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TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

MAY 7, 1927
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Volume LXXXIV Number 2

TWICE-A-MONTH

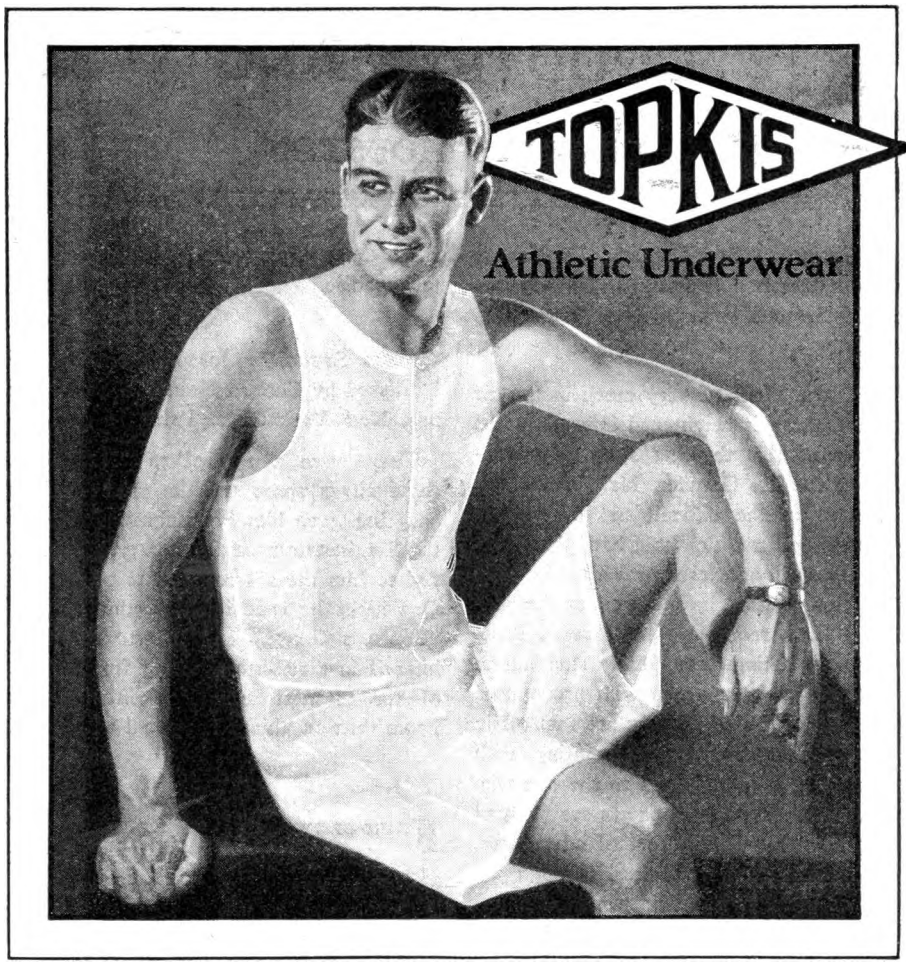
The Popular Magazine

CONTENTS FOR MAY 7, 1927

Twice-a-month publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary.

Entered as Second-class Matter, September 20, 1909, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $4.72. Foreign, $5.44.

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION, $4.00 SINGLE COPY, 25 CENTS



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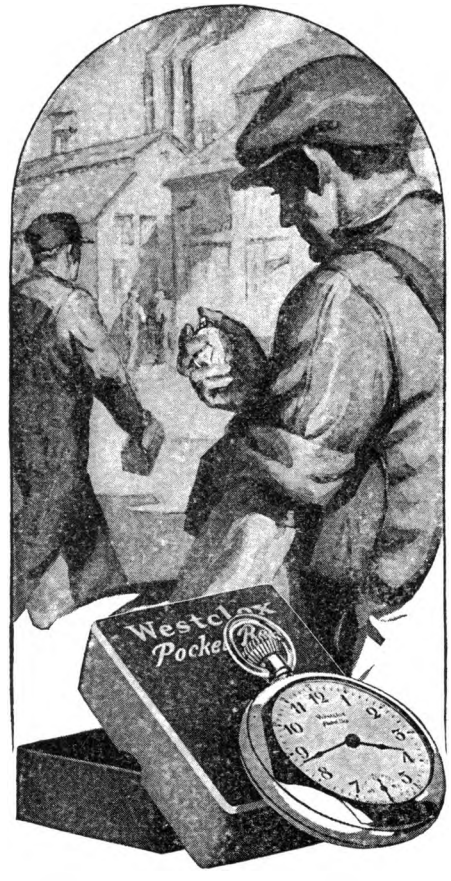

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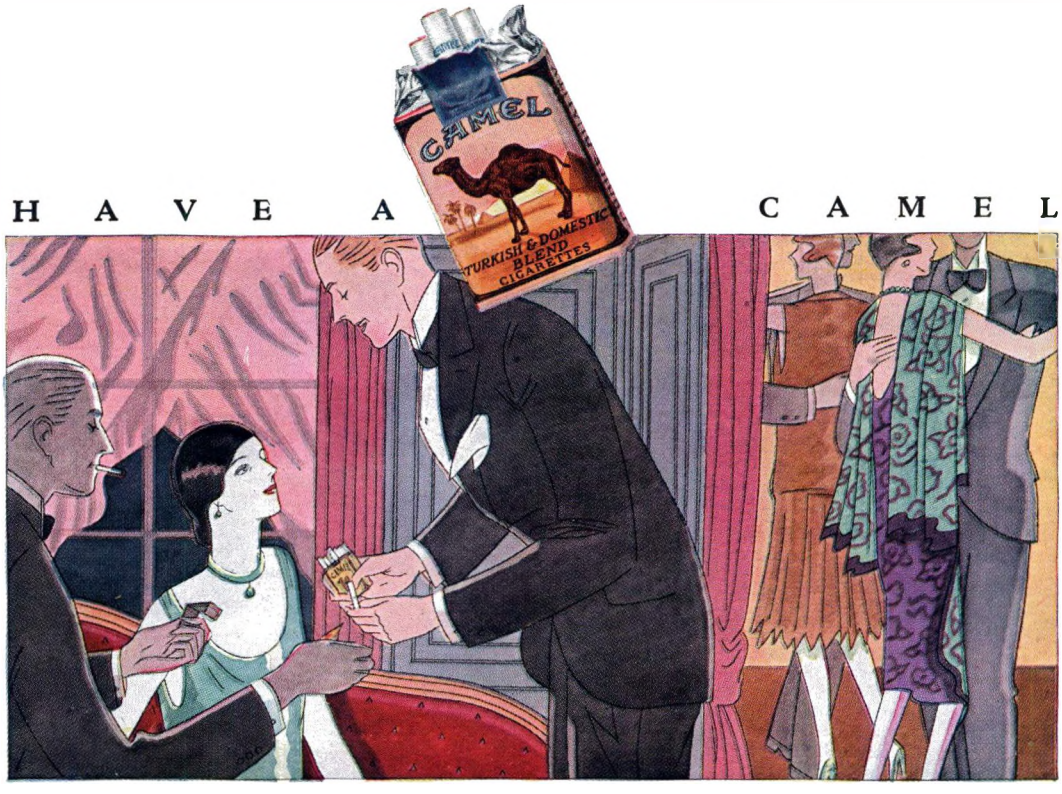

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THE POPULAR

VOL. LXXXIV MAY 7, 1927 No. 2

Ten Dollars a Minute

By Robert H. Rohde

Author of "David Rolfe, Deceased," "The Higher Showmanship," Etc.

It never occurred to Sanford, the novelist, that he was the hero in his own life story. It started when, in a storm in Florida waters, he met by chance, the princess of his hopes, and appointed himself her knight-errant. Then he found that a modern knight-errant, be he never so gallant, is up against a more powerful weapon than the medieval lance—human cunning.

CHAPTER I.

FLOTSAM.

OFF in the southeast, where Cuba lay, a storm was cooking. The dawn itself had given no warning of violence to follow, but the sea under the rising sun had a metallic luster and a sluggish roll, ominous of simmering fury.

In the late morning the fair wind had turned fitful and begun to haul. At noon, when Sanford started below toward the luncheon set out by the invaluable Halvorsen, the aspect of the sky had changed, where its skirt brushed the horizon ahead. The neat blue hem was fraying into a ragged selvage of slate gray.

Sanford, before he surrendered the ketch's wheel, handed his binoculars to Halvorsen. He pointed over the port bow, where a black dot had briefly bobbed along a crest to vanish, coasting,

into the trough. It was far off, barely visible.

"It's lucky for some one," he said, "that we're happening along. They seem to be in trouble, and this is going to be a devil of a day to be at sea in a little open boat, with a stalled engine."

The big Norwegian squinted through the glasses.

"A dory," he decided. "But I think there is nobody in her. Anyhow, I see nobody."

"There's no telling," said Sanford. "I thought I did see some one. He was in the bottom of the boat, tinkering with the motor. Hold onto this course. We'll see what's what when we get abreast of her."

"Maybe before that," grunted Halvorsen, "we see something about the *Felicity*, how good she would behave in weather. I have not been so sure, but pretty soon we know. An air is coming."

"Let it come," said Sanford lightly. "I'm backing the old ketch on form. She's ridden out too many autumn gales off Maine to be flustered by any little perfumed Florida blow."

But Halvorsen, who knew this coast and its weather signs through many windjamming voyages, and the *Felicity* only by the one loafing trip south out of Casco Bay, shook his head dubiously. It was down here that he had lost his ship and his ticket.

Out of bitter experience he had learned what vicious force these velvet winds of the South Atlantic could develop. Their softness masked a tiger heart and sheathed tiger claws. Tropic airs were uncertain quantities—like women. Like that one woman, anyhow, who had gone mad over a philandering half-caste in the dive at Singapore.

Always, when in the soft latitudes, Halvorsen thought of her and shuddered. She had been a soft little thing and very pleasantly perfumed to a sense blunted by the tar bucket. Yet so small a thing as an exchange of glances had wakened and loosed the slumbering devil in her breast. Her scream, like the first rush of the hurricane through the rigging, forever rang in Halvorsen's ears. Some times his eyes would not shut out the flash of the knife—stabbing, stabbing, stabbing, after her man was dead.

No; give him the North seas in storms—man seas, calculable seas. And give him, too, calculable vessels. Between the four-mast vessels he'd spent his life aboard and this problematical pleasure craft of a scant fifty foot over all, was a wide difference—a difference, possibly, of life and death.

"Better I would like to be in a real ship now, or in harbor," he grumbled. "This will be no nice night for fooling with toys."

That the storm held off, only increased Halvorsen's uneasiness as the afternoon wore on. His eyes were more often on the darker line of sky than on his compass.

The sea had kicked up, and the setbacks which the ketch received, as she quartered the lace-capped swells, made her progress toward the drifting dory painfully slow.

Beyond the bow the murk was thickening, though above all continued serene. Once, after casting an eye aloft, Halvorsen lifted a fist toward the bland overhead blue.

"Treach'rous!" he muttered. "You smile wit' the face, but you don't yolly Olaf. Behind the back you have got a club. I know!"

A little after that outburst he would have called Sanford, had it not been that there were orders to be considered—definite and emphatic orders. "The first rule aboard this ship," the *Felicity's* owner had told him, "is that I'm not to be pestered, whatever happens, while the typewriter's going."

ALL through the afternoon, with the storm's shock troops massing across the course, the typewriter had been going. Halvorsen marveled at that, as at an astonishing bit of vaudeville jugglery. How Sanford could keep the queer little contraption upright on its slender tripod, how his fingers could find the right keys, while the belabored ketch bounced and jounced and writhed beneath him, was beyond lay comprehension.

The ship's clock in the cabin struck eight bells—four o'clock of the afternoon

watch—and presently the clatter of the typewriter ceased. Sanford's head appeared above the hatch.

"Olaf, my bonny lad, I have met the impasse I saw before me, long, long ago!"

"So?" queried Halvorsen and clucked deprecatingly.

He didn't know what his owner was talking about precisely—seldom did—but the strange word held a sinister inference.

"Met the impasse," continued Sanford, in that round and baffling tone of soliloquy he so often employed; "met it and have found a way over. I asked you, Olaf, to consider the predicament. Place yourself in this position: you are a girl of, say, twenty. Delicately nurtured, understand. You are beautiful, and you know it."

The sailor, bewilderment in his blue eyes, passed a huge hand over the stubble on his chin.

"I am? By golly!"

"Beautiful—gorgeous!" Sanford firmly reiterated. "But you are poor. Now, considering that you have known love only as a dream built around a youngster you haven't seen since before you put your hair—oh, had it cut—don't you think it's likely that you——"

Abruptly the question ended. An untoward incident had brought the questioner tumbling out of the high clouds of hypothesis to consciousness of the threatening lower ones. He grabbed at a boat hook, but his jaunty white yachting cap, lifted clean by a puff, was out of reach astern.

"We're about due for that breeze," he said. "Haven't you noticed the indications, Olaf? It's blowing up some, right now."

"And by and by," remarked Halvorsen, "more so. I'm glad you come. I think for now we tie down the mains'l good, and double-reef the mizzen, and put on her the storm yib."

He spun the wheel before resigning it to Sanford, and, when the ketch had come up into the wind, Halvorsen sprang forward to the mainsail halyards. When he took the helm again, the breeze had steadied and risen to a half gale, and the sky, where it had been gray, was black.

"For maybe an hour now," opined the sailor, "we have it this way. Then—look out!" He jerked a thumb toward the Florida coast, lying low over the starboard bow. "Down there—twenty, thirty mile—is a good inlet. But it would not be good any more when we get to it. The sea will be so heavy on the bar we could not see where the break is."

"No, thank you," said Sanford quickly. "I don't like strange inlets in thick weather. I'd rather stay out. There's no need to worry about the *Felicity*. She'll stay with it." He thought with quick compunction then of the helpless dory and picked up the binoculars. "What's happened to the little neighbor, Olaf? We haven't run past her?"

Halvorsen shrugged a thick shoulder.

"Not yet. But the boat is empty. I have seen. We would be foolish to bother with it in such a sea. Soon enough we have plenty troubles of our own."

"We'll stand by," said Sanford briefly, "until we're sure there's no one aboard." He swept the sea with the glasses until the dory, now not more than a mile away, tossed into their field. "There she is! We're falling away from her. Can't you edge up another point on the wind?"

"I guess," assented Halvorsen, without enthusiasm. "But I think it is better, maybe, if you start up the engine. For every three feet we sail, the sea pushes us two feet back, and of the foot we go ahead the current eats six inches. By golly, I bet we make hardly a knot an hour the way it is. Look at the dory! Where was she at noon? Five miles south—six?"

BEFORE he went below again to crank the asthmatic old auxiliary engine, under the ketch's cockpit, Sanford took a longer look at the sky. As he descended the steep companionway, he fervently congratulated himself on the good fortune which had turned up Olaf Halvorsen for him after he had seen, coveted, and impulsively purchased the *Felicity* a couple of months since.

He would have readily employed then almost any able-bodied man who could cook and who had sufficient water wis-

dom to help at the helm. Dumb luck, nothing else, had delivered him his paragon. To a weakness for ardent spirits and soprano laughter when in port, Halvorsen had cheerfully confessed. Afloat, he was sober-sided perfection, an eternal miracle of versatility. His cooking was better than professional; it rose at times to art. And twenty-five years of sailing big fore-and-afters, before the mast, as mate and as master, had qualified him as something infinitely superior to the ordinary A. B. He was a navigator, had held an "all-oceans" ticket. Of this coast, in particular, he possessed an uncanny knowledge.

Sanford had not ceased to give thanks when, having coaxed the motor into action, he returned to the cockpit in oilskins.

"I'm sure glad, Olaf," he said, "that I've got a real sailing master with me. From now on, you're the skipper and I'm the deck hand. Do your stuff. Where do we go from here? On into the teeth of it?"

Halvorsen grinned.

"If we got luck," he said, "we go to Santa Bella Bay—and we stay there."

Back of the dancing dory, Sanford could make out, without the glasses, a distant low beach. The sailor followed his glance.

"No," he said. That is not Santa Bella ahead. It is a little island—the head of a shoal which long ago was a cape. Lost Tongue, it is called. We go around, for there is no shelter there. Santa Bella Island is fifteen miles beyond."

Helped by the push of the engine, they had come now within two or three hundred yards of the smaller boat.

"Empty!" cried Halvorsen. "You see? If a man was aboard he would be up, waving."

Sanford, standing on top of the cabin, clinging to a shroud, strained his eyes, as the ketch hovered dizzily over the valley in which the dory wallowed.

"Not on your life!" he shouted back. "I was right the first time. There's some one in the bottom—stretched out. Sick, maybe, or hurt. We've got a job ahead of us."

Halvorsen regarded him solemnly when he had crawled back into the cockpit.

"By golly, I don't like it!" he said. "If there is nobody to take a line, what can we do?"

"Got to get to her the best way we can. It's clear duty."

"Would we try to get alongside, we smash. That's all. We don't help somebody by sinking him, I think."

"How about the dinghy?" queried Sanford. "She's an able little thing."

Speculatively Halvorsen eyed the yacht's tender, swung inboard on her davits.

"Would she live in such a sea?"

"I'm going to chance her," said Sanford. "Anyhow, she has water-tight compartments. She can't sink. Help me get her over."

The sailor stared.

"I think," he said slowly, "you are crazy. If it is a dead man in the dory, what use? Must you kill yourself, too?"

"Don't intend to," asserted Sanford. "Whether I reach the dory or whether I don't, you can get a line to me. We're not tangling with any hurricane yet."

Launching the tender in such a sea was ticklish work; but Halvorsen, though he lent a hand under protest, gave his best skill to the job. Within five minutes after he had brought the ketch into the wind, the dinghy was falling astern, with Sanford, stripped of the oilskins and with his sea boots kicked off, at the oars.

There had been a hair-raising moment at the get-away, when a huge sea lifted the dinghy and made a most earnest and all-but-successful effort to crash the tiny craft down on the *Felicity's* after-deck. But once safely clear of the ketch, Sanford found his faith in the tender vindicated.

IT was only on the crests that the wind smote him. The deep, broad hollows held the calm of sheltered waters, and in them the dinghy handled as easily as in some river. There was only the screeching of the wind above, with the downpour of spray whipped from the caps, to keep Sanford awake to the hazard. Each new sea, rising steeply astern, might be the one that would swamp him.

The *Felicity* had overrun the mark by a quarter mile. She was lying to, slowly drifting back. Sanford, from a white eminence, had a glimpse of Halvorsen braced in the cockpit, coiling a line.

Then a downward rush brought him into the same hollow with the dory. She was not a pretty craft; not even tidy. She badly needed paint. At her bow an unskilled brush had daubed her name in yellow, perhaps intended to counterfeit the usual brass—*Good Luck.*

Sanford had maneuvered alongside the dory, had actually begun the leap which landed him aboard her, before he knew that he had come over the storm sea to a derelict. It was a coat, lying forward of the dory's boxed-in engine, that had hoaxed him. The boat might have been under tow when she broke adrift; a long painter, fastened in a ring, trailed over her bow.

Halvorsen, aboard the *Felicity,* had thrown the engine into reverse when he saw Sanford make his expeditious exchange. The ketch was making faster sternway. A line presently shot over her counter, and its end fell with incredible precision across Sanford's reaching arms. Sanford made it fast in the ring before he shouted back an answer to the sailor's ironic congratulation.

"Seaman's duty, anyhow, to remove menaces to navigation! We'll take the dory along with us."

Halvorsen made a megaphone of one of his vast hands.

"Now you are there, Mistar Sanford, I think you better stay. Maybe we don't have good luck again getting the dinghy inboard. See if you can get the motor started." He jerked at the clutch and bore on the wheel, and the towline tautened, as the *Felicity* paid off and filled.

The dory's engine, Sanford discovered, was a two-cylinder, two-cycle affair, built for heavy duty. It chugged away industriously after a couple of spins of the flywheel, materially lessening the strain on the line.

Sanford had a chance then to give attention to the gallantly rescued coat. At first glance there had seemed something incongruous about it; in the bottom of the disreputable dory it had been out of place. Now he saw why. It was a plain coat, but obviously a costly one—a sport coat of Scotch weave. Sanford was reasonably sure he could recognize an imported material when he saw it.

But the big thing, the puzzling thing, about the coat rested rather in the cut than in the fabric. This was not a man's coat, but a woman's. A stock phrase reminiscent of his newspaper days leaped into Sanford's mind and fired his imagination. The coast down here, he had heard, was popular with the bootleg fraternity. Had he come upon the lost flagship of some ill-starred rum-runner "queen?"

Something that peeped under the skirt of the gray coat caught his eye. It was a small, leather-bound book. He reached for it and, with the tiller gripped between his knees, opened it. On the flyleaf appeared: "My Diary." That was printed, but underneath that caption the owner of the book had written in a round, fair hand:

> No; not a diary!
> Not to be a record of small doings that don't matter.
> Rather a day-to-day examination into my heart!
> An attempt to solve the question:
> Why do I so despise men?

Sanford stared at the neat blue script and reread the words.

"I'll be damned!" he ejaculated.

He turned a leaf, then resolutely closed the book.

"No," he said, "we respect the lady's privacy. Darned if I'll turn into an inquisitive meddler."

The wind had veered again and was on the beam. The *Felicity,* scarcely feeling the drag of the self-powered dory, was making far better time. In the course of an hour she had come under the lee of the island that Halvorsen had called Lost Tongue. It lay a couple of miles ahead—a circular white beach surrounding a few acres of weedy tangle. Halvorsen hove to again.

"It ain't safe to try coming aboard, Mistar Sanford," he shouted; "and it ain't safe, either, that you should try making Santa Bella in the dory."

Sanford threw a question against the gale.

"Then what?"

"Better you put in here. You can go right on the beach. But the *Felicity* has too much draft. I will go on to Santa Bella. I will trust the ketch now. She is able. To-morrow I will come for you. You will have appetite for breakfast, you think?"

Sanford, who had felt certain misgivings concerning the heavier seas that must be fought beyond the Lost Tongue shoal, fell in quickly with Halvorsen's scheme. He cast off the line and drove the dory closer to the yacht.

"Sure you can manage single-handed?"

"Oh, easy, now the engine goes."

"Then," said Sanford, "don't worry about me starving. The last crew of the dory seems to have abandoned a lunch basket with the ship. It's pretty well filled. I'll make out."

Evidently Halvorsen felt that time was precious. He gave no more of it to discussion, but got swiftly under way. When Sanford had negotiated the flattened surf and dragged dory and dinghy up on Lost Tongue's leeward beach, the ketch had already rounded the island, and only her topmast was visible.

The southern blackness had extended far up into the sky then, and rain was beginning to fall. It came first in great spattering drops. There was a crash overhead, and lightning ripped across the dark vault. Seizing up the lunch basket, Sanford raced for the one promise of shelter that Lost Tongue offered.

Back among the tall weeds he had espied the wreck of a cabin, built perhaps by some hermit fisherman and evidently long since abandoned. A path, half grown over, led to it, and his hand was at the latch when the crazily hung door swung inward.

For an instant Sanford thought that it had been a trick of the wind, for the impulse had not been his; then suddenly his wild hair, his sodden clothing, the grease from the dory's engine that streaked his arms and hands and shirt and trousers became an embarrassing part of his consciousness.

On the threshold a girl faced him, inquiringly. She didn't at all fit the fisherman's rest. She was dark, slim, pretty, and she wore knickers and a sweater of silky wool.

"Oh, pardon!" stammered Sanford. "Is this your island?"

What had been a transitory alarm became an expression, unmistakably, of defiance.

"Well," asked the girl coolly, "is it yours?"

Her eyes rested on Sanford's salvaged luncheon and widened.

"Anyhow," she said, with a positiveness in no way lessened by her amazement, "that's my basket!"

CHAPTER II.

THE LADY OF LOST TONGUE.

"BEAUTIFUL evening," remarked Sanford.

He winced, for his courtly bow had exposed his neck to the rain, now torrentially descending, but his smile was nevertheless disarming. The girl smiled, too.

"I haven't been out," she said, drawing farther back into the doorway.

Sanford felt safe in considering that an invitation to come up on the crazily tilted porch. He took the one step up and found a spot not directly beneath a leak.

"You recognize my basket?" he queried.

"*My* basket," repeated the girl.

Shrugging, Sanford placed it between them, inside the threshold.

"Debatable," said he. "I'm not very well versed in maritime law, but it's my impression that anything you find afloat, abandoned——"

"I didn't abandon the basket," she submitted.

"Some one did."

"No one did. It abandoned me. Everything did. Before I started off exploring, I'd pulled the dory up on the beach. Not far enough, though." Her next sentence hadn't the construction of a question, but her eyes made it one. "I don't know," she said, "where the dory is now."

"I can tell you," Sanford volunteered.

"It's on the beach again—here. I came to Lost Tongue in it. I'd sighted it, drifting far out at sea, and got aboard."

"Gracious!" the girl gasped. "You must be a strong swimmer!" She regarded him in overt unbelief. "Such a bathing suit!"

"I was in another boat—a bigger one," explained Sanford. "Had an insane idea there might be somebody in the dory who needed help. And then I found it was easier to get into her than to get out again."

"What a reward," murmured the girl, "for valor!"

"Some day," said Sanford, "I hope to tell you how well the reward pleases me. But," he added deprecatingly, "not now, of course. I just don't want you to infer that I feel cheated in any way."

"Thanks," said the girl. She surveyed Sanford with a faint glint of approval. "I'm wondering if I shouldn't ask you in, until it clears."

"That may be a long time from now," Sanford demurred. "It would be a rash invitation, so I won't leap at it."

She debated, studying him more closely, and stated the bald fact.

"There's no other shelter on the island."

"The one rotten part of it," assented Sanford. "But don't worry about that. I won't drown—or melt. Besides, I really don't think the rain will last long."

"But you said——"

"About it clearing? Well, I meant the storm in general—the big wind. We're getting the first breath of a hurricane."

"Then," said the girl tentatively, "suppose you come in until the rain stops? You look as if you were starving. And I—I *could* eat a sandwich."

Sanford bowed himself lamentably into a trickle from the porch roof.

"You're kind," said he. "I hadn't anticipated giving any of the day to society; didn't dress for a call, as perhaps you've observed; haven't even a card. But my name, saving the engraver, is Sanford—James Effington Sanford is the full spread of it, though I've been trained to answer quite intelligently to unadorned 'Jim.'"

She repeated the name.

"Sanford, James Effington! That's certainly the man who wrote a novel I've recently read—'Queen's Fool,' you know? Is it coincidence?"

"My name," nodded Sanford. "My book."

She looked at him with a new interest.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed. "An author!"

"Falling stars! Reeling universe! A customer!"

Instantly Sanford recognized and deplored what she might very well have mistaken for a boorish mimicry.

"It's honestly a shock," he said. "I mean, meeting some one who's read my book—well, just in the ordinary course. Naturally, a few reviewers had to, whether they liked it or not. And a man's friends will read his stuff out of a variety of motives—curiosity, chiefly, I suspect—to see if he's got anything on the ball. But when a person's bought the book without knowing you, read it simply as so much reading matter, that's different. Can't you see?"

She shook her head slowly.

"I've got to adjust myself to a brand-new situation," said Sanford.

"So," said the girl, "have I. You—you don't look a bit like a novelist."

"Flatterer!" murmured Sanford gratefully. "What neater compliment could be turned?"

She had stepped back out of the door, making way for him.

"A poor place," she said, "to ask a lion into. But if you haven't pillaged my basket, I think I can give you tea. Isn't that the lion treat?"

SANFORD, looking in, saw wreckage of furniture lately straightened about, but nothing that resembled a stove.

"How tea?" he demanded.

The basket provided the answer. It contained, besides an astonishing array of food, a spirit lamp and a stock of little nested aluminum utensils.

"I'm used myself to traveling light," remarked Sanford, when the water was bubbling—rain water that he had personally intercepted on its earthward way.

Once more he had that same odd im-

pression of the girl. She seemed on the defensive.

"I like to make things, and I seldom have the chance," she said, and her tone discouraged further inquiry.

Sanford, who had decided that the shack held no more comfortable seat than the floor, crossed his legs and maintained a discreet silence. The next conversational encounter ran to argument. There was only one cup. Sanford, prevailing, drank from an aluminum pannikin, with a sandwich balanced on one knee and a wedge of cake precariously set up on the other.

"Delicious!" he pronounced. "That excellent Chinese blend, I think—the Tsa-Lao."

"Right!" marveled the girl. "Do authors know everything—or do they simply become specialists in tea?"

"I learned what I know about it," said Sanford, "in the course of making a living. A few months ago I did a special article on tea tasting for *The Helpmeet*, and I saw a chance to pick up a parlor trick. But I'm no real expert—just a flash. I guess at 'em."

He saw her staring, and he divined her difficulty.

"Oh, not many writers are able to live on novels alone," he said. "We have to chore around. It's a miracle that 'Queen's Fool' is still selling. By the way, you haven't told me what you thought of the book. Are you being charitable?"

"Well, I thought," returned the girl promptly, "that the real fool was 'Lola.' She turned out a perfect ninny!"

SHE spoke with such energy that Sanford was set to wondering. What was behind her early defiance, her recurring shortness—behind that diary which wasn't a diary? At this moment the little book was in his pocket. The drenched coat he had left behind, but on impulse he had put the book under cover.

Perhaps he had looked at the girl peculiarly, perhaps she had divined his thoughts. She flushed and went at a point. Sanford could see that coming when she asked him, altogether too casually, if he had found anything else in the dory besides the lunch basket.

"There was a coat," he said. "I left it behind."

"Nothing else?"

"A small book. Believe I tucked it away. Yes—I have it here."

She reached out a slender hand. Sanford, giving up the diary, was smitten by a sense of guilt. The girl's eyes held panic. She read confession on his face, and the panic flared into swift anger.

"I suppose, Mr. Sanford," she said in a voice hinting at mayhem, considered and suppressed—"I suppose that novelists come eventually to look for material in the most unlikely places. It must stab your pride, though—if you ever stop to think—to live on the prowl!"

"If by 'prowling' you mean moving through the world with eyes open," said Sanford, "I plead guilty. At least, I try to be alert to what goes on about me. But I'm afraid I can't admit to shame. I may observe, but I don't pry. Don't you think you may have been a little hasty?"

Innocence had spoken, not with injured passion, but tolerantly, understandingly, with reproach reduced to a note infinitesimally muted.

"Oh!" cried the accuser and caught her breath. "You didn't read——"

"I read no more," Sanford said, "than filled my eye at a single glance. It was enough to excite my curiosity mightily; however, I didn't go on."

Challenge succeeded speculation in her eyes.

"Well?" she demanded recklessly.

"Let's drop it. I have a most accommodating kind of memory. I'll forget everything I saw—absolutely."

She refused amnesty.

"No; we'll have it out now. Afterward we'll forget—perhaps. I want to know what you read. I—I've a right to know."

"Maybe you have," Sanford assented promptly. "Certainly, it's not my part to argue if you insist. What I saw was a question. I wonder if you've found the answer yet, yourself. What's wrong with *my* sex?"

She showed her relief.

"That's all?"

"All I read, on my honor. Just the question. Have you learned what the trouble is?"

"I find," replied the man hater, "that your sex includes a great many highly impossible persons."

"Dare I ask if I've been adjudged among the impossible?"

"You're merely improbable—thus far—and hardly plausible. The idea of you turning up in mid-ocean, lighting like a gull on a drifting boat, steering straight for me—who'd believe it?"

"You may see enough of me later," said Sanford, darkly threatening, "to authenticate me."

"I'm sure I won't."

"I can't believe that," Sanford said. "It's an axiom of my trade that all things have a beginning, a middle and an end. This is only the beginning with us."

"You're wrong. The beginning's all over. We're in the middle of the incident, now." She paused, seeking an analogy, and found one in the theater. "We play all three acts of the comedy in the same set; the final curtain drops on Lost Tongue."

"It isn't a comedy, then," asserted Sanford. "It's out-and-out tragedy. I know enough about the drama to call the distinction. Haven't I written a play?"

She became eager.

"Have you? Tell me about it."

"There isn't a great deal to tell."

"Wasn't it a success?"

"It started out like one. That is, it was accepted by a manager, and I collected an advance in real money. Maybe I was unfortunate in picking a title. The play is about a man who sees himself rolling into one of life's side pockets, and who fights to keep out of it.

"I called it 'The Shelf,' and the manager must have found a suggestion there. He held the play back last fall, and it doesn't look as if he'd get around to it this coming season, either. So 'The Shelf' classifies as an unproduced success, but I'm not certain I get as much satisfaction out of thinking of it that way as I would out of a proved flop."

THE girl leaned forward, with her chin on her hands, and raised her voice against the deeper howl of the wind.

"Would it bore you to give me the story of 'The Shelf?' "

Sanford caught her eye and made a discovery. She'd been deliberately leading him out of dangerous territory.

"It most certainly would," he said, grinning. "Especially, when we have the makings of so much livelier a plot on the premises. A young man has met a girl here, under auspices unquestionably romantic, and she has told him, first pop, that they're never to see each other again. It calls for an investigation. What is the barrier?"

"To write novels and plays," observed the girl, "you must have a gift of imagination. Use it."

He looked at her hands, small and unadorned.

"I can imagine only one valid reason—which is where, you'll perceive, I flatter myself. I'm sure you're not married."

"Goodness, no!"

"I've told you who *I* am. Don't you believe in reciprocity?"

"In its place." She would have stopped there, but a thought came that awoke laughter in her eyes. "My name," she said, "is rather fit. It's very much like 'Crusoe.' "

"That helps some," said Sanford. "Thank you, Miss Crusoe. At least you've let me get my foot in the door."

She was listening to the wind. The cabin, despite the protection of the dunes at its back, shuddered at the impact.

"I expect that at any minute we'll be blown away," she said.

"The shanty must have weathered lots of other hard storms," Sanford said. "There's nothing like facing danger in comfort, if it can't be altogether avoided. No use anticipating trouble, though. May I continue the inquisition? How did you come to be in that dory, then? I'm sure it doesn't belong to you—doesn't look as if it did."

"I rented it for the day. I'd seen Lost Tongue out here, and it looked private. I wanted to be alone."

"My apologies for intruding are renewed. But I can't very well get away at present, you'll admit. So you live, you tell me, on the mainland in sight of Lost Tongue?"

"I didn't mean to tell you," protested the Crusoe girl very coolly.

"Of course I'm presuming," Sanford confessed; "but I'm anxious to see things straight. You simply don't want to see me again—that it? If those are the sentiments, Miss Crusoe, the smallest inclination of the head will be enough. The nuisance will be discontinued."

She hesitated before the unembroidered question.

"I mustn't see you."

"Is it too much to ask a reason?"

"There'd be trouble; for me, surely, and perhaps for you. If we did see more of each other, it couldn't be much more."

"Because?"

"We're birds of passage—my people."

"I get about more or less myself," Sanford volunteered hopefully. "My trade lends itself to the avocation of knight-errantry. I'm free to march against dragons and ogres whenever the unhappy princess turns up."

For all his lightness, he seemed somehow to have startled the girl. She looked at him searchingly.

"Why do you say it—that way?"

"Have you an ogre?" Sanford asked, countering the question. "Or are you deliberately manufacturing mystery?"

She shook her head.

"There isn't any mystery. But there is an ogre—a complete ogre family, in fact."

"And they hold the princess in chains?" suggested Sanford.

"She isn't a real princess, of course," said the girl, "whatever any one chooses to call her. In a way, though, she is a prisoner—a prisoner, you might say, to a promise." She checked herself and made a little gesture eloquent of pleading. "May I ask a favor, Sir James?"

"You'd like to get away from personalities?"

"I'd much prefer to."

"The inquisition's over, then," said Sanford. "On Lost Tongue the old order survives. A princess need never *ask* here: she commands!"

Having made his promise, he kept it religiously. That, in the main, wasn't hard, although the breadth of the background, which gave the girl so much to draw on, constantly pricked his curiosity, as new stretches were revealed.

Certainly not more than twenty, quite evidently and wholesomely American, she had traveled far. Her description of herself as a "bird of passage" had been amazingly apt; she knew Europe, at least, like a courier. She had gone wide of the beaten trail, and hers wasn't the ordinary tourist talk. Sanford, who had spent a year abroad for the New York *Era*, first in the Paris office and then in London, knew that.

As they talked, the rain smashed across the roof in solid sheets, and the wind wrenched at the rattly, grimy windows.

Hours wore on. The luminous dial of his wrist watch told Sanford that midnight had passed; he was sure then that the worst of the storm had missed them. In an interlude, he began to worry about Halvorsen and the *Felicity*. How could Halvorsen win through, single-handed, if he had been caught in the heart of the hurricane? Hadn't he, Sanford, behaved unfairly, everything considered, to let him go on alone?

The silence extended. Sanford, blessing the rubber lining of the pouch that had kept his tobacco dry, struck a match. As the flame flared over his pipe bowl, he saw that conversation was definitely at end. Curled in the corner where she had been sitting, her head pillowed in her arms, his audience had gone comfortably to sleep, while he waited on her reaction to the first-act climax of his sidetracked "success."

Delicacy bade Sanford rise and depart. The rain, obligingly dwindled to a patter, suggested that an excuse for delay no longer existed. But his bones were weary.

"I'll sneak out," he promised himself, "when I've finished my pipe."

And that was absolutely his intention. Even though he permitted his eyelids to come together between puffs, that was no sign of failing resolution. It would be a long and chilly night outdoors; a man must pull himself up to face it. Thirty winks——

Then, as if the miracle had been accomplished by the snapping of a switch, it was daytime.

The girl stood over him, shaking him savagely.

"Go! Go! You mustn't be seen here!"

He was instantly awake, poignantly humbled.

"Something went wrong," he avowed. "I was leaving, and——"

"Leave now—quickly!" she said, and her voice was sharp with alarm. "They're coming!"

"They?" queried Sanford, floundering.

"The ogres in person," said the girl. "If they find you with me—*oh, Lord!*"

CHAPTER III.

OGRES.

SANFORD had a vision of a soon-to-be-shocked family already on the path to the shack—even at the door. He started toward a window, but the girl's voice called him back.

"A minute or two will make no difference," she said. "I wanted you to be thoroughly awake."

"Oh!" said Sanford. "A false alarm, eh? It worked like a charm. I'm certainly up and about and brimful of grief for the—faux pas."

She stood in the open door, looking out across the tamed sea.

"It's no false alarm," she told him. "They're on the way over from Del Rio Beach. I've been up since dawn, straining my eyes. Lucky thing *I* didn't oversleep!"

Sanford glanced at his wrist watch. It was nearly nine.

"You should have called me," he reproached.

"I was afraid," she said, turning with a smile, "that you'd get up shouting for eggs. I hadn't any."

Getting as close to the door as was possible without putting himself on public display, Sanford perceived that the wind overnight had shifted back into the northeast. A fresh, full-sail breeze was blowing. Far south he saw two white specks against the blue—the *Felicity*, with everything set, beating dutifully back to Lost Tongue.

"I think you're mistaken, Miss Crusoe," he said. "I'm the one who should be expecting a call. That's a ketch down below; my boat, unless she has a sister, in these waters."

"You're looking," the girl advised him, "in the wrong direction. See over there!"

Sanford's eyes had missed the power boat, a natty raised-deck cruiser, with twin blue pennants whipping from her military mast, which was plowing a straight offshore course, halfway between mainland and island.

"A perfect stranger to me," he said.

"Not to me," the girl said. "It's the *Vanetta*. She's not ours. We charter her—had her last year, too."

He regarded the oncoming yacht critically.

"I prefer sail, myself," he remarked. "But for any one who likes straight power, she's a corker; with all her brass work and polish, she's a fit ship for any princess." An expression half quizzical, half rebellious, came into his eyes. "I'll concede that introductions may not be exactly in order just now, but, must it be good-by?"

Again she evidenced her faculty for begging a question.

"We're not south for the season," she said. "That's our way. We're never anywhere, it seems, while the season's on. We do get to nearly all the nice places, but we either pick up and leave before the crowd comes in, or don't arrive until the hotels are empty."

"Don't like crowds, myself," Sanford remarked.

"I like them," the girl said, "where they naturally belong. Sometimes, traveling as we do, I feel as if I lived in a world that had been swept by a plague. When, time after time, you're one of a dozen guests in a hotel built and staffed for a thousand, it's creepy. Can you understand?"

Sanford, dismally watching the cruiser, nodded.

"I can imagine. There's story material somewhere in the idea." More questions were rising, but he held them in. Bitterly he lamented the hours he had lost in sleep since the dawn. These were precious minutes slipping away now—final minutes, perhaps. "I won't lose you," he said stubbornly. "I'm going to see

you again. If there's any objection to that, I know it isn't your own. I'll first find you, and then find a way of meeting you all over again—officially."

"Stuff!" cried the girl. "You'll do no such thing!"

And yet her manner denied that she'd be gravely displeased if he did. Sanford carried that warming conviction off with him when, a moment later, he pressed her hand with a murmured "Au revoir" and slid out the door. The power yacht was close under the beach then and hidden by a sand hill.

Another hill, closer to the beached dory, afforded Sanford cover, as the *Vanetta's* gleaming motor tender pushed toward shore.

THE launch carried two passengers in addition to the sailor at her wheel. One was a hawk-featured man in a yachting cap, with sharp, deep-set black eyes and a very small and very black mustache.

When the two were on the shingle, Sanford decided that the mustache was dyed, for the face which it adorned was deeply lined.

The blondness of the launch's woman passenger was emphasized by the contrast. Apart, it was a most vivid blondness, all but confessedly chemical in its massively coiffed glory. Nor could lacing conceal the fact that the woman's figure was middle-aged. Even under high and resolute constraint, it billowed.

Sanford's surreptitious study of the pair stirred a conflict of emotion within him. They weren't the sort of "people" he had pictured as belonging to his little lady of Lost Tongue. They were oppressively gorgeous and fantastic. The man's precisely tailored ducks were in the mode set by the operetta tenor, not the sort one would wear aboard a real yacht. His companion, attired otherwise and elaborately for sport, had completed her toilet at her jewel case. Her hands drew the sun to a hundred flashing facets.

"No!" whispered Sanford, chilled yet loyal. "I won't believe it. They're not hers!"

But the brazen letters under the yacht's swinging stern spelled *Vanetta,* and the woman of many diamonds was shrilly calling:

"Edie! E-de-e-e-e! Edie, are you here?"

From the shanty came a prompt and disillusioning halloo.

"Yes, mother. I'm here and perfectly all right. Have you been awfully worried?"

The two from the yacht had started toward the voice, and on their way over the dunes they passed precariously near to Sanford.

"Now, won't you trust my intuition?" the woman was saying. "You see how it turns out, Iggie? You had your tantrum for nothing."

To that the answer was a grumble significant of reservations withheld.

Within a very few minutes Sanford was to hear the reservations put into words. In the weeds where he lay, a swarm of avid green flies had rallied as if to a mess call, buzzed on some ecstatic insect bugle; but to make a change of base now was to court discovery. Stoically he stayed put until the yacht's people and his comrade were on the move toward the water; and what he heard then made him instantly immune to the stings of the happy samplers.

The he-ogre was speaking. His inflection, rather than any marked accent, stamped his English as an acquired tongue.

"You have not been alone, Edith, I think! What is the truth?"

The girl's armor of self-possession turned the shaft.

"That's a weird thing for you to say," she observed. "How large a population do you imagine Lost Tongue has? And where is it?"

The foreign voice took a sharper edge.

"You have not been alone. I know it!"

"Oh, if you're sure——" Her tone implied a shrug. It held no alarm; not even curiosity. Sanford, among his flies, touched his cap to her.

"There has been some one else here—a man!"

Her tone hardened.

"Please explain."

The three had halted where Sanford had a full view of "Iggie" and the girl. To one side the monumental façade of the golden woman vignetted into green.

"In the place where you say you spent the night," proclaimed Iggie, reaching deep for the dramatic note, "I have found —this!"

He was holding up a pipe—the same straight-stemmed, straight-grained brier that had betrayed Sanford into his late dereliction.

The girl examined the evidence with impersonal calm.

"No; it isn't mine," she said. "Maybe it belongs back there. Hadn't you better return it?"

"It doesn't belong there!" retorted Iggie passionately. "You know it!"

"How *should* I?"

"It has no place in a peasant dwelling. I am acquainted with pipes, and this pipe is of the highest quality—costly. A fisherman would not purchase it."

The girl remained unabashed.

"Marvelous!" she drawled. "But haven't you left other possibilities unconsidered? Am I necessarily the first person ever storm bound on Lost Tongue —the first visitor since the original fisherman sailed away?"

"There has been another visitor during this storm—a man—here with you. This pipe has been smoked within not many hours. The tobacco at the bottom of the bowl still is moist. What have you to say to that?"

She met dilemma with a smile.

"If I'd thought it any affair of yours, *mon père,*" she affirmed calmly, "I'd have saved you all this brain work. As it is, I can only say that you have arrived unerringly at the fact.

"There has been a man on the island since I came here. He smoked that pipe. I saw him do it." She laughed recklessly. "There's a further detail that might interest you. The man who owns the pipe spent the night in the cabin with me. Is there anything you'd care to have me add to the confession?"

The white bosom at the right side of the frame through which the tableau presented itself to Sanford swelled ominously. A coloratura scream rent the air.

"Edith, child! You are out of your mind! Tell me, darling—tell me——"

Iggie's voice clipped in, chilly incisive:

"Where is this man, Edith? He is yet on the island?"

The girl fell back at once on the tactics with which she had made Sanford familiar.

"Do you think," she returned obliquely, "that I'd be telling you about him if he were?"

Apparently Iggie didn't. He accepted specious argument as direct and convincing denial and dashed off on a new scent.

"But he came here with you?"

"No."

"You met on the island by prearrangement? It was a rendezvous?"

"Not by any means. The meeting was a complete surprise to both of us."

"Ha—so! But why had you never told us of him—at least, your mother?"

"There wasn't anything to tell. You don't need to remind me that I once was rash enough to make a promise. The promise hasn't been broken—yet. The acquaintance that so distresses you began on Lost Tongue. Circumstances presided over our introduction, and the storm played chaperon."

Iggie pressed a hand to his forehead.

"What do you tell me, miss?" he cried. "The man was a stranger!"

"A perfect stranger."

"Yet you—you accepted him—you were——"

The girl silenced him with a gesture; then faced him with blazing eyes.

"I've said enough, and I've heard enough," she said. "What's in your mind may stay there, for all of me; but please don't soil the air by speaking it. I won't try to explain this man to you, for you wouldn't understand him. The type is rare where found—in many lands extinct."

The white façade came farther into the picture. Two plump, pink, powdery arms went about the girl.

"Oh, I knew it was all right!" cooed the she-ogre. "I understand, Edie—and so does Iggie, in his heart. But, of course, he has seen so much of *life.* You were fortunate in meeting a gentleman. Isn't that what you mean?"

"Almost my first gentleman," said the girl, with a biting emphasis on the noun.

"And naturally he told you who he was?" It was the she-ogre speaking again. Curiosity pointed her voice and went unsatisfied.

"Naturally," agreed the girl. "Hadn't we better be getting on?"

The golden dragon touched her eyes with a fleck of lace.

"Edie," she said, "haven't my words to you always been, 'Tell the truth and shame the devil?' I'm so happy that they've taken root!" And then in a breath she had descended from the enthusiastic and commendatory note to one plaintive and anxious. "Now," she said, on this new minor, "there's only one fly in the amber. I didn't like the way you spoke about your promise. Do you remember, Edie? You're not going to see this man again?"

Sanford wondered if the girl had raised her voice with a thought of him.

"I'm afraid I never will," she said defiantly.

They walked on; and Sanford, defiant, too, in the hope of a further hint, left cover and, on hands and knees, paralleled their course on the far side of the sand dune.

As the three approached the *Vanetta's* boat, there was more talk. Sanford caught only fragments of it, meaningless to him. Only one speech reached him intact, and that was from the girl.

Iggie had said something bitter about a ruined future, illustrating that he was yet far from convinced of the guiltlessness of the island night.

"*My* future ruined, dear?" she repeated clearly, and laughed. "Wasn't that all provided for, years ago?"

They were gone, and the *Vanetta* was a speck as small as the dory she towed had been, when the ketch's anchor splashed off Lost Tongue. Sanford went joyfully and hungrily out to her in the tender.

"Fair weather now, sure, all the way to Biscayne," Halvorsen promised him. when the *Felicity,* after a ceremonial breakfasting, was again under way.

"Biscayne?" murmured Sanford absently. He was lighting a pipe he'd never liked quite so well as a certain other one. "What's at Biscayne?"

He dropped the match overboard, burning.

"You're the man who drew this coast line back before Colombo's day, Olaf," he remarked then, uttering patent hyperbole in that bafflingly solemn way of his. "Say, do you remember if you sketched in any kind of harbor at a place called Del Rio Beach?"

CHAPTER IV.

THE ROYAL SUITE.

THE City in the Sun"—Del Rio Beach —boasted two hotels that were equally spacious, equally ornate, equally fanciful as to tariff and, in the off season of James Effington Sanford's impulsive advent, equally lacking in patronage.

Between them existed only a single difference. That was external, representing a division of architectural taste. The Imperial Tower magnificently soared, whereas the New Grand Mission luxuriously spraddled. Thus Del Rio Beach bowed to both the visitor favoring elbow room and the tourist craving the heights. One paid one's money—ah, paid and paid!—and thereupon had one's choice.

It was as much a matter of chance as the tossing of a coin that led Sanford to the New Grand Mission, with its quarter of a mile of castellated stucco facing a sea that here took on a reflected glow of purple. An army of uniformed servants paced its yawning corridors, recalling past gratuities and looking eagerly forward to the promise of the approaching winter season.

The chance was that Sanford, blindly tramping the vast empty board walk, hesitating to commit himself to one palace lest the other prove, too late, to have held his princess, came quite violently into collision with the only other visible wayfarer of that autumn afternoon.

So, because he had known Watford Derrick abroad, and because this was Watford Derrick, Imperial Tower lost a prospective guest.

That Derrick was stopping at the New Grand Mission was not precisely an imperative reason why Sanford also should

go there. Yet, since there was no reason at all in favor of the rival hostelry, it was an argument that sufficed.

With Watford Derrick, as a matter of fact, Sanford had not more than the scantiest acquaintance. They had met very casually in Rome, where the brisk little Englishman had been stationed by the London *Express;* and relations between them had been on that slightly formal basis which obtains between the "arrived" British journalist and the American correspondent who prefers to call himself a newspaper man.

Nor did Derrick now, after he had spoken a word for the quietness and comforts of his hotel, give evidence of any yearning to develop an intimacy closer than of yore out of the acquaintance so suddenly renewed. With a muffled, "We'll be meeting presently, what?" he abandoned Sanford at the desk and vanished into a vastness peopled only by boys in buttons and men in caps and frock-coated assistant managers stepping softly through the silences, with heads bent in meditation, the hands clasped behind their backs

"You [illegible]ning in the house except the [illegible]," the officiating room clerk remarked, and to Sanford his cheerful smile savored somehow of sacrilege. A sense of humor seemed to have no more place here than in the Valley of the Kings.

They gave him a room at the end of a corridor that wound and wound, until it seemed to Sanford it would have no end at all. The silence of the lobby hung heavier along the halls, with their interminable rows of open doors gaping into chambers filled with the clutter of the decorators, austerely inhospitable. It was obvious that the new guest had the whole wing to himself, or, at least, this uppermost floor of it.

The bell boy and the porter of his convoy had not long abandoned him before Sanford began to experience to the full the oppression which the girl had attempted to describe. Chronically a dweller in hotels, he had subconsciously come to take comfort in the proximity of neighbors unseen. The murmur through the oak, the clink of glass, the gale of laughter sweeping over the distant transom—these were things scarcely noticed, never missed until they weren't. Their lack left a void not exactly ominous, and yet distinctly unpleasant. His prancing friend of Lost Tongue had not been far off, Sanford decided, when she called this empty-hive atmosphere "creepy."

This would be, it occurred to him, a unique and mechanically practical setting for a murder-mystery yarn; and, straightway the idea had presented itself, Sanford lighted the pipe he didn't really care so much about and proceeded to erect a scaffolding of fancy about it.

Here would be a man, to begin with, filed away and forgotten—a man lost like a memorandum tucked into a back pigeonhole of some prodigious desk. Conceivably, a hotel office might lose tracks for days of such a guest as himself. The accident of a card falling from a rack would accomplish that.

Take his own case as a working hypothesis. In the office of this hotel, his individuality was already as effectually lost as if he had entered a prison. System had run him through its hopper, and he had come out a number. He might be alone here for days, unregarded; all manner of sinister things might happen, and nobody'd be the wiser. Nobody'd give a rap.

BUT all that was fiction in a dream, yeast in the vat. Fact arose, the tearer down, with a direct and demonstrable contradiction.

Somebody did give a rap. Somebody, in truth, gave two raps. It was the red-haired bell hop who had "roomed" Sanford and had departed ten minutes since, with a reward which, as the donor had happily reflected, would just about cover taxi fare back to his far-away bench.

Sanford regarded the visitor with not too great favor, for the sorrel youth had intruded himself as a spoke in turning wheels.

"You don't need to go into your speech, my boy," he said sourly. "Your friend on the Havana steamer is unquestionably a person of honor and discretion, but——"

Then he saw that the bell hop bore a

salver, and that on the salver reposed a square, cream-colored envelope.

"Great Cæsar!" he cried. "They haven't begun to bill me already?"

It was a card, though, that the envelope held—a cream-colored, crested card. Two lines of script in a raking backhand marched across the card:

This can only lead to trouble. Worse than you know. Please don't stay.

The boy was already on his way; for Sanford, simultaneously perceiving the salver and his error, had absently dropped a coin upon the tray. A peremptory whistle called him back. He came, grinning.

"Change your mind, boss? Well, the feller I deal with ain't on no Cuba boat, anyhow. He brings it by air line. Fact!"

"We might do some business—later," said Sanford, baiting a hook. "I'm interested in this note just now, though. Where did you get it?"

The bell boy assumed an expression of most engaging candor.

"Well," said he, "I was sneaking a smoke outside the house, and a man I never saw before or since—a sort of tall man, he was, with a big nose and a slouch hat pulled down pretty well over his eyes—this man, as I was saying, come up to me, and——"

"Snap it off," invited Sanford. "You mean you were told not to let me know where the thing came from?"

"Might be something like that."

Sanford tested the influence of a bill, holding it aloft to invite attention to it.

"It would be worth something to me to know," he said.

"Sorry, boss." The youth spoke with genuine distress. "I can't do it—honest. It wouldn't be dominoes. I got mine at the other end—see?"

Sanford added a second bill to the first.

"There'd be no harm in it," he suggested. "You could tell me, at least, if the lady's stopping in the hotel. Perhaps give me her apartment number."

He had met the man whom Diogenes missed.

"Fold it away, mister," directed he of the red top crisply. "When I'm right, I'm right. Who said it was a lady, anyhow?"

"The handwriting gives that away," Sanford pointed out. "Look here, son, there must be a means of us getting together. Just how was the contract drawn up between you and this party of the first part? Nothing in it, was there, about not taking back a reply?"

The youth brightened.

"Not a word," he said hopefully. "Is there an answer?"

"Of course there is," Sanford told him. Requisitioning a sheet of the flamboyant stationery with which his escritoire was stocked, he dashed off a line masterfully direct. The gist of the communication was that Grant before Richmond was less resolved upon the attainment of an end than James Effington Sanford in the New Grand Mission Hotel.

"Take this," he con d, "to the tall man with the big hat and the slouch nose, and say that Mr. Sanford as he wrote the message, had the appearance of a man prepared to go to any lengths. I'll know by the word you bring back if you've made it strong If the word's right—my hand and my promise—I'll make the last oil man you did a favor for look like a busted bond salesman. Savvy?"

"Say, but don't I, chief?" demanded the courier. "I'm th that has handled 'em both!"

He was back in ten minutes.

"I don't know what the letter says, but I bet you win," he said.

"So do you," said Sanford. "You draw five dollars for this writing. That's a rate per word far above the current market, but the words are worth it."

HE had read the second crested note and doubt was altogether banished. His correspondent, as he had readily though amazedly surmised, was the other orphan of the storm. She signed herself "Miss Crusoe," and she had capitulated to his demand. She could see him for only a moment, she wrote, but that moment he might have. At four, barring the unforeseen, she'd be in the east room of the lounge.

A dozen times before the hour appointed Sanford peered into the vast, deserted sun parlor facing the sea, which was the New Grand Mission's "East Lounge." With two or three minutes still lacking of four, he grew dubious. The unforeseen, whatever that should be, had certainly eventuated. As he was telling himself that, the girl appeared on the dot.

Sanford had to look at her twice before he was sure of her. She no longer wore her knickers and sweater, as on the island, but was dressed in a frock that was fluffily and distractingly feminine. She didn't look the sort of person who'd shove off alone to sea in the teeth of a threatening storm.

The girl was quick to read the gaze with which Sanford beheld the revelation. She had spoken before he could.

"You're tyring to think of something nice to say. Don't. I wrote the truth when I said I'd have only a moment. I'm almost breaking faith to see you again for even so little a time. I'm not supposed to see anybody."

Her words had come with breathless haste, yet she surrendered to the temptation of a question.

"How did you know I was here?"

"I wasn't sure—just hoped. May I ask the same thing of you?"

"I saw you coming into the hotel with that little Derrick man. We don't like him—neither I nor my people. He isn't at all in good standing with us. I don't know why. He simply isn't. Doesn't he write for newspapers?"

Sanford nodded.

"Derrick's perfectly all right," he said. "An able citizen—one of Britain's best, they say. But if you don't know how he got on the black list, let's forget him. I'd like to hear why you don't want me to stay, now that I'm here. Would it make trouble for you? How?"

"For you, too, I'm afraid. Yes, it might be far worse for you than for me. I—I had a premonition of trouble when I saw you."

"You mean if I'm turned up as the chap who shared Lost Tongue with you? Can't you trust me to talk 'em out of that?"

Her face clouded.

"If I could explain—but I can't. It's impossible for me to have you meet my people now. That's the truth. And without meeting them, I—I can't be seeing you. If it were a few months from now, things might be different. That is all I can say."

"Suppose," Sanford suggested, "I found some other way of meeting them. As guests in the same hotel, fellows of the chosen few——"

"You'd find them brutally discourteous," said the girl. "I can tell you that. You wouldn't appeal to them a bit."

Sanford smiled ruefully.

"I can't help thinking you underestimate my appeal," he remarked, "but I fancy you know them. But what's the harm in hanging on? The hotel's to my liking. I'd hate to leave it, honestly. And if I didn't leave it there's always just the bare chance I might be seeing you about."

"I won't be about. I've never been allowed much liberty, and the trip to Lost Tongue has cut off what I did have. Until we go North, I'm confined to quarters. That's the penalty. I'm violating parole even by coming here."

He regarded her in astonishment.

"Great Scott! What's happened to the 'new freedom?' Hasn't it occurred to you to remind them that you're a big girl now? Over yonder—on the island—you impressed me as having distinct capabilities in the line of self-assertion."

She shook her head.

"I'm still taking orders. It won't be forever. I can afford to be patient."

"I can't believe you let them lock you in a closet like a naughty child."

"Oh, I'm permitted the run of the whole suite. We've several rooms. It's quite a trip through them."

"But no tennis—no bathing—no riding—no dancing? What's Florida for?"

She smiled.

"I can get along comfortably without any of those diversions. I'm fortunate, you see, in having a hobby. It's equally entertaining in all climates and weathers."

"Don't tell me postage stamps—or French dolls!"

"Worse than either. Radio. I'm the original addict."

He eyed her suspiciously, but she was serious.

"It's positively the last weakness I'd suspect you of," he asserted. "I can't stand the things, myself. If the two of 'em were put before me, I couldn't tell a B battery from a detector tube—nor an audio frequency from a gadget."

"Neither," said the girl, "could I. My violence doesn't take the technical outlet. I just like to go cruising on the air, catching up the waves that bring voices and music from far places. Somehow—well, radio gives you a sense of freedom. But you'll never appreciate what I mean until you've been a—a sort of prisoner yourself."

SANFORD, with his thoughts on the flying seconds, had found the topic singularly bare.

"You promised," he said, "to explain why I should pack out of this hotel."

"But I've done that already," the girl told him. "It's because I'm afraid you'll eventually find yourself in trouble if you stay on. You're marked now as a friend of the Derrick person's, I think, and that isn't a good start."

"What sort of trouble?" Sanford demanded.

"I can't tell you. It's only intuition, perhaps. But I don't want anything unpleasant to happen to you on my account."

"A more satisfactory account," said Sanford, "is beyond my imagination. You're not absolutely ordering me out, then?"

She gasped at his bluntness.

"Oh, no! What right would I have to do that?"

"Believe me, I'm yours to command. However, if it counts for anything, I'd rather remain."

"But if I can't see you?"

"Perhaps Heaven may send me an opportunity of admiring from afar—or even a better one than that. I've always been a gambler at heart. You've no direct personal objection, then?"

She hesitated.

"No-o-o. But I'll worry."

"Nonsense! Deuce take Derrick and his private feuds! If you say the word I'll avoid him."

"It would be as well."

She caught a glimpse of the watch on Sanford's wrist.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed. "I've spent nearly ten minutes with you. That's much too long for safety. Au revoir, Sir Knight!"

Sanford stood between her and the door of escape.

"'Au revoir' implies something," he said.

"I meant it to," she assured him. "Some day—perhaps before you see me again—you'll have a note from me. I suppose your publishers will forward it?"

"That isn't enough," protested Sanford doggedly. "At least, I want to know who you are before you leave me. It's only fair."

"I can't tell you," she said, with a little laugh. "It's ridiculous, I know, but I can't. It all goes back to that absurd promise."

"But I can find out," Sanford threatened; and when she had gone, in a sudden anxious flurry precluding any lingering of farewell, he added purposefully to himself: "And damned if I won't right now!"

She had no more than passed out of the lobby when he stood before the facetious clerk.

"Been trying to place that pretty little woman," he said. "I've surely seen her before somewhere."

The man behind the desk grinned sympathetically.

"She's certainly all to the Ziegfeld," he said; "but I think you've got her wrong. She's one of the party in the Royal Suite."

"Proper!" murmured Sanford. "Case of suites to the sweet, eh? But what's her name? Can you tell me?"

"Sure," obliged the clerk; "and the title that goes with it. You've just been looking at the Princess Crusoe."

Sanford stared, doubtful of his ears.

"Absolutely," his informant enthused. "She looks American, but she's an Italian princess. And Crusoe's the name—C-o-r-u-s-s-o—Crusoe!"

A change in the clerk's expression registered itself queerly on Sanford. The man's jaw had fallen; then suddenly his face was a blank, and his hands were busy at his cravat. A tallish man of military erectness and notable severity of mien had materialized at the desk. With his penetrating black eyes and warlike beak of a nose, he was disquietingly reminiscent of Lost Tongue's Iggie. He was. indeed, a larger and younger Iggie.

No sooner had Sanford discovered this neighbor than he heard himself addressed.

"The gentleman has done himself the honor to make inquiry in respect to a certain lady. May I ask what is the gentleman's interest?"

"Certainly," said Sanford. "If you'll first give me an inkling of what yours is."

The tall man bowed stiffly from the waist.

"The gentleman must admit that *my* interest is legitimate. I am of the family of the Princess Corusso. And may I not have the privilege of asserting that as the lady's future husband I stand ready to answer all questions which with propriety concern her?"

Sanford, looking into the insolent black eyes, decided that he and their owner would never precisely chum up. Neither was he enamored of the other's suavely superior tone.

"Thanks," he said. "I'll keep it in mind. But there's nothing more at present!"

CHAPTER V.

PRINCE CORUSSO'S PROFESSION.

THE flippant room clerk—he must have been, Sanford thought, a recent acquisition from some breezy and uncouth commercial caravansary in the North—rallied quickly from his alarm. Recognizing Sanford's adequacy, he became an interested and appreciative audience.

Patently it disappointed him that the promising passage was not protracted; but he was generous enough, upon the haughty, if abrupt, withdrawal of the Princess Corusso's self-announced betrothed, to render a decision for his compatriot.

That, he congratulated, had certainly been handing it back. It had been something worth listening to. Count or no count, the bird had had it coming. There hadn't been anything disrespectful said about anybody, so what was the excuse for the bimbo horning in? He was a pain, anyhow—a kicker; so ultra that one high hat wouldn't do him, and he had to carry spares. Well, thank the stars and the thirteen stripes, that fellow had been told at last where he got off. It saved young Mr. Purdy, who knew where to go if the Mission preferred doormats, one seriously contemplated bother.

But Sanford, when he had cooled beneath his collar, was not so sure he had dealt with the militant member of the Corusso family to the best advantage of all concerned. Within a very few seconds after the exchange of cold stares, which had ended the incident in stalemate, he heartily repented his readiness in "handing it back."

It was no oppressive weight upon him that he had made an enemy; but it appeared on reflection that he could have been more diplomatic, and that he should have been.

How the typical and admirable American girl who had shared her shelter with him on the storm-swept key, could be an Italian princess, was a problem on which his brain, in its present state of upset, refused flatly to function.

It was certain, however, that in her anomalous situation she had already been suffering enough embarrassment without the addition that his quick and blundering belligerency must bring upon her.

Sanford walked into the billiard room—deserted now except for a napping marker—and lighted a cigar as first aid to cogitation. When the cigar was half smoked, he was no closer to a theory accounting for the extraordinary duality of Edith, Princess Corusso, than he had been when he sat down; and so, for sanity's sake, he abandoned the effort.

He could, at any rate, reconsider the facts, perform an addition, examine the result. There had been, at the beginning, a mystery connected with the two who came to Lost Tongue—the ogres. Edith—thank the Lord, he had one compre-

hensible name for her!—had addressed the woman as "mother," and she had called Iggie *"mon père."* But even then he had been loath to believe the pair stood in that relationship to her which her speech indicated.

Nevertheless, she was with them here in the hotel, and occupied the unquestionably costly rooms which were, by courtesy, the Royal Suite.

If the Grand Mission staff knew her as the Princess Corusso, it must be because she was so registered; and the beetling Scarlatti, who might or might not be a genuine count, and who also might or might not have been truthfully representing his status as her affianced husband, was at least a member of her party.

The girl herself, then, was either actually possessed in some incalculable way of a spectacular title, or, for purposes equally unfathomable, she was playing a game of make-believe.

However that might be, she was obviously under some form of duress. It was only in spirit that she clashed with the wills of Iggie and the astounding blonde, "her people." She spoke her mind, but she did their bidding.

On Lost Tongue, Sanford had overheard enough to convince him, even had he heard or observed nothing else, that one strict injunction laid upon the girl was that she shun the company of strangers. She had been made to promise that she would; and because of her unavoidable association, while on the island, with a castaway of the other sex, she was now being held to account.

SANFORD wondered if Scarlatti had been informed regarding the island adventure; if, perhaps, he was now suspecting, or had earlier suspected, that the inquirer at the hotel desk might own the incriminating pipe which Iggie had picked up in the fisherman's shanty. If there had been any suspicion whatsoever, Sanford gloomily told himself, he had clinched it by his failure to be subtle. And so much worse, then, had he made things for the girl.

Belatedly he thought of Derrick. There was another curious complication. In what way could the Englishman be involved with the party in the Royal Suite?

Derrick had said he was in Florida in the interest of a British newspaper syndicate, assigned to write a series of articles on the Yankee at holiday. Had that been a mere blind?

Sanford resolved to know more. At the office he got the number of Derrick's room and, without telephoning in advance, went to it. He found the Briton seated in suspendered discomfort before a portable typewriter set up on the rack intended for his bags.

"Sit down," Derrick said. "Glad you dropped in." But he didn't look it. Rather, there was inquiry in his eyes and in his subsequent silence.

"Wouldn't have risked interrupting you without a purpose," Sanford told him. "There are people in the hotel who appear to know you, and I'm interested in them. They're Italians. That is, some of them are."

The Englishman settled his glasses more firmly on his nose and blinked behind them.

"Italians who know me?" he repeated. "Now, is that surprising to you, Sanford? I had seven years straight in Rome, you know."

"I thought," suggested Sanford, "you might have seen them around the hotel."

Derrick shrugged.

"Not yet. Who are they?"

"I can't exactly tell you."

"And you're interested in them, you say?"

"After a fashion," said Sanford. Then he hazarded: "There's one Scarlatti in the crowd."

"Don't place him," grunted Derrick.

Sanford, driven to it, tried again:

"And I believe there's a—a Princess Corusso."

That was a name, Sanford saw, which meant something to the other. Derrick repeated it.

"Corusso? No, I don't know of any Princess Corusso. If it's the same family I'm acquainted with, there's no princess of the name—not unless the old bounder has married again."

Sanford, his thoughts swiftly flown

back to Lost Tongue and Iggie, discerned a possibility.

"I wonder, Derrick," he said, "if you'd recognize a description. The chap I have in mind must be rather close to sixty, but he's in an excellent state of preservation. Uses plenty of dye and wax on his mustache. Medium height, I should say, and decidedly spare. He dresses almost too perfectly, but his really distinctive feature is his nose. It's curved and sharp like a scimitar—and almost as long."

Derrick carefully laid aside his pipe.

"I believe I know the nose," he said. "Your man sounds like Prince Ignacio Corusso. That's the fellow I had in mind when you mentioned the name. He's here, you tell me—in this hotel? Upon my word!"

"You're surprised?" queried Sanford.

"Not so surprised as Corusso would be if he knew I was his neighbor; no, I'd say not by half. He'd not be glad to see me, I fancy."

Sanford saw no necessity for telling Derrick he had been seen. He went directly to the question that reporters feel free to ask other reporters the world over, by privilege of their estate.

"Now that we've mutually identified Prince Iggie, what's the low-down on him, Derrick?"

The journalist regarded him sharply.

"I've gathered the impression," said he, "that your interest isn't professional."

"It's not," Sanford confessed.

"Then, if you don't mind," said Derrick, picking up the pipe again and fishing for a match, "I would rather not discuss Corusso with you."

"I believe," Sanford reminded him, "that you referred to Corusso as a 'bounder.' Don't you think that such a term requires qualification when applied to a prince?"

"Prince? Gad! Italy's overrun with princes. It's the cheapest title in the land. There are thousands of them, literally. I thought you knew that. For the most part, Sanford, Italian princes are without honor in their own country. And their honor when they migrate is quite often a matter of question, indeed."

"Another reference to Corusso?" asked Sanford gently.

"Touché!" murmured Derrick. "But my dear fellow, do you imagine I'd take such an attitude in respect to your question if there wasn't something at least faintly malodorous about the fellow's name?"

"I'd like to know what it is," said Sanford earnestly. "It's important that I find out about him—I think, almost vitally important."

"I'd prefer to leave Corusso's past buried," Derrick asserted. "His exploits have ceased to concern me. Let it go that I knew him, years since, as a perfect rotter."

Sanford's eyebrows lifted.

"What's his specialty?"

"Pocketbooks!" exclaimed the Englishman.

Sanford grinned.

"You're doing famously, Derrick," he said. "Having gone thus far, you might as well tell me the rest."

HIS witness faced about reluctantly, thumbs hooked in his suspender loops. He resigned himself.

"I dare say," he observed, "that you'll respect confidence if I do go on. But, really, half Europe knows Prince Ignacio Corusso's reputation. Once upon a time he had an army commission, I believe. Apparently he found the career too hard and too lean. If there was a scandal preceding his resignation, it was very efficiently hushed; but since he's been on his own, Corusso has been precisely that—living by his wits."

Derrick would have halted there, but Sanford supplied another feeder.

"Cards?"

"Oh, yes," the journalist nodded; "but you appreciate what living by one's wits means on the Continent. It's not in the record that Corusso ever passed a penny by when he saw one that might be lifted. He's been mixed in some ugly swindles.

"It was when he attempted one in London—a wild-West African scheme—that we fell afoul of each other. I chanced to be at home at the time, and I accidentally came upon Corusso in the City. I made it my business to discover what he was up to. The result was an exposé in the *Express* that kept many

thousands of pounds in the pockets of the gullible and landed his highness in Bow Street. Except for a rather delicate political situation at the time, he'd have seen the inside of a prison. No, I don't fancy he'd be happy to learn he had me for a neighbor. By Jove, I *would* rather like to know what he's up to here!"

"He must be in funds," Sanford said. "They've given him what's undoubtedly the best in the house—the Royal Suite. And he seems to carry a considerable train."

"What," queried Derrick, his own curiosity awakened, "about this princess?"

"She's the person I'm interested in," admitted Sanford. "She doesn't quite fit the title. That's not to say she isn't worthy of it, but she's certainly no Italian. She's American through and through and devilish pretty and personable."

The Englishman smiled faintly, but refrained from ironic comment.

"Corusso," said he, "has made rather a specialty of Americans. You don't mind my saying, I hope, that you Americans have some of the world's worst snobs among you. Unquestionably his highness has had some of his finest pickings off wealthy hopefuls from the States, whom he found quite content to be gulled so long as it was a prince who got their money. I've heard of one such in Paris —a rich widow from some drab city in your Middle West. Featherill, who's top man in Paris for *The Thunderer*, told me she turned out an absolute gold mine for Corusso. His cover then was a vague Near East charity, and the fatuous lady dropped thousands upon thousands of pounds into his chest."

Derrick blew out a mouthful of smoke and looked after it with narrowed eyes.

"What sort of game can his highness be after here," he asked, "that he baits his hook with a beauteous princess? Is she a woman, Sanford, who looks as if she knew her world?"

"She's an enigma," Sanford said; "a bewildering compound of self-reliance and docility. Two generations seem to meet in her; she has the air of the new and the meekness of the old. However, of one think I'm absolutely certain. If Corusso has some crooked game on, she's no witting and willing party to it. I'd stake everything I have on that."

"You may be safe," said Derrick dubiously. "But depend on it that any activity that Ignacio Corusso interests himself in is sure to be off color."

HE showed symptoms then of wishing to resume his suspended labors; so Sanford, with something else to think about, went back to the billiard room. Cigar tobacco having proved itself of no inspirational value, and his second-string pipe being a hard march away, he roused the marker from his torpor and bought a package of cigarettes.

Then, no sooner than he had himself comfortably settled, his shuttling speculations were intruded upon by the very subject of them.

Iggie, elegant in flannels tailored as meticulously as his Lost Tongue ducks, stood in the door of the room. He peered about over the shaded dimness and then came straight for Sanford.

"Excuse," he said. "I have not the honor of your acquaintance."

"Quite right," agreed Sanford, with a geniality speciously hearty as a cover for his surprise. "You haven't."

"But I think," continued Iggie, smiling slyly, "that I am justified in presenting myself to the gentleman."

"Don't worry about the justification," Sanford encouraged. "I'm not terrifically exclusive. If you're hunting a billiard partner——"

"No, no!" protested Iggie quickly. "I would not so presume. But an article has come into my possession which I believe is the gentleman's property."

And Sanford found himself looking at his fateful left-behind brier. The attack had been so direct, so utterly unexpected, that for a moment he would not trust himself to speak. His silence gave him a chance to formulate a policy; he'd make admissions, if at all, only as they were forced.

"What causes you to think," he asked, "that this pipe is mine?"

His highness shrugged.

"Per'aps," he said, "it is no more than a coincidence of initials. But the letters

'J. E. S.' are to be discerned on the silver band here, and Mr. Sanford is the only one of the few present guests whom the monogram fits."

"Ah!" murmured Sanford. "You found the pipe somewhere about the hotel?"

The conjecture appeared to amuse Corusso.

"I thought perhaps you would have missed it before you came here," he said. "Have you not recently been to a small island off the beach—one that is called Lost Tongue?"

Sanford unceremoniously plucked the pipe out of the tapering olive fingers.

"Oh, did I leave it there?" he queried. "You're kind to have bothered to look me up. Thanks."

Corusso slanted his dark head, supporting it with a slender hand.

"Mr. Sanford," said he, after a little contemplative pause, "you have impressed me as a person of both intelligence and discretion. Let us meet together on a basis of candor and mutual respect. When you were on this island of Lost Tongue, I believe you found there a lady—unhappily detained by the storm, which made the return voyage to mainland too perilous to be attempted. This, Mr. Sanford, was my daughter."

He paused to let the significance of the announcement sink in, and he left Sanford mentally gasping. What would be the appropriate comment in this most ambiguous of situations? What the deuce could a man say? If he spoke his mind one short sentence would tell it all: "I don't believe it!" But that, of course, wasn't the thing. Eventually he decided it was better bridge to leave the lead where it had been, and he contented himself with a murmured:

"I see."

Corusso seemed mildly disappointed by the failure of his sensation.

"Of course," he said tentatively, "I have been apprised of all that occurred on the island."

"Naturally," concurred Sanford.

"That you and my daughter should be at the same time on the island was purely accident," pursued the prince.

"Entirely."

"But, nevertheless, that very accident makes your residence in the New Grand Mission Hotel—may I say unfortunate?"

"Surely you may," assented Sanford. "But I wish you'd tell me how."

"I can tell you in a word," said Corusso. "My daughter is engaged to wed. I shall make no matter of her station. We shall consider her, you and I, merely as a woman whose hand is bespoken."

Sanford was looking his blankest.

"I still can't understand how I could possibly be in the way," he said. "This is a large hotel and not at all crowded."

Prince Corusso's voice took on a temper of sternness.

"I think the fact is, Mr. Sanford," said he, "that you *will* not understand. The incident of Lost Tongue is greatly to be regretted."

"Not on my part."

"Per'aps not. That is man's way. But it occurs that my daughter's fiancé is here with us in Florida. He is aware that she was not alone on the island, and while her explanation is accepted by him it would not do to press his pride too far. Carmine Scarlatti is a man of singularly jealous, and, I may say, of singularly resolute character."

"I have judged so," remarked Sanford, "in the course of our very brief and, perhaps, not-to-be-continued acquaintance. But"—he met Corusso's eyes with cool inquiry—"I must ask again what all this has to do with me. Why should I be interested in the disposition of some one whom I never saw before this afternoon, and whom I may never see in the future?"

"Ah!" whispered his highness, "I think you are destined to see him, Mr. Sanford, if you will not be guided by the advice of one who knows not only the man's heart but his temper. I have tried to inform you that Scarlatti has a nature that is—er—strongly possessive. He is a very tiger in anger; and already, I suspect, he associates you in his mind with——"

Sanford flicked from his cigarette an ash that fell very close to Corusso's silk-laced Oxford.

"I seem to sense a threat of some sort," he said, briskly cutting in. "What's go-

ing to happen to me if I don't do—what? You proposed candor, and I prefer it."

The prince made a gesture of disclaimer.

"Myself," he protested, "I would not use language so strong. It is no threat I make, but an attempt to avert an unpleasantness that I foresee as inevitable if you do not leave this hotel. There is another below which is quite as excellent."

"Scarlatti wants me to get out?"

Corusso nodded.

"Believe me, it would be better."

Sanford dropped his cigarette end and crushed it beneath his heel.

"If your friend objects to my presence," he said, "I'd rather that he told me so himself. My decision then would be based on the validity of the reasons he advanced—of course, as they appealed to me. You'll tell him that?"

Corusso straightened and half turned.

"Unlucky moment!" he murmured. "He is already here!"

SANFORD, too, looked toward the door. With a suddenness that was clear evidence to him of eavesdropping, the large military person who had rebuked his interest in the Princess Corusso had appeared there. He stood for a moment melodramatically posed, erect, accusing, menacing.

"Oh, come in!" called Sanford cheerfully. "We're not talking about anything private."

Scarlatti waited no second invitation. He walked swiftly across the room and came to a halt before Sanford.

"Sir," he said fiercely, "I object to you!"

Sanford had got to his feet. He stood an arm's length away from the angry count—an exact and careful arm's length, as measured by a practiced eye.

"It wouldn't take a great deal," he remarked mildly, "to make it mutual."

Scarlatti scowled.

"I ask you to find another stopping place. I insist upon it."

"But I'm no more than comfortably established here," said Sanford. "You must have cause for inviting me out."

Scarlatti made an unpleasant grating noise with his large, strong teeth.

"A cause too deeply felt, too personal, to be spoken. If you cannot guess, I shall not find it in honor to disclose it. But go! Go!—go before I do you violence!"

He took a step forward, his face flushed, his big hands clenched. Sanford took a step backward. It matched Scarlatti's to the inch. The same distance as at first still separated them.

"I abominate violence," said Sanford, "except as a final resort. What kind were you thinking of? Nothing so direct and primitive, I hope, as opening a window and dropping me outdoors?"

For answer, one of Scarlatti's heavy arms drew back.

Sanford knew a better trick than that. Promptly and automatically as the imminent clumsy blow was signaled to him, his arm shot forward. There had been no back pull at all with him. It was a straight-arm jab across a neatly calculated interval, and its goal was the point of Scarlatti's chin.

There being nothing in the way to prevent, the goal was reached. Scarlatti, caught off balance, went on his back. Falling, he struck one of the tall chairs set about the billiard table, and that went crashing, too.

Thoroughly aroused and entirely scandalized, the marker came rushing across the room.

"People!" he cried. "Hey, people! Cut it!"

Scarlatti struggled to his feet, helped by the prince and the marker. He stood facing Sanford, breathing heavily and purple with passion, but making no motion to resume the combat.

"Now!" he panted. "Now, I ask you for the last time—will you leave?"

Sanford laughed.

"Not," he said, "until you've considerably improved your footwork."

The count fingered his swelling jaw.

"This I do not understand," he said. "It means that you refuse?"

"That's the gist of it, excellency!"

Sanford found it hard to diagnose the gleam that for an instant lighted Scarlatti's eyes. Thus briefly, despite the

humiliation of his cause, the man seemed fairly to gloat.

"I give you thanks, sir!" he cried savagely. "Then this is not the end!"

As Scarlatti and the prince walked out, Sanford lighted a fresh cigarette and walked down the length of the room. A look of amusement appeared on his face as he passed the marker.

CHAPTER VI.

"I SMELL THE BLOOD——"

THE *Felicity*, with Halvorsen in sole possession, lay anchored in the broad river no more than a mile below the New Grand Mission Hotel. Aboard her, in his snug stateroom, with its tiny white bath adjoining, Sanford would have been better content than in any shoreside quarters Del Rio Beach had to offer.

In truth, it had been his plan to return to the ketch as soon as his job of sentimental sleuthing was done; but now he couldn't. Against his own preference, he had committed himself indefinitely to the hotel. Not to stay on until his mystery princess and her attendant ogres were themselves leaving, would be to afford Scarlatti a satisfaction too painful to contemplate.

So, standing pat, he dined uncomfortably alone that evening in abysmal silence, surrounded by a great acreage of unpopulated tables, gleaming with crystal and futile napery. There were no more than a half dozen parties in the immense room, insulated one from another by regiments of spectral chairs that within the next month would be out of their slip-cover shrouds and rating fat premiums.

Derrick, the self-contained, had not only a table but an entire bay to himself. He nodded to Sanford, as he entered the restaurant, but did not beckon. Solitude always had suited him; he was one to luxuriate in this lavish loneliness.

Iggie was still farther away from where Sanford had been seated. Scarlatti and the buxom lady of refulgent coiffure were with him; but, though Sanford's eyes kept returning eagerly to the door, the fourth member of the Royal Suite party did not appear. Edith, Princess Corusso, must be dining in the apartment above. Her "confinement to quarters" was as complete as that, then.

Next day, Sanford made a trip to the *Felicity* to fetch another bag. Returning at noon, he found Prince Corusso with a guest, a newcomer to the hotel. Scarlatti was missing from the Corusso luncheon table. Where he had sat the night before the stranger was now ensconced, his wide back to Sanford. It was not a gay party. Some business appeared to be under discussion. Iggie was both earnest and deferential, and his indubitably stylish stout betrayed traces now and again of an inner agitation.

Sanford, though from his distant table he could see little and hear nothing, gave more attention to the remote pantomime than to his food. It impressed him that the man who sat in Scarlatti's chair exuded an aura of prosperity. Harking back to Derrick's reluctant and certainly responsible denunciation of the prince as a blackleg, he wondered if this were a fat fly come straying into a web especially spun for him.

The thought worried him through the afternoon. What the specific game might be, whether as new as Russian contracts or as ancient as Spanish prisoner, made no whit of difference. If Corusso had business on, it would be crooked business. Derrick's word was good for that. The Englishman said little enough when he had documented fact to back him; he never talked loosely.

His newspaper training had not taught Sanford to have a deal of sympathy for the average swindle victim. They were rapacious and smugly astute people, themselves unscrupulous, in their own waters flying the Jolly Roger of *cavcat emptor*, upon whom confidence men chiefly preyed. Sanford knew the saying, "You can't trim an honest man," as the dogma of the brethren.

It was fear for the girl that troubled him rather than any concern over a prospective headache of Prince Corusso's guest. Crime always must carry the possibility of consequences; and the fact that she herself had been victimized by Carusso might not make her immune. It could be, indeed, that she was innocently playing a part in the game which she'd

find it hard to explain if the prince's operations ever came up for punitive review.

IN time, Sanford's uneasiness carried him back to the miscast slangster at the hotel desk, but the result was only to increase his anxiety. In the light of the information which the clerk had to purvey, what had been a theory became conviction.

"Sure, I know who you mean," the clerk said. "That's a party by the name of George McKaig. He's got a live little business up in New York selling steel rails and steam engines and other trinkets like that.

"McKaig was here when I joined out with the house at the tail end of last season. Things were pretty much like they are now, slow as a suburban oyster supper, with this same bunch of titles and nobody much else around. His royal nibs and McKaig seemed to have got pretty thick then, and I sort of think this trip down of McKaig's was made special for the sake of old times. Anyhow, the first question he asked when he came in was where to find Prince Ignacio Corusso, Esquire."

Bad medicine?

The oftener Sanford turned the situation over in his mind, the worse it looked. Live little trades in steel rails and steam engines, he was aware, turn tidy little profits. So here he had a man of plethoric means, a man of evil record, and a casual hotel meeting to set down in the one column. The result could be anything.

He could, of course, sit by and let events take their course. If McKaig could extract wealth out of railroads and still hadn't sense enough to keep his hand on his pocketbook in the company of strangers, any misfortune that befell him would be distinctly his own.

Cynically playing the side lines would be wisdom's course; but for the girl's sake Sanford knew he couldn't do that. If he could find some discreet way of putting the McKaig person on his guard—not directly repeating what he had had from Watford Derrick, but permitting a hint to percolate—that would be better. It shouldn't take much to flush McKaig, and once he had spread his wings he'd surely be through for good with Prince Ignacio Corusso.

Sanford took his problem of procedure out upon the board walk and, opposite the impressive hollowness of the refurbished Imperial Tower, walked full on into the solution. He had closely observed Corusso's guest, as he walked out of the hotel restaurant; so now, at a distance of a hundred yards, he instantly recognized him by his girth and waddle.

McKaig had been out strolling alone. He had got to the end of the board walk, and was returning. At closer hand he developed into a puffy and rather pleasant-faced gentleman somewhere toward the tag end of middle age; very high of forehead. He wore a mustache not so carefully looked after as that of his highness, and frankly gray.

To Sanford it seemed that fate was showing the way, and impulsively he accepted the challenge.

The stout stroller, hearing his name sung out by a young man whom quite evidently he couldn't place, stopped short.

"Hello, hello!" he said, with the anxious cordiality of one caught at momentary disadvantage. And to that he added even more heartily: "Well, well! Well, well!"

Sanford had expected a frostier reception. Men who got themselves into swindlers' toils, so far as his journalistic experience went, were a crusty lot—hard-bitten, greedily intent. He found himself instantly and surprisingly warming to Mr. George McKaig, no longer a neutral, but a partisan. That, he realized, was going to make it easier.

"Don't bother trying to remember me, Mr. McKaig," he said. "You don't know me. But I'm stopping at the Mission, too, and this afternoon I happened to learn who you were."

McKaig's round face showed his relief.

"Oh, I see," he said vaguely. "A neighbor. Pleasant day, Mr.——"

Sanford supplied his name.

"I was about to turn around myself," he said. "If you don't mind, I'll stroll back with you."

"Yes, yes," acquiesced the big man, still vaguely. "Delighted."

Perceiving that with all his freight, McKaig was a rapid coverer of ground, Sanford got to his mutton with less grace than haste.

"I think," he said, "that I saw you lunching a while ago with the Mission's guest of honor."

"Corusso?" queried the New Yorker and dittoed a "Yes!" with rising inflection.

SANFORD felt the limb out which he had begun to climb swaying ever so slightly beneath him. But each step was bringing them closer to Iggie and a parting, and the steps were long and swift.

"I suppose you're quite well acquainted with his highness?" he said.

McKaig's vagueness passed, as he shot a sharp side glance toward his companion. Plainly he was amazed; nevertheless he was alert.

"Reasonably well acquainted," he replied after consideration. "Oh, yes, yes." Expectancy tinged his assent.

Sanford plowed desperately on.

"The question I'm going to ask will probably have an impertinent sound to you, Mr. McKaig," he said, "but I ask you to believe that it's well meant. Have you entered into any business transaction with Prince Corusso? Directly, I'll admit, it's no affair of mine; yet——"

McKaig looked again at his questioner, but harder.

"Very probably," he agreed at once, "it is not. But I see no other reason why I shouldn't answer you. Yes, I have business with his highness. What of it?"

"I wonder," said Sanford, "if you've had occasion to look him up."

"What, what?" exploded Mr. McKaig, who seemed to find a measure of relief, when moved, in double-barreled speech. "Look him up—look him up! What the devil?"

"It might repay the trouble," said Sanford.

"Ho! By Jessica! What's repaying your trouble? What are you up to, young man?"

"I may be doing you a service. I hope I am."

"Now, now!" was the human shotgun's comment on that. Then, no longer testily, but in a tone moderated and slyly persuasive, a question came. "What about the prince, Stanwood? You know you've been talking damn mysteriously. What's it you want to say? Acquainted with him yourself, are you?"

"I'd hardly say that I was," Sanford confessed. "Please let me stand on the suggestion I've already made. That is, I think it would be worth while to get at Corusso's European antecedents before becoming committed to any proposition of his."

Mr. McKaig smiled most amiably.

"You seem to know something about these antecedents," said he with a note of blandishment.

"Not at firsthand," Sanford told him. "But, if you'll follow my tip, you'll soon have heard as much as I have. And I imagine that as a man of intelligence you'll be guided by your findings. That's really all I feel at liberty to say."

Mr. McKaig laughed shortly and not so pleasantly.

"At liberty!" he repeated. "Yes, yes! Quite apropos!"

He came to a standstill; glanced deliberately up the board walk and then deliberately down it.

"Where is he? Where is he?" he demanded.

Sanford was mystified.

"Who?" he asked innocently.

"Your keeper!" snorted Mr. McKaig.

"Now, wait!" protested Sanford. "If I'm the lunatic at this time——"

"If you're not, young man," observed Mr. McKaig tartly, "then you're certainly a very complete and utterly damned fool! Good afternoon!"

Sanford, summarily abandoned, reflected as he looked after him that the man had, after all, the self-sufficiency of the ideal mark. He'd put himself through the ordeal in vain; his warning had failed altogether to register.

A most disturbing question had assailed him, as Mr. George McKaig was laboring up the steps to the Grand Mission veranda.

If McKaig had taken his friendly intervention in this cantankerous spirit,

wouldn't he be rushing with a report of the incident to the enemy? And wouldn't that sweetly complicate the situation?

CHAPTER VII.

CHOICE TO THE CHALLENGED.

IF Watford Derrick had been in the shoes of the fabled Mohammed, legend would have been poorer by an often-quoted catch line. Never would he have seriously considered the alternative of going to a mountain that would not come to him. The mountain, this inflexible Mohammed would have said, might well stay right where it was, and be hanged to it.

Derrick being that kind of Englishman, Sanford knew he had been extraordinarily favored when he opened up to a rap and found on his threshold not a bell boy in buttons, but a journalist most formally arrayed—this on the very evening of his board-walk fiasco. Derrick wore the frock coat, striped trousers, and spatted patent leathers which make the British reporter on his way to an interview indistinguishable from the wedding guest and the honorary pallbearer.

"I say, Sanford," he demanded, "what the devil have you been getting into with Corusso and the others? And who's this chap Scarlatti?"

To Sanford there was something as unusual in Derrick's manner as in his visit. It was preposterous that one who made a creed of calmness should let himself thus get out of hand, yet the Englishman's excitement was evident. It showed not only in the eagerness of his tone and his clipping of words, but in his habitually tranquil blue eyes.

"Except that he calls himself a count," Sanford replied, "I don't know myself who Scarlatti is. Have you finally met him?"

Derrick shook his head.

"No; it was Corusso who looked me up. What have you been doing to his playmate?" Then, as Sanford hesitated: "I mean, why the deuce does he want to fight you?"

It occurred to Sanford then that Derrick had picked up some gossip around the hotel in which the facts of the brief encounter had been both magnified and gloriously garbled.

"I had an idea," he said, "that the fight was over."

Derrick stared.

"Apparently not. This Scarlatti thirsts for your blood, old fellow. Corusso said something about you having insulted his kinsman's intended, but, of course, I knew that was all rot. Now, what were the facts, Sanford? I'd like to be informed, don't you see, if I'm to be drawn into it."

Eliminating Lost Tongue and the adventure of the storm, Sanford offered a briefly circumstantial narrative of his feud with Scarlatti.

"But why," he wanted to know, "should you be involved? And what makes Scarlatti think he'd derive any profit out of a return engagement? He may know the rest of his 'Peerage' and his 'Almanach de Gotha' backward, but I'll lay even money in any amount that he never heard of the Marquis of Queensbury."

"I appear to have been cast for the rôle of next friend," said Derrick. "Corusso had seen us together, and that's why he came to me. As for the esteemed marquis—he's left entirely out of the plot. Scarlatti doesn't want to black your eye or bloody your nose. His ambition is either to shoot your head off or cut it off. The choice under his proposal would, of course, be yours."

"What's this?" gasped Sanford. "You can't be serious, Derrick! You mean Scarlatti is crazy enough to have a notion of calling me out? Don't believe I've ever heard of anything quite so deliciously ridiculous. Why, some practical policeman'd have us gathered in for attracting a crowd, without a license, before the camera had begun to grind!"

The Englishman's sober-sidedness was proof against the contagion of Sanford's delighted grin.

"I agree it's ridiculous, old chap," said he; "but these people are in deadly earnest. I can vouch for that, for I know Corusso. They have an idea that a show could be run off somewhere in the back country, with absolutely not a witness except the seconds. Their idea is that I'll

act for you, while his highness does the honors for Scarlatti."

SANFORD eyed Derrick with suspicion, for he had met other straight-faced Britons with hidden and fantastic senses of humor.

"Are you spoofing?" he demanded.

Derrick solemnly averred that he wasn't.

"No, by gad! Scarlatti's heart is set on a duel. That wouldn't be exactly unprecedented in America, would it? Didn't your Alexander Hamilton——"

"Great Cæsar, Derrick!" Sanford interjected. "Surely you're not taking it seriously?"

"I am merely," deprecated the journalist, "doing as I agreed with Corusso to do. I promised him that his fiery kinsman's challenge would be duly transmitted to you. If a suggestion is in order, I see only one reasonable way of handling the matter. That's to get hold of Scarlatti and kick him downstairs—and a blessed shame it is that the arena of operation couldn't be the top floor of our rival hotel!"

"If only," Sanford remarked wistfully, "he'd give me the opportunity! But if this proposal's actually been made, suppose we have a look behind it. Scarlatti and Corusso both must know as well as we do that American law doesn't recognize the right of individuals to settle their differences out of court. Even punching a man's head is assault and battery under the statutes.

"The challenge, therefore, is a bluff. It annoys me that Scarlatti thinks I could be run off the lot by any such absurd posturing on his part. And so, Derrick, I'm rather for carrying the comedy along. Scarlatti having bluffed, suppose I call?"

"Eh?"

"Send word that I accept his challenge."

"But what," queried Derrick, "if he isn't bluffing?"

"Why, then we meet on the field of honor."

"You're mad!" asserted the Englishman.

Sanford chuckled.

"Doesn't the code give the choice to the challenged?" he asked. "So long as I'm permitted to pick the weapons of combat, why shouldn't I take Scarlatti on?"

"The idea doesn't appeal to me as humorous, somehow," Derrick said. "The fellow, for all we know, may be an ace with the pistol and the blade—a practiced bravo. I rather put the bobbies on him than stand up to be perforated by him. It's no thing to joke over, Sanford. Once you play into Scarlatti's hand, you may very well find yourself on a straight road to tragedy, with no way off it except by humiliating retreat."

"I don't agree," said Sanford. "I shall propose to Scarlatti that we resort to weapons typically American. They'll be weapons representing the Anglo-Saxon notion of the dueling code—and, by Christopher, I don't believe he'll prove man enough to go through. On the field I'll pass the choice back to him. If he won't take a chance on my weapon at ten paces, it'll have to be fists or nothing."

He had spoken soberly, and Derrick regarded him with anxious amazement.

"I fancy I catch the thought," he said. "You'll name a weapon so deadly that you're sure the fellow will shy off. But even so you may be putting your foot in it. We neither of us know our man. What if it embarrassingly develops that he's accomplished in its use?"

"He won't be, any more than myself," replied Sanford confidently. "The possibilities are so terrible, should even a single missile find its target, that the most ardent of duelists must give pause."

Derrick could not repress a shudder.

"Ten paces—and a typical American weapon?" he murmured. "Gad, Sanford, you haven't in mind the murderous submachine guns that your bandit chaps are affecting?"

"No," said Sanford gravely, "it's no sort of a gun. Neither is it a sword, a rapier, nor a snickersnee."

For a little, frowning, Derrick pondered the conundrum.

"I give it up. What, then?

"A form of bomb," said Sanford. "A hand grenade which explodes on contact."

"Judas priest!" weakly ejaculated his second. "Do you mean it, old man? A bomb loaded with—what?"

"Disaster!" answered Sanford, grimly enigmatic.

He was pacing the floor, but in a moment Derrick perceived that the principal's deplorably savage and reckless mood had passed. Sanford stopped and beamed upon him with a cheerfulness that seemed in the circumstances a little ghastly. It was a bit unfeeling, too, Derrick, for he was decidedly uncomfortable in his contemplation of this lunatic Yankee jest and knew he was showing it. Sanford, though cognizant of his distress, smiled only the wider.

"Old fellow," he said, with incomprehensible enthusiasm, "it is such ordeals as this we face that draw men close together. So, if I fall into the informality of addressing you as Watford, you'll understand how it is—eh?

"You've been impressed into this ugly business, Watford, and yet really do not feel yourself a party to it. Nevertheless, come what may, I ask you to stand by me. Oh, I know you will!

"First, I ask you to take back my answer to Corusso, for delivery through the usual channels to Scarlatti. That's the way it's done, I believe.

"Tell his highness that I esteem myself honored by the challenge, and that I'm on—that I accept. Inform him that I'm ready at any time to enter the lists. Sunrise, sunset, high noon, or somewhere along the board walk by arc light—it's all one to me.

"But don't, I beg of you, mention the bombs. I know I can readily obtain them in Del Rio Beach. You'd be amazed, Watford, by the variety of wares which the merchants of these plutocratic resort towns carry! But I want to introduce them as a surprise.

"Let Scarlatti take to the meeting place whatever tools of the dueling trade he happens to have lying about. Simply tell him that I'll do the same, and that I prefer the decision as to weapons be made on the spot."

Derrick had risen, desperately protesting against the insanity of the course mapped out for him. But Sanford, deaf to his expostulations, herded him to and through the door.

"Now go on, Watford," he urged. "There's a sport! Do as I've asked, and everything'll come out even. You'll see!"

An hour passed during which Sanford, like many another called to the defense of honor, walked his rug. Now and again the emotion under which he labored manifested itself in a most singular manner. He would come to a standstill and burst into laughter that echoed weirdly along the empty hall.

Momentarily he was expecting the return of the impressed second, but it was the red-haired bell boy who presented himself first. He had his salver and another of the cream-colored envelopes.

"From the same party," he announced. "Any answer this time?"

Sanford was reading the note on the crested card:

Please don't be foolish. For my sake, don't. S—— is a much more dangerous person than he may have seemed to you.

That was all she had written—probably all, Sanford thought, she had been able to write. It was enough, though, to convince him she had somehow gained at least an inkling of what was afoot. He uncapped his fountain pen and replied:

I wouldn't miss being on the old bridge at midnight for anything. It's an experience that has never come my way before, and I'm bound to make the most of it. I might offer something facetious about "taking the count"—but I do loathe puns. Don't you?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FINE ITALIAN HAND.

NOT the old bridge at midnight, but the river bank at sunrise had been the fire-eating Scarlatti's choice—the sunrise to be that of the second day following the issuing and acceptance of the challenge.

Prince Iggie, exploring the woods that stretched away westward back of the New Grand Mission's sporty private golf course, had found what he asserted to be an ideal location for the meeting; and

with frosty punctilio he waited on Watford Derrick, who went with him to inspect the terrain.

Reporting on the trip to his principal, Derrick was faintly enthused.

"It's a lovely glade that Corusso has discovered—really, a spot quite suited to the purpose," he said. "There are no dwellings within miles, and we were a good half hour walking over from the motor road. I fancy that anything short of volley firing would not be remarked out there.

"In fact, I must concede merit to a rather gruesome suggestion that his highness made. It was to the effect that if the encounter were to result in a certain manner, one of you could jolly well be interred where he fell, and no one would ever be the wiser.

"Gad, but he gave me a start, old chap! I mean, for the moment I quite lost sight of the fact that you were going into the business with your tongue in your cheek, as it were.

"Corusso, of course, didn't like it a bit that you insist upon bringing weapons of your own without offering an intimation in advance as to their nature. He quoted me authorities in proof that this was something simply not done—kicked, indeed, like some half-wild beef steer on your Western plains. Only my brusquely repeated assurance that both he and Scarlatti should be permitted to examine the weapons, and given their pick of them, won him over. That, he could not but admit, was cricket."

Derrick had asked about the bombs, then. Had Sanford made certain they were on sale in Del Rio Beach? He had. Had he already bought them? Not yet; but he had spoken for them and would make the actual purchase later in the day. A batch of the bombs—the journalist's eyes widened when Sanford spoke so casually of a "batch"—were being made up by the cynical merchant with whom he had established contact.

Possibility of the morbid test miscarrying occurred to Derrick. What, he demanded, if one of the things prematurely exploded? Suppose some one inadvertently or ignorantly touched a firing pin? Wouldn't it be well to have a doctor somewhere near; not taking him in on the sell, certainly, but at least arranging to have him about?

Sanford replied with a curt negative.

"There are no firing pins," he said. "I think I told you that these are contact bombs, Watford. If one of them explodes, a doctor could do nothing. Somebody—have you met this Americanism before?—will be sent to the cleaners!" To which he devoutly subjoined: "But God forbid it come to that!"

All this was on the day after the preliminaries of the seconds had been instituted; and Derrick, in a condition of nerves after a sleepless night, came frequently back to Sanford to be reassured that he did not secretly anticipate a sanguine outcome.

At four in the afternoon, second and principal met in the long hall, Derrick on his way to Sanford's apartment, Sanford on his way out.

"I'm going now to fetch the—goods," said the amazing American. "Want to come along, Watford?"

Derrick quickly declined.

"Thank you, no," he said, "As it is, I'm running quite sufficient chance of seeing the inside of a jail. I was coming up to tell you, Sanford, that I—I think it's as well we shouldn't be observed leaving the hotel together to-morrow morning.

"Don't misunderstand. I'm not drawing out, in any sense; but I have the interests of the syndicate to protect. Let us meet, say, up the board walk by the band stand. Make it at five thirty. It's a go?"

"An excellent plan," agreed Sanford. "I'll be there with bombs on."

He smiled and went on. Half an hour later Derrick saw him coming in through the lobby carelessly swinging a square box wrapped in innocent brown paper and bound with a string which seemed to him altogether too light for the securing of so lethal a freight. Derrick slipped hastily down the corridor and into the billiard room. That night he did not sleep so well as the incredibly unruffled Sanford.

It was the fact that Sanford not only slept well, but that prior to sleeping he

indulged in none of the eleventh-hour moralizing to which gentlemen committed to a vindication of honor are supposedly given. He said no prayers and wrote no letters. Rather, he read a while; then he amused himself at solitaire, cheerfully keeping check on the dwindling of a hypothetical stake pitted against an unprofited bank, and finally he smoked a pipe over speculation as to the probable manner in which Edith, Princess Corusso, had spent her day.

AT midnight he set his small alarm clock for five, yawned mightily, and turned in.

When the brisk bell awoke him, the nearness of dawn was manifest only in a paling of the stars that dangled beyond his windows. He was up and under his shower before reveille had subsided to its final spasmodic chatter; and ten minutes afterward, shaved and spruce and nonchalantly carrying the box with the too-light string, trotted down off the New Grand Mission veranda.

"You Mr. Sanford?"

The voice came to him before the man had stepped from his shadow. It was a voice with the cracker drawl; and, in further evidence that he was a Del Rio native, the one who asked the question was bundled in an overcoat against a chill not apparent to the Northerner. He wore also a muffler that covered the whole lower part of his face.

"There's a party wants to see you," he said.

"All right," said Sanford. "Produce the party."

"Not hyah." The thin-blooded citizen nodded toward the dark west. "This party's over theah a piece."

"Sorry," Sanford said. "I'm going in the opposite direction. Matter of an engagement."

The cracker lowered his voice.

"Mebbe you can stand to be late. My party's a lady."

"Oh!" said Sanford. "Possibly that's different. Where is she? Are you a fast walker?"

The man was. He replied by demonstration. His legs were long, and Sanford was put to it to keep pace with him. A couple of blocks back of the hotel a big closed car was standing. It appeared to be the objective. Sanford observed, as they neared it, that the motor's curtains were drawn down.

"Hyah we are," his guide announced. "Open the doah an' step right in. You-all's bein' expected."

And that, at least, was a statement absolute in its accuracy. There was something even curiously eager in Sanford's reception. The limousine door flew out, as he turned the catch, and a large hand and a forearm were extended.

Sanford saw the hand and the arm and felt the thud, as an unidentified item of persuasion crushed down the crown of his hat and sank into his skull. The blow dazed him, but he kept his feet. Blindly he struck back—with the hand that clutched the portentous square box.

Contact was achieved, contact so forceful that the box telescoped against the face of the motor's rude occupant. But no explosion ensued, and a second cranial assault with the hard something that reenforced the large paw crumpled Sanford upon the running board.

Dimly he knew that he was being lifted and pushed into the curtained tonneau. Then closer and darker curtains lowered before him, and he returned with a sigh to his interrupted slumber.

Presently Sanford experienced the phenomenon of a second dawning. Strong light struck through his eyelids, but they were too heavy to be raised. He was curled up awkwardly on some sort of cushion too short to accommodate his full length, and upon it was being unmercifully jounced.

Voices penetrated to his flickering consciousness.

"Bill, you're a mess!" some one was saying. "What was it the sleeper hit you with? Looks like egg to me."

That voice had a quality of heavy hilarity. The one that answered was an outraged grumble.

"Egg—hell! Don't you know egg when you-all sees it? Looka that 'ere ruin on the floah, Sid. Queeah grub fo' a party to be carryin' at five of a mo'ning. So help me—cream puffs!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE PRINCESS PASSES.

THE lifted curtain dropped again, and the picture already was blurring, as it came down. Sanford had seen before him a swimming expanse of blue cloth, overlaid with streaks and splashes of a sticky, ghastly yellow, resultant from the premature explosion of his dueling "bombs." With a laugh that strangely had no sound, he had begun to struggle up; but his elbow, thwarting his will to resume hostilities, folded weakly under him.

Once more, but happier now, after that glimpse of an enemy made ready for the cleaners—he went plunging down the dark chute to oblivion.

This time the lapse was longer. The sun slanting across his eyes, warming them awake, told him that. He sought the corroboration of the watch on his wrist and discovered then that his arms were bound against his sides by many loops of strong, new rope.

He was flat on his back, on the earthen floor of a tumble-down building which evidently had had either a horse or a cow as its prior tenant. The side of a stall arose before him. Words which he presently recognized and deduced to incorporate a message for himself were chalked in vast stuttering letters across the boards: "Tak' it eezy. Youl be loost at six aclok."

Take it easy? Wasn't that advice wasted on a man trussed like a Pharaoh? Sanford wriggled within the rope and discerned a possibility.

"The devil I will!" he decided. "Not if there's a Chinaman's chance of getting out of this alone, I won't take it easy."

There was a chance and a way: a long chance, an arduous way. The roper had bungled by allowing Sanford's right hand a play inside its wrapping. Crooking the arm and twisting his body, he contrived to get his thumb into the small change pocket under his belt. He couldn't quite make the angle with an assisting finger, and the little gold knife which the pocket held offered a spirited and brilliant resistance to his strategy of cornering it and squeezing it out.

Sanford had learned, once upon a time, to roll cigarettes with one hand. Opening a knife with one hand proved an operation even more intricate, but it could be done. The rest, after that feat had been achieved, was comparatively simple. The first couple of loops that Sanford sawed through left him no freer when they had been severed, but the third was the key to the whole scheme of entanglement. After he had disengaged his arms, he slashed the lower bonds and climbed stiffly to his feet.

When he was up, the watch came under his eye. It was three in the afternoon.

The kidnapers had taken the precaution of barring the barn door. Sanford considered that rather ridiculous, for they had not thought of securing the open, glassless window. Through the window he left his prison.

Outdoors, he found himself in a desolation as complete as that of Lost Tongue. Weeds grew high about the barn. Twenty yards away a farmhouse in no better repair than its crumbled outbuildings sagged drunkenly over a narrow, deep-rutted dirt road.

One glance at the road discouraged all thought of waiting for a lift. The ruts had been made by wagon wheels; no sane motorist, Sanford knew, would come this way when a highroad offered an alternative route. Somewhere within earshot there was a better road. In the distance he could hear the drone of a noisy engine, a warning hoot at a curve.

Following a trail through the woods beyond the dirt road, Sanford came after a mile of mosquito-infested travel to macadam—the traveled pike. A car was approaching. Sanford stepped into the road and raised a hand, as it hove into view, but his signal was disregarded. Urgently honking him out of her path, the elderly woman at the wheel had stepped on the gas. He saw a set, pale face, and two frightened, staring eyes; then the machine had whizzed by.

Sanford understood why that had been when, after a long wait, he had a view of his own face. The next car along had stopped for him, and the three men who were its passengers stared too.

"You've been in a smash, hey?" the driver said. "Whereabouts? Anybody else hurt?"

This machine carried its rear-vision mirror on a front fender. The face Sanford saw in it was drawn and white, where crimson had not clotted upon it.

"Wasn't anything much," he said. "I'm the only victim. Which way is Del Rio Beach—and how far?"

"Where we're going. About ten miles. Get in."

THE macadam road, smooth enough here, had many long, rough stretches farther east. The bouncing reopened Sanford's head wound, and when the motor that had picked him up rolled into the business section of the Beach, he dropped off at a bungalow that displayed a doctor's shingle. There he cleaned up, going on presently afoot to the hotel, with his clothing neatly brushed and his scalp neatly stitched.

On the veranda he met Derrick.

"Well, I say!" exclaimed the Briton, blinking. "Where the deuce have you been, Sanford?"

"It's a long and interesting story," his defaulting principal replied. "I'll spin it later. A bigger question engages me now: Where's Scarlatti?"

Derrick waved a brown hand.

"Gone. He said that you'd apparently decided to avoid him, and that since he'd planned to leave to-day he would as well forget the engagement with you and push on. Rather swank about it, he was —so uppy, by gad, that for another word I'd have bashed his Cheshire grin!"

"Sorry you didn't," said Sanford. "He played us a trick worth two of mine. But that's part of the recounting to come. What about Corusso? Did he go, too?"

"The whole crowd. Scarlatti and Corusso and a flaming dowager and the perfectly stunning girl they've had in tow. I guess you know—what?"

"Where to?" demanded Sanford.

Derrick shrugged.

"How am I to tell? They went by motor—an expensive motor, no less. His highness must be riding the crest these days. America has been good to him."

Happening to glance then across the vacant lobby, Sanford observed his friend behind the desk violently wigwagging to him.

"Stay put a little," he begged Derrick. "What I have to tell is worth waiting to hear. I got my bombs into action, anyway. You'll wait while I trot inside?"

He crossed to the hotel office. His eyes eagerly sought his box in the great rack and found disappointment there. Except for his room key, the box was empty.

"Your little old playmate, his countship, has up and checked out," remarked the clerk.

"So I hear," said Sanford.

"But," challenged his informant, "I bet you didn't hear about the ruckus we had before the Royal Suite gang slipped anchor. No?"

"Was there one?"

"Grand makings, anyhow. And if anybody's entitled to an earful, Mr. Sanford, it's you. It started after the little lady —the princess, that is to say—had slipped me a note that she said was to be put into your box."

Sanford's heart leaped.

"I don't see it there."

"You bet you don't. That's what the fuss was about. It never got that far."

"You let Scarlatti scoop it?" demanded Sanford through drawn lips.

"Not me," protested the clerk. "It wasn't him, but the old dame. She came sailing down on the office like a battleship all cleared for action. I didn't get that about her at first, for she asked very soft and polite if she couldn't see the message her daughter had just left with me.

"The envelope was still lying on the desk here, and she must have followed my eye to it. Before I could say a word, she had grabbed it up and seen the handwriting. In another instant she had turned it into confetti.

" 'Madam,' I said to her, 'you hadn't any right to do that. You've got me in hot water, if not worse.'

"With that his royal niblets pops out of nowhere into the argument, and we were having it heavy, three ways, when I saw the princess over yonder with the Scarlatti bird. I called her and told her what was what."

"Good enough!" applauded Sanford. "What did she say?"

"She's the kind you can't fluster. It didn't seem to make a bit of difference to her. She wasn't even surprised, let alone sore. 'There's really no great harm done,' she said. 'It was just a line to Mr. Sanford, saying good-by. You can tell him that for me, if you don't mind.' "

The clerk had caught his reflection in the plate glass housing the cashier's cage. His carping eye perceived that his cravat had fallen infinitesimally out of line, and he broke off to effect a readjustment.

"That was all?" Sanford asked sharply.

"She said something else," replied the breezy Brummel, "about being disappointed. I guess that was on account of her not seeing you before she left."

BUT Sanford, walking slowly away, had guessed otherwise. In a flash the full beauty of the scheme hatched by Iggie and Scarlatti dawned upon him. The two—for certainly it had been they who engineered the ruse of the early morning—had played a far-seeing game.

They'd never intended that there should be any duel, but they had let the girl know of the challenge and its acceptance. That had been apparent in her note. And now, having let himself be decoyed away, he stood debased and dishonored in her eyes. His failure to appear made his blithe last message to her seem the cheapest braggadocio. She must have gone away believing that he'd funked it. Disappointed? That had been too mild a word. Perhaps it was as well, he thought, that he hadn't got the envelope intended for him.

In the grip of this bitter mood, Sanford went to his room and dismally began to pack. He made a bad job of it and was kneeing and reviling a suit-case lid which refused to close, when a brace of smartly professional raps at his door announced the red-haired bell hop.

"Listen, Mr. Sanford," said he. "That party in the Royal Suite started to leave a note for you, and——"

"I know all about it!" snapped Sanford. "Get out!"

"Buttons" stood his ground.

"Listen," he persisted. "Listen!"

"Well?"

"The note didn't get through, and this party I'm talking about knew that it didn't, see? So she came to me, when she got a chance, and said she wouldn't have time to write any more, and would I tell you something."

Sanford straightened and turned and sat limply down on the suit case.

"All right," he said grimly. "Shoot!"

The bell hop scratched his head.

"There was a lot to it," he qualified, "and I don't say I'm giving you the party's exact words. But I'll hit as close as I can.

"The party was expecting to see you, I guess. She said it was too bad you missed connections with her. Something had happened, she said, so she couldn't be sure whether you wanted to see her again or not. She said maybe you had decided there was too much trouble where she was, and that she wouldn't blame you a bit if that was the case. She wanted you to know that was the way she felt.

"But if it wasn't the case, she said, and you hadn't missed any appointments on purpose, why that was something she could understand, too. Do you get the drift, Mr. Sanford?"

"I'm beginning to. What else?"

"Well, this party went on to say that she couldn't tell how you looked at things, excepting only by whether she would hear from you or not. She said she couldn't tell exactly where she'd be, but that for the last couple of years her bunch had been stopping over for a week in Washington on the way North, putting up at the New Hilton. That's the whole of it. Does it mean sense?"

Sanford drew a deep breath.

"It means more than sense," he said, and in proof he showered upon the bell boy an overflowing handful of silver. "I congratulate you on a labor handsomely performed. Now, I wonder if you won't do another favor for me. There's a yacht down below here in the river. She's called the *Felicity*. Aboard her is a big Norwegian—Halvorsen. I want you to see that a communication I'm about to write gets safely and quickly to him. It's a—a—just a line, saying good-by."

That attended to, and his luggage on the way down, Sanford looked up Derrick. He began his promised yarn on the New Grand Mission veranda and finished it in a bounding taxi. The night train northbound was already in the station when the cab pulled up there.

"I hope," said Watford Derrick, "you fairly kill the fellow. I do now, old chap."

"It'll be coffee and pistols for two, next time," avowed Sanford.

They were in front of the station agent's wicket then. Evidently the last remark had percolated through it, in some part.

"Lunch room at th'other end," a weary voice came back.

"Thanks," said Sanford, "but I'd rather trust the diner. A ticket for Washington, D. C., please. Yes—one way'll do nicely!"

CHAPTER X.

IGGIE'S GOLDEN GOOSE.

THE Corussos were not at the New Hilton when Sanford arrived there; but he had scarcely expected that, motoring, they would lead the Limited into Washington.

It did seem odd, though, that they hadn't wired ahead for reservations, and, after waiting for twenty-four hours, he began an anxious paging of the other big hotels by telephone. Everywhere he met the same discouraging answer; the titled tourists were not registered, and no advance word of their coming had been received.

During his second day in the city a depressing conviction fastened on Sanford. The Corusso car had missed Washington altogether on its northern journey, or had driven straight through. That thought carried the intimation of a disastrous possibility: Corusso's destination might have been a steamship pier in New York or Philadelphia, and the party might be already far at sea.

Stricken by this suspicion, Sanford looked up a friend of his newspaper days, latterly doing the state department "run" for one of the big news services. Wheels of inquiry were set to grinding, and presently the obliging newspaper man relayed back a faintly cheering report. The department had no record of a recent visa on the Corusso and Scarlatti passports, and so considered it extremely unlikely that the party had left the United States.

Sanford went on to New York and consulted an advertising agent. He wrote a check which considerably depleted his bank balance—a contribution to a forlorn hope. On the following morning, and daily for a week thereafter, every newspaper in the eastern States boasting a circulation of more than ten thousand copies, carried among its classified advertisements a boldly typed "Personal," imploring "Miss Crusoe" to communicate with one who subscribed himself her "mislaid knight," in care of the Messrs. Consant & Cray, New York City.

Consant & Cray were Sanford's publishers, and before the week was out they were holding nearly a hundred letters for him. A dozen were from romantic ladies who invited correspondence. Another dozen were inspirations of idle curiosity, and half a third dozen were from seers, astrologers and private-detective bureaus who offered, for a trifling consideration, to put forth their best efforts in Sanford's behalf.

The rest were from newspapers not included in the agent's list, and these were of like tenor. If the advertiser had not had results from his personal notice in the papers, that was because he had neglected to insert it in the *Star*, the *Sun* or the *Moon;* however, the *Star, Sun* or *Moon,* as the case might be, still were eager to serve him as per rate card inclosed.

When ten days had passed, Sanford charged up nine hundred and some odd dollars to profit and loss and wrote the forlorn hope off his books, as a total failure. It had been fairly well established in his mind that Edith, Princess Corusso, wasn't watching personal columns for word from him, and he sent through a stop order on his advertising campaign.

IT was not until then that the wide, indignant Mr. McKaig came to mind as a possible source of information con-

cerning the vanished travelers. Sanford had to look no further than his telephone directory to turn up a George McKaig, whose business the phone company's cryptographer described as "Ry sups."

Sanford called the number, discovered that McKaig had returned from Florida, and set sail in a taxi for his office. Embarking, he had not been without misgiving as to the cordiality of his reception, but McKaig both remembered and pleasantly disappointed him.

"Yes, yes!" the outfitter to railroads chuckled. "You're young—young Stanley. Edith Ballard's sensational discovery—what? Dammit, Stanley, I'm glad you've come in! What news do you bring?"

Edith *Ballard!* It sounded more like a name that would really belong to her. McKaig had spoken it familiarly—evidently held a key to the mystery of the title.

"News," said Sanford, "is what I came to you for. News, I mean, of Edith."

McKaig brought his blunt finger tips together and smiled quizzically over them.

"What do you want me to tell you?" he demanded. "Hasn't she shown that she's—ah—interested? Seems to me the rest is up to you."

He had some considerable knowledge, it was plain, of the affairs of the incomprehensible Corussos. His tone clearly implied that the knowledge was not new. Whatever his relation to Iggie and the others, McKaig had surely been no gull. To Sanford, their board-walk conversation of the other week took on suddenly another and dismaying aspect.

"I seem to recollect," he said, "having cut an absurd figure when we last met. Is it too late to——"

McKaig waved off the apology.

"I didn't understand you. Don't yet, for that matter. Not quite. However, we'll let that go. My rule's never to look back. What you were up to then makes no difference. It's past. Point is, what is it that you want now? Yes, yes?"

"There's a lot," Sanford said, "that has been puzzling me. Now, when you mention Edith Ballard, I take it for granted you refer to Princess Corusso But——"

"Princess Tommyrot!" exploded McKaig. "That's the old lady's idea, of course. *She's* the real and only Princess Corusso. You should be able to see that for yourself."

"I can't see anything," said Sanford. "I'm entirely in the dark. Maybe you'll let me explain."

McKaig interrupted again.

"You don't need to explain," he said. "I know how you and Edith met. Sort of got to thinking you over after that little chat of ours, and I decided she was the most likely one of the tribe to have an answer to you. So I've heard about the storm and the island and all that. And I've dropped a hint, I think, that you've interested her. What else is there to say?"

"You've known her for some time, then?" surmised Sanford.

"Now, now!" McKaig exclaimed. "That sounds like the question you asked me about the prince. Certainly I've known her for 'some time'—since she was a baby. Bill Ballard and I were partners when she was born. *What* she was born was Edith Ballard, and, if you ask me, there isn't another name in the whole of Europe she cares more about. If she lets 'em get away with the princess bunk, it's for the sake of peace in the family. You watch how quick she shakes the title when she comes of age. That'll be only a couple of months now. As for Iggie and his scapegrace nephew, she'll shake them, too, even if it means walking out on the old lady. Mark my words, young Mr. Stanton!"

Mr. McKaig, himself, marked them by slapping his desk with a well-cushioned hand. Sanford dropped into a chair.

"The old lady?" he queried weakly.

"Edith's mother—that is to say, her stepmother," interpreted Mr. McKaig. "Prince Corusso's golden goose, as you have come to know her."

Sanford echoed his earlier protest.

"I don't know anything, except that the girl I'm mildly insane about is as much an American as I am. You see, Mr. McKaig, she never got around to telling me about herself. I took the title

on the hotel register with a whole spoonful of salt, but that never made any real difference. And when some one told me that the prince was a cr—that is, something of an adventurer—*that* didn't make any difference, either."

"Adventurer?" McKaig grunted the word. "A scalawag! Isn't that what you mean? We can talk freely now, Saunders. We've met before—and don't forget I've had a report on you. Yes, sir; I repeat, a scalawag. A highness and a highbinder to boot. That's what you were trying to tell me down at Del Rio Beach. Pshaw! I've known the man for years!

"Yes, years, my boy—ever since he stepped to the altar, with the Midstate Iron & Steel Company blushing on his arm!"

SANFORD'S thoughts flashed back to a hotel in Florida; to Watford Derrick, leaning on his typewriter, recalling Prince Corusso's reported success in Paris with an expatriate, title-infatuated American widow. Could that have been, he wondered, the "golden goose" of the present?

Even as he asked himself the question, McKaig proceeded to answer it.

"That isn't to say," he qualified, "that I was a guest at the wedding. Matter of fact, if I'd known what was coming off, I guess I'd have found a way of soaping the tracks. But the whole business was staged in France, and it wasn't until a month afterward that I found out what Mrs. Ballard had been mortgaging her income for.

"She came home then as the Princess Corusso, worried about money for the first time in her life. They'd begun their honeymoon at Monte Carlo—a happy thought of Iggie's—and something had gone wrong with the infallible system that his highness had generously settled upon his bride. Shouldn't be surprised if most of the thousands she donated to Iggie's pet charity before the wedding had gone the same way.

"However, that's neither here nor there. The principal's intact, and it's my business as Bill Ballard's executor to see that it stays that way. I want you to understand all this because I think Edith would want you to. Tut! No use to ask why. We'll say it's just an opinion."

McKaig lighted a fresh cigar and crossed his thick legs over an open drawer.

"Edith," he said, "will find her fortune intact when it comes to her. Not a great fortune, maybe, but comfortably close to a million. That encouraging?"

His eyes were shrewdly appraising; then they glinted approval, for the expression the announcement had evoked was one of consternation.

"The deuce!" exclaimed Sanford. "That does rather jam things up. I—I didn't know." He rubbed his chin. "Look here, Mr. McKaig! I hope you haven't been thinking that I——"

The older man grinned.

"Oh, you're all right, my boy. I know that, and some one else does. But if a girl's unfortunate enough to have expectations, is that to be held against her? No, no! We must be fair."

"I didn't know," reiterated Sanford. "It does make a difference. It's—cold water."

"You're all right," insisted McKaig. "All right with Edith, all right with me. You'd be all right with William M. Ballard, too. If he could know about you, I guess he'd turn right side up in his grave again. That is—well, if things come out.

"Bill must have been pretty uneasy these last few years, down underground. But he'd seen it coming before he died. Trust him to see ahead. His marrying Philip Haverling's daughter was just an ironic gesture, you might say.

"To show you what I mean, I've got to go back to Bill's beginning. He was a poor boy in a small town, which means being poor where everybody knows it and is either superior or sorry or both. While he was in grade school, he was out hustling grocery orders afternoons and all day Saturdays. You know?

"Connerstown was built around the Midstate Iron & Steel Company in those days, just as at present. It was the Conners & Humphrey plant then, though, and a one-horse affair.

BILL went to work there when he was around seventeen. Lost all the class he might have pretended to because of the old man having been a white-collar bookkeeper in Phil Haverling's inherited bank. Bill wore black shirts, without any collar.

"He had fought up to a foreman's job before he got married. There wasn't any gesture in that marriage. Edith's mother came of plain people, but she was a fine little woman—a real help to Bill Ballard. She encouraged him to study, experiment with new processes. Too bad she couldn't have lived to see what she was building. But she didn't.

"Edith was about four when her mother died. Bill was on his way up, then—had been made assistant superintendent of the plant. A couple of years later he had a call to a bigger plant in Pittsburgh. He was beginning to be heard of. I met him there; was in the sales department of the company that had sent for him.

"Back in Connerstown, C. & H. got into difficulty later on. They were old-fashioned people, and hadn't kept abreast. Bill and I organized a corporation to take over the plant. That was the beginning of the Midstate. Guess maybe you've never heard of the company, my boy, but it's one of the huskiest of the smaller independents to this writing—a specialist in certain fence lines that competition has never been able to bust into.

"There were years when it was a question whether Phil Haverling or Bill Ballard was the biggest man in Connerstown. The issue sort of ironed itself out when Bill married Haverling's daughter. I was best man at that wedding, even if I did get left out of what the former second Mrs. Ballard likes to call her 'alliance' with Prince Iggie.

"You see what I had in my mind when I spoke of irony? Bill didn't marry Eva Haverling out of love, or even out of any wish to have a mother for his daughter. Edith was twelve then and used to looking out for herself. The whole idea was that Bill was carried away by an ambition to put one over on the snobs of the city. And Eva Haverling—not a debbie by a good many seasons—was the queen of 'em.

"From her point of view, it was a fine match for Eva. Her father had begun to watch the ticker for news some time before, and he had found it mostly bad. She needed the Ballard money to solidify her position. Bill kept himself away from the claws of her imported lions, but he gave up gracefully. It was what he'd expected to do. He was showing Connerstown.

"But, as I've told you, he looked ahead. He made a couple of trips to Europe with the second Mrs. Ballard, and he could tell from the way she acted that Connerstown wasn't going to be big enough to hold her forever.

"He was thinking of that when he made his will. He'd had a good opportunity to study the gentlemen who flutter around American women abroad, and he'd made up his mind that no daughter of his was going to grow up subject exclusively to their attentions.

"The will provides that unless Edith spends at least six months of each year in the United States, all bets are off. One duty of mine is to see that there's no slip. If there is, the Southern Ohio Historical Museum out in Connerstown gets every dollar that Bill left.

"Bill was liberal. I mean, he allowed Eva half of every year to do as she pleases. Of course, for her six months she sets up housekeeping abroad; did it even before Iggie pushed his way through the titled poor who were always ready to have a meal on her and a few francs to help out worthy and deserving cases they all seemed to be in touch with.

"Seems that Iggie has one American trait. He does things in a big way. He was looking out for the poor of a whole Balkan range. Well, anyway, that was his story. I don't know the details of the courtship, but I don't think that Eva Haverling Ballard would have made any prince do all the running.

"She didn't keep Iggie guessing for long. It was only a few weeks after the heavy overdrafts began to come over when I had a cable announcing the wedding. When Eva returned to the States, after the Monte Carlo experiment, she

had Edith with her, a brand-new pedigreed poodle, and Iggie. And Edith—Heaven help her!—had already been labeled Princess Corusso.

"Enchanted with the glamour of the title? By glory, Stansbury, the poor kid wept on my shoulder! That's how she took it. You believe it?"

An echo of the girl's words on Lost Tongue came back to Sanford. A poor imitation princess, she had called herself, and he'd never guessed that she was speaking literally.

"I know it," he said with conviction. "She's absolutely real. But, Great Cæsar, what a story! With the figure of Ballard in the background, his struggle, his rise, his satiric fling at the small-town social order—with all that reaching its climax in Iggie—it's epic!"

McKaig nodded.

"My mind doesn't exactly run that way," he said, "but I've often thought there was a book in it. You wait, though, until you've heard about the joker. There was one in the will, tucked away so neatly that Eva imagined she had a clean sweep of the whole income right to the end of time.

"That isn't quite so, and I pointed it out to her after she invested in her title. The income, except for a few thousands allotted to Edith, has gone to the widow. She's continued to draw it since her new marriage; naturally, his highness looked practically into that phase before he stepped off the block.

"But the fact of the matter is that when Edith becomes of age, Midstate Iron & Steel goes into the American Metal Fence Corporation under a deal closed a few months before Bill Ballard's death.

"Bill stipulated that the preferred should go to Edith, and the common shares to her stepmother. That was his dying jest. American Steel Fence preferred pays seven per cent, and the dividends are as dependable as the interest on government bonds. The common stock's a different proposition. In a boom year it pays as high as five per cent, but it's nothing out of ordinary for the dividend to be passed altogether. If Eva averages ten thousand a year out of her holdings after the conversion, she's going well. And I've told her so!"

McKaig folded his hands over his vest and indulged in a satiric laugh.

"That was old Bill Ballard," he puffed. "You see—a man of vision. And very soon now Prince Iggie'll have to change his system—or his tailor. What, what? Now, isn't *that* a better wind-up for the book, I ask you?"

CHAPTER XI.

HIGH TIME.

SO far as the dispelling of the recent Royal Suite mystery went, the visit to the McKaig office had been a fruitful one. Sanford found the history of the House of Ballard utterly absorbing, for he had followed it not only with the attention of a party at interest, but with the extra appreciation of a professional commentator. As McKaig had observed, there was surely "a book" in his narrative.

But, though favored with information he had not expected, Sanford went away without that he had hoped to get. McKaig had had no answer for that most important question of all. He did not know what had become of the prince and his car and his party. Whither they journeyed was no affair of his. By agreement, they communicated with him when they arrived in America, and again when they left. If they found themselves confronted by a necessity of realizing on futurities, as at some time on almost every trip they did, they wired him, and he went to them with drafts to deposit and notes to sign.

For all McKaig's knowledge, the Corussos might be anywhere between the Atlantic and the Pacific, north of Mexico and south of Canada. He was certain they wouldn't have left the country, knew that and nothing more. That had been well enough, but toward the end of their talk the trustee had dropped one disquieting remark. It had been intended as a reassuring comment on the status of Scarlatti, an attempt to clarify the relationship existing between him and the younger Princess Corusso.

"I believe," he said, "that you've been

informed of an engagement. Don't worry. It doesn't mean anything. Am I taking too much for granted in regard to your—ah—sentiments? Well, well. That may be. However, I can tell you that Edith has never given a hang about Carmine Scarlatti and never will marry him of her own free will.

"If she should become his wife, it would be through just such a marriage of convenience as her stepmother's—a marriage brought about by pressure. I do think that she would eventually have married him, if it hadn't been for—say, a rising of new interests. I'm candid with you on that. I couldn't interfere.

"Before this trip, she never confided in me, but I surmised they were worrying her into it. Iggie, of course, was the chief sponsor of the match. With only ten thousand a year, he'd be back pretty close to Poverty Row again; and it's been a more or less desperate play with him, since the discovery that his golden goose was only plated, to keep the money in the family.

"If he were to marry Edith abroad, Scarlatti, under the dear old Continental system, would become the master of her dividends. And his highness, you may be sure, would exact a substantial share of the spoils. Being a philosopher, I dare say he'd content himself with the half loaf. But that situation has all changed. Edith won't go through with the thing now, in any circumstances. You can depend on that."

So something else had been explained. The fugitive flittings of Prince Corusso; his religious avoidance of the fashionable crowds he must have yearned to parade before; his studied side-stepping of the haunts of eligible young men—here was motive making all logical.

Disappointed in his golden goose, Iggie had ordered his life upon a determination that the golden gosling should not slip away. In America he had played a game of hide and seek with possible suitors. He had kept Edith masterfully secluded, chaining her by an absurd promise that must have been exacted under a pretense of solicitude for her own interests.

He had artfully inoculated her with a distrust of men that had grown into a disgust with them. On the other side, probably, he had permitted her to have contact with some choice specimens—hand picked with a view to advancing the cause of his complaisant kinsman, the count.

Sanford, deducing all that, conceived the girl's acceptance of himself as a trifle less flattering. The advantage of novelty had been with him. He had exemplified a type new to her, a type she had been taught to believe did not exist.

BUT he saw himself none the less her champion. In her present situation, wherever she might be, the screws would be tightening on her. Only a few weeks remained before she would become the mistress of her fortune and her destiny, and Corusso had striven too long for an end to accept defeat with grace. What had been a regimen of restriction would now develop into a campaign of coercion.

There were ugly potentialities in the offing. Corusso was a man without scruples; and so, by implication of their compact, was Scarlatti. With their backs to the wall, facing comparative penury should their scheme not carry, they would be ready to take extraordinary measures to preserve and perpetuate their economic security, and to take, if need be, extraordinary risks.

If Edith would not be driven or coaxed into their marriage trap, desperation might point still another way. Sanford, harking back to grimly analogous cases of his journalistic experience, found himself considering a possibility that chilled him. The thought had a grip of horrible fascination. In vain he argued to himself that he was morbidly exaggerating the menace; it would not be shaken off.

He called McKaig on the telephone the next day.

"I've been thinking," he said. "There's something else I'd like to know about the Ballard will. What are the reversion provisions? If one of the two chief beneficiaries should not survive the life of the trust, what happens?"

"What, what?" barked McKaig. "Why, decedent's share goes to the other. Now, please tell me——"

But Sanford had hung up and was

staring at the placard of house rules which an archaic and considerate hotel management had installed above his wall telephone. A word stared back at him —"Warning!"

He groaned. He stood helpless here, warned by his premonition, and yet unable to lift a hand—he who had pledged himself as her knight. If there should be Alps to surmount, Hellesponts to swim, dragons to slay, he told himself he would win to her in her need; but the obstacle which intervened between them was absolute. Her ignorance of his whereabouts and his ignorance of hers were the two sides of a wall too strong for penetration, too high for scaling.

ON the slim chance that she might have wired or written back to him in care of the New Grand Mission Hotel, advising him of a change of route, he called Del Rio Beach by long distance. He found no message lying there—scarcely had dared hope to.

It was the clerk who had so cordially detested Scarlatti who spoke for the hotel.

"Hope you find her, Mr. Sanford," he chirped. "And say, if you do, you might tell her that we'll send on the little book she forgot, if she lets us have the address. I don't know, though. Maybe it's no good to her where she is now. It's her radio log, and I guess the dial settings are different in different parts of the country. Well, tell her anyhow. It's here!"

Sanford stood rooted again at the telephone when that connection had been broken, but now of a sudden there was a rift in his despair. Schooled to seizing, nursing, prayerfully standing watch over the smallest atoms of ideas, he knew the glimmer breaking through for what it was.

One word spoken over the telephone had struck to pay sand, and his pierced subconsciousness was returning that which he could always recognize, but never command.

Radio, radio!

Something there to hold on to, something to mull over, something somehow applicable to his Gordian problem. Methodically he marshaled his thoughts to realize on the inspirational flash.

Radio knew no barriers, no limits of travel, save only as power was limited behind its racing waves. He was here inactive, because in his quest he could move only in one direction, and that direction might take him farther with every step from her whom he sought.

The miraculous impulses of the wireless, if only they could be made to serve his purpose, would be under no such handicap. They sped forth like ripples from a pebble cast into quiet water, spread far and wide in all directions, in a twinkling would blanket a circular zone of five hundred or a thousand miles, or perhaps even more than that. North, south, east and west, once harnessed to his hope, the ether waves might be made to carry his call to her.

Sanford knew at once that there could be no certainty about it. There would be, at best, something short of a probability of success. It was a chance—just that, nothing more; but as he turned the fragile idea over and over in his mind, it assayed more clearly as the only chance.

If there had been other chances, other ways, he felt the thought would have been preposterous—his voice crying out over half a continent to ears which but for a miracle scarcely less than that of the radio itself would be closed to it.

His writer's instinct held him hovering over the situation thus conjured. Detached, as remote from it as if it were another than himself who weighed the possibility, he saw both drama and pathos in the heart call gone wandering out through atmospheres electric with the jangle of dance orchestras or booming with broadcast oratory.

He brought up sharp, with a grumble of impatience.

"Damn shop! Would it be any use—or wouldn't it?"

His final thought was that it would be. The girl had told him she had found rare diversion in radio. When he had met her, she was already a "fan." She'd been in the habit before that of spending most of her evenings on air cruises; so there was good reason to believe that now, somewhere, she'd be listening in. Reach-

ing her would be a matter of being on the right wave length at the right minute. That boiled down to a question of sheer good fortune. It might be one chance in a thousand—something like that, at any rate.

"I'll do it!" Sanford decided. "I will."

AND then it became a problem of finding out how to go at it. Aboard the *Felicity* there had been a radio-receiving set. It was part of the equipment turned over with the ketch by her previous owner, and the first Sanford had ever owned. Until he began the leisurely voyage down the coast, he had never found time for radio—had rather resented it as an institution, because of the nightly squawkings which, in city quarters, had diabolically cut in on the hours when his mind worked best.

But, sailing south, he had spent many evenings lounging in the little saloon, while music and speech, magically wafting over hundreds of miles of land and sea, poured from the brassy throat of the loud speaker.

He had wondered, earlier, at the philanthropy of the broadcasters, sending out their offerings to uncounted and unidentifiable thousands who accepted the entertainment in easy-chairs at home, with never a thought of the fiddler's pay. Now, after his own taste of air cruising, he knew the broadcast stations for nothing more nor less than astral billboards.

The studio announcers were forever interrupting proceedings to remind their audiences that this particular orchestra was obliging through "the courtesy" of Beebee's Breakfast Flakes, or that the brace of song-and-patter artists just heard would return on Thursday evening next, at nine, to express further the manufacturer's appreciation of the rising public demand for White Wing Starch.

If radio stations were open to engagement by any one with the price, why couldn't he "hire the air" as well as Mr. Beebee and the grateful sponsor of the White Wing Boys? If it had become a custom to interrupt programs with announcements, what difference if the words spoken into the microphone were addressed to an individual instead of to the wide world?

It occurred to Sanford that the answer lay at no greater distance from him than his telephone. He searched his memory for the name of one of the broadcasting concerns which had contributed to his offshore evenings' entertainments. None arising, he began to thumb through the directory. Weren't they all W somethings?

Far back in the book he came to one: *"W-A-N-D (rad stu)."*

Sanford recognized the call letters of the station. He'd "had" it a dozen times. It was, he had judged from the quality of its programs, one of the three or four leading broadcasters within the New York metropolitan district. WAND! There was even a promise in the word the letters spelled. WAND for him.

He didn't bother with telephoning when he had noted the studio's location. It was in the Times Square neighborhood, not a quarter mile from his hotel.

Ten minutes afterward he pushed open a door behind which he had half expected to find lightning playing over switch panels and dulcet announcers filling microphones with melody, and found himself in an office having an air quite as decorous as that of Mr. George McKaig.

Mr. Wilmerding, according to the neat girl intrusted by WAND with the dissemination of information to callers, was the man in charge of bookings; and Mr. Wilmerding didn't size up as at all artistic when he beckoned Sanford from the door of a small private office.

He voiced a crisp question when the visitor inquired, point-blank, about the station's tariffs.

"Whom do you represent, Mr. Sanford?"

Sanford, taken aback, wanted to know what difference that could make.

"We're a member company of Affiliated Advertisers," replied Wilmerding. "Accounts not acceptable to the association would, of course, not be acceptable to us. I hope it's not patent medicine?"

"No," said Sanford. He had checked himself at the point of clearly stating his purpose. The studio's business manager

didn't look to be a person who'd appreciate the simple truth in this matter.

"Then?" queried Wilmerding.

"It's just a small proposition of my own," Sanford told him. "Not much more than an idea. It may not last long, but I'd like to squeeze in as much time as possible while I'm at it. How much can you spare?"

"You mean immediately? This month?"

"This week. The earlier the better."

Wilmerding consulted a ruled form which lay beneath the glass top of his desk.

"The hour from nine to ten on Friday evenings will be open after the tenth," he said, "if the Gribheim people decide to discontinue their Strollers' program. I might be able to let you know definitely later in the afternoon."

"Only one night a *week?*" said Sanford, dejected. "I'd really like to get on the air every night."

The studio manager stared.

"A small proposition, you said? Our biggest accounts broadcast only once a week."

"This is something different. It must be nightly. Isn't it possible that it could be arranged?"

Wilmerding smiled.

"Hardly. It might be done with scattered split halves, but I'm afraid I couldn't advise it. Drive is what counts in advertising—the steady swing of the hammer, hitting always in the same place at the same time."

"But I've said this is different," insisted Sanford. It's—well, a hit-or-miss game. That's the way I see it. And I'm perfectly willing to speculate. What do you mean by split halves?"

"Fifteen-minute periods. There's been a swing this year to shorter programs. Makes it rather hard to close up the gaps in our schedule. We fill in with brief recitals by members of the studio staff. Of course, if you don't mind going on the air at odd times while you're trying it out—sometimes as early as eight o'clock, again as late as ten—we might slip you in."

Sanford nodded acquiescence.

"That would be all right. It's all one to me, so long as my time is in the evening."

Wilmerding lifted his eyes from a resumed scrutiny of the ruled form.

"We'll leave aside for the moment the nature of your proposition," he said. "What sort of entertainment do you plan to offer? You can understand that we must exercise a certain censorship over our clients' programs."

"Entertainment?" demanded Sanford. "Does there have to be any? If I'm paying out my money for the privilege and simply want to say a few words——"

The suggestion gave Mr. Wilmerding obvious pain. He did not let Sanford proceed.

"Ab-so-lute-ly, no!" he said, with great firmness. Two years ago, perhaps, yes. You could have lectured then on the merits of any product from apple butter to zithers from the best stations in the country. But radio has arrived on a higher plane to-day. The quality of entertainment comes pos-i-tive-ly first."

"You mean," gasped Sanford, "that if I hire the air I'll have to hire a jazz band as well?"

"Or its equivalent," said the manager. "It's not only best for our business, but best for yours. I can put you in touch with any number of orchestras and artists whom you'd be certain to find highly satisfactory. For a split half you can engage talent for from fifty dollars to——"

"Stop!" begged Sanford. "Are you talking about a week or a night?"

"You'll find the minimum about fifty dollars a performance," said Mr. Wilmerding gently, "for any one worth while."

Sanford rubbed his chin.

"Please be reasonable," he said. "I honestly want to make a deal with you. To be frank, I'm sold on WAND and need you badly. There's just a brief announcement I'd like to have made to—to the invisible audience. That's the big thing. But I would like to get my own voice on the air for the rest of it. Isn't there something I could do myself?"

The man of the ether lifted his eyebrows.

"For instance?"

"I've got a fair-to-middling baritone,"

said Sanford diffidently; "but I'd a lot rather not sing."

Mr. Wilmerding was beginning to develop the annoyed expression of a busy man who suspects his time is being wasted.

"We might find a short cut," he suggested briskly, "if you were to tell me what your business is. Some lines are not exactly—ah—adaptable to radio exploitation. I'm always outspoken."

"I haven't what you'd call a business," said Sanford. "It may be a profession, may be a trade. I'm a novelist."

"Ah!" murmured the manager and picked up the card from his desk for a second inspection. "James Effington Sanford? Yes, I do know the name. A publishing venture, Mr. Sanford?"

THE phenomenon of inspiration reoccurred. Sanford's mind spurted into action, as he picked up the cue.

"In a way," he said slowly. "In a way." He was silent for an instant, and at the end of the pause the big idea had fledged. "And in another way," he continued, in the judicial tempo, "it is not. I am also a playwright, Mr. Wilmerding. My plan, in effect, is to stimulate advance interest in a drama of mine soon to be produced on Broadway."

"Ah!" said the studio manager again, but now with a greater intensity. He was interested at last—rubbing his hands.

"If I were to read the play in person before production, for the first time through any microphone—would that be entertainment?"

Mr. Wilmerding's gloom had definitely been cast off.

"Oh, I think so, Mr. Sanford," he said. "I'm quite sure of it. If you'd been explicit in the beginning, I'd have told you the same thing. Your name—yes, it's familiar. People will know it. The offering would be fully up to the WAND standard. But, pardon me, will you not have finished the reading of your play in two or three evenings—at the outside, four?"

"Not the way I intend to read it," replied Sanford.

"It's long?"

"No longer than ordinary. But I'll not only give the dialogue—I'll read in action. I could make it last all winter if I had to."

Wilmerding released a tight smile.

"I don't see how you fellows do it," he said. "You know, I've often thought of dashing off something in the writing line myself if I could only find the time. Now, quick action's necessary, is it? Suppose I could find a hole for you tomorrow night?"

"Fine," said Sanford. "And regularly after that?"

"Regularly—except as I explained in the matter of the split halves coming in at odd hours."

"I won't have to commit myself to a definite number of nights or weeks?"

"On the split-half time, no. A twenty-four-hour notice in advance of discontinuance will be enough for us. You spoke of an announcement you wish to have made. I'll jot down a memorandum of it now to send along to the studio. I suppose you'll want to mention the theater and the opening date of the play?"

"No; not exactly," said Sanford and frowned into space. "How about saying merely that James Effington Sanford can be reached by wire or letter in care of Station WAND? And could it be added that he's mighty anxious to hear from his invisible friends? Just like that—how?"

It could and should be done, averred Mr. Wilmerding warmly. This, from his manner at the moment, might have been taken as a personal favor; but he quickly turned to business detail again.

"I suppose," said he, "that we'll have your check before you go on the air tomorrow. An amount to cover a week of the split halves will be sufficient. Sunday evening, too, you think? Well, then" —he pulled a scratch pad to him—"that will be ten hundred and fifty dollars for the seven periods."

Sanford's head fell to one side.

"I—I beg pardon," he said. "I didn't quite catch the figure."

"One thousand fifty," repeated the studio manager. "It's a straight rate, the same to all. One price to the full-hour client on year's contract, and that iden-

tical price to the short-program advertiser on split halves. Ab-so-lute-ly straight rate."

"Somehow, I don't work it out yet," said Sanford weakly. "You'll have your check—that's certain. But how do you get your total?"

"Simple multiplication," murmured Mr. Wilmerding. "Time's high on the air, you know. WAND'S charge is ten dollars a minute."

CHAPTER XII.

THE GREAT "UNPRODUCED."

THE check which Sanford drew to WAND'S order that evening brought him perilously close to insolvency, but he dashed it off in a highly nonchalant fashion on his return to the hotel, and between the writing and the mailing knew never an instant's hesitation.

There were more round thousands and more odd loose fifties where that money had come from, and he had repeatedly demonstrated that his typewriter had keys which in proper combination would open the vaults that held them.

The cost of his experiment was therefore to be lightly considered, if considered at all. Even though it brought no result, one thousand and fifty dollars—for that matter, ten thousand and fifty—would have been well spent in the venture. It would be worth every dollar he had, every dollar he could raise, to be rid of that maddening, intolerable feeling of impotency—to know that, however the run of the odds against reëstablishment of contact, he was reaching out a hand which his vanished princess might touch.

When the check had gone, he recollected belatedy that second copy of that unproduced masterpiece, "The Shelf," was not in any of his luggage, but lay in a locker aboard the *Felicity*.

However, it didn't seem likely that the Messrs. Tandy & Fulz, the producers from whom he had had the royalty advance, would greatly miss the original manuscript for a week or two at this stage of the game. They'd already been holding it for almost the full year of their option, and should by now have sufficiently familiarized themselves with its content for all practical purposes.

But Simon Fulz, head of the producing firm, on the following day received Sanford's request with a lack of enthusiasm amounting to overt suspicion.

"Now look at this from another feller's angle," he said. "You shouldn't be getting the fidgets so soon, Sanford.

"It ain't the show business system that a play should be taken in by a manager one day and launched out on Broadway the next, with a second company already in rehearsal for the road.

"You wouldn't get quicker action by peddling 'The Shelf' anywheres else, I promise you. I don't care what any wiseacre maybe has told you. Times Square is always full of free advice, but try to get a dollar!

"Forget anything you have heard and stick by Tandy & Fulz. And say, did it ever strike you what a bum title you've got on the show? It don't mean anything. There ain't a box-office dime in it.

"Frankly, Sanford, I got another title in mind; and also an idea for pepping the end of the first act. With that, and some carpenter work on the second act, and maybe jazzing up the third a little in spots, I shouldn't be surprised the play would last a week or so."

Sanford had a sensation of listening to an old story.

"I'm glad you still see possibilities in 'The Shelf,' Mr. Fulz," he said. "But it's just as I've told you. I've a reason of my own for wanting to get hold of the script. I simply want you to lend it to me. I happen to have an immediate use for it, and my carbon copy unluckily isn't available."

To Simon Fulz the proposal appeared to demand study. For a moment he shrewdly scrutinized his visitor. Then, sighing, he made an extraordinary motion. From the wide center drawer of his desk he produced an impressively large check book—one which Sanford had seen before on a day when its appearance gave him a greater thrill. Slowly it was opened.

Fulz at length spoke, sounding a note of bitter complaint.

"You come to me, Sanford," he said,

"when I got so much on my mind that I tell you I could jump at any minute from under my hair. I got no time now to argue with you—no brain to fight you with. I only want to say that Tandy & Fulz's option has yet got nearly five weeks to run. This morning I have noticed that.

"But this is what I am ready to do, Sanford, so that I should be left in peace to look after bigger matters. I will here give you a check for five hundred dollars, and that will cover a six-month extension—the old regular royalty arrangement to stand.

"What I mean, Sanford, this is absolutely the best concession you can get from me. It's final, you understand? Five hundred dollars more on the option, paid now, and—well, I give a trick to you and make the extension only for three months. Could anything be fairer, I ask you?"

Sanford's heart gave a bound.

In turn, he studied Fulz.

"Is this a way of telling me," he asked, "that you're finally bringing 'The Shelf' out of the camphor chest?"

The producer's snapping black eyes suddenly became quite void of expression.

"I'm not telling you anything for sure," he hedged. "The case is that we ain't doing anywheres near as well as we expected with 'Warmed Over'—in spite of all the fine notices we got and the big houses of the first couple weeks. It simply ain't a show that people go home and talk about.

"Now, if we should decide to pull 'Warmed Over' off, maybe 'The Shelf' would keep the house from going dark during the life of our lease. Anyhow, your play takes only a small cast, and so it ought to get a break. But don't think I'm looking for a hit from it. It's nice, and I like it, myself, but it ain't got the gizzard. A break is the best to expect. After thirty years in show business, I could tell you that now and gamble on it. Well, what do you say? Five hundred——"

Sanford thought it best not to appear too eager; he was thinking, though, that the windfall check would buy precisely fifty more minutes of WAND's expensive air.

"If I were to sign up," he temporized, "it would be only on condition that you'd lend me the script—just for long enough, I mean, to have a copy run off."

Fulz waved a hand freighted with a mighty solitaire diamond.

"Sure, sure!" he agreed. "That'll be all right. It shouldn't take only a few hours. I tell you, Sanford, I'll have the copy made here in the office, if it's important as all that, to-day. But what good it is going to do you is something I could never guess."

HE kept his word. At five that afternoon, three hours and fifteen minutes before the time set by Wilmerding for his new client's radio début, Sanford received at the hotel a fresh, fair transcript of his play, bound in an immaculate and starchy blue cover. With it came a note from Fulz:

> Come in Monday. Maybe we will begin then to take the show to pieces. On account of "Warmed Over" I think I am losing too much sleep.

At another time Fulz's invitation, with the imminent production it promised, would assuredly have worked more spectacularly upon its recipient; but now Sanford merely glanced at it and laid it aside at once.

Even so early, he was experiencing the trepidations inseparable from a first adventure "on the air." What if his voice deserted him at the moment he stepped before the microphone? What if the script should slip from his hands, and the page from which he'd been reading be lost? Imagination must then make the aloof contempt of the unseen audience far harder to accept than any clamor of booing from the front of a theater.

He had begun, too, to develop other doubts. What the deuce did a man wear when he went to a radio studio to broadcast his voice? Was the studio's a formal atmosphere, where one would be out of place except in evening dress? The announcers he had heard sounded as if they never wore anything else.

Sanford struck a compromise by climbing into his dinner coat. Once in the studio, which he found on the floor above the WAND business offices, he breathed more freely. Dinner coats appeared to be the thing. At all events, they predominated in the anteroom—a sort of greenroom of the air theater—into which Wilmerding ushered him. A score of men who looked as if they might appertain to waiting orchestras lounged there, smoking. With them dinner coats appeared to be a sort of uniform, worn as a matter of course and not too smartly kept up.

There was a great sheet of plate glass at one end of the greenroom. Beyond it, hung with heavy drapes like an arty Shakesperean stage, was the studio proper. A young woman, with a microphone before her on a floor stand and a piano at her back, was singing there. Her voice filled the anteroom, coming not through the glass, but flooding out of a metal-plated loud speaker.

One of the musicians standing near—Sanford knew *he* must be a musician, for he hugged a violin case under his arm—made critical comment on the current performance.

"That's what stopped the show at the Chicago Op'ra! Listen to it, Emil!"

Sanford looked again at the girl who sang. He knew the face; had seen it often in the Sunday rotogravure sections. It was Millie Tarver, the season's sensational find out on the Lake Front, whom he had been booked to follow.

Presently another dinner-coated musician was at his elbow, talking directly to him. No, this wasn't a musician, but some functionary of the studio.

"First time on, Mr. Sanford? Feeling a little nervous? Yes; they all do. There's really nothing to it. Don't let it bother you if your voice sounds different in there—dead, flat. That's because of the way the room's built and padded. What you'll miss will be just the echoes. They play hell with broadcasting. This way, please."

SANFORD followed his guide out of the greenroom, along a corridor, and through another door. Passing over the new threshold, he gulped. He was in the studio—in for it. Miss Tarver, a little pallid and shaky herself, was coming out. She smiled at him.

"Good luck!" she whispered.

The march ended at the microphone by the piano. Sanford observed another of the leggy instruments closer to the cushioned wall. A man who wore not a tuxedo, but a pepper-and-salt business suit of indifferent style, was talking smoothly into it.

"——author of 'Queen's Fool' and other much-discussed novels, who on this and successive evenings will read to you excerpts from his latest play, entitled 'The Shelf.' WAND is happy to present this play to its listeners in advance of the Broadway first night."

The voice was silent, the nearer microphone buzzed; Sanford's guide nudged him and nodded.

It was true that Sanford did not recognize the next voice which struck upon his ears. He could only suspect it must be his; for he was talking. He knew that—and that the lightning of inspiration had made a hit again.

"Before I begin my reading," he was saying, "may I not have a moment's indulgence? Somewhere under these waves that carry my voice, there is a friend who at this time is lost to me. Perhaps she hears me now as I speak. If she does, I want her to know that any word she may send to me in care of Station WAND, in New York City, will be eagerly awaited and most promptly acknowledged. That is my prelude. I thank you. To the play!"

The script was open in his hand. His knees had stopped their shaking, his mind was clear. Intuitively he knew he was done for all time with the terrors of stage fright—air fright. Calmly, elaborating settings, inventing and interpolating business with a facility at which he marveled in the back of his mind, he began to read. The task absorbed him. Jove! it *was* a good play!

Another nudge. His guide was pointing to the illuminated clock on the farther draped wall. The clock warned him that he had only two minutes to go. For a panicky instant he feared he couldn't cut off in time, without an awk-

wardness and abruptness that must be apparent to every listener. Then he astonished himself by coming to a passably graceful closing—heard himself, with all the mellowness of the announcer aces, wishing his good friends "out there" a very good night!

Wilmerding was in the anteroom when he went to get his coat and hat.

"Splendid!" he beamed. "You've got that rarest of all things, Mr. Sanford—a radio personality. Damn clever touch at the beginning, too. You made the smashing human appeal in your first couple of seconds on the air. Got to hand it to you playwrights for knowing your public!"

But Sanford had been listening to the announcer's voice in the loud speaker. The man had taken a full minute—ten dollars' worth of WAND's extremely valuable time—to impress on the audience how greatly Mr. James Effington Sanford, just heard, author of novels discussed the country over, would appreciate comments from listeners on his new play, "The Shelf." Also, that Mr. Sanford was very anxious to hear from his friends.

And, after a second split half, begun with that same smashing human appeal which had so impressed Mr. Wilmerding, mail did begin to pour in. From as far off as St. Louis and Minneapolis came requests for Sanford's pictures and his autograph—mild inquiries as to whether he wouldn't care to read and criticize plays written by aspirants who saw the leagues separating them from Broadway as the one great obstacle to careers.

There were communications of another sort, too. One sweet young thing in Terre Haute—Sanford formed a picture of her from her pert handwriting and perfumed stationery—wrote:

> DEAR SIR: Your play is terrible. So are you. Why don't you get off the air and give us a chance for dancing?
>
> Very cordially,
>
> NO ADMIRER OF YOURS.

For a day or two his letters through WAND amused Sanford. He read them all and devised a genial multigraphed response applicable to jeers and kudos alike. But he soon perceived that the ready letter writer wasn't representative of the highest intelligence in the land, and thereafter he spent no more time on the contents of each envelope than necessary to assure himself that no roundabout message from his princess was concealed therein.

Before the end of the week, he was worrying about money, but not about money spent. He hadn't come to realize his contract with WAND as criminal or even necessarily reckless extravagance. The trouble was that he hadn't more capital to fling into his ten-dollar-a-minute dissipation.

The first payment to Wilmerding had brought his balance in bank down to a couple of hundred dollars. With Fulz's five hundred, that would give him only five more nights of split halves when the week was done.

He thought of the *Felicity;* and though it wrenched at his heart, he sent a terse and explicit wire down to Halvorsen:

> Find a buyer for the boat. Quick. Am mailing power of attorney, special delivery, care New Grand Mission Hotel. Ketch should bring eight thousand, as she floats. Take anything. Wire me at Hotel Queenston, New York for further instructions when sale is made.

By the time WAND wanted another check, Sanford had run upon a friend who admitted having five hundred dollars that could be spared. He deposited the money at the eleventh hour and wrote Wilmerding a check for another one thousand and fifty dollars as casually as if that amount meant absolutely nothing to him.

"A man on the outside," remarked WAND's business manager, "hardly realizes what a mint of money there must be in writing novels and plays. Getting you a good response, aren't we?"

"Not exactly what I hoped for," said Sanford. "But I'm willing to go the limit to try out my idea."

A day or two after that he had a letter from Halvorsen. The gist of it was that the *Felicity* couldn't be given away in Florida at that writing. When the big Northern money began to come in, then, opined Halvorsen, things would be differ-

ent. But was Sanford insane to think of selling the only toy boat in the world that would ride out a tropic hurricane?

With the money worry upon him, Sanford found himself less fertile in the extemporaneous plotting of stage business before the microphone. The bare dialogue of "The Shelf" began to ravel out all too rapidly. He found himself into the third act and fearful lest his money survive his play. Would he have the brass, he asked himself, to propose reading it again? Would Wilmerding think such a repetition up to the WAND standard?

And then, in his plummeting despair, a large, square, cream-colored envelope tumbled out of a basket of mail sent over to him from the studio. Sanford stood staring at it for a little; with trembling fingers he lifted and opened it. She had written it. All doubt of that vanished when he had read the first words:

Your voice, my knight! I knew it on the instant I tuned in, but I couldn't believe it. Is it a miracle that I should find you again in this way? How strange—incredible!

We went to Asheville and missed Washington. Did you know? It was impossible for me to write to you. For a fortnight we have been here in New Hampshire. Burden, they say, is quite lively during the summer season, but a queer little sleepy place now.

Mother is in Atlantic City, alone. She has not been well. The "ogres" are here with me. You may think me foolish, but I have a feeling that trouble brews. There's always seemed to be something between Iggie and Scarlatti, but now it appears deeper. I can't explain. But, knight of mine, I'm *afraid*. Do write a line to cheer me—put me right with myself. *Now*, please.

And then there was a postscript:

S. told me an improbable story about you. Can you guess what it is? Of course, I've never believed it. Was he really absurd enough to challenge you?

With her letter in his hand, Sanford went to the telephone.

"Do you mind filling in the rest of my split halves with studio talent?" he asked Wilmerding. "You see, I've been called out of town!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BREATH OF FIRE.

SHE had been afraid. It had been the merest, vaguest uneasiness at first. She had been ashamed of it, had fought it down. The attitude of contemptuous defiance had so much become a part of her that she could not abandon it and so confess the haunting doubt of herself that pride had thus armored.

When Corusso had won his plump and protesting princess over to the idea of journeying down to the seashore alone—only the sea, only rest, only a fortnight of solitude, he had insisted, would erase the fatigue faintly discernible through her otherwise flawless glory—Edith experienced her earliest alarm.

It had been her impulse then, all but inconquerable, to cry out her protest—to insist that she, too, needed the sea. But pride had been too strong. To a weak, uncertain surrendering, "Would you mind, dearie?" she had been able only to answer:

"Why, of course not, mother. It will do you a world of good."

She had minded; minded terribly. She knew that before the retreating car, on its way to the station, had reached that first sharp curve in the road down to Burden. It had been one thing to be in this remote place with just the three who had contrived for so long to close out the rest of the world from her life. It was another to be left here to the devices of Iggie and her despised betrothed.

The fact of her stepmother's presence, for all the ineffectuality of character that had been plain even to a child, had been protection. Always had been.

Murphy, the polite, brisk chauffeur who had driven them down to Florida and back North again—he had been a protective sort of institution, too. He'd been very meek in the presence of his betters, this Murphy—quick with his servile fingers to the cap. But his eyes had been blue and humorous, and the servility somehow never had seemed to get into them. Murphy's eyes, and the thoughts behind them, she instinctively knew, had never tired out. Murphy had been a comfort.

But Murphy, up here in the mountains, had vanished. He had gone very quietly and had left her only with the impression of an unwillingness in the blue eyes when last they turned on her.

The chauffeur who had come to take Murphy's place had black eyes, and a dark, brooding face. A scar on his face —unquestionably come there through no desire of his—lent him a look of menace. His name was Tony, and Corusso and Scarlatti addressed him in a tongue that came more readily than the English Murphy had required.

There had been other changes of staff, too, immediately after the arrival in New Hampshire. The friendly old couple, who had made the house ready for the surprising winter tenants, had perhaps been a bit too democratic in their interest in his highness. They had gone, and another couple—younger and gifted in the preparation of foods more highly spiced—had come. At first sight their unconsulted mistress had not fancied them. They were singularly silent people. It was not hard to imagine them as furtive, these Mabruzzis.

The house was a big one—so big that she felt there, as it seemed she had always been feeling in these last few years —lost in a maze. There were twenty bedrooms, at least. The Crow's Nest was a monument to the days when servants were more plentiful, and millionaires now suffocating in Park Avenue apartments, with only eight or ten chambers, gestured their hospitality in a wider way. Hundreds of its own acres surrounded the house, making it aloof from the village and its folk—aloof even from the smaller and smarter places, now closed until another summer, which bordered the lake.

IF there was room in the Crow's Nest to be lost, there also was room for retreat. Here she could have her own suite. With stout doors fending away intrusion, Edith Ballard, Princess Corusso, sat herself down to what she feared would develop into something uncomfortingly like a standing of siege.

At meal time, of course, there was no avoiding the two who more than ever represented jailers to her. And at table she found them superficially unchanged. Courtesy—the show of consideration—they yielded her that. It was their eyes that were different. Sometimes she thought the eyes mocked her; again she would surprise an exchange of glances, and that built upon her rising alarm.

Then, on the radio—Sanford! The Sanford, who playfully, but certainly not insincerely, had pledged himself to be her knight. It had seemed almost as if he had been calling to her alone. There had been a quality in his voice that wasn't in any other voice the radio had ever brought to her. He was reading some sort of skit or play—dialogue, anyhow.

She never heard a word of it—only the voice. Then another voice told her that Mr. James Effington Sanford was fairly burning with the wish to hear from his friends. In care of this station, if you please.

The little disturbing doubt was swept away. He wanted her. *That* had been in his voice. He hadn't needed to tell her in so many words. What were words but straws for weaving lies? Tones, glances gave the truth.

She wrote to him that night and in the morning she smuggled away her letter in the apron of a grocer's boy who blinked at the bill she gave him with the envelope, and gulped foolishly: "Say, *lady!*"

She had been afraid—yes. And then relieved. She would hear from him, she knew. He wouldn't withhold the comfort she had pleaded for. That was all she needed—some tangible contact with a sanely and decently organized world to banish her groundless terror.

But the terror swiftly returned to her —in double measure, because at last there was solid bottom beneath it. Iggie's chair at the breakfast table was empty, but service, nevertheless, went ahead. She questioned Scarlatti with her eyes. He smiled.

"It was a sudden resolve," he said softly. "You know Corusso, my dear Edith. He has all the virtues of the true aristocrat and all the occasional instability. He has gone to Atlantic City to join

the princess. Ah, yes—gone very suddenly. He went last night."

That had been all, then.

AFTER that, breakfast was a silent meal, and luncheon, too. Evening brought the crisis. She sensed its approach during dinner.

Scarlatti had been finishing a gin cocktail—and not his first, she thought—when she came to the table. He ate almost nothing, and so the bottle of Medoc, which he entirely consumed, added the more to his buoyancy. The situation and the Medoc inspired him to philippic.

"This country of yours, Edith!" he cried. "Your people are so strait-laced in so many ways—so incredibly liberal in others! Do you think that on the Continent this could ever be? You and I, not yet husband and wife, left to ourselves with no chaperon to guard the conventions! Pfaugh! America!"

With ice in her eyes—and ice, too, at her heart—she cut him short.

"I see nothing strange in it," she said. "In America it is taken for granted that gentlemen are gentlemen. As for chaperons, aren't there plenty of servants about? I really haven't the slightest fear of scandal resulting, Carmine. But is it a nice thing to talk about to me, do you think?"

He called for a liqueur and put a detaining hand on hers when she would have arisen.

"You are a woman grown, my loved one," he said. "A child you may be in many things, but why pretend you do not know the world? Must talk between two who are to marry always be banal? Sometimes, do you know, Edith, I like to speak of these things that are real. To-night—what is the word?—the inhibitions fall away. There has always been constraint. When there are three or four, conversation is art. One sparkles or fails. But between two? No; two speak with candor, one to the other, or fail!"

"If candor is called for, Carmine," she said, fighting for steadiness, "I can give it. You have had too much to drink and too little to eat. It's affecting your behavior."

His eyes were bold.

"Do you think it? I cannot fathom you, Edith. You are a woman, and yet you are not. This thing—charm—you have. Yet you seem to deny it to yourself. Is it only drinking too much, you say, that could affect a man's behavior?"

His grip tightened on her hand.

"No, Edith, some men will go far, very far, when love maddens them. I love you, but you have only once let me say it. You who will some day be my wife. That is a thing that maddens—the repression. I dare not to turn my eyes inward—to ask myself am I one of those men who go far?"

His voice had risen.

"Softly!" she cautioned. "The—the servants!"

Scarlatti broke into laughter.

"The Mabruzzis. Perhaps they already wonder that we should be left together this way. Corusso—the way he dashed off for his train—forgetting all, except that it would be pleasanter—gayer—by the sea. Scandal? Certain! But I who love you, *carissima*, will also protect you."

She managed to say, still without betraying the wild beating of her heart:

"I'm quite capable, Carmine, thank you, of protecting myself. Not nearly so much perturbed as you insist upon being."

He leaned to her.

"But we are to wed some day? That is true?"

"Not before my birthday. I have always said that."

He drew back, fingering his mustache with his free hand.

"It is not so long," he said. "A few days, only. You may say that I, who have had such patience, must have more. But to all things there is an end. It is a small place, this Burden. Otherwise than cities. Here officials are more easily found when offices are closed. To-night we——"

She arose and with a desperate tug released her hand.

"No!" she cried. "The wine—the rest of it—has made you mad!"

He, too, was out of his chair. His arms encircled her.

"The wine? No, *carissima!* No, a

thousand times. But I am mad. And to-night I am with you!"

His breath, heavy with alcohol, choked her. His lips were close to hers.

"The first kiss, *carissima!*"

"Here!"

The hand she had wrested from him clutched into a fist and struck his mouth.

It was only a small sound that the blow had made; but in the corridor beyond the old wide door it was answered almost at once by an echo of greater volume far than itself. The great silver knocker had been lifted and crashed down.

Scarlatti, for an instant unbalanced, was coming toward her again.

"No, not to-night! We let them rest to-night—the officials who make marriages! And to-morrow——"

His arms fell from her, as the knocker's clamor filled hall and room. There were steps outside—voices. She knew one of them; wondered if dread had brought delirium upon her.

"Jim! *Jim!*" she screamed; but she had fainted when he came.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOMING EAGLES.

IN the eventual duel of James Effington Sanford and Count Carmine Scarlatti, of the well-known old Roman Scarlattis, neither rapiers nor broadswords played a part; nor did pistols nor cream puffs, nor bombs nor coffee.

The weapons, rather by force of circumstance than by long-considered choice, were nature's; assuming, in a word, that nature had provided the long-necked bottle which at one juncture Count Scarlatti heroically endeavored to insinuate into the contest.

That was an early juncture. Indeed, the duel, as such, was of short duration, so far as the nobleman was concerned. As a thing to look at, the count's jaw had been eloquent of both decision and force. Actually, under test conditions, what had appeared as steel proved only bone.

It was bone of excellent quality, as all aristocratic tissue is likely to be, but the material in at least four of James Effington Sanford's knuckles was harder. Only one of them broke with the resolute Scarlatti jaw.

Sanford, directly after that, had to resort to the bottle he had taken from the count. Complications had developed.

One man in a chauffeur's cap and another, who dressed, but did not otherwise look like a butler, had injected themselves into the difficulty as Scarlatti went down.

In such a contingency, use of the bottle in the manner conceived by the count recommended itself to Sanford as not only honorable but mandatory. The butler person went down first, sighing very heavily, as he fell.

The chauffeur, to some degree protected by his cap and rendered difficult of approach by the long knife which he flourished, was a tougher nut to crack. But he did crack, just as the silver knocker came banging down again.

Edith, recovering consciousness to find wreckage where there had been order, and through the wreckage a bloody maniac dodging and cursing and flourishing a knife, had very practically thought of asking the telephone operator to send along the Burden riot squad. And here, back of the banging knocker, they were—the village constable and the taxi driver, whom on the way to the Crow's Nest the officer had deputized against the prospective emergency.

But there wasn't any emergency, Rather than that, merely an oddly breathless and somewhat disordered couple who begged a ride back to Burden with the relieved law—and after that directions for finding some one who would both license them to marry, and marry them.

That had been Sanford's suggestion, gathered out of chaos. Out of chaos, too, had come assent. And so by lamplight, in a little room dominated by a stove architecturally as wonderful as the Taj Mahal and many times as hot, they were married.

But they had been a strange couple to begin with, Sanford and the prospective Mrs. Sanford, and strange they continued to be, as city people always are.

In the house where they had been

married, Sanford found an apartment for his bride. Afterward he went on alone to the Mountain House.

IT was all very mysterious and queer, too, the way they slipped aboard the eastbound early in the morning, without breakfast and without luggage, except for the bag the young man had dropped at the Mountain on his way to visit his titled friends at the Crow's Nest.

They breakfasted together, though, on the diner. There they had their first chance to talk.

"Where," asked the bride, "are we going?"

She was a little timid about it, it seemed.

"*We,*" said the bridegroom, "are not going farther than Boston. I hope you don't think, Miss Ballard——"

"Isn't it 'Mrs. Sanford?'" she asked.

He smiled, but a little painfully.

"It is—for now," he said. "I thought it would be better. You're absolutely safe this way. Later on, after your birthday, we can straighten things up. Now, you mustn't worry—not the littlest bit. Everything's all right."

But she was worrying. Her eyes showed it.

"I don't think I understand," she said. "You say we're not going farther together than this train goes. But we're—I'm Mrs. Sanford, aren't I?"

"For just as long," the bridegroom cheerfully assured her, "as it's any help to you. I don't think you ought to ask a promise. Honestly, you won't find me difficult."

"I do, though, now," she said. "Well, what are the plans?"

"I'm going to leave you in Boston with friends of mine. You won't be molested there."

She bit her lip, but he didn't appear to observe that.

"And you?"

"Oh, I'll go on back to New York. We'll have lunch together in Boston—and maybe dinner. Of course, if it's the same to you."

Her eyes were incredulous.

"Would it be strange if we had both luncheon and dinner together on the same day?" she asked. "I continue to labor under some doubtless absurd delusion that I'm your wife."

Then it was Sanford's eyes that were incredulous.

"You don't mean to say," he ejaculated, "that you think I'd hold you to this! Now, that's not exactly kind."

She became practical.

"Why not?"

"I'm an extremely poor young man. Just now, anyhow."

"Well?"

"And you're a very rich young woman—or you're soon going to be."

"Well?" she asked. And that "Well?" was a minor.

He looked at her strangely and very, very much more incredulously.

"My dear wife," he said, "what you have suggested, without saying a word, is simply and absolutely impossible. I've never yet asked life to give me anything I hadn't earned. I'd insist on marrying your respect along with *you!*"

But a month later he sent a telegram from New York and asked her to take a train, and suggested the train she could take.

It brought her into Grand Central at an early-evening hour, and he was there to meet her; he came scrambling through the crowd around the gate at sight of her.

There were other crowds, and denser, in the streets. She had never mingled with such crowds, could scarcely recollect ever having been permitted to see them.

In the taxi he asked her about "the princess."

"Has she changed her mind again," he wanted to know, "since her last letter?"

"No; she's solid as rock for once. She'll go to—is Nevada the State?—and begin the proceedings there. I think she's even tired of the title. But it might be useful in Connerstown."

The machine, herding among many, approached a theater. Sanford directed her attention to its lights. They spelled: "OLD MAN'S DARLING."

She looked at him curiously.

"It's been a secret," he said. "That's what used to be 'The Shelf.' It's my show, with an assist on the title."

"It would be nicer to be a young man's," she said.

"What?"

"Darling!" She whispered what should have been obvious.

They had stopped at the canopy. There was a queue at the box office that curled out onto the walk.

"It's—*going!*" she breathed.

Sanford glanced at his watch.

"Yes; just about this time," he said. "Stand here with me. Do you see what they're doing? Buying tickets! *Buying* 'em! Tickets for my show. And a half dozen managers, with real money in their hands and tears in their voices, are wanting to know if I won't have a heart and let them look at something. This show makes a difference."

"It is going to make a difference?" she asked. "With us?"

"It does with me, anyhow," he said. "Do you know how much I get of the money passing under the wicket there? I figured it out, dear, and it amounts to just about ten dollars a minute. Do you think a girl raised to luxury could get along on that?"

She squeezed his arm—squeezed tears into her own eyes.

"On ten cents a day," she said, "with you!"

Holman Day contributes the book-length novel to the next number of THE POPULAR. *This story has for its setting the lumber camps in the North and is called "In the Tall Timber." Mr. Day knows this region intimately and his story is a dramatic episode in the lives of these hardy woodsmen whose natures are primitive and whose capacities for love and hate are equally powerful.*

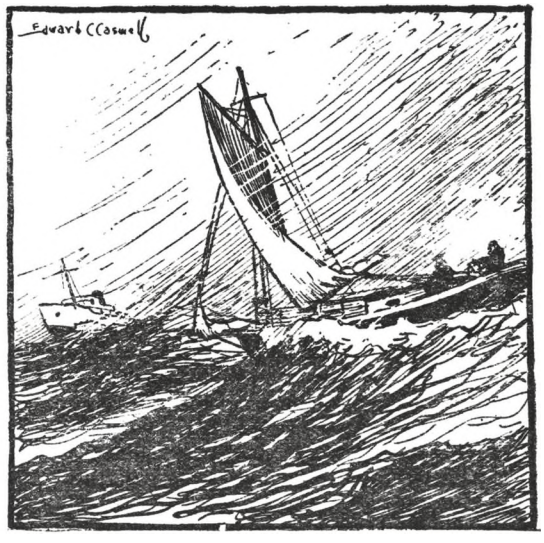
HE GAVE HIS HAND FOR HIS FRIEND

ANCIENT Sparta was noted for the physical and moral courage of her citizens. Sparta's eminence in the exercise of this virtue has contributed an adjective to the English language. A man or woman who can endure pain and not flinch is said to be of Spartan courage. An example of human fortitude, which can match any of the classic instances related of the Spartans, has recently been made public.

Two South Africans, John Byng and Frank Cooke, some months since, attempted to establish a new route up the face of Table Mountain, near Capetown. Cooke was a veteran mountain climber, but Byng was an inexperienced mountain man. Linked together by a rope, the two men had ascended to a height of a thousand feet, when Cooke fell. He was saved from instant death by the magnificent act of courage of Byng.

Seizing the rope by which he was linked to Cooke, Byng slipped it over a rock. To keep the rope from fraying and snapping by sawing against the stone, Byng slipped his free hand, as a buffer, between the rope and the rock. In spite of the fact that his hand was crushed and cut, he continued to keep the rope in position, hour after hour. Cooke was hanging over a gorge hundreds of feet deep, and he was unable to help himself because his thigh had been broken against the face of the cliff.

Eventually Byng succeeded in drawing the attention of a party of mountain climbers, by waving his handkerchief, which he held in his mouth. When the rescuing party reached Byng, he was on the point of collapse. At once they set about rescuing Cooke. Twenty some hours later, Cooke was hauled to the summit of the cliff, more dead than alive.



Winning a Windjammer

By J. H. Greene

Author of "In the Poor-Fish Navy," "A Jazz Bearing," Etc.

Captain Soames and young Hastings were always quarreling about navigation. The captain would trust a sail in any sea, but scorned the modern engine which the young man, in his tech training, had learned to respect. When a storm threatened ships of both types, their argument was settled at last.

QUICK of fist and caustic of tongue, Jerry Soames, lean, red-headed and of any age between forty and sixty, was superintending the loading of his lumber schooner, the *Mabel*. Jerry exacted that the cut lumber be properly stowed in his ample hold and on his deck when the hold was full. Loose logs in heavy seas pound leaks and burst cabin bulkheads. Besides his professional directions, Jerry extracted homilies from the lubberliness of the men. Slack work meant lazy minds; he delivered his usual lay sermon on the need of forecastle discipline for the rising generation.

"Yer got to know how to stow cargo to be sailors," he kept on repeating. "It ain't only hauling braces and standing watches. Law lummy, if I had yer all for one voyage round the Horn, I'd make men of yer."

"Who wants to be a sailor?" at last replied one young man who combined the velveteen trousers of the natives with the sport sweater and the tan Oxfords of the city.

Jerry had become aware that his usually effective imitation of a bucko mate had been rendered ineffective by this young man's continual smile.

"No back talk, Clem Hastings," barked Soames. "This ain't a college petting party. I don't have no sea lawyers working for me."

This morning Soames was suffering from the additional worry of not knowing where he was to get a mate for his vessel, for Sam Aitken who had been his mate, cook, crew, cabin boy, partner at checkers, and verbal punching bag, had gone to the hospital. Soames had to have a man if he wanted to sail with to-morrow's tide.

Breathing heavily from the log on his shoulders, Clem had not replied to this. The inefficiency of this way of working galled this young student of engineering at the college. Soames was too mean to install a donkey engine on his old wharf; he even refused to let them rig a tackle.

"Ye'd all be better men," continued Soames, "if ye'd l'arn to skip to a rope's end. That's what's the matter with yer. All over twenty and dunno what yer want or where yer heading fer. The sea would l'arn yer. Give yer ambition, give yer pep. That's why the world's going plum' to hell to-day. There ain't no more sailors."

Clem had tossed his log on deck and paused to remove a splinter that had pierced his cotton working glove. That operation in minor surgery leisurely performed, he lit a cigarette and inhaled.

"D'ye think one of my old mates would let yer stop to manicure yer fingers?" fumed Soames in reply to this gesture of impudence. "No sand—none of yer! Taking a spell every time ye're hurt. Cry babies! One voyage on a whaler would——"

"Just a minute, Captain Soames," said Clem, stung somewhat. "Can all this sea bunk. The only men who go to sea are those who can't make good on land. The sea is a beastly, uncomfortable, underpaid job. Your old-timers were Legrees; your fo'c's'les were worse than slave quarters before the Civil War. You want the old days back just to make you feel bossy. You like to see men breaking their backs when a bit of machinery would——"

"Git to hell off my vessel! I don't want yer. Git, or I'll throw yer over the side," roared the older man, redder than his hair and stepping over the rail to carry out his threat.

Clem Hastings was rather pale from combining his classes with service in a one-arm restaurant, but he was long and muscular. He stood his ground. He had come down to see his people and a girl. Soames' wages would cover his traveling expenses, but he did not feel he had to agree with the romanticism of the man he was working for. Clem had been raised in a village full of old boasters like Soames; he had lived long enough in Boston to find out that men can be made in offices as well as by trips around the Horn.

"Never mind the throwing, Captain Soames," said Clem, climbing over the rail to the wharf. "I'll go."

"And don't you come around my house no more—understand?" bellowed Soames, with some biting significance after that retreating figure in the sport sweater. Clem caught his meaning and returned smiling.

"Isn't that for Abbie to say, captain? She asked me to supper. I always understood she was skipper ashore."

THE retort brought a laugh from the other men who had paused in their labors. All were young and more or less suitors for the skipper's handsome daughter, the youngest of his large and widely scattered brood. All knew that the tongue-lashing tyrant of his decks and wharf became a meek and slippered fireside player of checkers, once he was under feminine hatches.

"You see, Abbie has been to college, too," continued Clem. "She will agree with me that brains, not bulldozing, count most to-day. The old deck-swabbing, hand-pulling days are done. You're frightfully behind the times even in sea matters. Don't you know there aren't going to be any more fo'c's'les? The modern sailor's going to have a separate berth, like in a Pullman car. He'll clean his decks with some kind of vacuum cleaner. Why not? Only squareheads and hunkies will stand for your old slave driving."

The mere mention of his daughter had a restraining influence on Soames. He had encountered the higher education in her. She had wanted him to give up sailing this bluff-bowed, unprofitable schooner, but he clung to her decks to keep in touch with his youth, which he romanticized, forgetting its hardships and miseries. He had no understanding of the romance of the youth of to-day, the romance of denying the past, ignoring the present, and demanding everything of the future.

"Some of you chaps tell Abbie to come

down here right away, will yer?" said Soames with unusual courtesy. "Meantime, let's git on with our loading."

Clem stood on the wharf in some uncertainty; for all his self-confidence he had his full share of youthful self-distrust. Too much post-war literature, too much that passes for culture, too many plays in which avoidable evils are put down to environment, and cry-baby characters suffer needlessly, had tinged him with the popular cynicism. Modern America he had learned was the worst of all possible continents, and to-day was a terrible time to be born in.

Soames' charge that the modern young man does not know what he wants, or how to get it if he does, had been for a time true in his case; he had been uncertain in his choice of a profession. At first high marks in school English led him to the arts course at college. He wrote verses and was nearly crippled for life by having some published. He wasted a year, till the mechanic that sleeps in the fingers of most Americans awoke and switched him to the tech. Literature, he decided, was either a raving over an impossible past, in the manner of Soames, or a synthetic cocktail for tea parties. The radio set he had played with became of more importance than the latest in stylists, and fashions in emotions faded before the latest in hook-ups. He had found out what he wanted to be—an electric engineer. He also wanted to hook up with this energetic, trim, pretty little girl, now hurrying down the wharf at the call of her father.

Abbie was quick to see that her father and Clem had clashed more violently than usual. The loading ceased. The men knew that Soames was liable to spring some sudden tricky action when he reined in his speech. Was the old fox going to administer a rope's ending to the town hero, the man who had struck out for himself in the wilds of Boston? The prospect made work an impertinence.

"Just a minute, Captain Soames," said Clem, looking round at the grinning onlookers. "Hadn't we better——"

"No; we hadn't," snapped Soames. "I ain't ashamed of what I'm going to say. It's meant for all of yer. Abbie, Clem has been saying sailors is no good. He has been insulting the way yer father was brung up—the way his father was brung up. He's made the whole lot of them think the same, so they can't work no more. I won't have 'em round my house. I don't want none of them kind for my son-in-law."

"I don't want to be your son-in-law," cut in Clem.

SOAMES stopped in his tirade, the wind being out of his sails. Every young man who worked for him, Soames figured, was aiming at the fat competence he would leave Abbie.

"Yer don't? I thought—— Then what the heck are you aiming at?" The old man's anger made him stammer.

"I want to be Abbie's husband, a very different thing. I don't want your money, your house, your relationship, or you. Fathers-in-law are as out of date as wooden windjammers. Will you please go into the cabin, while I ask Abbie to marry me? It concerns only me and her."

Not for many years had Soames flushed so full a purple. His fevered harangue against scrimshawers and landlubbers was largely a matter of mechanism. Now, for a second, he really looked the murderous old sea monster he had so often aimed at being. The girl was alarmed and got between them. She waved Clem to be silent and go away. Clem did not budge and continued, seeing only her.

"I'm right, Abbie; it's only me and you. Nothing else matters. I haven't got a dollar in the world but what I earn. I have to work my way through college. You have to work keeping house for him. He can hire a housekeeper. Let's get married, and both work for each other. I'll have to borrow the price of the license and our fare to Boston, but how about it?"

The hoodlums, for they were not much better in their lack of purpose, in their dependence on odd jobs, in their hanging about their home town, cheered, as if Clem had made a touchdown. Here was red romance, more real than any of Soames' old yarns of the sea—romance

in the language of to-day—romance they would all like to imitate. But Clem frowned at them.

"Don't you fellows know enough to beat it?" he cried.

In his ferocious shame at being called upon to declare himself so publicly, Clem looked more like the bucko mate than ever Soames had; the men melted away into the cabin, behind the piles of logs on the wharf. Clem had the privacy befitting this forced wooing. He repeated his question. Abbie still clung to her father, who was as wooden as if he were carved out of his own lumber, more impressive now he had given up blustering, an inscrutable old fox.

"You've got to like father, Clem," she whispered.

Clem, ridiculed too bitterly by that father, found it impossible to give any promise; he was feeling too deeply to be anything but starkly and crudely sincere.

"I'll like him if he leaves me alone, but I'm not going to take back anything I said about the sea."

Clem was astounded to see Soames' strained face break into a sudden smile.

"Young feller, I will say you stand by yer guns," said Soames. "Don't give him his answer yet, Abbie. I don't want to see yer running away and starving in Boston. Clem, my lad, take a trip with me on the *Mabel*, and yer won't have to starve nohow. You can sail a boat, can't yer?"

"Learned to before I could read," answered Clem.

"Thought so. Durned sight better than reading for a man. You finish your eddication with me. Make good with me, and I'll stake yer through college."

"You must, Clem." said the girl suddenly, with some of her father's authority.

"I'll ship with you, Captain Soames," said Clem.

Clem went home to get his dunnage together; Abbie returned to her kitchen; Soames resumed driving his stevedores. He even lifted a few logs himself. A fresh energy had come into the old man; he grinned at the rigging aloft, at the sails lashed on the booms, at the idle wheel aft, for he was depending on his old schooner to break off this marriage he was sure would end on a lee shore.

THE *Mabel* put to sea next morning, and for the first three days the master and the one-man crew shared watches and meals under a taciturn restraint.

"Yer seem handy enough," muttered Soames, when Clem had hopped forward over the deck cargo to free the fore-sheet which had fouled in a bundle of laths. "Bred in yer, I guess."

"There's nothing to it," replied Clem lightly. "Any fool can learn to sail, but a marine engineer has to serve——"

"We'll stow arguments till we're ashore, lad," said Soames grimly, and Clem obeyed.

So far the weather had been moderate, the wind fair, and the old *Mabel* trudged along the water highways, like the market tramp she was. Soames wanted different weather before he would argue with this conceited young fool. Besides, Clem was a splendid cook, and Soames wanted to enjoy that cooking without verbal battles while that weather lasted; he could afford to wait till the uncertain sea taught this young blasphemer its lessons.

"Feel like taking the first night watch?" he asked Clem, after he had seen the young man at the wheel for a few days longer. Soames had been taking the night watches himself.

"All night, if you like," answered Clem.

Soames glanced at his barometer; it was set fair.

"Got yer side lights out?" he asked grimly.

Clem had forgotten the side lights in his baking of a one-arm-restaurant bread pudding.

"Yer can't afford to forget nothing at sea. A sailor can't stop to remember. He has to l'arn to do things without thinking. The sea don't give yer time to think sometimes."

Satisfied with this reproof, the older man turned in, after he had seen Clem set the side lights.

Clem took the wheel. The responsibility of guiding that creaking, wallowing old hull through the dark by a mere mark on her compass card and at the same time feeling for every shift of the

wind on his cheek and watching for lights of steamers that are supposed to give windjammers the right of way, but sometimes fatally do not, began to work its charm on Clem. The schooner was running on a beam wind; Clem began to play with her. He ran her off and on the wind, watching her mastheads wander among the stars; he felt the difference in her heeling. He enjoyed her response as if she were something alive he was bridling; he heard the wind in her cordage change its note and the difference in the drumming of her reef points on the canvas. Turning that wheel was like tuning in his radio.

"What in heck are you doing?" barked Soames from his bunk inside the cabin. "Keep to yer course."

"Aye, aye, sir," answered Clem, involuntarily falling into the old formula.

There was no telltale compass in that cabin. How did the old man know so quickly what he had been doing? Clem from now on kept her rigidly to her course, out of a growing respect for windjammer sailors.

But two men as self-opinionated as Soames and Clem could not share the narrow quarters of the schooner for long without clashing. The *Mabel* would not let them. The old vessel, while quite seaworthy, needed little attentions constantly. The cargo, swelled by the water, was apt to come loose by bursting the lashings; every flutter of her canvas and every whine of her blocks suggested something to be done, a new seizing to be wound, a worn sheet to be replaced. Soames told how he had shortened her boom and cut down her mainsail years ago; he then looked years ahead when he would have to supply her with a new foremast.

A fisherman passed them, with a tuft of smoke under her stern, showing she had power to help out her sails. Clem began suggesting a forty-horse-power kicker for the *Mabel* to render her partially independent of canvas. He expatiated on the inefficiency of mere wind. He had facts to show that even forty-horse-power kickers were out of date, that most of the Gloucester men were installing hundred-horse-power engines, that in five years not a yard of canvas would be seen on the seas.

Soames scorned power; engines were always getting out of order, he said; so did sails, but you could carry extra sails. You could sail a boat with a blanket tied to an oar, but in a power boat you were lost, if you ran out of oil, or your magneto would not spark. He had seen too many power boats towed in by the coast guards to believe in them.

"Maybe you'll see some power you've never heard of," he said, after a look at the barometer. "It's going to breeze up. We'd better reef."

CLEM proved he had plenty of that power Soames liked, when it came to lowering and hauling halyards. He also showed he could tie reef points without making grannies.

A heavy westerly struck them that afternoon; big, bulging rain clouds darkened the sky; the seas changed from the first angry whitecaps to the long, foam-streaked rollers of steady bad weather. Not a sail was in sight; the many fishermen they had been accustomed to sight must have scurried to harbor.

"They all carry radio now," explained Clem. "They get the storm warnings long before your barometer knows anything. You ought to have a radio."

"The *Mabel* don't have to make harbors every time it breezes. If it gets bad, we lay to and ride it out."

Toward dusk a steamer passed them, laboring heavily from her light draft, a coal carrier returning North with empty holds. She showed her red paint all the way to her bottom, as she rolled.

"She don't have to lay to," remarked Clem.

Soames did not answer. He was watching the blades of that steamer's propeller, as she raced them out of the seas. He turned to his *Mabel*, close-reefed and taking the weather as a matter of course. She rolled, too, but was ballasted by her cargo; her bluff, buffeting bows took the seats comfortably; she shipped very little water. Soames suddenly missed the spurt of foam at the stern of the steamer.

"Something's wrong with her," he announced. "Her kicker ain't going;

mebbe she'll ride it out, mebbe she won't. That's power for yer. Bust a pipe, and yer gone. Let's take in everything but the jib, lash the wheel, and see how we ride out weather."

Night came on. The *Mabel* was all snug and tight, her lights lit, a small triangle of a jib holding her head against her lashed wheel. Soames said she needed no regular night watch; the old schooner could be trusted; she and they could sleep out the gale.

Before turning in, Clem climbed the main rigging to see if he could make out that disabled steamer. He saw her lights, unsteady alternations of red and green showing that she was holding to no course. She had no steering way; she was a mere mass of drifting iron, helpless in the power of the wind, the sea, the tide, and the currents. The lights disappeared—either from the thickening of the weather or because she had got under way. Black night had settled on the sea, a night of roaring winds, heaving seas, and thick drives of rain.

He did not share Soames' pessimism about the steamer. Such vessels carry competent engineers who will not be beaten by merely material obstacles, men raised in the faith of a tech that the world, with its seas and its winds, is a power plant to be controlled, not cringed to.

He came into the cabin intending to announce that the steamer was under way. But the sight of Soames, playing solitaire with greasy cards that slipped out of place, as the schooner pitched, silenced him. That cabin was warm, dry and homelike. It rolled, but with the steady regular rhythm which one's joints could forestall; Soames in his chair and the lamp in the gimballs kept time to the same regular beat. Something was to be said in favor of windjammers.

"No need to keep a watch, I told yer," said Soames. "Git out the checkers."

The two men sat at the game, but this time it was Soames who started controversy.

"Seen that hooker founder yet, Clem?" he said, as he set his men, furnished with pegs, so as to stay on the board.

"Why should she founder?" asked Clem belligerently.

"Why?" grinned Soames. "Can't yer feel the sea outside? It's a million times wuss than that."

He pointed to the little waves of oil splashing in the glass bowl of the lamp.

"Yer seed her roll, didn't yer? She's jerking her masts out and opening her plates. She's an old rusty hooker, manned by young kids from navigation schools and old officers what can't get deep-water jobs. Monkey-wrench sailors who can only pick rust and stand by donkey engines. Bet yer she's sprung more leaks than a sieve."

SOAMES absolutely ballooned, with pride in himself and his ship. He sat back in that rolling cabin, with all the ease of a farmer before a log fire, and he played his usually keen game, sweeping the board of Clem's pieces.

"And look at us," he continued. "All tight and dry, warm and snug. What did I tell yer about packing cargo? Yer don't hear my logs slipping, do yer? Nothing loose from truck to keel. I'll bet yer that old hooker rattles 'tween decks like the village dump, when the wind lifts the cans. That loses yer the game. Ain't playing as well as yer did on deck yesterday."

Soames' blue eyes, hard as agates, glinted at Clem.

"Well, I was thinking of that steamer."

"You kids always has an alibi. Set 'em up again and leave her be. She ain't your think just now. Difference between you and me is, I always play best when the weather is bad."

Soames chuckled deeply. The second game started in silence; Soames would not let Clem keep his mind upon it, but kept harping on the superior advantages of their being on the *Mabel*.

"Bet yer there ain't no playing checkers on her. She ain't so many miles off a lee shore. Liable to be on the shoals before morning."

"By this time her wireless is bringing her cutters or something. Every vessel for five hundred miles knows what's happened to her."

"Don't that wireless break down some-

times?" retorted Soames. "What'll she do then? Sink—or go ashore."

"Can't we go ashore, too?" answered Clem.

"Been ashore lots of times," said Soames, with light scorn. "Don't hurt a vessel like this to go ashore. My game again."

Again Soames took the last of Clem's men.

"I tell yer windjammers is best. You got a comfortable night's lodging here, and the coffee's b'iling on the stove. I bet yer her galley fires is out."

"But if you'd had a kicker, you wouldn't have had to lay to; you could have made port——"

"If I had an engine in my hold," interrupted Soames, "I'd be scared every time we leaked. No, sir; don't forget you're on an all-wood vessel that can't sink, and so we can get a good night's rest. No couple of tons of iron to drag us to the bottom. Bet yer that hooker's old man ain't pounding his piller."

Once in his bunk, Soames turned his face toward the cabin lining. His vessel's timbers carried to his ears the bubbling plunges of the hull, dropping in the hollows and staggering up the seas, but Soames slept immediately, knowing his timbers were sound, his calking good, and that he could not sink.

But Clem could not sleep. The voices of the wind, the sea, and the creaking ship were transmuted by his imagination; a crack from a bulkhead was a ship splitting asunder; the tinkle of pots on their nails was the ripping of plates from bursting steamers; the wind in the stays became the shrill shrieks of drowning crews, and the jolt of the rudder on its pins sounded like a rock piercing her bottom. He was not in the least afraid, but he could not attain the complacent confidence of Soames. He had to get up.

He slipped into his oilers to face the reality of what was so disturbing in those half dreams and stepped out of the cabin door rather carelessly. A drive of spray with drops like bullets, a gust that with ripping fingers tore open his oilers and blew back his sou'wester, till the string caught his throat, drove him stumbling against the stern rail. For one terrific moment he hung on, as the sinking deck seemed to be trying to spill him. His balance was gone; he was depending on an awkward back-handed grip; a swift drowning was awaiting him when the imperturbable schooner dipped her head, lifted her stern, and jerked him inboard.

HE staggered to the wheel and clung with both hands, and shaking, not so much from fear as from awe. In one brief flash he had seen himself as a pitiful little braggart, tripped by his confidence in his youth and his brains, hanging shudderingly over the open jaws of the sea. He had been saved, not by those brains, not by the strength of his youth, but by a mere lucky plunge of the old despised windjammer. He went into the cabin, making more noise than he intended. Soames turned over in his bunk.

"What's the matter?" asked the old man.

"Nothing," said Clem, trying to untie the knot in the tape of his sou'wester.

Soames eyed him keenly.

"I've seen men hanged by a bight from the sheet when the sail filled sudden," he remarked, seeing Clem draw the tape away from his thorax. "Kinder nervous, ain't yer? Nervousness loses more ships than ignorance. What happened to yer?"

"Well, I slipped."

"Didn't I tell yer never trust yer feet, but yer hands?"

Soames, lying back on his bunk pillow, was maliciously probing Clem.

"All right! I nearly went over the side, if you want to know."

"I knew you was that kind," crowed Soames triumphantly. "You're a nervous sea lawyer with no grit. I told yer the vessel was all right, but you knows better. One breeze-up, and yer shot to pieces. How would you last in six weeks round the Horn? Lemme tell yer, gitting married's wuss than twenty Horns. You won't be able to hold onto any gal, let alone my darter. She'll find yer out same as I have. How can a man stick to a gal when he can't stick to his ship and her captain? Wait till I tell her. I don't want yer; the old *Mabel*

don't want yer, and Abbie Soames won't want yer nuther."

The old man had half emerged from his bunk; he was pointing his finger at Clem, as if he were uncovering a criminal. Clem listened, amazed.

"You seem sorry I didn't go over," he said. "You'd like me to founder, as you'd like that ship to founder. I believe that's why you shipped me."

"I shipped yer," screamed the old man, "to try yer out—to save Abbie the trouble. She's a Soames from keel to headpiece, proud of me and her folks, sailors from way back. Look at our gravestones. Her uncle drowned at sea. Her grandfather lost in the arctic. There's a bay in Greenland called after *us*. D'ye think she'll sign on with you? No, sir. You're N. G.—not seaworthy. Lloyds will insure anything, but you couldn't get any money on your marriage. You're only fit for books and quill driving and shooting off your jaw. Windjammers? It's you young fellers is windjammers, with no braces in yer canvas, no cargo in yer hold, and no course to steer by. Hell! You ain't men."

Clem let the old man run on till he was out of breath and then sat quietly opposite him in his own bunk.

"Listen, Captain Soames," he said. "When I nearly went over the side just now, I saw my whole life—everything I'd done."

"Yer ain't done nothing. When I was young no man could git a gal like my Abbie till he had ironed his fust whale."

"But I saw more," cried Clem, angered at the old man's interruption. "I saw all I was going to be. I saw myself married to Abbie. I saw our kids, and not one of them sailors of your kind. If they'll care about the sea, they'll be sailors that *know how to beat it*. Sea engineers, on liners that don't roll, and are floating hotels—ships that don't care a hoot for your storms—ships that fly over them or dive underneath them. Yes, old man, you and your old-time ways will be only in museums, along with the skeletons of your old whales. Do you think Abbie will want her kids kicking round in old cabins? They'll do more to get their names remembered than being drowned at sea. You don't know what chances kids have to-day. Wait till I tell Abbie. I haven't talked to her yet. You've shown me where I stand now. She'll be glad to sign on with me and sail out of Hard-up Harbor for Port Tomorrow. She will, old man, for when I nearly went over just now I heard her calling to me. 'Don't be scared,' she said. 'Look ahead and hold on! It's you and me and the kids and the sea and everything running as we want it; our kids will be sea engineers, men of the tech, running the world from a switchboard.'"

That queer mixture of love of women and that no lesser love of science poured from the lips of the young man, with all the ardor of prophecy. Soames was silenced by this storm of words.

"You can turn back into your bunk," continued Clem. "And that's what I'm going to do. We've both had our say."

Clem tore off his oilers, rolled over in the bunk, and slept. Soames watched him for a moment and then turned over also. The *Mabel* cradled them both.

CLEM was up before dawn, preparing breakfast. A peep through the cabin door revealed the rails dipping heavily, long slants of rain against the graying east and the lashed tiller still on duty.

He had made up his mind to argue no more with Soames. Soames had trapped him into the voyage to ridicule him, to prove him a weakling to Abbie. Clem now realized that his first independent defiance had been best. He did not want Soames to stake him. He would tell Abbie his vision of their future. His love in that instant of dallying with death had been sublimated; it had grown from a boy's to a man's; it would win her now.

After the breakfast was prepared, he went on deck and climbed the weather rigging. Then breakfast, schooner, even Abbie, were forgotten in the sight of the steamer, drifting on her sea anchors, signaling to another steamer farther west, with a haul of flags at her masthead. Clem knew enough to read under her ensign and code pennant the distress flags of international code. The other steamer displayed no flags, not even an answer-

ing pennant. She was passing south, heading for a blot of rain that would soon curtain her. She was either neglecting the signals or could not see them for intervening rain.

Clem tumbled off that rigging into the cabin and began pulling out what tattered old flags he could find in the *Mabel's* locker. He was soon back on deck, bending an ensign upside down to the halyards, when Soames bellowed from the cabin door.

"Hey, we don't need that. We're only low in the water 'cause our cargo's wet. Didn't I tell yer we can't sink?"

For the first time Clem noticed that the *Mabel's* decks were low; those piles of soaked logs had become many extra tons of depressing cargo.

"It's not for us," he answered. "It's for that steamer. She's calling that fruiter."

Clem ran up his distress signal. The fruiter might see it, come to their aid, and then be made aware of the steamer. So Clem curtly and contemptuously explained. Soames apparently had thought Clem was afraid the *Mabel* was going under. It was useless telling the old man he had not noticed she was nearly waterlogged.

Soames gave one look at the steamer, at the weather, at his own vessel, and then went into the cabin for breakfast. Clem followed him; the sight of the old man contentedly chewing his bacon further disgusted Clem. He was quite prepared to believe Soames would like the steamer to sink.

Evidently the steamer's wireless had broken down, thought Clem, or she would not have been driven to signaling by flags in that thick weather.

"If she can't get help, we'll have to do something," he said at last, unable to contain himself.

"What kin we do?" growled Soames.

"We can take her crew off, at least."

"Kin we? She's dead to windward. Take a day's tacking to reach her, and we can't catch that other steamer for her, kin we?"

Clem choked; the water-logged *Mabel* could not sail into the wind; she would be mere driftwood till she was pumped; he foresaw himself standing by and watching that staggering, helpless steamer founder, unable to lift a hand to help her. Clem rose impatiently to go on deck.

"Yer needn't be scared," grinned Soames. "Even if the cabin gets flooded we——"

Clem flung out of the cabin. He was only scared that he would have to knock some elementary humanity into that tough old windjammer.

HE again went up the rigging; the fruiter's funnels were half down below the horizon. There was now other smoke to the north, black belchings probably from some big liner. His binoculars caught something that tossed on the clear edges of the broken waves, something like a huge lobster pot; it was the tip of the basket mast of a battleship, whose hull was out of sight. He could also make out her long cage antennas. A steamer was sinking just a few miles over the sea's curvature, and her helpless little antenna was carrying no cry for help to those of the battleship.

He turned his glasses on the steamer. She, like the *Mabel,* was lower in the water; the ruins of a staging hung from her stern; apparently an attempt had been made to repair her propeller. Her bows went under at a tug from her sea anchors, and, as her stern lifted, Clem saw she had no propeller now. She was a doomed vessel unless that string of wire between her masts could talk. He then picked out a huddle of black spots amidships. They were lowering the boats.

"They've taken to the boats. Captain Soames, we've got to pick them up," cried Clem, coming aft to where Soames was calmly watching the steamer and enjoying his after-breakfast pipe.

"We can't carry all their crew," said Soames slowly." "We're loaded fur down as we kin."

"Captain Soames, we'll unload. You're skipper and all that, but you've got to chuck your deck cargo overboard and lighten the *Mabel* to take on those men. I'll do it for you, and if you try to stop me, by God, I'll unload you!"

The callous indifference of Soames

drove the young man frantic. Soames lolled against the cabin door, as impassive as its timbers. He paid as little attention to Clem's clenched fists as he did to the plight of that steamer.

"Young man," he said, "you've got the makings of a good first mate in yer, but remember I'm master. I want some more coffee."

He then went into the cabin, while Clem went forward and began hacking away the lashings of the bundles of laths on the foredeck. As he tossed them overboard, he reckoned three of them would not equal the weight of a man; not till he reached the heavier lumber below would the *Mabel* be perceptibly lightened.

"Hello, for'ard there!" yelled Soames from the hatch. "Keep tally of what you jettison. I'm going to charge yer for it, Mr. Hastings."

Soames disappeared, and Clem leaned a stay. That old fox had him beaten. Clem could not unload the *Mabel's* deck cargo speedily enough by himself, and he could not drive the old man; a younger man he could pummel into service, but this indifferent old hard-shell mossback was beyond his fists. He set to work again, desperately hoisting over laths, piles of firewood, and long, dressed logs, till the sea was littered with them; but still the *Mabel* was not perceptibly lighter in the water; she was probably leaking heavily. He was shut in by a drive of thick rain and would no longer see the steamer.

"Schooner ahoy!"

He looked up and through the thick gray mist of rain and spindrift saw a boat coming alongside. The boat was not packed with a shipwrecked crew, but carried only its complement of rowers and an officer in the stern.

"Our captain wants to know if you'll take a chance with us," cried the officer, a burly, elderly man. "We're in bad shape, but if we get our wireless going we can pick up a tow."

Soames came out of the cabin, chuckling hoarsely.

"Hello, Ben Travers!" he shouted. "Time that old *Elaine* of yours did go to the bottom. Sarve yer right fer quitting sails fer steam. We're all right. We histed that flag fer you. How about us towing you in? I'll do it fer fifty per cent of yer hull."

"You go and feed the eels, Jerry Soames," shouted back the officer, not ill temperedly.

Clem listened amazed, utterly confounded by those two old windjammers joshing each other in the slavering jaws of the sea. The steamer had sent the boat to save them.

THE first mate of the *Elaine* went on explaining their troubles. The lights had gone wrong; something had happened to the dynamo; she was leaking badly, and their propeller had broken away.

"Electrolytic action between the blades and her hull, the engineer says, though I don't know nothing about that. Only electric shark we've got is our second, and he can't fix the wireless."

"Electricity!" sneered Soames. "You take my mate aboard. He's a shark from the tech, whatever the hell that is. Hop aboard, Clem! And, Ben, you leave me one of your men to get under way. You're drifting faster'n us, and I was figgering on your coming closer, so I could bear down on yer and take off yer crew."

Clem got into the boat, replacing the bow oar who climbed on the schooner. In those few clipped words Soames had completely humiliated Clem. Soames, with his superior knowledge, had seen the quickest way to reach the steamer's side was to take advantage of her drift. Soames' callousness had been assumed to let the younger man make an utter fool of himself. Soames now was further calling upon him to make good as a sea engineer by repairing that vessel's wireless.

Clem tugged at that bow oar, facing the red-faced old windjammer mate and getting glimpses of the *Mabel* astern, hoisting a double-reefed mainsail. In a few moments the boat bumped the heaving plates of the *Elaine*. Clem climbed up the ladder before the boat was hauled in, preceded by a shout from the mate, introducing him as a wireless man, to the master who was another old-timer.

"You see, we don't carry a regular operator," said the master. "The second qualified by a course last summer to save expenses, but the dynamo's out of commission."

"Can't you get a flash from your storage batteries? A spark'll carry two hundred miles."

"Hell, man! Don't I tell yer we ain't got no lights? My damned engineer blew out the fuses, and there's a short circuit or something. Been running on oil lights all night. If you can do anything, go down to the engine room."

Clem followed the mate down to the engine room, where the second mate was unwinding the coils in the armatures of the dynamo that drove the generator for the wireless. He had just found the break in the wire, a parting in the copper. It was a small break, but too big for a spark to bridge, and it had severed the communication nerves of the steamer and left her a dark, dead, dumb thing on the waters.

"We've tried everything," said the second. "Blinker signals with kerosene lamps. Batteries N. G. Not an amp' in them. Couldn't get our owners to spend money on new batteries. The chief, here, has been fighting 'em for a year over that propeller."

The fat, gray-headed engineer, who had overlooked them for a moment, nodded.

"Boilers, too," he murmured, as he returned to his gauges. "And the engine room shoulders the blame."

Resplicing that wire was easy; recoiling it was a long, slow, and difficult job. Clem helped, heedless of the comments of the oilers and the engineers on that ill-found tank, which was sinking under them. He did not notice the increasing sluggishness of her roll, her dangerously increasing dip to stern. He did not hear the chug of the choking pumps, the spit of steam, the slowing up of the stokers' shovels, as they prepared for the word to abandon the ship. He was lost in his work, trying to add his knowledge to that of the hastily trained second's; he thought only of getting a wire to turn properly in a field of force; he was a sailor of the future, navigating that mysterious ocean of power which lies between the poles of an electro magnet.

The engine room was flooded with steam from a rust-rotted pipe; the black gang had gone on deck; the chief himself, the last man to leave the engine room, had to drag Clem from his labors.

"Where's Clem? Where's that boy?" shouted Soames in alarm.

THE *Mabel* was very deep in the water, with the crew of the *Elaine* clinging to her like flies. The schooner had been shoved off, and her sails were drawing, when Soames missed Clem. While the word was being passed fore and aft among the confusion of that crowded deck, the schooner drew away farther. Clem could not be found. Even the second mate could not explain how he had missed him; the chief engineer had dragged Clem on deck and knew no more; a bilious-looking, grimy stoker gave his opinion, looking at the sea.

"He couldn't," denied Soames. "He didn't fall overboard. That boy has too much brains. You left him behind. I'm going back for him. Haul in that sheet and bring her head round."

The first mate of the *Elaine* had taken the helm, while Soames had gone forward to find Clem; he hesitated about heading for the steamer's; the *Elaine's* condition did not invite a further boarding; her stern was almost awash; her forefoot was out of the water; volumes of steam poured from her companions and ventilators; she was preparing for her last plunge. Soames caught at the wheel and brought the *Mabel's* head round, while bawling his utmost at the men he had rescued.

"Yer couldn't keep an eye on him—just a green kid, but a better man than any of yer. He stood up ter me better than a fo'c's'le full of hard-tack sailormen. He jettisoned my cargo cause he thought I was lettin' yer sink. My old shipmate's son!—my son-in-law, the father of my grandkiddies, left by you putty-faced, coal-shoveling, donkey-engine drivers——"

A strange thumping noise came over the water, audible over Soames' raucous abuse. It sounded like the firing of guns;

perhaps those battleships, smearing the horizon with their smoke, were at rough-weather gun practice. But, as the *Mabel* edged more closely to the steamer, it was plain that that heavy thunder came from her. The engineer surmised that more pipes were bursting, a broken crank pin, more disintegration of her junk-pile engines.

The mate at the wheel had nervously paid off, and the schooner edged past the stern of the steamer. They sighted a figure on the port bow, swinging something with large vigorous gestures, timed to the beating that came from her hull. It was Clem, desperately pounding on her plates with a large hammer.

"Crazy! Must 'a' got hit in the head. Burned with the steam, rolled against a fire box. Seen 'em go like that," declared the mate, puzzled at Clem's behavior.

"Jump, lad, jump!" shouted Soames, who grabbed the wheel and brought the *Mabel* round again to pick up Clem.

But the *Mabel* took her own time; she could not be hurried; Soames was now swearing at his own vessel for her slowness in approaching that mysteriously hammering figure pounding the plates of the *Elaine,* as if to knock further and unnecessary holes in her.

"You can't go any nearer, Jerry! She'll suck us under," expostulated the mate, trying to take the wheel from Soames. Soames, mortised on his own deck by his obstinate sea boots, gripped his wheel with fingers harder than monkey wrenches and could not be budged.

"Don't care if she does," he said. "And if she does, this yere vessel will come up again."

The *Mabel* was not within a cable length of the steamer before the long, rust-stained hull began to shudder. Strange rumblings came from her interior; the waters reached her fires; more steam and smoke were erupted from her; the bows veered and swayed, as if in appeal. That hammering man stood for a second erect on his slant foothold, threw away his hammer, shouted something, and pointed off to the west, as the steamer slid aft and down, with increasing speed. Clem dived, as the water had half engulfed the *Elaine.*

The *Mabel* rolled heavily, dragged as she was into that pool of suction created by the sinking steamer. Her booms swung violently, knocking overboard several unprepared men; green cataracts poured into her cabin; men worn out with the long night watches on the steamer, who had tumbled into the berths, crushed each other frantically, as they escaped by that narrow hatchway from that filling cabin. The *Mabel* was not drawn under, but her decks were now awash; the seas that hit her bows floated loose logs from her deck cargo, left unsecured by Clem, and these began acting as rams against the cabin walls, against the men who had now nothing but the top of the cabin to cling to. The *Mabel* and her derelicts were in a desperate plight.

But Soames paid no attention; he was watching the smooth patch on the waters, bubbling with steam and air, where the steamer had last shown her jack staff, as her bows went under. His face was drawn; his eyes were piercing that water like sinkers; Clem had not come up; Soames knew no diver could fight against that terrible down drag of the waters. The center of the whirlpool filled up; buckets, oars and gratings were cast up, and Clem appeared, clinging to a bundle of laths. Not till Clem had been hauled on board the *Mable* did Soames pay any attention to the men knocked overboard by the booms. Luckily none were lost.

"Sorry I didn't think of it sooner," said Clem, lying on the top of the cabin, where Soames had carried him. The driving logs were knocking it away from under them, crashing through the walls of the cabin, but it was the only place Soames could clear for Clem.

"I couldn't find the hammer sooner," continued Clem, closing his eyes.

Soames bent over him; he had utterly forgotten his *Mabel.* The men of the *Elaine* were doing their best to clear her decks of the logs, to pump her, to get way on her; it was a desperate endeavor to navigate a raft without steering way and flush with the waters. Soames feeling at Clem's heart, trying to reassure himself that Clem was sound in mind and body, was the last to hear a loud bellowing from the sea. At length he looked

up to see a gray navy tug churning close and to hear an officer from its deck talking to him through a megaphone.

"Sorry we didn't get your message sooner. Any hands lost?"

"No. What message?" cried Soames.

"Your S O S. Luckily the battleship caught it on her listeners."

"Anyway, I saved you," murmured Clem, lifting his head from the top of the cabin and falling back again and into the deep sleep he needed.

LATER, when the tug had taken off the crew of the *Elaine*, and the speedy gobs had restowed the *Mabel's* cargo, patched her cabin, and pumped her dry; when the unsinkable old schooner had once more resumed her leisurely trudging of the seas, Clem explained to Soames the workings of the submarine ears of modern battleships.

"I should have thought of it before," he said. "You know you can talk with anything. The flags failed, blinkers failed, wireless failed. I just thought of those ears when I heard those shovels sliding aft in the stokehole. I couldn't get a heavy-enough hammer for a long time. You see, I had to beat out an S O S on the steamer and give her bearing. Had to guess at that. You see, it's this way. Sound goes faster in water than in air. And——"

"I've heerd somethin' of that," admitted Soames. "But you don't think it'd work all the way to home, do yer? I'd like to get a message to Abbie right away. She's got to go and buy her wedding rig, son."

THE MEANING OF MAGIC

IF we can believe the author of "The Golden Bough," magic is as old as man. From the beginning of time man has resorted to superstition in an effort to foretell the future. The modern man laughs at the Indian's attempt to read the future, and he smiles derisively at the arbitrary devices employed by the ancients to learn what would happen next. But the current faith in astrology, cards and the ouija board witness to the perennial superstition latent in the heart of all of us. During the War and in the years immediately following it, many supposedly intelligent people resorted to the ouija board as a means of communicating with the dead as well as of learning the future.

It will come as a surprise to some of our readers to learn that William Fuld, the inventor of this device, recently died at Baltimore, Maryland, in a fall from a roof. Mr. Fuld was superintending the erection of a flagstaff on the roof of his factory, when a strut to which he was clinging gave way. This factory contained the plant which manufactured by the thousands the device which credulous people maintain can put them en rapport with a disembodied intelligence.

That this device should have been invented by a man of the present generation, when education is said to be universal in the United States, and when science is supposed to have cast into the limbo of discredited superstitions the ancient instruments of magic, must make us pause. Perhaps the roots of our incurable desire to know the future and to get into communication with the dead are part of that inner mystery which we call the human soul. Unquestionably no reasonable man can seriously regard these traffickings with the supernatural, but they do witness to the eternal hunger in the heart of man to get into communication with that Great Mystery which is the soul of religion and the spring of all our mystical aspirations. These mystical aspirations are noble aspirations, and they are the only passionate hungers which lift us above mere animal desires and really make us, each in his own measure, "a son of God!"

Reekmylane

By Edward Albert

Author of "The Hillahoo," Etc.

Outwardly beautiful on a highland that overlooked half of Scotland, there was nevertheless something creepy about the house bought by the Armstrongs. Every former owner had suffered there. Perhaps it was a curse, an evil history. Whatever it was, it reappeared with an awful inevitability.

JO tilted her chin to look upward, for the house stood upon a heathy knoll above the road, as if on a pedestal. It was one of your quaintly crazy modern bungalows, red roofed, many windowed, with one high sequestered gable, from which grew a chimney stack. It looked wonderfully attractive, standing so high and lonely, as the western sun coppered its western windows, and yet Jo unaccountably and unreasonably felt a chill of distaste. She had Highland ancestors, you know, and they—according to Jo—had the "second sight."

"What's it called?" she asked, turning to her husband.

Before he answered, Harry drew the car into the side of the road, which was steep and straight, and jammed the handbrake on hard. Then he began searching in his pocket for cigarettes.

"Reekmylane," he replied. "Got a match, Jo?"

She continued to stare, as she searched mechanically in the side pocket of the car.

"What a funny name," she said at last, handing over the matches.

"Scotch, of course. Thanks, old girl. It means 'Smoke Alone.' Rather romantic, what? Thanks; put them back where I'll find them again. What d'you think of it, Jo?"

She really didn't know what to answer. She ought to be pleased, and yet——

"It's—it's—*cheap*," she concluded, with a snap of finality.

Harry's face fell a little. He had no Highland ancestors, and he had been priding himself upon the splendor of his bargain. He put it down to jealousy on her part.

"By gum it is darned cheap," he said. "What d'you think of it, Bill?"

Their son Bill replied with all the seriousness of the eight year old.

"Jolly good, dad. By gum it is!"

The spasm of filial mimicry, though unintentional, was so ludicrously accurate that both parents laughed.

"I wish you wouldn't teach him your silly phrases," said Jo, recovering her gravity. "But can't we get into the house?"

"Of course, old girl. Bill, old son, run up and open the gate."

The track to the house, steep and grassy and cobbled, left the main road for a few yards, then took a sharp right-angled bend to enter the gate. The approach was not very difficult, and yet, Harry's front mud guard fouled the gatepost, crumpled up with a booming crash, and tore a huge sliver out of the post itself. The shock threw the driver right upon his wheel; a long crystalline crack shot across the windshield, and Bill disappeared, head first, into the nettles that choked the ditch at the side of the road.

In a twinkling Jo was out of the car and had salvaged her offspring, who emerged blistered and excoriated.

"Steady, old son!" she whispered, wiping his face and hugging him. "Don't cry!"

Bill, noble fellow, gulped down his tears, while his mother salved his wounds. Then she directed her wrath upon her husband, who by this time had recovered his breath.

"Oh, Harry," she cried, "what came over you?"

"I never did that before," cried Harry, excited into a state of volubility, very unusual for him. "Dash it all, Jo, did you ever see me hit a gatepost before? There must be something darned well wrong with this house to make me bump into the gatepost."

OH, Mrs. Craigie," cried Jo, "you've spilled the salt."

Mrs. Craigie, who had been clearing the tea table, took up a pinch and went through the prescribed ritual to avert the evil eye.

"I'm no' that superstitious," she explained, "but I dinna like tae gie thae things a chance."

The first sight of Mrs. Craigie, a domestic help recruited from the nearest cottage, conveyed a sense of universal tightness. She suggested the biblical parallel of new wine in old bottles. Her clothes were tight—at the waist, the neck, and wrists; her shoes were tight; her stockings were tight; her gloves—when she wore them—were tight; the skin that inclosed her jolly, rotund body was tight to bursting—at least, so it appeared from her apple-red cheeks and bulging eyes.

"I dinna like, neither," continued Mrs. Craigie darkly, "to gie this hoose a chance, neither."

"What's wrong with it?" asked Jo sharply. "It's a new house."

"Aye, it's new." Mrs. Craigie's face had grown very red, as it always did when she was hard worked or excited. "But div ye ken, Mrs. Armstrong, what happened to him that built it? He was a funny auld lawyer from Edinburgh, ye ken. He was called Davy Spiers. He spent a' his money on his hoose, ye ken."

Harry, who did not like the look on Jo's face, interrupted the garrulous Mrs. Craigie.

"Well, what happened to him?"

Mrs. Craigie turned so red in the face that she appeared to be actually at bursting point. Her eyes bulged, as she wagged her head.

"Naebody kens what happened to him," she replied.

"What d'you mean?" asked Harry angrily.

"He just disappeared, ye ken. After a lang time the lawyers just said he was deid. And the hoose was sold to a lady and gentleman from Peru."

At this point Mrs. Craigie, who had suspended her work of clearing away, the better to impart her information, resumed her task with ominous assiduity.

"What happened to them?" asked Harry, fascinated in his turn.

"The lady died within the year."

"Cheerful," said Harry. "Any more good news?"

"Weel, the hoose was sold to a weedy lady that had three bairns."

"I think we'll——" began Jo, quivering.

"We may as well hear it all, Jo," said Harry, affecting a cheerful indifference. "Come on, Mrs. Craigie, you've been good to us. Say on."

"Weel, a' I can say is that ane o' thae bairns died within the year and that——"

"Come on, Bill," said his mother hastily. "Bedtime."

AND yet, as Harry stood smoking his cigarette in the porch of Reekmylane, everything he saw ought to have uplifted his heart in thankfulness.

By profession he was a civil engineer; by necessity he worked in India. During five years of toil he dreamed of his one year of assuagement. When the Indian sun was like a scimitar, when the air appeared incandescent, when the earth was mealy with drought, and all green things were blasted into barrenness, he thought of these cool greens and sober browns, of that thrush vocal upon its spray, of this green turf, God's masterpiece. How he had sickened for them all!

Harry was dark and tall and lank. His head was small and shapely, poised upon a long neck. The muscles of his cheek and neck had that stringiness that tropical heat and malarial fever bring. A taciturn fellow, he had a habit of looking absently into the farthest distance, as if something he hardly expected might all at once surge above the horizon. You might have known that he came from India, because he never called his lunch tiffin, nor used the words sahib and *wallah* and suchlike, nor smoked cheroots, nor gobbled curry, nor did any other of the curious things that Anglo-Indians do in storybooks.

He and his wife, who was a small, blond, vivacious woman, whom India had bleached into bony whiteness, had come to the district in order to put their son Billy into one of the great schools that abound near Edinburgh. Moreover, Billy had been a martyr to dysentery—another Indian legacy—and medical attention in Edinburgh is both expert and various.

And now Harry stood looking in his absent fashion over the vast prospect before him. The house stood upon an outspur of the Pentland Hills. The rich shire of Midlothian, immemorial in its cultivated fertility, fell from the very front door in easy gradation to the Firth of Forth, eight miles away. From his front door he could overlook leagues and leagues of ancient Scotland, from the Bass Rock to the Grampian Mountains; the Kingdom of Fife, the islands of the Forth, the tiny multiplied roofs of Edinburgh itself, the Castle, Arthur Seat, and numberless hills and golf courses old in story.

A queer, unhappy restlessness brooded over him. He turned and threaded the little pine wood that sheltered the house from the southwesterly winds; and, going beyond it, he found himself at the very limit of the habitable world. A great moorland, starred with broom and rough with heather, rose to a pair of twin crags that gloomily darkened the southern horizon.

He followed a moorland track over the deep turf and came out upon the edge of a quarry. Standing on the scarp, he cast a professional eye over it.

"They've struck water," he said to himself. "That's finished it."

A great pool of water, immeasurably profound, patched a portion of the quarry floor. Some derelict machinery, rusty and weatherworn, emphasized the deserted nature of the place. Even under the pleasant evening light it appeared a dreary and ill-omened spot.

Above the quarry the track bifurcated, and he took the right-hand branch. For about half a mile it led, with many a link, across the moorland, till it dipped into a hollow. There he found a curious little building, disused and half ruinous. A small rowan tree grew out of its rump, where the strong roots had clawed down the major parts of the stonework. There were no windows in the house, but the massive door appeared to be in good condition. The walls, too, were of great thickness.

For a moment Harry was nonplused; then his professional training came to his aid.

"The powder house," he said, "for the disused quarry."

A low moan almost made him jump.

"Curse it!" he said. "What a fool I am."

The noise was made by a ferocious-looking Highland steer, which pushed its shaggy head and enormous branching horns round the ruinous end of the powder house. Several more joined him, and they came lumbering forward toward Harry, swinging their heads and breathing heavily.

They might have had no serious intentions. They may have been merely curious or even friendly. Harry, unused to such terrific creatures, thought he had better not give them a chance, and, retreating the way he came, he sought the other side of the moorland track. Then, keeping well to the left and skirting the moorland, he came out upon the highway and Mrs. Craigie's cottage. This bore the sign of "County Roadman."

It was a healthy, jolly, dirty place. Unwashed children squabbled in the dust around it. Fowls scratched among porridge—pans and vegetable refuse littered its neighborhood.

He would have stolen past, but Mrs. Craigie, ever on the alert for news, hailed him from the doorway.

"Are ye gaun alang the road, Mr. Armstrong? Look in the wee wood and ye'll see 'Auld Bob.'"

"Who's Auld Bob?" asked Armstrong, resigning himself to the situation.

"Auld Bob Veitch, ye ken. He's just oot o' the jile."

"Oh! What for?"

"D'ye no' ken what for?"

"I'm just home from India, you know."

"Of course ye are. I clean forgot. Weel," she settled down to detail the story, while Armstrong, divided between amusement and impatience, lingered to hear. "Weel, he stole twa great big bags of pound notes."

"Lucky man!" commented Armstrong. "They never came my way, or I'd steal them myself. How did it happen?"

"It was from a post office van, ye ken, an auto car, that runs atween Edinburgh and Glesca, taking money for the old-age pensions. It was sae fu' o' money bags ae nicht that the sneck o' the back door fair burst, and oot tummeled twa secks, and on went the van, and the driver never knew o't." She paused partly for breath and partly to admonish some of her offspring. "Weel, alang comes Bob Veitch in his wee powny cairt. Bob was an auld tinker body, selling brushes and things. And he up wi' the bags and aff wi' them."

"And he was found out?"

"My, wasn't he, though! Though it was as dark as pitch and a winter nicht. The quarry hole was frozen then, I mind fine. But the polis soon found him out. The tinkers was the first folk they sought oot. But you allow Auld Bob. They found only ane o' the bags."

"They never found the other?"

"Never. And they gied him seven year 'cos he wadna tell what cam' ower the other. And auld Davy Spiers, wha built the very hoose you're in, he was to be the lawyer for Bob. But d'ye ken this? Auld Davy Spiers disappeared aff the face o' the earth afore the case cam' off. And Auld Bob got seven year. Ye'll be gaun on? Stop to speak wi' Auld Bob——"

IN a little wood, hard by the roadside, among green bracken and overshadowed by baby-birch trees, Harry found Old Bob.

Bob, though newly released, had obviously reëstablished himself. A little pony cart was snuggled down beside a wood fire. A pony grazed at leisure.

Harry, naturally shy with strangers, was on this occasion moved by internal promptings.

"A fine evening," said he.

"A fine evening indade, sorr."

Irish, every inch of him—the broad, humorous mouth, the clear, gray eye, the short upper lip, the very accent, even. Bob's expression was bland, and he smiled as benignantly as a bishop.

Harry hesitated, uncertain what to say further. Then a curious erection, half buried in the undergrowth, caught his eye.

"What's that?" he asked.

Bob beamed benignantly.

"Faith, sorr, it's a boat."

"A boat! Here in the hills!"

"But it's a funny boat, you'll be admitting surely. Have a look at it."

Six strides took Harry to the spot where it lay half concealed, something like an elephant in ambush. It was a real boat, fitted for four rowers and capable of seating perhaps a dozen people. But the extraordinary thing about it was this: it was ingeniously mounted upon a four-wheeled wagon body, and so could be drawn along the road. The prow was the driver's seat.

"What on earth——" Harry could not take his eyes off this curious amphibian.

"Bought it at a sale, sorr. See her name on her—*The May Queen.* A rale boat she was, sorr, and cheap. Says I to mesilf: 'And I'll mount her upon my old wagon body, and I'll take her round the fairs, and the folk'll be paying their tuppences to row *The May Queen* upon the dry land like——"

Harry left him, still smiling his moony smile.

JO met him at the door. Even before she spoke, the clenching of her brows told him that all was not well.

"Bill's ill," she said.

All his strength seemed suddenly to be flushed out of him. He stood gazing.

"Bad?" he asked faintly.

"Don't know, Harry. Maybe that fall he got when you hit the gate did it. But his dysentery's come back real bad."

Already he was picking up the telephone that lay upon the hall table. Among the telephonic clicks and purs and distant elfin voices, the words of the local operator solidified, large and clear, against his ear.

"Local doctor? Nearest is Doctor Simpson."

"Connect me with him, will you?"

Clicking and buzzing. Then, jarred and discordant, a voice said: "Hello!" And Harry knew it.

"Jesse Simpson! Holy smoke! Jesse Simpson!"

"The same, begad! Who're you, so free with that ridiculous Christian name of mine? . . . Why, it's Harry Armstrong!"

"Listen, Jesse."

A few sentences made the situation clear.

"Right-o, Harry. I'll be with you in no time. I'm four miles from you, but my car's a good goer. Cheerio!"

For the next half hour Jo and Harry alternated their visits to the bedside of the sick and fevered little patient, with brief attendances upon the front porch. There they listened for the pulse beats of Simpson's car, but they listened in vain. The night was darkening now. It was the month of May, and the twilight was long and splendid; over that enormous landscape a hushed glory was settling hazily.

"At last!"

Almost before the telephone had begun its shrilling, Harry had snatched it from its hook. Simpson's voice materialized creakily.

"Funny thing, Harry. My car absolutely won't start. Have been sweating and swearing this half hour. I'll come along on my bike."

"My car's damaged, but I'll come down for you."

"Better not. You don't know the way, and you may miss me."

As he clapped back the receiver, Harry met Jo's eyes, and they were tragical.

"His car refuses to start, Jo."

She nodded, like one whose worst fears were confirmed.

"It's this house, Harry. We ought never to have entered it. I felt it."

"Rot! What's wrong with it?"

She shivered and glanced about.

"I don't know. But there's an awful chilly feeling about it. There are faces in dark corners! Harry, we'll shift Bill the first minute we can and never come back."

"Look here!" said Harry gruffly. "This won't do. Just you pull yourself together, Jo. What on earth *can* be wrong?"

"Who knows what happened to the man who built it? And think of what's happened to *everybody* who's lived in it. And now we're the next! Ah!"

A feeble cry from Bill sent her scudding upstairs.

"Look here," said Harry again, following her, "I'll fetch Mrs. Craigie. You can't manage alone."

She stopped halfway and swung a piteous face round at him.

"Don't leave me, Harry! Don't leave me in this house alone!"

"But I must. I shan't be away for ten minutes. Don't be absolutely potty, Jo."

Jo gave a kind of imploring wail, as she continued to scamper upstairs. She repeated the cry, as the front door clicked behind him.

Jo was desperately busy at Billy's bedside when a noise outside attracted her attention. She listened. The house was full of noises, especially of the sound of the rising wind drumming over the rooftree. Yes, some one was knocking at the front door.

The doctor, doubtless. But why in Heaven's name didn't he ring the front bell? She sped downstairs.

The hall was low and profusely windowed. The front door was in itself a window down almost to the ankles. Jo switched on the light and ran to the door, peering into the night.

It is a scientific fact that if the interior light is more brilliant than the exterior, the outer world is in darkness when viewed from within. In the glass panes of the door, Jo saw only the dark reflection of her own bobbed head.

And then she saw it.

Swimming up out of the darkness, like a fish out of deep waters, was the face of a man—an oldish man, livid and staring, lighted from within by an unearthly glow. It swam up to the door, mouthing at her; and then, still like some dreadful monster of the deep, it vanished.

She did not faint. The thought of her sick son upstairs kept her even from screaming. But she sought a chair in the hall and lay choking.

The doorbell trilled, and she saw the reassuring flicker of a bicycle lamp.

"Jesse Simpson!" she cried.

A much astonished doctor was just in time to flick the door open and catch a fainting woman in his arms.

"SHE'S had a bad scare," said Simpson. "She wouldn't tell me what it was, either. Did she tell you?"

Harry, who had been upstairs to visit Jo, sat down wearily.

"No," he replied, "she said it was just nerves. Have you a cigarette, Jesse?"

For a space the two men smoked in silence. Simpson was a great, broad-shouldered fellow, with red hair and blue eyes and a breezy manner that was worth a fortune to him professionally. Harry and he had been fellow students in Edinburgh. Their postgraduate careers had carried them far apart, but they were united by the memory of those old days when they were two of the finest pack of forwards that Edinburgh University had ever produced.

"Bill's not too bad," said Simpson. "I'll call in a specialist, though, if you like."

"We saw two specialists on Monday, dash them, and they said he'd be all right."

"He's had a bit of a shock, like his mother."

"Jesse," exploded Harry, "it's this damned house."

Simpson stiffened perceptibly in his chair.

"So you know, Harry," he said.

"I know now," grunted Harry. "If I'd known when the house was first suggested to me, I'd never have taken it."

"Take my advice, old man," said Simpson, staring out of the window, "and quit."

"But, Bill?"

"Oh, give him a day or two, and he'll be all right. You'll be able to move him."

"Will he, do you think, in this house?"

Simpson coughed dubiously. "I'm not superstitious," he said, "but I'm not disposed to give this place a chance. I'm never comfortable myself when I'm in it. The rotten old soul of Davy, the lawyer, seems to taint it. There's a feeling, somehow, that his soul can't get peace, and it haunts this house till he gets it. He broke himself building it, and it brought him ill luck. He disappeared and was never seen again."

"Harry," came Jo's voice, making them jump, "what about Mrs. Craigie?"

She stood in the doorway, pale and shivering, but upheld by her indomitable spirit.

"Oh, her!" said Harry. "She's had

her troubles, too. She went home and found two of her family ill. And she says it's this house. She's afraid she won't be here to-morrow morning."

This was the last straw. Jo's lips twitched, and her eyes filled with tears.

"What am I to do?" she cried. "Whom am I to get?"

"I'll send a nurse, if you like," suggested Simpson soothingly.

"But Mrs. Craigie's the only woman who knows how to manage this house!"

"Well, well, wait till the morning. It's late now."

"WE *must* have Mrs. Craigie," said Jo, in a kind of tremulous desperation. "We must!"

Jo and Harry were sitting over their breakfast, which had been cooked by Harry himself. All three had passed a wretched night. In particular, Jo's face was white and drawn, and great purple smears ringed her eyes.

In answer Harry grunted. His nerves were on edge, too. It was long since he had felt so thoroughly dissatisfied with his wife.

"Won't you go and get her, Harry?"

"What can I do? I did my best last night."

"I'll go." Jo rose, trembling. For her part she had never felt so disgusted with her husband.

"Wait till the nurse comes, then."

"I won't. I'm going. Bill's not too bad, and you can attend to him till I come back. You can at least do that."

"All right," he answered sulkily.

"How do I go?"

"Take the track across the moor, past the quarry."

She was gone without another word. Husband and wife had often had their tiffs, as all married couples have; but on this occasion they felt thoroughly at issue.

"Damn this house," said Harry to himself, as he lighted a cigarette. "It'll set me and Jo against each other, next."

He became so grievously engrossed in his domestic duties that he received quite a start when he was hailed through the dining-room window and saw the ambrosial face of Mrs. Craigie, peering in.

"I'd better no' come in," said she. "Twa o' my bairns have caught the measles."

"Did Mrs. Armstrong see you about it?" asked Harry.

"Naw. I just came along to tell her."

"God!" cried Harry, looking at the clock. "She's been away an hour, too."

In an instant he was out of the house and nearly had her by the throat.

"Did you not see Mrs. Armstrong?" he demanded.

"Mercy, what's wrang?" she cried, scared by the angry terror in his eye. "I never seen her."

A sudden nausea distressed him, and the world swam round.

"Guid sakes!" exclaimed Mrs. Craigie. "Are ye no' weel?"

"There's some brandy in the sideboard," he said, collapsing upon a garden seat.

The good-hearted woman was back in a twinkling.

"An' I turned oot the gas in the cooker," she said. "Guid sakes, the kettle was b'iled dry."

After taking the brandy, Harry felt better physically, but the horror within his mind was not allayed.

"She went by the moor road," he said. "Did you not see her?"

"I cam' by the main road."

"You wait and watch Bill," said Harry, starting up. "I'll go and look for her."

"But I've ma' bairns, tae," returned Mrs. Craigie, very flushed and obstinate. Her eyes goggled aggressively at him.

"Curse it!" Harry struck his hands together. "Damn you!" he roared at her. "It was you that told us the stories about this cursed house!"

"It wisna' me that made the hoose!" she retorted, as red as a lobster.

"Sorry," said Harry, suddenly contrite. "But was ever man in such a mess? Ah, thank God!"

It was Simpson, in his revived motor car.

"Where's the nurse?" asked Harry, seeing that the doctor was alone.

"Sorry. She'll not be available till to-morrow. I've a very good woman I'd like you to have, and she's finishing a

job. It won't matter for a day, you know. What the blazes?"

Harry was lying back in the seat, laughing weakly. But there was no mirth in his laughter.

THE police constable, Mr. Henderson, was an importation from the Western Highlands of Scotland. He was large, platitudinous, and benign. He was a sandy-haired and weak-eyed man, but his navy-blue-serge uniform, adorned with its brilliant buttons, might have served as a cure for ophthalmia.

"We have searched all the moor, now," said he, in his careful English, "and we have found no traces of her whatever."

Harry sat dumb. Jo had been missing all day, and no news was as yet available. He, too, had been searching along the roads and moors, and was now at exhaustion point. His sallow face had gone nearly green, save in the hollows, where you might see dabs of purple. He was shivering, for once again his malaria had risen and seized him.

"There will be one thing more," said Mr. Henderson, eying Harry dubiously. "We might search the quarry hole."

Still Harry said nothing. The same thought had been recurring to him all the afternoon, but he had hated it and flung it away.

"The pathway, to be sure," continued the constable, "goes past the quarry, and she may have stepped in."

"Accidentally," cut in Harry, glaring at him.

"To be sure, to be sure," said Mr. Henderson. And, as Harry still continued silent, he went on: "We can get a grape at the new quarry."

"A what?"

"A grapple, sir."

Harry shivered. "We'll need a boat," he said at last. "The pool's a very big one."

"Sure we will, now," said the policeman, nonplused.

"There's that thing of Bob Veitch's," cried Harry, suddenly animated. "That'll do just fine. You know, his boat on the wheels."

"The very thing, to be sure," said Mr. Henderson, quite excited. "And he is still camping in the wood. I am after passing him there."

"Come on," cried Harry, glad of any excuse to be doing something. Exhausted as he was, he scrambled out of his chair. "I forgot," he said, stopping, "there's Bill to be looked after. The village woman who's been here to-day won't stay during to-night. She absolutely refuses. The reputation of this house simply drives them out."

Honk! Honk! said a motor car outside, and in burst Simpson, fresh from his professional round.

"Any news?" he demanded eagerly. Harry's face was sufficient answer, and Simpson collapsed dismally in a chair.

Hurried explanations from Harry followed.

"I'll stay and look after Bill," said Simpson. "I'll get a bite here and telephone to my partner Anderson that I am detained for the remainder of the night."

"It's dashed good of you, old man," said Harry feelingly. "You've just had a hard day on your own business."

"You've had a harder," rejoined Simpson, glancing at the other's livid face. "Better stay at home, and I'll go with the constable."

But Harry just gave him one ghastly look and was gone.

IT took an hour or two for Simpson to complete his tasks and settle down for a brief spell of rest, which he did at the dining-room fire, replenished by himself. Upstairs, his little patient was asleep and fairly comfortable, and to all intents he was alone in the house of Reekmylane.

Like everybody else, he hated and feared the house, despite its pleasing exterior. There was a taint, a curse, a miasma, upon it. It was dark, too, and intensely still. He caught himself listening for noises, and imagining them.

He cursed himself for a fool, lit a cigarette, and settled deeper in his chair. The chair was comfortable, at any rate. He had made a decent meal off cold meat, and he had had a long and tiring day.

Something creaked outside his door—something scuffled.

Simpson shot erect, and for a moment stood dazed. He must have been asleep, for his mind flung about like a snared rabbit. Then he remembered.

Outside the door something creaked again. Lunging forward, Simpson seized the poker, which raised a prodigious clatter, and leaped for the door.

Something went heavy and fast down the passage. Whipping open the door, he was just in time to see something vanish into the kitchen. Too excited to care for anything, he raced after it and shot into the kitchen.

As he entered, a solid object hit him on the side of the head, and he went down amid shooting stars and sheet lightning. Then the something went tearing out of the kitchen and back the way it had come.

Simpson arose quickly and blasphemously, and he was back in time to seize his assailant, just as the latter had his hand on the front-door handle.

The doctor was a powerful fellow, and in moments of excitement hardly knew his own strength. The wrench he gave to his assailant's collar made a ruin of his necktie and waistcoat buttons. Another prodigious heave sent him headlong into the dining room. Simpson was in the room almost as quickly and closed the door.

"Make a sound," he gasped, "and I'll break your confounded neck. There's a sick child upstairs."

The other man, half stunned and breathless, was little disposed to make any sound. He picked himself up slowly, while Simpson tenderly investigated the side of his own face and regained his breath.

The man was white-haired, with a smooth-shaven face as delicate as a child's. His white teeth were showing.

"Bob Veitch!" exclaimed Simpson. Everybody knew Bob Veitch. "What are you doing here, you blackguard?"

"Sure, sorr, I'm trying to get me collar straight," replied Bob, once again smiling his smooth smile and holding up the necktie that Simpson had demolished.

"All right, you impudent hound," growled Simpson. "I'll ring up the police and put you all right."

Suddenly a bell shrilled somewhere.

"There's that doorbell," said Simpson angrily.

"No, sorr, it's the telephone," put in Bob.

"How d'you know?"

Bob slowly looked round. "If I had five pounds for every time I've been in this room, it's a rich man I'd be to-day."

B-r-r-r-r-r! sang the bell.

Simpson stood hesitating.

"Answer the telephone, now, sorr," said Bob insinuatingly. "It may be the polis, you know, sorr."

"You won't bolt, then!"

"Trust me, sorr!"

"I'll leave this door open, and if you give me the slip, I'll wring your neck."

Bob smiled his moony smile and stood passive, while Simpson passed into the hall and caught up the receiver.

"Hello! . . . It's you, Anderson! . . . Yes, I'm at the house here. They've gone to drag the quarry hole. And, I say——"

Simpson's telephone conversation was rudely interrupted. From the dining room came a soft thudding of feet and the clatter of an opening window. By the time the doctor had dashed back into the room, Bob Veitch had disappeared into the exterior darkness.

THE sun was gone, but a thin and piercing afterglow held the crown of heaven. Upon the quarry floor the searchers moved in great blotches of violet and crimson shadow. Bob had not been at home, so they had simply commandeered his boat—in the name of the law, as the constable had declared. Mr. Henderson had also armed himself with a grappling iron, whose ghastly, incurved, shining teeth made Harry turn cold to the very marrow.

Mrs. Craigie's husband, a loud-voiced, bull-chested, bald-headed man called Tom, of a singularly mild and obliging disposition, had joined the search party. Other natives, drawn by the curious human instinct for disaster, had also materialized out of the magical twilight.

Very cautiously they lowered Bob's curious vehicle into the water. Afloat, it appeared as absurd as when it was on

land. It reeled and wallowed. Its wheels spun round like grotesque paddle wheels. Water poured in through its shrunken bone-dry timbers.

"Guid God!" exclaimed Tom. "I wouldn't sit in that thing for a fortin'."

"It will not be far, now," said Mr. Henderson, in his large, soothing manner. "Me and the gentleman here will sit in the boat, and you will hold on to the rope. Give the gentleman your lantern now, Tom, and push us off."

Their assistants pushed them off so lustily that one of them pushed himself into the water and had to be expeditiously retrieved in a lamentable condition. Under the violent impetus, the boat reared almost on end, throwing its crew of two into the bottom. Harry just snatched the lantern into safety.

"Are ye a' richt?" roared Tom across the water.

"All right!" retorted the policeman, incensed. "When I return to shore, I will be after giving you a kick, you big fool!"

To his dying day Harry never forgot that scene. The broken water lapped and splashed, and the light of the lantern quivered upon it. Two wild fowl rose honking from the surface. Everything was eerily dim and strange, and one star was abroad in heaven.

Swinging his grappling iron, the policeman cast and dragged and cast again. The water splashed musically, as the boat drifted away toward the deeper end. More stars came out, and a thinner, newer radiance told of the rising moon. Harry, holding the lantern, sat in a kind of dismal torpor.

"I've got something," said the policeman, his voice suddenly sharp and tense. A dreadful shudder ran down Harry's spine.

At the quarry edge there was the rush of feet and the crash of trodden stones, as a man flung himself out of the darkness, seized upon the rope, and began frantically to pull upon it.

"Give me my boat! Give me my boat!" howled the newcomer.

"Dod! It's Bob Veitch!" cried Tom. "Leave off, ye auld fool!"

A regular scrimmage ensued. Bob pulled and yelled, while the others hustled him and expostulated. The uproar culminated in Tom being pushed from the steep edge into the water. Meanwhile the boat was being trailed to the bank, the angry policeman paying out his rope, which had evidently become anchored to something heavy at the bottom.

The boat and the submerged Tom reached the quarry side together. Everybody was shouting at once. Bob, inspired with the strength of twenty men, was clinging to the rope, fighting, screaming and biting.

In the midst of the hubbub, Simpson, suddenly appearing, butted his way through the mob and again seized Bob by the collar. This scared the tinker into comparative quietness. He had no desire to have Simpson at his throat again.

"Give me my boat," he whimpered. "What are you doing with my boat?"

"I'll have you arrested," said Mr. Henderson, "for interfering with the police in the execution of their duty."

"What duty?" demanded Bob, trembling, as he looked round at the ring of hostile faces.

"We are after recovering this gentleman's wife's body."

"Him!" Bob nodded at Harry. "Why, his wife's in the powder house."

Harry lurched forward and held him by the throat. In the strange congeries of light and shadow his face was frightful to see.

"Say that again, you hound!" he said.

"Sure I shut her there myself," blubbered Bob. "I wanted to keep her there till——"

Harry gave him one blow that sent him sprawling, and the darkness swallowed him up, as he went headlong for the powder house.

IN the dining room of Reekmylane a queer company assembled, just as the dawn was strengthening.

The superfluous members of the search party had been tactfully sent away, leaving Harry, Simpson and the constable. Added to these was Jo, pale, but wonderfully recovered. She had been rescued

from the powder house and had flown to her son's bedside, to find him rapidly on the mend. That alone was a tonic to her.

They surrounded Bob Veitch, who sat in a chair in the midst of their chairs, like the principal performer in some new parlor game. Bob was smoothly smiling, but under his smile lurked fear; for he saw Mr. Henderson eying him with professional avidity.

"I was going across the moor to Mrs. Craigie's," explained Jo, "and I took the wrong road that led to the powder house. Then I met the Highland bulls. They rushed at me, snorting horribly."

"They will be cows," explained the constable gravely, "and it would be only their curiosity."

"They were bad enough for me," retorted Jo, reddening. "They drove me into the powder house for shelter. The door was open, but there was a fearsome smell. I hadn't been in the place for a minute, when the door banged, and I was shut inside. That's all."

She ceased. Every eye turned upon the central figure.

"Yes, it was me," said Bob Veitch. "I was sitting behind the powder house when I seen her coming. I knew it was the lady of Reekmylane, 'cos I had seen her on the evening before."

"So it was you I saw through the door," cried Jo. Bob gave her a strange look, when Simpson cut in impetuously:

"What the blazes——" But Bob silenced him with a dignified gesture.

"I wanted to keep the lady an hour or two in the powder house. I meant her no harm. I just wanted the people in this house to go searching for her and leave the house empty for me."

"What for?" asked Harry, impressed by Bob's manner of serene simplicity.

Bob did not answer in words. Rising —everybody regarding him intently— he went to the fireplace, swept away the rug, and with his long finger nails lifted the tile at one corner. From the tiny cavity he drew a piece of paper and held it out.

Upon it they read in rather faded handwriting: "The northwest corner. The deep part. D. S."

"D. S. is Davy Spiers," said Bob, smoothing the paper. "It was him that found the two sacks of money that fell off the mail car. He was on his motor bicycle and ran into them. It was dark, you know. Upset he was, be jabers, in more ways than wan. Up I comes on my donkey cart, and him gloating over the money. Scared I was, too, at the sight of it. The slimy ould blackguard persuaded me to take it on here, his bicycle not being suited to it. 'They'll never trace the notes,' says he. 'We'll go shares,' says he. 'Hide the money for a bit,' says he, 'and then spend it quickly.' And I believed the sneaking ould hound."

Bob paused, brooding over this bitter memory. Nobody dared say a word.

"Well, and they copped me and my bag of money. And in jile I sends for ould Davy, letting on like he was my lawyer. And he begged and prayed on me not to split on him. 'I'll give you shares when you come out,' says he. 'That'll be some time,' says I. 'Not any longer than if you hadn't the money,' says he. 'How will I make sure?' I asks. 'You might be dead,' I says. Then he down on his knees and swears by Almighty God to place a record in the northwest corner tile in the dining room. 'And if I get a chance,' says he, 'I'll sink it in the quarry hole. If you don't hear nor see aught,' says he, 'look in the quarry hole.' "

Bob crackled the paper in his fingers.

"I lived in hell for five years," he said at last, and the dawn made his face paler. "I never heard the living water fall, nor a bird sing. But I comes out, and the very first thing I see that boat thing at the fair. 'That's for me and the quarry hole,' says I, and buys it with my prison earnings. Dirt cheap it was. D'you wonder I was desperate to get that paper, and you in possession of the house?"

Harry and the constable looked at each other.

"Where was that thing lying that you caught on your grapple?" asked Harry.

"It was the deepest part, to be sure," answered the constable, after some careful consideration.

"Come on!" cried Simpson, rushing away. The other three men were not long in following.

The morning was now in gold. In the quarry the shadows were slaty gray. The boat, water-logged, sprawled derelict at the water's edge.

"See there, now," said the constable.

The grappling rope, one end of which was still attached to the boat, ran down deep into the water. They laid hands upon it and pulled.

Slowly they drew it in. Strange shocks ran along the strands, metallic bumps and jars, communicating electric thrills to the searchers. Then it came up streaming, bound with strong rope in which one of the flukes had become lodged; it was a big tin box, like an oversized deed box, painted black.

They drew it in and eyed it hungrily.

"Let's open it!" cried Simpson, before the stolid constable could say a word.

The taut rope twanged under a penknife; the lid, violently attacked with a big stone, sprang open, the rusty hinges yelling like a soul in pain. They looked inside.

A reeking, slimy mass, smelling vilely with a thin acridity.

For a while the shock held them dumb. "Gosh, the water's fairly got it!" cried Harry.

"Curses on his soul," said Bob Veitch very quietly. "It's as rotten as that dirty paper."

THEY were all back in the dining room, and, as before, Bob Veitch sat in the middle of them.

"What's to be done with this fine fellow?" asked Simpson. "Gee, what a catalogue of crimes he's committed: Abduction and burglary and assaulting the police, and I don't know what else."

"Divil a bit I care what you'll do with me," said Bob, and he meant it. He was beyond caring now.

Constable Henderson stepped forward in his best official manner, but Jo thrust herself in between them.

"No, no!" cried Jo. "Let him alone. Hasn't he suffered enough already? I'm the person that's got most to say against him, and I've no wish to hurt him."

"Well, I'm damned!" exclaimed Simpson. "He hit me on the head with a chair."

"And look here," cried Jo, warm and flushed and voluble. "Hasn't there been enough misery caused by this house already? Don't we feel a curse upon it? Oh, you know what I mean! We'll make it worse if we add this extra sorrow to it."

She had phrased it crudely, but they all knew what she meant. It appealed to every one, even the constable. They stood aside, while Bob, like a man in a dream, made for the door. Then he turned his smooth shining face, with its quaint, wistful, charming smile, upon the lady who had set him free.

"Lady of the house," said he, using the fragrant old Irish phrase, "if there's anything that will lift the shadow from the house, it is the blessing of a forgiving heart." He looked upward and around, drawing in his breath like a man breathing an unfamiliar atmosphere. "I feel the shadow lifting," he said and left without another word.

"Jove!" cried Simpson, quite touched. "He's bound to be hard up, too. I'll run after him and give him something."

"And, oh!" cried Jo after him, "I've found that I've left my purse in the powder house. I had some malted-milk tablets in it, and took it out to get them."

"I'll fetch it," cried Simpson over his shoulder.

He hurried on, taking the moorland track; but nowhere could he find Bob Veitch. He came to the powder house and entered. The place was dark and damp, and it had an odor.

Instantly Simpson paused, forgetting everything under the influence of that faint nauseating odor. Was it a dead sheep? He had often smelled that smell in France, weeks after the battlefields had been cleaned up.

His nose took him outside again, to the ruined end of the building, where the rowan tree had pushed the heavy stones down. He poked and pried, becoming more and more excited, like a questing hound, as the odor became stronger. Then he came upon the source of it.

"YES," he explained to Jo and Harry, half an hour later, "he was squashed as flat as a black beetle, and a tin box was flattened under his chest. I could still distinguish the printing on the money. I met the bobby as I came back, and I sent him on to the place."

"So old Davy got his deserts," said Harry slowly.

"Yes," answered Simpson. "It was simply worthless paper that he cached in the quarry hole. He purposely allowed the water to soak into it. D'you know I distinctly smelled something like chloride of lime in it, too. I thought I was mistaken then, but I know now."

"But what was his idea?" asked Jo.

"As clear as mud," explained Simpson. "I see it all now. He intended that poor old Bob Veitch would come out and find nothing but the pulp, as in point of fact he did find it. And meanwhile, Davy Spiers would hide the real money in the powder house, and when Bob came out, he and Bob would salvage the box in the quarry, and the old rascal would pretend that the money had been spoiled. So Davy would get all the spoils, the double-dyed thief!"

"Then came fate," said Harry somberly.

"Yes, or the Almighty, if you like. There had been a hard frost, you remember. Davy must have waited for the thaw in order to bury the box. Well, that thaw loosened the stones of the powder house, and down they came, snuffing out Davy Spiers and all his trickery."

He moved off. "Cheerio!" he said.

"What!" cried Jo. "Not wait for breakfast?"

"Sorry. I've my day's work to do, even though I've been up all night. The boy's all right now. Good-by."

Husband and wife stood in silence, watching him go. The sun was now risen, and the full splendor of the morning was on hill and hollow, bush and tree. In the little wood behind the house, upon a green tasseled larch tree, a missel thrush was screaming with joy. A throng of larks were crying at the doors of heaven.

Jo slowly stirred, looking upward and around and breathing, just as Bob had done. She breathed with a new enjoyment. A curious look of peaceful elation stole across her face.

"Harry," she said, "Bob Veitch and I are fellow Celts, and I feel like him. The shadow's lifting from the house of Reekmylane."

For a space Harry stood gazing afar, in his absent, taciturn fashion. He saw half of Scotland before his feet, its castles and its cities, its islands and its headlands, its steaming locomotives and its golf courses. Suddenly, he, too, felt a stab of elation.

"D'you think so?" was all he said in answer.

"Yes, dear. They'll bury that poor old man's body, and his soul will have peace. I believe it's *that* that kept this house in the shadow of fear. Harry, dear, it's lifting!"

As she spoke, the sun thrust a brawny arm through a cloud, and a flock of golden sunbeams fell singing upon the one high gable of the house.

She suddenly caught her husband in her arms and hugged him hard. He was much astonished.

"Harry! Dear! We'll stay here and be happy. I'm sure we will. As sure as the sun's shining on the gable yonder. The shadow's lifted from the house of Reekmylane!"

RENOVATING THE WHITE HOUSE

ONE interesting side light on the president's present absence from the White House during the repairing of the executive mansion is that he is the fourth president to have occupied other quarters since John Adams' administration. In the War of 1812, when the British burned the White House, President Madison temporarily resided elsewhere. The reconstruction was finished when Monroe was president, and he lived, until its completion, in the Octagon House at Eighteenth Street and New York Avenue. In 1902 the White House was renovated, and President Roosevelt occupied a house at Jackson Place near by.

By

B. M. BOWER

Author of

"For the Good of the Service," Etc.

IN FOUR PARTS—
PART III.

Points

THE STORY.

On a Western ranch a tragedy had occurred. Cole Lawson, Sr., a cattleman, had lost money in the market and had been found dead, a gun in his hand. Cole, Jr., miserably decided that happiness lay away from his tragic home. With two pack horses, a colt and a saddle pony, he rode off. At a secluded ranch he applied for a job, but bad news travels fast in the open, and he was turned down. He saw now that he would have to mark out his horses' brands to avoid recognition. This he did, making camp in a hollow until the burns healed. As he was about to resume his journey, two men appeared. They were suspicious characters, but one of them, Roper, offered Cole a job rounding up strays. The lad went with them toward a place called the Sinks, a rocky pass. That night he became separated from his companions —fortunately, since he discovered that the two were scoundrels who meant to kill him that they might steal his horses. He escaped by doubling back along the trail, but the desperados blocked his way. By charging them, Cole got away with only a slight wound. After a long ride, he made camp again. He awoke to find that he had slept in the doorway of a cabin, the only occupant of which was a mongrel dog. Here Cole decided to make camp. One day a rider, herding horses, dashed past the cabin, sweeping up Cole's animals in the rush. He shot at the stranger, missed, and then found that it was a girl, and a spirited girl, too. Their encounter was a contest of sharp tongues. Angry and humiliated, Cole started out to recover his horses, followed by the taunting girl. She led him to her home, where her mother, Mrs. Harris, greeted the boy cordially. This woman was kindly and sweet, and yet she had her troubles, too. Her stepson, Steve, was trying to oust her from the property; the crops were ready, but could not be harvested by the two women alone. Cole, although he had never done ranch work other than riding herd, gallantly offered to help. When he later worked around the place, the daughter, Dorothy, teased him so that, while pitching hay, Cole kept on despite his fatigue, and injured himself in a fall. Confined to bed with a strained neck, he was unable to do anything when Roper, the horse rustler, came to demand money for the stepson. He was still ill when the stepson himself later appeared with threats. Mrs. Harris ordered the reprobate from the place. Cole now resolved to stay and protect the mother and daughter. Mrs. Harris had come to regard him almost as her own son, and Dorothy, on her part, silently declared a truce with the object of her taunts.

A shadow hung above this relief, however, for both Steve and Roper were now aware of Cole's presence at the Harris home. Who could tell what they might be up to?

Young Cole Lawson, inexplicably checked in his flight from his troubles, at last found the keynote of his difficulties. He learned that he had erred in running away, that he should have squared his shoulders to endure the blows of life—and in that revelation Cole became a man.

West

CHAPTER XVI.

STEVE CALLS FOR COLE.

LIFE began to assume a normal, kindly aspect for Cole, who had believed himself thoroughly embittered against it. He found himself speaking to Dorothy almost as freely as he talked with her mother. He was able now to take her gibes in the spirit she gave them, without resentment, but flinging back a retort in kind; like two pups flying suddenly at each other's throats and making a great pretense of savage battle, or boys who clinch and go down in a tangle of straining arms and legs in a friendly wrestling match. Dorothy still called him "Billy, The Kid," but Cole no longer minded the sinister title. He dubbed her "Cactus Carrie," in retaliation, and made it plain "Cack" for short and to further infuriate her.

Even Mutt approved of the new domicile and forswore his long nocturnal hunting expeditions, putting meat on his ribs, while he lay in the shade of the cottonwoods and cracked chicken bones in his teeth; a lazy life for Mutt, these days; a life of full-fed idleness, his most arduous task the driving of marauding Leghorns out of the tomato patch.

Eagle had arrived on the third day after Steve's short visit, and with him came all of Cole's belongings, which Dorothy declared were being devoured by rats. So Cole was installed in Steve's room, and Steve's things were packed and put in the storeroom, ready to be delivered on short notice to any messenger Steve might send.

"He won't come after 'em himself," Mother Harris grimly predicted. "I guess I settled him, once and for all." And after that she went away and cried over the sorrow and disappointment he had caused her.

The one thing that did not seem to right itself was Cole's kinked neck, and that defied the homely remedies applied by Mother Harris. The shoulder muscles improved somewhat, however, and Cole could walk to the corral and back without suffering tortures afterward. But as for working, that was out of the question; for the time being, Cole remained what Billy Parrish would have called a star boarder. His offer to help was as yet an empty promise.

That irked him. It left too much time

for thinking, and his thoughts, in spite of the friendly atmosphere which surrounded him, were not always pleasant. For one thing, he felt as if he ought to tell Mrs. Harris the truth about himself. He knew she must wonder why he didn't; he wondered himself, the times he was left alone, while she and Dorothy were busy with the chores, doing a man's tasks, while he sat idle, with his back against a pillow.

He ought to tell the whole story—about his mother, the C Bar L, his father's mysteriously unfortunate business entanglements, his sudden crash from apparent wealth to bankruptcy, and then the tragic end of it all. They had believed him, these two, when he said he was no thief; they must have believed him, or they would not be so willing to let him stay and help with the heavy work. After that night of Roper's visit, they had avoided the subject, save when Dorothy teased him with the name of outlaw and thereby proved how little she thought him one. But he knew that the mystery of him must nag at their minds. Mother Harris, at least, was entitled to know.

At night, when he lay awake and thought of all that had happened in the last month, and of the goodness of Mrs. Harris—yes, and of Dorothy since the truce—he would promise himself that in the morning he would tell her, perhaps while Dorothy was driving the cows back to pasture. It wouldn't take long. He even composed the sentences he meant to speak. He knew just how long it would take. He would say:

"Mother Harris, I'm going to tell you who I am. The reason I haven't told you before is because I can't stand having it talked about, but there's nothing I've done to put me here among strangers. I blotted the brands on my horses because I didn't want any one to know I'm from the C Bar L. My name is Cole Lawson, and my father——" Yes, he would tell her the whole truth, but it would not be easy from there on.

It was so hard that for three days he procrastinated. He would wait until after breakfast, because he didn't want to have her look at him across the table, with the story fresh in her mind and her pity for him shining in her eyes. No, he would wait until she was rubbing his neck. She would be standing behind him then, and he would not see her face at all. No, she was talking about all the work there was to be done before cold weather; how the cow stable must be banked higher on the north and west sides, and more dirt piled on the roof, because the cows would fall off in their milk if they were not warm enough; how the winter's wood must be hauled down out of the cañon; how the hay must be bought and hauled from Miller's place, because it cost three dollars more a ton if they delivered it; how a dozen things must be done.

ANOTHER day it was the same. The hours slipped away, while he held the first sentence behind his lips, ready for speech, but waiting upon his aversion for the subject. It would not be the same, after he had told. They would know he had been accustomed all his life to better things than they could afford—Dorothy had already flung at him some gibe for the clothes he wore—and they would be conscious of their poverty. They would think about it—maybe speak of it unthinkingly. They accepted him now, and they could do no more if they knew. It would sound as if he were making a bid for their pity, and that was the last thing he wanted.

So he did not tell. Like the subject of Steve, which they left alone by common consent, after his room had been emptied of his belongings, Roper's story lay in the background of their minds. They did not accept his statement that Roper was a villain; they had known Roper too long for that. But they did not attempt to argue about it, and Cole found it easier and easier to let things remain as they were, with past events tacitly ignored.

Later he wondered whether he had been wise to keep silence.

It was on the sixth day, with a haze in the air that sent the far hills swimming in elusive lights and shadows, and with a languorous hint of coming autumn in the warm breeze that blew up from

the southwest in little, vagrant gusts, which fanned one pleasantly upon the face and passed on. Cole had walked slowly and deliberately down to the corral to see how Eagle was coming along. The other horses were in the pasture, and Mutt was asleep somewhere. Dorothy had ridden over to Miller's with the ten pounds of butter delivered every week, and Mother Harris was churning in the milk house, a task which Cole had attempted to perform and couldn't because of the jar of the dasher, which felt like a hot hammer pounding upon his shoulder.

A couple of horsemen came riding quietly up the trail from Catrock, and when they saw Cole standing beside the corral they separated, one coming up on either side of him. It was Eagle that warned him of their approach, and he turned just in time to see Steve Harris nod and point, and the other man pull a gun.

"That's him," said Steve, pulling up his horse and glowering at Cole.

"What do you want?" Cole, with his head tilted to one side and his neck bandaged, was not a formidable-looking foe, and he knew it and lifted his lip in a sneer.

"You. I'm a deputy sheriff, and you're wanted for shootin' with intent to kill—murderous assault on Steve Harris. Don't you try any tricks. I know all about you, and I won't take any chances. Put up your hands! Steve, you better see if he's packin' a gun."

Even then Cole's predicament did not impinge itself upon his senses. Steve was not hurt; the bullet had no more than scratched deeply the side of his neck, according to Mother Harris, who had seen the scar. That he would ever have to face more than Steve's personal animosity had never occurred to Cole, for in his experience the law was not called upon unless men's quarrels were more serious than this.

It flashed across his mind that this was not a bona-fide officer making a legal arrest, but some crony of Steve's who was playing the part for some sinister purpose of their own; to get him away from the ranch without interference, most likely, for Steve must know that the two women were capable of making him trouble if he roused them sufficiently. Steve would not dare start trouble with Cole at the ranch. He would not want Mother Harris to know about it.

"You can't run any bluff on me," Cole said contemptuously. "If you're an officer and want me, you must have a warrant."

"Sure, I've got a warrant! You can see it when we get that gun you're too free with. Take it off him, Steve. If he makes a crooked move, I'll lay him out."

They had all the best of it, for it happened that Cole's gun was at the house. Steve came up and made certain he was unarmed, and the deputy thereupon produced the warrant and gave it to Cole. He read it with a growing sense of incredulous fury. He had never before seen a warrant of arrest, but there was no mistaking the authenticity of this document. He was named as John Doe, but for the rest it was terribly explicit.

Cole was appalled—stunned by the unexpectedness of it. He was trapped, and there was no choice for him, unless he could fight; and, if he even attempted to fight, he would be killed for resisting arrest.

STEVE was already carrying his saddle from the shed, in haste to be gone before the women came to upbraid him.

"Better take him down the trail, Joe," he growled, as he glanced uneasily at the house. "I'll bring his horse."

So, because he was at their mercy, Cole walked down the trail ahead of the deputy and his gun. Handcuffs gripped his wrists. They had seen to that without any delay. As Joe had observed, they were taking no chances. Presently Steve rode down to overtake them, leading Eagle by the bridle reins. They waited grimly while Cole mounted, and they herded him between them, as if he were some dangerous criminal.

With his manacled hands clasped over the saddle horn and every hoofbeat marking time to the agony that racked his body, Cole rode away in that sleepy sunlight. He was poignantly aware of

Mother Harris in the milk house, humming an old-fashioned love song, while she sent the dasher up and down, up and down, with a muffled *plop* when it struck the rich cream in the stone churn; of Mutt, lying asleep in the shade near the spring, where the ground was moist and cool, and he had scratched a comfortable hollow for himself; of the ducks waddling in and out of the spring creek, just above the stable, flirting their wings and gossiping among themselves; of the horses down in the pasture; of Dorothy galloping home from Miller's—but not along this trail—and of the mystery, perhaps the worry, of his unaccountable absence. What would they think of him?

And then the sickening answer that struck him like a blow. They would think that he had lied about himself, and that he had taken sudden alarm and gone hurrying away to escape capture for some crime that dogged his footsteps. They would think that he had not dared take the time to get the other horses, but had saddled Eagle and fled from whatever it was that threatened him.

They would assume then that he had lied about Roper, also; that he had wormed himself into their confidence for sake of the security of that lonely little ranch tucked back against the hills. How could they know or suspect the truth? If Steve had watched the place, he could not have selected a better time for taking Cole secretly away. He remembered now that they had held their voices down; Steve must have known Mother Harris was churning, that Dorothy had ridden away from the ranch. He must have waited until he saw Cole walk down to the corral.

They rode swiftly, as if they feared some awkward meeting on the trail. They did not speak, and Cole was thankful for that. He did not want them to guess that he was riding with his teeth clenched, holding back some wordless expression of the agony of that ride. And there was Eagle with his newly healed shoulder. He must be suffering, too, thought Cole. Eagle was gamely keeping up with the other horses, but Cole could feel the effort it cost him, and he added that item to the black list against Steve and Roper—who was probably cognizant of this particular exploit—and the town where they were taking him.

So, once again, Cole felt himself slipping back into the darkness of a smoldering fury against circumstances that seemed malignly intent upon destroying him, body and soul. He steeled himself against whatever might lie ahead of him and set himself the hard task of endurance. It was all that he could do.

CHAPTER XVII.

A WISE LIMB OF THE LAW.

"WELL, young fella, I see you've been getting yourself into a little trouble. No business of mine; my job is to keep you safe and sound till the judge has his say. But maybe I can give you a little advice that will help out. I've had a good many men put in my care, and every one of 'em could tell you I stood ready to help where I could."

This was the sheriff speaking. He reminded Cole a little of big Ed Carroll, of the Black Rim, with his twinkling blue eyes that seemed to miss nothing, and a passionless, imperturbable face that masked whatever emotions filled his soul, and a big body capable of putting forth considerable brute strength when occasion demanded. He had brought a weekly paper and a package of cigarettes, and apparently these were meant to pave the way to acquaintance with his new prisoner. At least, Cole suspected it and refused to meet the friendly overtures.

"You run against a mean proposition when you tackled Steve Harris," the sheriff went on, after a pause spent in picking his teeth and sizing up Cole through half-closed lids. "He's goin' to put you over the road if he can. What's the matter? Boil on your neck?"

"Sprained it," Cole answered him shortly.

"When? Last night?"

"No. Week or so ago. Wind caught me with a pitchfork of hay in the air."

"Uh-huh. Thought maybe Steve had something to do with it. I'll have a doctor take a look at it. You look bad, and

that's a fact. What happened to your wrist?"

"Bullet went through the flesh." There was no use in trying to hide the puckered scar, and Cole slipped back his sleeve for a better view.

"Steve?"

"Steve or one of the others. There were three of them."

"Uh-huh. Steve has got two witnesses in town ready to take the stand and swear you rode up and shot him without cause or provocation."

"That's a damned lie," grated Cole. "They were trying to stop me. Pulled up in the trail, and one of them hollered at me to stop."

"Uh-huh. Them was the Griswold boys—Ben and Tike. Know 'em?"

"I don't know anybody around here. I'm a stranger."

"Where from?"

Silence. Then, "Points West," said Cole shortly, as he had done on another occasion.

"Never was there, but I've heard of the place," said the sheriff, and Cole's quick glance from under his eyebrows could not determine whether the sheriff was joking or in earnest. "What was the rush?" he went on with his quizzing. "That night, I mean."

"I was getting away from Roper."

"John Roper?"

"Yes."

This was getting close to something Cole had not meant to tell, but the sheriff had a mild way of waiting for his answers which seemed to pull them forth from Cole's lips almost as if the sheriff dragged them out with a string. It was, too, like starting down a steep incline and not being able to stop. Cole did not know where the terrifically simple questions would lead him. He felt as if the sheriff read the truth before it was uttered; as if his words merely confirmed what the sheriff already knew. Cole had never, you see, been questioned by any one who is accustomed to dragging the truth from criminals, and the method was new to him.

"What had Roper done to you?"

"Nothing. It was what he was trying to do."

"What was that?"

"Well," said Cole with measured calm, "I heard him talking about bumping me off. He said those were four good horses I had."

"Where was that?"

"That was down in what he called the Sinks."

"What were *you* doing in the Sinks?"

"I was going with Roper and a man he called Pete. Roper hired me to help him get back a bunch of horses he said were stolen from him. He said it was ticklish work, and he might have trouble. He said he couldn't go to law about it, because the sheriff was in cahoots. He would pay me a hundred dollars, he said, and it wouldn't last longer than a month."

"Uh-huh. When did you hear this talk about bumping you?"

"In the Sinks. It was dark, and my horse took up the wrong side of one of those edges of rock that stick up narrow and jagged, like chicken combs, all over and every which way."

"Uh-huh. That's the Sinks, all right. You say your horse took the wrong side?"

"They went up one way, and my horse took up along the rock on the other side. I missed them and was waiting to see if they would come along, and I heard them talking. There was a wide crack in the rocks there, and the sound came through plain. They were going back to look for me. Roper said the farther they got me in the Sinks the better."

"Uh-huh. What did you do?"

"I waited all night and all the next day. The wind was blowing so hard my tracks were covered, and the horses were in a niche out of sight. At dusk I took a chance, and my horse Johnny led me out."

"That's when you run across Steve and the Griswold boys?"

"Yes. I was up on top of the ledge that day, and Pete and Roper came along past. I guess their side of the rock was the trail home. I heard them again. Roper said Jim would see me with the glasses. That's why I waited till it was too dark for him."

"You thought Steve's bunch was some of Roper's men?"

"Yes. They swung across the road. One of them did. I commenced to shoot and ride straight for them. They got one of my horses in the shoulder and me in the wrist, but I made it away from there, all right."

"You think now that you made a mistake, don't you?"

"Yes," said Cole after a minute, "I do. But Roper and Steve are pretty thick, just the same. He sent Roper to Mrs. Harris for money, and Roper lied. He told her Steve was in the hospital and needed an operation. He said Steve was shot through the body."

"Uh-huh. But you don't think Steve was after you that night."

"No-o. I think he was just riding along, and I happened to meet him and the rest."

"Uh-huh. That's what I think, too, kid. But Steve is sore at you. Know why?" He put the toothpick away in his vest pocket and made a final polishing of his teeth with his tongue. "Beyond that little furrow in his neck, which don't amount to much—what other reason has he got for being down on you?"

"I don't know, unless it was because he found me there when he went home. He had trouble with Mrs. Harris, and she turned him out; told him to beat it. And," Cole added with dangerous frankness, "Roper told him I was an outlaw, I guess."

"Why?"

"Because my horses have all got blotted brands. I don't know any other reason."

"All of them?"

"Yes. I marked out the brands myself. I had a right to. They're my horses."

"What was wrong with their brands?"

"Nothing. I got tired of looking at them, is all."

"Steve says he's goin' to put you in the pen. If not for the shootin', then he'll bring a charge of horse stealin'."

"How? They're my horses, I tell you."

" 'How' ain't my job, kid." The sheriff got out his pipe and knocked the dottle free against a bar of the door. "No, that ain't my job, but keepin' the country free of criminals is—as far as my power goes.

"Now, take your case here. You ain't got a ghost of a show before a jury. Steve grew up in the country, and he's got friends—naturally. The Griswold boys are pretty wild, but they're all right, so far as takin' their word in court goes. You admit you rode up out of the Sinks, met them three in the trail, and wouldn't stop when they called. Maybe they thought they knew you. They can say they did, and who's goin' to read their minds? Now, say they do testify to that. You start shootin'. You've got four horses with yuh, and they've all got blotched brands. How's that goin' to look to a jury?

NOW, say you get five years in the pen. Judge Bailey don't hardly ever give less'n that. You *could* get *ten;* it all depends on what the charge is, and how black they paint you. You go up there and herd with criminals. You're twenty-one—just a kid. You ain't old enough to be hard but you will be when you git out. You'll come out on the fight, if I know your stripe. You'll blame the law, and you'll be an enemy of the law from the first jump. In all probability you'll have it in your head to get the ones that put you in jail. I've seen it work out, time and again; I've been a peace officer for over fifteen years, and I've yet to see the kid that come back better than when he went in. If a fella ain't a criminal when he goes, you can gamble that he'll be one when he comes out. If he thinks he didn't get a square deal, he's almost sure to come back ready to break the law."

"I haven't broken any laws so far," Cole said sullenly. "A man's got a right to defend his own life and property."

"Uh-huh. Sure he has. I'm talkin' about what will get before a jury, and what the jury'll say, and the judge'll say. If your case goes to a jury, you ain't got a Chinaman's chance of getting an acquittal."

"I can't help that, can I?"

"Now that's just what I'm comin' to,

kid. You can help it in this way, and it's the *only* way. You can plead guilty to this charge of shootin' with intent to do bodily injury. That'll get you a light sentence right here in the county jail, and it'll head off anything in the nature of a frame-up to send you up for five or ten years. See the difference?

"You'll be savin' the county money, too. You plead not guilty and stand trial, and the county's got to spend money to prosecute the case. That won't get you anything but a longer sentence in a darn-sight-worse jail. It'll get in the papers, and if you've got friends over at Points West, they're liable to hear about it. You better plead guilty, kid, and take the easy jolt and be done with it." He puffed at his pipe, got up, walked to the barred door, which he had locked behind him and looked out, as if he were expecting some one. But perhaps he was only giving Cole time to think. For, in a minute or two, he turned and came back to the iron cot where Cole sat staring gloomily at the stone floor.

"Does Roper know you heard him talkin' about you, that time in the Sinks?"

"No. If he'd known I was anywhere around there, I wouldn't have lasted long."

"The boys don't know why you started shootin 'at 'em, then?"

"No—I guess not. I don't see how they could, except that they tried to stop me."

"That'd look as if you was on the dodge and takin' no chance with strangers. Who-all have you told? About Roper, I mean."

"I told Mrs. Harris and her daughter. They didn't believe it."

"Think they'll repeat it to anybody?"

Cole did not know, but he was inclined to the belief that they would not discuss him any more than was necessary. They would be afraid of doing him a harm.

"I guess they don't gossip," he said. "They think Roper is all right."

"Uh-huh. Well, they ain't alone in that, so you'd best not tell anybody else what you told me. Don't tell *nobody*. Keep all that behind your teeth, no matter what happens till I give you the word to talk. I won't, while this Steve case is up for settlement. You could only hurt yourself and do nobody else any harm. You got that? Leave Roper out of it. Don't talk.

"Now, when you go before Judge May for your preliminary hearing, plead guilty. I'll do what I can for yuh, kid—get you off with a light sentence. You didn't do much damage to Steve, so you won't get much. Just plead guilty and keep your face closed about everything. Will you do that?"

"Yes," said Cole, after a minute of rapid thought. "I don't know why you've gone to all this trouble about it, but I can see where you may be right, at that."

"I *am right*," said the sheriff softly. "I'm righter than you know. I ain't been sheriff for fifteen years without havin' my wisdom teeth cut. You don't know all the ins and outs of this case, you see. All you've got is your own personal angle of it.

"Now, look upon me as your friend, kid but don't act like I am—when you go to court, I mean. One word is all I want you to say, and that word's *guilty*. Get that?"

"Yes-s——" Cole hesitated, turning his body so that he could look up at the sheriff, towering above him. "Roper didn't give you a very good recommend, so I guess you're all right. Anyway, I'm up against it. Yes, I never denied shooting Steve, so I'll plead guilty."

"What I don't want," said the sheriff, leaning over him to whisper it, "is for you to start explainin' *why* you done it. They can't go back of that plea to drag anything out of you."

"*You* sure have," Cole suddenly charged him. "I wasn't going to talk to you, either, but I did."

The sheriff chuckled so that his sides shook, but a man outside the barred door would not have been able to hear him laughing.

"Sure, you talked. But don't you talk to anybody else that way. Now, I'm going to bring a doctor over to look at that neck. You won't have your hearing before this afternoon."

He went away, and Cole somehow felt comforted, in spite of the stone walls and iron bars that shut him in.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE VISITOR.

WELL, you got off pretty lucky, after all. Ninety days beats five years considerable." Sheriff Saunders unlocked the jail door and signed Cole to enter first.

Cole stopped in the doorway and cast one long glance behind him at the wooded hills which rose beyond the town of Crater. The sun was shining warmly down into the narrow valley, and the breeze carried the faint odor of hemlock and spruce and pine. Somewhere, back in a narrow lane that led to the hills, a burro set up a raucous braying that reminded him of Wop's lugubrious plaint. Ninety days, and the snow would be falling into those purple cañons up there! Ninety days—and the Harris stable not banked to the eaves, the wood not hauled down for the winter, nothing done save what two pairs of woman hands could perform! Ninety days of cooped inaction, like a coyote in a cage—ninety eternities! Cole stepped over the doorsill and started down the short, narrow corridor, past the place where heavy leg irons, with chains running up to an iron belt, hung on the wall beside other appurtenances that smacked of old horrors, but were manifestly intended for use in quelling recalcitrating prisoners. Ninety days of it for Cole Lawson, the young autocrat of the C Bar L a month ago!

"Not that way, kid. You go in here, right next the office, where I can keep an eye on you."

Cole turned obediently, dully indifferent to his quarters, and walked into a cell such as he had read about but had never before seen; not so bad a place, unless one were locked into it, he thought, as he gave an apathetic glance at the meager furnishings. Saunders locked the door and stood looking speculatively in at him through the bars, studying Cole's face with a curious intentness for a man who has seen prisoners of all sorts and sizes and conditions come and go for fifteen years and longer.

"Cheer up, Cole. Somebody's comin' you'll maybe be glad to see. Be here to-night, maybe. How's your neck?"

"All right—better, anyway." Cole walked over and sat down heavily on the cot, his face going into his two palms in the posture of complete dejection. "I don't want to see anybody," he added, without looking up. "All I want is to be left alone."

"You'll get over that," was the sheriff's philosophical remark, as he walked away.

Cole lay down on the bed and tried not to think. But thoughts came trooping up, whirling from this subject to that subject, with a maddening irrelevance that somehow fitted into a sequence of such utter wretchedness that his very body seemed to feel the weight of despair.

Who was coming? Not Mother Harris! Dorothy wouldn't come—couldn't leave the ranch long enough. He wouldn't see them if they did come. Behind the bars—that was the ultimate disgrace. Mother always spoke those words solemnly. Steve and the Griswold boys had looked cheated. Roper—what was Roper doing there? Pete, too, had been ready to testify against him. Who was coming to-night? Nobody he knew. He wouldn't see any one. They'd peek in through the bars. Why did the sheriff want to keep an eye on him? Gene had gone to jail, once. Some fight or other. Ninety days! Thank God, the folks he knew wouldn't hear about it! And this was the way he was making his own way in the world! Fine start—ninety days in jail. What made the sheriff talk like that? Want to keep him out of the pen? Maybe he was a friend of Steve. No; he'd have—— Who was coming? What did they want? What would become of his horses? He didn't want Mother Harris to feed them. How was Eagle? Maybe the sheriff would look after him. What would happen, now he was in jail? Would those blotched brands make his horses—— Would some one just take them and claim them? Roper wanted

them. Who was coming? Nobody he wanted to see. Maybe Billy Parrish—— Yes, he'd like to tell Billy about it. Billy would know what to do. What a damned mess he'd made of things! Couldn't be Billy. Nobody knew where he had gone. Just dropped out of the Black Rim. No way of tracing him. Nobody would take the trouble, anyway. Who was coming to see him?

Hour after hour, that question nagged at him, slipped into the front of his mind, and pushed back other thoughts. Maybe it was Roper. But, no; the sheriff had said it was some one he'd be glad to see. Cole could not think of any one on earth he wanted to see in that cell. He wanted to drop out of sight and out of memory until the ninety days were up, and then—well, then he did not know what he would do. He could not seem to look past the next three months. They stood before him, a black wall that shut out the future, almost as final as the thing that had come to his father that day in the office room at the C Bar L; only he could go on thinking, and his father's tired brain slept—he hoped.

AFTER a while some one began to sing a ribald ballad off key. Cole had not known there were other prisoners in the jail, and this evidence of companionship struck him unpleasantly. He would rather be alone. He dreaded even the return of the sheriff. Where was Joe, the surly deputy who had brought him here?

Gloom deepened to black dark, and then a light snapped on in the corridor. It painted a checkered shadow on the floor of his cell, and Cole absently counted the squares. A blot slid across them, stopped, and he heard the bar of his door lift and clang. It was his supper, but he did not want it. He wanted to be left alone. His jailer—not the sheriff, but a stranger—set a tray on the floor and slammed the door shut. The bar dropped, and presently he walked past whistling, with another tray held in one hand.

"Here y'are, ole socks!" Cole heard him call good-naturedly to some one beyond. "And here's the magazine I was tellin' you about. Couldn't get hold of the one that had the first part of that story, but it's all explained, so you can get the hang of it. How you fixed for the makin's? Huh? New feller? Oh, he got ninety days. Steve was sore as hell; he wanted to send him up for a stretch. Kid beat him to it. Saunders put him in No. 1, I guess, because he ain't right sure how he'll act. He looks like a mean umbry. Wait till we size him up, and then maybe you can bunk in together."

Back he came, whistling; looked in and saw Cole's tray untouched, and stood irresolute.

"Hey, your grub's gettin' cold," he cried buoyantly. "What the hell do you think I bring it hot for? Better throw it into you. I've got to take the dishes back in a few minutes."

Cole did not answer, and the fellow went on, resuming the whistled tune where he had left off.

Silence. The checkered shadow on the floor. A dull throbbing at the base of his neck, where the doctor's fingers had probed mercilessly and with a final twinge of pain that had somehow relieved the stiffness. Who was coming? Maybe the sheriff just said that to give him hope. Maybe the sheriff was not so friendly as he had seemed. It might be Steve who was coming—or no one at all.

Ages of that, with his thoughts ranging round and round the circumscribed bounds of his misfortunes. What had he done that this thing should come upon him? No great wrong, surely—nothing for which he should be punished like a malefactor.

With his eyes mechanically tracing the squares of light on the floor, he retraced, step by step, his actions of the past month. He had started out to make his life over, among strangers; nothing in that to bring disaster upon him. That was one square. He had asked for work and been twitted about his dad—square two; and there was nothing there for which he could blame himself. So he went on to the blotting of the brands, to Roper and the ride into the Sinks, the long hours there and the ride out again. Any man would have done as he did, it

seemed to him. And yet something must be wrong, somewhere. Deep within his soul he sensed the inexorable law of cause and effect. The great law of compensation. It was there; it must be there—the cause. Somehow, he had set in motion the law, and it had brought him here to this cell in the county jail of Crater.

ROUND and round went his thoughts, seeking the answer to the puzzle. Then, quite suddenly, it came; or, if it did not, at least the thought that struck him was illuminating, and he sat dismayed before it.

He had tried to dodge, to shirk consequences, back there at the C Bar L. He had not wanted to face his friends and live down the look in their eyes, hear the note of sympathy in their voices. He had run away from that. What if he had stayed, had gone on to town with Carroll, had taken his place with Billy Parrish and the rest of the boys, and made the best of things? He had thought he was doing the proud, independent, brave thing when he rode away from it all, but now he saw that he had done the weak, cowardly thing instead. And when he marked out the brands, that, too, had been an attempt to dodge the issue.

Until that evening Cole Lawson had been able to think well of himself, however he might criticize and condemn those around him. He had been able always to justify his actions to himself; it was the other fellow who had blundered. But now he faced his own weakness and knew it for just that; his vanity—he could no longer call it pride—made a difference. Cole Lawson began to appear rather contemptible in his own eyes; not the fine, high-spirited young man who asked no man for sympathy or pity or help, but a swell-headed youth who wasn't willing to stand up and take a few hard blows. Yes, it surely did make a difference.

So, having dodged and run away from what life had placed before him, he was here because this was the trail he had taken. You couldn't run away from things and find any good fortune along the path of your flight. You had to take what came your way and make the best you could of it. You couldn't dodge; life wouldn't let you; if you refused your lesson in one form, you got it in another.

It was his mother's teaching, unheeded until now when it all came back to shed a little light in the darkness. Cole raised his head and looked around him, at the bare walls, the door that let in the light in squares. His supper sat cold on its tray, just where the cheerful attendant had placed it; not much of a supper, but food of a sort. He went over and lifted the tray, sat down with it upon his knees. The big mug of coffee was cold; the beef stew was cold. But that was his own fault. They had been hot enough when the man brought them, and he had let them cool while he sulked.

Cole drank the cold coffee, but the stew was too much for him, so he ate the bread that came with it and put the tray back by the door. He stood up and peered out into the corridor, his mind curiously at ease, now that he had reached what seemed to him a solution of the puzzle his life had become. If all this was the result of dodging issues, then hereafter he would meet whatever came his way. He would do the best he could with it and let it go. Even these ninety days he would meet, somehow, without that sullen resentment which he now saw had dominated him during the past month.

Though he did not know it, youth dropped away from Cole on that evening and left the man; a little hard around the mouth, a little somber in the eyes, but a man who would give the trail to none, come good luck or bad; a man who would drive straight to his purpose, who was done with subterfuges and evasions.

Restless after the long, silent hours of tense thought and no muscular action, he rolled a cigarette and began pacing slowly back and forth the short length of his cell. He was waiting now with a more normal curiosity for the arrival of the sheriff and his mysterious visitor. He still had no idea who it could be, but now it did not seem to matter much. He had neither defiance nor dread, but only an

expectant mood of waiting to try his new-found strength of soul and purpose, to turn his face toward his world and put his philosophy to the test.

He had finished that cigarette and was starting another, turning toward the barred light in the corridor, so that he could see to sift the tobacco into the little paper trough in his fingers. A shadow fell upon the floor, blotting out the black squares—the shadow of a man wearing the high-crowned range hat which was the fashion among those he knew. Though he had not heard any one approach—they went cat-footed on rubber heels in that jail, it seemed—he knew that it must be the visitor, for the silhouette did not resemble the sheriff, somehow.

Cole stared at it for a minute, raised his head, and looked up into the twinkling blue eyes of big Ed Carroll, the sheriff, whom he had last seen riding away from the C Bar L corral.

CHAPTER XIX.

COLE DECIDES.

"YEAH, he's the sheriff of Points West," chuckled Saunders, when the three were settled in the jail office with the door closed. There had been a decided air of secrecy about the trip from cell to office, and, among other puzzling things, Cole wondered why; but, since it did not seem to be his party, he waited until he was spoken to. "I kinda thought you'd recognize him. Glad to see him?"

"Well, I'm not sorry that I know of. How are you, Mr. Carroll? You didn't come clear over to Crater on my account, I hope. How'd you know I was here?"

"Didn't, till Saunders wired me. Lookin' kinda peaked, ain't yuh, Cole? Told you the devil was a poor boss to work for, didn't I?"

"Yes, you did. But you never came away over here to crow about that. What have I done in your county that I shouldn't?"

Two hours ago Cole could not have talked in that vein to save his life, but now he seemed to have dropped a weight of some kind, and the sight of Carroll stimulated him—cheered him, even. All the boys had liked Sheriff Carroll. Even in these circumstances he was a friend from home, and it was amazing how Cole warmed to his presence.

"Nothing, except leave it. Bill Saunders, here, has been telling me you got yourself in a little trouble, Cole. How about that story you told him about John Roper? I'd kinda like to hear the particulars."

Cole looked at Saunders, who was leaning back awkwardly in his desk chair, picking his teeth and staring at Cole with a ruminative expression that hid whatever might have been passing through his mind. Stupid, Cole thought him; stupid, but a good-natured and probably an honest man.

"Why, I guess Mr. Saunders told you all there is to tell," he answered after a minute. "I rode with Roper to take a job helping him get some horses, and I overheard him mourning because he hadn't killed me while he had the chance. He wanted my four horses. I gave him the slip, all right, but it was while I was doing it that I bumped into the trouble that landed me here in jail. You know my Eagle horse? Well, he got shot pretty bad in the shoulder. He's the one they made me ride in, and now you're here, Mr. Carroll, I wish you'd see if he's all right."

"I'm lookin' after the horse," Saunders grunted. "Got him in the stable with my own."

"What made you blot the brands, Cole?" Carroll was studying him more intently than even Cole's predicament seemed to warrant.

"Well, I wanted to cut loose from everything, and the brand advertised where I was from. I did it after I'd stopped at a ranch up by Thunder Pass and asked for work. Fellow there knew who I was, just by the brand on the horses. He threw it at me, and I turned and rode off, and after that I marked out the brands. I didn't want everybody asking about things that were none of their business." He shot a sidelong glance at Saunders, wondering if he knew.

Saunders let his chair tilt forward and

snapped the toothpick between his fingers.

"That the Muleshoe, where you stopped?"

"I don't know. Yes, I guess it was. I saw some cattle ranging near there, with a Muleshoe brand—or, anyway, it could be called that."

"And you blotted the brands *after* that? When was it you met Roper?"

"Four or five days afterward—five. I camped four days by a creek, in a little meadow, and then I rode into a place —'Little Lost' was the sign over the gate —and bought some grub. It was that night at supper when Roper and a fellow he called Pete rode into camp. They asked themselves to supper, and they kept eying the horses, I noticed; but I didn't think anything much of it at the time. Folks always do look them over; they're horses that would take any man's eye."

Saunders looked at Carroll, who pursed his lips in thought.

"There's the connection I been lookin' for," said Saunders softly. "I knew there was one somewhere. What do yuh think, Ed?"

"Looks that way," Carroll admitted. "Four days—that would give 'em plenty of time to send word around."

"Send what word around where?" Cole's eyes widened. "They didn't think I stole the horses. The man at the Muleshoe knew I was Cole Lawson, and he knew the brand was the Lawson brand. He asked me straight out if I wasn't Cole Lawson's son."

"Uh-huh. And what did you tell him?"

"Me? I told him to go to hell, or words to that effect."

"Thought it was funny Roper would try to pull off a murder just to get the horses," Saunders mused, groping in his pocket for another toothpick. "Well, I guess we got the connection, all right. Little thing like that! But it's the little things that lead to big ones. Ain't that right, Ed?"

Carroll was still staring at Cole, with a look as if Cole were transparent, and he could see through him and beyond to something not visible to the others.

"Funny the kid should be the one; and yet, maybe, things don't just happen, either. Well, Bill, looks like we got something to go on, now. I suppose this bunch here is kinda on the anxious seat about Cole."

"Wisht you could have been at the preliminary, Ed. You'd have seen some sour looks thrown at the kid. Muleshoe, huh? Muleshoe and Roper. Pretty slick. Too slick to foller him themselves, or make a play at the ranch. Uh-huh." Again he ruminated. "That horse you was riding that night, Cole—he's got an extra feed of oats comin' to him!"

THEY were talking in riddles, treating Cole like a child who has innocently given grown-ups some valuable information, but is not considered old enough to be told what the excitement is all about. Had they told Cole to "Run along and play, now," they would have been acting consistently. He resented that.

"I wish you'd quit treating me like a ten-year-old kid," he said sharply. "I've got three months on my hands, with nothing to do but think. I'm not going to put in the time wondering what the devil you two are talking about, and I'm not going to have any chance to tell all I know. You may as well give me the straight of this thing. Why would the Muleshoe men send word on to Roper, and why——"

"I can tell you that," Saunders cut in, breaking the second toothpick and leaning forward in his chair. "Bart Nelson had his own reasons for getting scared when he seen you ride up, coming straight from the C Bar L, right after your father was killed. I've been kinda puzzled over Bart and his outfit, and I never could pin a thing onto 'em. Now I can see the connection. You came straight over there and asked for work. I can see now that Bart would think you suspicioned something, and thought maybe you could snoop around and find out a few things. Course, he didn't have no work for yuh!" Saunders looked at Ed Carroll, who nodded his confirmation of the deduction.

"He was scared to tackle you, though; probably he thought you had somebody with you, and you was just sent ahead to scout around. No, he wouldn't dare do a thing but let you go and send word around to look out for you, and get you if possible." He chuckled—that silent shaking of his big body in throes of mirth that made no sound. "I bet the Muleshoe stepped soft for a while," he added. "Huh, Ed? Lookin' for more C Bar L men to come trailin' the kid."

"Billy Parrish and Red Billings come pretty near doing it," Carroll volunteered. "I got to 'em in time and talked 'em out of it. Made 'em see that it would do the kid good to get away by himself for a while. Pretty much of a shock, the way things happened. Looked like his dad had committed suicide, and all the property——"

"*Looked* like it!" Stark white, Cole was on his feet, glaring at the sheriff of Black Rim County. "Didn't he? Was he—was——"

"Now, Cole, take it easy. I been studying you, and I made up my mind you could stand the gaff now. But if you're going to—— Hell, man, *sit down!*"

Cole sat down, drawing a long breath as he pulled himself together.

"All right. I'm not a kid any longer, Ed. Shoot the works. I can stand it—anything but being left in the dark, guessing at things."

"Well, guessing's about as good as any of us can do for a while, Cole," Carroll said moodily. "Saunders and I, we're just puttin' two and two together. We couldn't take any of this into court, mind you. We're just piecing the evidence together, and it's you that has furnished us some mighty important pieces." He looked at Saunders inquiringly. "I guess we might as well tell Cole all we know about it, hadn't we? Seems to me he's about as interested a party as any of us."

"Uh-huh, if you say so. You've known him longer than I have. It's a ticklish proposition right now, but for ninety days he ain't going to make any foolish moves, and by that time——"

"I'll stand good for Cole's brains, and it seems to me he ought to know what we know. It's like this, Cole: When I said it *looked* like your father shot himself, that's about as far as I can go, right now. I will say this much, though, that I don't believe it was suicide. Looked that way, because the bank had foreclosed on him all of a sudden, when the bottom dropped out of the beef market and cattle went down to where it didn't pay to ship. Caught your dad where the hair was short—everybody knows that. But didn't it strike you as mighty funny, Cole, that he should take the six-gun route before he'd even found out how bad he was going to be off when the banks got through? Course, a man does go crazy enough to do a thing like that, sometimes; but there's a few points I'd like to clear up before I'd say he fired the shot himself."

"THE men on the ranch were all in the bunk house," Cole said slowly, his eyebrows pulled together, while he recalled that scene which he had been trying for a month to forget. "We'd had a big argument at supper over a certain saddle in a catalogue, and we all went to the bunk house to settle it. It was just about dusk—a little late for shooting hawks. I guess that's why I ran up to the house when I heard——" He stopped a moment to moisten his lips. "The boys were all in the bunk house," he repeated dully, and stared unseeingly at the floor.

"Yeah, I know. You sure you heard just *one* shot? You sure it wasn't two shots right close together?"

Cole looked up at him, startled out of his painful meditation.

"Why—I thought it was one. All the boys were laughing and guying Gene about what he'd said, and there was a good deal of noise, but I thought it was one shot. Afterward I thought it was funny I should run to see—— Dad was always taking a shot at hawks that came down off the hill after the chickens."

"Well," said Carroll dryly, "you knew it was kinda late in the day for hawks. The chickens had all gone to roost, hadn't they?"

"I guess they had. I never thought

about that—afterward. But I wasn't more than a minute or two getting there."

"No, I don't expect you was. And it wouldn't take a minute for a man to get into the brush back of the house. How long would it take you to duck out of that room and into the gully behind the house?"

"About ten seconds," Cole declared, making a quick calculation.

"Yeah, about that. Would anybody at the bunk house or the corrals be liable to see yuh?"

"No, they wouldn't—not unless they were watching the door. From the bunk house you can't see the door, anyway. Dad used that room for an office because the windows were just right for his desk, and the room has got that outside door. But he couldn't see what was going on around the corrals, unless he came to the door and looked out." He stopped abruptly, swallowing the lump that rose in his throat. How often had his dad appeared in the doorway, looking to see what mischief he was up to!

"Well, it's mostly guesswork. But there's the tracks of high-heeled boots going down into that gully, and whoever made 'em was running. They don't show at the house because the gravel walk is wide there, and beyond the gravel is a strip of grass. But beyond the grass, dipping down into the gully, is where the tracks show plain. Anybody you know of been running down there, right around close to that day?" Carroll was making it as easy as he could for Cole. "Did you, for instance?"

"No. There wasn't any reason for any one to go down there. Dad left that hill wild, and the gully, too, because—because mother liked it just as nature made it. That's why our yard wasn't fussed up much with flower beds. She loved the wild growth. Her room looked down into that gully and up the hill beyond. We all liked that view. Dad wouldn't even put a fence where it would show on that hill."

"So if any fresh tracks showed, runnin' into that gully, it's safe to say nobody on the ranch made 'em. That what you mean?"

COLE took time to study the matter. He could see what Carroll was driving at, and he knew he must not make a mistake.

"No matter how many are living around a place," he said after a minute's thought, "there are always certain spots they don't bother. That gully's one of them. There just wasn't any reason to go down there at all. I don't suppose any one went into it once in six months; not since I grew up, anyway. I used to play Injun down in there and hide from mother or dad when they got after me for something. But that's all it's good for. Even the chickens range off the other way, toward the creek."

"That's what Billy Parrish and Red told me. I ain't talked with the rest of the boys about it. But there's tracks in there, just the same. Whoever come and went that way done it more than once. They could go up the gully to the top of the hill, crawl through the fence, and ride off across the country without any one seeing them. That right?"

"It could be done, yes. It could be, but it wasn't—not by any one at the C Bar L. It would be too much out of the way, getting anywhere."

"Not for some," Carroll remarked with grim meaning. "Well, I got to prowling around and run across them tracks, and that's what started me thinkin'. Since then there's been other things to bear out the theory that somebody was there that evening to see your dad. He was used to staying in that office a lot, wasn't he?"

"Since mother died, he was. He liked to be left alone a good deal. When he was in the house he always stayed in his office, except at meal time and when he went to bed."

"You didn't stay with him—set in there with him?"

"No." Cole caught his breath, suddenly struck with the utter loneliness of his father. "I never thought he wanted me there. He never talked; he read a lot, I guess, and worked over his books and smoked. I was always with the boys in the bunk house or riding around. The house was lonesome after mother died. I slept there, is all. Sometimes

I ate with dad and sometimes with the boys. I guess"—he glanced up at Carroll and away again—"I wasn't much company for dad. I wish I had been, though."

"No fault of yours, Cole. He wanted it that way, or he wouldn't have had it that way. When a man puts money makin' before everything else, he ain't much company for a kid. What's the matter?" He broke off to lean and stare keenly at Cole, who had turned white again.

Cole bit his lip, looked away, caught Saunders staring at him, and closed his eyes tightly for a minute. When he opened them again they were not the eyes of a boy. They gleamed with a new bitterness, and they met Carroll's look without flinching.

"The way it happened," he said with forced calm. "Could a man shoot another one—that way?"

Carroll exhaled a long breath and sat back in his chair.

"Would a man lay down on the floor and blow his own brains out with a gun?" he countered slowly. "Both are possible, but neither one is common. I believe the killer knocked your dad down and then shot him—with the gun in his mouth. I found where the bullet went into the wall, *under a chair.* Nobody knows that but me and Billy Parrish. Your dad wasn't in the habit of packing a gun——"

"No, but he kept it handy. On the table in the office, mostly."

"It ain't a pleasant subject to talk about, Cole, but there's one other point. You got to him first. Remember where the gun laid when you went in?"

"It was right by his hand. His fingers almost touched it; like this." Cole went down on one knee and spread his right hand open on the floor to show them. "The gun lay right there, as if —— Why, good Lord, Carroll! I never thought at the time, but it ought to have been by the other one! Dad was left-handed in his shooting!" He got up and stood looking a bit wildly from one to the other.

"Now I know 'Ham Fat' was right. He said he heard somebody talking to dad—remember? We all thought dad was maybe talking to himself. He did, sometimes, when he was alone and upset over something. Ham Fat said he heard talking, and he heard a bump, but we didn't pay any attention to him. We couldn't see how any one could be with dad when we were all in the bunk house. Now it fits——"

"Who's Ham Fat?" Saunders wanted to know.

"Chinaman cook. He took care of the house. He went and hid when he found out what had happened. That wasn't his name. It was Wong Fat, or something, but we called him Ham Fat, just for a josh. Good old chink, too, but maybe——"

"It wasn't him," said Carroll, answering Saunders' look. "Well, you see how it lays, kid. It looked like suicide, all right, and coming right when it did, on top of all them foreclosures, it seemed reasonable enough. And, as you say, the way it happened would show it was suicide. But Billy Parrish asked me on the quiet, afterward, what I thought of that right-handed shooting for a man that's always shot left-handed, and that started me to prowling around. That's how I happened to run onto the tracks going into the gully. Somebody had left a horse tied outside the fence, up over the hill, and more'n once, by the looks of things. It's bushy up there, if you remember, Cole."

"I know."

"It was right in that young-pine thicket up there. Ain't more'n half a mile from the house, but I don't suppose anybody'd go there once a year, unless it was to look after the fence. Gully runs from there on down to the foot of the hill, and brush all the way. What more'd a man want?"

No one spoke for a minute, and then Cole swore a sudden oath under his breath.

"And for three months I've got to sit in here doing nothing!" he said bitterly. "Mr. Saunders, you argued me into it, and now if I break jail you needn't blame anybody but yourself. I'll tear the damn joint down, but I'll get out, I warn you!"

CHAPTER XX.

COLE DEMANDS A CHANCE.

COLE got up restlessly and began pacing back and forth across the office, his hands in his pockets and his sunken eyes bent in haggard misery upon the floor. Murder, not suicide, had taken his life and smashed it with wanton brutality. About the property he did not care so much, perhaps because he had never known the pinch of poverty and so could not visualize all its sordid details. But to think that his father had been murdered and made to seem a coward in death! With all the men on the ranch, men who loved him enough to fight for him, his father had suffered that ignominy, and the murderer had been able to sneak away unsuspected. Without in the least knowing what he did, Cole pulled one fist from his trousers pocket and shook it at the wall.

"I'll get the skunk!" he said between his teeth. "Who was it?" He whirled upon big Ed Carroll, who watched him. "Do you know? Was it Roper? Was it some one at the Muleshoe? What did they have against dad? Mr. Saunders, I can't stay in here for three months; I *won't* stay. You've got to let me out so I can——"

"Now, now, hold on a minute!" Carroll restrained him with an uplifted hand. "You can maybe do more good right where you are now, Cole. This is something we've been workin' on for close to two years. It's more than just your father. That's only one angle of it. No, don't take me wrong, kid. I ain't belittling what happened to him. But the thing goes farther. Saunders and I have been tryin' to get a line on an organized gang of rustlers and holdup men that's been operatin' all up through this country, and even into Montana and Washington and Oregon. Seemed like one link of the chain was over this way, but Saunders couldn't pin anything to any one.

"Now, I've got reasons to believe your dad knew something. He did a lot of outside buying, you know; little bunch of stock for sale, he'd go grab it. Worked on money he borrowed from the bank, last few years, and branched out more'n was safe. But, anyway, he must have——"

"If you say he was working with a gang like that, Ed Carroll, I'll kill you!"

"Aw, sit down! I never said he was, nor never meant it. I do say he must have found out something. Maybe he was the goat on some deal they put over on him. I don't know, but it looks now as if there was something brewing at the C Bar L—something the gang was worried about.

"Anyway, Saunders, working over at this end, gets word from me to look out for you, Cole, because you've hit out for yourself and are headed this way. Nothing to that, only I wanted you should have somebody over here in case you needed a friend. Ain't long till he hears about you shootin' a fellow on the run. At least, he thinks it's you, from what he heard."

"Griswold boys described you," Saunders explained, "and then Pete Brown, that's working for Roper, said he'd seen you before that, and that you had some stolen horses and was a hard-lookin' guy that acted like you was on the dodge."

"Yeah; well, when this fellow swore out a complaint——"

"Steve Harris," Saunders supplied.

"——Bill saw there was a lot more feeling displayed than the crime called for, so he wired me to come over. Then he got your story, and the thing looked a darn sight bigger than at the start."

Back and forth, back and forth, went Cole, like a tiger in a cage. Now he stopped and eyed the two with sharp questioning. They looked quickly at each other, looked away again. Probably they had seen men driven to desperation before and knew the signs. Carroll got up quietly and dropped a hand on Cole's shoulder; the sprained one, for the lad winced.

"Easy, boy. We're counting on your help, but right now you can do more by staying here in jail, where they think you're safe, and they're safe. If it's like we think it is, somebody over on this side the mountains knows more about what happened that night in your house than we do. But it wasn't Bart Nelson,

or he wouldn't have throwed it up to you about your dad. Maybe it was Roper, and maybe it wasn't. We don't know. You can't go hellin' up and down Burroback askin' every man you meet if he killed your dad. You've got to go at it sly and easy—and maybe slow, to what you'd like to do. You throwed a scare into the bunch when you come riding down Thunder Pass like you meant to stay, and I'd stake a good deal on my guess that Bart Nelson sent out the word that you're in the country and to look out. Probably Roper was hunting you, and them blotched brands gave him another jolt. It showed you didn't want it known where you was from. All he could think of was to get you off down in the Sinks and see to it you disappeared, and the chances are your horses would have gone with you!

"But what can we *prove?* You say you heard them talking. The two of them can say you lied. Roper's an honest rancher on the face of it, and Pete Brown's his hired man—on the face of it. Now, if they don't know you heard 'em——"

"They don't. How can they, unless Mrs. Harris or Dorothy tells?" Cole had quieted, but it was the quiet of a leashed bloodhound quivering for the hunt.

"They won't tell," said Saunders.

"So the gang thinks you're out of the way, in jail here, and they're safe. They'd have liked it better if you'd gone to the pen, but, anyway, you're safe for ninety days. Don't you see it, Cole? While they're thinking about you here, we'll be following the lead you've furnished us."

Cole gave an impatient snort and sat down, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees. Carroll had never seen his jaw so square and stubborn, his eyes so hard. He looked years older, more like his father.

"You two are old hands at this, and I'm green," he said tensely, "but there's something you've overlooked. Look here, Carroll, would I be apt to come off over here on a clew of some kind, and nobody else at the ranch know a thing about it? If you're right about the Muleshoe and Roper and all, you can bet your sweet life they're watching for the next move. If that trick to make dad look like a suicide didn't get by with me, how would it get by with anybody else? I don't know about the Muleshoe outfit, but Roper's no fool. I can see why he'd want to get me out of the way; they'd found out by that time that I was alone, I suppose. But don't you ever think they feel safe and are going to tip their hands!

THE one thing giving us the edge on them is the fact that they don't know I was wise to them that night. They never knew I heard them talking about me, so Roper probably thinks I just got lost and wandered around till I found the way out. He thinks he's jake with me, and if I was to meet him in the road he'd probably offer to hire me again. He thinks I was stampeded by them three I met, but he doesn't know I thought they were his men. How could he? The last he saw or heard of me, I was trailing along, expecting to go to work for him!"

"That's right," Saunders admitted.

"I'll bet they're watching over Black Rim way, a heap closer than you're watching over this way. They just thought they'd put me away, while they had the chance, but don't ever think they believe the danger stopped with me. For one thing, they never tried to find me. They just let me go. I don't believe they thought I was so darn important, after all. Roper told Mrs. Harris I was an outlaw, on the dodge with stolen horses. I don't see why——"

"Uh-huh, sure he'd tell some such story," Saunders cut in. "John Roper's an honest rancher, you want to remember. He wouldn't make any open move against you. That night in the Sinks, it just looked too good a chance to pass up, I guess."

"What you got on your mind, Cole?" Carroll had been watching him.

"Nothing, except that to find out anything worth while you've got to get right in and work with him and for him. I know every word Bart Nelson at the Muleshoe said, and every word I said,

and what's to prove I didn't ride off mad because I'd stolen those four horses of mine? He don't *know* I'm Cole Lawson. You spread around the report that Cole Lawson is somewhere else, Carroll, and I'll go to Roper and bone him for that job he offered me. I'll be an outlaw on the dodge, so far as they're concerned."

"You couldn't make it stick," Carroll objected. "Besides, it's too risky."

"I could get away with it, all right, if you'll help plant me somewhere else. Say, I'll write a letter to Billy Parrish, and tell him how somebody stole my horses, and how I had to walk to the railroad, and caught a train somewhere. Seattle's a good place. I'll say I'm headed for Alaska. The boys all know I've been crazy to go there, and they'll fall for it. You can work it, can't you?" Cole looked from one to the other, an eager light in his eyes. "If I was a sheriff I could work it," he hinted. "I'd work it, if I had to make the trip to Seattle myself to mail the letter. Anybody you think is in touch with these fellows over here, make darn sure he sees the letter or hears about it, anyway. Get the boys to talk a lot about me going to Alaska.

"Then, when I come out of here, I'll go strike Roper for a job *and hold it!* Hell! I can be as tough as they are, if it will help find the fellow that——" He did not finish that sentence. There was no need.

SAUNDERS was industriously chewing another toothpick and watching Cole stupidly. Now he snapped the tiny stick in two and cast the pieces from him, leaning forward with his hands clasped across his middle and his thumbs rolling swiftly over each other; a sign, by the way, that big Bill Saunders was very much awake to the situation.

"I can get you all the dope on ships sailing north," he said in his lazy drawl. "You'll want plenty of local color that can be checked. Not havin' much money with you, probably you aim to work your passage. I'll find that out, too. I'll have a Cole Lawson stopping at a cheap rooming house down on Second Avenue—I know the place—and I'll have Cole Lawson start for Alaska on any ship we want. Got a friend there—deputy sherff—he'll fix it up. Mail all the letters you want to write. Better say good-by to all your friends. If you got a girl over at Points West, you better send her some little beaded dewdad they sell to tourists on the coast." He drew a long breath and looked at Carroll mildly.

"Idea's fine, if we can put it over. It'll take a little time, but then, time's plenty around here. We been workin' two years to land our men, and I guess another month or two——"

"Ninety days." Cole gloomily corrected him. "Eighty-nine, I mean, if your clock's right."

"Uh-huh. Ten minutes to one. Well, I ain't in the habit of havin' jail breaks, but if a prisoner should get away from me, I'd have deputies out after him, you bet——" One fat eyelid went down in leisurely fashion and lifted again.

Cole stared and glanced sidelong at Carroll, who was studying him with expressionless intentness, then looked at Saunders again and grinned.

"I'd sure give them a run for their money," he boldly declared. "Say, I'm the toughest guy that ever stole a horse! Jails can't hold me."

"This one will for a while yet," Saunders dryly declared. "Think he's tough enough, Ed?"

"Cole's all right," Carroll answered gruffly. "He'd go through with anything he started, but it's too risky. We better not let him tackle it."

"I want it risky!" Cole cried eagerly. "I can see the whole play, now. If Mr. Saunders means——"

"I mean you're going back to your apartment, young feller, and stay there and keep your mouth shut. Ed and I'll have to do a pile of thinkin' and schemin' on this proposition. We make a fluke of it, and our goose is cooked at next election. Keep this all behind your teeth, and maybe——"

"Damn ticklish," Carroll grumbled.

"Look here! I *know* I can put it over. They gave me the name, and I sure can play the game. All I want is a chance. I——"

"Come on, and keep your trap closed. I got a fella down at the end of the hall that's kinda tough himself. Stole a rifle and watch from the blacksmith, and he's layin' out a sixty-day sentence. Used to ride for John Roper." He paused to let that sink in. "Maybe in a day or two I'll put you in with him to see how tough you are. And, by the way, Dick, who looks after the boarders, is a mouthy cuss that turns whichever way the wind blows. Good hearted, but what goes into his head comes out on his tongue. You couldn't keep his mouth shut with copper rivets. Comes in handy for me. I sure know how the prisoners look and feel—and *talk*."

"I get you."

"Don't ever be misled by his seemin' friendly," Saunders warned him further. "If you're goin' to put this thing over at all, you got to be a horse thief waking and sleeping, young feller. You dasn't let up at no time, except in this office with me. And if I act harsh, you take it like a horse thief and a bad egg generally."

"I understand, Mr. Saunders. Don't think I'll fall down on the job."

"Uh-huh. But the C Bar L is no friend of yours from now on, remember."

"Too damn dangerous," Ed Carroll protested for the third time. "They'd cut his throat as quick as they'd stick a pig."

"And I'd see them hanged and never turn a hair," Cole said with an implacable kind of calm. "I want you to know, both of you, that my business from now on is to find the man that killed my father and made it look as if he shot himself because he was too big a coward to face a little hard luck. That's why I left in the first place. I couldn't stand the thought of folks knowing my father sneaked out of life the way he did. If I can prove to people that he didn't—that he was murdered, and his—his good name tramped in the mud—don't you suppose I'll go the limit? You needn't worry, either of you. I'm not going to make any slip-up."

"No, I guess you won't. Well, we'll see. Go quiet, kid." Saunders opened the door and waited for Cole. The two went out so silently that even Carroll, who was listening in the office, heard no sound in the corridor.

CHAPTER XXI.

FORCED QUIET.

TWO days later a sullen youth slouched into the large cell at the end of the corridor, his entrance accelerated noticeably by a push from behind. The door clanged shut behind him with a spiteful definiteness, and Saunders met his impotent snarl with a scowl of disfavor.

"You keep up that midnight cussing," he said sourly, "and 'Shorty,' here, will kick your ribs in. I've had about enough outa you. Little more, and you'll go in the cage, on bread-and-water diet, for a while. Don't take any lip from him, Shorty. He's got a lame shoulder, and I guess you can handle him if it comes to a show-down. Kept me awake two nights now, so I'm turning him in for you to tame him."

Shorty McGuire, the brief possessor of a rifle and watch he had not earned, licked a thumb and began mechanically slipping off three cards from his worn deck, while he eyed his new cell mate.

"Aw, he'll be all right, sheriff. Goes kinda tough when a feller's left all by himself like that. I cussed considerable, myself, first week or so in here; all the difference is, I was off down here at the end, where you couldn't hear me. Say, I swore m'self hoarse!" His rather close-set eyes of commonplace blue turned measuringly upon Cole, and he swept up his layout of solitaire with a sigh of anticipation. "How about a little game of coon can or something, stranger? Solitary sure gets monotonous after a while. Couldn't we have a table in here, sheriff?"

Sheriff Saunders gave a grunt and walked back up the corridor, and Shorty listened with his head cocked sidewise until he was certain the office door had closed. Then he looked at Cole and grinned.

"You don't wanta mind *him*," he said in a tone meant to be reassuring. "His bark's worse 'n his bite, any day. I bet

he don't put a guy in the cage once in six months—not unless they're crazy or the like of that. He just makes threats. My name's Shorty McGuire. What's yours?"

"I've been calling myself Cole. Kinda like the sound of it, too. Better use it," Cole said in none too friendly a tone. He took a turn up and down the cell, which was double the size of his own and could, at a pinch, accommodate four prisoners. "Damn this town!" he abruptly exclaimed. "I meant to make it up into Montana before cold weather."

"Aw, forget it!" Shorty urged sympathetically. "I ain't hangin' around because I'm in love with the life, m'self." He was shuffling the cards slowly, evidently waiting for his invitation to be accepted.

Cole halted beneath the barred window which was set into the stone wall, six feet from the floor. He stood looking up at it, his eyes narrowed. After a minute of perfect quiet he reached up with his well arm and felt the bars, one by one, gripping each and giving it a tentative shake. Shorty laughed unmirthfully as he watched.

"Nope, they don't rattle in the wind," he dryly observed. "Not enough to keep yuh awake nights, anyway. I made sure of that long ago."

Cole turned and looked at him morosely.

"How long you been in?" he asked sourly.

"Me? Four weeks to-morra. She's the lonesomest damn jail I ever seen. This town is dead and buried. All this room in here, and nobody canned once a month. Come on and let's start a series. Twenty-one games, and the loser—— Got any money on you?"

"What do you suppose, after that sheriff went through me?" growled Cole.

"Yeah, same here. Afraid we might git extravagant." Shorty pulled down the corners of his mouth in a sardonic grin. "Well, we'll keep tabs with matches, till Dick comes, and then maybe we can talk him outa some dry beans. Low deals. Come on, cut!" And when Cole did not move toward him: "Aw, what's the use of fightin' your head about it?" he remonstrated. "Don't make the time go no quicker. I know, buhlieve me! I tried it."

"It's the feeling that I had to go and slip up on a bad break in the dark," Cole said, as if the thought literally forced itself into speech. "I've managed to steer away from the jug, when—— And to get caught up on a blunder like that——"

"Yeah, I know that side of it, too," sympathized Shorty. "Why, look at me! Had to go and swipe a darn gun I didn't really need—found out afterward the rifling was all wore out, at that—and a watch that lost twenty minutes a day! And get nabbed! Darn that ugly Swede! It makes me sore every time I think of it. But then," he added by way of extenuation, "I was pickled to the ears, or I'd 'a' knowed better. Come on, cut for deal."

COLE wearily cut the cards to a ten-spot. Shorty cut a trey, licked his thumb, and dealt the cards swiftly, ten to each. They began the silent game, making the spreads on the space of lumpy mattress between them on the cot, which they used for seats and table as well. Cole had last played coon can with Red Billings at the C Bar L, and a wave of homesickness swept over him; but he shut the memory sternly from his mind and calmly picked up the queen of clubs, spread it with jack and king, and discarded the trey of diamonds, which Shorty promptly seized, making a spread of treys.

Twice during the day Cole went carefully over the room, examining walls, floor, and the ceiling, which he could not reach, of course. He gave particular attention to the window. Shorty watched him and thumbed his prized deck of cards.

"You ain't used to bein' cooped," he remarked, when Cole was making his third attempt to shake a window bar.

"And I ain't going to get used to it, either. You can bank your sweet life on that," Cole retorted. "Let me up on your shoulders, Shorty. I want to take a look outside."

Shorty obligingly complied.

"She backs up against some old sheds, and then comes the hill. On a dark night——"

"Sss!" hissed Shorty, and eased Cole down to the floor. "Wish we had some beans," he said cheerfully, pulling Cole back to the cot and pushing him down with the flat of his palm. "I'd try you a whirl at poker, old-timer—sky limit and the joker runnin' wild. Your deal." He sent a stealthy glance over his shoulder to the door. "Four tabs! I need 'em in my business, and I'm goin' after 'em right now."

He was talking for an eavesdropper, but his caution was apparently wasted, for the sound in the corridor ceased. Shorty strolled over to the door and peered out, listening.

"You never know what that mealy mouthed Dick is up to," he remarked, as he resumed the only pastime they had, save reading. "Don't go shakin' them bars all the time, Cole. There ain't a chance in the world of loosening 'em, I tell you."

Cole did not reply to that, but the gleam in his eyes, as he glanced up from his hand, caused Shorty to overlook a king when he was making a spread of kings. This was an unusual oversight, for Shorty seldom failed to see anything that was to his advantage.

Day followed dull day, and the two struck up a certain degree of friendship, natural to companions in solitude. As became the rôle he was playing, Cole cursed his ill luck with consistent venom and spent hours in pacing the roomy cell and devising wild plans of escape, which Shorty discouraged. They talked of many things, but never of the Muleshoe or the Black Rim country or John Roper, because Shorty mentioned none of these, and Cole was afraid to take the initiative.

He studied Shorty; and sometimes he felt an uncomfortable conviction that Shorty was likewise studying him; that Shorty was watching and weighing him and only partly believing in him; that, behind that careless manner of being willing to take what came and make the best of it, lay Shorty's real self, with many things of which he did not speak. A strange, intent look came sometimes into his eyes. What it signified Cole was not able to decide, but he did know that right here, in the very beginning of his grim rôle, he was forced to play to a critical audience of one, and he was not at all certain that he would not hear a catcall of disdain for his poor performance before the first act was over. He did not put it in exactly that form. He told himself that he didn't know whether he got over with Shorty, and that he would have to get over now, or give up the crazy scheme altogether; because Shorty was not the fool he sometimes appeared to be.

Inaction was maddening. There were times when Cole doubted whether Saunders and Carroll were not making a fool of him. There were days when he lay on his cot, with his face hidden on his folded arms, and gave himself up to black despair, while he pretended to be asleep. At those times Shorty read Western stories and cursed fluently their glaring inaccuracies, or played solitaire with endless patience, while he hummed vile paraphrases of popular songs.

SAUNDERS never came near. Dick, the guard, brought over food twice a day and joked with Shorty and doled out matches and cigarettes to both and went his way again, whistling down the corridor and out into the sunny world that to Cole seemed shut away forever, a mythical world of rolling hills and wind-swept levels and sun and moon and stars. He could not see that he was accomplishing anything at all, except that, in spite of themselves, the days did drag past to where they could be checked off in his mind as that much time gone from his sentence. But three months of it—*three months!*—while his father's murderer roamed free.

But one thing was accomplished which should have gratified him. His sprained shoulder was recovering its full strength in that time of forced quiet, and he forgot all about the stiffness and pain in his neck.

He was lying so, with his face hidden, when voices came down the corridor. He recognized Saunders' voice and an-

other that tingled his nerves, so that a prickly chill went from his scalp to his toes and left him with a surge of hot blood and then a chill that seemed to center somewhere in his throat.

"Calls himself Cole, eh? That's gall, taking a man's horses and his name, too. Think he'll talk? Young Lawson'll be tickled to death if I get his horses back for him. He had some money, too——"

How plainly Bill Parrish's voice came down the corridor! It was to warn him, of course, and prepare him for the visit. They were afraid he might betray himself to Shorty McGuire. Not that it would matter a great deal, except that Shorty's sentence expired before Cole's, and when he was released he would probably talk.

"Hey! Wake up, Cole!" Shorty was saying in his ear. "You got company."

"Tell 'em to go to hell," mumbled Cole and twitched away from Shorty's fingers. "Lemme alone. I'm sleepy."

Why hadn't they waited until it was darker in there? But when he moved his head, so that one eye could look out into the room, he saw that the hours had dragged themselves slowly to late afternoon, and the cell was almost dusky. He wanted it so. He did not want Billy Parrish to see his face too plainly.

To be concluded in the next issue of THE POPULAR, *on the news stands May 20th.*

THE GOURMAND IS AN ANCIENT ANIMAL

THE scientist, Doctor Arnold Sack of the University of Heidelberg, after a pathological study of thousands of mummies, announces that the growth of human ailments runs apace with the growth of luxury. These Egyptian mummies, to the number of thirty thousand, date back to four thousand or more years before Christ and some of them are no older than the dawn of the Christian era. The mummified bodies showed unmistakable evidences that diseases which cause deformation of the body and its organs, such as smallpox, gallstones and tuberculosis made their appearance when the men of the early Pharaoh dynasties began to practice the arts of the gourmand.

An examination of the teeth of these mummies yielded some interesting data. Doctor Sack made a special study of the teeth, and he found that bad molars were unknown in the early periods. The peasant types retained their teeth in a healthy condition, even to extreme old age. But the rich and the rulers, easily distinguished by their costly mummy cases, invariably exhibited broken and decayed teeth. As living became more luxurious, the need of dentists grew, and the condition of Egyptian teeth at the beginning of the Christian era is only paralleled by present-day conditions among civilized nations. An examination of the teeth of five hundred mummies from the tombs of Gizeh showed one or more cavities in the teeth of every mummy.

One of the results of Doctor Sack's study of these mummies is of unusual historical interest to students. Not a single mummy, dating before the Christian era, showed any evidence of leprosy. From this fact, it is inferred that biblical leprosy was not the same disease which we call by this name to-day. Biblical lepers were regarded as unclean and were segregated, it is true, but they were afflicted, very probably, with a type of skin disease which had nothing in common with present-day leprosy.

Taken!

By Bernard Breslauer

In a port café on the west coast of Africa, where dispirited men, deep in their own memories, prefer not to be their brothers' keepers, Bull Montjoy told a story of comradship that sent tingles down the spines of his motley listeners.

THE Royal Café on the water front of Akassa is distinguished chiefly as being the place where "Bull" Montjoy refused to let Sven Jansen sit down at his table.

Akassa is a small port on the mouth of the Niger and fronts on the Gulf of Guinea. Men come into it by sea, land, or river—thirsty usually. Taverns are therefore plentiful, more than enough to outnumber a man's good resolutions. A sailor ashore may resolve to stay sober and save his pay. He will be drunk by midnight, broke by dawn, and noon will find him with a splitting head and a thick tongue, grimly signing on for another voyage.

The Dark Continent is too dark for men to deny themselves the light, brief moments of forgetfulness that come with rum, whisky, or pombe. Africa gives some men victories, and they drink to celebrate them. It gives other men defeat, and they drink to forget or to imagine themselves victorious.

This man, bitten by a burrowing flea, drinks to forget that the terrible insect, no bigger than a grain of black pepper, has begun to lay its long chain of eggs within him, and that the surgeon's knife is helpless against the spreading purple blister. That man who has come upon the skeleton of his negro guide in the forest, drinks to forget that what was once his strong servant has gone to feed an army of safari ants, billions of them, the army that never turns, simply devours what is in its way and goes on; a man may step across it unharmed, but the man who sleeps in its path—he never rises again. One man drinks to master a fever which quinine cannot kill; the other to celebrate his imminent departure for home, wife and children.

Truly there are many reasons to drink in Akassa. Each man has his own, many

of them are queer, some deserve a laugh, others a curse, still others a tear, although tears are a rare luxury along the Gulf of Guinea. Youth goes soon there, and, somehow, men soon forget how to cry, no matter what provocation they may have.

Yes, there are many reasons to drink in Akassa. The big man who stalked like a tired tiger into the crowded Royal Café, a little before midnight, had his. Other customers had come and gone all evening without exciting comment. Not so with this one. Voices were lowered, and the deep, harsh rumble of unrestrained conversation sank perceptibly. But the newcomer bore the scrutiny of many pairs of eyes without seeming to be aware of it. He must have sensed that the conversation at the various tables had turned to him; yet, for all his face revealed, they might have been talking about the rainfall of the wet-weather season. He seemed to think himself alone.

He looked haggard. His bronzed cheeks were sunken; his massive shoulders sagged. He gave the impression of intense physical weariness and of something more—a weariness of spirit, perhaps; but his eyes, darkly circled, gleamed from their sockets in token of the strong inward fire which all the fevers of Africa had not quenched.

Whisper, hum, buzz, all around the smoke-filled room; glasses poised in the air midway to the lips of the drinkers.

"That's Bull Montjoy."

" 'Oo's 'e?"

"Gorilla hunter—elephant ivory."

"Blime, if Hi ain't seen him in Zanzibar."

"Capetown, I'd swear. He's swung twenty thousand miles round the coast. You can run into him most anywhere. Got gorillas for the British Museum—more f'r hell than money. He made a good strike in Gold Coast Colony. Money's dirt to him, and he spends it faster'n 't comes. He can go anywhere, do anything. He's his own boss and comes from the States; college bred, they say."

"Where's 'is mate?"

"Yes, that's a fact—he's got a pardner —'Tack' Calhoun. They travel together all the time. Strange, he's alone. Looks as black as a thunder cloud."

"Where's Calhoun? Where's the twin? Calhoun ain't with him to-night."

Almost entirely oblivious to all this speculation and curiosity, which would have tickled the vanity of another man, Montjoy strode heavily to a small table, the only empty table in the café, pulled out one chair, stood behind it for an instant, as though waiting for some one to sit down upon it, then stepped to the opposite end of the table and slumped into the other chair.

"Wine for two!"

The deep voice carried with a mellow resonance to the bar.

"Looks like Calhoun's coming," some one whispered on hearing the order.

THE swinging doors of the café opened, and a huge blond sailor entered. His light-blue Scandinavian eyes peered innocently around the room for a vacancy. A pleased expression came into them, as he espied the empty seat at Montjoy's table. His awkward body was set in motion, and he lumbered forward and reached the seat, as Montjoy looked up.

"Taken," Montjoy said.

The Norwegian did not understand and drew the chair back, preparatory to sitting down.

"Taken," Montjoy said. The voice was somber.

A mist came into the sailor's mild-blue eyes, and the square face flushed beneath its weather-beaten hue. The room was quiet. Montjoy's short answers had been heard to the four corners. They saw the big seaman standing undecided by the chair, his shirt open upon a tremendous hairless chest, his big eyes misty and calm. Strange, but it was the same calm a sailor knows at sea, when no puff of wind comes to ruffle the sails, when the huge swells roll beneath a hot copper sky, and the ocean is peaceful with a false peace, a deceptive tranquillity. They saw Montjoy, still slumped in the same position, with downcast eyes, seeming already to have forgotten the big man who towered above him.

The Norwegian, evidently making up his mind that he had misunderstood, and

that Montjoy had not meant to be hostile, smiled and said:

"Yas, I take it."

"Taken!"

The waiters pulled up on their rounds and stood still. The bartenders relinquished the taps and paused in their wiping of glasses; a negro boy dropped his bar rag. The big Norwegian understood at last that the seat was being refused him. Suddenly a terrible, murderous mist flooded his pale-blue eyes, and he roared out of his great chest, as he swung the chair off the floor and aloft in one powerful hand:

"I take it!"

The room rang with a babble of voices. The sentiment was against Montjoy:

"Let the square face sit down." "He's no right to hold a seat." "A crazy fool running amuck—gone berserk." "Does Montjoy think he owns Africa?" "Calhoun can find another seat when he comes."

But Montjoy had sprung to his feet. There was something strange in his eyes —in his large body, which was quivering like a tall pine in a gale; but it was his voice which silenced the room—silenced the almost-blinded Norwegian. So savage that voice was, so shaken with an unknown grief, that it was like the mournful roar of a she-ape bereft of her young one. No one in all Africa had ever heard a sob in that voice before.

"Taken! Reserved for my friend!"

Montjoy's body trembled cruelly, as he strove to master himself. The storm was subsiding, if not within him, at least by outward signs. The old Montjoy was beginning to look out of the bloodshot eyes. When he spoke again his voice was low and level.

"What's your name, sailor?"

Perhaps it was because the question came as a command, reminding the Norwegian of his captain, that the answer was given so promptly:

"Sven Jansen, sir," the "sir" escaping quite involuntarily.

"I am drinking with a friend to-night, Mr. Jansen." By tacking on the "Mister," Montjoy raised the Norwegian to the status of a mate. It was diplomatic and cost him nothing. The Norwegian's rage had been arrested in time. The compliment helped considerably. He was peaceable enough now. Meanwhile, a waiter had set two glasses of wine upon the table. The chairs had been placed in position again. The Norwegian shifted his weight from side to side, embarrassed, puzzled and waiting for the further explanation which it seemed would be forthcoming. The rest of the crowd waited for the same thing. It was not like Bull Montjoy to act the bully, nor at any time to deny another man his rights. If perchance he did, he must have a reason for it. It looked as though he were about to give it.

Montjoy stepped slowly to the center of the room and looked about him. If there had been a woman in the crowd, she might have pitied him then; for, with a woman's keen eyes, she would have seen a strong man bowed with a grief which he strove to hide. But to the men in the café he was Bull Montjoy, who had just won another victory—a small one, it is true, when compared with others, but still a victory.

"I am drinking to-night with Tack Calhoun," Montjoy began, and from then on he continued without interruption, his words rolling out in a steady, resonant stream. A strange story, a confession that came without reserve. Surely there must have been some imperative inward need that compelled this man, otherwise so secretive and given to hiding his thoughts and emotions from the world, to let down the barriers and open the floodgates of his heart at this moment and in such a place. The deep voice rose and fell, fluent at the beginning, broken, halting toward the close; powerful one moment and the next moment like the voice of one talking in a dream.

SIXTEEN years ago a youngster came as a freshman to a 'prep' school in the States. He came up from the South, from Georgia, and he found himself without friends in a new country, the Berkshires of Massachusetts, where the snows come in the winter time, the first snows he had ever seen.

"The campus bully—every campus has one—decided that this young Southern

aristocrat, with his slow drawl and handsome face, needed a thrashing to fit him for the rigors of New England life. Another freshman couldn't see it quite that way and proceeded to upset traditions by thrashing the campus bully, who was a sophomore. Somehow or another, this second freshman had rather cottoned at first sight to this youngster from the South, and he couldn't stand the thought of seeing the best chiseled nose in the school smashed in by a bullying lout, whose fat face was no handsomer than a rhino's. But he learned soon enough that the mild-looking descendent of old colonels and cavaliers could have turned the trick of thrashing the husky galoot, himself—and done a better job, maybe. The first freshman was Thomas Calhoun, called Tack, the second was John Montjoy, called Bull.

"That was how Tack Calhoun, young gentleman from Georgia, came to shake hands with Bull Montjoy, son of a Bowery saloon keeper, who changed the whisky and beer he sold into the dollars that made his son a gentleman, and who died satisfied, with his fingers curling tightly around Bull's college diploma.

"'Ah reckon we're friends,' Calhoun said to Bull in his soft voice, almost like a girl's then. 'Ah'd like to room with you if yoh can stand it.'

"They roomed together at prep for two years and spent the Easter, summer and Christmas vacations together, alternating between New York and Georgia. Old man Montjoy's saloon was no Southern mansion. He gave the two youngsters soft cider instead of mint juleps to drink, and the smell of suds took the place of the scent of magnolias; but from the look on Tack's face whenever they entered, any one would have thought that the café was a sure-enough Southern ballroom, and that the man he bowed to and handed a fine Havana cigar was Jeff Davis himself, instead of only old man Montjoy, who was my father, and who never thought he was a gentleman, but was a gentleman all the time.

"Graduation came, and then college. We played football together. Tack was a back, I played tackle. That's Greek to some of you, but no matter. It was the best time of life, two healthy youngsters finding on the gridiron the small battlefield that foreshadowed the larger battle ground of the world. Since then there have been many gridirons, bigger battles, injuries worse than a broken shoulder or collar bone. But Tack Calhoun and Bull Montjoy have played together in the same way; the world's only been a bigger football field for them.

"They shared what they had. One man's purse was the other's. I wore his shirts, he wore my ties. We even shared our girls. When the junior prom came—a prom is a dance—and the girl I had selected suddenly broke the date, Tack turned his own selection over to me and sent for a doctor, on the plea that he was too sick to go. The doctor afterward told me that he'd never seen a healthier specimen.

"The only quarrels we ever had came when it was up to one or the other of us to do a difficult or disagreeable thing, and then we'd quarrel with each other for the privilege of doing it. In the beginning I won! I could talk more and usually succeeded in wearing Tack out verbally. But later on things began to change.

"Tack had got hold of an old silver dollar, a good-luck coin, he called it, and thereafter we would resort to tossing it and abiding by the result. Tack was superstitious about that coin and would never let it pass out of his possession. I never handled it. He said it was a one-man coin.

"We'd toss for most anything, car fares, meals, theater tickets. The man who won, according to our lights, would be considered the loser by an outsider, since the one who called the turn had to pay. But we always thought that the man who lost, as the outsider figures it, really won.

"After college I found myself alone in the world, with a nest egg left me by my father, and the world before me. That's the time when friendships formed in school days usually break up and die. This one didn't.

"A year later, Tack Calhoun and Bull Montjoy, after philandering about in the capitals of Europe, found themselves in Algeria and in the Foreign Legion. They

joined it because the native tribes were troublesome at that time, and the campaign against them promised to be active. It was.

"The natives were encamped in the sand dunes, about twenty miles east of the Figig Oasis. The commandant wanted to know what the Algerians were about. We both volunteered. One was enough; another man was one too many. We tossed the lucky coin. Tack cried, 'Heads.' It came heads. Looking back now, I can see that Tack usually won whenever it was a question of life or limb. When it was a question of money, I usually did. He called it his lucky coin.

HE set out for the hostile camp in native dress. He posed as a man deaf and dumb, 'an afflicted of Allah,' as the natives call it. It's a safe-enough disguise, because the natives won't harm an afflicted one. But he was caught listening in on a council. Some suspicion as to the truth of his affliction made the natives decide to test him.

"They have their own special methods. This particular one consisted in burying him up to his chin in the sand and proceeded to stretch his neck. The method is good enough to make even a really dumb man speak. But Tack didn't speak. As a reasonable man, he figured it out this way. If they pulled on the rope a bit more, they would probably break his neck; on the other hand, once he cried out, his life wasn't worth a farthing, and he would certainly lose it. He therefore chose the uncertainty of strangulation in preference to the certainty of immediate execution.

"The natives, afraid that they had already incurred the wrath of Allah, but still unconvinced, extricated him and compromised by clapping him under guard. He killed his guard, stole a horse, and was back at the outpost at sunrise. The experience gave him a stiff neck—no worse, he claimed, than being scissored on the football field. He saved my life. *I* would have cried out.

"That lucky coin went with us to the gold fields. We got tired pretty quickly of getting gold out of the ground, so we pulled up stakes, sold our claim for a song, and went to running salt down the Niger. We had occasion to toss the coin on our last trip down. It fell into the river. Before I could stop him, Tack had gone over the side to fetch for it. As I was praying that all the crocodiles in the river would suddenly die, he came up with the dollar and a grin and put the coin away in his pouch, as though it were a balas ruby. We didn't toss the coin again that day. Tack let me go ahead and do the thing we had argued about. You see, it wasn't much.

"We spent the next two years in the Rusisi River country, running down elephants from Tanganyika to Kivu. Then we got restless again—thought we were making too much money out of ivory. So we left the elephant trail and started out to spend what we had. The only money Tack ever cared for was his silver dollar, and as for me, I don't see anything in gold, silver, or bank notes except that they can take you where you want to go. We made a twenty-thousand-mile circuit —Canary Islands, Tangier, Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli, Cairo into the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, ashore at Zanzibar, then through the Mozambique, around to Capetown and up the west coast. That was our vacation, so to speak, and we spent it together, just as we spent our Christmas vacations back in college days.

"A year later found us on the hills surrounding Kivu, in sight of the Gorilla Triangle, the three mountains, Mikeno, Karisimbi, Visoke. We tossed the coin a number of times in the months that followed. The months lengthened into two more years, and we were still alive. We came down from the top of the world with six male gorillas, and it looked as though Africa was about played out for us.

"I'm not going to talk much more. I'm pretty tired, I guess. In the sixteen years we've been together—Tack and I —that lucky coin has swiveled in the air more times than I can remember. It's a strange coin, that silver dollar—a strange coin. But I count back now—eight, nine, ten years. During those ten years that coin has gone up more than

ten times in a life-or-death toss, and each of those times one man of us won. It was always Tack. But Tack always came back.

"I had come to believe in those ten years in a friendship stronger than death, stronger than all suffering, stronger than the jungle, the lion, the gorilla—stronger, even, than women. For neither of us had ever married. Three weeks ago we tossed again.

"There are famine and drought up north. There have been five inches of rain in the whole wet-weather season, where there should have been twenty-three. The land's a furnace, and the villages are peopled with the dead. The small rivers are dried up. They dried up so fast that, up in Bornu, some natives caught two hippopotami before they could drag their feet out of the mud. Coming down I found six salt smugglers off the trail. They'd curved off to get past the customs man and had died of thirst.

"For six months Tack and I had been trekking Nigeria with pack horses, loaded with quinine and vaccines. The word came up to us at Lake Tchad that the inhabitants of Yola, Okari, and the smaller villages along the Binue River were giving up the ghost quicker than they could be buried. Lake Tchad was about the healthiest place a man could be at the time. But there we were with the stuff, and the Black Death, dysentery, typhus and malaria, mixed with starvation and thirst, were reaping their harvest along the route we hadn't yet covered.

"We started out. We made bad time. Horses died, and we had to get others. Our water ran low. But we got past Okari and headed for the Binue. We fooled ourselves for a while. The water was almost enough for one man to get through on. It was about as bad as nothing for two. We rode along in silence, thinking the same thought, I guess. I knew it would come pretty soon. Tack reined in. I drew up alongside. We didn't say a word, as the silver dollar came out of the pouch. We tossed. Tack won.

"Yes, Tack won—he won again. No reunion this time. It was over at last—it was over. He put the coin back in his pouch and looked at me.

"'Well,' he said.

"I answered: 'Come along part ways, we might strike water.'

"'Not a chance. As soon as you'd see me with my tongue hanging out, you'd give me some. Then we'd both be gone. I guess it's over, Bull. Pretty good while it lasted. We've no kick coming.'

"'Yes, I guess it's over.'

"A man can't say much when he feels a cold hand in his vitals, taking out his heart, pulling out a part of him. It was like a wrench inside of me—worse than death. Hell, it's easy to die. But prep school and college—Montjoy's saloon—sipping juleps on Colonel Calhoun's lawn—sleeping, eating, working, fighting together, and then for one to die, the other to live! I opined the silver dollar would be a best remembrance. He wanted to refuse—I could see it in his face—but then he smiled and handed me the pouch.

"When I rode away and heard him singing out of the darkness, over and over again, trying to keep our contact unbroken as long as possible—'Good-by, Bull—good-by, Bull—good-by, Bull—good-by, Bull'—something inside of me *died*—snapped. I was alone in the world."

FOR the first time the narrator paused. His face was more haggard, more worn than before. As his hand swept up to his hat, which he had kept on all the time, he seemed old. At thirty-five his youth seemed to have been left far behind. The room was painfully still.

"Look at me!" Montjoy cried hoarsely, as he threw off his hat.

A murmur of amazement, of horror, almost of awe, swept the café. Bull Montjoy's hair was gray.

Again silence, as Montjoy drew a pouch out from under his shirt, undid the knot, and produced the silver dollar.

He held it up before them, as a prestidigitator on the stage holds up a coin which he is about to palm.

"Heads," he announced.

He turned it over and presented its opposite face to their fascinated gaze.

"*Heads,*" they heard him repeat, al-

most in a whisper, and they saw that it was so.

He straightened up. "And that's why," he said slowly—"that's why, Mr. Jansen, no man sits in that seat to-night —because Bull Montjoy is lonely and wants no stranger sitting opposite him. Because Bull Montjoy is drinking with Tack Calhoun to-night, and Tack Calhoun is drinking with me."

They saw him step to his table, saw him sit down, saw him stare across and lift his glass to the uncanny emptiness that was all that remained of Tack Calhoun. His lips were seen to move. To him there was no emptiness there; there was only the handsome familiar face, the ready smile, the cheerful word, the unfailing understanding. For their friendship was stronger than death.

INSECTS AND THE ELECTRIC LIGHT

SCIENCE and the State of New York have linked forces to fight harmful and obnoxious insects. Electrical engineers, entomologists, pathologists, and horticulturists of the State are coöperating in an experiment which is rightly regarded as one of the most important of modern times in this particular field.

It is a well-known fact that the flame of a flickering candle invariably attracts insects by the thousands. Magnified a thousandfold by electricity, the flame of a candle will be used on the grounds of the New York State agricultural experiment station to lure to destruction the female codling moth. Electric-light traps will be distributed over the grounds in an effort to ensnare this destructive pest before it has an opportunity to lay its eggs in the calyx of the pink blossoms of the apple tree. The same lure of the brilliant candlelight is expected to trap the leaf roller, the cherry maggot in its moth form, the rose aphis, and the cut and cabbage worms in winged forms. If this experiment proves successful, it will prove a boon not only to the horticulturist, but a real economic factor.

These electric-light traps will emit rays almost invisible to the human eye, but glaringly attractive to the eye of an insect. In the orchards of the station, electric lights of varying intensities will be installed at various angles to attract the winged insects that fly at high altitudes.

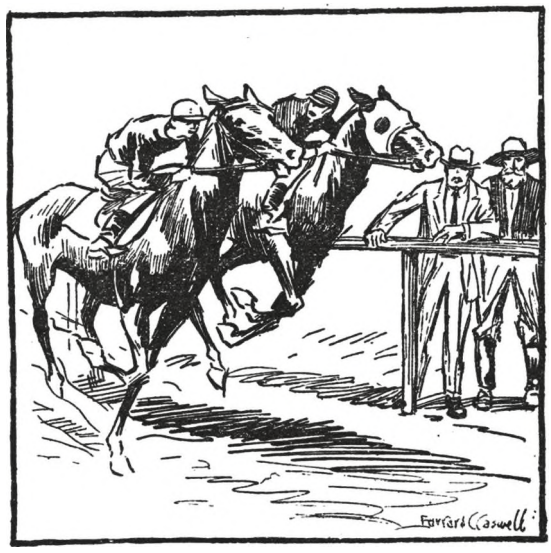
AN HISTORIC HOUSE

THE report that Henry Ford is about to purchase the Edward Everett House in Boston, will meet with the approval of all lovers of fine old architecture in this country. Unquestionably beautiful as the recent examples of city building in the United States have proved, an historical as well as an æsthetic sentiment attaches to the few remaining examples of good eighteenth and early nineteenth-century houses in this country.

The Georgian tradition carried over into the first years of the nineteenth century. The Everett House, which was completed before 1814, embodies the best traditions of late Georgian, and some of its details are outstanding examples of chaste classic taste. The entrance and doorway are particularly fine. The spirit of restraint, characteristic of Colonial days, is strikingly illustrated in the Doric columns of the entrance portico and in the fanlight over the door.

Matthew Bridge, a Boston shipowner and merchant, built the house, which later passed to his daughter, Sallie, who married Seth Knowles. When the cornerstone of Bunker Hill Monument was laid in 1825, Seth Knowles there entertained General Lafayette and Daniel Webster.

It is also rumored that Mr. Ford is seeking to purchase the famous old Harvard Church and the burying ground in which John Harvard is buried.



Black Gert

By William J. Makin

Oom Jannie's love for his daughter was equaled only by his faith in his horse. He backed his horse, Black Gert, against the South African field; but Leonie, his daughter, ran true to the oldest race in the world.

AS he removed the big calabash pipe from his mouth, Oom Jannie blew a cloud of smoke through his thick lips.

"Ever since the *rooineks* came to this country," he growled reflectively, "things have been different. They brought the curse of gold with them and that itching to buy and sell, which is a blight worse than drought or the locusts."

"Yet they are always fair in their dealings, father."

Oom Jannie turned his leathery, tanned face in the direction of this interruption of his outspoken reflections. His gray beard seemed to bristle in angry fashion at the sight of his daughter, bending down before the log fire and poking it into a blaze.

"Allemaghtig!" he snorted. "It is not right that a girl should contradict her father. Have you made the coffee yet?"

"In two minutes, father," replied the girl cheerfully, rising from the fireplace and straightening her back. Her flaxen hair gleamed almost like polished brass in the glow of the fire, and her blue eyes smiled cheerfully across the room at the old Boer farmer. There was no denying that the daughter of Oom Jannie possessed a beauty rare on the hard, sun-baked veld of Africa. Shy, perspiring young Boers had often entered the farmhouse to prostrate themselves in adoration before that creamy-white skin which the fierce sunshine of the day did not destroy.

"I have lived in Wagenkop for forty-five years now," resumed Oom Jannie, shuffling his burly body deeper into the chair. "It has been the Lord's will, Leonie, that I should see many come and go, including your dear mother, Marta. *Aach!* She was a fine woman. She could harness the oxen as well as any man on the veld. But the coming of the *rooineks*

changed everything. They came into Wagenkop, shaking their bags of gold and corrupting all the men of the veld. Within two years they had stripped Wagenkop as clean as any swarm of locusts. They bought our cattle, our horses, our grain—*aach!* The curse of the Lord was upon us, and they left us with a few jingling golden coins and deserted kraals. Never were there such fine horses as were bred at Wagenkop in those days, never were there such fine herds of cattle, such sheep, and such grain. Then, slinking into the midst of these riches, which the Lord had provided for us, came these jackals from the towns —the *rooineks*. They took the fine horses, the fine herds, the sheep and the grain, and, now what is there to be seen in Wagenkop, eh? A few mangy horses, sheep that suffer from the blight, and a few *morgen* of withered mealies. Our shame is open to the world."

The harsh voice of Oom Jannie ceased, and smoke clouds swirled angrily toward the roof of the farmhouse.

Unperturbed by this outburst, Leonie busied herself at the table, laying it with a medley of meats and sweets which revealed that the old Boer farmer had not lost his taste for heavy table delights.

"If the devil himself had come——" began Oom Jannie, and suddenly he stopped, as a knock sounded on the door.

Leonie, poised at the table with the coffeepot in her hand, looked inquiringly at the old man. He looked back at her and then stuck forward his gray beard menacingly.

"*Foei-toch* then!" he cried. "See who is there!"

With a startled swirl of her skirts, Leonie placed the coffeepot against the fire and hurried to the door. With a desperate tug she swung it open and walked onto the *stoep*. In the quickly fading light of the veld evening, she could discern the figure of a young man standing there.

Oom Jannie waited, puffing the old calabash heartily. His long legs, heavily booted, sprawled outward on the floor of the *eat-kamer*. A moment later, and Leonie, her flaxen hair disordered in the breeze sweeping across the veld, stood nervously before him.

"Well?" growled Oom Jannie.

"It's a *rooinek*, father."

"A *rooinek!*"

"*Ja!* He is asking for some food and a bed for the night. He is on his way to Nylstroom, but both he and his horse are tired."

"But—a *rooinek*, you say?"

Oom Jannie had twisted his thick lips into a snarl.

"He speaks only English. What am I to do?"

Leonie's blue eyes fixed themselves on the old Boer. She could see, struggling within him, the unquestioned law of the hospitality on the veld conflicting with his distaste for the English. But hospitality was too sacred an affair to be withheld.

"Ask him to come in," he growled. Then, as she moved quickly to the door: "Stay! I will go and look after his horse. Have supper ready when we return."

And, raising his huge bulk out of the chair, Oom Jannie strode out on the *stoep*.

WITH the candles lighted on the table and an appetizing supper spread with lavish display, Leonie awaited the coming of her father and the young *rooinek*. In the darkening light of the veld, she had not been able to see much of the stranger. Only his voice, with its soft drawl of English, spoke of youth. So it was that the shuffle of heavy boots on the porch and her father's growl, "Come in," caused her to turn with some anticipation toward the door.

Nor was she disappointed. The young Englishman swept off his wide-brimmed felt, revealing a thin handsome face burned red by the sun. His dark hair swept up from the forehead and curved smooth over the back of his head in a fashion entrancing to Leonie, who had seen too many disheveled heads of young Boers. His brown eyes gleamed at her pleasantly.

"I'm so sorry to have to inflict myself upon you," he began, "but this is the only homestead I could see for miles

around, and one of your Kafirs pointed out the path."

"*Aach!* We are only too pleased to give you what we can," growled Oom Jannie. "Leonie! A chair for Mister —Mister——"

"——Lawrence," replied the young man cheerfully—"Richard Lawrence. I've been visiting a farm in the Kransberg district in which my dad is interested."

"So!" said Oom Jannie, with a swift glance at the young man. "Your father is a farmer, eh?"

The Englishman laughed.

"Oh, no. Dad just sits in an office in Johannesburg. When he buys a farm it's only to sell again and grab the profit."

Oom Jannie looked menacingly into the fire, but said nothing.

"Supper is ready, father," said Leonie, breaking in upon the short silence.

The men drew up their chairs to the table. Slowly Oom Jannie rose. With eyes closed and his gray beard resting on his chest, he spoke a short prayer in Dutch. Then he sat down and began to tackle a huge plate of cold mutton that Leonie had placed before him. The young Englishman did the same. Leonie did not seat herself at the table, but attended to their wants.

As the slim white hands stretched themselves about the table, Lawrence found himself stealing swift glances at this young Dutch beauty. The flaxen hair entranced him. In the shifting light of the candles he noticed that it changed; sometimes gleaming like gold, then, as she moved, becoming almost white. The high cheek bones, so characteristic of the Dutch, merely enhanced her beauty. Once she caught his glance in her direction, and blue eyes stared into brown. Then a flush swept up from her throat, suffusing the creamy pallor of her face.

With his head down to his food, however, Oom Jannie had his thoughts in another direction.

"That's a poor horse you're riding, Mister Lawrence," he declared, his jaws working vigorously at a piece of mutton.

"Yes, it is," agreed the young Englishman. "But it's the best I could buy in the district. Where are all the famous country-bred animals that one hears people boast about?"

"Where are they!" spluttered Oom Jannie. "Why, you Johannesburgers ought to know. They've been bought—and then sold for a profit, I suppose. There's no farmer on the veld here can resist gold. They're all mad about money. They sold their fine stock years ago, and now they can't breed anything worth looking at. I'm the only farmer within three hundred miles who has a horse worth boasting about."

"Yes, I've seen it."

"You saw it in the stable when I took your horse there."

"Yes."

"Well, man, I tell you that Black Gert is the fastest horse in the country. There's no other horse can equal him. No, not even the fastest of your Johannesburg beauties. And Black Gert is pure country-bred, here in Wagenkop. He's the last of the fine breed that we once were famous for. And, let me tell you at once, Mister Lawrence, he's not for sale. All the gold of the Rand could not buy that horse."

THERE was a fierce intensity in the voice of Oom Jannie. His gnarled hand reached out for the bottle of gin that Leonie had placed on the table, and he poured out a big drink for himself.

Lawrence smiled.

"I'm not going to offer to buy the horse," he said, "much as I should desire it. I know my dad would go into ecstasies over it, if he saw it. He has a racing stable at Joh'burg and is just crazy about horses. Haven't you ever raced Black Gert?"

The old Boer shook his head vigorously.

"*Allemaghtig!*" Why should I race my horse before a yelling crowd of white-faced, consumptive miners? I know he's the fastest horse in the country, and that's enough for me. With him I shall breed horses in this country that will take pride of place in South Africa. The time will come when farmers will again talk of the wonderful horses bred at Wagenkop. That is why I intend to keep Black Gert."

He took another deep drink of gin and pushed the bottle over invitingly toward the young Englishman.

"You've certainly a fine horse in Black Gert, *mynheer,*" he said. "But are you quite sure that he's the fastest in all South Africa?"

"I am as sure as I am about God," replied Oom Jannie simply.

"Yet I think my dad has a horse that will beat him."

It was said quietly, but the effect was astounding.

Oom Jannie's fist crashed to the table, rattling the plates and causing Leonie, who had been eating her supper in the kitchen, to come running into the *eat-kamer.*

"I tell you there's no horse in South Africa can beat Black Gert—no, not even a horse owned by a *rooinek.*"

"Father!"

Both men turned at the sound of that girlish voice. Leonie, flushed and distracted, tried to soothe the old Boer. But Oom Jannie was struggling out of the chair, and his huge bulk towered over the young Englishman.

"Where is this horse that you say is faster than Black Gert?" he demanded roughly.

Surprised at the sudden vehemence roused in the old Boer, the Englishman stared at Oom Jannie and then at Leonie.

"Where? Why, in my dad's stables at Johannesburg," he replied unflinchingly. "I'm talking of Mopani, who won the Durban July Handicap this year, easily. There's no faster horse in South Africa."

"Allemaghtig! I know my own horse," cried the Boer. "I've watched him ever since he was a foal. There's no horse to equal him in South Africa. And you, a *rooinek,* dare to tell me that there is one that can beat him. You lie, yes, lie."

"I only know that——"

"If you think that this horse of yours can beat Black Gert—*foei-toch*—bring it along and race it against mine. Bring your gold with you, too. I am ready to race Black Gert for five thousand pounds a side. Tell that to your father, and see if he still thinks his horse is so fast, after all."

And, with a hand trembling with the passion of the moment, Oom Jannie slopped more gin into his glass.

YOUNG Lawrence was aghast at the angry tornado he had roused. The girl, in all her pale beauty, was standing before them, a pleading look in her blue eyes. Yet he felt that he dared not retract now. There was a boastfulness about the Boer that nettled him. Of course, this horse was a good one, but to consider him the equal of Mopani, that had won every big race in South Africa, was really absurd.

"If you are serious——" he began.

"I *am* serious. I have made a challenge. Will you accept it?"

"Very well. I do accept it. But it is impossible to race the horses here on the open veld. It will also be necessary to bring Mopani by rail from Johannesburg. Will you agree to the race being run at Nylstroom?"

"As you will," growled Oom Jannie. "And for five thousand pounds the winner."

"Five thousand pounds the winner," replied the Englishman steadily.

The old Boer scraped his heavy boot on the floor.

"Get me my lantern, Leonie," he ordered.

She fluttered back into the kitchen and reappeared a moment later with a stable lantern. The old Boer lighted it carefully, snapped it safely, and walked to the door. Then, with a curt nod to the Englishman, he went out.

Leonie turned impulsively to Lawrence, as soon as he had gone.

"I'm so sorry that this should have happened," she said, her blue eyes searching his anxiously.

He found himself smiling frankly at her.

"I'm rather glad," he said.

"Why?"

"Because I shall see you again." She flushed at the remark.

"Father is so bitter against the English," she said. "He blames them for ruining this valley, where once were bred the finest horses and cattle. He so loves his farm and the horses that the *rooinek* has become his great big grievance."

"And you?" he asked. "Do you hate the *rooineks?*"

Her blue eyes smiled provocatively at him.

"I have rarely met them," she said.

"You have lived here, on the veld, all your life?"

"Yes."

"And you are happy?"

"Of course. There is nothing finer than the veld. It is all so—so free and spacious. Then there is the farm. That keeps me busy. Plenty of work does not give you much time for dreams."

"But you do have dreams?"

Her eyes took on a wistful gleam.

"Sometimes, I dream that——" She stopped suddenly. "But why should I tell you of my dreams?"

The flaxen hair and the creamy skin seemed to be overwhelming him. Her nearness was upsetting. But he resisted it. By an effort he turned his head and said quietly:

"You are right! There is no reason why I should know of your dreams."

Her blue eyes had gripped him.

"This—this race at Nylstroom—will it take place?" she asked.

"If your father is determined—yes."

"He is determined. Even now he is in the stable tending Black Gert. He worships that horse. It would kill him to think that there was a better horse in South Africa."

There was a short silence. Then Lawrence spoke again, looking boldly into those blue eyes:

"And I shall see you on the day of the race at Nylstroom?"

She smiled.

"I shall have to cajole father into taking me."

"I shall look for you," he said.

There was a crunching of heavy boots on the *stoep* outside. It was Oom Jannie returning from the stables. That glimpse of Black Gert had evidently reassured him, for he was singing softly to himself:

"Vat jou goet en trek, Ferriera,
Vat jou goet en trek
Zwaar draa, alle en de cin Kaat;
Jannie met de hoepel bein!"

Before he had lurched back into the *eat-kamer*, Leonie, after one provocative glance of her blue eyes, had whisked herself away.

TWO months later saw an imposing procession enter the little town of Nylstroom. On a big roan horse, heading the procession, rode Oom Jannie, a big silk hat decorating his head for the occasion. The red dust of the veld had coated the gray beard a strange hue, but it stuck out defiantly for the traders of Nylstroom to marvel at.

Behind Oom Jannie came Leonie, riding a young country-bred mount from her father's farm. An attractive, healthy figure she made in her khaki riding breeches and white blouse open at the neck, displaying that creamy-white skin which caused young Boers, lounging outside the store in the main street, to glance at her quickly again.

Then, in the procession, came three Kafirs who, between them, managed Black Gert, the fastest horse in Africa. Well named was the country-bred, its black coat shining in the morning sunlight.

Finally came a span of six oxen dragging a covered wagon through the dust. In the wagon, which was crammed with household goods and provisions, two Kafirs peered out on the primitive civilization of Nylstroom and grinned happily.

A cloud of dust swirled through the main street and halted in front of the procession. When the breeze had swept the air clear, Oom Jannie saw that his friend Van der Hooven was holding out a hand from his horse in greeting. Their beards almost brushed in the warmth of the meeting.

"The Johannesburgers are here, Jannie," cried Van der Hooven. "You will have to have all the luck in the world to beat their horse. Never have I seen a better one. Mopani is a horse in a thousand. And they have brought one of the best colored jockeys from Joh'burg with them."

"We shall see—we shall see," was all that Oom Jannie permitted himself to say.

"They are at the hotel, and they wait for you," Van der Hooven went on. "I told them that I would bring you to them."

Oom Jannie stuck out his beard in menacing fashion, and the blood surged to his cheeks.

"Who are they that I should go to them?" he growled fiercely. "Why should I, a Boer from Wagenkop, wait on these *rooineks* from Johannesburg? If they want to see me, let them come to my camp on the veld outside the town."

Oom Jannie had a distaste for the comforts of the Vlei Hotel of Nylstroom. He was determined to outspan with his oxen on the veld in the neighborhood of the race course which had been recently arranged.

"As you will, Jannie," murmured Van der Hooven. "There's a big crowd in the town and plenty of betting already. I hope you've brought plenty of money with you, for the *rooineks* are taking every bet that's offered."

"Allemaghtig!" snarled Ooom Jannie. "I come here to race my horse, not to gamble with fools. Lead us to the outspan."

With a shake of his head at his friend's obstinacy, Van der Hooven turned his horse round, and the procession resumed its solemn progress.

"And how is my little Leonie?" smiled Van der Hooven, as he rode by the girl's side.

"Just crazy about the race, Pieter," replied the girl. "Tell me," she added in a whisper, "has Black Gert really got a chance?"

The Boer pursed his lips.

"Of course, Black Gert has a chance—a good chance."

"But on which horse have you bet, Pieter?" insisted the girl, with a shrewd glance of those blue eyes.

The Boer was plainly discomfited and made no reply.

"You'll see to-morrow," broke in Oom Jannie loudly, "what a country-bred can do against the best race horse in South Africa."

"The Lord will decide," grunted Van der Hooven.

BY this time the procession had reached the center of the little town. Several Boers loafed on the *stoep* of the hotel, their great slouch hats and heavy boots dominating the scene. Many of them had come in from the outside districts, for the race between Black Gert, the unknown horse of the veld, and Mopani, the fastest horse on South African race courses, had been bruited abroad.

It was with some repressed excitement that they watched the procession pass the hotel. Shrewdly they eyed Black Gert, with his attendant Kafirs. Not a murmur passed their lips, but there were a good many significant glances.

Hundreds of natives were in the town, too. Decked out in their festival costumes, carrying their short spears and knobkerries, they displayed the whites of their eyes, as the procession went by.

"You won't enter the hotel, Jannie?" asked Van der Hooven.

"My camp is on the veld," murmured the old Boer, not deigning to turn his eyes in the direction of the group that watched him so covertly from the *stoep* of the hotel.

It was an hour later when the camp had been pitched, and the two Boers were sitting down to their coffee, that a Cape car driven by Richard Lawrence and carrying his father, drew up by the ox wagon.

Throwing the reins to a Kafir, the two Englishmen strode forward. Oom Jannie and Van der Hooven rose to meet them.

"Glad to see you again," began young Lawrence, holding out his hand to Oom Jannie. "This is my dad, the owner of Mopani."

The old Boer gazed shrewdly at the Johannesburger who confronted him. There was a white softness about the hand that extended itself toward him which he disliked, but he held it for a moment in his own brown, gnarled hand.

"It is my son who is really responsible for this challenge," began the Johannesburger. His plump, reddish face wreathed itself in smiles. "But I'm certainly keen to see a horse which will match Mopani, and I understand you

have a country-bred animal which is something of a racer."

"The fastest horse in South Africa, Mister Lawrence," growled Oom Jannie.

"Well, I'm risking five thousand pounds on my horse being the faster. Mopani has not been beaten yet in this country."

"It will be to-morrow," said the old Boer confidently as he looked belligerently into the eyes of Lawrence.

"Perhaps you'd like to increase the stakes to, say, ten thousand pounds," said the Johannesburger easily.

The Boer shook his head.

"No. I said I would race my horse for five thousand pounds. Not a penny more, not a penny less."

There was silence for a moment.

"Would you have any objection to my seeing your horse?" asked the elder Lawrence.

"Ja! I will show him to you," growled Oom Jannie and lurched in the direction of the open veld, where three Kafirs squatted by Black Gert.

The elder Lawrence looked shrewdly at the black horse, quietly nosing the drying veld. It moved easily, the muscles rippling beneath a shining black coat and causing the Johannesburger to murmur in admiration.

"A fine horse, *mynheer*—a fine horse."

"There is none in Africa to equal him," replied Oom Jannie simply.

"I like the build of him," admitted Van der Hooven, "and I can assure you, Mister Lawrence, that my friend Oom Jannie has a reputation for breeding some of the finest horses in South Africa."

"It looks a racer," said the elder Lawrence, with his eyes still fixed on Black Gert. "What's your price for him, *mynheer?"*

The old Boer turned his head in the direction of the Johannesburger and looked at him through narrowed, rheumy eyes, as though he had not understood.

"Price?"

"Yes. I'm prepared to buy the horse whether he wins or loses to-morrow."

"Allemaghtig!" The old Boer's wrath seemed to struggle in his throat. "Do you think I would sell Black Gert—the fastest horse in Africa—to a *rooinek?"*

"Why not? I'll give you a good price."

The growl of the Boer was like an angry lion roused.

"Keep your gold, Mister Lawrence. Let me tell you that Black Gert is not to be sold. I sell no horse of mine. Too many have gone from our valley at Wagenkop. The breed is disappearing. But I am not to be tempted by gold. I came here to race my horse. When the race is finished, and I have won, I go back to my farm and Black Gert goes with me. That is all."

And, spluttering his disgust, the old Boer turned on his heel.

His friend and the Johannesburger followed behind, and in silence they reached the camp again. Oom Jannie reached out for his mug of coffee and drank a deep draft.

"Well, I reckon I'll be getting back to the hotel, *mynheer,"* said the elder Lawrence, breaking the silence. "If you should change your mind—and I hope you will—I'm to be found at the hotel, *mynheer."*

"I never change my mind," said Oom Jannie.

The two men shook hands.

"It'll be a great race to-morrow," said the Johannesburger.

"Black Gert can beat anything," said the old Boer.

They parted.

"By the way, where's Dick?"

"Dick?"

The two Boers looked puzzled.

"Yes, my son. Where's he gone?"

"He seems to have found something more attractive than a horse." Van der Hooven pointed with a smile.

The other two turned. The flaxen-haired Leonie and young Lawrence were seated on the ox wagon, oblivious to every one but themselves.

I'LL take three to one on Black Gert! Three to one! Come along, gents—three to one on Black Gert."

Oom Jannie stared at the red-faced, loud-voiced bookmaker.

"Already Mopani is the favorite, Jannie," muttered Van der Hooven in his friend's ear.

"Ja! But these Johannesburgers are

all mad!" replied Oom Jannie. "Take the odds, Pieter, while you can."

Van der Hooven looked uncomfortable.

"I've already betted enough, Jannie. I'm wanting to see the race now."

Oom Jannie eyed his friend steadily through his rheumy eyes, but said nothing.

The race course at Nylstroom was packed with a strange, mixed crowd. Boer farmers from surrounding districts had taken up their position early. They displayed wonderfully flowered waistcoats and gaudy cravats. Tall silk hats adorned their shaggy heads.

Many had brought their womenfolk along—fat, lumpy creatures in vividly colored frocks. They sat patiently on the grass near the race track, eating—always eating. Their puffed brown faces stared stolidly from beneath wide-brimmed straw hats.

There were quite a number of Johannesburgers there, too. The elder Lawrence, who affected a morning coat, but spoiled the effect with a wide-brimmed felt hat, was surrounded by a group that had come with him from the city. They were talking and laughing loudly, with full confidence in the result.

"Cheats and gamblers—they are all there," growled Oom Jannie. "The judgment of God is going to strike them today."

"Who is riding for you, Jannie?" asked Van der Hooven.

"Klaas, one of my Kafir boys. I'm going along to see him now. Care to come?"

Van der Hooven followed Oom Jannie, as he pushed his way through the crowd unconcernedly. One or two Boers recognized him and called out a greeting. Oom Jannie merely nodded and strode on. There was a fierce determination about him that struck even Van der Hooven.

They came to the box where Black Gert was pawing the sawdust excitedly. A grinning Kafir boy, with a piece of dirty yellow cotton cloth tied about his body, materialized from the gloom inside.

"Everything all right, Klaas?" asked Oom Jannie.

"All right, *baas*," grinned the Kafir.

Oom Jannie eyed him steadily, his gray beard sticking forth menacingly.

"Remember what I said, Klaas. If you don't beat the *rooinek's* horse, I shall tie you up against my wagon and thrash you till you die. You understand, eh?"

The Kafir still grinned.

"All right, *baas*."

"Go and get your breeches on. I'll saddle the horse."

The Kafir disappeared. Oom Jannie took the saddle and flung it across Black Gert. The horse was startled and threw its head up, baring the white teeth.

"Aach! Be quiet!" growled Oom Jannie and went forward to stroke the lovely, glistening black neck which rippled under the touch of his hand.

He bent down his head until it was couched against the horse, and began to talk in strange whispers. Even Van der Hooven could not understand that language. It was a mixture of Dutch, Kafir, and English. But the horse seemed to understand that soft whispering, for it suddenly gave forth a neigh which was like a cry of victory.

The next moment Oom Jannie was bending down to tighten the saddle, though not before Van der Hooven had glimpsed something suspiciously like tears in those rheumy eyes.

A bell clanged loudly. A native was walking round and round, shaking it vigorously and importantly. There was a rush of Boers to see the two horses enter the course.

At the same moment Klaas swaggered in, wearing an old pair of khaki breeches and the yellow piece of cloth. He had never worn breeches before, and he judged the affair of great importance. He wore no boots and slipped a black splayed foot into the stirrup.

"You win, Klaas, or else——" Oom Jannie paused significantly.

Klaas grinned and swung himself into the saddle. The doors were flung open, and Black Gert pranced out into the fierce sunshine of the veld.

A murmur of admiration went up from the assembled Boers, as they saw the beautiful black creature, its ears twitching excitedly, and its legs dancing before

this strange crowd. But the admiration changed to a laugh, as they saw the Kafir boy in the saddle. With his grinning indifference, his strip of yellow cloth, and black, bare feet, Klaas looked anything but a winning jockey.

"Three to one on Black Gert! Three to one on Black Gert!" yelled a bookmaker excitedly.

"Oom Jannie's a fool," muttered one Boer. "I'm going to put some more money on Mopani."

AT that moment Mopani was led forth proudly by its owner. It looked like a thoroughbred. Quietly, but proudly, it walked through the crowd toward the course, the colored jockey in the saddle looking smart in his white jacket and gold sash. His riding boots were polished to a fineness that made them glisten in the sun. For a moment he eyed Klaas contemptuously and then urged Mopani onto the course.

Pandemonium began, as the two horses pranced to the starting post. "Three to one on Black Gert! Three to one!" yelled the bookmakers, but no one seemed to care about taking the odds. It was obvious that most of the money was being carried by Mopani.

"Aren't you going to bet, Jannie?" asked Van der Hooven, as he walked alongside his friend toward the improvised stand.

The gray beard stuck out again menacingly.

"I do not come here to gamble, Pieter. I come to show these Johannesburgers that the best horses in Africa can still be bred at Wagenkop. And very soon I shall hear them say so. They will want to buy Black Gert. These *rooineks* always want to buy. Like the locusts they eat up the riches of the countryside. To-day they will see a horse that all the money in Africa cannot buy."

It was at this moment that the elder Lawrence caught sight of the black silk hat moving toward the stand.

"Good afternoon, *mynheer*," he called, smiling.

Oom Jannie gave a curt nod. Then he turned his leathery face to watch the two horses start. Black Gert was still prancing about in excited fashion and giving the starter some difficulty. Mopani walked about quietly, suggesting confidence.

"They're off!"

The cry went up, as the two horses lurched forward. The race was to be two miles, or twice round the course. Mopani had obviously got the advantage of the start, and the white jacket of its jockey could be seen leading.

The rheumy eyes of Oom Jannie, narrowed to mere slits, as he watched the yellow jacket of Klaas. Black Gert was going well, but Mopani still kept the lead and was slightly increasing it.

Half a mile gone.

Black Gert seemed to have his head at the tail of the other horse. The colored jockey on Mopani was riding beautifully and easily. He, at least, seemed to have no doubt about the race.

They were coming into the straight by the stand now. The faint drumming of hoofs could be heard.

"Go on, Mopani! Go on," yelled some one, and the loud cry, breaking the silence, roused others to urge the horses forward. The white jacket with the gold sash flashed by the stand. Mopani was striding along beautifully. It was clear now that the lead had been increased. Black Gert followed, and Klaas turned a grinning face to the stand, as he went by. It caused a roar of laughter to go up.

One mile gone.

"If Klaas dares to fail——" muttered Oom Jannie.

Van der Hooven looked at that stern face which gazed after the horses.

"Black Gert can do it easily," went on the old Boer. *"Allemaghtig!* I know the horse. Klaas has only to ride him properly and——"

A mile and a half gone.

MOPANI was still leading and still going with that long stride. The next few minutes would decide the race. The only sign of the tension was that Mopani's jockey had bent a little lower over the saddle.

But so, also, had Klaas. As the crowd in the stand gazed at the two horses

rounding the bend, they saw that little piece of yellow cloth almost disappear from sight, and when both horses had entered the straight, it was seen that Black Gert had lessened the lead.

"Come on, Mopani! Come on!"

The horse seemed to hear the cry and increased its speed. But Black Gert was giving a wonderful display. With that dirty strip of yellow bent almost flat on its back, it came forward yard by yard until it was almost level with Mopani.

"Mopani wins! Mopani wins!"

"Klaas, you black devil—come on!"

It was Oom Jannie who was shouting now.

Black Gert had drawn level now. The drumming of the hoofs filled the ears of the crowd and roused them to yells.

The white jacket was seen to raise his whip and strike Mopani. The thoroughbred leaped forward. But Black Gert was striding past him with perfect ease and drew away.

"Black Gert! Black Gert!"

There was no mistaking the result now.

"By Heaven, that's a horse," cried the elder Lawrence, as Black Gert shot past the winning post, an easy winner by a length.

There were cries and counter cries.

"*Aach!* I tell you, Jannie, I never expected it," said Van der Hooven, as he pressed with his friend through the crowd toward that yellow piece of cloth bobbing up and down.

"I was never more sure of anything in my life," murmured the old Boer, as he put out a gnarled hand to the bridle of his horse.

Calmly he led it through the crowd and eventually found the elder Lawrence before him.

"That's a damned good horse, *mynheer,*" said the elder Lawrence.

"He has beaten the only horse in Africa who could match him," growled the Boer.

"Well, it's cost me a good deal more than the five thousand pounds that I owe you," replied Lawrence. "But I'm prepared to double that five thousand if you'll give me Black Gert."

The old Boer shook his head.

"Not for a hundred thousand pounds do I sell Black Gert, Mister Lawrence. He is to be kept in the valley where he was bred. I shall sell none of my horses."

It was at that moment that through the surging crowd pushed young Richard Lawrence, his face flushed and happy.

"Who won, dad?" he asked.

The elder Lawrence stared at him.

"D'ye mean to say that you didn't see the race?"

Richard Lawrence smiled.

"Sorry, dad, but I had a very important engagement."

"And what might that be?"

"I was getting married to Leonie. Allow me, dad, to present to you my wife."

A shy, flaxen-haired Leonie came forward.

Oom Jannie stared, and, as the realization dawned upon him, his head dropped, and his beard was against his chest.

"*Allemaghtig!*" he muttered to Van der Hooven. "These *rooineks* are too clever. They always get what they want."

And a very old man led Black Gert back to the horse box.

MAROONED ON AN ISLAND

IT is much more convenient to be marooned on a tropical island than on an arctic one, but Axel Larson had no choice. He was already up in the Alaskan waters, and had to make the best of what he found. His fishing boat was wrecked, and entirely lost. Without even the comfort of food or matches, the fisherman found himself cast on a little island twelve miles from the nearest mainland—too far to swim, even if he had been a Channel swimmer. Icy water is not very inviting. Larson was up against it. His only protection was a blanket, but even that luxury became soaked in the driving storms. For two weeks he managed to keep alive by eating mussels until the halibut schooner, *Republic,* finally rescued him. In his rescue, too, Larson was unfortunate, for he was forced to swim through seventy yards of rough, cold surf to reach the boat. There's a lesson in this. When you do your marooning, pick a warm climate.

The Broadening Trail

By

DON McGREW

Author of "Men Command Men," Etc.

IN FIVE PARTS—PART IV

THE STORY

On a Wyoming plain rode Buck Hilton, a lad whose parents had been killed, supposedly by Mormons. Buck's quest was revenge, but at the moment he was busy defending a little Indian girl, Rose-dawn, daughter of a Sioux chieftain, against a Pawnee attack. A band of Sioux rode to a timely rescue. While they were celebrating the victory, a caravan arrived, led by Dan Mulcahey, a friend. When the ox teams proceeded, Buck went with them. Rose-dawn, too, was adopted by the party. They met a cavalcade of soldiers, commanded by a Major Busbee, and later a stagecoach, carrying the major's daughter-in-law and granddaughter. A member of the Mulcahey group, The Smiler, had uncertainly been identified as one of the killers of Buck's people. The caravan continued westward. Near Utah, renegade Mormons took all prisoners. Buck and a companion were later released. Learning that Major Busbee's granddaughter, Matilda, now an orphan, was in this section, Buck set out to find her, and located her in the care of Ma Leward, a Mormon wife. The years passed and Buck, now a soldier, had located the objects of his quest in Cheyenne. These were Eb Snow, a powerful figure, and his cohorts. In an encounter with them, Buck was victorious, but Snow and The Smiler escaped. In the Indian land negotiations, Buck and Dan Mulcahey played prominent parts; but the developments most important to Buck were the entrances into his life of Rose-dawn and Matilda, now grown girls. It was the former, however, whom he regarded affectionately. Other things began to occupy his time. The Sioux were now openly hostile, fighting for their land rights. In a scrimmage, Buck saved the life of Red Cloud, the chief who led the objectors. As time went on, the Indian difficulties were settled, and Buck once more turned his attention to his private life—this time in a vain search for Rose-dawn, who had disappeared. Matilda offered him a job on her ranch.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SUNRISE.

EARLY on a summer morning in '73, Buck stood on a fragrant carpet of pine needles, high up on the Snake Back. This is a southern projection of the Bighorns. While on a return trip from Medicine Bow to Matilda's Lone Star Ranch, he had camped there overnight.

On the red coals of his breakfast camp fire a black coffeepot teetered and simmered. As he lit a cigarette and nonchalantly hooked a thumb in his cartridge belt, the flickering rays fitfully played over his tall form. Now a cowpuncher in leathern chaps, gray-flannel shirt and knotted red neck scarf, he stood there with his soft Stetson pushed back on his head—a rider of the sagebrush in the full flush of his raw youth, a pioneer man, easy and comfortable in the midst of surroundings he both loved and understood.

Had any one told him that he suggested anything more than a cowhand, he would have grinned most joyously.

Yet in the rakish tilt of his hat there was a marked significance. Something deeper than momentary nonchalance was depicted by the thumb hooked so carelessly in that cartridge belt. The attitude portrayed vividly a priceless spirit which has ever been the mainstay of pioneer America. It typified that sardonic assurance which relied so blithely on a latent talent to cope with any and all unforeseen emergencies. Combined with the glow of the rich, red blood under the tan of his smooth cheeks, and the supple figure with its suggestion of pantherish grace and strength, it symbolized a romantic era, wherein heroic horsemen joyously galloped in the vanguard of civilization through the stillness of a myriad yesterdays.

Unconscious of his romanticism, Buck inhaled the cigarette smoke, busied himself with sardine cans and cracker boxes, and, after breakfast, stretched himself at luxuriant ease. To enjoy "a fling," and "blow in" his wages for three months in a single night, he had ridden a hundred or more miles between this point and Medicine Bow, and returned. Now, with no regrets and a conscience quite at rest, he was back in his wilderness, waiting for the dawn.

Somewhat like a gallery was the pine-shaded grotto in which he lay. A rocky bluff pitched precipitately downward from a brink within two feet of his head. His vision from where he reposed in comfort would in consequence soon take in contentedly the uncharted sweeps of a terrain which had presented the same face to the sun when the pyramids were built.

Just now the land was covered with mists, but the increasing illumination of the approaching sun lightened and softened the murky color scheme then dominating this nebulous earth blanket. And presently from behind the ridges there crept the first delicate blush of dawn. Heliotrope and rose sifted through the mists. Then flaming torches filled the sky with red. At last, up over the dark hills rose the golden sun, and there lay the veined and corrugated bosom of Wyoming, with all its mesas and buttes and coulees precisely etched.

FAR beneath him and to eastward lay the Lone Star Ranch, with its many buildings and corral. The buildings looked like doll habitations, snug against the green foot slopes of the Chalkeye Range. Near South Fork a herd of antelopes formed tiny dots on the plains. Marching in single file over a dun hummock up near Middle Fork, a herd of buffaloes was dwarfed to the size of ants. Part of the Lone Star crew, busy branding calves beside a fire near the thin streak called Buffalo Creek, were as so many "Tom Thumbs," seen through an inverted telescope. Gray smoke, rising indolently over Eb Snow's far-distant ranch house on Salt Creek, could be barely discerned. To northeastward, near North Fork, the Sioux tepees pitched there were minimized to a faint patch of white against the somber brown of the earth.

Delicious contentment spread through Buck's veins. Neither too cool nor too warm, the temperature was ideal; and to-day, he knew, there was no need for haste. Over there in Dakota was the Sioux nation, peaceful now on their reservation, save for some discontented bucks, and these for the most part among the Hunkpapas. And, as the only two ranches on the hunting grounds were the Lone Star and Snow's Bar N, there had been no clashes to date. Ample range was afforded for all, and the peace of truce, at least, lay over the bloody Wyoming frontier.

To lie contentedly inert in the mystic silence, after his hundred-mile ride through the solitudes, quite suited the young rider's mood. The dawn breath of the earth, freighted so odorously with sweet moisture and the redolence of the pines, was as nectar to this youth; and, as his gray eyes, clear now as a mountain brook, took in the rainbow colors in the blue camp-fire smoke, which floated out from the glen and lingered in the balmy air, he sighed ecstatically.

"Blacky," he murmured softly, "what do you make o' that out theah?" And, as the horse moved over near him, he grinned affectionately. "Shucks," he continued, "you see, but you don't always savvy. You're like some folks I know

who look at that"—his gesture included the universe—"and try to figure a religion out of it, an' the meanin' of it all."

Blacky evinced his personal interest by snuffing prospectively at various pockets.

"Go way an' let me philosophize, you sacrilegious cayuse!" the master drawled, in tones of rotund authority.

Instead of obeying, Blacky with promptitude seized Buck's trousers in his teeth, raised him gently, and lifted one forefoot in a mock threat.

"All right, you rustler!" Buck assented in surrender. Then from his pocket he produced two lumps of sugar to make his peace.

Shortly afterward, there appeared on the limb of the tree above him a striped chipmunk. Breathing slowly, Buck relaxed even more. None might have guessed that the spark of death had ever been struck from the steel within him. His face was that of the little boy who had thrilled to the tale of the rainbow.

Within two minutes, then, the squirrel was perched near his foot, eating bits of cracker. Another and still another squirrel came to chatter and eat. And to this gathering there were added within the next half hour an inquisitive oriole, three fluttering mountain plovers, a horned lark, and a red-headed woodpecker. For a time the lark sat on his shoulder, while the woodpecker, after a bit of reconnaissance, perched confidently on his boot.

To all this Blacky paid no attention; but suddenly his ears went up. As though apprehensive of something in the basin, on the other side of the ridge, he peered nervously into the trees. Raising his feet mincingly, he moved over near Buck, whinnying very softly.

"Why, I knew he was theah befo' you did," Buck reassured the horse in soft tones. "How come you let a two-laiged man beat you at this language without words? *He* ain't on the prod."

Presently, in verification of this, a black bear came silently out of the brush and paused. He squatted on his haunches some distance away; but Buck, without rising from the ground, tossed him a lump of sugar. Cautiously at first, and then with a whine of delight, Bruin accepted the gratuity. Sitting up on his haunches, he then begged for more.

But before long Buck stiffened a little, and he saw the bear's hair raise. Wheeling, Bruin slipped off into the brush, while the birds and chipmunks fled aloft. Blacky, on the other hand, sniffed the air once, looked at the ridge behind them, and whinnied.

"Thought so," said Buck under his breath. "Some one that don't speak these folks' language, but some one that Blacky knows. Probably one o' the outfit."

No move was made by Buck toward his weapons, and neither did he arise. Thus far his morning had flowed smoothly, like a warm current, and he sensed nothing of animosity out there in the cool green of the trees. Just how far away the newcomer was he did not know; perhaps, he thought, the other had not seen his smoke, and was going on down into the dim western basin, intent on rounding up a stray broncho. With this possibility in mind, he checked an impulse to shout. It suited him that morning to remain alone.

"If he finds me, let him come," he decided. "If he doesn't, let him ramble."

Several minutes elapsed before returning confidence warmed and dispelled that cold-current uncertainty which had so abruptly severed the relationship with his wild friends. These now returned, cautiously at first, and then more boldly, till all save the bear were once more gathered round about him. Once only did they grow silent, like little statues, while Blacky's ears went up anew; and Buck, listening intently with them, made not a move at this juncture. But presently all relaxed once more.

"If it's the same one he's around on the other side this time," the cow-puncher carelessly drawled. "And his heart is good this morning's morning."

It was thus, within a few minutes, that Red Cloud came silently among them. His appearance was almost uncanny in its abruptness and the utter lack of sound to herald his approach. No twig had warningly snapped, no acorn nor cone had been thoughtlessly kicked aside in

that cool green filter, which was the shadowy passageway beneath the whispering pines. One moment he was not there; the next saw him standing in the grotto, where flocked the sportive squirrels and trilling birds so confidently upon the recumbent figure of the cow-puncher, with his dangling neck scarf and his battered, shaggy chaps.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE EAVESDROPPER.

THE chief's greeting came: *"Ho, mita koda!"* And then, with satirical amiability and a smile which was oddly tender for one with a reputation so grim and bloody, he added: "Red Cloud might have taken the scalp of Papoose-born-a-man."

Buck smiled and indicated the birds and squirrels; not one of whom had moved away. "The song of Red Cloud's heart came through the air," he replied.

Stirring gently, then, that the small people of the forest might not be alarmed, he arose and reached into his saddlebag for provender. Whereas no sumptuous cascades of feathers adorned the head of Red Cloud this morning, Buck's observant eye correctly read the meaning of the chief's bloodstained hands, his gaunt features, and the fresh eagle feathers protruding from a buffalo-hide packet upon his back. Having earned the right to new feathers in his bonnet, Red Cloud had gone to the mountain fastnesses, there to lie stoically hidden without food or water, under the skin of a coyote or panther, until some predatory eagle, thinking to feast on a dead body, was decoyed within reach. Thus the feathers had been savagely torn from the live body, while the enraged eagle's bill and talons gouged the warrior's hands and breast. Now he was famished; for Sioux custom forebade his breaking the fast after such a feat until he encountered a warrior of his own mettle.

"I will eat with Papoose-born-a-man," he said, sitting down.

In the course of the ensuing conversation, it developed that he had intended rejoining the Sioux in the tepees of the hunting party on Buffalo Creek. But he had been drawn thither by his desire to investigate Buck's fire. Later, he signified, he had intended to visit Lone Star Ranch, expressly to see Buck.

What this portended Buck could not with accuracy guess; but, as Red Cloud ate on, a curious contraction of the heart sent a chill through him. Was the chief about to tell him that Rose-dawn had returned? If this were true, he sensed fearfully the imminence of a distressing dilemma. Just when he had first become conscious of such a possible contingency, he could not definitely determine; yet he was of one thing quite certain. Though Rose-dawn's features remained clearly etched on the canvas of his memory, another picture, of tints pink and red and darkest violet, in a setting of soft black hair, persisted in entering and dominating unconquerably that particular mental gallery, whenever he ventured to open its door.

With conflicting emotions aroused by the thought, he waited with hidden impatience till Red Cloud finally accepted a cigarette.

"Rose-tints-in-the-dawn," said Red Cloud, then, with a telepathic perception, startling in its directness, "is somewhere still alive. We are sure. Whispers have reached us from the mountains to westward. The Gros Ventres, the Blackfeet, and the Umatillas talk in whispers of a woman who makes big medicine in the peaks, high above the clouds. When we find out where——"

He left the sentence unfinished, but Buck accurately visualized the Sioux storming those primeval battlements.

"Another thing," Red Cloud resumed, "is on my mind. Sitting Bull makes medicine for the war dance."

"Because of Custer?"

"Yes. Long Yellow Hair keeps marching with paleface soldiers across Montana into the sun. It is said that the *washechu* would build another road for smoke wagons."

Buck, of course, knew of Custer's expedition to explore and open the way for the proposed Northern Pacific, and he nodded understandingly.

"They are having a hard time to find money for that railroad," said Buck.

"But, if it comes, will all the Sioux be up again?"

Red Cloud shook his head. Neither the Ogallalas nor the Brules intended to fight the building of a new road, so long as the sacred Black Hills were not encroached upon, and the last treaty broken.

"But if the Hunkpapas go to war, it may take us all in against our will," the chief shrewdly pointed out. "Always they are asking us, 'Why do you guard the Black Hills? Is there gold there?' We are afraid some pretext may be taken to seize those hills."

"They would do it if they were sure."

Red Cloud very gravely nodded. He sighed heavily. Then he became alert and looked cautiously round about, and particularly up over the tiny falls, plunging pure and white over the rocks at the rear of the cuplike indenture.

"Who is with you?" he inquired.

WHERE he had looked, there was no sign of movements. The glen was as quiet as the lonesome, steep, red cliffs which mounted in sun-kissed warmth above the shadowy green pines in the background. Yet Buck was no less certain than Red Cloud that some one was, nevertheless, in the vicinity. To the possibility that the man might be deliberately eavesdropping, he gave but a momentary consideration. Prospectors had almost ceased to prowl these particular mountains, and the chances were ten to one that whoever was there belonged to the outfit.

"That's the way it is," he explained to Red Cloud. "Maybe he's creeping up through the brush to see about this smoke. I might yell and save him some trouble."

"Wait!" The chief looked around again. "Do you trust all your friends?"

"Why, yes—most of all Straight Tongue and Zeke. They're the only ones who understand Siouan, too."

"I will tell you then." With which the chief pulled from his pouch a gleaming nugget of gold.

"That," he said, "I found at Four Points in the Black Hills. If trouble comes, and the Black Hills are taken"—he sighed again—"I would want you, my friend, to have that gold."

Silently Buck looked down at the nugget which Red Cloud pressed into his brown hand. His emotions were inexpressible.

"And," the chief continued, "if you want to dig for this gold now, no white need know."

Buck very slowly turned his head, and gravely the two considered one another, the cow-puncher filled with gratitude for the spirit rather than the intrinsic value of the gift, the Indian shorn of his boastfulness, but filled with a quiet pride.

"Suppose I should say I did not want this gold," suggested Buck at last.

"In his heart Papoose-born-a-man does not want the gold. His heart is like that in many other white men I have met since we went on the reservation. They would like to lie on the ground and look at the stars at night, like the Indian. But something will not let them."

"What is that?"

"The women. The *washechu* women are like the peacock of our agent. They preen. If one white woman has one more feather than another, that one who has less cries in her heart. She says to her man, 'Go and get me more feathers,' and her man must go, because he cannot keep his fingers in his ears forever. It is not the white man's sword which will prove sharper than the Indian tomahawk. It is the paleface woman's tongue!"

"Ahuh!" approved Buck, chuckling delightedly. Oddly enough, his thought flew to Zeke's wife, who remained a fly in the ointment of the Lone Star family. But aloud he pointed out: "Papoose-born-a-man is not married, though."

"Huh!" Red Cloud's guttural grunt was accompanied by a shrewd, ironic, sidelong glance. "I have seen the *washechu* squaw, Deep-thought, look at Papoose-born-a-man."

Buck chuckled again. "Looking at me?" he lightly replied. "Well, she was probably scheming something, that's all, I guess."

"Huh! Red Cloud has seen her eyes behind the back of Papoose-born-a-man. Red Cloud has spoken."

"Oh, well," Buck facetiously retorted,

"I'll have something to say about who I marry."

THE chief's only comment was a faint quiet grin. Abruptly he raised his hand and pointed prophetically to where contented droves of long-horned steers were emerging slowly from their cool night retreats along the creek beds. Brigade after brigade breasted the coulee brinks and spread through the sunshine, to browse placidly on sweet grasses, which in that period grew thickly over the fertile Bighorn foot slopes.

"If war comes again, I see nothing but cattle like those grazing everywhere, in the end," mournfully prophesied the chief. "We will fight, but who can stop the falling leaves?"

To this Buck could only nod.

"The Great White Father, when he sent for me to come to Washington, said he would tell white men to kill all the buffalo and force the Indians back to the reservations," the red man lamented. "Now, nearly all the buffaloes south of the railroad are gone." He sighed despondently. "Killed in numbers, like blades of grass, for nothing but their tongues!" And sadly he shook his head over this unparalleled slaughter, in which over five thousand hunters scoured the plains to southward of the Union Pacific, in the season of '72 alone. The estimates of the animals killed in the southern herd varied from four to eleven million.

"But," he finished, "that cannot be helped now. I grow older, too, and my eye widens. I am willing to live and let live, if we receive justice, on our own reservation. And you, who are white, your heart goes one trail to the mesas, where one can sit and drink color for his soul from the dying sunset, while your feet without gold must go another. It is a rocky path. That is why I want you to have this gold. I would strew that rocky trail with pine needles, so the jagged ridges do not tear your moccasins."

Slowly and speculatively Buck tossed the nugget up and down in his hand.

"You say it's at Four Points?"

"At Four Points."

"Who else knows?"

"Myself alone." And Red Cloud described the location. At the place indicated, Red Cloud's father had often fasted alone and communed with the whispering pines. There ofttimes his spirit had leaped to the back of an eagle and risen high into the heavens. But on one occasion, while alone on a pilgrimage to this lofty Mecca, the old warrior had discovered a cave. Before the entrance to this cavern had lain for centuries, in apparent immobility, a granite rock. After discovering that it could be easily swung aside, the old chieftain had asked his son to keep the secret and bury him there when death overtook him.

"He wanted to sleep high above low thoughts," Red Cloud explained. "So I took his body there, alone, and closed the cave and replaced the rock, that none might guess. But, before he died, he told me of the broad streak of gold in the wall. 'If any ever do you a great service,' he said, 'and you owe him a debt of gratitude, and the time comes when the *washechu*—white men—overrun the land, and you would put laughter in that friend's heart, hesitate not to disturb my bones and give him gold. For my son's thought which disturbs my bones will but rest my spirit the more with pride in him. Brave thoughts are good; prayer thoughts are good; but gift thoughts are best of all.' So spoke my father."

Deeply touched, Buck's eyes expressed his gratitude; but again he considered. It was good to have gold to make one independent. It was even better still, he thought, to have gold with which one could so opportunely aid a friend and repay in some degree a sentimental debt. But none of his friends were in want. All were well clear of Matilda's debt and fairly prosperous; and, against their present security, with the cattle market holding up, despite the Eastern financial panic, he weighed judiciously another angle. This tipped the scales.

"No," was his firm decision. "I won't take it now."

In explanation he clearly pointed out the very probable results, should he undertake at once to mine Four Points. No gold secret could be guarded forever.

Once the rumor was substantiated, he foresaw a determined rush to break the Sioux treaty.

"Papoose-born-a-man would not want that, lying like a dead coyote in his thoughts," the cowboy declared.

The chief stood erect, with eyes lustrously gleaming. Buck rose with him, and Red Cloud deliberately took the coyboy's two hands and pressed them tightly against his scarred breast.

"We will keep the secret together," he said. "If such a time comes, Papoose-born-a-man knows he can go as the crow flies to the spot, while others prowl and hunt."

So saying, he slipped away into the trees and was gone.

SADDLING soon afterward, Buck departed. He rode whistling up out of the indenture to southward, intent on regaining the old Indian trail which wound so sinuously down through scented glades and multicolored canyons to the plains below. Yet, when he reached the brink opposite the side from which Red Cloud had departed, he came to a sudden stop.

"So the son of a gun *did* come up and look down!" he muttered.

Dismounting, he studied with a frontiersman's eye the extremely faint and almost imperceptible boot tracks. "Spur scratches—small boot heels—spraddled out—that's a cowboy, shore nuff," he mused concernedly. "Not bow-legged, but straddled out—no deeper imprint on the outside. Ahuh! He tried to wipe out the tracks, too, looks like, only he maybe wanted to get away in a hurry an' didn't take time to do a good job." Thoughtfully Buck tipped his hat back and rubbed at his nose. "Or else, maybe, he figured that the print on the needles heah is so faint I couldn't read 'em," he reasoned.

Twice, with extraordinary care, he knelt and studied every bit of the ground in the immediate vicinity. His eyes were almost microscopic in power—nothing escaped them.

"He laid here some time," he decided presently. "Steps light an' soft as a cat, too. H'm!"

Leading Blacky behind him, he next studied the route taken by the shadowy eavesdropper, being barely able to discern some of the prints. Indeed, they were no more than the faintest of cautious marks on the outcroppings of rock along the way. Yet Buck followed them unerringly through the golden quiet to a point on the sun-baked Indian trail and halted there.

"He even got on this rock to mount," Buck now mused aloud. "Heah's where he let his reins drop befo' he crept up with his rifle to take a look at my smoke. Heah's where his bronc stood—and only them forefeet shod." With a little dilation of the eyes, he knelt and inspected minutely the horse's tracks. "Why, that's Zeke's bronc!" he gasped. "I put that bar shoe on him, myself."

Dazed and wondering, he slowly came erect and removed his hat. Confusedly he wiped his brow. "*Zeke* eavesdroppin' an' sneakin' away on me like that?" he breathed in a horrified whisper. "Hell, no!"

Sweeping back, like the return comb of a wave, came the memories of Zeke, the quiet Zeke, the unpretentious Zeke of the steady heartbeats, so like the ticking of a grandfather clock. Why, there was that in the man's character to liken to a compass needle! Persistently and inflexibly it had pointed throughout the vicissitudes and character trials of their acquaintance to the north of honesty, candor, fairness, loyalty and right. Reconciling this time-proven fact with such an act was like trying to make two and two make six.

"It just *can't* be!" he muttered.

So he stood irresolute and shaken, playing a desperate game of mental dominoes, till at last he shook himself disgustedly.

"Shame on you!" was his accusatory thought. "You'd ought to apologize to old Zeke for even *suspectin'* him. Maybe some one else rode that cayuse to-day. And if it *was* Zeke, he'll have some explanation. Why, shore!"

With this in mind, he dealt unto himself some further castigation, mounted in a bound, and loped down through the sunshine toward the plains.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HARUN'S MAGIC CARPET.

ARRIVED, at last, upon the plains, where a covey of plovers flew low over the zinc-colored sage, he was cantering easily, his body loose and springy in the saddle, when he noted an apparition of sorts.

Emerging dolefully from a coulee, there presented itself to his incredulous view the figure of a sway-backed mule. He was more fly-bitten and forlorn than some old neglected dog. His drooping ears depicted eloquently an unutterable woe, while in his apologetic eye there seemed to be a pathetic appeal for understanding and sympathy. For on his back rode two human beings who invited critical inspection.

The foremost of these was Rocky Moore, appropriately equipped with a battered high silk hat, and a dilapidated umbrella, raised over his head. Of other raiment he had only an undershirt and a pair of overalls, which might well have seen service in the Revolution. Shoes he wore none. Nor could Sudden McEwan boast of more apparel.

Rocky was just then engaged in an attempt to focus upon an object on the plain, and it was only after bringing to bear all the experience acquired through nearly sixty-five years of hilarious boyhood that he centered his rolling eyes upon Buck.

"I knew it—the third time!" he yelled. "Buck, is there anything in that cantle roll?"

With countenance grave and eyebrows raised, Buck took them in.

"I beg yore pardon," drawled he, "but have I ever been introduced to you?"

His hearers succeeded in bringing him into focus again, after some extraordinary ocular gyrations.

"Oh!" said Sudden, at last. "Well, Suh Galahad, I am Haroun al Raschid."

"An' this is his carpet," Rocky solemnly assured him, indicating the mule.

Buck allowed a judicial eye to rove over them. They had departed for Medicine Bow in full possession of horses, saddles, bridles, guns and numerous dollars.

"An' why this whichness now, Harun?" he inquired. "Thought you done swore off gamblin', you two?"

"We did. Tha's why we got switched off to Laramie an' missed you. Mister Moore, he hears there's a sky pilot holdin' meetin's there who will shore show us the way to walk the straight an' narrow. We sashays over with the best o' intentions, an' then's when I saw the light."

"The sky pilot's light?"

"Naw. Over a sign—new faro layout."

"And," cackled Rocky, "we'd have drifted by, only the sign says, 'Pekin,' an' Sudden he says, 'Nobody kin bluff me!' "

Joyous clamor now stampeded the denizens of sage land. Grasshoppers, sage hens, jack rabbits and shocked prairie dogs scurried in alarm.

"Where in the name o' Judas did you corral this crow bait?" Buck gasped, at last.

"Shhh!" Sudden returned owlishly. "I made out the requisition, an' Cap'n Moore approved it."

"But it's got Eb Snow's Bar N brand! Didn't you see that?"

"Buck," Sudden barked, with an assumption of indignation, "would even a man with all sails set pick out such an animus as that, 'cept in the *dark?*"

Yodeling hilariously, Buck threw up his hands. Presently they wended their way toward the ranch, trying with only a modicum of success to piece together the fabric of their haze-clouded adventures. Exactly where they had acquired the mule they could not remember.

"Anyhow, Snow would be insulted if we asked him to take it back," Rocky airily predicted.

Their arrival soon afterward at the ranch created diversion for some men who, with sulphurous, but humorous, language, were chasing a particularly active maverick about the corral. Their uproar brought Matilda, now nineteen, to the door of the office, which occupied one corner of the huge log structure. She struggled for composure and succeeded so well that Rocky, who with Krueger and old Pat ordinarily occupied a room in the main house, which was called "The Barracks," now rode penitently by at the salute.

"Very good, sir," he said, as though she had spoken, "I'll go to the bunk house."

"The vacant stall, I think," Matilda laconically suggested as more appropriate.

"Aye, aye, sir!" Rocky responded meekly. And later he solemnly picked up a pitchfork and proffered it gravely to McEwan. "Here, Sudden," he lugubriously added, "take the key to your room."

WHEN they disappeared within, Matilda sat weakly on the step and laughed till she was breathless. It sent a curious thrill through Buck to hear her, for her laugh was so low-pitched and musical.

"What a fine foreman you've become!" she gurgled when he came up. "Foreman a year and a half now—and then bring in a man that way!"

Buck grinned a little, but it was not the joyous grin of perfect fellowship which he reserved for Blacky and his male friends.

As the shifting light changes slightly the appearance of a cliff, so had a subtle change taken place in his outward manner.

"Mighty awful," he acknowledged, meeting the spirit of the sally with one in which politeness predominated. "About those two-year-old cattle, now," he went on seriously, "do you want them rounded up for sale, round-up tally?"

A queer little light flickered for a brief heartbeat in Matilda's black-violet eyes. As on many another occasion in the past four years, he had quietly put her back in her place as employer.

"Oh!" she said expressionlessly, growing serious. "I'll decide that when Uncle Dan gets back with the mail." She cocked her head to one side and eyed him with a suggestion of her girlhood's sauciness. "You might tell me, though, how they came to acquire the mule."

He made his explanation brief, and an observer might have noted that he now used language devoid of his former idioms. So much had his reading done for him.

"Those scalawags!" she commented joyously when he had finished. "And now I'll tell you a bit of news. Your old friend, Bear-at-bay, is here."

"What?"

"They're moving most of the Pawnees from the Loup to the Indian reservation. He's going to spend the rest of his life with you and Dan, he says."

"Well, I'll be——"

"Dratted. Exactly! He's out in the stable now—he and Uncle Pat. When I saw them last, Uncle Pat's grin had become permanent."

What else might have been said was cut short by the arrival of Mrs. Harding. She came over from the spacious cabin which with Dan's home, the main house, the bunk house, and the stables made up the Lone Star collection of buildings. The pleasant lines of a face once rather pretty were obliterated under an habitual expression of barely subdued petulance.

"My!" she exclaimed. "Wasn't it *dreadful* the way those men came back!"

"Why, Ada," Matilda replied brightly, "they got back *alive*."

"Oh, of course, I suppose that's one way to look at it!" the older woman returned, with the faintest tinge of her sudden animosity showing in the veiled sarcasm. She sniffed faintly and looked away with her nose at a critical and disdainful angle. Patent enough was it that she noted neither the heights of the Chalkeye Range, nor the picturesque canyon. She saw nothing but the dull sage, the somber prairie bosom, the dry creek beds in the distance, and the unpeopled emptiness of it all.

"Drunken cowboys and prairie dogs barking!" she sniffed. "Well, I wish Zeke would give it up."

Buck with difficulty checked a retort. Ada at times affected an air of martyrdom which, had it not so vitally concerned Zeke, might have been more amusing.

"Superior to her surroundin's!" he snorted inwardly. "Jealous o' Matilda because Matilda has all that money. Hates Dan because she thinks he's responsible for losing Zeke's jack."

But while Matilda sensed all this quite as clearly, she laughed pleasantly.

"You've just got one of your headaches

to-day, Ada. Come in and let me rub it for you."

"Oh, thanks. Did you see Zeke out there to-day, Buck? He said he was going over the Snake Back."

Buck schooled his features with an effort and shook his head, as Matilda called his attention elsewhere, pointing out over the prairie.

"What do you make of that proposition?"

The young foreman looked and recognized Smiler at the head of four horsemen, who loped toward them from eastward. With them rode a lone Indian. When they came closer, Buck saw that this was Rose-dawn's cousin, Son-of-bear. He was a treacherous, surly young warrior now, high in the councils of the malcontents, and a favorite of Sitting Bull, the Hunkpapa leader.

"Why, maybe," he ventured, "they've come to see about Haroun's magic carpet."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HOSTILE DEMONSTRATIONS.

BETWEEN the two largest ranches then north of the Bordeaux outfit, the relationship was one of armed and watchful truce. The calculating Eb Snow knew full well that only sentiment had been responsible for the Lone Star grant, and that this with Red Cloud was the strongest tie. He also knew that Red Cloud's position with the Sioux was impregnable. His coup in forcing the United States to abandon ingloriously the three Bozeman Trail posts had given him a preponderance over the minds of the whole Sioux nation. Therefore Snow dared not incite secretly the renegades and individual Sioux malcontents to prey upon the Lone Star outfit, for this would undoubtedly arouse Red Cloud's wrath and react upon his own holdings like a boomerang.

For these reasons, Snow had carefully impressed upon his men the necessity for playing a square and aboveboard game with the Lone Star. Unbranded calves with Lone Star cows were left to run unchallenged. And this was scrupulously reciprocated by Matilda's riders.

All this passed through Buck's mind, as he quietly watched The Smiler and his men ride up. He wished now that those scalawags had left the decrepit mule alone.

"Of course," he reasoned ruefully, as he went forward, "they didn't go to *steal* it. And it ain't worth the powder to blow it to hell. Still, it's a Bar-N mule."

Within a minute The Smiler halted before him, near the horse corral. Son-of-bear and the cowboys reined up behind him, the Indian expressionless, the cowboys maintaining an attitude of indifferent attention.

"Waal," began the giant, essaying his old-time grin and slouching sidewise in the saddle, "I done heard there was quite a rhineacaboo down Laramie way."

Buck allowed his eye to sweep lazily over the man, with almost an air of abstraction. A coward of another stripe might never have summoned the courage to face again so imperturbably the man who had publicly humiliated him. But the brassy-eyed Smiler had bolstered up his self-esteem by savagely crushing various antagonists of ordinary ability who had dared to cast the Cheyenne incident in his teeth.

"More brass, gall, an' conceit I never saw," mused Buck. "Thinks he's pullin' a cute one here, too."

Then, trying to fight down his rising anger, Buck said aloud: "Why, if it's the mule you want, there he is."

"Oh, the mule!" Casually The Smiler slanted his huge head to one side. With equal casualness he looked at the mule. Grinning slowly and expansively, he brought his eye to bear again on Buck. There was a light therein which seemed to express his appreciation of a huge joke. "O' course," he said, "we understand there wouldn't no Lone Star hand steal a mule like that to keep him. Sho'! Plumb ridiculous!"

"Glad you realize that," Buck answered dryly.

"Why, shore!" Then The Smiler spoke with suavity, striving to cloak his words in the broadcloth of plausibility. "Just happened to see a stray cayuse o' yore's down with a broken leg, and thought we'd drop in on the way an' tell yuh. O' course I'd heard from Chi Mullins how

Rocky an' Sudden rid off with ole Calamity, but I thought they'd turned him astray long ago."

Straightening then in the saddle, The Smiler spoke on in his easy, casual tone: "Well, if hit's all the same to you, I'll throw a rope over this mule an' lead him home."

To this, of course, Buck cold not do anything but assent. Yet the situation had a peculiar aspect. Buck was not responsible, either individually or officially. It was quite clearly an issue between the Bar N and the two involved.

Neither had Buck any authority whatsoever over Rocky, since the Four Musketeers were spending their declining years in more or less of a perpetual holiday. And the young foreman might in any case have washed his hands of the whole affair.

"Only," there flashed in one murderous rush through his mind, "a man that throws down his friends every time they get a little ways off the path, is narrow gauge."

THIS, he knew, was exactly what The Smiler counted on. It was betrayed by the exultant malevolence behind the smile in those brassy eyes. For The Smiler had with cunning subtlety reasoned that Buck would infinitely have preferred open anger to acceptance of magnanimity from his hands, and that the Lone Star foreman must either callously repudiate his friends or apologize for them. And this was his point. Forcing Buck adroitly into a position where he must apologize to him for *any* reason was, in The Smiler's vicious opinion, a bit of Machiavellian finesse.

"Well," Buck began slowly, while his rage drove the color from his cheeks, "I'm sorry that——"

A shuffling movement behind him caused him to break off. He turned to see Rocky Moore, Bear-at-bay, and Sudden McEwan advancing belligerently across the yard. Rocky had secured a cartridge belt and revolver from the bunk house.

"You ain't aimin' to get hostile, are you, about that animile?" Rocky demanded, waving the gun.

The Bar-N punchers noted this, with an indulgent smile, but cautiously shifted the positions of their ponies, watching Rocky narrowly.

"Sho' now," The Smiler said, "you'd better take that six-shooter away afore he starts somethin'."

Had Buck been close enough he might perhaps have snatched the cocked gun away from Rocky. He was not within reach. And here Bear-at-bay occupied the spotlight on his own account.

Catching sight of young Son-of-bear, the old Pawnee straightened tipsily in his blanket and attempted to fold his arms. "Huh!" he snorted. He took two or three strides, pausing to glare in sidelong fashion and grunt disdainfully. Then a romping dog tripped him, and he fell headlong.

The Bar-N punchers laughed uproariously; but in a flash the old Pawnee was groping for a rock. He arose and threw it in the general direction of his enemies, and it struck Chi Mullins in the breast.

"I'll make you do a new war dance for that, you Injun devil!" roared Mullins, suddenly irate.

"Hey—cut that!" thundered The Smiler.

But it was too late. Mullins reached for his gun, and Rocky, catching the movement, fired into the Bar-N punchers. He had aimed at Mullins, but his bullet struck young Son-of-bear, tumbling him headlong from his horse.

Buck, a second later, had reached Rocky and tripped him, and Matilda, running out, joined the colonel and old Krueger, as they ran up to subdue Bear-at-bay, while the anxious Smiler called on his men to keep their heads.

"A miss is as good as a mile," he told Mullins. "Reckon, anyways, that's enough for one day over a mule." So saying, he dismounted to inspect Son-of-bear.

"All right," Mullins rejoined in milder tones. "I was only goin' to make the ole devil dance, anyway." He then holstered his own weapon and dismounted.

It was quickly ascertained that Son-of-bear was not fatally injured. But he had suffered a severe head wound. When he recovered consciousness, he refused vi-

ciously all ministrations at the hands of the Lone Star outfit. His was a tricky and vindictive countenance, and he glared in bitter hatred at Rocky and Bear-at-bay, when The Smiler helped him mount.

"I'll apologize *this* much, an' no more," said Rocky, somewhat sobered now. "You talk Siouan, Smiler, don't you? Leastwise, you oughta, livin' with that squaw, Gray Squirrel. Well, you tell him I didn't aim fer him."

The Smiler, knowing Buck overheard, interpreted correctly; but Son-of-bear merely grunted. So The Smiler prepared to leave, veiling his exultation under lowered lids. For him the affair had brought results beyond all his expectations.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MATILDA TALKS.

THE Bar-N punchers having departed, and the three celebrants having been headed to the stables, various opinions were forthcoming from the family. While most of them really deprecated the occurrence, they could not but chuckle hilariously over the ludicrous phases of the incidents which had brought them so close to tragedy.

Ada, however, took pains to express another view.

"All of us may have to suffer if Sitting Bull takes it up," she declared, with the air of one who has long predicted calamity.

"Tush!" was the colonel's scarcely sympathetic retort. "Sitting Bull isn't going to do anything to antagonize Red Cloud." Then he chuckled, and his eyes snapped with combative joy. "By George, as far as that Bar-N outfit is concerned, I was almost wishing that Buck would lose his temper."

"Oh, yes," Ada sniffed, "I quite believe it, notwithstanding the fact that our men were entirely in the wrong."

Buck, with an effort, relieved his feelings with some hot words, and turned to Matilda. "I'll ride up to Red Cloud's hunting party an' give him the straight o' this," he said.

"Right," Matilda returned. "And I'll go with you."

Buck had no recourse but to acquiesce, though it filled him with mixed delight and misgiving. So they were soon mounted and loping off through the quiet.

Acutely conscious of the girl at first, the cow-puncher presently drifted off into reverie, which she made no attempt to disturb. Buck was the first to break the silence.

"I reckon the time's a long way off when every one can take his pick o' perfect angels for friends," he asserted, coming out of his absorption.

"Meaning that Ada forgets Sudden's ride to Fetterman last winter for her medicine?"

"Ahuh!" And here Buck grimaced disgustedly, for both knew that Sudden had lost two fingers and three toes, frozen on that ride. "Now, Ada, she's got—she an' Zeke—no more than about five hundred head risked, if there's trouble; while you—gracious! An' yet I noticed you didn't turn none on your friends because they made a slip."

He was speaking out of his reverie, and his eye was remote with speculation. Yet now the color mounted in Matilda's brown cheeks, for in his absorption he had all unconsciously paid her his first direct compliment.

"Thank you," she said demurely.

Buck started a little and came back to his surroundings. Once more the consciousness of this girl weighed upon him with poignant pain and sweetness. When, he asked himself, had he first begun to indulge in introspection, attempting to analyze dispassionately his real attitude toward Rose-dawn? Had he only *liked* her? The Indian girl had most assuredly an appeal for him as sweet and joyous as the song of a bird in fragrant springtime. But Matilda seemed to have grown irresistibly upon him, despite all his resolutions to the contrary, despite his resentment, despite any power of his own to forestall or control it.

Thoughtfully he stole a look at her. Practical she was and businesslike. Her sanity was as clear as his beloved mountain streams, flowing so sweetly above the alkali, which eventually dimmed their rare transparence. But she was far from

being hard. Her generosity and loyalty to her friends had been so effectually demonstrated as to mock dispute.

Nor was she mannish. Even as the wind failed signally to mar her bronzed skin, so had the rougher aspects of her frontier life failed to coarsen her.

SIX years before he had been certain that love had come to him. Now, at twenty-eight, he found himself looking critically at his immature susceptibility. Which was infatuation and which was love? Even though he was not sure that he would ever see Rose-dawn again, her lingering memory made him doubtful of himself.

If Matilda in her ancient feminine wisdom instinctively divined this phase of his dilemma, she gave no sign. She seemed for the time content to canter serenely through the enchanted silence. Now and then she stole a contemplative glance at his clean-shaven chin and thin, curved lips; but for the most part she scanned dreamily the dim and alluring distances. It was as though the spirit of the thoughtful girl had absorbed the changeless calm of the ocean of space, almost untenanted and superbly impervious to the teapot tempests within the brains of puny men.

Within another half hour they came on Red Cloud unexpectedly, riding with several hunters. To him Buck soon made the situation clear. And, although sorry the incident had occurred, Red Cloud quickly assured the cow-puncher that he would inform Sitting Bull of the affair, and that no tribal action would be forthcoming.

Perhaps a mile or more had been covered in silence on their return trip, when Matilda, absorbed on her own account, spoke directly out of her thoughts.

"You've been with us four years," she said.

"Yes."

"You worked about two years and a half for forty a month."

"Why, yes, as a puncher." Curiously he looked at her clear profile, averted now and enigmatical. What was she driving at?

"Then the last year and a half as foreman, at one hundred a month," she went on.

"Well?"

"You might have been making one fifty, at least, as a scout."

"Oh, yes."

"Looked at that way, you're out something like forty-two hundred dollars."

"I don't think of it that way," he answered, somewhat gruffly.

"Exactly. Yet you've worked—and worked hard."

Work? Yes, he had worked. Silently he glanced across the great levels to where the brown slopes gently mounted to the ranch buildings. Behind these buildings rose the steep brown cliffs, high and calm in the cloudless void, while in the chasm, beginning at the immediate rear of the corrals, there flowed and tumbled over polished stones an irridescent mountain creek. This view, with the approach of the sunset shadows softly stealing out upon the plains, was suggestive of romance, but what unromantic toil had gone to the erection of the buildings alone! Every log had been felled upon the mountainside and dragged down with chain and sled. And what prodigious effort had been expended in the mere building of the fences! The so-called pasture in the upper basin of the Chalkeye took in, with a nonchalant Western gesture, no less than twenty square miles.

"Of course," she continued, "I know you stayed out of loyalty to your friends —not to me, but to the others."

This being the truth, he remained silent, while she eyed him with her still, unwinking gaze. It seemed almost clairvoyant in its penetration and utter detachment from that consciousness of self which usually dominates the young feminine eye. He knew she was delving with uncanny accuracy straight to his motivations.

"You've worked uncomplainingly and effectively for others," she declared, "but you have not displayed any incentive to acquire anything for yourself."

Slowly he turned this over in his mind, while he leaned forward, with his fringed gauntlets crossed upon the horn.

"I suppose," he observed at last in equal gravity, "that in your opinion hav-

ing no urge to get wealth is an indictment."

"I think that one should have the urge to play the game."

"What do you call playing the game?"

"Producing to the full extent of one's ability whatever he can of necessities, entertainment, machinery, medicines—anything that makes for bettering existence."

"You mean a person ought to do this as though it was an obligation?"

"You roped all four feet that time!"

GRAVELY the cow-puncher's eyes met hers over this assertion. He searched his growing vocabulary for the words he wanted. At last he found them and faintly smiled.

"That's mighty idealistic," he commented.

"Perhaps."

"I guess," he said finally, with an almost imperceptible edge on his tones, "that a lot in this world have no right to complain if a man keeps off their premises and away from their pocketbooks. They live and die without thinking an inch beyond their noses. They're selfish through and through. Do you figure a man is under any obligation to *them?*"

"Yes, even to them, if they're plugging along with the rest of the folks."

"Well, I don't see the obligation."

She pursed her lips, and, still with lowered lashes, she ran her hand up under her horse's mane.

"Buck," she inquired at last, "why do you read?"

"Why, to be informed," he replied, in surprise.

"You admit then that you get something from your reading that you would not have gained otherwise?"

"Well, I should smile!"

"Then where's your sense of obligation to the writer?"

"Obligation?" His eyes grew round. "Why, when I pay for his book that lets me out."

"No. When he takes your money and buys beef that doesn't let *him* out, either—if he's got another book in him. Cattle have to be raised, so carpenters can have strength and time to build houses, and doctors can sit in security and discover new ways to prevent disease, and writers can turn out better and better books, and so on round the circle."

Buck tipped back his hat and very slowly smiled at her. "Well, Matilda," he now said dryly, "I suppose you know what you're driving at."

She smiled on her own account.

"Oh, yes." And, with apparent irrelevancy, she added: "Aren't you sorry sometimes that you weren't born an Indian?"

He drew a deep breath. "In some ways, yes."

"Thought so." She, too, sighed a little. "I can see some of the reasons. I'm not now the little girl who saw the Indians eating with their fingers. Comes to that, we have roller towels. We whites are apt to idealize ourselves when we compare our habits with the Indian's."

"Glad you see that now."

"Yes. We live and learn. I don't judge them by their bullet-headed Polaks any more, for I know they grade up to their Washingtons. And when, for instance, I learned *why* they occasionally sacrifice their dogs it gave me a shock."

To this Buck nodded understandingly. The Sioux boy was now and then required to give up ungrudgingly for tribal sacrifice the life of his best beloved dog. This was to instill selflessness and to impress upon him indelibly the insignificance of his individual wants when compared with the needs of a people who wore upon their breasts the symbols of a profound faith.

"It opened my eyes," she repeated. "I understood better their motives. I can even understand now their attitude in mutilating the dead enemy to keep him from the happy hunting grounds."

"Well, I don't let first impressions make my decisions any more, either," he in reciprocal candor conceded.

What more they might have said was interrupted here by sight of the horse corral, as they came up out of a draw. Upon the fence they saw some shouting men, and within the inclosure a cloud of whirling dust, and through the dust a snorting, squealing broncho, pitching and bucking violently. As they came nearer, the broncho sunfished, and "Bitter-root"

Bevins catapulted skyward and landed ignominiously in the horse trough.

Pandemonium now broke out among the spectators. The wild laughter of the colonel and his musketeers rose even above that of the younger cow-punchers.

What a picture they made! Old men kept young and young men rollicked like colts in this air which would have ended rapturously the quest of Ponce de Leon! And to Buck, as he threw off his saddle and some of Matilda's words returned to him, there came the thought: "Would I want to leave this if things were different?" He put it hastily away, as though he did not want to meet it then. "And as to what she's driving at, I suppose I'll find out, if she's made up her mind," he concluded, with a grin.

Then all thoughts of the conversation were driven from his mind by the arrival of Zeke. He returned with two strays. The aspect of Zeke's features, as compared with the face Buck remembered upon the Oregon Trail, struck chill upon the latter's spirits. Lines of worry had sadly aged a countenance which once had been only grave and thoughtful. And, twenty minutes later, Buck's heart was very heavy. Zeke, striving to be casual, had made no mention whatever of the Snake Back incident.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BUCK SCORES.

COULD Buck have overheard Matilda and Ma talking that evening in the latter's kitchen, he might have received some enlightenment on one score. For Ma was as close to her "girlie" as Dan was to Buck.

"I reckon there's some things got to come about their own way," Ma observed, dusting some flour from her hands.

"I think that *making* them come about is better," Matilda retorted amiably. She had insisted on helping Ma with a batch of biscuits and was now quite domestic in her white apron. She very definitely cut out a disk from the dough and placed it precisely in the pan. "Just like that!" she added, by way of illustration.

"But, honey," Ma pointed out, with an indulgent smile, "that boy ain't jest like the biscuits. You can't just stick him anywhere." And she sighed. "I've sometimes a notion to give that loco hombre a piece of my mind."

"Why?"

"Well, there don't seem to be no *other* girl in his life, and why he don't——"

"Ma!" Matilda protested. "Have I said——"

"Shucks!" Ma swept her girl close, and Matilda hid very red cheeks upon the ample breast. "I've knowed a long time how it is." And after a minute she resumed: "No, I think it's jest the wildness of him. He and that Dan o' mine! Well, do you know, I think they'd like to sit on a mesa. Yes, sir, poundin' a tom-tom an' singin' songs 'bout the colors in the clouds!"

Matilda, who had regained her composure, laughed delightedly. "Yes! Meanwhile, Buck's the best cattleman I know. Anybody can turn steers loose upon an open range. But everybody can't add from one hundred to two hundred pounds a head to stock."

"Handles men, too," Ma interposed. "Jest like he does horses. Without a spur."

"Yes. And if he only had the sense of *ownership*——"

Matilda broke off pensively and frowned. "I had a chance to buy up the Lazy-U herd cheap," she explained, "last week. He's more than earned it."

"Ahuh!"

"But if I offered that herd to him on the same terms Uncle Dan and the rest had——"

"A-course he'd not take it."

"Exactly." Matilda energetically dusted her hands and, with lurking deviltry in her eye, surveyed Ma. "I'll give the matter prayerful consideration," she announced. "I've made up my mind."

"You mean you're going to buy that there Lazy-U herd?"

"Bull's-eye, Ma. Then we'll see later."

THINKING that Matilda bought the Lazy-U steers merely because she saw a good bargain, Buck dispatched men to drive them over the mountains. But while this and other duties engrossed

him, he was never quite free of the problem which confronted him. This had to do with Zeke. Not quite certain and hesitating to speak, lest he wound to the quick an honest friend by the revelation of an unjust suspicion, he could only bide his time.

While this state of affairs existed, he received further word from Red Cloud. Sitting Bull was not vengeful. Son-of-bear had been told that if he wished revenge he must act individually. So it seemed that the matter was closed.

"Unless," Buck reflected, "The Smiler or Snow hit on a way to use that Indian's feelin's."

Thus time went on till, some two weeks later, Zeke departed on horseback, presumably bound to Cheyenne for dental work. And, on the following day, Buck found himself riding toward the Black Hills. He rode with a leaden heart, for Zeke had evidently yielded at last to temptation.

The footprints which Buck followed were those of a man leading a pack horse, and these, with a bit of scouting, pieced together a story upon which the sorrowful cow-puncher based his reluctant deductions.

"He cached a pack somewhere, picked up an extra cayuse at White Bone, an' doubled back," he mused.

His way led him far from the tall lush grasses which so abundantly thrived upon the swath skirting the Chalkeye and the Bighorns. It carried him across the dry bed of Salt Creek, on past Pumpkin Butte, and ever in a northeasterly direction till he struck the valley of the Belle Fourche.

Like Powder River, which in spring often proudly attained the width of a mile, but which now trickled only faintly in the desert, all the creeks in the vicinity were either reduced to a thread or wholly dry. There were also dismal stretches here of thirty miles or more which were continually arid. Across them no rivers or creeks flowed refreshingly between thin files of cottonwood or willow to relieve the heated monotony of a saffron landscape, with lanes of restful green.

Here the sagebrush appeared more desolate and colorless than a grayish slag heap, rearing but a ghastly masquerade of life upon an earth dead and drear. Neither eagle nor buzzard floated in the motionless air. Underfoot was caked alkali, cracked and ankle deep, from which rose chokingly a thick and never-ending heat. Overhead there glared a pitiless sun in a dim-blue sky without a cloud. Far off the pale and hazy heat shimmer gave to the towering peaks the hue of pallid tombstones. Signs of life in the lone rider's vicinity there were none, nor were buffalo or elk or cattle to be discerned upon the horizon, nor any visible movement, save the slowly creeping shadows of the chimney buttes upon the sand.

There were two camps in the open on such terrain, where frequently he passed unique formations of clay and sandstone, squirting up like dirty mushrooms through the alkali. He then passed through a cordon of bald ridges, which reared their flattened tops from three to six hundred feet above the plains. And when he had cleared these and reached the forests which gave the Black Hills their name, where cool water and shade refreshed both horse and rider, he mounted steadily into the mountain world until he sighted his destination.

Here the high cliffs and the green forests walled in an inclosure on four sides, with scarcely any gap. Silver-tipped and austere, the four chief peaks stood in solemn sentry duty over an uncharted solitude. Far down in the bottom lay a valley, flanked by steep sides, with thick growths of fir in a green swath upon them. A river rushed into the square from the west, pitching down from a labyrinth of mournful pines and tearing savagely onward between the many-colored walls of a deep cañon. Thence, dashing over huge brown boulders, it shot out again through a chasm equally steep and tortuous. And over the peaks and round about the guarded sector of seclusion which they established, there lay in virginal dignity the soundless peace of creation's morning.

High up, along one side of the place ran the trail which Red Cloud had described. Midway of the square, this widened into a more or less level inden-

ture. It was signally marked by several gigantic and stately pines, taller far than any others in the immediate vicinity.

These landmarks were as so much large print to the cow-puncher; and to guide him further he had the remains of a Sioux warrior. As Red Cloud had declared, this comparatively recently deceased Dakota lay in a buffalo-hide casket, suspended among the branches in one of the smaller trees. The warrior's weapons were on the casket, for his use in the happy hunting grounds, while at the base of the tree there sprawled the gnawed bones of his two ponies. So Buck had no trouble in locating easily the cave farther on, wherein rested in final repose the solemn figure of Red Cloud's father.

THERE, as he feared, were Zeke's horses, picketed quite far back in the pine-carpeted indenture. There, too, was the rock at the base of the cliff in the rear. It had been pushed eagerly aside to disclose the opening to the cave.

Cautiously, lest even still there might be error, Buck dismounted, letting the reins fall to the ground. A moment later found him carefully listening at the entrance. He heard inside a pick strike rock; and then, peering within, he saw Zeke's form in the candlelight. With pistol in hand, he waited no longer, but called out Zeke's name and entered.

Zeke whirled, dropped his pick, and reached for his gun. Yet this was merely the involuntary reflex of panic. Immediately thereafter he collapsed weakly upon the rawhide casket bearing the bones of Red Cloud's father. His face was ghastly. A helpless gesture all too clearly expressed his recognizance of the utter futility of explanatory words. No ratlike defiance lurked in his eye; the man was effectually crushed.

Silence gripped the cave for a time. Buck had but a glance for the streak of gold gleaming there in the cavern above the sleeping Indian. He stood breathing slowly, looking sadly down at Zeke's bowed head. Tears welled from his eyes. They rolled unheeded down his brown cheeks and fell upon the rocks. No cup so bitter had ever touched his lips.

"Zeke!" he groaned huskily at last.

His old friend very slowly raised his tragic eyes and gazed at him across a bottomless chasm of despair.

"Don't!" Buck brokenly expostulated. "Don't let go all holds like that."

Zeke seemed not to grasp it.

"I reckon you can shoot," he said dully. "I'll not resist."

"Shoot? Oh, *Zeke!*" Buck reproachfully cried. Emotion threatened to overcome him for a moment. But presently he was master of himself and spoke more clearly.

"Zeke," he pleaded, "I want you to listen while I say out what I've thought."

"I'll listen. But I know now I'd a heap rather be shot than face the family again."

"Wait!"

Buck breathed deeply and looked again at the bowed head. "It's a good place to say it, too," he began. "You know, Red Cloud's father wanted to sleep here so he could rest 'high above low thoughts.'"

Zeke could only groan.

"Well," Buck resumed huskily, "I've done a heap o' straight thinkin' since I knowed your tracks that day on the Snake Back. I——"

"I thought I'd work this all unknown to you a while," Zeke interposed. "I knew you wouldn't. Somebody'll discover gold *some time* in these hills, I thought and—— But hell! that's making excuses. Go on!"

"Why, there ain't so many words to say, Zeke. I could sermonize, but, Zeke, I ain't goin' to. I—well, it's like the time I knowed first theah was no Santa Claus."

Again Zeke groaned.

"I'll tell you, Zeke," Buck continued: "I read a story once about a 'big, strong silent man.' Shucks! A big, strong bag o' bluff. I know now there ain't a livin' man that ain't got a hole in him somewhere. When I meet one that don't *show* it an' pretends he hasn't got it, I watch that hombre. He's got to have it, or he can't let off the steam o' his orneriness."

He paused significantly before going on in his deepest tones: "Zeke, I knowed that, but thought you different, some-

how. An' that wasn't *fair* o' me. I kind of expected you to be more than human. Why, I plumb forgot that even the compass needle swings off the mark when theah's iron around it!"

Zeke's head shook despondently.

"Wait!" Buck entreated. "Your iron was your wife, Zeke. I——"

"I didn't tell her, though, where this place is! I'll say that. I just told her I was going prospecting."

"Well, I'm mighty glad o' that. That leaves it between you an' me. An', Zeke, you stand up an' look at me."

Wonderingly and shamefacedly Zeke did so.

"If you was to let this eat into you, it would break you," Buck continued. "Likewise, if you're *big* enough, you can go ahead as though it never happened. If you're not, you'll hate me, an' then you'll not be worth worrying about. But you're not goin' to hate me."

"Hate you—for what?"

"Why, for callin' this whole deal off where she lays."

"Buck!" Zeke ejaculated incredulously. "You don't mean it!"

"Surest thing you know. Zeke, this gold is not a matter o' life an' death to you an' me. Most white folks have been raised to believe this individual scramble is praiseworthy. They'd say a man's *crazy* that don't hog anything he can get his hands on. But when a man has got to get it at the expense o' mo' misery an' double-dealin' an'——"

He broke off and looked away, as though at a vision of the future. His emotion had brought the inner man to the fore. His face was rigid, blazing with scorn.

"There ain't a set o' humans on this earth ever got a dirtier, trickier, more rotten deal than these Sioux got from us whites!" he stridently declared. "I'd take the word o' any average Sioux before I would the signed bond of the politicians that cheat them. Why, they were like *children* in their faith once. Start the ball rollin' to take their last huntin' grounds from 'em? Zeke, I'd rather cut my arm off."

He relaxed then, and his tones grew milder.

"If things shape different," he concluded, "an' some one else starts it, why ye can always come back. But meantime we'll just roll back the stone."

"And then?"

"Why, no one will know a thing save you and me."

THE astounded Zeke gasped like a man who, after swimming for hours, reaches a floating log. And what further things these stalwart sons of Nature said brokenly in their tears, even a reader has no right to know.

Soon afterward the stone was carefully replaced; and the morning of the following day found them back in the foothills.

For precaution's sake they had also ridden ten miles or more through the shallow rushing waters of a mountain creek; and because of this they had, with some degree of certainty, reasoned that the secret of Four Points was effectually guarded.

Yet both knew that they were still far from secure. Among the Sioux, Arapahoes and Cheyennes, split into bands as they were, and with no one ruler holding power over any tribe, there were many insurgents. Over these the chiefs of the bands exercised only a nominal control. Nor had the government agents any real power. For, during this period, the Indian's fate was the football of politics. It was kicked about between extreme Eastern sentimentalists and prejudiced Western frontiersmen; and, in consequence, the agencies in Dakota were even less practical than those erected in Minnesota twenty years before.

In the latter case, the Santee Sioux involved had at least been semiagricultural in their original forest life; and so they had fitted more readily into the agricultural program mapped out by the government. With the western bands the opposite was true. Buffalo hunters and nomadic horsemen, they were the toreadors and the Romany troupers of the American continent. Chaining them to a plow was like placing stolid Dutch sabots upon the twinkling feet of *Carmen*. So, for want of a really constructive program, the western Sioux at this period

were allowed to draw supplies every two weeks and suffered in the interim to roam the reservation at will.

Knowing this full well, Buck and Zeke traversed the Sacred Hills with even more than ordinary vigilance. And now, as they rode, the trilling notes of a blue jay sounded among the impenetrable leaves. It was answered from some other part of the still forest. Neither man particularly noted this at once, nor were they alarmed by the notes of a lark far off in the distance, where, through the green filter floating in the forest, they could discern the yellow peak tips, shining in the sun. But now the blue jay trilled again, still abreast of them. Immediately thereafter, from the dim and mystic silence up ahead, there came a second answering note, faint and eerie, like a ghastly echo.

It was Buck who instinctively sensed the danger first. His sharp ear clearly caught the delicate shade of difference between the true notes and those marvelous imitations. The quiet of the forest had become too quiet; even the sun, which had appeared so cheerful but a moment since, now shone somberly down on peak and forest. And, casting the odorous air like an elk, Buck read the signs even before the horses raised their ears.

"Zeke," he said, "we'll drift. They're on both sides of us."

Zeke stifled an exclamation of amazement. Yet when Buck broke into a gallop, he and his pack horse followed without question. He it was who had confidently led the way years before; now the younger man had surpassed him by far.

No sooner had they increased their gait than the blue-jay call was repeated shrilly, off to the right. Others answered it, still farther off, and down in the valley which paralleled their game trail.

"Those in the valley below us are mounted," Buck decided. "Aimin' to cut us off at the pass."

THEY sped on at breakneck speed, and reached the open pass without molestation. But they heard yells behind them. Foiled thus unexpectedly in effecting the impromptu ambush which they had hastily arranged by signals after stumbling on their prey, the small party of Sioux now raced through the lower valley in open pursuit.

"Don't let that plug hinder you!" Buck warned, indicating the pack horse.

"No!" Zeke returned.

He released the animal, letting him gallop along after them at his own sweet will. This he did, frequently stumbling awkwardly on the dragging halter shank and falling farther and farther behind.

"Don't shoot yet," Buck further warned. Looking back, he saw that the Sioux were not more than eight in number. When they mounted the slope on the opposite side, these were still five hundred yards behind.

"We'll make the Crow's Nest," he called.

"Yes," said Zeke.

The Indians gained a little, as they crossed the ravine bottom, and Buck, looking back again, recognized Son-of-bear. At the same moment the pack slipped a little on the lone horse. He almost fell.

"They'll get him," said Buck.

"Yes. Samples o' rock in that pack, too."

"Spilled milk. Ride 'im, cowboy!"

Dashing into the trees, they had galloped perhaps a hundred yards, dodging under low branches, when a flash of gray in the brush caught Buck's eye. He whipped up his pistol and fired.

"Got 'im, by gum!" he exulted, reining in. He was off in a bound, letting the reins drop to hold the well-trained Blacky. Running into the brush, as Zeke, in round-eyed amazement, reined in on his own account, Buck whipped back into the trail the body of a timber wolf. One slash from his knife, and the tail was cut off. Then he raced to Blacky and remounted.

"Dead tree next stop," he grinned, spurring on.

"You win," said Zeke, not understanding in the least. "Some shot, though."

"Lucky."

Busy with a piece of the end of one rein, which he now cut off, Buck fashioned hurriedly a small loop. Coming to a dead tree in the trail, near the edge of the next opening, he halted. The

wolf's tail was quickly suspended from a lower limb.

"There!" he said confidently. "I reckon curfew has rung!"

Zeke said no word, but his eyes were question marks.

"Oh, I ain't crazy yet," Buck chuckled, when they spurred on. "Wait and see."

THEY neared the lip they had been aiming for, as the Indians appeared. Less than two hundred yards now intervened between pursuers and prey. Yet no shot was fired. Instead, the nearly naked Sioux halted before the wolf's tail, chattering excitedly.

"Oh, boy!" Buck exploded, with a grin. He rode into the natural inclosure, dismounted, and wiped his face. "Reminds me o' the time I aimed to borry ten bucks off that deacon. Got his hand as far as his pocket."

"Close, eh?" In their new understanding, Zeke was playing the game as Buck had so fervently prayed he might. He was safely back on his old track, perhaps more firmly intrenched now than he had been at any time in his life. And he grinned rather ruefully at Buck, wiping his own face free of perspiration.

"I never knew your system was so ornery," he said.

Buck yodeled ecstatically. "Nothin' to it!" he crowed. "But there—I'll tell. Bad medicine."

"Oh!"

"Shore. I just happened to know Son-of-bear's particular bad medicine. That's all."

Zeke no longer expressed surprise. He knew this trait of the Indian well enough. No wind that blew, no bough that bent, no twig that accidentally fell across his path was without some significance, good or bad, to the first American. Dreams were of special import. Son-of-bear's special bugbear was the tail of a wolf seen hanging from a tree in one of his periods of indigestion.

"He's the leader, and they won't ride over his bad medicine," Buck went on. "It'll hold good till another sun comes up. I've seen one leave a fight, right in the middle, because a shadow fell over his face."

They allowed the horses to rest, while the Indians below them parleyed and shook their heads. Then out of the trees one rode, leading the captured pack horse. This they immediately stripped. And, even as they chattered, The Smiler came out of the forest.

"The plot thickens," Buck observed.

"Do you suppose that skunk knew it was us?"

"Who can tell? See Son-of-bear stagger? Half drunk." And the two concluded that The Smiler had ridden into the hills with a load of whisky.

"Maybe he knew, but laid back to be sure the Indians would finish it," said Zeke. Then the big man groaned. "Buck, he's got the samples!"

"I know." Buck was grave now, but he clapped Zeke on the back. "Wait till we see how much milk is spilled before we weep."

The Smiler soon gave them an inkling. Across the sunlit space he called:

"I didn't know who these Injuns was a-chasin', boys."

"No, probably not. Well?"

"Maybe we can dicker."

"How dicker?" Buck queried.

"Well, you let me in on this strike, an' we'll keep it between us."

"Suppose we don't?"

"Reckon I might go back an' find yore location."

"Not in a hundred years."

This bluff having been called, The Smiler tried a new tack. "Well, you don't aim to hog it *all*, do you?"

"Don't intend to hog *any*."

The Smiler was at first unable to believe his ears. When he at last grasped the fact, he threatened in veiled terms to tell the authorities. But at this Buck merely laughed mirthlessly. He mounted Blacky, and, with Zeke following, rode off down the slope to the group below. Not a hand was raised to molest them, though the young Hunkpapas ferociously glowered.

"I'll take them samples," Buck coolly ordered.

For once The Smiler's treacherous grin was conspicuous by its absence. Avarice tore at his vitals, and with it the accumulated hatred of many years. The man's

hand shook. He looked swiftly from Buck to the sullen Indians, and the alert cow-puncher read easily the giant's bitter thought.

"That wolf tail deprived you o' their help for the day, Smiler," he said. And now, in a rush, all his own latent hatred blazed suddenly in his gray eyes. "Hand over them rocks!" he cried harshly, and his hand hovered in air ready to drop to his holster.

Reluctantly then The Smiler gave up the specimens.

"Good!" said Buck, yet there was something like a sigh in his tones. "I hoped you *wouldn't*, you yellow dog. I've been itchin' long years for a white man's chance to drill you." Then, as The Smiler only glowered, he added, "You won't have these samples to show round an' start a rush, anyway. As for prospectin' on your own account, that's your lookout. Only, I'll try to put a bug in Red Cloud's ear to spike your game."

So they refastened the packs and continued serenely on their way, leaving the baffled Indians muttering with the hate-filled Smiler.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

NOTHING HIGHER THAN A DEUCE.

NO sooner had they ridden away into the golden light than Zeke began to reproach himself anew. The Smiler, he gloomily predicted, would never rest until he had cunningly ferreted out a way to profit by the certain knowledge that gold lay somewhere in the Black Hills.

Buck no less clearly recognized this fact. Yet to him the reëstablishment of Zeke's self-respect meant far more than any other present phase of the situation. And as for The Smiler——

"He can't start a rush without samples, an' what's more he don't *want* to," he declared. "He'll want to spot a place for himself *first*, don't you see?"

Zeke saw that; but he said there was undoubtedly gold in other parts of the Black Hills, even though prospectors had failed to find it in the past. That more than one Indian knew it, he was fairly certain. If The Smiler was unable to locate gold by stealthy prospecting there, he would be sure to find another way. Sooner or later, Zeke prophesied The Smiler would work his way round one of the Hunkpapas with whisky.

"That's just it!" Buck eagerly exclaimed. "Sooner or later some one else will do the same thing, even though Smiler doesn't. You savvy the powwow. 'Why are them Sioux so anxious to keep settlers out o' the Black Hills?' they say. And they answer theirselves, 'Because there's gold there.' "

"But they only guess, and Smiler is plumb certain," said Zeke.

"Shucks! That was one o' them accidents."

With such arguments did Buck steer Zeke away from the shadows and back again into the sunshine.

"Only," he said, before he finally saw Zeke on his way to Cheyenne, "I'll break a rule and make a suggestion."

"What's that?"

"When you come back from having those molars fixed, try usin' a hairbrush."

"For somethin' beside brushin' that cowlick o' mine, I suppose?"

"You can have three guesses, old-timer!"

Whether or not Zeke took the hint literally, he never said. After he returned, Ada looked worshipfully and with undoubted respect upon her tight-lipped lord. And where petulance had marred her countenance, there shone a subdued and contented light.

Nor did anything occur immediately to bring on the contingency Buck feared. Intercepting Red Cloud, the Lone Star foreman told his story. It but cemented their friendship the more solidly. Although perturbed, Red Cloud assured him that he would take steps to see that The Smiler did no prospecting. As to further developments, he said these must lie there in the haze, which ever obscures tomorrow's trail.

Soon afterward Buck was perforce absorbed in the work of the round-up. It took him and his crew of punchers, with their chuck wagon, on long trails over the open range and deep into the heart of this new cattle land. So days went on, one much like another, and grew into weeks, till at last, in the clear autumn

sunshine, Buck and his riders approached Medicine Bow with the fall beef herd.

The last news having been received over a week before, Buck eagerly awaited the approach of Tuesday Knight, when that young horse wrangler returned from a trip to town. He brought a brief note of various instructions from Matilda, and no disquieting tidings. A new outfit was moving in over west of the Bighorns. Steers were up four dollars. Folks said the new deputy marshal at Cheyenne had false teeth. The Bordeaux outfit had strung up a rustler on Horse Creek, who was overly ambitious to show dexterity with a running iron. Twins had been dropped by the stork at the Atchinsons' on Skull Creek. Beer was a dollar and a quarter a bottle.

"Nor that ain't all," the irrepressible Tuesday rattled on, rolling a cigarette after the manner of a Mexican, without wetting the paper. "Yuh ain't heared about 'Slim' Bellaire. Slim—he's a-prospectin' now over on the Rattle Snake. Dog-gone if he ain't gone an' got hisself the mumps. So the Tin Cup boys was affixin' fer to send him a bottle o' nickels."

The laugh this created having subsided, Buck casually inquired, "Any Injun news?"

"Naah! Guess they're satisfied, now there won't be no Northern Pacific built yet a while, in spite o' Custer's expedition," Tuesday replied. Then his eyes grew round and solemn. "Only scalp lifted this summer was Bitter-root Bevins' toupee. Say, I said right off when I heared that, 'Look,' I says, 'at what civilization has gone an' rejooced them pore Injuns to!'"

"Aw, pshaw!" Bitter-root protested with his mild grin. He embarrassedly pulled his sombrero lower over his prematurely bald head. "I allus knowed you boys put that up on me."

"Well, now ain't that the limit? That makes two people thinks the same."

"Two?" Bitter-root blurted.

"Yeah. Say, boys, you know that sweet biscuit shooter Buckeye's been a-spoonin' down at Medicine Bow? Well, she's the other one. She——"

"How come *she* knowed about it?" Bitter-root ejaculated, turning exquisitely red.

"Why, some one shore went an' nailed the durn thing up over her door!"

The riot this precipitated nearly caused a stampede; and now all turned their faces eagerly toward Medicine Bow.

ACROSS miles of motionless mountain prairies its minimized dimensions were clearly visible. An isolated frame station, a grimy coal chute, the gray water tank, and the dusty corrals rounded out forlornly this small collection of stores, eating houses, and saloons. The present picture contrasted sadly with its pristine beauty. For here the Indian tepees had once colorfully added their rainbow touch to an unblemished landscape. Yet, in that mountain radiance, the town stood out so bravely that Buck ignored its material ugliness. He saw it in the light of its associations, with its background of frontier life.

Matilda had completed a sale with a buyer, but Buck's responsibilities did not cease until the steers were safely loaded. When Buck had discharged his responsibilities in the matter, and the boys had drawn their "time," he strolled into the store where Matilda was making her headquarters during the stay in town. It was still early in evening, and Buck felt a great sense of relief. He was not aware that any untoward incident portended.

"Little game goin' on in the back room," the storekeeper informed him in confidence.

"Since when did yuh start that here?"

"Oh, I ain't settin' up opposition to no tinhorns. I jest loaned the room, like, to Miss Busbee an' some o' her boys."

"Miss Busbee, yuh say? *She* a-gamblin' in there?"

"Why, yes," the storekeeper blandly retorted. "Free country, ain't it?"

Buck frowned thoughtfully and wandered on back. He had at times seen Matilda playing cards at the ranch and for various sums of money; but he was unprepared for the sight which greeted him now. Dan was there, grim and flushed; the colonel was also playing; and so were Rocky Moore, Tuesday

Knight, and Sudden McEwan. They were playing stud poker, and the chips were high in front of Matilda. And now he saw that this was no mere pastime. Hundreds of dollars were changing hands.

"Reckon this is gettin' too steep for *me*," sighed Tuesday, pushing back his chair, as Buck entered. "I'm cleaned."

"Well, I'll stay," growled McEwan.

Now all were so apparently intent on the game that Buck received merely a preoccupied nod. And within a few minutes Rocky, Sudden, and the colonel dropped out of a pot. This left Matilda and Dan betting. Both had two kings in sight. Matilda also had a pair of tens up, while Dan's remaining exposed cards revealed a pair of jacks.

Stubbornly Dan forced the betting, while the sphinxlike Matilda met him with raise after raise. This continued till all Dan's chips were in the pot.

"Shure, there's all I got from the sale," said Dan then. "Kin I get the finger?"

"Shoot," came the laconic response.

"Thin I'll raise yiz wan hundred head!" challenged Dan, after a moment of thought."

"And a hundred."

Buck looked closely at Dan. Here was something not at all to his liking. Had his old friend been drinking too heavily? The man was betting part of his remaining herd, still on the range. But none of the people engaged were children. So Buck in conformity to the code remained silent, watching disapprovingly while Dan, with a final gesture, wagered his last remaining steer.

"Jack's full!" he cried, turning over his unexposed card.

"Kings!" Matilda retorted.

Amazedly Buck gazed at Matilda's cool profile. Even though she might have lost, what were five hundred steers to her? But old Dan and Ma were now without a dollar.

"A damned shame!" he thought inwardly. Yet he smoothed out his features and said casually: "Reckon I'd better sit in this game while the gettin's so good."

"Oh, vurry well," Matilda replied callously. "Warn you, though! My luck is good to-night."

Buck said nothing. With the thought that some day he might have to support Dan and Ma, he had saved seven hundred dollars. With this to risk, he reasoned that he might win back that herd for Dan.

FOR a time Rocky and McEwan won large pots and lost alternately. Buck did not notice at first that they and the colonel began to drop out whenever he and Matilda held good hands. But before long he was winning constantly; and within two hours he had taken back from Matilda over three thousand dollars.

His own hand on the next pot being very poor, he stayed out. Thereupon spirited betting began between the others. McEwan, whose pile of chips had pyramided, shoved them all in the pot. It required all of Matilda's chips to remain in, and Sudden won with three kings over two aces.

"I suppose I can bet the finger?" she inquired.

"Oh, yes," Buck replied. "Steers, p'ticular."

Just why he happened to glance at Tuesday at this moment he could not afterward have told. Tuesday was looking at the floor with studied inattention. But Buck saw something in the flicker of the horse wrangler's long lashes. And upon the youth the truth broke like the bursting of a cloud.

Why, this was all "framed!" How could he have ever stupidly reconciled such selfishness with Matilda's other characteristics? Back to the conversation of the summer flew his thoughts. This game was her conception, planned with the connivance of the family, of how to pay a debt he refused to acknowledge, and also to thrust a herd upon him.

To hide the fact that he had seen through the stratagem, he lowered his eyes. But he could not hide the flush which mantled his face. Thus Matilda read as so much print the fact that her design had been betrayed to him, and also his stubborn decision to return under cover of legitimate play all that he had thus far won from her.

Eventually there came a hand wherein, as card after card fell, the others dropped

out. Matilda bet along easily, and Buck followed, till the hands were full. Her four exposed cards revealed a queen, ace, nine and deuce. His four were: an ace, a jack, a trey and a seven.

Obviously, then, neither player had a pair in sight. The unturned card might be the requisite half of a pair, or an odd card; and, obviously again, neither player could possibly have higher than a pair of aces. In case both had aces, then Matilda would win, with her queen as the next highest card.

Buck knew he had no ace; instead, he had but a lowly trey concealed. Since he had formerly been playing consistently to win, he reasoned that Matilda had received no inkling of his change. Her previous bluffs had not been so outrageous as to excite suspicion. In all likelihood she now had at least a pair of nines, or possibly a pair of queens. He could therefore lose under the guise of a bluff. He would beat her for once at her own game.

The betting cautiously progressed, as though each were trying in all seriousness to feel the other out. Then it mounted rapidly till at last his chips were in against Matilda's note for some five hundred head of cattle. Not a sound could be heard, save the breathing of the spectators.

"And call!" said Buck at last.

Matilda looked up and radiantly smiled for the first time that evening.

"Buck," she said, "I'll bet you a hundred on the side that this is on you!"

"So?" he retorted, smiling. "Well, I guessed some time ago I wouldn't have to win back no herd for Uncle Dan." And Buck looked round about at the telltale faces of the conspirators.

"How about that bet, though, of a hundred?"

"Go you!" he cried. And then, as he triumphantly turned over his lonely trey, hilarity straggled the family. For Matilda produced nothing higher than a deuce.

To be concluded in the next issue of THE POPULAR, *on the stands May 20th.*

OREGON PROTECTS PLANT LIFE

STATE protection for wild flowers as well as wild animals is now a definitely recognized movement. A wise commonwealth has come to see that destructive aggression will beget the same extinction in the vegetable kingdom as in the animal world, if the marauding flower hunter is given the same carte blanche which he took in the pursuit of the antelope and other wild animals. That the West as well as the East is resorting to special laws to protect the wild flowers is a clear indication that public sentiment has come to value plant life.

Years of violence against plant life in the East have left us with few wild flowers to protect. Present-day school children are being taught that there are certain flowers which must not be plucked, but their elders are slow to realize that the trailing arbutus and the lady slipper must not be picked, if these varieties are to survive in the environs of our large cities.

Oregon recently passed special laws to protect wild plant life. Like California, Oregon knows that one of the great scenic attractions of its hills and valleys is the abundance of wild flowers. The East was the pioneer leader in this movement of conserving wild life, animal as well as plant; but the Western States are now pushing energetically the program for floral conservation. To make the movement successful, however, either in the West or the East, public sentiment and interest must be educated as well as aroused. A poet once declared that "only God can make a tree." Any barbarian invader of God's wilds can destroy in an hour what Nature has taken years to bring forth. In the face of persistent barbarism, Nature refuses to multiply her miracles.

The Strafing of Two-Gun Perkins

By Kenneth Gilbert

Author of "Unbeatable Ballaster," "The Thunder God," Etc.

All this newfangled trench warfare seemed purposeless to Two-gun Perkins. He didn't like the war, he felt lost without his six-shooters, and he longed for a sight of his Arizona horse, Chiquita. There came a time, though, when even Two-gun was ready to admit that it was a rip-snortin' war, after all.

FOR the third time Sheriff Tom Bender slowly read the telegram which had just been delivered to him. He noted that it bore the notation, "Gov't paid." Authentic enough, all right. The old sheriff got to his feet, put on his hat, opened the door of his office, and stood there for a moment in the glare of the Arizona sunlight.

Then he heard the intermittent noise that an automobile engine makes when it is back-firing, but the sheriff did not interpret the sound as such. It came from down the street, apparently in the rear of Manuel Gonzalez's chili parlor. Bender nodded, satisfied, and headed in that direction, moving with a springy step which belied his years. Arriving at Gonzalez's place, he walked around to the back and paused at the corner of the building.

In the vacant lot there, perhaps twenty-five or thirty men and boys were gathered, some squatting on the ground, others standing, but all interested spectators in what was taking place. A few paces in front of them was a man with his back toward Bender. A tall, rangy man clad in faded overalls and cotton shirt, wearing the high-heeled boots of the cow-puncher and the regulation wide-brimmed hat of the cattle country. He stood with his arms folded.

Twenty feet from him was another man who held an empty tin can in each hand. Now, as the tall man nodded, he suddenly threw both cans high in the air, well apart.

Thereupon, what seemed to be a miracle took place. The tall man moved; slightly, it is true, but so rapidly that the eye was defied to follow his actions. For

an instant he appeared wreathed in the thinnest of dissolving clouds of smoke; a staccato roar beat upon the ears of Bender, and then the tall man was standing with folded arms as before.

But disaster had smitten the tin cans. Torn and crumpled by the rain of heavy bullets, they were hurled to earth a dozen yards away. It was almost magical.

A breathless pause, and then a storm of cries and clapping broke out.

"Do it again! Do it again!" One strident voice led the shouting. The tall man turned and acknowledged his due with a nod.

"Shucks!" he exclaimed, when the clamor died. "That wasn't nothin'. I can show yuh a new trick——"

He broke off, as he caught sight of Bender. For an instant he eyed the officer askance; then he grinned.

"Howdy, sheriff!" he called out. "See the stunt?"

Bender nodded and came forward.

"Yuh're sure a wizard, 'Two-gun,'" he approved. "Never saw yuhr beat." He held out his hand, and the other grasped it eagerly, reddening at the praise. He was a young man, wind burned almost to the hue of magenta, and not unhandsome, yet there were lines beginning to show in his face.

"Son," said Bender, still shaking the other's hand, "yuh're sure goin' to be a big help to yuhr uncle!"

The other drew back, puzzled.

"Uncle?" he echoed. "I ain't got no uncle!"

Bender grinned.

"Uncle Sam," he explained. "I'm proud to inform yuh, son, that yuh've been drawed in the draft. Yuh'll report to the draft board at Prescott at once!"

Bewilderment showed in the young man's eyes.

"Me?" he asked. "Draft?"

"Sure thing," said the sheriff. "Yuh registered for it. Remember? Now, yuhr number has been called. Yuh're goin' into the army, overseas, to fight!"

The young man scowled. Then he swore.

"I never figgered it would amount to anything," he complained. "I've been out on the M K Ranch lately and haven't seen the papers. I just registered because some fool told me I had to. Figgered the war would be over in a little while, anyway. Now yuh say they want me? Yuh mean they'll send me away over on the other side of the world to smoke up a lot of jaspers I never saw before?"

"Just that, Perkins," said Bender, his old eyes kindling. "Uncle Sam says 'do it,' and that's what yuh do. I'm too old to go. Wish I had yuhr chance!"

Two-gun swore again. "Wish yuh did, too!" he declared ungraciously. "Anybody honin' for my place can have it, with my thanks throwed in. Me, I can't make head or tail of this war. No one in Europe ever tromped on my toes, far as I remember."

Bender caught him by the shoulder.

"Listen, son," said the old sheriff earnestly. "Yuh've got the wrong slant on it. This ain't yuhr own little private war—nor mine, either. It's the nation's. Yuh've et Uncle Sam's grub, yuh've breathed his air, and swaggered around his broad domain for quite a spell. Now, he's callin' on yuh.

"No, by gravy, he's *commandin'* yuh! All yuh have to do is refuse, and yuh can't fill yuhr hand fast enough to get away from what'll happen to yuh.

"I'm tellin' yuh frankly, Two-gun, yuh don't sound so much to me. Yuh may be an artist with a six-shooter, but yuh're yellow, just the same!"

Perkins' eyes flashed.

"Think so?" he asked unpleasantly, drawing away. "If yuh wasn't sheriff, and an old man——"

"I can slip off my badge and twenty years in a holy second, Two-gun!"

Their eyes met and held—fearless eyes of age that looked into the fearless eyes of youth. Then Perkins shrugged. Suddenly he put out his hand.

"I'm plumb sorry, sheriff," he apologized. "Not that I'm afraid of yuh. But I shouldn't have said what I did. I'm not yellow, and yuh know it. And I'll prove it. I'm hittin' the grit, pronto, for Prescott!"

Bender seized the other's hand again.

"Good boy!" he vowed. The crowd cheered.

"But, say!" exclaimed Two-gun abruptly. "What about my hawss? What'll I do with Chiquita when I'm Over There?"

It was then that one of the onlookers, a man with a greasy apron fastened around his paunchy stomach, pushed forward. He was short, fat, swarthy, with dull, piggish eyes, but his teeth glistened whitely in an ingratiating smile.

"All the tam you señors talk, I theenk," he announced. "To Señor Perkins, I have thees to say: Leave Chiquita by me. Soch good care I take of her! *Bueno!* As you would do yourself."

Two-gun regarded him doubtfully.

"Yuh mean it, Gonzalez?" he asked. "Yuh know, that hawss is part of my life. I'd ruther die than lose her. She knows more tricks than a pet monkey. Money couldn't buy her!"

The Mexican gesticulated.

"Si, si!" he agreed. "Well do I know eet. You may trost me, señor."

Suspicion still showed in the young man's eyes.

"There was a horse buyer for the French army who came through these parts not long ago," he reflected aloud. "Chiquita'd bring top price. If I thought that——

"But, no, I don't reckon yuh'd dare to do it. *Yet, if yuh did*—— Why, say, Gonzalez, the Atlantic Ocean ain't wide or deep enough to keep me from yuh, even if I have to swim! And if I stop lead Over There, and they plant me under six feet of sod, I'll r'ar right out of my coffin and come set on yuhr stummick every night, and twist my cold fingers in yuhr hair."

"Dios!" broke in the Mexican, with a shudder. "For w'y you make soch talk? I be good to Chiquita. You see!"

"Yuh better be!" warned Two-gun grimly, as he turned away. "I'll go break the news to her now. Damn this war thing, anyway! Had a circus job offered me yesterday—me and Chiquita. Eighty a week and found. Now, *that's* off! Sheriff, yuh got any more good news that yuh've been holdin' out on me?"

Bender cleared his throat.

"Only this tip, son," he replied. "Stop kickin' about this war when yuh get among folks who don't understand yuh like I do. They might think—— Well, they'll get yuh wrong. Good luck, son! When yuh see the enemy, strafe 'em like yuh did those tin cans!"

"I'll do worse, if I ever meet the guy that started this here argument!" vowed Perkins.

TRAINING camp. Unaccustomed uniform and low-heeled, heavy-soled shoes that made a man's feet feel clubby. Nagging noncoms who kept barking at him day after day to stand erect, "like a soldier."

"For why?" asked Perkins blandly of the drill sergeant who had snapped the command at him for the fiftieth time. "Are we goin' to shoot, or merely show off? Me—I wouldn't trade my .44 carbine for an armful of these here rifles yuh got. What's the use of carryin' around half a cord of wood on a gun? First, yuh take my six-shooters away from me and give me this here musket, with a front sight stickin' up like a sore thumb. Then, yuh tell me I've got to 'stand up straight and look like somebody.' Why not turn me loose with the tools that I can use?"

The sergeant explained colorfully, forcefully. Likewise he added a lot of extraneous comment which had less to do with war and the conduct of it than it did with Perkins' person. He dwelt on certain matters of anatomy, frankly expressing the belief that the new soldier's head was constructed of fossil ivory, and that an examination of Perkins' back would reveal a saffron stripe the width of a man's two hands.

Perkins listened, impressed. No man had talked to him quite like that before. There was an element of novelty in it. Likewise, he had the feeling of one bereft of trusted friends; without the familiar bulge under each armpit of his "personal guns," which had been impounded at the beginning, he lacked the aplomb which normally characterized him. True, he might work over the drill sergeant by the bare-hands method, but what he had seen so far of military discipline and penalties convinced him that he would pay a costly price for such satisfaction. So he

merely replied in his own language, flavored with idioms of the range.

The sergeant, who had spent much of his army service at Western posts before the war, missed no values in the other's meaning. Perkins learned a profound philosophical truth, then, that matters can never be so bad that they can't get worse.

First, he was clapped in the guardhouse for three days, which was no hardship, since it relieved him of drills temporarily. Then he was brought out and thrown upon the atrophied compassion of a soulless mess sergeant, who promptly gave him kitchen-police duty in man-size doses.

Nor did his old friend, the drill sergeant, quite forget him. Four times a day, Perkins was hauled forth from the steamy confines of the cook's domain and put through the manual of arms. Always there was included with this a brisk workout at double time, full marching order. Rifle on shoulder, and neck bent under the weight of field equipment, he was made to trot back and forth, while a natty little corporal, whose arms ached for another chevron, stood by and barked: "Hup—hup—hup!"

Two-gun Perkins, the untamed pride of the M K Ranch, "hupped." Common-sense whispered that it was the only thing to do. Probably he deserved it, having failed to heed Sheriff Bender's warning against "kickin' about this war among folks that don't understand yuh."

But there was meager comfort in the realization. Wild thoughts of desertion, or even running amuck and laying waste the drill sergeant, the mess sergeant, the corporal, and the whole noncommissioned breed, surged through his mind at times, but always he checked these impulses. Not yet. Nevertheless, he simmered against the injustice of his treatment and voiced his thoughts at night in the squad tent, perhaps yearning for sympathy from his buddies.

He got none, however. True, they hated the drill sergeant with a fervor no less than his own, but of sympathy they had none to spare. This was war—all that General Sherman's classical quotation implied—and the army no kind-words club. The wounds that would demand care and solace were of the flesh, not the feelings. Perkins was regarded even by his squad mates as a born kicker. One of his buddies went so far as to upbraid him about it. Ere Two-gun had finished remonstrating with the man, the battle being confined within their tent, the military police arrived, and there was a week of bread-and-water diet as the ex-cowboy's portion. When he came out of the guardhouse, a little paler and thinner than before, he had learned that self-control is not without its virtues, even in the army. Thereafter, he did most of his complaining to himself. Yet his refusal to adapt himself to the new life and conditions forced upon him was not weakened in the slightest. He vowed that some day he would be revenged.

Homesickness gripped him, too. He longed for the old ranch and a glimpse of the boys there. Sometimes at night he would lie awake for hours, thinking of Chiquita, the little bay mare who was his first and only love, and whom he had intrusted to the Mexican, Gonzalez. He wished that he had thought to have a picture taken of her before he left. Maybe he could get Gonzalez to have it done, later. Twice he wrote the Mexican, asking how Chiquita was getting along, but got no reply. That did not worry him, however; it would be unlike Gonzalez to reply, anyway.

Meanwhile, army life at the training camp became no less irksome. He was almost at the point of taking some desperate chance when orders came for the regiment to embark. Perkins felt better. Here was something at last which promised action.

FRANCE, and the little town where Perkins' outfit was billeted. Rain and more rain, while the lanes of squishy mud that marked the streets became next to impassable. Soldiers—soldiers everywhere. Talk of the big adventure which lay just ahead for those who had yet to receive their baptism of fire. Wounded men, convalescent, on their way more to the rear, beyond even the sound of the guns, which Perkins heard now and then, and which sounded like muttering thun-

der back in the Arizona hills. Depression—moods when a feeling of helplessness and revolt took possession of him. White-capped French girls who smiled at the American *soldats*, which was better; and now and then a bottle of *vin rouge*, which was best of all.

Still, Two-gun Perkins was far from enjoying himself. He was sullen and went about his duties scowling. Long ago the noncoms had given up riding him, because he appeared willing enough now, yet his attitude was such that officers marked him. Perhaps his best friend, although he scarcely had an opportunity to know it, was the regimental commander, Colonel Mattison. The latter, a captain with the border patrol at the outbreak of the war, had gone up the ladder fast in a few months. Knowing the Southwest and the men therein, he was, perhaps, better than any of the others able to understand something of the ex-cowboy's attitude. But the colonel was also a good officer, and he knew that Perkins must solve the problem in his own way. So he stood aloof, but in secret quieted rumors that came to him, from time to time, concerning the morose man who gloomed about the camp, doing duty mechanically, but without spirit, and by his very lack of enthusiasm seeming to invoke suspicion. Probably if it hadn't been for Mattison, the unwilling private would have eventually been sent to a detention camp at the rear and kept under surveillance.

Perkins was in bad, and, if anything, was getting in deeper. Few of his comrades "buddied" him; and they had long ago learned that it was unsafe to "kid" him about Chiquita, concerning whom he had been wont to boast at the beginning. Behind his back they called him "The Horseless Horseman." Perhaps it was a relief for everybody, Perkins included, when the regiment was moved up to the line.

Events came rapidly enough then. The sound of the guns was loud, and there were wounded men everywhere, it seemed. The horizon reddened, so that it reminded Perkins of distant brush fires he had seen in his own mountains. Acres on hillsides, dotted with white crosses, each marking the last resting place of some soldier who had "gone west." Dead horses and sick horses, the latter wandering about behind the lines.

It was the horses that "got" Two-gun the hardest. These were French army horses, brought from all over the world to move the artillery. As they became sick or wounded, they were turned loose behind the lines. So that no one would work or ride them. A strip of red flannel was tied to the root of their tails—a badge of honor.

"What's that for?" queried Perkins one day of a doughboy, indicating the red marker fastened to a horse which walked slowly past, head down, as sick of war as Perkins was himself.

The artilleryman grinned. He, too, had heard of the morose ex-cowboy and saw a chance to "kid" him.

"That?" he remarked with seeming innocence. "Why, the enemy did that. Whenever they grab one of our horses that's too sick to use, they tie a red rag on it and shoo it back over into our lines!"

Two-gun stared after the slow-moving horse and thought gratefully that Chiquita was far enough away to escape such humiliation. What manner of foe was this that made war on horses? Resolved to remove the offending red rag, he started after the horse, but a sudden bustle of excitement at company headquarters distracted his attention.

Something was happening. Orders were issued, orderlies hurried here and there, and a bustle of excitement stirred the regiment. Assembly. And then everybody learned that they were going into the front-line trench.

The enemy's drive straight for the heart of Paris was getting well under way. Ground was being given by the Allies. But at this point the flow of the gray tide would be stemmed, if possible. Action! The thought thrilled everybody. The regiment was going to get its first real taste of battle.

THE rain of early evening had stopped, the sky had cleared, and the air had become colder. This meant fog, and it came, shortly after midnight. Yet it

thinned again, as the hours passed. And now, with daylight not far away, only the thinnest of hazes lay upon the terrain which at that moment was No Man's Land.

In the firing trench, lined up with the others and awaiting the zero hour that would send them over the top and through the barbed wire at the slow, menacing walk which was the charge, Two-gun Perkins shivered, though not from fear. He was cold, for one thing; and for another, he had the feeling that he was going blindly into a game about which he knew nothing.

The night had worked up to this climax. But a few yards distant was the enemy trench. There was every reason to believe that at daylight, or shortly thereafter, the foe would resume the drive. As a countermove, the American forces were to strike first. Much of the enemy's artillery was still far at the rear, having failed to keep up with the rapid advance, hence there could be no barrage laid down to cover the enemy advance. This worked to the advantage of the Americans. They would need only to face machine guns and regular trench fire. There was no wind, and no gas was expected.

Seemingly, the enemy thought of the possibility of the Americans doing that very thing, for now and then a machine-gun nest was heard from along the enemy line, bullets sweeping the terrain to forestall a raid. At intervals, too, a light flare made the place almost as bright as noonday, so that the prone figures of dead men, dead horses, and likewise the gaping shell craters, could be seen plainly.

To Perkins it seemed a foolish thing—this whole horrid game of war. Across that strip of terrain were men he had never seen before. They wanted to kill him, and he was supposed to want to kill them, although no personal quarrel existed.

"No sense to it, at all," he said in an undertone.

"Silence, there!" came the hoarse whisper of his platoon leader from near by. Two-gun said no more.

Suddenly, big guns began to speak back of the enemy line, and shells began to fall. The earth quaked and quivered like jelly. Yet it was plain that the enemy had not succeeded in bringing up all of their heavy artillery, for the firing was ragged, nothing like the drum fire of the barrage. Yet the big projectiles were striking uncomfortably close. The gunners had the range of the American trench and were trying to destroy it before the daylight advance.

"Telephone line's gone between here and regimental headquarters," Perkins heard some one whisper. "Shell hit the trench." With deafening detonations taking place every few seconds, there was no need now for the men to keep silent.

The shelling stopped, then, as abruptly as it had started. A period of silence. Presently the terrain was lighted by a flare.

Immediately an enemy machine gun spoke up. Two others followed suit. Craning his neck, Two-gun saw that the fire was directed at a moving figure out in front, a figure which instantly flattened itself, while bullets raked the ground about it. He wondered what it could mean, and at that moment the flare died. Some one in his own trench made a guess.

"That's a messenger from headquarters!" the man said in a whisper. "Telephone line's down, and he's got word for us. Took a chance on goin' straight across rather than loop around."

Undoubtedly that was correct. At this point, the foe had driven a great V-shaped wedge into the Allied line. Headquarters was on one leg of the V, and Perkins' battalion was on the other. With the trench cut between, the shortest route was directly across No Man's Land. Probably, too, the almost impassable condition of the terrain behind the American line at this point made the more hazardous route advisable.

Darkness came like a thunderclap, but presently it was lightened by another flare. Once more the staccato roll of the enemy machine guns came to Perkins' ears. He saw that the messenger from headquarters had gained ground.

Soon after the flare died out, there was a commotion in the American trench.

A guarded light showed for an instant close by. Only for an instant, yet it revealed the blood-streaked face of a man lying in the bottom of the trench. The messenger had got through!

In the darkness Perkins heard the man mumbling, saw the dark form of the company commander bending over him.

"Zero hour is five forty-two—not six ten——" The man's voice trailed off in a whisper. Thereupon he "went west." Not all of those enemy bullets had missed.

The company commander straightened.

"Headquarters will want acknowledgment," he whispered. "No way of getting it to them except by messenger. Who'll go?"

Silence for a moment. Not one of those huddled men but what understood that the assignment probably meant death.

"I'll go," said a voice suddenly.

The captain's voice came back sharply: "Who is it?"

"Perkins," was the reply.

Silence again, and then the officer made an odd little clucking noise—amazement. Again a pause.

"Very well, Perkins," he said brusquely. "I didn't think it was in you. But go ahead, and good luck. Five forty-two it is! And if you get through, you'll get a medal for it, man!"

Perkins grunted.

"Keep it for yuhrself," he said sourly. "One favor I'm askin'. I don't have to lug this danged rifle with me, do I?"

"No," was the reply.

"Then somebody lend me a six-gun. No, I forgot; yuh don't use 'em. Then I'll borry an automatic."

"Take mine!" said the company commander.

LYING out there in the terrain, hugging the ground as closely as he could, when a flare went up, Two-gun wondered why he had done this thing. There was no desire to display heroism; he had no particularly patriotic motive for it. Rather, it seemed to be a task for a man—a task which was stripped of all ordinary military fripperies—one that he could understand. It might have been, too, that he welcomed an opportunity to show that he was not a coward. There had been covert intimations among the men who did not understand him, that the reason he had no enthusiasm for this war was because he was afraid. Merely it was a job to carry word to the colonel at regimental headquarters. Well, he would do it.

But there was no use taking unnecessary chances; he wouldn't trade his life for the thanks of his officers, or even a hatful of medals. If he was going to do any good in carrying out this mission, the thing was to get through without being shot to pieces.

A week before, the ground where he lay had been well behind the Allied lines, but now it was disputed territory. Big shells had pitted it, but here and there were discarded pieces of equipment—trench helmets, spades, buckets, pieces of canvas and an old knapsack or two—hastily left behind when the enemy started its active push. Perkins' regiment, among the first to arrive in France, had been thrown into the front-line trench, in an endeavor to strengthen the resistance; and this was being done with other American units everywhere on the front, when the thinning ranks of the other Allies had weakened. The British bulldog, the French fighting cock, the American eagle, were setting themselves stubbornly, while the gray hordes of the invaders massed for another overwhelming onslaught.

But Two-gun Perkins made no analysis of the situation. He was concerned solely with the thought that this was not his war, yet he had volunteered in a moment of foolish impulse, to do a hazardous thing. Maybe his act would bring the end of the war that much nearer. If so, he was glad. So he lay in the mud of No Man's Land, flattening himself, when a flare lighted the area, and crawling swiftly on hands and knees, when darkness came again.

Not long until daylight now. Despite the haze, he detected a faint graying in the east, the false dawn. Perhaps in less than an hour it would be light enough, and one of the opposing armies would go

over the top. To be the first to strike —that was the plan of the American divisional commander, which accounted for the zero hour being advanced from six ten to five forty-two. Perkins crawled on.

From the enemy lines a machine gun spoke stutteringly. Evidently the flame deflector of the gun was out of adjustment, for Perkins could see where it was located. Impulsively he raised the heavy automatic, certain that he could "get" one or more of the gunners; but he lowered the weapon again as common sense whispered that he must remain unseen. He did, however, half rise and scuttle ahead rapidly, gaining twenty yards. And while he was in this exposed position, a light suddenly glowed like an arc lamp, almost above him.

Before he could drop, he heard the whine of bullets. The machine gunners in another nest, closer at hand, had been ready and waiting. Cursing, he flopped down in the mud, while the deadly little missiles zoomed like angered bees all about him. But none touched him, and presently darkness came.

Now he knew that he had been seen, and that his position was doubly perilous. The enemy would try to "get" him next time. He must move faster. Throwing caution to the winds, he leaped to his feet and ran.

That machine gun again! Without waiting for a flare, it was raking the terrain blindly, back and forth. Almost before Perkins knew what was happening, he was in the line of fire. There was a sudden, hot pain in his left leg, and he stumbled, but rose again, determined that he would get through at all costs. And then abruptly it seemed that the earth yawned at his feet.

Headfirst he went down, rolling over and over, and finally landing with a splash in a pool of cold water. The shock of it made him gasp, and he came up spouting mud and sulphurous language. Yet for the moment he was safe; the air twenty feet above him was vibrant with machine-gun bullets, but none could reach him here.

He understood, of course, that he had plumped down into an old shell crater, which had already collected considerable water; and the place was as black as a pit. But it was sanctuary for the moment. When the firing ceased, he would go on. He straightened his legs under him, preparing to crawl up to the edge of the crater, when he heard a light splash in the water close by.

Instantly he froze, an eerie sensation prickling his spine. Something was down in the shell crater with him! But what? One of the enemy, perhaps, who was trying to get close to the American lines?

Gun in hand, Perkins waited, but he heard no more. Above, the machine-gun fire died away. Cautiously, then, he put out his hand, touched something, and involuntarily pulled back with a startled oath. He had put his hand on the face of a dead man.

Another light splash. Certainly the dead man hadn't made that noise. While Two-gun crouched, ready to shoot, the shell crater was suddenly bathed in the white light of a flare which hung up in the heavens. Two-gun saw within a yard of him the form of an enemy officer, plainly dead, helmet askew and long-barreled automatic pistol still in his hand. And, half sunken in the pool of water, was—Chiquita!

HIS first impulse was denial of the testimony of his eyes. It couldn't be! Another horse, perhaps, who looked like the little bay mare he had raised and trained from a colt. Chiquita was thousands of miles away. Moreover, this horse was thin, evidently sick; there was likewise a raw bullet wound on its shoulder. But the color of her, despite the caked mud, and that peculiarly shaped white patch on her forehead—there could never be another horse marked just the same.

"Chiquita?" he asked doubtfully.

At mention of the name, she raised her head and pricked her ears. She would not know him in these unfamiliar clothes; and his face was camouflaged with a coating of damp clay. Yet she made an odd little sound and lifted herself from the pool where she had been lying. She recognized his voice!

At that moment the flare went out.

But Two-gun Perkins was gripped with a consuming anger such as he had never known before—a blind, murderous rage—a hatred that could know no bounds. Gonzalez had sold her to the French army horse buyer, after all! Sold Chiquita into truck-horse service, the filly that had never known a harsh word or a blow; the highly intelligent, finely strung animal that was gifted as were few of her kind.

That was what the villainous Mexican had done. But it had remained for the enemy to add final insult to injury, as Perkins saw it. For, tied to the mare's tail was a red flannel rag!

So, Chiquita had been made to haul heavy fieldpieces! And then the enemy had wounded her and turned her adrift, with this flaunting badge of shame! It never occurred to the distraught Two-gun that perhaps the mare had sickened in service and had been turned loose by the French artillerymen, to wander into No Man's Land during the night. He understood only that he had been betrayed by Gonzalez, and that his beloved horse had been mistreated.

Speech came to him at last—blasphemous words and words of endearment, for in a bound he had splashed into the water and to the side of Chiquita. He held her head in his arms, and in one breath cursed Gonzalez and the enemy, and in the other told her of his love. He poured his soul, told her of his troubles; and it seemed that she understood, for she rubbed her head against his shoulder with every evidence of sympathy.

Another flare came, and in the light of it he regarded her more closely and was shocked at her appearance. Quickly he untied the hateful red rag and stamped it into the mud.

"They hurt yuh, baby!" he whispered fiercely. "And then they made a mock of yuh!" He swore a resounding oath.

"They're goin' to sweat for it! And if we ever get back, we'll drag Gonzalez at the end of a rope!" Above the shell crater the machine-gun bullets sang a defiant note, it seemed to the infuriated man. For the first time the war had become a personal issue with him; the enemy had found a way in which his fighting rage could be aroused. Before the flare went out, he had done two things—he had seen to it that his borrowed gun was in working order, and from the hand of the dead officer he had retrieved the long-barreled Luger. When the next flare came, he was out of the shell crater, and with him was his horse.

The grayness of daylight had already overspread the land, and the fog had thickened somewhat, so that for a moment he was unobserved. Then a machine gun opened on him, as he swung lightly on the horse's back. Weak and sick she was, yet she could carry him; and it is probable that his presence gave her strength. For, as he crouched low on her back, a gun in each hand, he spoke a word, and she sprang away through the mud and dregs of war—straight for the enemy lines!

IT was an astounding, unbelievable thing, and the machine gunners hesitated, their fire wavering. Visibility was poor at best in the weak light and the fog. A moment before they had seen a man standing beside a horse at the edge of a shell crater; now it seemed that merely the horse, maddened by wounds and gunfire, was charging toward them. They could have shot the animal down, but first they wanted to understand. Before they could really know what was happening, horse and rider were upon them.

At this short range, no artist such as Two-gun Perkins could miss. One of the men died beside his gun; the second raised himself, to pitch forward, while the third leaped up and ran. An instant later he was ridden down; and the half-crazed horse stopped suddenly, turned, and was off again, this time headed for the second machine gun.

The quickness with which the thing happened was too much for the machine gunners; they had no time to slue their weapon about before the demon was upon them. Two-gun shot instinctively, without aim, and the heels of Chiquita spurned dead bodies and the abandoned gun. Glorying in his revenge, Perkins set his course for the third gun.

But even the slow wits of the enemy were working now. They had sensed dimly what had happened to the first gun and saw that which occurred at the second nest; and they were ready now. The bulky barrel of the weapon vibrated, pointed straight at the onrushing horse and the maniac who rode, a blazing gun in each hand.

Perkins felt the bullets strike him—felt them rip through the flesh of legs and shoulders, but still he shot as accurately as of yore, praying to get closer. Two of the gunners slumped flat, and Perkins tried to raise a throaty shout of triumph, but found that he had no voice. Yet the third gunner desperately held his place.

And then Chiquita suddenly dropped from beneath her master, and he went on, through the air and into the mud, while the air seemed full of whizzing pin wheels; yet, before the lights crashed together in one grand final, and blackness came, it seemed that a shrill whistle penetrated his consciousness, and he had an impression that men were pouring out of the American trenches.

Five forty-two! Zero hour!

FROM floating on the fleeciest of clouds, which seemed strangely composed of something that smelled sickly sweet, Two-gun Perkins figuratively got his heels on the ground at last. He opened his eyes with the consciousness that he was numb all over, save that twinging pains shot through his head now and then. There was a more or less familiar face above him. Dully there came to him moaning, choking sounds from near by. He was in bed. He understood, then, that this must be a hospital. The face above him was that of Colonel Mattison.

"Perkins," asked the regimental commander, "do you realize what you've done?"

"Plumb forgot about that message, colonel," he replied. "I went hog wild." He said it slowly, for his tongue was thick, and words came with difficulty.

But the officer shook his head impatiently.

"No, no!" he exclaimed. "That message was unnecessary. The telephone lines were repaired right after you left.

"But this incomprehensible thing you've done—the assault on those machine guns! Why, the whole division is ringing with praise for you. The commander in chief himself has expressed his pleasure. You've saved the lives of hundreds of our boys.

"Perkins," he added, deeper emotion in his voice, "I'm afraid we haven't understood and appreciated you. But now, my boy, you're going to get every medal that——"

"Where's my hawss?" demanded Two-gun suddenly, trying to lift himself, but finding that he couldn't. Yet the colonel held tenaciously to his own theme.

"You'll pull through, the doctors say, but you're going to be out of the war for several months, at least," went on Mattison. "Maybe you'll be invalided back to Arizona."

"Where's my hawss?" insisted the wounded man more loudly.

"So *that* was the horse you were always talking about!" exclaimed the colonel wonderingly. "Thank the Lord, some of the boys who took those enemy trenches had sense enough to look out for her. They must have known. She's shot up, too, but she has as good a chance to pull through as you have."

Two-gun relaxed, with a sigh; peace in his soul once more.

"Then the *strafin'* I got isn't goin' to hurt," he announced. "Darned if I couldn't almost forgive Gonzalez what he did, sendin' her over here to me!"

An inscrutable look came into his eyes.

"Colonel," he said abruptly, "I don't want no medals for gettin' even with the squareheads who tied a red rag on Chiquita's tail. And don't you send me back to Arizona—yet! Reckon this whole scrap is just a matter of what you'd call viewpoint, and I've got personal reasons now for fightin', which same makes all the difference in the world. Me, I can see some sense in this war now. Come over me suddenlike, when I found Chiquita.

"Me and Chiquita—we're goin' to stick. Dang it, we've just started to fight!"

Hands Off!

By Bertrand W. Sinclair

Author of "The Land of Frozen Suns," "Loot," Etc.

Mart Gray, foreman of the Ragged H range, had itching feet—in other words, the Wanderlust—and those itching feet, plus a cash inheritance, carried him out of his rut toward the strangest adventure he was ever to know.

THE Ragged-H beef herd went stringing in slow files up the west bank of Dry River—a misnomer, because it was a very wet river, indeed. They had watered in that stream and now bore out to graze on the upper levels, a brave array of sleek beasts, seventeen hundred strong, red, black, spotted, buckskin, and roan steers, with slender, wide-curving horns that flashed in the autumn sun.

Of the seven or eight riders who sat their horses watching the herd, one assuredly had no mind on his work. His face expressed more than detachment—indifference. A pair of gray eyes looked out from under a wide hat brim at something far beyond the cattle spreading over the plain.

Mart Gray's abstraction was partly dream and partly wonder. His birthplace was Iowa. He had run away from a home that irked him, to follow a vision of being a cowboy. In contrast to many small boys who depart westward to ride and scalp with abandon and who are returned home by the truant officer, Mart had achieved his purpose as easily as if he had been bred for the business. He had come up the trail when trail herds took eight months between the Texas Pan Handle and northern Montana. He had stayed in Montana to ride for old Ben Holliday, of the Ragged H. Mart had commended himself greatly to Mr. Holliday, so much so that Mart now was the Ragged-H range boss and had his own brand on a thousand yearlings, a gift from the old man.

Mart had adventured by the way. Life itself he regarded and accepted as an adventure, even if he never put that idea

into words. He had calmness, but not philosophic calm. Habitually he translated his thoughts into the language of action. He was preparing to do that now.

When he had moved with the laggards of the herd out of the creek bottom, Mart could look over that sea of broad backs to a town in the distance, to a railway. Something in his pocket set him comparing this view with a memory of orchards and cornfields and farm-bordered lanes. This "something" was a large, official envelope. Mart took it out and looked once more over the closely typed sheets of some formal-looking documents.

He stowed it in his pocket and rode around the herd to address his second in command:

"Graze 'em down onto the flat back of the old Kraft ranch. I'm going to town."

IN half an hour Mart was dangling his long legs from a seat on the counter of a general store in Malta. Beside him perched Holliday, who had preceded the herd, to order cattle cars. Martin talked to his employer with one eye on two letters bearing an Iowa postmark. When conversation languished, he put the letters in his pocket and rode back to camp, where he read them at his leisure, with his back against a wagon wheel, while he chewed on a biscuit-and-beef sandwich, supplied by a genial cook.

At daybreak next morning the furious activity of shipping out the Ragged-H herd began. By noon the last car was loaded and rolling East. The Holliday punchers prepared to celebrate. Not so Martin. He sought out Ben Holliday.

"I'll have to go East," said he. "Trumbull can run the wagon the rest of the fall."

"Huh! What's itchin' you now?" old Ben demanded. "Can't I make you fellers stay put? Joe Pratt goes and marries that Smith girl and degenerates hisself into a ranch boss, so's he won't ever have to ride from home overnight. Here you want to drag it in the middle of beef gatherin'. What ails you? Ain't there enough excitement around here for you?"

"Plenty," Mart assured you. "But it happens I come into some money. Seems like my old man, who cashed in when I was a kid, was partners in a farm with my uncle. Uncle's an old bach' back in Iowa. He used to raise Cain with me. I never did nothing to suit him. That's how I come to go cow-punching. Uncle must 'a' thought something of me, after all. He's dead. Left all he had to me. Amounts to about thirty thousand dollars. I got a heap of correspondence about it from lawyers back home."

"Oh, well, that's different," Mr. Holliday changed his tune. "That's business. Better go tend to it. Trumbull can manage, I guess. When'll you be back?"

"I don't know," Martin murmured. He was trying to be frank. He considered his toes thoughtfully. "I might not come back at all," he said at last. "Seems like all I've done for two years now is ride and eat and sleep. Since you made me a range boss and staked me to a bunch of stock, I feel kinda tied. And I don't like it. I don't seem to get used to it. I've sort of took root with my feet, while my mind goes wandering. You've been darned good to me, Ben. I feel I owe you something, so it's likely I'll amble back. But I'd like to give you a bill of sale of them yearlings, so if I conclude to roam I won't feel I'm under an obligation."

"Uh-uh." Old Mr. Holliday shook his head decidedly. "I give 'em to you, Mart, free gratis for nothin'. You done me a good turn once. I like your style. I got to have men around I can trust. But you're free to roam, if you'd rather roam than run the Ragged H. Don't let them yearlings worry you. You can sell 'em or give 'em to somebody else. They're yours. I ain't no Injun giver. What you reckon you might do? Settle down on the farm an' marry one of them corn-fed Iowa girls?"

Mart snorted. That was the last thing he contemplated. In fact, for the first time in his life he didn't know what he wanted to do. Only he was impatient to do something—something different. Thirty thousand dollars, he reflected, gave a man some leeway. There were things and places he was curious about. Only he didn't know—he wasn't quite sure.

"Well, I wish you luck," old Ben said a little wistfully. "I liked your ways, Mart. The Ragged H'll be here for quite a spell, I reckon. You can easy find us again. I had the itchin' foot when I was your age, too. But I'm satisfied to stay put now an' take life easy. Good luck to you."

They shook hands.

LATE that night Martin Gray was staring out a sleeping-car window on an eastbound train. In four days he was in the corn belt, in a town he hadn't seen for ten years, and which he hadn't expected ever to see again. He remained there one month; thirty days of mild surprise for Mart Gray. His uncle's farm had abutted upon the edge of this hamlet, containing nine hundred souls. Mart had left there at the age of sixteen. He had progressed to his last term in high school there. He knew everybody. Everybody knew him. They still knew him. Mart had seen an amazing transformation in the cattle country in a decade. A decade, it seemed, was merely a detail of elapsed time in that village.

Except for the arrival at physical maturity of Mart's immediate contemporaries, the consequent marrying, embracing of trades, professions, vocations, nothing had changed. The streets, the houses, the farms, the village drunkard, were precisely as he recalled them. The young people had merely grown up. Few had died or gone away. The old people lingered on unchanged, static in their tiny cosmos, secure in the fertility of rich soil, content in an unchanging round of duties and occupations, conscious of an exterior world into which an occasional son or daughter—the wild ones—departed in search of rainbow ends.

His elders bestowed a lot of gratuitous advice, to which Mart listened politely. He had come into quite an estate. Evidently in foreign parts—they took this for granted—he had been a wild one. Now that he was a man of substance, they presumed he would grow tame and settle down.

And Martin, thinking his own thoughts about this peaceful backwater, let them assume what they pleased, while he transformed Uncle Bill's estate into currency.

Having accomplished this, he passed out of the scene with five thousand dollars in cash on his person and a draft for twenty-five thousand on a Chicago bank.

"Now," said Martin to himself, as he departed from that rural district toward the Windy City. "If I had a partner I'd be all set to step high, wide and handsome for a spell. I could have some fun. If Joe Pratt hadn't got himself anchored to a wife, I'd wire for him. We'd see the sights."

Thus he soliloquized on the disadvantage of pursuing pleasure single-handed.

Chicago relieved him of that handicap. From north, west, south, trainloads of range beef poured into the aromatic stockyards of that metropolis. Wherever there are range cattle on the hoof there are bound to be range men. In the lobby of the hotel where Mart put up, almost the first face his eyes noted was that of a cow-puncher named Clem Bates, from Windy Gap, Wyoming, where Martin in his mounted vagabondage had once ridden for a season. He forgathered joyously with Clem, who had discharged his duty toward a trainload of cattle and had a few hundred dollars for which he craved action.

Subsequent proceedings were wrapped in what seemed to Mart Gray a beautiful golden haze. He uncovered a peculiar quality or talent or what not, of which he had never been cognizant. That is, he discovered it later on, although it began to function at once. His mind, it seemed, was capable of an alcoholic aphasia, even while his sturdy body took not the slightest account of John Barleycorn. No one could say Mart was drunk. He walked straight. He talked straight. He could dance gracefully when dancing was in order. He never forgot his manners. He was conscious of being happy and knew that he moved in the midst of great events. He could not possibly have convinced any one that while his body was in good order, the steering gear of his mind was clean out of commission.

Certainly, this was not revealed to the girl with whom he struck up a conversa-

tion on the mezzanine-floor lounge. Martin didn't know her from Adam's off ox. He merely had a hunch that she belonged west of the Big Muddy, and hence was a kindred spirit. At any rate, she wasn't haughty. Mart gathered that she came from western Nebraska, on business connected with the sale of her father's beef. She was going to do some shopping, visit relatives on the shore of Lake Michigan, then return home.

Martin pushed Clem Bates into the background, while he played escort to this daughter of the range. Three was a crowd.

THERE was nothing of the clinging vine in Mary Sloan. It took Mart, in a state of beatitude, about twenty-four hours to conclude that Mary was the ideal woman for whom he had yearned, without knowing it, these many years of rough riding in sun and wind and rain. The kind of a partner he wanted was a long-haired partner, and he told her so. Mary laughed and her eyes danced. Perhaps she was accustomed to siege without a declaration of war. She didn't take Mart seriously, nor was she offended. Her hair was yellow, like ripe wheat straw, her skin lovely under a faint coat of tan, and she carried herself like a queen—a range queen, with a dimple at one corner of her mouth, when she smiled. Men often turned to gaze after her. Perhaps Martin Gray only told her the truth in his extravagant language.

"You must be a top hand on the range you come from, Mr. Mart Gray," she bantered, "you're that swift. But you don't really mean it. And I'm not fallin' into your arms so quick. You might be sorry if I did. So might I."

Mart protested in vain.

So did Clem Bates. But for different reasons. Clem was being slighted. He was getting restless. Also, he was a pessimist about women, especially about strange girls of the attractive Mary Sloan type. Clem had a conventional mind.

"Hands off the lady," Martin warned. "She's all right. You're jealous, Clem, that's all. I got the inside track. I know what I'm doing. Hands off!"

This, Clem denied as a slur on his loyalty in friendship. So Mart magnanimously included Clem in the excursions abroad. How Mart contrived to keep up his spiritous exaltation and still remain a perfect cavalier, is neither here nor there. He did manage it. The proof of that came later.

When they were alone, Clem Bates once ventured to suggest darkly that Mart was fixing himself to run on a lady puncher's rope and get busted wide open. And Mart again voiced his war cry:

"Hands off! You're a disgustin' brute. If you weren't a friend of mine, I'd lam you over the sky piece. She likes me, but she don't love me. Gol-darn your hide, I got troubles enough without you yowling at me, Clem. Hands off and leave me be! What in blazes do you know about women, anyway?"

"You're a hard-hearted female," he said to Mary later. "I'd love you to death."

"I don't want to die," she answered lightly. "I want to live a long time and have a lot of fun. My mother married at seventeen and raised nine kids. Not me."

"Well, even if you don't want to follow in your mother's footsteps," Mart replied, "still, I don't see why you shouldn't take a chance. Couldn't we have some fun together? Don't you like me well enough? Don't you like me at all?"

"That'd be tellin'." Here she smiled. "And me only knowin' you four days. What kind of a girl do you think I am? And what would my dad say?"

"You don't care how much it hurts me to lose my scalp this way," Mart mourned. "You ain't quite human."

But he revised this conclusion on the very day he said it. Mary Sloan had a room on the same floor as Martin and Clem Bates. Mart had been about town. He came in at noon, hoping to prevail on Mary to go somewhere and lunch with him. Passing her door he noticed it ajar. There was no answer to his gentle tap, and Mart shoved the door with his foot. The opening revealed Mary Sloan in the middle of a disorderly chamber. Every dresser drawer was open. The contents of two suit cases

were strewn about. The chairs and table were pushed against the wall.

The material disorder was as nothing to the disorder of Mary's normal composure. If ever a woman's countenance reflected acute emotion, hers did. Grief and fear were subjoined to produce something akin to panic. She stared blankly at Martin Gray.

"What's wrong?"

"I've lost my money!"

She got the words out with an effort, as if she were choking. The look on her face, and the tone of her voice gave Mart a strange sensation in the region of his Adam's apple. But he was a practical soul, used to coping with difficult situations. It took a lot to dismay him.

Presently it was revealed that Mary had cashed the checks paid over for her father's cattle, that she had the currency stowed in her belongings at the hotel, and that the money had vanished. In the face of this disaster she didn't know what to do.

"Holy smoke!" Mart said. "Why didn't you leave it in the bank or in the hotel safe?"

"I wanted to take care of it, myself. I wanted to pack it home and show dad what a smart girl I was," she wailed. "What on earth will I do? I can't go home. I simply can't. I couldn't face them. That money meant so much to us."

In a frightened voice she told Mart a few of the things that money meant to the family of a comparatively small cattleman. Mary dreaded facing the music. She wasn't hysterical. She didn't talk about immolating herself as a penance. But she was really in a desperate state of mind.

"How much was it?" Mart inquired.

"It" was twenty-two thousand dollars, barring a couple of hundred she had spent. Mart whistled. The sum was large enough to command respect.

"You got after the hotel people as soon as you missed it?"

She nodded. "They've had detectives up here. They seem to think I never had that much money. I've been tearing everything to pieces. I thought I *might* have mislaid it. It *did* worry me—that money. Now it's gone. Whatever will I do? Whatever *will* I do? I can't go home."

A lesser man might have said: "You can always come with me, old girl."

But Martin merely made a heroic gesture. Said he: "If it don't turn up, I'll give it to you."

No trace of the money having been vouchsafed in forty-eight hours, and the hotel people plainly skeptical, Martin made good his word. Mary Sloan wanted nothing so much as to leave Chicago. That loss had shaken her confidence in everything and everybody, unless she made an exception of Mart Gray. The perils of a great city were not for her, she mourned.

Mart and Clem Bates escorted her to the bank. Mart saw her tuck the sheaf of currency into her dress. He saw her to the station, helped her aboard, watched the train pull out, in the mood and manner of the hero who has made the great renunciation. For Mary had wept on his shoulder and told him that, though she didn't love him, she thought him the most wonderful man in the world to trust her so, and she would somehow repay the money if it took her a lifetime.

THUS, having parted with his heart and his funds, Mart repaired again to the bank and drew out all his remaining cash.

"Let the horns go with the hide and tallow," he said in the dark despair of unrequited love.

For several days thereafter he moved in a mysterious way and performed many wonders, which may only be accomplished by a lusty youth loose in a metropolitan center, with his pockets full of currency.

Then, by some strange metamorphosis, Mart found himself in his bed one morning. The lake wind blew dankly through the lifted window. With a bad taste in his mouth and that strange cerebral discomfort known as a "head," he listened to Clem Bates chanting the saga of some hectic days.

"You sure need a guardeen," Clem said at last. "I couldn't slow you up

nohow. Ain't you got no recollection of nothin'?"

"Not of that," Mart commented, upon the most significant canto. "How'd this play come up?"

Clem stared at him incredulously. Succinctly he recounted the Mary Sloan episode.

"You can't tell me," he concluded heatedly, "that you didn't know what you was doin' then. You give me a black eye for hintin' that she was stringin' you."

"I think you're stringing me now," Mart replied.

He didn't believe Clem's tale. Still, there was a curious gap. That gap was filled with a mental fog. But, as he nursed his aching head through the forenoon, more especially after one drink of brandy and three cups of black coffee, Mart Gray became aware of the fog lifting in spots. In these lightened areas of recollection he saw dim figures, obscured incidents. There was a sort of consecutiveness about some of those blurred pictures that troubled him.

That afternoon he wabbled down to the bank where he kept his funds and proved for himself the reality of those hazy recollections, also the truth of Clem Bates' story.

He returned to the hotel and took stock. He had a lot of loose change in his clothes. Clem had taken one sheaf of currency from Mart drunk, which he now returned to Mart sober. Altogether he had seventeen hundred dollars left out of his inherited total of thirty thousand.

Mart didn't care so much about the money. He had never known want. He was supremely confident that from the orange of life he could squeeze juice according to his need. But he didn't like to be buncoed. He didn't like to think of himself as a lamb easily shorn, a tender bird for skilled fingers to pluck. There was a strange disturbance in his bosom, also, as Mary Sloan became clearer, a more alluring figure in the mists of remembrance. He could see the ripe yellow of her hair, the friendly quirk of her lips. Yet he couldn't recall her name!

Clem enlightened him. "May Stone she called herself," he said, thus proving that Clem had a slightly defective aural nerve. "She had a good line of bunk," he growled sourly. "She was a smooth worker, all right. A cowman's daughter from Nebraska—I don't think! Twenty-two thousand *pesos*—gee whiz!"

He gazed at Mart with a pitying look, which aroused that young man to an unjustifiable fury, so that for a second it was touch and go whether he would then and there climb Clem's frame—and Mart was an able frame climber, as Clem already knew. Then he subsided.

"I got it coming to me," he growled at last. "But don't you start rubbing it in."

"Let's hit the trail," Clem suggested. "I've just about blowed my roll. I've had plenty of Chicago."

SO had Mart. But in the end, Clem left for Windy Gap alone. Martin Gray betook himself to Omaha. It happened that inquiry at the hotel desk elicited the fact that a Miss May Stone had indeed registered from Omaha. That Miss May Stone and Miss Mary Sloan were entirely different persons did not occur either to the clerk or Martin Gray. In Omaha he hunted up the address left by Miss May Stone for forwarding mail, and quite naturally drew a blank. In a perfunctory way he looked up the brand registry of the State, but no Stone evidently had been cast into the pool of the Nebraska cow camps. It never once occurred to Mart that Clem Bates had the wrong name.

In the end he relegated Mary to the limbo whence his twenty-two thousand dollars had vanished. He still had more money in his pocket than he had ever possessed at one time. He had trinkets, also, which he regarded with humor—impedimenta accumulated on that grand "bust." Two trunkfuls of clothes, a resplendent watch—full jeweled and holes bored for more—a beautiful silver-inlaid six-shooter, and a lot of other very expensive trifles.

"I got darn good taste in knickknacks, if I do say so myself," Mart observed. "I didn't throw it all to the birds."

Omaha offered nothing that he craved, so he moved on. He didn't know exactly what he did crave. Now he was seized with a more acute dissatisfaction than had afflicted him when he left the Ragged H. His feet itched, and his mind was ill at ease. He was troubled by visions. So he took the travel cure. Mart had known that to relieve men with his ailment.

He rolled west to Denver. From Denver to San Francisco. Instead of looking on the California wine when it was red, Mart looked pensively at the Pacific rollers bursting in lacy spray on the Seal Rocks before the Cliff House.

He found little satisfaction in that. Something had happened to him. He forswore both whisky and casual acquaintances, so the world seemed very lonely, very stale and unprofitable to a young man who liked to be sociable, and whose soul craved action.

He took a coast steamer to Seattle. The ocean voyage unsettled his stomach and failed signally to settle his mind; whereupon, still driven by the imps of unrest, he took the train for Butte, Montana. Thus in three months he whipped the devil around the stump and came back to within a day's journey of his starting point. Mart had rolled much and scattered considerable moss. He was not sadder, but he deemed himself somewhat wiser, and he stayed in Butte till spring.

When the snow was stripped from the earth by a late March chinook, Mart felt the fires of spring burn bright as ever in his breast. He had wintered well and wisely. He had disciplined himself. In the midst of convivial copper miners and wild women Mart had remained abstemious and virtuous. Now he hankered for a springy horse between his legs and the smoke of branding fires. Down where the Little Rockies cut the sky line with their ragged crests, in forty-eight hours Mart was on his home range.

"You got back, heh?" old man Holliday greeted him. "Thought one uh them corn-fed girls got you staked out for sure."

Mart grinned. He had ridden miles across sagebrush flats and rolling hills, where green grass upthrust a million little spear points through fecund earth, where blue wind flowers nodded their dainty heads. He had seen the wild cattle stare at him, and the wilder horses raise a loud drumming with their hoofs, as they fled. He stretched his long legs before the fireplace and smiled contentedly.

"I bought two thousand head of southern two year olds for April delivery at Miles City," the old man said abruptly. "You rustle up a trail-herd crew an' go git 'em."

SO it came about that, a month or six weeks later, Mart, with a trail herd of flighty Texas steers, bore down on a stream bisecting a wide region of uninhabited grass land between the Yellowstone and the Missouri.

From the top of the bank he saw a camp in the bottom, a mile below. Horses grazed about the staked tents, two dabs of white on the green sward, and beyond the camp loomed the amorphous blot of a big herd. There were other trail herds behind him, a dozen or more. So far as Mart knew, none was ahead. So when the Ragged H moved out at dawn, Mart loped past the other herd. He marked the brand—Three Links on the left rib—a strange one to him. The cattle were all ages, mixed stock. From which fact he deduced that it was some new outfit moving north to a better range. Mart passed on. His own herd, two thousand longhorns, traveled like cavalry on the march. They left the Three Link outfit far back by noon.

When Mart turned his cattle loose on the home range, he discovered anew how small the world is, and how gossip travels in a land guiltless of society reporters. Clem Bates had told the tale of Mart's downfall in Chicago. Somehow, the yarn had short-circuited from Wyoming to Montana. The Ragged-H punchers chuckled behind his back. Old Ben referred to it jocularly—once only. And he was the only man who took that liberty. Ben was old and privileged, but he didn't spring the joke twice. Ben had suffered himself at the hands of a

designing female. Nevertheless, Mart knew the tale was on the frontier, and snickers were snickered at his expense.

He grew very uncomfortable. He ached to punch somebody's head or puncture somebody's hide. Failing that, he debated leaving the country. No man likes to be thought a fool. No man cares to be worked for twenty-two thousand dollars by a sophisticated adventuress. On trail, in the dark of the night, while his crew snored, Mart often lay awake, seeing the image of Mary Sloan. It tantalized him. She was just one of those smooth articles who threw the harpoon into a greenhorn from the cow country, of course. Still, Mart couldn't account for his complexity of feeling about her. He said to himself that he would have forgotten all about it, if the tale hadn't been told, with him the butt of the tale.

Sometimes he was tempted to chase the knowing smile off somebody's face when camp talk turned on money and women, by shouting his old battle cry, "Hands off!" But he didn't hanker for war. In the end he decided that he would have to take his medicine. If he had blown it all in one grand bust—or lost it in a big poker game—— But to give it to a strange woman because she worked on his sympathy with a cock-and-bull story! He did a lot of mental squirming those bright spring days.

With the end of the drive, he took his crew and joined the spring round-up. Three weeks or so brought him to the western limit of the Ragged-H range. There, in one of the round-ups, a goodly sprinkling of Three Link cattle appeared. The next day four riders on Three Link horses jogged into the Ragged-H camp.

Mart and some of his men had just finished working a herd. He himself was last in and unsaddled. The cook had called dinner, and everybody had pitched in, when Mart strode toward the chuck wagon.

He stopped short. He almost had to pinch himself. Because, unless he was dreaming, the girl sitting on his rolled-up bed by the wagon wheel, with a plate of food in her lap, was the distressed damsel of the Chicago hotel.

She was watching Mart Gray, and she betrayed no embarrassment whatever. Not so Mart. Here she was in the flesh —and what in Sam Hill has he to do about it? What could he do about it before a group of ribald stock hands? For a second he was pretty close to bewilderment.

THEN a tall man unfolded himself, like a carpenter's rule, from a seat on the ground and extended his hand.

"I'm Jim Sloan," said he. "I own this here Three Link stuff scattered around here. These are two of my boys, and this is my girl."

The range didn't as a rule make much fuss over introductions. Mart said "Howdy" to each and proceeded to fill his plate. After which he calmly seated himself beside the bed on which Mary Sloan was camped. May Stone—Mary Sloan. So that was it. Clem Bates had twisted the name.

"Seems like I've met you before," Mart addressed her politely between mouthfuls.

"Last fall, when I was down to Chicago with our beef," she said demurely. "I wondered if you'd remember."

"I got a pretty good memory," Mart observed. The conversation languished after that. He wondered how he was going to get a chance to talk to her alone. Her hair *was* yellow, like ripe wheat straw. Her skin *was* lovely under its faint coat of tan. She *did* carry herself—— Mart felt again all those strange yearnings that had troubled him for months. They crystallized and took definite form, as he looked at her now.

When the horse wrangler bunched the cow ponies in the rope corral, Mart lingered, while every other man, including the Three Links, went to catch fresh mounts. Mary Sloan looked at him reflectively.

"I thought you were going to hunt me up, on your way home," she said. "Why didn't you?"

"Oh, well——" Mart was stumped. He couldn't tell her that he had not only forgotten her name and where she lived, but on emerging from that alcoholic fog had put her down as an adventuress.

Now he was highly abashed because she wasn't that at all.

"You were awful good to me," she went on hurriedly. "Didn't you reckon I might want to tell you again how much I appreciated that?"

"Oh, that," said Mart airily and dismissed it with a gesture, as a thing of no consequence.

The girl's eyes twinkled.

"Are you a millionaire cowman that you can pace around the country givin' away money in twenty-thousand-dollar chunks without missin' it?" she inquired sweetly.

"Gosh, no," Mart replied. "But I reckon you needed it worse'n I did. How did you come out when you got home?"

"Dad and the boys are ready to head for camp. I see 'em lookin'," she said hurriedly. "Ride with us a ways."

"I'll be right with you," Mart promised.

He scattered his crew and was as good as his word. For a mile or so the five rode abreast. They spoke of cattle and horses and free grass and American politics and compared notes on the South as contrasted to the newer Northwestern ranges. And then Mart Gray and Mary Sloan fell in beside each other. They lagged behind. Probably this phenomenon had occurred before in the Sloan family. Neither father nor sons looked back. Indeed, presently they shook up their horses and disappeared over a rise.

"You're the most trustin' man I ever heard of," Mary said. "How did you know I'd ever give you back the money? The more I thought about it after, the crazier it seemed."

"Did you tell the old man?"

"My land, no!" Mary exclaimed. "He'd skin me alive."

"Well, I don't know as I care much if I don't get it back," Mart said. "I have a good job. Probably I'd just blow it in."

"It's a lot of money," Mary brooded.

"What's money?" Mart demanded to know. "I got no family to support—unless," he finished boldly, "you change your mind about living your life free and wild, without no man having a string on you. I recollect you telling me that in Chicago."

"Did I?" Mary murmured. "Huh! What did you think after I'd gone?"

Mart refrained from answering that question with literal truth. He simply reached out one arm, which fitted nicely around Mary's waist. Their horses walked equably, side by side. They were spirited beasts, but they seemed to know what was required.

"That's what I've been thinking for months," he said earnestly. "How I'd like to get my arms around you."

Mary made a feeble effort to push him away. Then she gave a strangely amused little laugh and leaned her head for a second on Mart's shoulder, which enabled him to plant a kiss on a very smooth white neck.

"That's funny." Mary twisted herself out of his clasp and looked at him, with dancing eyes. "I wouldn't have let you kiss me for anything in Chicago."

"But now," Mart stated firmly, "you don't mind me kissing you whenever I feel like it? Which," he asserted, "is going to be frequent and for a long time."

"Well," said Mary, "I'll have to think about *that*. You're awful sudden in your ways.

"Meantime," she smiled, after a moment, "there's something else."

She thrust one hand inside the bosom of her pongee blouse, tugged a moment, and brought forth a flat packet wrapped in brown paper.

"There!" She handed it over to him. "There's your twenty-two thousand dollars, Mr. Martin Gray. I'm darned glad to get rid of it. I've been worried to death packin' it around for seven months."

"I don't *sabe!*" he said slowly. "Were you just actin' as a temporary bank for me, or what?"

"When I got home," she explained, "I gave dad the money you gave me and never peeped a word about what happened. That night, when I unpacked, I found the original bunch of money all wrapped up in a stocking."

Mart whistled. He juggled the packet in his hand.

"This here's the principal," he re-

marked judicially. "Seems to me there's some interest due."

"Interest?" Mary laughed. "You darned Shylock! You'll have some time collecting interest off me."

"Yes, sir—interest *and* damages. You damaged me considerable," Mart declared. "Nothing less'll do me than a mortgage on you for life."

"You don't say," Mary smiled.

"I'll be over to this new ranch of yours on Black Willow one of these days with the papers for you to sign," Mart continued. "Will you sign peaceful, or will I have to take proceedings—legal or otherwise?"

"Oh, well," she sighed. "I guess so. I suppose I got to pay my just debts."

They ratified that agreement in the usual manner.

THE WILDERNESS IS STILL WITH US

HERE are glad tidings for all lovers of "the great wide open spaces." The United States Forest Service, after a painstaking survey of the Western States of this country, declares there is still much real wilderness left in this territory, despite the rapid incursions of civilization and the machinery and factories that go hand in hand with all our so-called improvements.

The march of the summer resort and the zeal for building motor roads induced the Forest Service to investigate the fears of the lovers of primitive country that the wilderness and the wild lands of the West were going the way of the historical country of the early prospectors.

What is the smallest unit of land to which we can apply the term "wilderness?" The Forest Service fixed on an area of ten townships, about three hundred and sixty square miles, as the minimum tract to which this term is applicable. It discovered that there are still seventy-four forest areas, ranging from three hundred and sixty miles up to ten thousand, where there are no roads at all, no newspapers, no sign boards, no automobiles, no bathtubs, and no bobbed heads and silk stockings. After all, these seventy-four forest areas constitute about a third of all the national forests. With these consoling figures to allay our fears, we need have no immediate concern that our grandchildren will have to go to Asia or Africa, when they decide they must go out into the wilderness to commune with their souls.

SEA TRADITIONS

THERE are two things to remember in this tale, and one is that the traditions of the sea are always respected. The other is that nine bottles of rum were cached in the arctic a little over three hundred years ago. In 1594, the ship of Willem Barentz, the Dutch navigator, was frozen in the ice at Ice Haven, near Spitzbergen. Barentz, incidentally, named Spitzbergen, and the Barentz Sea was named after him. To go on—he took his records and stores and the nine bottles, and cached them. A year or two later he died, and the cache remained intact for over three hundred years. In 1894, the Leigh Smith expedition found it. "Smith, being an Englishman," the narrative runs, "was a stickler for the unwritten laws that protect one explorer's cache from the hand of another except in extremity." That three centuries had passed away made no difference in the application of the law. It is said that members of the Smith crew were not as avid in their respect of sea traditions as the commander; but the latter restrained his men and saved the nine bottles of rum, yo, ho! Doctor John C. Vaughan, a New York surgeon who was the *America's* physician on the Ziegler north pole expedition, relates that when his party discovered the precious bottles, there remained only four ounces. Perhaps up in the arctic, rum evaporates during the long polar nights. One thing is certain: The traditions of the sea are written deep.

Duke of Doukhaboor Island

By Clay Perry

Author of "Fluid of the Sun," "Manus Quits," Etc.

There were several conflicting stories about how the island got its curious name; but if you went to Indian Charley, he could tell you a stranger tale—the true one, too—than all the hazy rumors in the town.

THERE is a large and very irregular island lying not far from the southern end of Redgut Bay, which is an arm of that sprawling great lake of the North, known as Rainy Lake. It bears the odd name of Doukhaboor. Except for its great size, this island is not unlike the thousands of others that dot the wilderness of waters which seep down out of the jumble of rocks of western Ontario. It is, like the rest, an island of solid rock, and its only soil is the mold of ancient forests, which has fallen into the crevices, and in which the hardy conifers thrust their hungry roots and find foothold for new growth—jack pine and cedar, spruce and poplar, birches, Norway pine, and some few specimens of the noblest of them all—the great white pine.

The reddish-granite boulders and cliffs, which make its ragged shore line, are penetrated by deep bays and runs, some of them ending abruptly against steep walls of stone, some in muskeg marshes, some in tamarack swamps, and all of them cutting the shore line into a maze of twistings and turnings, most confusing to one forced to hug the shore for fear of wind and wave.

The half-breed guides, who take tourists up through Redgut Bay to Otukamamoan and Kaopsikamak and Meggisi, or up the Turtle River, and who are tongue-tied in town, but grow garrulous the deeper they go into the wilderness—these guides tell an unbelievable tale of how Doukhaboor Island got its name. They say that a man was lost on the island seven days and then blew himself up with blasting powder, and that his name was Doukhaboor. Not even the most credulous "dude" tourist would believe such a tale, but, as a matter of fact, it has got to be a tradition which grows by the year. "Indian Charley" will tell

you that this man was not lost on the island, and that he did not attempt suicide at all. His name was Doukhaboor, better known as "Duke."

Indian Charley may be found down at the river front, near John Mowray's docks, tinkering hopefully with the balky engine of an ancient power boat, which will sometimes run. He has a perfectly good, new power boat, which will always run, but he clings to the old love, which he ties up at the railroad embankment. Asked how and why he has two gas boats, and he will tell you a tale.

A WHITE man, alone in a battered canoe, its cracking birch-bark covered over with canvas to hold it together, fought wearily and desperately up Redgut Bay one day in late September. The whistling north wind which had risen that morning, instead of the sun, had churned the lake to whitecaps. It was running a dangerous sea. The voyager fought to keep his canoe headed north-northeast, but he was forced to head into the wind to avoid being swamped. He drew nearer the forbidding, jagged shore line of rocks, with their fringe of evergreens at the top and grayish, dead cedars along the water line, which lay at his left. It was late afternoon, but he did not wish to go ashore and make camp yet. This was his second day from Fort Frances. He had camped last night at Bear Pass, having made the thirty miles the first day, with a late start. Since the dawn, this day, he had battled the wind and the waves, but he had made little actual progress. He was headed for the country up to the west of Lake Meggisi —for the Height of Land, which runs between the two water courses that flow into Rainy Lake; the one out of Manitou and its tributaries, the other down from Meggisi and Kinnyu and Eagle Rock, on the east—moose country, wolf country, beaver country. But this man was neither a hunter nor a trapper, though he carried a gun and some traps.

He was Gilbert Doukhaboor, Duke Doukhaboor, soldier of fortune. He was hunting gold. A bad time to start up into this country in a canoe, yet Duke Doukhaboor was no greenhorn. He paddled a canoe like an Indian, with the shaft swinging right against the gunwale and prying outward, as his stroke ended, to trim the craft straight. The finish of each stroke had that extra pull which puts a pound or two extra into it and brings an extra foot or two of progress. He knelt low on the edge of a tarred canvas which was tucked snugly over his meager outfit. Between his knees was spread a crude map—a map drawn with pencil on a linen handkerchief. It traced a line east, then northeast, the route he had come through the eastern arm of Rainy Lake; it shot north and curved through Bear Pass into Redgut Bay, then north and slightly east and on up the waterways a hundred miles. It bent westward, there. Across it was a dotted line, the Height of Land. Beyond the Height of Land was marked a portage trail. Midway of the trail was a cross, and near the cross a dot, and that dot spelled as plainly as if printed out in letters the word—*gold*. The line curved on, to west and south, and finished in the upper, narrow waters of the Manitou.

In his pocket Doukhaboor had another map, drawn to scale by government surveyors, but it showed the country all about the Height of Land as a blank. It had never been surveyed. Not even a Mountie had traveled its trails; only Indian Charley had ever crossed its difficult portages. Indian Charley had drawn the crude map on the handkerchief; had made the cross and made the dot, and Doukhaboor had printed in his mind the old breed's verbal directions to the spot where, many years ago, Charley swore he had halted, resting the bow of the canoe that he carried against the upturned roots of a wind-felled tree. Here he had idly picked a pebble from the dirt on those roots, a pebble the size of a prune, very much dried, and it weighed so much that he used it for a sinker on his fishing net. A long time afterward he discovered it was gold.

A gold nugget in a country where only deep veins, buried in the hard rock, had ever been found—veins which must be bored and blasted before you can bring out the ore! This ore must be crushed

in stamping mills and then taken by boat and tump line many miles to realize its wealth. If it yielded twelve dollars a ton, it was the most you could ask.

YES, they had struck gold in this country, but rich man's gold. And at this season of year no ordinary prospector would have braved these wind-swept seas for this rich man's gold. Even the hardened, gold-fevered wood rats, who hung hopefully about the abandoned diggings of old mines, were hived in for the winter now. The fishermen had scudded home from the whitefish run at Kettle Falls; duck hunters had fled from the icy breath of impending winter gales; the Indians had struck their far-flung canvas camps, up and down the lakes and rivers, and were housed in wooden walls on the reservation, waiting for the snows. Lumberjacks had hidden themselves in far forests to hibernate until spring. Not even a trapper ventured on the lakes and would not until ice and snow gave snowshoe trails. This is because September in this country is a month of change—swift change. Winter is upon the wing with the waterfowl that fly south; the moose are plentiful; the northern lights play clear across the zenith, and the lake trout come close to shore, and by October no canoe may venture even in the big waters. Deep ice may form in a single night and does, unless unseasonable, lingering autumn prevails.

It was the lure of lingering warm weather that had given the final argument to send Doukhaboor out alone in this shell of a craft, heading north to a marked portage in an unmapped, rocky country. His outfit Indian Charley had selected for him, because Gilbert would not go to Mowray's again. He had been there once, the first place he headed for when he swung off the train, a returned soldier of fortune, with his total wealth small enough to be held in the palm of his hand. He had gone to ask John Mowray for a job. In the presence of his daughter, Charlotte, the proprietor of Mowray's store, pretended not to know Duke Doukhaboor and offered him a job as a guide.

Doukhaboor thought at first Mowray was joking. Duke's father had been Mowray's superior, when Mowray was a clerk for the Hudson's Bay Company. The company had for its voyageurs and packers those poor half-breeds who were neither white nor red, but a hybrid race, looked down upon by white and red. And now John Mowray, outfitter, sent out into the wilderness, as guides for the dude tourists who came to his place for their outfits and grub, half-breeds who would act as cooks and packers—chambermaids about the camp, nurses for the tenderfeet. The breeds would perform these menial tasks which no white man in the country would lower himself to do.

Fortunately—for John Mowray's physical well-being—Gilbert Doukhaboor, when he realized Mowray was in earnest, had looked first into the eyes of Charlotte Mowray. They were blue—deep blue. He remembered looking into them that day he went away to war, when they were blue washed dark by tears.

He looked into them now. His glance fell on the golden, boyishly bobbed hair, which had then been in braids and flaxen. His hand tingled at the touch of her fingers, which had clung to his coat sleeve when he stood on the platform of the train, which was carrying him to the training camp. Now the touch sent a tingle up his arm and clear into his heart.

It was an insult that John Mowray offered him instead of a job fit for a Doukhaboor. He was neither humble nor proud from his soldiering, though he had served as a private soldier and had also won medals which, if they could have been sold for the worth of their winning, might have made him a rich man. Back of all this lay the pride of a man whose forbears had been gentlemen adventurers in New France, and whose blood flowed so strongly in him that he had been the first, the very first, to go from this old town into the army that fought for France.

The insult—and the tingle of his heart and hand at sight of Charlotte—both had sent Doukhaboor down to the river front in a fury of anger and despair. There he came across Indian Charley. Gilbert was ripe for desperate adventure.

He could not wait until spring, when Charley said he would go with him and run his power boat as far North as it could go, then take canoe and guide Doukhaboor directly to the spot where he had found a nugget of gold. For the son of the man who had been Charley's best boss in Hudson's Bay Company days, he would do almost anything, except try to run the power boat, now that cold weather had come. Its one-lung engine was bad enough when it was warm.

BUT Doukhaboor—whom Charlotte Mowray had hailed softly by the old nickname of "Duke"—was fired with the determination to stake all upon a desperate chance, a forlorn hope. He would show John Mowray the color of real gold —he would match this gold against the gold of Charlotte's hair.

So now he labored, his hands numb from wind and icy waves, against the wind which had swept up with the dawn, changing autumn into winter. The north wind forced his pitching canoe, more and more, toward the shore line at his left. This route was new to him and strange. He had gone up to Manitou in his boyhood days, many times, mostly with Indian Charley, hunting, fishing, trapping, for the fun of it.

He had struck out into the middle of the bay and, to his surprise, he found no friendly sheltering islands, where he could find shelter and dodge the wind. So at last he headed, as directly as he dared, toward what appeared to be the western mainland.

The sky had darkened, so that at three o'clock it was dusk. At four o'clock he lost sight of land and paddled only by the wind. An hour more, and the bow of his canoe touched on the granite shore. It was a wretched landing place, but he could not choose in the darkness, and he had to step into the water to his knees to save his boat from being injured on the rocks. He hauled it up and kindled a fire with birch bark and dry-cedar twigs and then jack pine. He studied by its glow the sheer bleak face of a cliff that towered over him. Below it was only a rubble stone and rounded boulders. He fashioned a birch torch and made his way over the stones toward a place where he could hear the rush and moan of water running into a hole. It was a cavern worn under the cliff. Here, high and dry in a nook which faced south, was a tiny cave, floored with clean sand and a few dry needles of jack pine, swept in by the wind.

"I've found a home," he muttered, sighing with fatigue as much as with relief.

He was too tired to seek any farther, and he was as hungry as a wolf. Dragging his duffel into the cave, with difficulty, he turned his canoe, upside down, across two bending cedars on the shore, moved his fire to the cave mouth, and found himself provided for the night with a shelter of solid rock, which sloped back from a height of five feet to nothing. In the crevice, back there, Duke placed with tender care an oilskin packet. It was blasting powder. Soon he had his frying pan sizzling with bacon, and then he added a can of pork and beans. While he ate, he studied carefully his linen map and the government one, as well. The latter showed him he must be upon the western mainland of Redgut Bay, and that the shore line led due north until it came to a narrow bay running off to the west. He must head northeast after reaching the bay. If the wind kept up, the cold could not freeze the big waters, anyway. In three or four days, if he had luck, he might make Meggis and there portage over to the Height of Land. The wind had made him very drowsy. He scraped up a few pine needles, laid his blanket roll upon them, crawled in, and, snug between folded woolen blankets and with the flap of canvas drawn over him, too, sank to sleep.

The moan of the wind in the pines and spruces, the surge and rumble of waters in the cavern below, and the cold drugged him almost instantly. He slept soundly, but he dreamed strange dreams. In all of them he discovered gold—fine-spun and glistening, like strands of woman's hair; or gold, red and rosy, like a woman's lips. But he found it in a rock-buried vein, which was curious and unlikely. He laughed at his dream and his concern for its probability, when he

awoke, but his laughter changed to apprehension when he thrust his head from beneath his blankets and saw the world white with snow.

He rolled out and stood up in a swirl of flakes and looked across the expanse of water to the east. Then he grinned, for the sun was coming up, blood-red. Hastily he rebuilt his fire and made breakfast, rolled his blankets, then launched his canoe, after a hasty inspection to see if it had sprung more leaks. The craft bobbed in lapping wavelets. The wind had died. The air was almost warm, though the frosty breath of night lingered.

He struck a fast pace with the paddle to warm himself and soon threw off his leather coat and paddled in his shirt sleeves. The sun was blanketed in low clouds before ever a ray struck the earth, but the temperature rose steadily. Very soon wraiths of mist rose from the surface of the lake. Duke paddled not far offshore, studying idly the jumble of rocks which were formed in fantastic shapes and ranged from perpendicular cliffs down to crumbled masses of rubble. His dream recurred to him. He did not laugh at it this time. It seemed a good omen. Alone in the wilderness he had begun to see, hear, feel, smell, think differently than in civilization. Dreams were a part of his world.

THE unseasonable warmth which followed so closely the bitterness of the north wind caused the water to steam and send out clouds of vapor. The mist wraiths joined and thickened. Duke paddled closer to shore. Within an hour the mist was a fog, and the shore line, seen dimly at a distance of a hundred yards, was his guide. His clothing and the canoe became drippingly wet. The fog transformed the wide world into a muffled, tiny prison. Duke sang in his delight at the warmth, which meant delay in the freeze-up and success to his aim. He paddled on until hunger, gnawing at his stomach, caused him to look at his watch. He exclaimed in astonishment when he found it was well past noon. The fog had not lifted for an instant. No breath of wind stirred the oily, placid surface of the lake. A sultry, clammy atmosphere enveloped everything.

Though he actually begrudged the time taken to halt and boil up, he knew the need for food and a hot drink. He halted at the first good landing, which cost him a hunt, for there were few landings.

The best of them were flat rocks. There was no earth, no grass, no kindly clearing—only rocks and tangled timber, brush and dead leaves and more rocks.

He paddled on, after lunch, dipping into deep bays at first, then boldly cutting across their mouths to save distance. Once he lost sight of land entirely and almost held his breath until he picked up a promontory ahead. He crossed what seemed a big bay and found that a peninsula curved around and forced him to paddle almost directly back in the direction he had come—or so it seemed. At last he came to a point he had found on the map, where he must shoot across, due north, to avoid a detour into Black Sturgeon Lake, an arm of Redgut Bay at the west. The map showed clear water ahead, then mainland again. He struck out boldly and in an incredibly short time he picked up the shore line at his left.

Now, he told himself, he had only to keep it at his left and paddle on to where a long island pointed itself clear across Redgut, from southeast to northwest. He must round its northwestern tip and strike northeast again. But he had many miles of western shore to course before he made the turn. If a sudden wind came up, he would be sheltered; and, anyway, he dared not venture far from land, or he might circle in any direction and lose his way entirely.

In his haste to leave Fort Frances he had neglected to bring a compass. That did not worry him even now, for there were many ways of finding direction if he needed to do it. He backed water suddenly, as a reef lying just under the surface threatened his shell of a boat. The fog was so thick that he was obliged, as the afternoon wore on, to go closer and closer to shore and move slowly. Very early he was forced to land and make camp, and in seeking a sheltered place he

ran into a bit of luck. His canoe plowed into a big flock of teal, harbored and awaiting clear weather. Before they could scatter and dive, he had knocked over two with his paddle. He had roast duck for supper. It consoled him for the slow progress he had made and removed his worst apprehension over the weather, for he had begun to be uneasy about the continued warmth.

He knew that when a break came it would be sudden and sharp. He rigged his tarp as a tent and spent much time splitting dead jack pine for its dry, pitchy heart. Everything was drippingly wet, and beads of moisture clung to every bush and rock and dislodged at a touch. His bed was hard rock; there was nothing dry enough to make a mattress. This night he slept less soundly, and for the first time in his life that he could recall, the vision of the previous night recurred, the opened vein in solid rock, with gold nuggets sticking out of it like warts.

"I've got the gold fever badly," he chided himself in the morning. "It works on me at night. Funny I should have the same dream! I wonder just where I am?"

The fog, without clearing, changed into mist—fine, drizzling mist—then into rain. It was still warm—too warm. He broke camp as quickly as he could and slid his loaded canoe into the water. The rain was almost as bad as the fog, so far as visibility went. He could see little farther and was obliged to accept the uncertain guidance of the crooked shore line.

Quite suddenly, and without a preliminary doubt of his direction, Duke became convinced that he was headed wrong. It was a feeling hard to conquer. He had to tell himself, over and over, that according to map and shore line he was all right. Stubbornly he kept on, but the feeling persisted. He fought it by refusing to look at the map again. He kept the shore at his left and paddled on.

The rain soaked him to the skin before long. His canoe became heavy from the water it took in from the clouds. He landed in midmorning and emptied it; then he searched suspiciously for a leak, but found none. His food was damp, despite the tarpaulin over it. He began to wish for a wind.

AT noon, in the wretched shelter of a leaning cliff, he spent two hours drying out his cornmeal in a skillet, for fear it might mold. He had too little flour, too little of everything, to let a grain be wasted. He expected to live largely on game when he got into the moose country. He was little cheered by hot tea and biscuit, and the rain began to grow colder.

But the cold chill that seized upon him did not come entirely from the rain; it had its origin largely in the growing doubt of direction. It was the worst companion a lonely voyageur could entertain. It robbed him of the driving purpose which had sent him swiftly and steadily ahead. It sent a sort of paralysis through his motor nerves and slowed up his paddle speed. It caused him to begin to doubt everything—Indian Charley's story, his map, Charlotte Mowray's meaning when she gave him her eyes to hold with his own gaze, her hand in what had seemed a clinging, affectionate clasp —himself and his mission.

At length he stopped paddling. He drooped in the rain, silent, motionless, his thoughts a whirl of conflicting indecisions. "What is the use?" was the tenor of most of them. "I might as well stop and wait for clear weather.

"But what if it turns very cold? I must keep on." He pulled the handkerchief map from its dry place in his shirt pocket and frowned over its wavering lines. In a few minutes it was wet through. He crumpled it savagely into a little ball in his hand. It dripped rain water.

"The whole map is wringing wet," he growled, then chuckled at his own complaint and his wretched pun. The return of a sense of humor restored to him some of his determination and confidence. He paddled on.

Just before dusk dimmed the objects ashore to indistinguishable blurs, Duke halted again, paddle upraised, and stared unbelievingly up at the gleaming wet surface of a granite cliff. His eyes traveled

it from top to base. Two leaning cedars, dipping into the water, met his eyes and confirmed the astonishing thought that had come to his mind and almost stopped his pulse.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed huskily. "I've paddled two days around in a circle!"

The cliff and the cedars marked the place where he had made camp just forty-eight hours before.

It was a sickening discovery. To have paddled for two days, fifty miles at the least, he estimated, and in the belief he was nearing the north end of Redgut Bay and into the "little long waters," Indian Charley had described, where the first portages began that would carry him up and up through the Otukamamoan or Trout Lake widening, then into the narrower waters and to the Height of Land; and at the end of this second day to find himself actually back where he had begun the second day of his journey!

He could scarce believe it possible. How could he have done it? He had been lost in the woods—had circled, as almost every lost person will do, but this was quite different. There had always been shore line at his left.

He had studied the government map until it was photographed on his brain. The indicated shore line of Redgut Bay, as it leaped into his memory, suggested only one thing he could have done at this time.

"I must have paddled clear around the bay," he muttered. "Yes, I did get out of sight of land—twice. That must have been at the upper end, where it narrows; again at the lower end. It narrows there, too. In the fog and rain I lost my bearings."

Disgust seized Duke—futile anger at the elements, at everything in this wild and cheerless world. Then he paddled ashore, and the irresistible emotion which seizes upon every man in the wilderness when he comes back over his old trail and upon a familiar scene, brought a stab of humor to him, and he conquered the worst of his depression with a loud laugh and cried out:

"Back again to my cave-dwelling home!"

THEN rose the wind, wild, icy with the breath of the North, whipping the lake into froth and sending waves once more thundering and moaning into the caves and crannies of the cliff until it seemed it must be torn asunder. He had no time to puzzle over how he had come back here. He was busy making for himself a more comfortable home in the little dry cavern. He was soaked to the skin through leather and wool. He built a fire, where he had made it before, against the corner of the cave, right up against the stone, and it flung back welcome heat, reflected from the blackened rock. He drew his tarp tightly across the mouth of the cave, glad the opening was so small, and steamed in the warmth, as he prepared a meal. The wind formed a draft that drew the smoke whirling from the cave. As he became warm, there were moments when he believed his fruitless cruise was almost a part of the curious dream he had had of free gold, but his calloused hands and wet clothing emphasized the actuality of it all. He fought against thinking and fell asleep against the warmth of the fire-heated wall.

In the middle of the night he wakened from a third venture into that tantalizing dream of gold, veined in a rock split wide open for his convenience; then he fell back into a worse dream, a nightmare in which he was crushed beneath a falling cliff. He wakened, this time to rebuild his fire, for the stones had grown cold, and his clothing was still damp. The wind roared in fury. He sat up beside the fire, nodding, but with his mind feverishly active. The mystery of his circle remained to be solved.

It came upon him suddenly—in a flash.

"It is an island!" he cried aloud. "It must be a big island, not shown on the map as an island. I must have paddled all around it in the fog and rain!"

As if a load had rolled from his soul, he fell back into his blanket roll and slept dreamlessly until dawn. He woke with a more sensible and less hysterical view of things. After all, he told himself, he was as well off as if he had remained here in the cave, as he had thought of doing; perhaps he was a little better off,

for he had toughened himself just so much more by his paddling. He had been lost, for sure, at one time. By luck, he had recognized the cliff and the cedars, else he might have paddled round the island again.

He gave up trying to guess whether he had already paddled around it once or twice—or more. It would be a big island, indeed, with fifty miles of shore line. Now the wind would clear the sky and the mist from the lake, and he could head due north and be sure where he went.

At breakfast he was shocked by the discovery that he had invaded his meager store fully one fourth. He had added nothing. His two teal were but titbits. He must hurry to the little long waters and shoot game before he sought for gold.

The wind continued strong. It died down a bit just at dawn, but it seemed to gather new force when daylight came. The sky was overcast, and, as yet, he could not be too sure of directions. From memory of how he had come, two days ago, from the middle of the bay to this cave, he guided himself and headed straight offshore, to the east, as he calculated it. He paddled for an hour in this direction. The wind was in the north, almost exactly, he judged. It should be his guide. He must not go wrong again.

In his preoccupation and his haste to get going again, Duke left in the cave an important part of his duffel. He did not miss it at all, for it was nothing he would use for making meals or camp.

The weather thickened ahead. He could not see any shore except what lay behind. The government map was right in indicating no other islands here. He wanted to get away from that uncharted big island which had cost him two days of precious time. For this reason he preferred to head into open water, despite the wind, rather than follow the uneven shore to the north end, if its end did lie to the north.

The wind rose to a veritable gale. The waves grew to be three and four feet high and broke white on every crest. At the end of two hours of desperate paddling, Duke looked back and saw that he was only two miles from shore. He shifted paddle. The wind clutched at his bow. He shipped water until his knees were wet, and he had to bail a little; but he could not do much because it took all his strength and skill to keep his craft from swamping in the trough of the waves. Ahead, to right and left, no other land loomed up. The wide expanse of water gave the wind a chance to roll up swells like ocean waves.

DUKE saw that if the gale did not moderate soon, he would be so fatigued that he could not even hold his own, much less make progress. The ancient birch-bark craft was quite frail; the canvas not too new. Paint had covered it, but that had flaked off, all over. Daubs of marine glue marked where rocks had gashed holes in the canvas. Half an hour more he fought on, then, with a drift of snow in his eyes, he gave up the useless fight. He came about with difficulty, scudded with the wind, and at noon boiled up on the island, which seemed destined for his home.

It was with a bitter heart that Duke built up his night fire, for the third time, against the rock wall of his cave. But he made his bed more carefully, erected the tarp as tight as a wall over the opening, leaving only a chink at the top for the smoke to rise through. He prepared for a grim wait this time, to be sure of the weather. He had never given up his purpose to make Height of Land and that lonely, portage trail.

He inspected and oiled his rifle, scraped rust from ancient traps, greased the leather tops of his boots, dug from his duffel bag a pair of mittens, and never once remembered that back in the crevice of the cave, hidden now in sand and jack-pine needles, which the wind had swirled about, lay an oilskin packet filled with dynamite.

Duke huddled by the fire and gave way to bitter thoughts for a long hour. One of his arms ached from overstrained muscles in the hard battle with the wind and from the fog and the rain and from the chill that invaded his stone shelter. He did not mind the pain; did not revile

the elements. He could stand pain, and he had endured more than cold, more than hunger; he was not afraid even of torture, if it only might be of some use.

Gold had lured him, not as it lures most men who fall a victim to its alchemy and go crazy with the lust for the precious metal. Duke was free from that taint. It was only in dreams that he thought very much of the gold itself, and even those dreams were shot through with the brighter gold of bright, bobbed hair. The dreams, for the most part, annoyed him now. As good omens they seemed to have failed.

"If John Mowray only could see me now!" he exclaimed. "He wouldn't even offer me a job as a guide. A fine guide I'd be!"

The thought that John Mowray might not be so hard as he had seemed, that he might have been testing this soldier of fortune to see of what stuff he was made, had never occurred to Duke. He was humbler now than he had been when he flung away from Mowray's store, but he was far from forgetting his pride. His pride steeled him to the idea of keeping on with his quest, despite the elements and his shrinking stock of food. The fire burned low, as he sat there, and he piled more wood upon it. It flamed fiercely in the draft, running up the pitch-pine hearts, split slim, and stood on end against the wall. The heat burst a fragment of rock from the wall. It rolled at Duke's feet, and he kicked it idly aside. He sat and thought because he hated to turn in and dream.

When he did roll in, feet to the fire, which he left a glowing bed of hot coals, he heard the wind, as if it were a savage enemy besieging him. Whimsically, he thought of himself as a hermit, locked away from the world in a barren wilderness, and he fell asleep to dream again of gold and of the falling cliff. He did not dream that all his dreams were reconstructed fragments of unconscious thought—that his active subconsciousness had built up a possible reality out of mints and hidden trifles which had meaning, big and ominous. So subtle is the hidden mind.

He was wakened by a thundering which he thought was that of driven waters—wakened from the nightmare of tumbling walls of stone, a sleeping nightmare, into a nightmare of reality. Something crushingly heavy lay upon his feet. His legs, to the knees, were pinned down. He touched rough, hard stone with his hands and broke into a perspiration.

A block of stone must have fallen from the roof or the walls of the cave. He fumbled for a match and found his guess was only too correct. A block of the friable granite of the cliffs had broken from the wall, where his fire had been, and then had rolled over onto his legs. Had it fallen directly upon them, they would have been crushed.

HE pushed on the stone, and it moved. A stab of pain in his left leg told him it was alive. Frantic, he mustered all his powers, and wriggled about until he was able to pry with his shoulders against the sloping top of the cave. Thus he managed to release his right foot. Scarcely had he extricated himself from his predicament, when a rumbling, cracking sound sent him headlong from the cave. As he lunged for safety, he tore down his tarpaulin.

He was not an instant too soon. Another block of granite, cracked by the heat, then contracted by the cold, slid down in a shower of smaller fragments, and the mass of débris closed the cavern. He could not have entered it again, had he wished to do so.

He tried to stand, but toppled over. His left leg was useless. It did not hurt at first because it was numb; but after a moment it began to throb. One of the bones above the ankle was sore to the touch. Grimly he massaged it, grinding his teeth in agony. He made out that no bones were fractured, but the throb of increasing pain told him that it had been terribly bruised. It was unmanageable, as if detached from the control of nerve centers. His right leg was hurt, but he could use it.

Fortunately, Duke had worn all his clothing when he turned in, except his boots, which he had thrust beneath his head for a pillow.

The bite of bitter cold through his

socks told him he would need boots very soon. He dragged himself on hands and knees to the cavern and tried to dislodge some rocks from one end of the hole. After a long time, with intervals of rest, when he chafed his feet and hands and leaned weakly against the rock he had rolled out, he got hold of his boots and dragged them out. It was long after dawn.

His blanket roll could not be budged. He could just touch the tump line of his pack through a crevice.

He fell to the painful task of putting on his boots. The cold had numbed by this time both his hands and his feet, as he discovered that he could not lace his boots. He was sick as well as weak. Wrapping the tarpaulin about him, he rested as best he could, favoring the left foot and welcoming the cold that numbed pain. Not for an instant did he lose hope. He laid out, in mind, just what he must do. He must recover everything he could from the cavern. He must find a sheltered camping place. He must have hot water, bandage his leg, and eat a good, hot meal.

After two hours of frantic work, he managed to rescue the contents of his pack. He had cut the sack and dragged the things out, one by one. He lacked blankets, his rifle, and his cooking utensils, except a battered skillet which he had happened to thrust in the pack. He melted snow in the skillet over a fire behind the tarpaulin, stretched against the rising wind. He cooked bacon, ate some crushed bannock, and then soaked a rice bag and an extra pair of socks in hot water. Rolling down the top of his boot, he bandaged his injured leg as tightly as he could, in the steaming cloths. This brought a little relief, but his effort to walk showed that he could not bear a pound of weight on the left foot. He lay down and steamed his leg close to the fire.

"I'm going to get my outfit," he assured himself stubbornly. "Perhaps the gun is all right. Now, if I had my blasting powder——"

It flashed on him that he had mislaid the dynamite. His face screwed into a grimace of chagrin, as he muttered:

"I left it in the far corner, two days ago. The caps are in my cartridge belt. I hung that on the rifle, near the fire. Whew!"

Providence had saved him from being blasted into bits. Only chance had prevented the concussion of the rock slide from exploding caps, or cartridges, or dynamite—or all three. He was shaken by the thought of his narrow escape, as he pried gingerly with a stout stick at the rock mass. While he worked, his fire died down. He noticed it, but ignored it until a puff of fresh, pungent smoke came to his nostrils, and he regarded the dead fire behind him. No smoke rose from it. It was burned out to a white ash. It had been laid on bare stone.

The smell of smoke grew stronger. He caught a muffled crackle of flame. In an instant he knew its origin.

"My old fire—inside!" he whispered, as if his breath might fan it up. "It's kindled something fresh."

Again, he knew just what to do and did it. He made a rude crutch, with his knife, out of a crotched cedar sapling, bundled his salvaged provisions into the tarpaulin, flung it over his shoulders, and began the painful descent toward shore. It seemed hours before he made it. When he came within sight of his canoe, he looked back and saw a smother of smoke filtering out of the rock which had been a cave. He could guess what had happened. The wind had created a strong draft through the chinks and had fanned his old fire into a blaze. The slide must have thrust fresh jack pine onto the embers.

Somewhere near or in that fire was a belt filled with .30-30 rifle cartridges and a number of fulminating caps for exploding dynamite. On the same level, three feet away, were twenty pounds of dynamite. There was every chance that the heat would explode caps or cartridges, and that either would detonate the dynamite. It might come at any moment. There was no safety save out on the lake in the canoe. He could not move fast enough on the rocks to reach a place of safety upon the island.

It took him longer to launch his canoe

than to climb down to the shore, for the waves were beating high, and he could scarcely balance himself on the slippery, wet boulders of the landing. He lost half of his provisions in the water, wet himself to the shoulders, fishing them out, and when he lunged into the canoe he almost upset it. His left leg throbbed painfully from the strain to which it had been subjected. After settling himself in the canoe, he dipped his paddle and headed due north along the shore.

BUCKING the heavy swells, which rolled high across the wide part of Redgut, where it opens into Black Sturgeon Lake, a sputtering, coughing old gas boat headed north, too. A bent, black-haired, black-faced old Indian crouched in the cockpit. At the wheel a girl in boots and knickers, with fine, golden hair flying out in a fringe, from beneath a woolen cap, half knelt, half stood, in order to keep the long, rakish nose of the bateaulike craft into the wind.

Charlotte Mowray had commandeered the gas boat and Indian Charley. She had done this within a few hours after she discovered that Duke Doukhaboor had headed out from Fort Frances in an open canoe. To Charley, who admitted knowledge of Duke's purpose and destination with great reluctance, she characterized it as a wild-goose chase. Indian Charley described her plan of pursuit as a loon chase, and declared he would not go.

But he went. He was not afraid of danger, of winter, or of wind, though his eyes were dimming, and his joints were stiff. He had even remembered to put snowshoes in the boat, in case they got caught in the ice up there. Charlotte had brought two pairs from the store. She had also brought a rifle and a full pack of food.

Charlotte had defied her father, conviction and danger to take up this loon chase. John Mowray had refused to allow one of his own power boats to be used for the trip. Charlotte had not said much, but an hour later she had roused Indian Charley in his shack by the river front. Three hours later, at nine o'clock at night, they had started up the river.

Ten hours later they came to the widening of waters, and there rolled down from the north a dull murmur of sound.

"What was that?" demanded Charlotte. "It sounded like a blast."

"She mus' be ice up in de Nort' Bay," said Charley, shifting his eyes. "She make ice—I guess so. De win' break heem up."

"That was not ice, making or breaking," she declared.

"Den mebbe it's de engine blow off down at de mill."

"The wind is against us," she reminded him sharply.

"I dunno," he said. "I hear de engine."

"Didn't you hear *that?*"

"Waal, yas, I hear heem. I dunno."

"Where?" she demanded, trusting the Indian's marvelous ears and sense of direction more than her own.

Charley pointed north-northwest. His face was stolid, but his pride was touched, and it overcame his evident reluctance to admit that a booming sound had come down the wind. He knew the nearest mine was fifty miles away. He did not like that sound. He was old, and the farther north they plowed the sadder he became.

"How's your gas?" asked the pilot.

"Guess I better put in more. She's not too much."

"I'm heading toward that big island you told me about. Am I headed right?"

"Leetle more to de wes'. Dat's right. Be careful! Keep her on de wind, or she swamp."

"Yes, I know."

The one-lung engine pounded faithfully. Once warmed up, its nature was to keep on going. It had taken three hours, down at the railroad embankment, to get the thing going, and even Charley had given it up three times. Charlotte Mowray would never give up. There were only fifty miles of navigable water for the gas boat, and Duke had been gone four days in a canoe. At the first portage he would pass behind a gate and disappear. That was one reason why Charley described their voyage as a loon chase.

But Charlotte was a woman, with a woman's reasons—or lack of reason. She traveled by intuition, feeling that she must overtake Duke. She could not forget the look that had come into his face, though he said nothing, when her father gave him the subtle insult, and he turned and walked out, never to return. That was the first time she had seen him since the day he went to war, and that day she would never forget.

THE boat moved slowly. It was an hour before they found the shore line again. Charley nodded when she asked if that was the island. Not even he had a name for it. He said it had been formed only a few years ago by beaver dams. It was no place to land for anything. The island had no game, no berries—nothing but rocks, scrub timber, and high, rough shores.

He grumbled at her decision to run for the island because the blast had sounded in that direction; but he grumbled beneath the sputter of his engine and admired the girl at the wheel. She had given her word that he should have a new gas boat after this voyage, and he believed her.

They made an unexpected forced landing at the south end of the rough point which Charley said was part of the island. The engine kicked out. Charlotte climbed high on the shore, while Charley engaged the engine in marine conversation. When she descended to the boat, having seen nothing significant, Charley had given up the struggle.

"She no go. I try everyt'ing. We got to wait until she's ready."

Charlotte did not reproach him. The time for that was past.

"Then we'll wait," she said, "but we'll take a little hike along the shore to see if——"

"You don't fin' anyt'ing at all," declared Charley, who was tired.

"I'll go alone. You can wait for the engine."

Charley followed her, groaning, as the "little hike" became a long, heartbreaking scramble over rocks and dead leaves and through numerous brush and alder thickets.

In a bay they came across the signs of a camp fire, close to shore.

"He has been here," Charlotte declared, though there was nothing to indicate who had built the fire.

"Somebody t'ree days or four ago," said Charley, examining the signs. "Rain and snow been here since."

That did not shake her conviction. She climbed the highest point she had yet seen, Charley behind her; and, as she gazed out over the water, she clutched his arm and pointed.

"A canoe!" she cried. "Way up the shore."

"No can see canoe," muttered Charley, squinting. Then he hung his head, for he had admitted, for the first time to any one, his failing sight.

"It must be," she insisted. "It's holding offshore. It's too dark a day to see the glint of the paddle. Let's get that engine going."

"She go eef she's ready," Charley admitted.

The spirit which manages marine engines of the one-lung type had, apparently, been propitiated by passive nonresistance. The gas boat was backed off gingerly, reversed just as gingerly, then sent ahead. Charley bailed hard, for the water had made headway against him. Charlotte headed far out, to try to pick up the object she had seen, and which she had marked as opposite a giant dead pine on a high cliff. When she got no sight of it from afar out, she ran closer to shore, for fear the canoe might be hugging the shore. They passed the dead pine, crossed the mouth of a bay, rounded a point, and saw nothing ahead, save tossing waves and dark, jagged shore.

"Perhaps he went ashore," she suggested and ran in so close that Charley warned her against reefs. She followed the shore line, however, rounded the next point, and suddenly picked up the fresh, raw rubble of a crumpled cliff. It showed a bright red stain against the weathered granite on each side.

"The blast!" she cried. "You see?"

"Somebody's crazy," muttered Charley. "No gold there."

"Somebody's—— What's that?"

Charlotte swerved toward the shore so quickly that Charley killed the engine, trying to slow down. They floated slowly toward a landing place, and Charley used an oar to steer the boat in.

HE saw it, too, before long. It was a canoe, bobbing up and down, the bow held between two rounded rocks, as if it had drifted there aimlessly.

The canoe was half filled with water. In the bottom lay a shapeless, dark-brown mass. It was an old tarpaulin, heaped over the thwart.

The loon chase was over. Under the tarpaulin lay the unconscious form of Duke Doukhaboor. His body was wedged under the thwart, and his feet were packed in the narrowing stern of the canoe. His head and shoulders were kept out of water by the pitiful heap of soaked provisions.

Charley first bailed out the water, then dragged the canoe on shore, where he smashed the thwart with an ax to get Duke out. Presently he built a fire behind the canoe, tipped on its side. Charlotte, in this shelter, with the tarpaulin rigged high, ripped Duke's clothes, to the waist and wrapped his torso in blankets. Fearfully she looked upon his blue lips and sunken eyes. He seemed dead. Indian Charley comforted her, however, by his wordless aid and by cutting the boot from Duke's battered black-and-blue left leg.

"I can't make it," were his first words. "I can't make it. The wind—— I've got to go back home. But I haven't got a home, now. Blown to pieces. Mebbe can find bit of blanket, though. Cold. Try again to-morrow—got to make it 'fore the freeze. Snow might bury trail . . . couldn't find it. . . . Got to have that gold, because John Mowray thinks I'm only good for a guide, and mebbe she—no, she wouldn't—but—— Oh! Leave the damn boot on!"

His strange dreams, which seemed to have recurred to him in semiconsciousness, mingled with reality so closely that he talked deliriously, but Charlotte made out a great deal that Charley did not understand. When the heat and the blankets and a bit of brandy had seemed to bring him back to reason, she asked him one question:

"Were you headed north, in the canoe?"

He nodded. "Fire blew up my home," he muttered thickly. "You might think I expected to find gold in that cliff, eh? No such fool as that, but I'm a fool, all right. Tried to get away from here and couldn't. What day is it?"

She told him. He burst into laughter.

"Four times!" he chortled.

Laughter shook him so that she thought he had a chill and bundled him up closer and held him to herself. Indian Charley brewed a pungent drink, strained it, and made the injured man drink a bowl of it. Duke sank back and went to sleep, his eyes holding Charlotte's until the lids shut.

"He talk too much," grumbled Charley. "I feex heem. He better kip still. So now we boil up tea and eat ourself."

They had lunch, and Charlotte, restored by the food and drink, exercised a woman's prerogative of curiosity. She clambered up to the demolished cliff. Indian Charley fussed with a marvelous poultice of tea leaves and flour, and bound the bad leg with it. He was startled when Charlotte, scrambling recklessly down from above, thrust a fragment of rock under his nose.

"Look at this!" she cried. "That's gold!"

It was. It was gold quartz of a lighter color than the granite overlay. It had a streak of white—a grayish mixture—and through it all went a dull vein, which in places protruded in tiny, round knobs, like shoe buttons. Charley cut one of the knobs off with his knife, and agreed with her.

"Sure! Dat's gold," he said. "Mus' be already he went up there in the Height of Land, eh?"

But Charley was wrong, of course. Duke described to them later how his "home" had been blown up, when his fire cracked down the roof of the cave, and how the same fire exploded his forgotten sack of dynamite, and how he had paddled out onto the lake and kept going north, until pain numbed his faculties, and he "dropped out." Eventually

he was driven back to shore, as he had been forced back three times before.

"This old island is the nearest that I got to Height of Land," he said. "The nearest I got to finding gold was in my dreams."

He talked on lightly, for he lay in a sort of dream now, with his head held up softly. As yet he did not know what Charlotte had found.

"Say, this is an island, isn't it?" he asked suddenly of Charley.

"Sure."

"What's its name?"

"It got no name."

"Oh, yes, it has," said Charlotte, and she whisked the bit of quartz before Duke's eyes. "It will always be called by your name—for you own it. You have struck gold, Duke."

"I'm going to call this Charlotte Bay, then," he murmured, a little later.

"We will call it Blanket Bay for the present," she said, and he submitted to the suggestion and fell into dreams which were again filled with gold.

AN INDIAN "IMMIGRANT"

THE absurd situations which have grown out of our interpretation of the existing immigration laws have furnished no end of copy for the newspapers abroad and at home. The interpretation of the law, however, recently resulted in an absurdity which tops all the other instances on record. An American Indian, a member of the Six Nations, who with other members of his tribe had been living in Canada, was refused admittance into this country.

The wisdom of the law respecting immigrants does not enter this discussion. We simply wish to point out the grim irony of the situation. The law attempted to debar a man whose claim to being an American rests on immemorial occupation of the soil. Of course, the framers of the law never intended his exclusion and never foresaw an incident of this nature. The legal status of the Indian tribes is so complicated and confused, that the authorities were nonplused by this particular case. Originally the Indians were looked upon as independent nations, then later they were regarded as "domestic dependent nations," still later they were treated individually as "wards," and finally as citizens, without, apparently, "full rights of citizenship." A special status attached to the Six Nations because of the early treaties which we made with them respecting their lands in the northern part of the State of New York. We also made treaties with Great Britain respecting the land holdings of these same Indians across the Canadian border.

This particular Indian, fortunately, was eventually granted the right of passage to visit his New York relatives, but it is safe to bet that the views of this American Indian, respecting the red tape of the white man, would make interesting reading.

A SOLUTION OF THE SERVANT PROBLEM

THE suggestion that pygmies be trained to take the place of the austere butler, the independent cook, and the pert maid, has been advanced by Doctor Frederick A. Cook, in the *New Era*. His idea is to breed a whole race of the small people, importing them in large groups from Africa, carrying on the work of breeding and training in the Virgin Islands. He feels that, since they are light and active, they could become more efficient than present servant types. Their work would not be confined only to the home, but would extend into the office, displacing the office girl and boy. Most of the minor work, according to Doctor Cook, is now done in a haphazard fashion, simply because those performing the work are not adapted to it. The pygmies could be developed in various sizes, according to the jobs for which they would be needed. Thus, there would be not only heavy and thin pygmies for manual and light labors, but fat and short ones for other kinds. It is not possible to say just how this solution would be accepted by housewives and business men.

The Girl of Rio

By Fred MacIsaac

Author of "The Greek Statue," "Out of the Air," Etc.

The gaming salons of Rio de Janeiro rival those of Monte Carlo, and the Excelsior Club was one of the most colorful. It was there that John Warren Littleton, late of Boston, had his first unforgetable glimpse of life.

ONE of the things about Americans which is most puzzling to the Latins is our interest in our neighbor's business. Because those of us who do not approve of horse racing, gambling and drinking rum, very slightly outnumber those who do, we have ruthlessly cut off the minority from their more or less innocent diversions.

In South America, majorities rule politically, unless the minority is better armed, but the idea of using the ballot for social reform is repugnant. Making laws to prohibit his neighbor from amusing himself according to his fancy strikes Mr. Latin as unwarranted interference with personal liberty. Besides, it's too much work.

And so the Excelsior flourishes in Rio de Janeiro.

Do you know Rio? Nature and man have combined to make it exquisite pictorially. The indigo of the sky, the purple of the jagged, saw-toothed hills, the turquoise of the bay, dotted with emerald isles, the snowy whiteness of the city, everything glittering in the warm light of the tropics! What good are words to describe such things?

The United States Shipping Board was running large, dry, empty passenger steamers down there at the time, despite the passionate press agent from whom I clipped the above description.

"See Naples and die," some traveler once said.

Don't do it. Wait until you see Rio. It makes Naples look like an Italian banana compared to a West Indian one.

John Warren Littleton was a Bostonian. His great-grandfather got rich running slaves from Africa, through the cor-

don of British cruisers to the West Indies, where they were in demand. His grandfather was killed fighting to abolish slavery in the South. His father increased the family fortune by getting in on the ground floor in Calumet and Hecla, and twenty years later lost it all in copper mines recommended by a Wall Street expert.

John's father had resigned from all the best clubs, and John knew that all he needed to get into them was money enough to pay the dues and initiation fees.

Because the family just at present didn't have money enough to buy polish for the ornate brass knocker on the front door of their brick house on Beacon Street, John Warren Littleton took a job which brought him to Rio de Janeiro, to work in the office of the American company which ran the electric railways.

Rio was not then famous for good hotels. The Republica was considered the best, yet its dining room was not very inviting. When John drifted in for breakfast he was not pleased at the outlook, but his interest was excited when the waiter handed him a letter with the fly-specked bill of fare. Although he knew no one in Rio, he was not as surprised as he might have been to find that the letter contained an engraved card, putting him up at a club:

Mr. John Warren Littleton
has been extended the courtesies of the
EXCELSIOR CLUB
during his stay in Rio Janeiro.
Sponsors: Dom Pedro Cavaliero, Dom Santo Benezo.

Undoubtedly some good Brazilians who had enjoyed his father's hospitality, at one time or another, he explained to himself and decided to avail himself of the privilege as soon as possible.

During the day, Mr. Littleton got acquainted with the office force of the American Street Railway Company. There were two agreeable youths named Sullivan and Mahoney who hailed from Boston, but as they were not the sort of people with whom he mingled at home, Littleton did not feel it necessary to become chummy with them immediately, particularly with a card from the Excelsior Club in his pocket. Neither did Sullivan nor Mahoney appear to yearn to receive him to their bosoms.

He spent the late afternoon and early evening in strolling about the broad streets of Rio. He was surprised to discover a very splendid library, with an enormous number of books in Spanish, French, Portuguese, English and German, equipped with all the latest appliances.

John visited a reading room as imposing as Bates Hall in the Boston Public Library, and secured a book from the stacks in much less time than it takes to get similar service in Boston.

AFTER a comfortable dinner, alone, at a French café, which he had found by accident, he summoned a taxi, which was a big touring car with a taximeter attachment, and which charged up a very moderate amount, considering the high cost of most things in the Brazilian capital, to convey him to the portals of the Excelsior Club.

The Excelsior was a large, impressive-looking building, with a huge electric sign across its chest, telling its name in three-foot letters. John passed through an elaborate entrance, handed his hat to a man in livery, who brought him a check, and followed a footman up a broad staircase to the second floor.

"Evidently some special occasion," he thought, as he heard a steady hum, as of a great many people in conversation. At the top of the stairs he received a surprise. Instead of a few conventional clubrooms, he entered the first of a series of huge salons, richly furnished in the gold and red of Louis Quinze. This room, and two others that he could see beyond, were full of people, most of the men in evening attire, and all the women in extreme décolleté.

In the center of the room, forty or fifty people were grouped around a long green table, and John heard a rattle and whir and chinkle, which meant gaming on a large scale.

Littleton was an intelligent youth, well educated and pretty decent, if he did im-

press people as a bit of a snob. He had often read about the tables of Monte Carlo, and it didn't need more than a few seconds to convince him that the Excelsior was a big gaming establishment of a similar character. He had never heard that Rio permitted such institutions, nevertheless the nature of this place was obvious.

His New England conscience suggested that he turn right around and march down those broad stairs, but his love of excitement persuaded him to remain and get acquainted with a form of entertainment he knew nothing about, particularly since he was present through no will of his own.

There was something in the atmosphere which went to his head, a tenseness, a thrill, a current thrown off by the emotions of those who risked their money at the tables.

John had never seen roulette, *chemin de fer*, or *trente et quarante* in operation, and he peered at the tables in each room, wondering which was which, and too shy and unfamiliar with the various Latin tongues, which were in use around the tables, to ask questions.

One or two Brazilian ladies, in opulent gowns, turned large, dark orbs upon him invitingly, but John was too interested by the gaming operations to notice them.

From the rear salon, large French windows opened into a pretty garden, where tables were set at the edge of graveled walks, and numerous couples were seated or walking about.

Beyond was a brilliantly lighted pavilion, which appeared to be a music hall, for John could see, through open windows, a stage with actors on it, and an audience in its seats. Like an intrepid explorer, he passed into the garden, ignoring a softly whispered invitation from a gentleman seated at a table alone.

An orchestra was playing an alluring Spanish dance tune, as John purchased a ticket from a much frizzed mulatto woman in the box office, handed the check to the doorkeeper, and was ushered into the theater.

The interior was curiously arranged to American eyes, comparatively limited space for orchestra seats, and much ground railed off into squares, each containing tables and chairs. A balcony was devoted entirely to boxes, where decorative ladies in evening clothes were drinking with Brazilians of every variety of mustache and whiskers.

THE entertainment was a variety show, but different from American types, in that all the turns were singing and dancing numbers, and the performers were all women.

A billowy Brazilian girl sang a single verse of a popular waltz song and vanished. She was followed by a beefy Spanish woman, who offered undulating dances for two or three minutes, only to vanish in her turn. A pair of French women, no longer young, sang a Parisian music-hall ditty, with much rolling of eyes, and then passed on their way.

John happened to glance up at the balcony to his right and was surprised to see the Brazilian song bird and the Spanish dancer occupying a box with three bearded persons who were opening wine. Rather disgusted at the obvious character of the place and the poor quality of the show, John was reaching for his hat when the sound of English struck his ears.

The stage had been invaded by a slim, dark girl, winsome in appearance, prettily and modestly gowned, who was singing an American ragtime song. It was a recent product of "Tin Pan Alley," but it sounded rather pleasant, so far from home, after the mixture of foreign tongues which John had been hearing all the evening.

He noticed that the girl's voice was quite ordinary, and she sang with little animation and a complete absence of the pep that ragtime requires to conceal its flimsy musical structure. In a few minutes her number was over, and, like all her predecessors, she received no encore.

A Spanish girl in toreador costume tripped forth to sing about successful killing of bulls. This time John threaded his way out of the music hall and stepped into the garden, which was cool, quiet and inviting. Spying a vacant table, he dropped into a chair and pressed the button which summoned the waiter.

At that moment the girl who had been singing ragtime, still in her stage costume, came down the pathway from the stage entrance. In front of Littleton she was met by a very swarthy Brazilian, with the mustache of a brigand.

"Listen, miss," he exclaimed in excellent English. "Three gentlemen have sent back requests for your company, and you walk out of the theater. What do you mean? Why do I pay you? For your singing? Bah, you can't sing. March right back. One of the gentlemen looks like a coffee planter from San Paolo. Do you want to ruin this club?"

"I can pick and choose, can't I?" demanded the girl sullenly. "Well, I pass up your coffee planter. I came out to meet this gentleman. Good evening, Dom Pedro."

Saying which, she dropped into the chair opposite John Littleton and gave him a strained and meaning smile.

Dom Pedro leered with obvious relief. "Certainly, my dear miss. I am glad to have you choose the most attractive guests. Good evening, sir. My most charming *artiste*."

With a deep bow he walked rapidly away.

"The nasty old snake," remarked John's visitor. "Say, it was lucky I spotted you, just when he caught me trying to disappear. You're an American, aren't you?"

"I'm from Boston."

"Well, never mind. There are worse places. You don't mind sitting here and talking to me for a few minutes, do you?"

"I am not accustomed——" began John rather frostily.

"Say, for the love of Pete, don't turn me down. Can't you recognize a self-respecting girl when you see her?"

John looked squarely at her for the first time. He had been too alarmed and embarrassed to do so before. He saw two honest gray eyes peering out from under their heavily painted lids, and the rouge on her face couldn't disguise a strong, courageous little chin.

"I beg your pardon," he said simply. "What can I do for you?"

"How long have you been in Rio?"

"Twenty-four hours."

"Don't know the ropes at all. That's too bad."

"Why?"

"I want to get away from here."

"Then permit me to be your escort."

"Listen, kid. You don't know anything about this burg at all, do you? We can't walk out of here as though it was a Boston hotel."

"Why not?"

"Because this is the roughest town in the world, believe me. This place is nothing but a huge gambling joint, and Rio is full of them. The gamblers own the town. It looks easy enough to walk out of here, but they'd have me back quicker than a wink, and I don't know what they'd do to you."

"May I ask what you are doing here?"

"Well, I'm up against a game I never played before, but I'm going to beat it somehow."

"But what are you doing so far from —er—Forty-second Street?"

"I'm a vaudeville performer, single act. I was playing small time up home, but my work didn't go very good, and I was having a hard time getting engagements. One day I saw an ad in the paper that read something like this:

"'Wanted: American vaudeville artists to tour South America. Season's work guaranteed, traveling expenses advanced, excellent salaries to the right parties.'

"I went right to it. I didn't know anything about South America, but a job was a job, and advanced traveling expenses sounded good, the way my pocketbook felt when I lifted it. The agent was a smooth one, all right. He showed me a first-cabin ticket for Rio and a ten-month contract, at three times what I ever made in the States. I came along with a couple of other girls who did vaudeville specialties. They shipped them right up to San Paolo."

"And then things went wrong, did they?"

"Just let me tell you. Dom Pedro met me at the dock. He was most dreadfully polite, told me that I would have all Rio at my feet, and landed me out here quicker'n a cat can wag his tail.

"After I had been given a room and taken a glance around the place, I tumbled to a lot, and decided that I had better pull my freight. Accordingly I called for Dom Pedro and told him that I thought Brazil didn't need any of my talents, and I wanted to go right back home.

"Then I found out what I was up against. I owed him for the trip down, most two hundred dollars, and I didn't have a dollar and a half in my pocketbook. Dom Pedro said he'd have me put in jail for debt, if I didn't stay here and work out my bill. He could have done it, too. My salary was a hundred dollars a week, but they charge me forty for room and board. Talk about New York prices! And they have a system of fines, in case you don't behave properly to the guests in the music hall, which keeps me broke. Besides, there are the tables, and every time I risk a dollar, hoping to win enough to settle my indebtedness and leave, I lose it. Anyway, I don't think they would let me go if I paid them. That's just the hold they get on us."

"Why are they so anxious to keep you? Aren't there plenty of performers who could be engaged without compulsion?"

The girl looked him firmly in the eye and lowered her voice. "The vaudeville part of the job is just to keep the audience entertained for a time. The idea is to meet the patrons of the place, persuade them to buy wine, and lead them to the gaming tables. They agree to allow me a fifty-per-cent commission on the wine and gambling bills of those men I persuade to part with their money. Now, I ask you, ain't this a fix for an American working girl to be in, who has traveled all over the U. S. A., without meeting anything worse than a stage-door John?"

"Why, it's an outrage. I'll communicate with the authorities and get you out in a jiffy."

"What authorities?"

"The police."

The girl rejected the suggestion scornfully. "This ain't the U. S. A.," she explained, as though she were talking to a child. "This is Rio. If you go inside you will find the chief of police at the second table on the left. This joint can't be pulled. It's legal. The Brazilians can't see anything wrong with the arrangements here. They like them. They would laugh at you and tell you I was pulling a grand-stand play to attract your interest. You ain't the first man I asked to get me out of this hole. The others thought I was kidding them."

"Well, I can go to the American minister."

"That might work, but by the time he got here they would have me spirited up to San Paolo or some other interior point."

"Then what are we to do?"

The girl smiled gratefully. It was an honest and very sweet smile. John felt himself thinking of her more protectingly at once.

"It's nice of you to say 'we,'" she said. "Makes me feel as though I wasn't alone any more. Now, if I could get out of here and reach the American minister's house, myself, he would have to protect me. The thing is to get out."

"Just get your hat and coat," said John aggressively.

"Wait a minute. We'll have to watch our chance. Meantime, I'll have to lead you to the tables. Got any money?"

"A little—not much."

"A little American money looks like more when you change it into milreis," said the girl. "If you don't play a little, they will call me away and make me talk to somebody else."

PILOTED by the girl, John went to the cashier and changed fifty American dollars into one hundred and fifty thousand reis. The huge figures on the bills he received impressed John, as it does every other visitor to Brazil.

It seemed that Brazil started with the same coinage system as the United States, both basing their units upon a thousand mills. But in America we call a thousand mills a dollar, while in Brazil they named the one thousandth of a dollar a rei, and called a dollar a thousand reis. Gradually the value of Brazilian money has depreciated, until at the present time

the Brazilian thousand reis is worth only sixteen cents in our money.

John knew this, but it was rather startling just the same to own one hundred and fifty thousand of any kind of money.

"What's your name, may I ask?" he demanded, as they moved slowly through the throng toward a huge, green table, where roulette was the attraction.

"Dora Dever," she replied. "What's yours?"

"John Warren Littleton."

The girl made a little grimace, as the syllables rolled forth, but fortunately John didn't see her.

"Tell me," he asked, "is this game on the level?"

"The roulette has to be, more or less, when there is a big crowd playing. They get a fairly big percentage here, they are not molested by the police, and they want you to come back, so they give you a run for your money."

John had never seen a roulette outfit, and he had only vague ideas of how to play. Dora explained the thirty-six numbers, alternately red and black.

"They tell me that you are paid thirty-six times your stake, if you win at Monte Carlo. Here you get only thirty-four. The bank's percentage in Monte Carlo is the thirty-seventh square, called zero. Here they have zero and double zero. Therefore, when you put a coin on a number, the odds are thirty-seven to one against you, and if you win you are only paid thirty-four. With a percentage like that the game doesn't have to be crooked."

"I should say not. What number would you suggest?"

"Forget the numbers—play red or black or odd and even. Here the odds against you are only twenty to eighteen. You have a chance."

Following her advice, John dropped thirty thousand reis on the black—ten dollars in our money.

The croupier released the marble which sped around the bowl and finally settled into twenty-four.

Only those who have stood before the green table and won their first bet can appreciate the thrill which shot through the Puritan from Boston. The croupier pushed three bank notes toward John, who tossed them upon his stake, still lying on the black.

Again the ball rolled. No. 2, a black number won. Again a roll of tattered bills—Brazilian currency is usually in a ragged condition—was pushed toward John.

"Take your money," warned the girl. "Don't overplay your luck."

"Now, what will I do?"

"Wait until either red or black comes up twice in succession, and play the other color. If you lose, double your stake on the same color."

DORA'S was a good system, perhaps the best system devised to beat roulette, but it has ruined thousands who follow it persistently. Her theory was that red, having come up twice, was not so likely to come up three times. If it did, it was less likely to come up four times. If it did, it was almost certain not to turn up five times.

Unfortunately for her system, the statisticians who study the tables at Monte Carlo, year in and year out, can show you that black has occurred thirty-two times in succession, while red has turned up thirty-six times consecutively. Since neither John nor Dora was aware of this, they played confidently and successfully.

An hour rolled by, and the pack of tattered bank notes in front of John grew to formidable proportions. Dora helped herself, again and again, and lost, but luck finally perched on her shoulder, also. Their faces were red, their eyes burned and glittered. Dame Fortune had caused them to forget that the girl wished to escape from this gilded prison, and the man intended to accomplish it for her.

Other players had not been so lucky, and the crowd around the table was gradually thinning out. A few professional gamblers were boldly plunging on Littleton's luck. Seeing the success he was having, they played the black and the red when he did.

The croupier turned uneasy glances toward him, and a gray-bearded manager hovered about uncomfortably. The bank was now losing heavily with each bet made by Littleton, for there were no win-

nings from unfortunate players to offset the gains made by the American.

Dora, whose knowledge of the character of the institution caused her to keep her eyes open, saw the gray-whiskered one nod imperceptibly toward the croupier. Curiously enough, the ball immediately fell into a red hole and a package of notes placed on the black by Littleton and Dora and their followers was raked avidly in by the bank.

"Time to quit, kid," she murmured.

"Not yet," replied Littleton, the lust of conquest on him.

Dora dared not argue with him, since it was her business to encourage him to play, but with the sharp point of her French slipper she kicked him neatly in the ankle.

The pain caused him to start, glance sharply at the girl, and remember their project.

"Enough for to-night," he exclaimed aloud and gathered up the profusion of currency which lay in front of him. He stuffed his pockets until he bulged like a scarecrow, and still he wasn't able to pack it all away.

Dora also had won, though not so heavily. She disposed of her winnings by the simple process of stuffing them into the bosom of her evening gown.

"Let us go to the supper room. You can change that money into bills of larger denomination at the cashier's. Pardon me——"

She broke off because she had seen the gray-bearded manager beckon from across the room. While John was changing his money, Dora interviewed the manager.

She returned smiling, took Littleton by the arm, and led him downstairs into a very dainty supper room.

"How much did you win, kid?" she asked, as they seated themselves at a snowy table.

"Hundreds and hundreds of thousands of these reis things, but I don't know how much in real money. I think it is in the neighborhood of a thousand dollars."

"Well, take a good look at it while you've got it. I was given my instructions that time I left you. The manager said to see that you bought wine and drank it, and then returned to the tables. They want that thousand back."

"Not from me," declared Littleton. "I know when I am well off."

"There would be nothing to it if you went back. They would see that nobody played at your table, and the croupier would do funny things to that little ball of his. I told you the game was more or less on the level. This time it will be less so."

"Then we shall have to make our getaway now."

"How?"

"I was looking around when I came downstairs and noted the arrangements at the front door."

"There are two porters, a doorkeeper, and a hat-check man at the door," said Dora. "I have sized that exit up often. No chance. You couldn't handle four of them."

"No," replied John; "but suppose I were to go out with you and pass on about fifty thousand of this funny money to each one of them—do you think we could get away?"

The girl's eyes gleamed with excitement. "I bet we could. These fellows would murder their grandmothers for that much money."

"Where are your wraps?"

"Top floor, in my room. I won't go after them. The night is so warm I won't need them. If there is an automobile outside, and we can get away quick, we might make it. But would you spend all that money just to get me away?"

"If it hadn't been for you I wouldn't have it at all," he declared.

THE waiter had by this time set cold chicken and thin glasses of yellow sparkling wine before them. John lifted his glass and gazed over it at his companion.

"Here's to our unconventional acquaintance and a happy ending," he toasted.

Dora touched her lips to the wine, but regarded him tenderly. She was a very charming vision with her flushed cheeks, bright gray eyes, and snowy neck and shoulders.

"Here's to the most perfect gentleman I ever met."

John had often shuddered at the phrase, "a perfect gentleman," as he heard it in street cars and restaurants of Boston. Coming from Dora, it sounded to him like an accolade. The fizzing wine sent pleasant shivers through him. He began to thrill with excitement.

"Now, for our plan of campaign. We start to walk out the front door. If nobody stops us, well and good. If the porter tries to hold us up, I slip him a bundle of bills. While he is counting it, we'll jump into a taxi and be on our way. If two or three interfere, I'll shell out other big green rolls. I don't think we'll have any trouble."

"But suppose we do?"

"Then we'll force our way out. How about a window?"

"Every last one of them is barred. They want to know who enters and who leaves."

"Then there is nothing for it but the front door."

"And suppose there isn't a taxi outside?"

"Of course there must be. There was a string of them when I came in."

John pushed back his chair, and Dora did likewise.

"Don't show any excitement," he warned, as they strolled slowly out of the supper room which was on the ground floor and opened into the front hall.

"Did you check anything?" asked the girl.

"Just my straw hat."

"Get it. A bareheaded man will attract more attention than a woman without a hat."

John stopped at the check room, presented a brass disk, and received his hat. With Dora on his arm, he moved nonchalantly toward the front door. Just as it seemed as if he would make it unquestioned, a huge mulatto porter appeared in front of him. He spoke volubly in Portuguese. John made to push by him, but a big yellow hand was laid on his chest.

"Slip the money to him quick, kid," warned Dora. "He'll have a crowd in a second."

John winked portentously at the colored man and offered him a whole handful of the tattered Brazilian bank notes. With a wide grin the porter grasped the imposing-looking bribe, stepped aside, and they were out in the velvet, tropic night.

A carriage starter bowed to them respectfully.

"Taxi, senhor?"

"Si! Si!" exclaimed the girl.

A large red touring car, looking foolish with a taximeter perched upon its windshield, drew up at the curb.

THE starter opened the door with a bow, Dora stepped in, and that instant there was an uproar in the club hallway. The mulatto porter rushed onto the sidewalk, followed by a waiter and the gray-whiskered manager and Dom Pedro himself.

A shrieking and chattering in Portuguese rent the air. The starter, galvanized by what he heard, exclaimed:

"Non—non—non!" and made signs for Dora to alight.

The necessity of action almost paralyzed John for a second. He didn't know what to do.

"Quick, kid, quick!" exclaimed Dora. "They're after us."

Forgetting the bribery plan, John suddenly shot out his right fist and caught the starter on the point of the jaw. The man swung completely around and flopped on the sidewalk. The young American leaped into the car, and at the same second Dora thrust her hand into her bosom, drew forth a handful of loot, and forced it upon the amazed chauffeur, screaming at him:

"Andamo—vamos! Pronto—pronto!"

The red car leaped forward just in time to avoid the rush of attachés from the Excelsior.

Those Rio Janeiro chauffeurs deserve a chapter to themselves. They are either Indian or mulatto or both. They are born with the speed mania. They operate automobiles as though they feared to live. This particular specimen attained forty miles an hour in ten seconds, in another ten he was doing sixty. Down the main avenue he darted and, swinging

around by the Munroe Palace, turned into the ocean-front boulevard, where seven or eight miles of perfect road and no speed regulations stretched away before him.

A violent jounce of the car caused Dora to be hurled against John, and without volition his arm closed around her. She snuggled against him, with a sigh of content.

"Gee! You certainly are a wonderful feller," she declared.

Whether it was the excitement or the wine, or the rush of cool wind past his ears, John did not notice the language in which the sentiment was couched, but he did appreciate its meaning.

"It wasn't anything. We had practically no trouble," John declared in his most casual manner. "Why, I thought we'd have a real fight getting you out."

Suddenly from far behind them came a sharp report. At almost the same instant there was a loud bang, apparently right under them. The chauffeur jammed down his brakes, and the car stopped within a few yards.

"Good Lord! They fired at us and hit a tire," exclaimed John. "We're not out of the woods yet."

The chauffeur had leaped from his seat and gone to look at one of his rear tires. A second shot rang out and then a third. The chauffeur crossed the street in one bound, leaped a low fence, and disappeared in the shrubbery of somebody's garden. He did value his life.

The rapid approach of another auto could be heard.

"Oh, I've got to go back," exclaimed Dora in a whisper. "Beat it, kid, the way the chauffeur did. I'm all they want. You get the American minister to-morrow."

"They won't get you back," declared John rather impotently. "I won't let them have you."

"But they've got guns, and you haven't a thing."

The conversation was shut off by the arrival of the pursuing car. Two men in evening dress, carrying gleaming revolvers, alighted. They were Dom Pedro and the manager of the gambling rooms.

"Senhor," said Dom Pedro suavely, "you have abused our hospitality. You win vast sums of our money, and you steal our most charming *artiste*. The money is yours, and we have nothing against you, but the lady——"

"This girl is an American citizen, and she is not going back to your club," declared John. "You don't dare shoot an American citizen on a public thoroughfare of Rio Janeiro, and you'll have to do it to get Miss Dora."

Dom Pedro grinned with amusement.

"We do not shoot anybody, my young friend. We fire the revolvers to blow up the tires and stop the automobile. That is all. While our servants hold you tight, we remove this young lady. It is no trouble. *Ho-la!* Manuel, José, Pedro!"

From the car came the chauffeur and two club attendants. John looked wildly around for a weapon, and his eye rested upon the crank of the auto lying in the bottom of the tonneau.

AS he straightened up with the rod of steel in his hand, he saw the headlights of an auto rapidly approaching from the opposite direction.

His opponents saw it also and began talking together.

"When this car comes fairly near, Dora, yell as loud as you can. If they're human, they'll stop at a woman's scream."

Dora gripped his hand, as a signal she understood.

When the car was a hundred feet away she emitted the most bloodcurdling yell that the Bay of Rio de Janeiro had ever been asked to echo.

It worked like magic. The approaching car hastily stopped, and three or four men piled out.

"What's the trouble here?" "What's up?" "Who's dead?" came a chorus of inquiries in English. John recognized, with a burst of joy, that the nocturnal tourists were Sullivan, Mahoney and others from his own office.

"American girl being kidnaped," he cried. "Hurry up, you fellows. I'm Littleton of the Electric Company."

The newcomers surrounded the red car and peered interestedly at Dora.

"Pretty good work for your first day in Rio," remarked Sullivan. "Who would you like murdered?"

Dom Pedro bustled forward, his revolver now reposing in his hip pocket.

"Senhor Sullivan, I implore you," he exclaimed. "Reason with this compatriot of yours. You are an old patron of our establishment, and you know that this young woman should go back with us. Didn't we pay her expenses from America and offer her every advantage an *artiste* could desire?"

"Young lady," asked Mr. Sullivan, "want to go back to the Excelsior?"

"Not on your life!" exclaimed Dora. "They'll have to kill me first."

"And me!" declared John fervently.

"Dom Pedro," began Mr. Sullivan rather floridly, "my heart bleeds for you. This young lady doesn't want to go back, and, as she is an American, what she says goes with us. If she owes you any money, we shall see that it is paid to you; but if you want her, you will have to beat up several of your very best patrons."

"Mr. Sullivan," declared Dom Pedro, with equal politeness, "if you make a point of it, of course we shall permit the girl to go. What she owes us is nothing. I would not offend any American in Rio. As for the girl, she was not suited to our needs. Let her go."

Whereupon the gamblers marched with great dignity to their car and in a few seconds were whirling down the road. The chauffeur of the red car now appeared mysteriously and began making vociferous demands.

"Wants to know who's going to pay him for the ruined tire," translated Mr. Sullivan.

"Tell him to take it out of the wad I gave him," suggested Dora airily. Her spirits had soared with her escape, and she was as buoyant and impudent as she probably was wont to be on Broadway.

"Well," remarked Mr. Sullivan to Mr. Mahoney, "guess they don't need us any longer. It's lucky we hove in sight, though; you didn't have a dog's chance with those guys if they got you alone."

"I appreciate most deeply what you did for us most," said Littleton. "Can you tell us what to do now? This young lady escaped with nothing but the clothes she is wearing, and she doesn't know anybody in the city. Where can I take her until she decides what she wants to do?"

"Better take her to your own hotel for the remainder of the night, and put her under the protection of the manager. In the morning the young lady can purchase a new outfit, buy a ticket for New York, or do anything else she desires, except venture alone anywhere near the Excelsior Club."

"Are they likely to try to kidnap her?"

"I don't think so, but I wouldn't answer for her safety if she puts herself into their clutches."

"Don't you lose any sleep over that," exclaimed Dora. "If Dom Pedro ever sees me again, it'll be with one of those telescopes you look through at the moon."

The young engineers laughed heartily, climbed into their car, and departed. Dora and John prodded the chauffeur of their crimson chariot and made him understand the Hotel Republica was their goal. He began to replace the tire.

A very matter-of-fact clerk expressed no surprise whatever at the rather disheveled appearance of a heavily rouged lady, without wraps, assigned her a room, and she departed, promising to meet Littleton at breakfast. He then called the manager and Littleton explained the situation.

WHEN he reached his room, Littleton spread out on the bed the bundles of currency which he drew from all his pockets. After the copious bribing in which he had indulged, he did not expect to find a very imposing total, but the figures on the bills astounded him, even though he knew that one thousand meant only thirty cents in real money. The total was over six thousand milreis, which reduced to our money amounted to over one thousand dollars, a very pleasant profit for an exciting evening.

Littleton presently slept peacefully and profoundly, and before he knew it the porter was pounding on his door, informing him that it was time to get up. As he shaved, John thought rather uncom-

fortably of Dora. He remembered the thick rouge of the music hall, the blackened brows and eyelids, and the evening gown in which she had accompanied him on their wild ride. He remembered also the embrace in the taxi, and his arm tingled agreeably at the remembrance. He wondered how Dora had interpreted that, and what as a gentleman he was expected to do.

Rather self-consciously he entered the dining room and cast his eye rapidly over the dozen guests in search of her.

"Expecting me to wear my war paint to breakfast?" asked a pleasant female voice, directly in front of him.

There, smiling demurely, was a totally different Dora from the one he had been expecting. She wore a trim white morning costume, as modest as it was neat. Not a vestige of rouge or pencil was visible upon a sweet and saucy countenance.

Those gray eyes, whose honesty had convinced him through their disguise the night before, were exceedingly potent now, and John suddenly became embarrassed, as he dropped into the chair opposite this entirely unknown young person.

"Confess, now, you laid awake half the night wondering how you were going to get rid of the awful music-hall girl you were entangled with," said Dora, as she sipped her coffee and gazed roguishly at him over the rim of the cup.

"Where did you get the clothes?" he asked, preferring not to answer her.

"Why, I found that I had over six hundred dollars left of my winnings last night, and I sent half of it up to the Excelsior early this morning, with the request that they accept it in payment of my debts and send down my luggage. It was here in an hour, with a polite note from that scoundrel Dom Pedro."

"Say, you don't even talk the way you did last night," said Littleton who was devouring his charming companion with his eyes.

"Never use slang before lunch," she declared. "A girl in the show business has to speak two languages, English and Broadway; take your choice."

John, whose Boston upbringing had caused him to wince when he thought of the expressions she had used the night before, beamed like a June morning.

Dora smiled understandingly.

"May I ask, what are your plans?" he inquired gravely.

"Sure. There's a boat for New York in ten days. I have money enough to go back second cabin and to live here at this hotel until sailing time."

"And when you get to New York?"

"Go back to work. If I can't find anything in the show business, I'll work in a restaurant or a laundry, but no more foreign travel for mine."

"And you will let me see you every day until sailing time?"

"My boy, you're elected. You are the only man I know in Rio, and if you show any inclination I won't say you nay."

THERE isn't much more to tell. Below the equator things happen quickly. Given a pretty girl and an attractive young man, propinquity and a tropical moon, and there is nothing to it.

Dora was an actress and a woman. Discovering that her Broadwayisms jarred the sensitive plant, she laid them away in lavender and was careful to speak the language of Boston. Of course she was not perfect in it, for no one brought up in New York can ever speak "Bostonese" perfectly.

John found her more adorable every moment and waited the sailing day, with more and more alarm. The night before they were walking on the sea front, where royal palms nodded in the soft and velvet breeze from the wonderful bay. The arc lights and the touring cars which darted up and down the wonderful boulevard were all that suggested Northern ways.

John, who a few weeks before, would never have considered any place as home which was not located within sight of the gilded dome of the Massachusetts Statehouse, found himself pouring into willing ears a plea that they live in a pretty bungalow in beautiful Brazil.

And Dora, who had earned her own living long enough to have no illusions about a career, just slipped her hand in his and leaned her head on his shoulder. And their housekeeping fund was the loot from the Excelsior Club.

A Chat With You

ONCE in a while there arrives to this green earth of ours a token from that larger world that we call the universe. Our world is large enough, but the greater worlds that swing in rhythm with us around the sun or other fixed stars are so much larger that we may feel as Rhode Island does toward Texas.

The sun is ninety millions of miles away from us. We swing round it, in an elliptical course, about once a year. Other planets like Mercury are nearer to it and move at a much faster rate. Still others, like somber Saturn and stately Jupiter, are far, far off and make their year in a different fashion. Between the planets there are hurrying bunches of little offshoots—meteorites, perhaps the astronomers call them. On an October night one may see them flashing across the heavens. We call them shooting stars. A golden trail across the midnight blue—and generally the little star is quite burned up before it reaches our earth.

* * * *

ONCE in a while, however, one of them lands, not quite destroyed by fire, and remaining to be a wonder and a sign to such folk as have seen it fall. When it cools off, it turns out to be a round stone. They used to worship these stones as gods; and that is not so strange, either, for they certainly are messengers of some sort from worlds so far beyond our reach, so terribly frozen in the dreadful cold of interstellar space that their appearance here is more or less of a miracle. They come hissing down from the dark heavens, balls of fire, and then a few days later they lie cold and hard, a subject for the geologist.

AND what does he find when he studies them? One might think that these bits of mineral which have traveled so far, these tiny worlds which might have been spawned by Mars or Jupiter, would have in their composition some new substance never seen on earth. It is not so. All these fallen stars, all these stray meteorites which have ever been examined, turn out to be made of the same old elements of which our world is made. Carbon, aluminum, iron, gold, silver, nickel, copper—there is nothing new in them. The whole universe seems, as far as one may discover, to be made out of the same stuff. It is quite likely that every atom of cosmic dust contains within its tiny sphere the potentialities of all the things that go to make our world.

* * * *

THERE is a saying that history repeats herself. Whether this be true or not, it is certainly true that nature does repeat herself—over and over. The star may find its image in the tiny snowflake; the leaf carries in its tracery some suggestion of the skeleton of the man. Just as it is true of material things, it must be more or less true of the things one cannot touch or see. If all worlds are made of the same world stuff, then all humans must be made of the same human stuff. It is a curious and interesting thought. Every woman carries within her the possibilities of a Cleopatra or a Joan of Arc. Every man has in him some of the same elements that made Lincoln, Judas, Nero and Cæsar. Partly his fate and stern necessity, partly his own will decree which he will be.

THE interesting and hopeful thing about life is that any man—being composed of the same elements as any other man—may aspire to anything. The sons of peasants arrive to be great scholars. A child brought up in a wilderness shack turns out a President of the Republic. A king and queen, born to the purple, die miserably in a public execution. The son of an impoverished Corsican woman becomes the master of all Europe, and almost of the world. We are all made, more or less, of the same cosmic dust. Some have a little more of this and some of that. How we fare in life is how the cards may fall to us, and then how we play them. All life is an adventure, and death may prove the greatest of adventures.

We hope you liked the adventure stories in this issue. There are better ones coming in the next.

The Popular Magazine

In the Next Number, May 20, 1927

In the Tall Timber	HOLMAN DAY
Lugubrious Luke	THOMAS BOYD
The Wedding in Gulkana	CAPTAIN RALPH R. GUTHRIE
Points West In Four Parts—Part IV.	B. M. BOWER
Star Light, Star Bright	ROBERT McBLAIR
The Pearl that Came Home	H. DE VERE STACPOOLE
The Broadening Trail In Five Parts—Part V.	DON McGREW
A Very Special Case	ALLISON W. IND
Leguerre of the Lost Division A Diplomatic Exchange	HOWARD FITZALAN
Ed Grogan's Escape	FITZHUGH GREEN
Flendship Mo' Bettah	ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE
The Nine of Spades	PHILIP KIRBY

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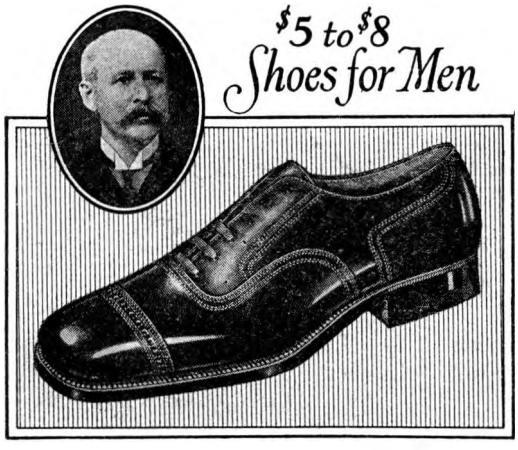

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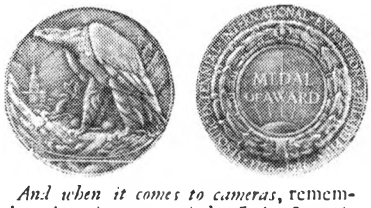

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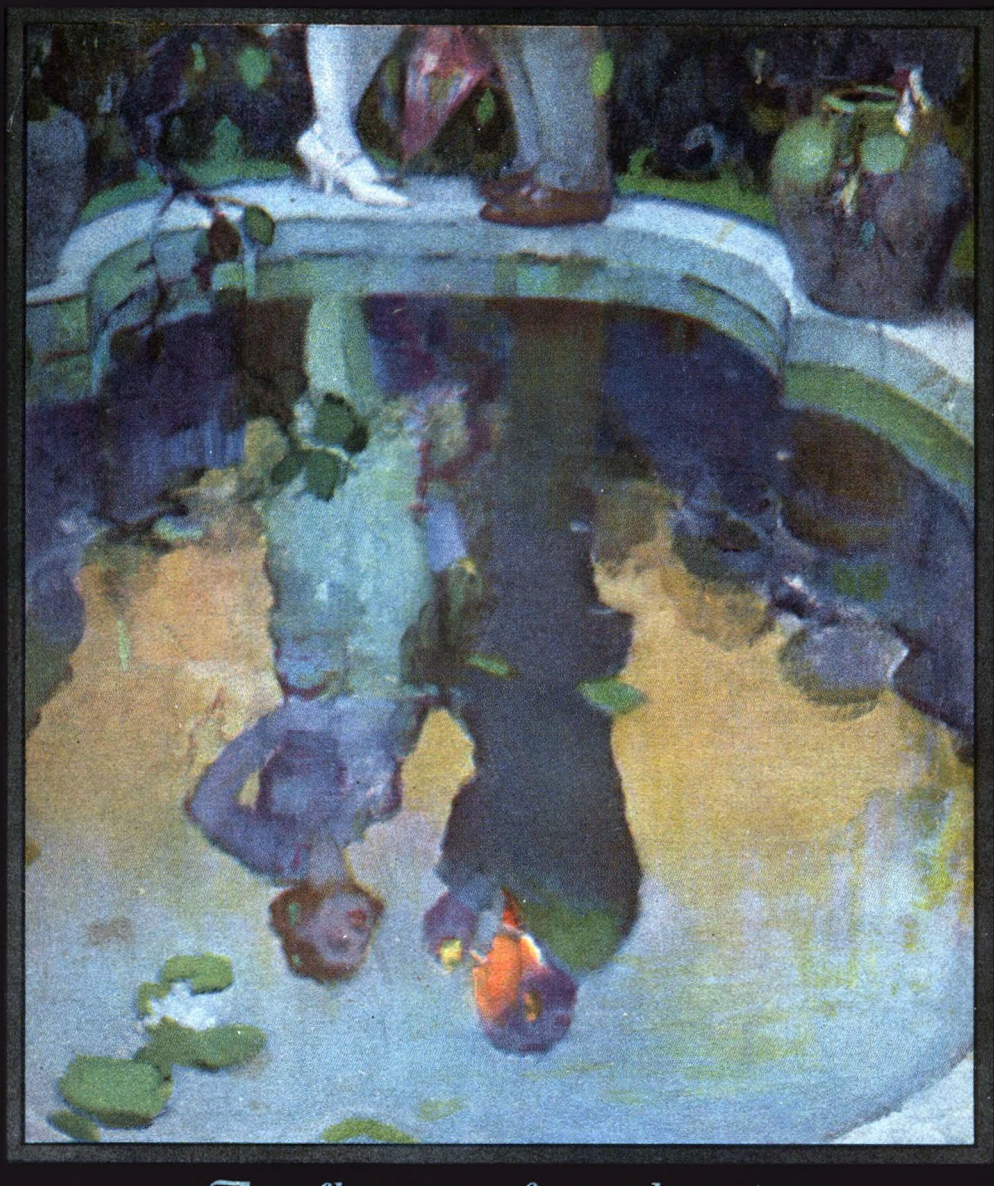

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