonville with us, and we left him quite content to exchange our companionship for that of a dwarfed and misshapen bottle on whose label glowed five seductive stars.

I was consumed with curiosity in regard to Hawkins. Not only had I never met him before, but I could not recollect ever having heard the Great One mention his name. Nor did I have opportunity to learn more about him while we were on the way to Bartonville. I sat in the front seat with Gifford, while Macumber and his flying friend talked behind my back with their heads close together and in tones so low that I could overhear not a word.

The Great One obviously had been over the route before. As we rolled into the village which was our objective he called directions to Gifford which brought us, after a half dozen turns, to a long shed at the edge of a cove.

In front of the shed stood a heavy-set man in a sweater coat. He came forward as Gifford pulled up.

"Hello," he said. "Sorta thought you wasn't coming. Brought a gang, didn't yuh? All wanta go up?"

"Why, yes," replied Macumber. "Did you say the plane would carry four passengers besides the pilot?"

"Yep; that's what she's built for. Many's the time she's did it, too."

"You've no objection to Mr. Hawkins handling her?"

"What's he know?"

"Put in three years handling 'em in the navy," spoke up Hawkins. "Let's have a look at the ship, cap'n."

"She's in first-class shape. Thinking of using her for taxi work, was yuh?"

"That's the idea."

"Well, there ain't many like her to be snapped up," said Kane; and having singled out the prospective purchaser he led Hawkins into the shed.

By the time the flying boat had been slid down her runway into the water Hawkins had convinced the owner of his competence to take her aloft. It was he who sat forward at the controls. In the boat body behind him were two wide seats. Gifford and I climbed in and occupied the one at the rear.

Kane, I could see, had no intention of joining the party. He stood on the little dock to which we had tied up, with his hands in his pockets. He shook his head when the Great One pointed to the seat beside him and came aboard only after Hawkins had demanded for the second time: "What's the trouble, cap'n? She shy on the lift?"

The sun was already low when we went churning out of the cove, for the engine had required coaxing; and we had traveled halfway to the distant beach before the boat body rose clear of the water. After that we climbed swiftly, and so steadily that Kane became uneasy. He sat directly in front of me, and the rush of wind kicked back by the propeller carried along his roar of protest:

"We ain't out for any altitude record, mister!"

Hawkins gave no sign of having heard. Our ascent continued. Around and around we went—and up and up.

The pilot had convinced me he knew his business. I felt safe with him. Through perhaps another thousand feet of that persistent climb my sense of security endured. Then I experienced a first tremor of misgiving. It grew. The air had become stabbing cold. Daylight was going fast. I didn't think I'd care much about night flying. In Gifford's eyes I saw an answering shadow of alarm. And then I could no

longer see his eyes. He was just a bulk beside me. We were rushing into night.

To what followed the fast fading of the twilight lent a sense of unreality that served only to enhance the terror of it. The man in front of me was shouting again, angrily. Was our pilot crazy? Why didn't he start down?

Now Hawkins heard. Dimly I could see him struggling with the controls. We ceased to climb, but we did not descend. Gifford shouted into my ear through cupped hands.

"He's having trouble, isn't he?"

The plane—I couldn't help thinking of her as a boat, for half boat she was—began to list sharply.

"Straighten her out!" cried Kane.

"I can't stop her!" shouted Hawkins. "It's not the ship herself. There's something outside of her—pulling her over!"

Macumber's seat was on the lower side of the tilting body. He leaned over the gunwale.

"Oh, Kane!" he called. "What's this? What's this?"

"What?"

"Either I've gone mad, or there's a fifth man climbing aboard us—a man in a leather coat! His face, Kane, his——"

Abruptly the Great One's voice died. He was pointing, still leaning over the gunwale. Above it, a foot or two forward of him, had appeared a ghastly, clawing, armless hand that flamed as if fresh lifted from the fires of Abaddon.

From Kane came a scream.

"Fogarty! Oh, my God, it's Fogarty come for his dirty money! We're dead men, the lot of us!"

James Francis Kane—as his name appeared in the masterly indictment drawn subsequently by District Attorney Gifford—was a limp heap in the bottom of the boat hull when the plane nosed gently to the runway which had been our starting point and with a last shriek and sputter lifted herself into her shed. His first confession, made later that same evening, I shall not attempt to reproduce. The terror still was on the man when he made it; and the many incoherencies and discordancies in the statement transcribed by Detective Sergeant Thomas Hawkins of the homicide bureau, State police, do not fit well in that straightforward narrative style to which the Great Macumber ordains that I adhere when treating of events wherein he has played a part.

From the police point of view, however, Kane's early admissions encompassed all that was essential. Nathan Goldfarb, whose name and probable whereabouts Kane supplied readily enough when he saw the noose tightening around his own neck, was arrested in Chicago the following day while engaged in circulating a portion of the blood money he had carried West.

The statement afterward prepared by Mr. Gifford and signed by Kane gives most comprehensibly the story of what, considering its circumstances, I think I may be pardoned for referring to as the high crime in which the Messrs. Kane and Goldfarb were collaborators.

Charles Fogarty, the victim, was a trafficker in goods made contraband by the enactment of the eighteenth Constitutional amendment—a bootlegger operating independently and widely outside the "ring" said to dominate the trade. Goldfarb, a gangster of New York's East Side, had been employed by him for some months as a sort of man at arms. Fogarty often carried very large sums of money, and it was the gunman's chief duty to be on guard against the robbers who prey on bootleg wealth.

To the average wage earner the remuneration drawn by Goldfarb would seem handsome, but the bravo came gradually to look upon his berth as a Heaven-sent opportunity to arrive at sudden and easy fortune. A score of times he had accompanied Fogarty on his trips to Rum Row. Invariably Fogarty went to Bartonville by motor and thence by plane. His money, he had figured out, would be safer in the air on this last stage of the journey; on the water a man could never know what adventures he might meet.

Fogarty always used Kane's flying boat. It was habit. Goldfarb cultivated Kane, whispered of golden possibilities, presented a proposition worked out in detail at the last.

Then came a night when Fogarty realized for a brief moment the perils of the airways. As his hired plane circled above the bay he was shot. The envelope that contained fifty one-thousand-dollar bills was taken from the pocket in which Goldfarb had seen it placed. Other pockets were emptied; then, carrying weight enough to sink him to the bottom of the bay and hold him there, Fogarty was cast overside.

Goldfarb, who had all this work to do

single-handed, may have thought his man dead. He wasn't. The shock of the bullet had left him without strength to struggle, but he did get a grip of death on a guy wire. Kane, looking back, saw Goldfarb beating at the hand with a wrench—saw the fingers slip and vanish. His shout was too late. Thinking the business over with minutes since, he had been sweeping inland. He was fearful that Fogarty's body hadn't fallen into the bay.

The next day he knew it hadn't; and thus concludes the confession of James Francis Kane.

Before he was taken from his hangar on that night when he had seen the Fury flying at his elbow, reaching its burning hand for him, Kane had dug up from under a corner of the shed a cigar box containing his share of the money for which his passenger had been murdered. There were twenty-five bank notes, each of the thousand-dollar denomination. Goldfarb had made an even split of it; in his code an employer was one thing, a partner another.

We drove slowly on the return drive to Willowbrook Manor and the waiting Hewlett after we had seen Sergeant Hawkins off for the county seat with his prisoner. Gifford now bubbled with congratulations, but the Great One would have none of them.

"Tush!" he cried. "If there has been a remarkable performance in the matter it has been that of young Hawkins. A marvel of versatility, that. I picked him to help us out because he's the one detective of my acquaintance who can fly an airplane, and also because he possessed the histrionic talent needful in the psychological experiment I had in view. But, man, did you see him swing the shorthand as our friend Kane gabbled!"

"But how the devil did you pick up Kane? By Joseph, my head's spinning yet with the combination of scare and surprise you've given me!"

"Oh," said Macumber diffidently, "it was by a sort of process of elimination I got my suspicions centered on the man: but it might best be called a lucky guess, at that. I'd have guaranteed no results from the evening's performance had you forced me in a corner beforehand. D'ye see, just such a fantastic explanation as we've had from Kane occurred to me before I remarked that our man in the leather coat might have flown into Haverley's walled garden—which virtually is how he did get there. Had his fall not been broken by the branches above and ended in that thick bed of leaves the manner of his arrival, of course, would have been a degree easier to guess. But as it was, the shot heard by France would be explained. The gun would have slipped from Fogarty's pocket and exploded when it struck the ground. Did you note it lacks the modern safety device?"

"No; I couldn't have seen the point as having importance one way or the other, anyhow. Go ahead, Macumber. Take us along with you on the trail which led to Kane."

"We're close to the end of it now. I simply followed out my altogether absurd theory—for it is the extravagant in criminology which ever commands my most earnest attention. I learned that four men along the bay have made a business of running flying boats out to the rum fleet. Already, you see, rum and robbery were associated in my thoughts. All four of these men, as I had the whisper, were making rich profits; and when I found one of them only too anxious to sell his plane and get out of the trade I fancied he was a man who could tell me something."

"That panicky scene in the plane was——"

"It needed no rehearsal. Hawkins is a brilliant flyer; he can do anything in the air. And as an actor I leave you to judge him for yourself."

"But that fiery hand, Macumber! By the Lord, I——"

"You see the same hand here, lacking the phosphorus."

"But, my God, professor! What am I to say to Haverley? How am I to——"

The Great One's reply came gently:

"Oh, that's all been arranged. We've talked over the matter between us in anticipation of this triumphant hour. I can tell you, Gifford, how you can win not only Haverley's forgiveness, but his heartfelt thanks."

"How?" gasped the little prosecutor. "Let me know how?"

"By persuading Neighbor France," smiled the Great Macumber, "to turn in his loud speaker for a head set!"

Another Great Macumber story in the next issue.

A Chat With You

HAVE you ever handled or examined an old flintlock musket? If you have, you have probably wondered why such a weapon ever superseded the simple and effective bow and arrow. Those that we have aimed and snapped seemed to have been designed by a humorist who worked in metals rather than on the comic strip of a paper. The musket is so long and heavy that it needs a strong left arm to hold it with reasonable steadiness. It takes a long time to load, what with powder from a powder horn, wads of leather or paper and round leaden bullet. Finally the scheme of discharging it is one of a singularly hit-or-miss fashion. The little hammer at the right side of the stock hits a piece of flint which has been clamped before it. Sparks fly from the flint. If the owner of the weapon is lucky one of these sparks falls into a little pan in which a priming of black powder lies where any wind might blow it off. The powder going off communicates through a small hole a spark or two to the charge in the firing chamber. The charge explodes—and the bullet is on its way. It takes patience to shoot with one of these guns. We imagine the kick is heavy enough to leave a blue bruise on the shoulder and there is always a sporting chance that the charge may have been too heavy and that the weapon may burst in your face. And yet one of these muskets was sold not long ago for a thousand dollars. It would have been junked half a century ago had it not borne on its stock the name, Alexander Selkirk.

THIS Alexander Selkirk was an ordinary enough sailor who never dreamed that he would become famous. Indeed his fame is in the nature of an accident. More than two hundred years ago Selkirk happened to call on a Mrs. Damaris Daniel in the old west England seaport, Bristol. Damaris had another visitor that evening, a dark, odd, silent, curious man. Selkirk loosened up after the fashion of any old sailor in the presence of an attractive and apparently attentive woman. He told of his adventures by land and sea. The odds are about ten to one that Damaris, in spite of her polite attention, forgot all about them the next day. It was different with the man who sat there. The discourse was not intended for his benefit, but all the same he got the benefit.

* * * *

HE went home that night through the muddy Bristol streets full of the stuff he had been hearing. He had recently been reading a book, published not so long before, Dampier's "Voyages Around the World." It came to him that using the reminiscences—how much truth and how much embroidery no one knows—of Selkirk, he himself might write a book even more interesting. He was quite right about it. Daniel Defoe's "Robinson Crusoe" was published in 1719 and was a success. Since then, it has been one of the classics of our language.

* * * *

THIS is the sort of thing that lends to the business of publishing or writing stories an engaging touch of adventure. You never know when you may discover some-

where, perhaps in the most unlikely spot, the materials for something that will reverberate in the minds of men for years. We suppose a touch of the same adventure attaches itself to any craft that is plied with sincerity and affection for it, but we can speak only for our own. Had Defoe not happened to drop into Mrs. Daniel's house that evening, Robinson Crusoe, the boy Xury, the black-savage Friday, the immortal goat and parrot would never have existed at all. They came into being through the meeting, by chance, of two widely different minds. Selkirk could not have written his story. It was his to live it. He would have passed into dark oblivion, an unknown, unsung Ulysses, had he not met his Homer in the person of this curious, secretive Master Defoe, who in addition to his other activities, turned out, after the lapse of many years, to have been a secret agent of the government.

* * * *

GOOD stories are not made up out of people's heads. They are discovered and given form by the writer. In the next issue of THE POPULAR you will find a two-dollar book-length novel, "The Silver Obelisk," by Roy Norton. With its strange setting in the ancient island of Crete, with its still stranger mingling of the spirit of the distant past with that of modern adventure, it might seem fantastic were it not so sound and credible. Yet Norton, when he wrote it, was working on a foundation of fact. It is one of the best stories he has ever given us.

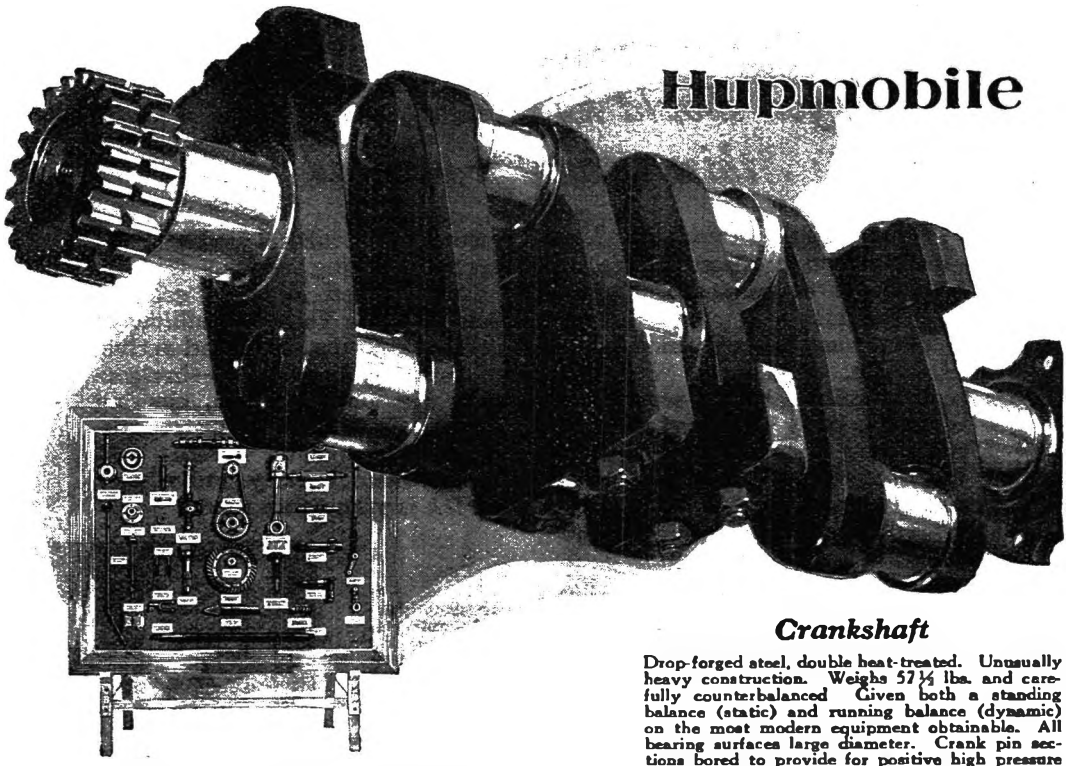
* * * *

IN the same number you will find a funny story by Montanye, the first of a new series of Western tales, "Galahad of Lost Eden," by William West Winter. There is a Mexican adventure story by Charles Tenney Jackson, a strange tale of a strange Chinaman in New York by Roy Hinds, an oil-field story by Dorothy Wardwell, a story of the Great Macumber by Robert Rohde, a wonderful study of human character under modern conditions by Eden Phillpotts, a railroad story by Calvin Johnston, a horse story by Mildred Fitz-Hugh and another generous installment of the serial by B. M. Bower.

* * * *

ALL of these stories have the quality of coming from life itself. The task of those who make this magazine is to discover how interesting, adventurous and romantic life really is and to pass the good news along to you. The cheering thing about it is that there are always new stories to come, for new things are always happening.

Some day, we have small doubt, the reincarnation of Alexander Selkirk will drift into this office and begin to talk in a fine Scotch brogue, puffing on an old clay pipe to emphasize his periods. And sitting in a corner, silent, inscrutable, attentive, will be Daniel Defoe.



Crankshaft

Drop-forged steel, double heat-treated. Unusually heavy construction. Weighs 57½ lbs. and carefully counterbalanced Given both a standing balance (static) and running balance (dynamic) on the most modern equipment obtainable. All bearing surfaces large diameter. Crank pin sections bored to provide for positive high pressure lubrication. Three large bronze-backed, babbitt-lined bearings, all bored at one time to insure perfect alignment, and then hand-fitted to crankshaft. It would be much less expensive, but not nearly as satisfactory, to use a lighter crankshaft, not counterbalanced, not bored for lubrication; and to use plain die-cast babbitt bearings, not hand-fitted, and not backed by bronze.

Common Sense Tells You This is Right

Buy No Car Till You Know What It Is

You can make up your mind to one thing—either the car you buy will measure up to Hupmobile in quality and value, or you will not get your money's-worth.

Prove What You've Always Wanted to Know

You've always admired the Hupmobile—consciously and unconsciously made it the standard.

If in the past you've bought a less finely built car, you were insistent upon being assured that the other car had the sheer mechanical value and trustworthiness that you feel the Hupmobile possesses to a greater degree than any other car in its class.

Now, before you buy another car, go a step further. Buy deliberately and with your eyes open.

Think of your money in terms of the effort it cost you. Think of the car in terms of performance, sturdiness, freedom from structural or material weaknesses, and of closely calculated dollar-value. Do not be misled by mere bulk and glitter.

To help you do this on the only practical basis, Hupmobile has done a revolutionary thing.

It asks you to check the Hupmobile, part by part, against any other car, of any make, at any price.

The Safe, Sure Way to Get the Facts

To make it practical and easy for you to do this, Hupmobile, in its famous parts displays, has brought hidden but important parts out where you can see them.

On these boards are captions telling what the parts are made of and how. In red ink, significantly enough, are described the lesser processes and materials that are often used.

This will prove to you that you cannot find a better made car than Hupmobile.

The Way to Buy Wisely and Well

We know this—hundreds on hundreds are making this unique and fact-revealing test. And a surprising percentage are buying Hupmobiles.

Make the test—convince yourself. And then when you know the definite, cold-steel reasons for Hupmobile superiority—buy your Hupmobile.

Hupp Motor Car Corporation
Detroit, Michigan

If your Health is threatened—

you should know the power of this natural fresh food

THESE remarkable reports are typical of thousands of similar tributes to the power of Fleischmann's Yeast.

There is nothing mysterious about its action. It is not a "cure-all," not a medicine in any sense. But when the body is choked with the poisons of constipation—or when its vitality is low so that skin, stomach, and general health are affected—this simple, natural food achieves literally amazing results.

Concentrated in every cake of Fleischmann's Yeast are millions of tiny yeast-plants, alive and active. At once they go to work—invigorating the whole system, clearing the skin, aiding digestion, strengthening the intestinal muscles and making them healthy and active. *Health* is yours once more.

"Since childhood, I have had to resort to taking salts every two weeks to relieve constipation. It was very seldom that I had a natural, healthy appetite. A night never passed that I would sleep soundly. Then I started eating Fleischmann's Yeast. My appetite began to increase, and my constipation gave way gradually to a healthy, regular, daily discharge of waste. Now each morning finds me full of life and vitality."

(*Extract from letter of Mr. F. A. Christopherson of Fresno, Calif.*)

"All my life I have been constantly annoyed with indigestion and a cankered, sore mouth—caused by acidity of the stomach. Fleischmann's Yeast has effected a permanent cure of my stomach and mouth troubles, and I consider Yeast as much a necessity as a toothbrush or my bath."

(*Extract from a letter of Mrs. Hugo V. Bolin of Ponca City, Oklahoma*)

"Innumerable boils on each of the three children. All treatments seemed in vain. Three medicine spoons went down three tiny throats twenty times daily. Boils still came. The little sisters still cried.

"When at last the doctor suggested Fleischmann's Yeast, the household laughed. But soon the boils came less frequently. And when three little girls began to spread Fleischmann's Yeast instead of butter on their bread, the boils disappeared entirely."

(*Extract from letter of Mrs. Mary H. Lloyd of New Albany, Ind.*)

Dissolve one cake in a glass of water (just hot enough to drink)

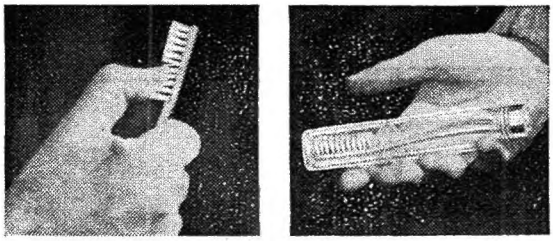
— before breakfast and at bedtime. Fleischmann's Yeast, when taken this way, is especially effective in overcoming or preventing constipation.

Or eat 2 or 3 cakes a day—spread on bread or crackers—dissolved in fruit juices or milk—or eat it plain.

Fleischmann's Yeast comes only in the tinfoil package—it cannot be purchased in tablet form. *All grocers have it.* Start eating it today! A few days' supply will keep fresh in *your* ice box as well as in the grocer's.

Write us for further information or let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Address Health Research Dept. Z-6. The Fleishchmann Company, 701 Washington St., New York.

C 2



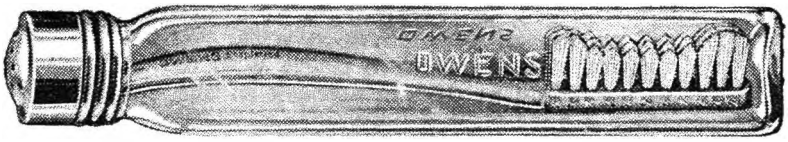
Which tooth brush do you buy?

ISN'T this first picture brought home to you vividly at times? Tooth brushes—lying exposed on a counter; picked up and thoughtlessly fingered; then put back for you to buy? Even those packed in cartons are taken out to be seen and thumbed!

Just contrast that unsanitary handling with the clean Owens Staple-tied Tooth Brush! Each one is sold in a sparkling glass container. Every feature of the brush may be seen without dangerous exposure or handling.

Notice the small brush, trimmed to fit the teeth. Bristle tufts are wedge-shaped—to clean thoroughly in every crack and crevice. The large end tuft cleans around the usually unreachable back molars. The gracefully curved handle makes correct brushing easier. The improved Staple-tied process holds every bristle tuft securely into the handle by a hidden staple. Handles come in six different colors, an individual brush for each member of your family.

You cannot get all these improvements in any other tooth brush made! Yet the Owens, *in the protecting glass container*, costs you no more than ordinary tooth brushes—30, 40 and 50-cents each, for child's, youth's and adult's sizes. *See* it at your druggist's.



IMPORTANT. Every Owens Tooth Brush is delivered to the customer in a sanitary glass container. This method of packing is the most sanitary ever devised for tooth brushes, and the glass container is meant to be thrown away when the tooth brush has been removed.

OWENS

Staple-tied TOOTH BRUSH

THE OWENS BOTTLE COMPANY, TOLEDO

C 4

Classified Advertising

Agents and Help Wanted

WE START YOU IN BUSINESS, furnishing everything; men and women $30 to $100 weekly, operating our "Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Booklet free. W. Hillyer Ragsdale, Drawer 29, East Orange, N. J.

MAKE $25 to $50 a Week representing Clows' Famous Philadelphia Hosiery, direct from mill—for men, women, children. Every pair guaranteed. Prices that win. Free book "How to Start" tells the story. George Clows Company, Desk 66, Philadelphia, Pa.

SILVERING MIRRORS, French plate. Easily learned; immense profits. Plans free. Wear Mirror Works, Excelsior Springs, Mo.

MAKE MONEY silvering mirrors, all kinds plating, knives, spoons, auto headlights. Outfits furnished. Free booklet. International Laboratories, Dept. 110, 311 Fifth Ave., New York.

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. Every owner buys gold initials for his auto. You charge $1.50, make $1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. American Monogram Co., Dept. 170, East Orange, N. J.

$60-$200 a week. Genuine Gold Letters for store windows. Easily applied. Free samples. Liberal offer to general agents. Metallic Letter Co., 428B North Clark, Chicago.

AGENTS Coining Money applying Monograms on automobiles; your charge $1.50, profit $1.40; $15 daily easy; experience unnecessary; free samples. Worcester Monogram Co., Worcester, Mass.

AGENTS to travel by automobile to introduce our fast selling, popular priced household necessities. The greatest line on earth. Make $10.00 a day. Complete outfit and automobile furnished free to workers. Write today for exclusive territory. American Products Co., 1856 American Bldg., Cincinnati, Ohio.

WIDE-AWAKE MAN to take charge of our local trade; $6 to $8 a day steady; no experience required; pay starts at once; write today. American Products Co., 1857 American Bldg., Cincinnati, O.

FAST SELLING PROFITABLE Rubber Goods. Fancy Aprons, Sanitary Belts, Napkin Supporters, Bed Sheets, Bibs, Bloomers, Bathing Caps, Gloves, etc. Details Free. American Rubber Products Co., Dept. 518, Pittsburgh, Pa.

AUTO OWNERS! Get your tires Free! Be our Factory Agent! Big spare time money-maker! Sample tires furnished. No capital or experience needed. Write today. Armour Tire & Rubber Co., Desk 736, Dayton, Ohio.

WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR. Soaps, Extracts, Perfumes, Toilet Goods. Experience unnecessary. Carnation Co., Dept. 225, St. Louis, Mo.

Agents and Help Wanted—*Continued*

"SELL us your spare time. Write showcards for us. We instruct and supply work. No experience necessary. Wilson Methods, Limited, Dept. 22, Toronto, Canada."

AMBITIOUS MEN, 18 UP. Become Railway Mail Clerks—Mail Carriers. $1400-$2300 year. Steady work. Full particulars free. Write immediately. Franklin Institute, Dept. L2, Rochester, N. Y.

BIG MONEY and fast sales; every owner buys gold initials for his auto; you charge $1.50, make $1.44. 10 orders daily easy. Samples and information free. World Monogram Co., Dept. 12, Newark, N. J.

Detectives Wanted

MEN—Age 17 to 55. Experience unnecessary. Travel; make secret investigations, reports. Salaries; expenses. American Foreign Detective Agency, 114, St. Louis.

DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY. Travel. Excellent opportunity. Experience unnecessary. Write, George Wagner, former Government Detective, 1968 Broadway, New York.

PRIVATE INVESTIGATORS Guidebook. Solves Mysteries, Domestic Problems, Business Irregularities and makes Detective Experts. Mailed $1.50. Capt. Dorsy, 1443 Amsterdam Avenue, New York.

BE A DETECTIVE—Exceptional opportunity; earn big money. Travel. Thousands of dollars offered in rewards. Established in 1909. Particulars free. Write C. T. Ludwig, 436 Westover Bldg., Kansas City, Mo.

Help Wanted—Male

ALL Men, Women, Boys, Girls, 17 to 65 willing to accept Government Positions $117-$250, traveling or stationary, write Mr. Ozment, 308, St. Louis, Mo., immediately.

EARN $110 to $250 monthly, expenses paid as Railway Traffic Inspector. Position guaranteed after completion of 3 months' home study course or money refunded. Excellent opportunities. Write for Free Booklet. CM-28 Stand. Business Training Inst., Buffalo, N. Y.

DETECTIVES needed everywhere; cities, towns. Free particulars. Write National Detective System, 188 East 79th, New York.

MEN over 18 willing to travel. Make secret investigations, reports. Salary and expenses. Experience unnecessary. Write J. Ganor, Former Govt. Detective, St. Louis.

DETECTIVE AGENCY opportunities for ambitious men. Experience unnecessary. We train you free. Clarke System, Box 239, Providence, R. I.

ESTABLISH YOURSELF—At Home—As a Photographic Expert. Make $75 a week while learning. Write at once for temporary offer. International Studios, Dept. 266-B, 3601 Michigan Ave., Chicago.

Help Wanted—Female

$6—$18 a dozen decorating pillow tops at home, experience unnecessary; particulars for stamp. Tapestry Paint Co., 110 LaGrange, Ind.

LADIES WORK AT HOME—pleasant, easy sewing on your machine. Whole or part time. Highest possible prices paid. For full information address L. Jones, Box 563, Olney, Ill.

Patents and Lawyers

INVENTORS desiring to secure patents should write for our guide-book, "How To Get Your Patent." Send sketch or description for our opinion of its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., Dept. 412, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. Send sketch or model for preliminary examination. Booklet free. Highest references. Best results. Promptness assured. Watson E. Coleman, Patent Lawyer, 644 G St., Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. Write for free guide books and "Record of Invention Blank" before disclosing inventions. Send model or sketch of invention for Examination and Instructions. No Charge for the Above Information. Victor J. Evans & Co., 767 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

Business Opportunity

COMMON SENSE and $100 or more will establish cash business. Dept. 113, Paul Kaye, 149 Broadway, N. Y.

Stammering

ST-STU-T-T-TERING And Stammering Cured At Home. Instructive booklet free. Walter McDonnell, 80 Potomac Bank Building, Washington, D. C.

Personal

YOUR Horoscope, Business, Health, Character, friends, enemies, changes. Send birthdate and ten cents (stamps) for remarkable test reading. Zanya, 200-L W. 70th Street, New York.

Journalism

JOURNALIST'S publicity agents always needed; get position, earn "big money." Successful newspaperman will teach you by mail. Write Thomas Miley, 3340 Decatur Ave., N. Y. City.

Astrology

ASTROLOGY—Stars tell Life's Story. Send birthdate and dime for trial reading. Eddy, 1085 B., Suite 74, Kansas City, Missouri.

Boyce-ite

Every motorist in the United States should read this announcement

GASOLINE forms carbon — your motor's worst enemy.

Carbon is a pest — it should never be allowed to form in any motor.

Carbon weakens compression, fouls plugs, reduces horse-power, overheats the motor, wastes fuel.

For years you and I have allowed carbon to do its destructive work until the knock became annoying and our car slowed up on the hills.

We then let some mechanic dig, burn, scrape or gouge out hard, gritty, unyielding carbon from the delicate parts of our motor.

This carbon pest is costing the motorists of America millions of dollars yearly. That is why after I established the Boyce Moto-Meter I turned my entire attention to the solution of the carbon problem.

After years of investigation and experiment my staff of scientists has produced *Boyce-ite*—a harmless, oily fluid which removes the knock from any motor and does away with carbon troubles forever.

Here's what *Boyce-ite* will do for your car—a small quantity poured into your favorite gasoline will

—give your motor more power

—make starting easier

—increase your gas mileage from one to six miles per gallon

—eliminate all necessity for grinding valves, cleaning plugs and removing carbon.

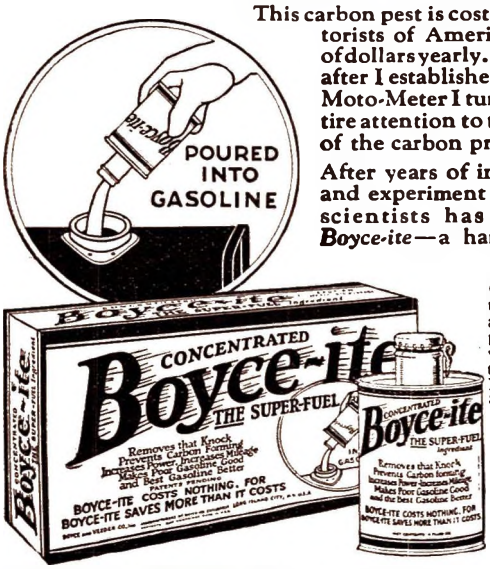
Boyce-ite kills the carbon pest.

I urge you and *every* motorist to use *Boyce-ite* every time you buy gasoline, it is inexpensive and most convenient to use.

Boyce-ite is no experiment. Distributors of such cars as Ford, Chandler, Cleveland, Packard, Cadillac, Oldsmobile, Marmon, Stutz and others—are recommending it to their customers.

Your dealer carries *Boyce-ite* or can get it for you without delay.

Boyce-ite is the fastest selling repeat item the trade has ever known —over 3,000,000 cans have been sold in the past few months.



Convenient touring package, fits the pocket of your car, contains 3 cans of Boyce-ite, $1.00

Thomas Boyce

BOYCE & VEEDER CO., Inc., Manufacturers of Boyce-ite Exclusively • LONG ISLAND CITY, N. Y. • Laboratory and Factory, Farmingdale, N. Y.

! ashamed

It brought him untold misery; yet only he, himself, was to blame.

HE had neglected his teeth so long that he was actually ashamed to visit his dentist. And like so many people, he kept putting it off.

Finally he became so sensitive about their appearance that in conversation he habitually distorted his mouth in an effort to hide them from view. He was uncomfortable wherever he went.

Listerine Tooth Paste cleans teeth a new way. At last our chemists have discovered a polishing ingredient that really cleans without scratching the enamel—a difficult problem finally solved.

A large tube of Listerine Tooth Paste is only 25 cents; at your druggist's.—*Lambert Pharmacal Co., Saint Louis, U. S. A.*

FRECKLES

Don't Hide Them With a Veil; Remove Them With Othine--Double Strength

This preparation for the treatment of freckles is so successful in removing freckles and giving a clear, beautiful complexion that it is sold under guarantee to refund the money if it fails.

Don't hide your freckles under a veil; get an ounce of Othine and remove them. Even the first few applications should show a wonderful improvement, some of the lighter freckles vanishing entirely.

Be sure to ask the druggist for the double-strength Othine; it is this that is sold on the money-back guarantee.

BUNIONS

PEDODYNE, the marvelous new Solvent, banishes Bunions. The pain stops almost instantly. The Bump vanishes as though by magic. THEN YOU WILL HAVE SHAPELY FEET.

SENT ON TRIAL

I want you to have relief from Bunions. I want you to know the pleasure of foot comfort. I will gladly arrange to send you a box of Solvent to try. Simply write and say, "I want to try PEDODYNE." Address—

KAY LABORATORIES, Dept. K-933
186 N. La Salle St. Chicago, Illinois

Have Good Hair And Clean Scalp
Cuticura
Soap and Ointment Work Wonders
Try Our New Shaving Stick.

In every form of sport, Beeman's quiets and steadies the nerves—its daily use is *"a sensible habit"*

BEEMAN'S
Pepsin Gum

AMERICAN CHICLE CO.

Have EYES Like Stars

For EYES of starry brightness, use *Murine.* This harmless lotion clears the whites of the EYES and imparts new life and sparkle. Delightfully refreshing after reading, sewing, business, motoring and all outdoor sports.

Write Murine Company, Dept. 61, Chicago, for FREE Eye Care Book

MURINE FOR YOUR EYES

Widely Used Since 1889

C16

She is No Longer Fat

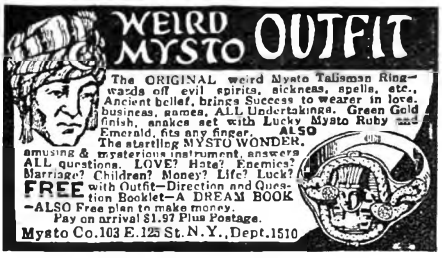
She found a way to reduce her fat. It was a way far more pleasant than dieting or exercising would have been. This new way allowed her to eat foods without danger of becoming fat again.

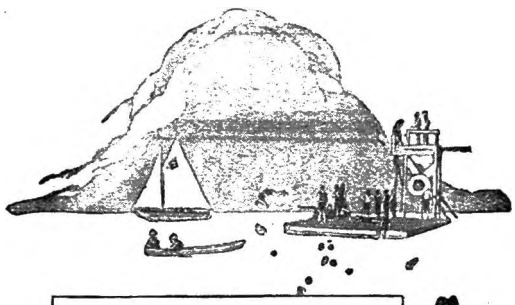
She found *Marmola Prescription Tablets*. They aid the digestive system to obtain the full nutriment of food. They help Nature to turn food into muscle, bone and sinew instead of fat.

Marmola Prescription Tablets are made from the famous Marmola Prescription. Thousands have found that these handy tablets give complete relief from obesity. And when the accumulation of fat is checked, reduction to normal, healthy weight soon follows.

All good drug stores the world over sell *Marmola Prescription Tablets* at one dollar a box. Ask your druggist for them, or order direct and they will be sent in plain wrapper, postpaid.

MARMOLA COMPANY
1715 General Motors Bldg., Detroit, Mich.





Only One in Five *escapes Pyorrhea*

Will that one be you?
Be sure—use Forhan's

Dental statistics tell the story. Four out of five over forty years—and thousands younger—are victims of Pyorrhea.

Apply the "ounce of prevention" before Nature warns with bleeding gums. Go to your dentist regularly. And brush your teeth at least twice a day with Forhan's For the Gums.

If used in time and used consistently, this safe, pleasant-tasting dentifrice will help prevent Pyorrhea or check its progress. It will *keep* your mouth clean and fresh, preserve your teeth and safeguard your health. Ask your dentist. At all druggists, 35c and 60c.

Forhan's
FOR THE GUMS

More than a tooth paste—it checks Pyorrhea

C 12

Stop Using a Truss

Enclosed Fac-Simile Gold Medal.

STUART'S PLAPAO-PADS are different from the truss, being medicine applicators made self-adhesive purposely to hold the distended muscles securely in place. **No straps, buckles or spring attached**—cannot slip, so cannot chafe or press against the pubic bone. Thousands have successfully treated themselves at home without hindrance from work—most obstinate cases conquered.

Soft as velvet—easy to apply—inexpensive. Awarded Gold Medal and Grand Prix. Process of recovery is natural, so afterwards no further use for trusses. We prove it by sending Trial of Plapao absolutely **FREE**

Write name on Coupon and send **TODAY.**

Plapao Co. 633 Stuart Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.

Name.....

Address.....

Return mail will bring Free Trial Plapao.....

GET THIN

Free Trial Treatment

Sent on request. Ask for my "pay-when-reduced" offer. I have successfully reduced thousands of persons, often at the rate of a pound a day, without diet or exercise. Let me send you proof at my expense.

DR. R. NEWMAN, Licensed Physician,
State of New York. 286 Fifth Ave., N. Y. Desk C-67

TIRES WITH 500 NAIL HOLES LEAK NO AIR

A new puncture-proof inner tube has been invented by a Mr. M. E. Milburn of Chicago. In actual test it was punctured 500 times without the loss of air. This wonderful new tube increases mileage from 10,000 to 12,000 miles and eliminates changing tires. It costs no more than the ordinary tube. Mr. Milburn wants them introduced everywhere and is making a special offer to agents. Write Sales Manager, E. C. Hansen, 336 West 47th St., Chicago.

Sell TIRES

DIRECT FROM FACTORY

We want an auto owner in each locality to advertise Armour Cords. You can make big money and get your own sample Tires Free, by sending us orders from friends and neighbors. No capital or experience needed. We deliver & collect direct. Pay you daily.

Most Liberal Tire Guarantee Ever Written

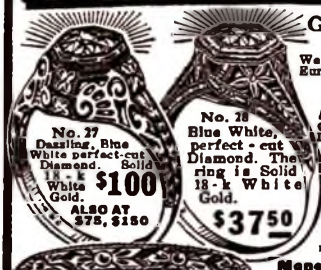
Armour Cords guaranteed by Indemnity Bond against Blow Out, Wear and Tear, Stone Bruise, Tread Separation, Blistering and Rim Cut for 12,500 miles. We are actual manufacturers. Write today for great Special Offer to Agents, and low Factory Prices.

ARMOUR TIRE & RUBBER CO., Dept. 806 Dayton, O.

LOFTIS BROS. & CO. Est'd 1858

DIAMONDS WATCHES

CASH or CREDIT



No. 27 Dazzling, Blue White perfect-cut Diamond. Solid 18-k White Gold. **$100**

ALSO AT $75, $150

No. 28 Blue White, perfect-cut Diamond. The ring is Solid 18-k White Gold. **$37.50**

Genuine Diamonds GUARANTEED

Wholesale Diamonds direct from Europe and sell direct by mail.

Send For Free Catalog

Over 2,000 illustrations of Diamond-set Jewelry, Watches, Wrist Watches, Pearls, Mesh Bags, Silverware, etc. Sent prepaid for your

Free Examination

TERMS: All orders delivered on first payment of one-tenth of purchase price; balance in equal amounts within eight months.

Money back if not satisfied

WEDDING RINGS

All Platinum, $25 up. With Diamonds: Three Diamonds, $60; five Diamonds, $80; seven Diamonds, $95; nine Diamonds, $110; surrounded by Diamonds, $225. Solid White or Green Gold, $8.00 up.

No. 16 — Wrist Watch, Solid 18-k White Gold. 17 Jewels, **$29.75.** 14-k, 15 Jewels, **$24.85**

Railroad Watches—Guaranteed to Pass Inspection

ELGIN'S LATEST RAYMOND, 21 Jewels; 8 Adj. Runs 40 hours one winding. Gold filled 20-Yr. Case - - - **$55**

ILLINOIS "BUNN SPECIAL," 21 Jewels, Adjusted to 6 Positions, Gold filled 25-year Case - - - - **$50**

LOFTIS BROS. & CO. Est'd 1858 **THE OLD RELIABLE ORIGINAL CREDIT JEWELERS**

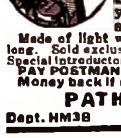
Dept. B-222 108 N. State Street, Chicago, Illinois

Stores in Leading Cities

HANDS UP!

$1.79

GET one of these little beauties right now, and **protect yourself** against hold-up thugs, rowdies, etc. and at the same time it serves as the best novelty cigarette case ever invented. Made exactly like the **real thing!** Just pull the trigger, back flies the lid showing a full package of your cigarettes.



Pat. Pending

Lots of fun scaring your friends and at the same time useful and a **great protector.**

Made of light weight metal, gun metal finish, 4 3/4 inches long. Sold exclusively by us. Order at once, supply limited. Special introductory price - - - **$1.79 each**

PAY POSTMAN on delivery our price plus postage.

Money back if not satisfied.

PATHFINDER COMPANY

Dept. HM38 534 Sixth Avenue New York

YOU HAVE A BEAUTIFUL FACE

IN THIS DAY AND AGE attention to your appearance is an absolute necessity if you expect to make the most out of life. Not only should you wish to appear as attractive as possible, for your own self satisfaction, which is alone well worth your efforts, but you will find the world in general judging you greatly, if not wholly, by your "*looks*," therefore it pays to "look your best" at all times. **Permit no one to see you looking otherwise;** it will injure your welfare! Upon the impression you constantly make rests the failure or success of your life. Which is to be your ultimate destiny?

My newest greatly improved superior *Nose-Shaper*, "TRADE MODEL 25" U. S. Patent, corrects now all ill-shaped noses, without operation, quickly, safely, comfortably and permanently. Diseased cases excepted. Model 25 is the latest in Nose Shapers and surpasses all my previous Models and other Nose Shaper Patents by a large margin. It has six adjustable pressure regulators, is made of light polished metal, is firm and fits every nose comfortably. The inside is upholstered with a fine chamois and no metal parts come in contact with the skin. Being worn at night it does not interfere with your daily work. Thousands of unsolicited testimonials on hand, and my fifteen years of studying and manufacturing Nose Shapers is at your disposal, which guarantees you entire satisfaction and a perfectly shaped nose.

(Above illustration represents my "Trade-Mark" and shows my first and oldest Nose Shaper. It is not a replica of my latest superior Model No. 25.)

But Your Nose!

Write today for free booklet, which tells you how to correct Ill-Shaped Noses without cost if not satisfactory.

M. TRILETY, Face Specialist 1999 Ackerman Bldg., Binghamton, N. Y.

Is Gray Hair Marking You Old?

She Is Getting Gray

He Is Getting Gray

Nothing Says "I'M OLD" So Quickly As GRAY HAIR

Q-ban Hair Color Restorer

Makes Gray Hair DARK

LET'S discuss the subject frankly. Gray hair, however attractive, does denote age. Gray hair marks a woman as getting old at the cost of her popularity. Gray hair does, unjustly, make it hard for a man to get or hold a job.

Is gray hair marking you old? Are you allowing gray hair to hold you back in social or business affairs? You know full well you are no older than others who have no gray hair. Has it ever occurred to you that they are concealing a few gray hairs? Hundreds of thousands do!

It is so easy to darken your gray hair—the Q-ban way. Q-ban Hair Color Restorer is not an instantaneous dye; it does its work so gradually that during the first week or so you wonder if it is going to work at all; but the gray disappears, your friends do not notice it, and your handicap of gray hair is gone. It is inexpensive and is easily applied in the privacy of your home. You need not have gray hair any more.

Your Druggist Guarantees Q-ban

Q-ban Hair Color Restorer is covered by the broadest kind of a guarantee. We authorize your druggist to refund your money if you are not entirely satisfied —and you are to be the judge.

Go to your druggist today. Get from him a full size 75-cent bottle of Q-ban Hair Color Restorer; use it according to simple directions, but don't get discouraged; you may possibly have to use the entire bottle before the desired result is obtained. That is why we do not put up sample or trial size bottles of this Q-ban product, although we have many requests. During the past 20 years millions of bottles have been sold. Only in isolated instances has Q-ban ever failed.

75 cents per Bottle
Try the Drug Store First

Special Offer

This Coupon and 10 cents

Send this coupon today for MINIATURE BOTTLES Q-ban Liquid Green Soap Shampoo and Q-ban Hair Tonic, and "BOOK OF SEVEN Q-BANS," containing valuable information on care of hair and scalp. Print name and address plainly and send coupon to HESSIG-ELLIS, Chemists, 151S. Front St., Memphis, Tenn.

HESSIG-ELLIS, Chemists
151 South Front St., Memphis, Tenn.

Enclosed find ten cents (stamps) for which please send me miniature bottles Q-ban Liquid Green Soap Shampoo and Q-ban Tonic and your "Book of Seven Q-bans."

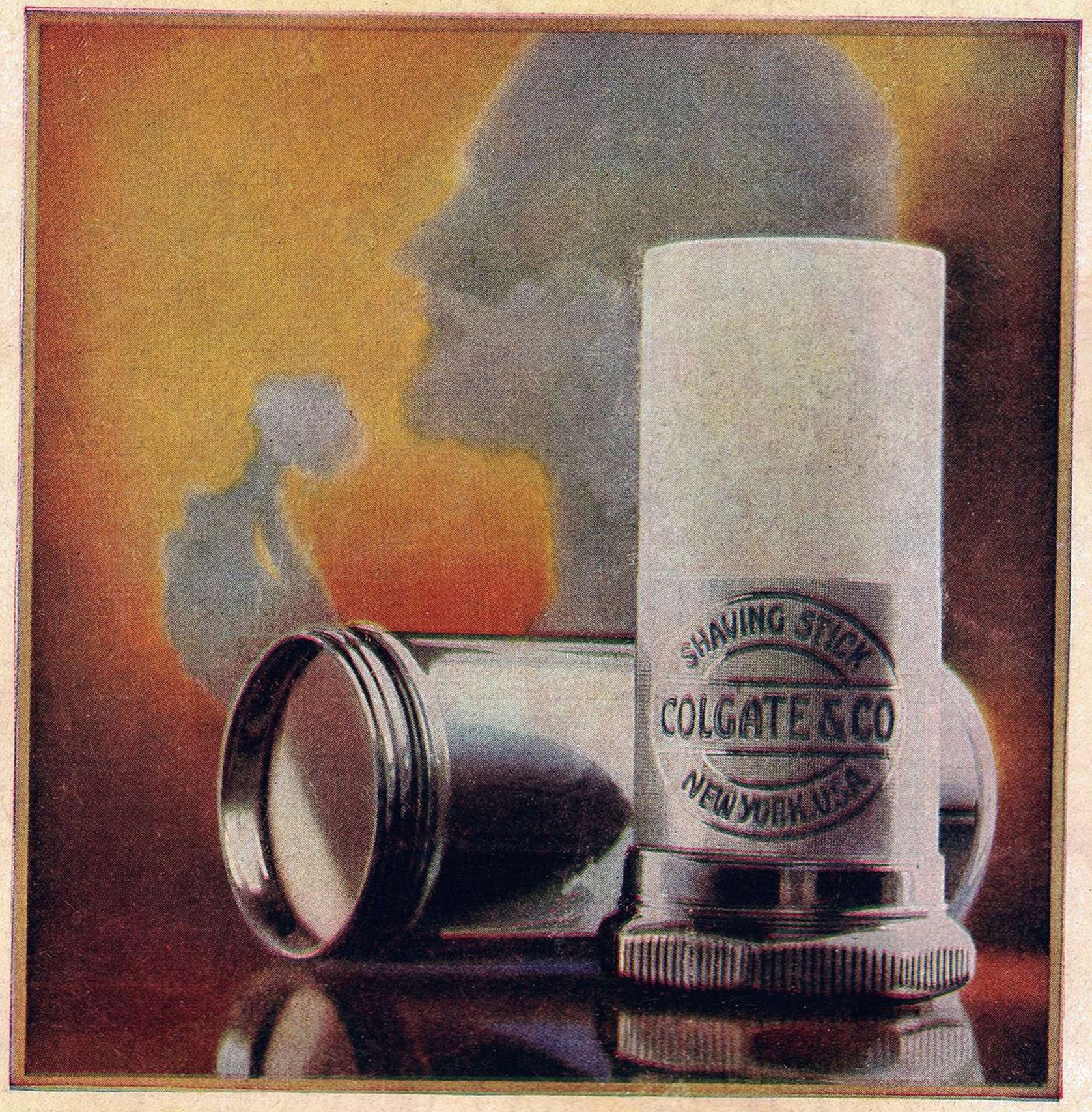
Name.....

Address.....

COLGATE'S

Shaving Stick

"HANDY GRIP" AND REFILL



For Comfort, Convenience, and Economy

When we say to you that the Shaving Stick has important advantages over shaving preparations in any other form, we can do so without bias, for we manufacture shaving sticks, powder and cream.

In its attractive nickel box, our "Handy Grip" Shaving Stick is most convenient for traveling. It will not crush when packed, and it makes a wonderful lather for *easy shaving*. It is not uncommon for a Colgate Shaving Stick to last more than a year in daily use.

The famous "Handy Grip", with a trial-size shaving stick in nickel box, sent for 10c. When the trial stick is gone, buy Colgate "Refills" for the price of the soap alone, 25c.

COLGATE & CO. *Established 1806* **NEW YORK**

Truth in advertising implies honesty in manufacture