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FIRST DEC. NUMBER

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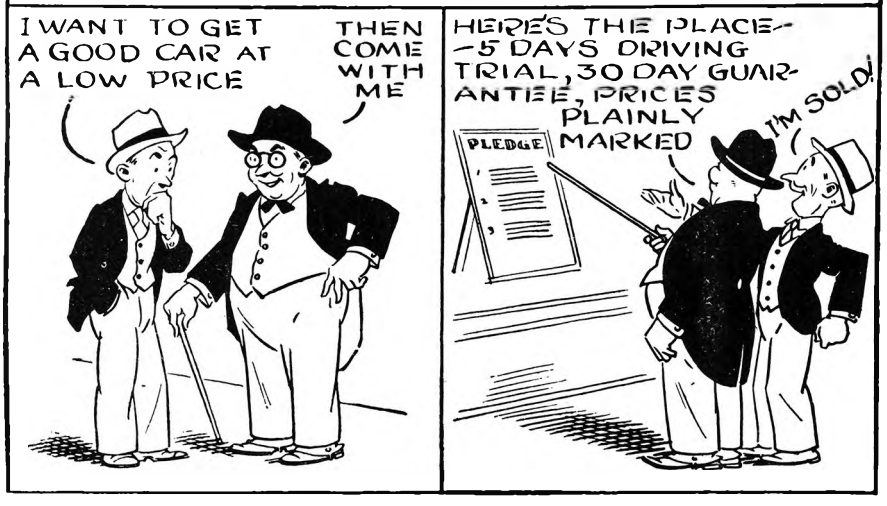

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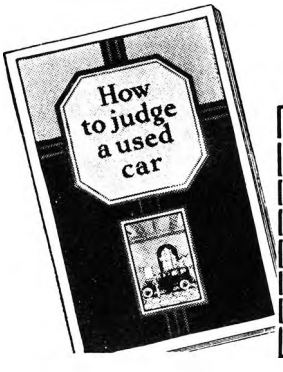

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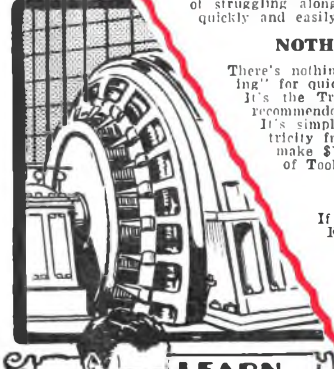

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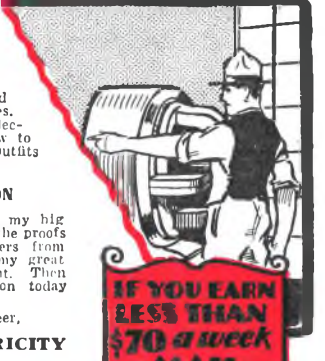

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By Fred MacIsaac

Master teller of glamorous romantic-adventure tales.

Volume XCIII Number 6

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

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CONTENTS FOR FIRST DECEMBER NUMBER

Twice-a-month publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Copyright, 1928, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1928, by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain. Entered as Second-class Matter, December 22, 1927, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $4.72. Foreign, $5.40. This issue dated December 7, 1928.

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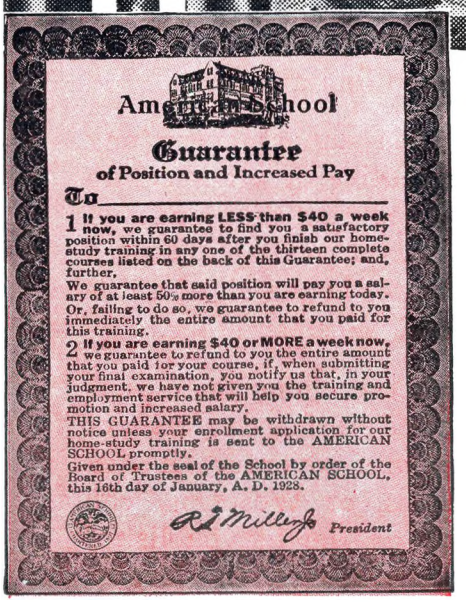

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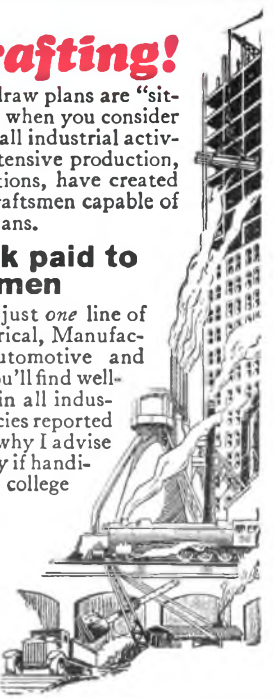

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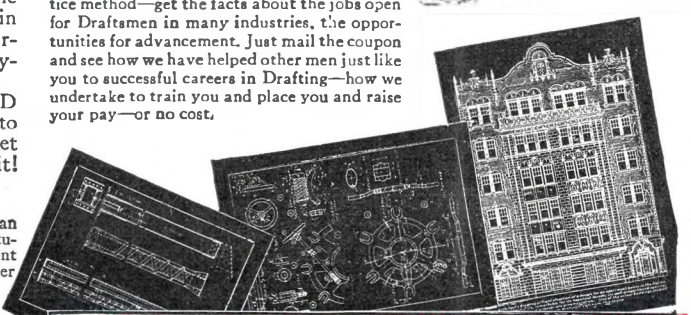

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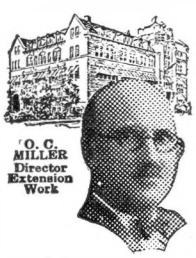

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SECRETARY OF STATE KELLOGG was returning from Europe, where he had been on one of the most important missions undertaken by an American statesman since the Great War.

As he arrived on the dock to board his steamer, he said eagerly:

"I want something exciting, something to divert my mind. Have you any good detective stories?"

The newspaper account does not tell what followed, but I have a very shrewd idea that they gave him detective stories which bore the mystic C-H trade-mark on their covers.

C-H, you know, stands for Chelsea House, and Chelsea House books stand for good reading the world over.

At any rate that seems to be the opinion of a big Eastern banker, who called me up the other day and asked me to recommend some Chelsea House novels that had the South Seas for their setting. He said that he was going to make a voyage down there and wanted to do some reading en route that would keep him awake.

And then almost every day some executive or other comes to some of the thousands of dealers who carry Chelsea House books in search of a rattling good Western story.

So, whether your taste runs to detective stories, or stories of romance and adventure in distant climes, or Westerns, you will find on the list published by Chelsea House, the largest and best established publishing concern in the country, the one book that meets your need.

I am constantly surprised at the high standards and low prices maintained by the publishers of these stirring yarns, which appear under the Chelsea House brand for the first time in book form.

I look forward, as I know you do, to long nights this winter with a radio crooning away in the other room, and my nose buried in some one of these sure-fire Chelsea House offerings.

KILLING JAZZ, a Detective Story, by Christopher B. Booth. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

Certainly the cards were stacked against him. It seemed as though Loren had no chance to untangle himself from the fatal web of circumstance which wound round and round him.

First he was implicated in one of the strangest deaths which ever opened a thrilling detective story. It was caused by nothing more unusual than the sudden blaring of a jazz record. But it came at a time and in a place when it was nothing less than fatal, stopping short the weak heart of an old man.

Then there followed a murder where again everything pointed to Loren as the criminal.

If you read Mr. Booth's "A Seaside Mystery," you will remember well Detective Jim Bliss, who, with just plain common sense, was able to solve the mystery in that novel.

Well, Jim steps into the picture again in "Killing Jazz," and does his stuff once more in an unforgetable manner.

(Continued on page following)

GOOD READING—*Continued*

"Killing Jazz" is one of those detective stories that just won't let you alone.

SQUATTER'S TREASURE, a Western Story, by Emart Kinsburn. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

It was the strangest of objects, that totem pole in the window of a curio store on Market Street in San Francisco.

"It was no more than four feet in height, and not over ten inches in diameter. It was carved and stained with bright reds and yellows and greens. . . . A large insect, crudely carved, topped the pole. The most astute entomologist would have been stumped to name the species." So the author describes it.

Now it so happened that this totem pole, stowed away in the pack of a hobo, was the clew to a treasure the search for which takes you through the colorful life of a Western construction camp, which Mr. Kinsburn knows so well.

Of course, as in all of this novelist's works, it takes you through chapter after chapter of thrilling adventure, and, by the way, introduces you to a most charming girl.

"Squatter's Treasure" is a priceless novel.

THE ISLAND WOMAN, an Adventure Story, by Captain A. E. Dingle. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

Who is there who loves the quick movement of a true adventure story who does not love the works of Captain Dingle? There are few who can write sea stories as grippingly and realistically as the captain, and in "The Island Woman" we have him at his best. The captain takes you straight off to the swarming life of one of the remote Japanese group of islands.

He gives you a front-row seat as spectator of as soul-satisfying a rough-and-tumble fight as modern fiction has depicted.

The thin walls of a saki shop tremble at the thunderous goings on of this gigantic contest between two great hairy Russians and a young, two-fisted redhead named Jim Gurney.

Jim was just a plain, fighting, clean-up man, and found his services very much in demand on the island where pearl pirates and outlaws made their habitation, under the leadership of a woman.

This is no book for a pacifist. There is enough fighting in it to make glad the god of battles. So, my friends, if you want placid, peaceful reading, have nothing to do with "The Island Woman." But if, on the other hand you——

RIDING FER CROSS T, a Western Story, by George Gilbert. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

You read "The Quick-draw Kid," and "Cowgirls—Plus" and "Hidden Herds." You bet you did. For if you are anything like me, you have a way of grabbing off every Western that has the name George Gilbert on the cover!

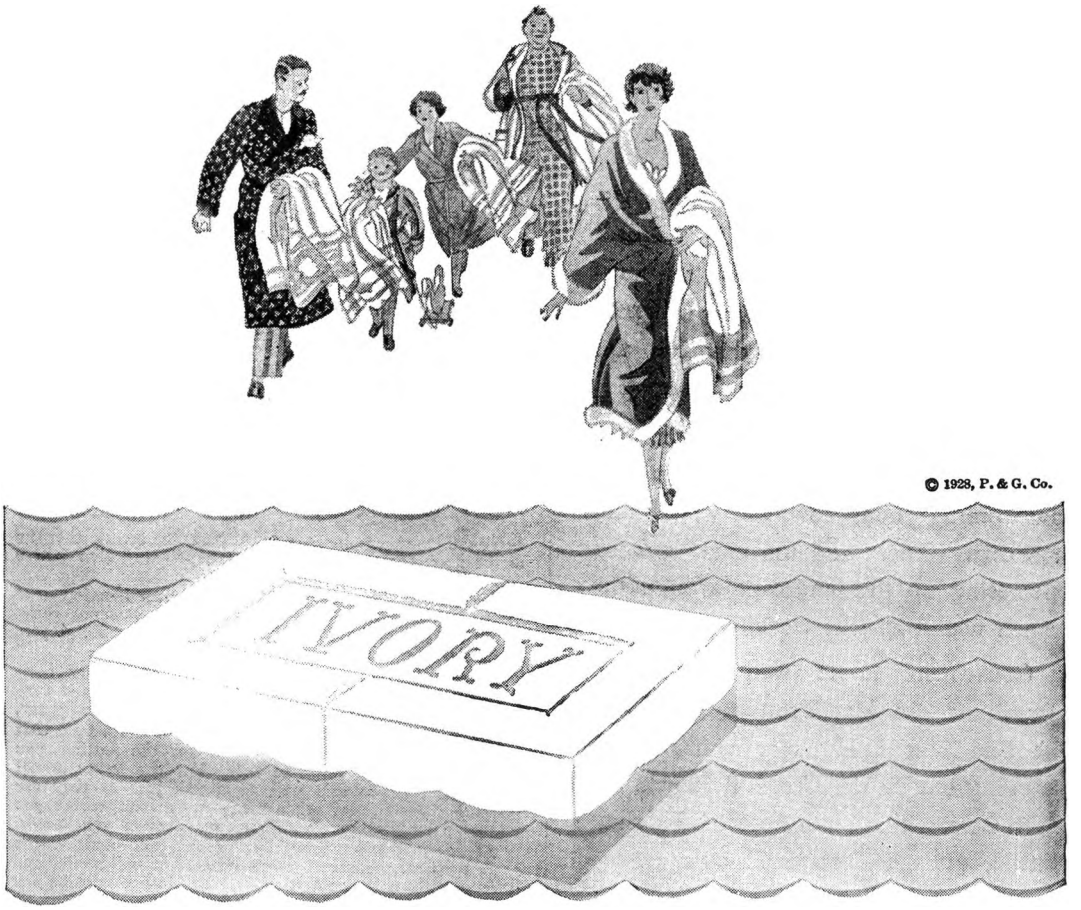
Mr. Gilbert tells this story in the person of "Snubby" Bricker, an up-and-coming young cowman, who found too many fences and too many women cluttering up the landscape around the ranch where he was working.

Consequently, he went riding in search of old Mr. Trouble. And did he find him? He sure enough did, hanging out on the Cross T Ranch. In fact, he ran that snub nose of his right into a mess of hot-paced adventure—the sort that makes you sit up in your armchair as though it were indeed a puncher's saddle.

You see, Cross T Ranch was owned by a girl, Donna Ynez by name, and as it was a mighty valuable property, there were quite a bunch of low-down characters willing to take the most desperate chances to get Cross T away from Donna.

But they had Snubby to reckon with, and they soon found that he was quite a handful.

I had thought that Mr. Gilbert had done his durndest when he gave us such books as those mentioned in the first paragraph, but in "Ridin' fer Cross T" he has outdone even his best.



The royal road to breakfast

Here is the jovial way to a brisk morning appetite:

Snug and warm as the bed may be, bravely fling off the covers. Now plunge into coolish water, to scatter night's cobwebs away. With the first splash you're awake. With the second splash, you salute the day with a smile.

Now is the time to plop a cake of Ivory Soap into your bathtub sea. Fill sponge or cloth with creamy, cleansing foam and massage the crinkles away —or rub the friendly cake soothingly on your skin. Either method succeeds when you use Ivory. Then, as you slip back into the water, Ivory rinses away without the waste of a precious morning minute. Of course, Ivory never dampens a whistle or halts a song, by sending its user groping along the bathtub bottom—Ivory floats!

When you're out of your Ivory tub, the breakfast aroma that steals upwards is the finest perfume in the world!

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The Popular Magazine

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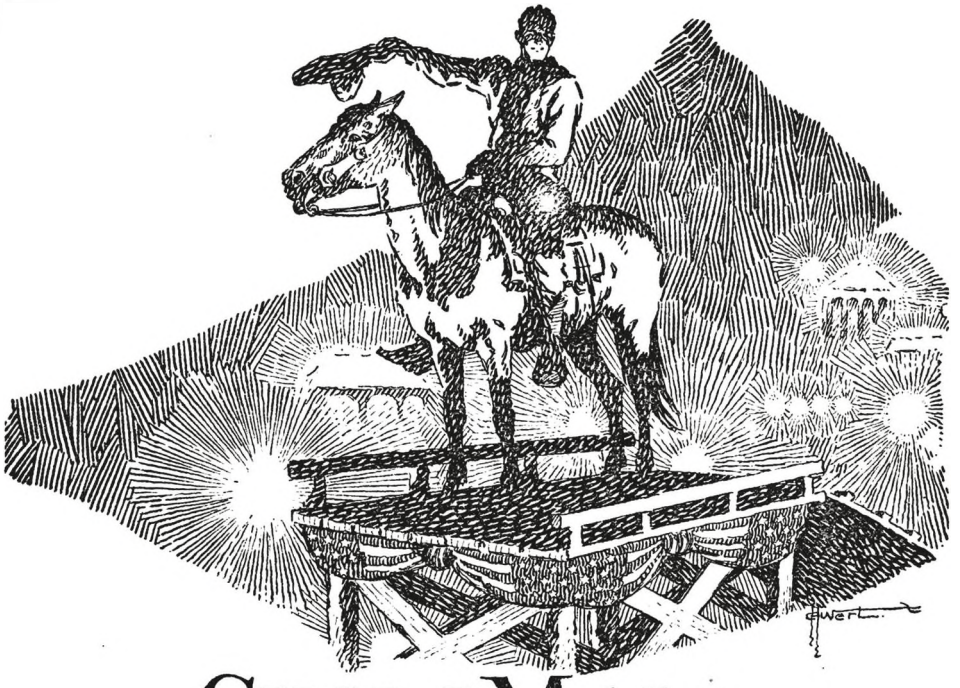


SHOW MAN

By Clay Perry

Who wrote "Crutch Freeman" and other stories

About a mysterious roughrider who excelled at log rolling, horsemanship, and heart winning

CHAPTER I.

PARKING SPACE.

CAROL KIMBALL sat in the driving seat of her big, glistening roadster, which was headed in at the curb, directly in front of the Altamont House. She was waiting for her chum, Harriet Lester.

It was characteristic of Carol that she had placed herself and her expensive car at the service of her friend, just as it was characteristic of her to preëmpt space plainly marked "No Parking," while she waited for Harriet to do a few minutes' shopping after the latter's busy day in the office of the Kimball paper mill, where she was employed.

Carol had insisted on driving Harriet to her home, out on the Willow Bend Road, for she knew that Harriet's free hours were very precious to her.

It did not detract from the scenery of Main Street to have the shining-haired girl in the shining car occupying the open space in the heart of the business district of Kimball.

Carol was one of the eloquent reasons why gentlemen prefer blondes, with her light-golden hair, entirely natural, her peachblow complexion—the envy of any drug store—and a chic, snappy, general appearance which spoke of life and fire. Particularly in the dark, violet eyes.

From those eyes she surveyed, coolly if disapprovingly, the knot of male idlers on the hotel piazza who were taking advantage of the rest it gave their eyes to look over the poor little rich girl whose father almost owned the town, who chose to act as chauffeur for a friend and who did not believe in signs.

She did not see or hear the approach of another individual of jaunty appearance who also chose to park beside her huge roadster, until he had halted his "four-cylinder runabout" close beside her—a beautiful, sleek, dainty horse.

The man was garbed in plain, leather chaps, a broad-brimmed Stetson, and wore spurs which close inspection would reveal as very dull though shining. There were also high-heeled boots, a light, flannel shirt and a knotted bandanna about his neck which—again—close inspection would reveal as of silk, but which had a pattern closely resembling the well-known red-cotton kind which became known, country wide, when the Bull Moose movement sprang into being years ago.

His costume evidently was meant for service rather than mere ostentation, although it was bizarre enough in Kimball, which was far from cow country. The rider, himself, was no cowboy, though he had been one.

He was Ranny Towner, proprietor and star performer of the Roughrider and Diving Horse Show which had come to Kimball to become an added attraction at the annual world's championship log-rolling (roleo) tournament.

Across Main Street, between the Altamont House and the Kimball State Bank, hung a huge banner which read:

WELCOME TO KIMBALL
AUG. 8-14
WHERE ROLEO MEETS RODEO

The sign betokened that during the next week a grand carnival of exciting outdoor sports was to be held, the roleo the main attraction, as it should be in this lumbering and logging country, with a rodeo of sorts and an Indian pageant of other sorts thrown in for good measure.

It promised a big jamboree, with contests between the kings of white water, footing it to a finish on peeled pine logs at Willow Bend Basin, and roughriders busting bronchos and riding the two famous diving horses, Cubby and Mince, for a forty-foot leap and splash off a tower erected right above the basin.

Log riding, bronchobusting and Indian powwow all rolled together insured a wow of a carnival which would put the town of Kimball on the map even more than it was, as the home of the great Kimball Company, forest products.

The excitement of the impending events was already in the air. When Ranny Towner rode up and flung the reins over the head of his horse at the curb, all eyes switched to him, and even Carol Kimball turned her head to look over. She recognized the horse as Cubby, champion diving horse of the world, as it was claimed and undisputed.

Cubby's velvety nose sniffed inquir-

ingly at the polished front fender of her car, and his tongue thrust out to lick from it some fancied flavor—or perhaps he thought he recognized in its Arabian sand shade some of the same blood that ran in his veins.

Cubby rolled an inquiring eye at her and she smiled, already deeply intrigued, for she loved horses. Harriet had described Towner's remuda to her in glowing terms. The outfit was installed in the big barn out at the old farm where Harriet lived, and had been there for two days, making ready for the carnival.

Carol had plenty of time and opportunity to look over Cubby, for its rider seemed to have overlooked her completely and, though he sat within arm's reach of her, did not give a glance in her direction. Instead he raised slightly in his stirrups to seek a face in the knot of men on the hotel piazza.

Among them was the principal cause for the knot being knotted—"Red" Rorty, Kimball's most famous, most notorious, naughty and nervy inhabitant. Towner called to him.

Red blinked a pair of somewhat bleary eyes beneath almost invisible eyebrows, regarded Towner insolently and made no answer or move.

"I'd like to talk to you for just a minute," Towner remarked, slowly and distinctly. "Somebody says that you can ride."

"What?"

Red Rorty's close-clipped, sandy hair seemed to bristle all about his hat brim. His face grew as red as its crop of yellow freckles would permit. He thrust his bullet head forward and clicked his big white teeth together as he snapped the question back at Towner.

"I said, I'm looking for a man that can ride. One of my best wranglers has got taken sick and I've got to send a sub in for him. I need another rider. There's a hundred in it, on the spot."

"Whaddye mean, 'ride'?" demanded Rorty, as if a personal insult had been offered him.

"A horse," drawled Towner patiently. "A horse with a saddle on top of him."

Red Rorty rose to his feet and began to swear like a trooper—which was what he once had been. Carol Kimball sat up, straight and suddenly, her eyes snapping as she glared at the cursing lumberjack. Then her little hand came down hard on the horn button. A hoarse, deep-throated hoot blared directly under Cubby's ruminating nose.

Cubby went up in the air as if springs had been released under each foot. He came down on his hind hoofs, his forefeet pawing the air as if to beat off a flock of braying jackasses that had exploded under him.

Cubby's rider, taken by surprise, snatched up his reins with one hand, slanted his body backward and with the other hand reached out and slapped the rearing horse along the neck. As he did so he spoke to him reproachfully, as if Cubby were an obstreperous boy.

Cubby wheeled and gave a long, powerful leap away from the car. Towner curbed him, continued to slap him sharply, and after two leaps and a fox trot sidewise Cubby decided to come back to earth. He brought up, quivering and wide-eyed, eying the automobile askance.

Tonwer drove him directly back toward the car, and though Cubby shied and whistled his alarm, the rider, petting and prodding and talking to the animal, made his wishes known so well that Cubby stood once again with his nose close to the fender.

Carol Kimball had been surprised, if not frightened, by the result of her hammering the horn button to drown out the flood of profanity Red Rorty had released. Carol was not frightened of anything—never had been. She simply was astonished. She had not thought what the horse might do.

Her anger at Rorty was impersonal.

She hated to hear a man swear like that —though she could rip out a "damn" or a "devil" herself on occasions, with eloquence such as it is hard to find in other words.

She held out a hand coaxingly to the trembling, startled Cubby, and pursed up her lips to attract his attention, still without much interest in the rider. Cubby conquered his alarm. He had been taught to do many different things and this invitation brought its corresponding action. He nuzzled Carol's palm, softly, blowing his breath, explosively as he sniffed, then seemed to find the smell and touch of the pink-and-white hand reassuring and nibbled at it.

"Kiss the lady for me and tell her you forgive her," came a voice from above Cubby's bent head.

Carol looked up, then, and her glance met a pair of eyes which were as much like polished steel as the nose of the horse was like velvet. It gave her a distinct shock, because there was firm and uncompromising reproach in those eyes. The unwavering gaze told her she ought to ask pardon.

Carol Kimball was not accustomed to being put in the wrong by any one, man, woman, child or horse, and she became instantly resentful, the more so because she knew she had been careless. She really was sorry she had frightened the beautiful, intelligent animal which fumbled affectionately at her palm.

Then Cubby reached out as his master spoke, and nibbled tenderly at her cheek.

"That's right, Cubby!" came the drawling voice. "What did she say?"

Cubby wiggled an ear at the question.

"She did? I'm surprised. No lady talks like that in front of gentlemen."

Cubby shook his head violently. He put a foot on the running board as if to climb into the car.

"Hey, you get out of that automobile!" Towner ordered sternly.

A roar of laughter greeted this, as Cubby backed away in perfect imitation of coy alarm. The loudest laugh came from Rorty, who stood, open mouthed, gaping intently at the girl, man and horse.

Carol flushed rosy red, her eyes darted Towner a look that should have blinded him and would, except that his eyes seemed of that sort of metal which diverts daggers. He grinned a little—only a little. He wheeled Cubby close to the hotel piazza, right on the cement sidewalk and urged him up to where Rorty stood, haw-hawing with mirth somewhat alcoholically inspired.

"Take his hat off for the lady," murmured Towner to the horse.

Cubby snipped Rorty's tilted felt with his teeth and yanked it off the astonished inebriate's head. When Rorty snatched at it Cubby flung his head up, then down, and began to make elaborate bows with the hat.

"To the lady," Towner ordered. Cubby turned and waved the headgear at Carol.

Carol had all she could do to keep from laughing, but she prodded her indignation and kept a straight, severe face.

"You gimme back my hat!" Rorty burst into profanity again.

Towner got off his horse quickly, took the hat from Cubby, walked up to Rorty and, before the angry lumberjack could dodge, he jammed the headgear down over Rorty's eyes so hard his bristling skull came right through the crown.

Then he pushed the heel of his hand, straight-arm, against Rorty's nose and sent him reeling back almost against the plate-glass window of the hotel lobby. Before Rorty could recover Towner stood still closer to him, gripped him by the wrists with fingers that were likewise of the steely temper which seemed to run all through him, held him helpless and drawled slowly:

"Keep your mouth shut, Rorty.

Choke off! If you utter one more cuss word I'll ram it down your throat. That girl don't like it. You know better."

Rorty's mouth was full of felt and the sounds that he made were indistinguishable though furious. Towner grinned, but he was grim about it. Friends and admirers of Rorty's came running toward him and went about separating the combatants; but Towner dropped Rorty's wrists, eluded the clawing hands and sprang into the saddle.

During this time Harriet Lester had come out of the near-by store and was in the seat beside Carol, who started the engine and began backing out.

Towner faced Cubby toward the car. He removed his hat.

"Sorry, miss," he called out to Carol as the car whisked past him. "I didn't go to stir up any such explosion. Hope you'll forgive *me*."

Carol Kimball did not even look at him. She had her lip in her teeth, and she rippled the gears and stepped hard on the gas, and left Towner and Cubby in a swirl of dust and smoke which seemed somehow to express contempt.

Over on the hotel piazza Red Rorty tore the gagging hat brim from his face and struggled wildly in the grip of many men, with profane roars of defiance at Towner. He threatened all manner of unpleasantness to him. Towner waved an impatient and repulsing hand at him.

"Chew your own dirt, Rorty," he said. "I wouldn't let you ride for me. You sound like a mule skinner. I don't believe you can ride."

CHAPTER II.

CAROL SETS THE PACE.

CAROL was furious. Her indignation was expressed in the weight of her little foot on the accelerator as she sped the powerful car out toward Willow Bend; and finally Harriet, though accustomed to Carol's driving, uttered a mild protest.

"I've got to stop at home, you know," she said.

Carol glanced up from the ribbon of the road to which she had frowningly kept her gaze glued, realizing for the first time that the ribbon had held, in its middle, the marks of dainty, sharp-shod hoofs—Cubby's footprints, where he had been driven into town. They were near the gate which led into the old Lester place, a landmark left by modern industry as a memorial to the pioneers who had hewn, out of the virgin forest, homes and farms.

Abel Lester, Harriet's father, had passed it on to his widow and daughter, for which they were grateful, though it meant that Harriet was obliged to work as a stenographer to Henry Kimball, in order to maintain the big place. Her mother did not wish to sell it.

The homestead included a sprawling white farmhouse with a broad piazza facing on the river, a stretch of partly wooded land along the stream, the big barn and some smaller outbuildings. It happened to be the only available place near the Willow Bend Park, Kimball's carnival grounds, where accommodations could be had for horses. The park had bathhouses, a band stand, cottages, refreshment stands and even a temporary garage and filling station but no stables. It served as recreation grounds for Kimball mill employees, except when the roleo week came around—when it became recreation grounds for thousands who flocked to the fun.

Ranny Towner had secured the use of the stables from Mrs. Lester and, by bad luck in losing the services of his cook, who also rode for him, fell into the good luck of being invited to assemble his crew at a table in the big summer kitchen of the Lester home.

Harriet had protested, but her mother had her arguments all polished.

"If you're going to enter the roleo because we need the money—as you've

told me—I'm going to take in tourists. Everybody's doing it and I'll hire an extra girl to help me."

She had her way. It was true that Harriet Lester was going to enter the roleo, but not entirely true that she did it for money. From her father she had inherited, besides her share in the farm, something of the dashing, daring spirit he had had, for he had been woodsman and riverman, rather than farmer.

After a winter in the woods he came down with the drive, and it was an annual thrill, now perpetuated in the roleo, to see the drive come tumbling down the freshet-swollen river, sweep past the houses into the booms at the mills, and the river drivers singing, yodeling, whooping and dancing on the floating timber—and to have her father home.

Harriet had learned to run loose logs when she was twelve, and the rivermen, amused at her audacity and skill, had taught her how to roll them. At twenty she was quite an expert at it. She could swim well, paddle a canoe, ride horseback, dance like a dryad and play tennis or baseball with equal facility.

The roleo bills announced her as the "champion amateur woman log roller of the world," which was probably true. Henry Kimball had lured her to enter the roleo and she knew how much it meant to him to make the event a big success. He had given her a week's vacation with two weeks' pay and the hint:

"You can enter the roleo if you want to. The Thompson sisters from Cloquet are coming, so you won't be alone."

Carol had added her urging and chauffeured her shopping, and offered the bathhouse at the Kimball River cottage for her rolling practice, and altogether was as excited about Harriet's début on the peeled pine as Harriet herself.

This was Friday afternoon. The carnival began Sunday with the Indian pageant, to continue with the preliminary rolling Monday, and for five days thereafter Willow Bend Park and basin would be the Mecca of thousands come to see the swift-footed rollers do their stuff, to see the diving horses, bronchobusting, a sham battle between Indians and cowboys—an idea of Towner's, worked up hurriedly as a surprise stunt. It would all finish on the last day with the finals between the pair of rollers who had come through all the sectional matches, for the championship of the world.

Carol Kimball, poor little rich girl, envied her friend. She would have given her brand-new car—and that meant much to her—to be able to enter the roleo as Harriet was going to do. It was out of the question, of course, for though she was athletic she had not had the run of the river as a girl and knew nothing of the tricks of topping timber in spiked shoes. She did almost everything else that Harriet did, save to swim, and although she had begged for permission to let Harriet tutor her in rolling, Henry Kimball had been adamant against it.

"I need you for bigger game," he told her. "We will have an important crowd up from Chicago for the roleo. You've got to be my hostess. I've chipped in five thousand dollars to make this event a success, because it's good business. I want to give Kimball the name of a championship town. It's advertising, just like our baseball team. I want a Kimball man to win the roleo. Harriet will get a cup as the girl champ of the Northwest. That will have to satisfy you."

Carol listened to reason at last—for one reason because she had an ax to grind, too. She had her cap all set to marry James Herrick, wealthy young stationery manufacturer of Chicago—to Harriet Lester of Kimball.

And now she drove like sixty—or a little better—because she was discovering how much Harriet had begun to ad-

mire this handsome rough rider, Ranny Towner. Already Harriet had been allowed to ride Cubby, and Carol had whisked away from the Altamont House in a double hurry because she desired to get her friend out of range of those steely blue eyes and the husky, drawling voice of Towner—as well as to remove herself from further obligation to him. She wanted no rival for James Herrick in the hectic week to come.

Harriet's remark about stopping at home got its result. Carol tore her eyes from the hoofprints, let up on the gas and turned in at the gate at the reduced speed of thirty miles an hour.

As she turned an inspiration came to her, drawn from those very hoofprints, which were continued in the shaded drive. Her eyes flashed; she gasped and gurgled, half aloud:

"I'll do it!"

"What did you say?"

"I'll slow down a little," giggled Carol. Under her breath she added: "Yes, I'll slow down! I'll speed things up—that's what I'll do. I'll set a pace for Mister Roughrider that will leave him gasping. Watch me!"

She swung the car around the house and halted it before the broad piazza.

"Remember," she said to Harriet, "that I depend on you to help me entertain my guests every evening after the roleo. I'll need you. There are going to be more men than women in the party and some of them young—and unattached. They'll expect activity. Dancing, canoeing, fishing maybe. Father wants to keep them busy, make an impression on them so they'll remember Kimball after they've forgotten their own names."

She laughed, then sobered.

"No rough stuff. Don't be frightened, Harriet. The men are gentlemen and if they do take anything they'll carry it like eggs. I'm going dry myself, and you will, of course."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of that!" expostulated Harriet. "Only, I haven't anything——"

"Anything to wear," supplied Carol promptly. "I knew you would say that. And you can't come in your bathing suit, although I am sure that would knock 'em dead and——"

"Carol!"

"Excuse me! I was going to say, you remember that dress I had you try on for me at Madam Lucy's a week or so ago?"

Harriet nodded.

"Well, it doesn't fit me. You'll have to wear it for me."

"Oh, please!"

"Please do or I'll throw it away."

"Oh! It's a beautiful thing."

"For a brunette."

"Carol, I wondered why you chose that color."

"I didn't. Madame Lucy sold it to me. Now, you'll help me, like a good girl?"

"Of course I will. But you're sure your father——"

"I have already told him that you are coming and he has authorized me to appoint you his social secretary for the duration of the house party. Isn't that a thrill? It will make a hit with city people. I know. I've been among 'em."

After Carol had started her car she halted suddenly and cried out:

"By the way"—just as if she hadn't thought of it carefully for the past fifteen minutes—"by the way, I have thought of a stunt to astonish the strangers. I'm going to invite the roughrider to the house."

"The rough—er—you mean—Mr. Towner?" gasped Harriet.

"Yes. It just occurred to me. Ought to be interesting, don't you think? I mean, to people who have probably never met a real, live, he-man, bronchobusting cowboy—socially."

Harriet flushed up a little and Carol,

cautioning herself with a muttered, "Go slow, girl, don't stampede 'em," asked thoughtfully: "You don't think he might be gauche?"

Harriet responded frankly:

"I don't believe he could be awkward, but I just wondered if he happened to have evening clothes with him."

"Oh, I reckon he can hire an outfit at Bombini's," Carol drawled in imitation of Towner's slow, husky speech. "Anyhow, I intend to invite him. I'll bet he's a lady-killer. It will furnish some palpitations for the women of the gang. Will you convey the invitation to his nibs when he drives in this evening? Or better, I'll just scribble him a bid for you to give him."

She opened a bag she had in the seat beside her, took out her personal, engraved card and scribbled on it with a gold pen.

"There, that's better," she murmured, as she passed the card to Harriet, waved good-by and sped away.

CHAPTER III.

SOMETHIN' SWEET.

CHUCKLING all over at the thought of the situation her impulsive coup promised to develop, Carol sent the big car purring over the road she had come.

It was dusk but not dark enough for headlights, and anyway there was seldom any traffic over this road, good as it was, save during carnival week. It ended at Willow Bend Basin. Carol knew it—but it proved dangerous knowledge.

She failed to see a horseman trotting easily along the center of the road, as she rounded a curve, until she was almost upon him. A quick swerve, brakes, horn, a sidelong picture of a horse springing away, the driver fairly lifting him off his feet; then the car ripped through a fence, smashing down several posts.

It bounced over rough ground, skidded, swerved back, demolished another section of fence, dived down a bank, and its two right wheels dropped in a deep ditch. Muddy water spurted up all over the hood and windshield.

The engine died and Carol found herself sitting at a steep angle, clutching the wheel, unhurt but shaken, physically and mentally.

She turned in the seat to face the man on horseback, as hoofbeats told her he had swung around and was coming. She was angry. She knew it was her own fault. That made her angrier than if it had been another's fault. For a second time within an hour the rough-rider had put her in the wrong. Or rather, she had put herself in the wrong by carelessness.

On an impulse she stepped on the starter—hard, meaning to be ready for a swift departure. Her mood was one of defiance. She expected another boring glance, perhaps reproof or some more of his horsy badinage.

The engine would not take hold. She worked choke and spark frantically. Now that the car failed her she began framing a scathing rebuke for the horseman who had hogged tbe road. He had been right in the middle of the road, and, from the hoofprints she had watched so closely on the drive out—and back, too—she judged it his customary manner of traveling.

The engine sputtered at last against the flood of gas she had fed it, but being well heated it roared into action. She shoved in the gear, released the clutch and the car lurched a foot forward—then stopped.

One rear wheel merely spun in the wet clay of the ditch; the other stood still. She tried reverse with similar results, digging the right rear wheel a little deeper.

She saw a loop of slim rope swirl past her, fall, lift itself like a snake, fly up under the front fender and over

the left front wheel of the car. As she jerked the car ahead the rope tightened. The black head of Cubby moved past, close beside her.

In another moment she felt the rope draw taut on the axle, through the steering column, and a drawling voice came to her ears:

"Give her the gun now. We'll get her out. Come, Cubby! Lay into it!"

The rope was bent about the high pommel of the saddle, a handsome, Mexican style accouterment with double girths and a breast strap. The rope rode under Towner's right leg.

Cubby, with his sensitive ears twitching, his hoofs dancing, set himself against the load.

Out of a quick and instinctive desire to help Cubby as well as herself, Carol gave the car more gas. It moved farther this time, kept on moving as the steady pull on the rope added its momentum to the slipping wheels. In a moment the car was out of the ditch on level ground.

Carol had her hand above the button of the horn but she checked the intended signal, remembering what had happened when she honked it before. Instead she called out to Towner, who was half turned in the saddle, looking back with a cheerful grin.

"All right. I can get along now. Thank you."

"Don't thank me, miss," came Towner's response, promptly. "Cubby will take your bow. You don't happen to have a little lump of somethin' sweet about you? He'd appreciate it."

There was an emphasis on the word "sweet" which caused Carol to bite her lip hard. Whether to check a smile or an exclamation of anger she did not really know; she felt like laughing and she felt like swearing. She waited for Towner to disengage his lariat, which he had slipped so deftly onto the axle as the car moved.

When he stood up, holding Cubby by the reins and came back close to where she sat, his eyes serious and steady, she was without words.

"D'you think everythin' is all right, miss?" inquired Towner. "Sure you don't need a tow into town?"

"As far as I can see, everything is all right—fortunately," she replied, with severe emphasis. "It's a wonder I didn't pile right into you. You ought to be more careful—for the sake of the horse, anyway."

"Thanks for the advice. I will," he answered, with a sober smile. "I didn't think anybody would be in such a hurry on this road. I sure do appreciate the hurdlin' you did to keep from plowin' us out of the road. Don't we, Cubby?"

Cubby nodded vigorously. His action broke down Carol's stiff severity. She burst into a laugh. Her nerves were a trifle shaken. At one instant during the mad careering of her car she had seen a telephone pole loom up like a log on end and had avoided it only by a hair.

"I'm sorry," she said, "that I haven't anything sweet about me—for Cubby."

"Seems to me," drawled Towner, chuckling, "that I heard somethin' just now like sweet water runnin' over the rocks."

His eyes twinkled. But they kept steadily on her face and she felt her cheeks burning. She inspected them in the mirror on the windshield, pretending to adjust her wind-blown hair.

Cubby nuzzled at her hand as she lifted it, close to her ear. She could not resist a pat on his nose. She had fallen in love at first sight with Cubby. She was already envious of Harriet's adventure in his saddle. She allowed Cubby to plant an equine kiss on her velvety cheek with his velvety lips which he vibrated in comical imitation of osculation.

"Now that's enough, Cubby!" warned his master humorously. "You remember what I told you!"

Cubby averted his head, drooped his ears and looked like a bad boy caught red-handed in mischief. Carol burst into a new peal of laughter, leaning on the wheel. It was too funny to resist—but her laughter concealed the excitement which was boiling within her, as she realized that this was her first opportunity to begin the bold campaign she had determined upon when she exclaimed, "I'll do it!" as she drove Harriet home. Her scribbled invitation to Towner was a part of her plan; this was a lucky accident—in more ways than one.

"What makes you think," she giggled, "that I'm dangerous—for man or beast?"

She looked out of the corners of her eyes at him. Towner laughed and now his eyes were suddenly shielded and inscrutable.

"What makes you think I thought so?" he parried.

"Why, what you said to Cubby."

"Oh, I say almost everything I think to Cubby," he drawled, "whether I mean it or not. Do you think I meant it?"

"I'm asking you."

"Well, I saw you hurtle out the concrete road, north, last night, and I thought you were Lindbergh taking off for Paris. I was afraid if Cubby got in the car he might fall off."

"Afraid he would fall for me," she mused, smoothing Cubby's nose again. "Even if I haven't anything sweet about me. No sugar or candy."

"Sugar and candy aren't the only things that are sweet. Honey."

"Mr. Towner!"

"Miss—er—Kimball, isn't it? I just said that honey is sweet. Cubby likes that, too."

Cubby nickered and thrust his nose against Carol's honey-colored head. Again laughter shook her. And again it was rippled by an undercurrent of excitement. Cubby was playing up—and so was Towner, to the game she had set for herself to go through with, for the sake of Harriet. She felt that her chum was dangerously close to being too much attracted by this handsome, bold-eyed stranger and his lovable horse.

He was not the man for Harriet, the quiet, big-eyed girl whose personality had ensnared Carol's affections to the point of making her almost as jealous of her future as a mother might be. She intended that Harriet should marry money—and with it a decent, charming young business man whose firm took forty per cent of the forest products manufactured by the Kimball mills.

James Herrick had shown some slight interest in Harriet on his last visit, had asked about her when Carol met him in Chicago during the winter. It would be a splendid match, and it would at once place Harriet where she belonged, in the same social sphere with Carol, safely ensconced where their comradeship could continue indefinitely.

Her job, as she saw it, was to steer the course of true love into smooth waters—and, to avoid rocks, she felt it incumbent upon her to divert this rough-rider from attention to Harriet. Besides, her curiosity was roused. She wanted to discover what manner of man this well-poised person was. She believed she had gauged his depth when he rose to her shallow coquetting.

"Honey also is sticky," she bandied to keep the ball rolling, "and flies get all tangled up in it and die."

"They die happy," he retorted easily. "I suppose a bee that got embalmed in his own honey was the original inspiration for the remark, 'Death, where's your stinger?' Well——" He paused while she laughed, exaggerating her appreciation of his joke, purposely, because she believed it was the right note to strike with him.

"Well," he continued, "guess I'd better amble along. Cubby is hungry. A

straight diet of—er—honey isn't good for man or beast. Sure you can roll along O. K.?"

Carol gasped inwardly and sat up straight. This was exactly the first time in her life that a mere man had even hinted he wished to terminate a tête-à-tête with her. This crude, uncouth cowboy was taking from her something she would have given much to take from him first. He was taking his leave. But for the sake of Harriet, Carol swallowed her indignation.

"Sorry to detain you," she said. "Thanks for the lift and all the good advice. I'll always carry sugar with me now, in case I meet Cubby again. I'd like to keep up the acquaintance—with Cubby."

"That's a horse on me," murmured Towner. "But really I didn't intend to tear away on my own account. Thought maybe you would like me to dust myself about my own business, that's all."

CHAPTER IV.

THE RAGE OF RED RORTY.

CAROL considered the drawling, easy apology. Probably, she thought, it was the best he could do. It sounded sincere. She was anxious to understand him, to talk his language in so far as she could, so as to make him believe what she wanted him to.

The game was too big and too exciting to be halted by mere social errors. Evidently Towner, in the profession he followed, believed that "all women were alike," she told herself, easily swayed and quickly won by boldness and assurance. Well, he had a tumble coming to him. While she played her game—for Harriet—she would plan revenge for being humbled by his humor.

Carol could not quite conceive of any man triumphing over her in a battle of wits or in the eternal war of the sexes. She had been generously endowed by nature with the qualities which make men foolish, and by birth with the goods to make a golden girl, in a legacy from her father's family.

What Heaven and grandparents hadn't given her, her own parents had, and she took almost anything else that she wanted, from the time she was able to say, "Gimme." It had not spoiled her but it had given her certain habits and tendencies, and one of her habits was to finish anything she started—her own way.

"Mr. Towner," she said, being very sober but at the same time arch, "I have issued an invitation to you to be the guest of my father and myself at a little informal get-together at our house next Friday evening. Some friends of the family and Miss Lester—with whom I have left your invitation. I thought I'd let you know—and inquire if we can count on you."

"Well," drawled Towner contemplatively, "I suppose I can't bring Cubby so I won't be so amusin' as usual, but I'll come, thank you. You said—*in*-formal?"

His cool unconcern nettled her; likewise his barbed humor about the horse. He seemed to be penetrating beneath her careless armor, just a little. Did he suspect her purpose? She did not think so.

"As you please," she answered his question indifferently.

She was not looking at Towner. He gave her a keen glance and then grimaced sagely.

"Would you like to ride Cubby?" he inquired suddenly.

Carol gasped.

"Do you think I'm trying to bribe you? How did you guess?" she exclaimed.

"Oh, no. I just used horse sense. You didn't scream or jump out of your car when he stuck his nose in your face."

"He's a beauty and I'd love to ride him," she admitted, flattered a bit. "I

will try to bribe you, though—or exchange with you. I'll give you the fastest ride in the world in my car through the prettiest forest in the north lake country if you'll let me ride Cubby for an hour."

"Well, I'll tell you," answered Towner, clucking to the horse, and Cubby sidled up to him and sat down in the road as if to allow his master to mount more easily, convulsing Carol inwardly thereby. "I'll tell you. I've already had the fastest ride in the world I want to take in any automobile. I rode with 'Cannon-ball' Baker from Chicago to Omaha once. I'd rather not. If you'll make it the slowest ride in the world——"

He swung aboard Cubby, who rose, groaning miserably, drooping head and ears and tail like a hack half dead from old age. Carol looked up at him, choking between helpless mirth at Cubby's antics and suspicion. She was beginning to be just a little disgusted with her awkward flirtatiousness.

"——and almost any woods would be pretty," Towner continued, "if I looked at the trees any. But I'll tell you somethin' better," he added, with the deliberation of a master of suspense. "I've got another horse which will ride me along with Cubby just as nice. Maybe we'd enjoy the woods much better that way."

Carol's head was bent. Her heart hammered at her ribs like the gong of an alarm clock. She was finding it difficult to play her part—the reckless flapper, bent on making a conquest. But her pride in her ability to do a thing once she had started it held her steadily to her road.

She would go through, she told herself, in spite of everything. Besides, she itched to feel the reins in her hands, along Cubby's sleek neck, his supple, springy stride beneath her. And she must take Cubby, and with Cubby his master, right away from Harriet if Harriet was to become pledged to James Herrick next week.

"That would be better, yes," she managed to respond, smiling, and her smile would have been a frightened one except that she was not capable of being frightened—yet. Instead it was embarrassed.

"Shall we make it early to-morrow?" he inquired. "The mornin' is the best time to ride, don't you think? Everythin' is fresh and free and fulsome—except me," he added, as if it were an afterthought. "I won't be fresh." He leaned over. "Well, I'll meet you, then," she heard him drawl out.

At Main Street's busy corner Carol had another near accident. This time it was not a man on horseback whom she almost ran down. It was a man who did not quite know whether he was on foot or on horseback, as the saying goes.

Red Rorty, rolling his way rudely through the traffic which had thickened as the second shift of workers in the Kimball mills rushed for home and supper, halted uncertainly in the middle of the right-hand flow of vehicles.

Kimball's one regular traffic officer stood here, directing with white-gloved hands the ebb and flow of cars and pedestrians. With drunken gravity and importance Red flung up his hand in imitation.

Carol had been held up, and was impatient about it for one reason, because she had discovered a bad leak in the radiator of her car and the motor meter was showing feverish indications. At the officer's wave she ripped the pavement with her tires—and then suddenly snubbed short as Rorty loomed up.

The power of hydraulic brakes could not quite halt the car before it struck Rorty—just touching him, to be sure, but enough to unbalance him, for his center of gravity was very high. He

staggered and sprawled, and when he recovered let out a flood of profanity.

The officer collared the lumberjack and whirled him aside, waving Carol to proceed. She obeyed with a swift, "I'll report it, to-morrow," as Red tore loose from the officer and lunged at her car as if he intended to attack it with his bare hands.

Again Carol had to act quickly to avoid knocking him down and perhaps running over him. It might have been good for him, in one way, but she knew the value that all Kimball—and this included, particularly, her father—placed on the ugly, cursing river rat.

He was the best log roller in the Northern Lakes region. He was Kimball's best bet for the roleo, the white hope of the company and of the town. To injure him would mean to dash the hopes of Kimball—and the Kimball Company—of carrying off first honors in the tourney, held here for the first time in five years.

Red Rorty's value was well evidenced by the fact that he was drunk and free. The tacit agreement was that Red was to be allowed to have his spree. The more he sported this week the quicker he would sober for the tourney. Red was on vacation, like Harriet Lester, with pay. He would have been on vacation without pay, were it not for the roleo.

He was a modern survival of the old-time lumberjack whose sober working season consisted of seven months, from October to May. The other five months were employed, usually, in liquidating the wages earned in the woods.

Red had been Wisconsin champion and Northwest champion, missing the world's title only by a hair—and he was ugly about it, too, for an Indian had "wet" him. He was "thrainin' hard" for the roleo, if anybody asked him, and his "thrainin' " consisted in hard drink, triple hard—hard to get, hard to drink and hard to get rid of its effects.

Habitually he appeared at the preliminaries so unsteady it seemed a miracle he could stand upright on the take-off platform, to say nothing of a moving log—and it *was* a miracle, each time, for somehow he always managed to keep in the running. The first fall usually wet him and the shock sobered him just enough so that he managed to take the winning two.

By the time the finals were to be run off Red would be stone sober, and a faster, more aggressive timber topper had not yet shown from the Northern Lakes region.

That is, save for the old Indian, Joe Madwayosh. How Red hated him! There was a reason, but nobody mentioned it where Red might hear it. There was a blot upon his scutcheon.

Red was fully aware of his importance. He got a grip on the handle of Carol's car door and held onto it despite all the efforts of the officer to break him loose. Red looked up into Carol's indignant face and his own broke into a grin. Most of him was as Irish as all Ireland and half of Massachusetts.

"Shure, I know who ye be," he announced cunningly. "I jush want to 'pologhize fer shwearin' in yer presensh. Shorry I did it. Why, damn it, I wouldn't 'shult a lady with shwearin' fer all the blankety-blank cowboys in Uni' Shays of 'Merica. An' you kin tell him so, the horse-wranglin'——"

The hard-working officer managed to choke Red off by twisting his shirt collar hard. Red let go the door handle to fight off the law and Carol, with an, "All right, officer; let him go," managed to make her escape.

Roars of injured dignity from Rorty followed her, together with roars of laughter from the crowd that had gathered quickly to see what the law would do with the wild cat it had got its hand upon. The law dropped him like a hot cake and turned to more serious affairs.

Rorty stood on the curb for half an

hour giving a free street lecture on the shortcomings of cowboys in general and Ranny Towner in particular, and informing the world what he would do to Towner when he got hold of him.

Friends managed at length to lure Rorty into the comparative privacy of the Altamont House bar, which was as harmless as a rattlesnake, and where there appeared before Red liquids in which to drown his grievances.

It was Saturday night and his night to howl. He howled loudly against Towner, claiming he had been " 'shulted in presensh of lady by a horse-wranglin' et cetera." Kimball began to sit up and take notice. There was promise of action in Red Rorty's defiance.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT PRICE CUBBY?

CAROL made an early call at the Lester place Saturday morning. Harriet was to have this day free for training, and Carol was to drive her up the west shore of the river to a spot which had been used, every year Kimball entertained the roleo, by women birlers.

Carol had not the slightest intention of keeping the appointment Towner had suggested. He had mocked her, allowed her to see, very plainly, that he knew she was playing a part, and she had meant it when she gave him her parting shot.

But when she drove up to the piazza, Carol was astonished to see two horses near by saddled and bridled, reins dangling on the ground, Western fashion—and Harriet in riding clothes chatting with Towner, who lounged on the rail. The horses were the pick of the remuda, Cubby and Mince, his diving companion.

"Oh, were you going for a ride?" Carol greeted Harriet, ignoring Towner. "I thought you intended to practice rolling this morning."

"Oh, I do," Harriet answered, waving an oilskin bag. "Mr. Towner has invited us to ride up the old river trail, on this side. We can cross on the boom. We've been waiting for you."

Carol swallowed, broke out a smile and said quickly:

"That is nice of him, but who is going to ride double?"

She wondered if Towner really had staged this twosome for her benefit, to show her that he could have his morning ride, "fresh and free and fulsome," without her company.

"Why, I'm letting you girls take the horses," drawled Towner. "I'll join you, later—if I may. I've a little work to do before I can treat myself to a scenic tour of your river panorama."

Carol capitulated. There was nothing else to do unless she wished to seem unreasonable. Besides, there was Cubby waiting for her—and in the pocket of her knickers she had some lump sugar.

Five minutes later the two girls rode up the shaded, brown-carpeted trail, beneath lofty pines and firs left from the old virgin forest out of which Abel Lester had carved a home—and Henry Kimball a fortune. Carol said nothing of her encounter with Towner on the road. Instead she remarked dryly:

"You might have introduced me."

"Oh, I am sorry!" Harriet exclaimed. "I thought you had met him. I thought you were talking to him in front of the hotel, yesterday."

"I was talking with Cubby."

"Come to think of it," laughed Harriet, "that's how I got acquainted with Mr. Towner, too."

"Cubby," remarked Carol, "is a gentleman."

Cubby waggled his ears and nodded as if he quite understood, and the innuendo passed unremarked by Harriet.

"He's a spoiled baby," Harriet declared. " 'Bowleg' Burns, the comical old puncher who is Mr. Towner's foreman, told me that Towner had raised

Cubby from a colt—and has refused ten thousand dollars for him."

Carol had another impulsive inspiration. Ten thousand dollars meant little to her; it was but the price of a car. Her birthday was coming next month. Her father usually signed a blank check and told her to go as far as she liked —and meant it, up to six figures. Often it was difficult for Carol to find anything she wanted; she had so much.

"Do you suppose," she remarked idly to Harriet, "that he would take twenty thousand for Cubby?"

Beneath her careless query was hidden purpose and genuine desire. If she could separate Towner from Cubby it would unhorse the centaur, reduce him to the level of a mere man—and lower him in Harriet's esteem, as well as give her possession of the beauty. She wanted Cubby.

"Carol, do you mean——" gasped Harriet, wide eyed.

"I wonder how highly he really does value him. Ten thousand is a big amount. How much do you think Cubby is worth?"

They were traveling slowly, the horses walking. At her last remark Cubby halted, lifted a dainty front foot and pawed at the ground in rapid, regular strokes. "One, two, three——"

Carol burst into laughter as she counted. Cubby kept on, up to ten, fifteen, twenty.

"Enough!" cried Carol.

Cubby stopped, with his foot poised in air. Carol clucked to him and he broke into a gentle trot. Within a few minutes the astonishing horse had shown her each of his five gaits, trot, pace, single-foot, canter and gallop, without a word of direction from her.

He arched his neck, pranced and high-stepped, showing himself off with such evident consciousness of his importance that Carol succumbed to laughter and fell to petting him and feeding him sugar.

She wanted him more than ever now. If twenty thousand were not enough—well, she could raise the bid. She intended to have him.

They halted at the end of a long, wide boom stretched across the river, holding back a drift of logs which were packed tightly behind it. Below it the river was clear, down to Willow Bend and beyond.

Along the shores no habitations showed, for the Kimball Company owned land far back on each side save for the Lester farm, and the strips of virgin forest all along the banks was another advertising idea of Henry Kimball's. It furnished a setting for Kimball Company's forest products.

At the west end of the boom was a tiny boathouse, and back in the trees, well hidden, a summer cottage which the Kimballs occupied occasionally or lent to friends. It was empty now, but in readiness for possible use during the carnival.

Carol had given Harriet the key to the boathouse to use it for her private training quarters and to extend its use to any others of the girls who were becoming interested in the sport of the North Woods. But they were few and Harriet so far had had the exclusive privileges.

The Thompson sisters of Cloquet were expected at the roleo, but as they were professionals, busy at various carnivals all season, they did no extra training here.

This morning Carol and Harriet had the boom and boathouse all to themselves. They left the horses at the east end as Towner had directed, reins hanging, and walked the boom to the boathouse, where Harriet donned her bathing suit.

"I suppose," remarked Carol, "that all those horses are trained to do their stuff."

"So I supposed, too," Harriet answered, "until I saw them roping some

of the wild ones in the pasture back of the barn. Oh, those busters really ride 'em wild, you know! There is one wicked mustang nobody but Towner can ride without being thrown, Bowleg Burns says."

"Oh, so he's a buster, is he? Why do you suppose he does this wild West stuff?"

"I guess he likes it," answered Harriet easily. "He doesn't have to, I gather. This remuda is only a small part of his outfit, you know. He has a ranch in Nevada."

Carol digested all this. That "ranch in Nevada," as Harriet had mentioned it, Carol discounted considerably. She did not believe it meant much—except to Harriet's imagination, and she could see that the girl might be even more romantically intrigued by Towner, with that background, than if he were but a strolling showman, with no roots in the soil.

"I've got to do something," she told herself; "something desperate. And I guess it's got to be something that will make him think that he prefers blondes —and Harriet must think so, too. What will it be?"

CHAPTER VI.

ALL WET.

WITH a long, light tamarack pole for balancing, Harriet, in a simple, one-piece bathing suit but with tightly laced leather shoes on her feet, the soles filled with sharp calks half an inch long, hopped the old, much-riddled but still buoyant "cork-pine" log which lay in a triangle formed by the main boom, a shorter one chained to it and the shore.

She began her fast-footing on the rolling timber. Carol sat down on a log which projected off the jam, halfway across the boom, and watched her rather enviously.

Carol envied any one the ability to produce swift, graceful action and Harriet was the picture of grace and agility, her skillful feet stepping fast and faster, her dark hair flying, as she spun the log this way, then that, ran its length and turned without stopping its roll, teetered, balanced and, when ready, caught the rope Carol tossed her and skipped rope on the rolling wood.

"I don't blame him for making a dead set at Harriet," Carol mused, as she sat watching. "She's the sort of girl he might admire. He would like a girl to swim and ride and everything. The danger is that Harriet will fall for him with his tricks. I've got to do something to break this situation up, something to distract them both. Why, I don't believe Harriet opens her mouth lately without saying, 'Towner!' Yes, I have got to do something desperate."

She heard a nicker and glanced over where she had left Cubby. She saw another horse moving up the river trail, a piebald pony, and Towner riding him. Involuntarily she started up, with the intention of crossing and meeting him, at all hazards to keep him away from this beautiful water nymph, threatened with being enamored of a satyr. A good name for him, she thought, pleased with herself.

As she rose, taking her weight from the log, it rolled slightly and she jumped back to escape being caught, then noticed that the log teetered easily. She picked up a spare pole from the boom and gave the log a tentative push. It rolled easily. She pried under one end of it as she had seen rivermen do to break a jam.

The log rolled entirely over, onto the boom and then into the river where it bobbed up and down, turning lazily halfway around, then back again. It was a large white pine with a bulge on one side which prevented it rolling round and round in the water.

Idly she played with it, keeping watch from the corner of her eye for the

expected approach of Towner on the boom. Something pulled one of her feet off the boom, to rest lightly on the log. The other foot began to itch. A devilish temptation crept into her pretty head.

It seemed to Carol that, all her life, she had wanted to do everything that was a challenge to her physical agility and skill. A doctor's dictum had kept her from learning to swim, with a diagnosis of her physical condition, while she was very young, as being likely to develop weakness of the heart if she indulged in too violent exercise—and swimming was banned. This "weak heart" of hers had become a family tradition, particularly since the death of her mother from cardiac ailment. But the tradition had never removed Carol's yearning to conquer the element she had been forbidden to enter.

From her very tender years Carol had seen the rivermen ride logs, roll logs and break jams. She had known that many of them could not swim a stroke, and yet any one of them was ready to ride a bad rapids, standing on a log, or to run a loose field of logs, from one side of the river to another. If they fell in they simply climbed back again.

Contestants in the roleo were not all swimmers. Big boats were kept close to the logs while the birling went on, not only for the judges to sit in but to gather up rollers who were "wet" by an opponent and to give them the feeling of security.

Pole in hand, foot on the log, Carol pictured herself taking a daring ride down the river, Towner watching her, open-mouthed, forgetting Harriet—and she stepped boldly onto the log with both feet. It sank only a little. The end of her pole rested on the broad boom, steadying her. It seemed absurdly easy.

Towner gave a halloo. Harriet answered with a wave of her hand, as she trotted her training log, eyes intent upon her footing, never dreaming that Carol was anywhere but safe and sound upon the boom.

"Something desperate," Carol repeated unsmilingly—and did it. Deliberately she shoved the big log away from the boom, standing firmly in the middle, with her rubber-soled sport shoes giving her good footing on its rough bark. She was off!

There was no chance for her to change her mind, for she had started the log into the current and it went out of pole reach of the boom almost instantly. She dipped the pole in water as the birlers did to balance themselves. The current swept up from beneath the jam and boom and turned the log slowly, broadside to itself. Twenty feet, forty feet—twenty yards the gap widened.

Towner had started out on the boom, and it was not until he had got to the end of the first section that he saw.

He stopped dead short and, as Carol had visualized him, his jaw dropped. He checked a cry on his lips and whirled back toward the shore.

The log tilted as the current caught it broadside. Carol shifted her feet with its roll. It tilted back, and again she shifted—but this time one foot struck wet bark and slipped a little. She splashed heavily with her pole to keep herself steady.

The log rocked back farther, back again, swinging like a pendulum—but unlike a pendulum, each roll was just a little farther. The knotty bulge that had kept it from turning clear over also furnished dead weight which pulled the log back more swiftly with each half revolution.

One foot went to the ankle in the cold water and it sent a shock of real alarm through her. An effort to snub the log's roll by putting her weight more heavily upon it at a certain point, only resulted in another slip. Her rubber soles, which had gripped splendidly at

first—because they were dry—were now like soap.

The log went clear over, and the big knot gave the log a lunging motion. Carol's feet slipped off entirely. She dropped her pole and scrambled on her hand and knees—and next she knew she was in the water, clutching wildly at the wet bark of the log.

Carol imagined herself cool and collected. She did not cry out but went to work to save herself. But she forgot, entirely, the simple thing that every riverman knows; that the way to get back on a log, out of the water, is to roll it *away* from the body and allow its momentum to carry the body up and over—or to grab it by one end and hang on or hoist oneself up and sit upon it.

Carol tried to climb up on the side she had slipped off—and the pine rolled toward her. It rolled faster with each clutch that she made, and beat her off with the brutal indifference of inanimate things toward human helplessness.

She heard a cry from Harriet, an answering shout from Towner. She could see neither one of them; the world had shifted strangely. The river was with her but the shores were miles away, and seemed a blur.

As she sank Carol tried to gasp out a cry for help. Her mouth filled with water and she gurgled, made a final grab at the log, her finger nails digging bark—and looked up at the beautiful blue sky—to see it blotted from her.

"Something desperate?" was the thought that flashed through her brain in a flash of self-revelation. "I am *all wet.*"

CHAPTER VII.

"HOME, CUBBY!"

HARRIET, looking up from a difficult double roll on her log, hoping to catch Carol's quick congratulations for her cleverness, toppled into the water herself at what she saw.

Her best friend in the world, fifty yards from the boom on a log, riding the deep and dangerous current of the Bitter River!

As she struck the water Harriet began to swim. The cross boom halted her, and as she pulled herself upon it to dive in again and swim to the rescue, she shouted and Towner answered her.

She heard something else, too. It ran through all that length of wood, from shore to shore, beating a tattoo. She gasped as she saw what it was.

Towner was coming—riding Cubby right out on the boom!

The beautiful horse picked his way daintily but fearlessly, at a rapid walk, along the thick, broad double timbers, hewn flat on top to make a runway for rivermen engaged in sorting logs.

Except for spaces of varying lengths, between the ends of the sections, where the river gurgled, the boom furnished a three-foot path from shore to shore, safe enough for two men to walk side by side—or for a horse.

But Cubby's weight and his master's made almost one thousand pounds, and proved too much for it. The timbers, heavily water soaked from long use, began to sink. Cubby's hoofs splashed water. At every step toward midstream the boom sank lower.

Harriet held her breath. Towner turned the horse's head upstream. Cubby climbed up on the tightly packed jam of logs, his sharp calks biting in, and picked his way high and dry like a mountain burro until he was almost opposite the spot where Carol had shoved off.

"She can't swim a stroke!" called Harriet, poising to leap in, terrified at the delay.

"Steady, sister!" Towner's voice came, clear and cool. "Neither can I; but Cubby can, like a fish. Hold yourself!"

He touched the horse on the flanks with his hand. Cubby gathered his hoofs beneath him, reared high and

leaped, in a graceful, plunging dive, quite as if he were on exhibition. Cubby had form. It was the way he had been trained; and it did not matter what his take-off platform was.

The dive was shallow and Cubby began swimming as he struck the water. Towner drew his feet up from the stirrups to lessen the resistance. Going with the current Cubby moved fast, his beautiful head stretched out, nostrils distended, his intelligent eyes searching, searching for the girl who had recently petted him, with sugar and with a soft, caressing hand upon his nose.

His thick, long tail spread out behind him like a fan; his hoofs churned like paddle wheels, carrying him, twice as fast as Harriet could have gone, toward the bobbing log which was now almost a hundred yards from the boom.

As Cubby neared it Towner swung his lariat. He dropped the loop, however, as Cubby plowed close to the log. He stood straight up on the saddle, shading his eyes with his hand as he searched the dark water with keen eyes for sight of the girl.

Then he left the saddle in a long, arching dive, holding in one hand the knot of his lariat, the other end attached to the pommel.

What happened next was hidden from Harriet. It was Carol's turn to know. She felt a hand on her head and fingers twined into her hair. Never in her life had she imagined that it could feel so heavenly to have her hair pulled.

It was exquisite pain, pain that lifted her up as she sank down, down, into darkness, her eyes straining upward, straining for the light which glimmered up there, with its promise of life, ease from the terrible, smothering water which gripped her.

Already her feet had struck bottom, stony and rough, and she had thrust hard to try to leap up to that light. The river was from twelve to fifteen feet deep at this point, with a powerful current which bore her along so swiftly she could feel her feet drag against rocks. Her clothing, her heavy-soled shoes held her down.

She fought with her arms until they were weary, aching, seemingly powerless—but at the touch of Towner's hand she discovered new strength. She clutched at him—his shoulder, she believed—and tried to raise herself up to the air.

It was not his shoulder that she gripped with such fierce desperation. It was his knees and she held him so he could not move to help her. Towner was no swimmer but he might have risen by sheer leg-and-arm action had she not so hampered him. He had no fear of water. He was accustomed to going into it, all over, several times a day, days on end, with Cubby.

He kept his head, kept his breath and placed his hope on the lariat. The slack that came when he reefed it toward him told him Cubby must be very near by. He must avoid those churning hoofs or it would be sure death for both of them. He let himself sink, Carol with him—felt her body go limp, her hold relax a little, and knew that she had gone unconscious.

Towner wriggled from the encircling arms, holding to Carol with one hand while he reefed in the rope until it went taut and he could feel the pull and vibration of it, telling him that Cubby was moving fast.

Just as it seemed his lungs would burst and that he must breathe, air or water, the tug of the lariat brought him to the surface. Cubby nickered, snorting. He had been swimming round and round, dipping his nose in the water, blowing it out, seeking for his master. Harriet knelt on the boom, crying like a baby as she watched the gallant animal.

Cubby waited for orders. Towner tried to speak and found that he had

swallowed water. He could hardly articulate. He was unable to move either of his arms in a gesture which Cubby could understand, for one of them held Carol, the other the rope. At last he managed to cough out:

"Home—Cubby."

It was the familiar command that always came to Cubby when his diving exhibition was over, the signal that he could run back to whatever stable he might be housed in, to warm blankets and a rubdown, to sugar and petting—and rest.

He turned toward the eastern shore, where Mince and the piebald pony stood with ears pricked up, Mince dancing impatiently as she always did for her turn at the dive, or for Cubby to come out to her.

Harriet dashed for the boathouse, grabbed a garment or two and ran as fast as she could along the boom. Her work was to come and she must be over there, ready when the others got to shore.

It was a heavy pull for Cubby, with the two trailing out on the lariat. Already he had swum some distance, and now the current quartered against him, rippled over his back, pulled him downstream, or tried to.

He fought it, splendidly and with his ears back, making furious, teeth-snapping bites at the water. When his feet struck gravel he kept on, scrambled up the bank, turned and waited, nickering gustily as Towner staggered up toward him with his limp, unconscious burden, a "desperate" little girl who had "gone through" once too many.

It was Harriet's turn, now. She knew her first aid thoroughly and she began working over Carol immediately. Towner knelt by and did what she told him to do, swiftly, carefully, and after the longest ten minutes either of them had passed in their lives, they got signs of life from the tortured lungs.

Carol's first conscious realization was of Cubby, his head bent down, close beside his master's shoulder, ears moving back and forth, nostrils quivering, not only from his recent exertion but from anxiety. Well he knew something was wrong. He was dripping—and Carol, as she blinked up at him, knew that he had saved her—or at least had helped. Her next glance showed her Towner's grim, anxious face, his plastered hair. That told her something else.

And now Harriet's face swam into her watery vision and she remembered what it was she had set out to do.

"How much," she gasped, a stab of pain going through her lungs from the water she had breathed in, "how much—will you take—for Cubby?"

Towner's eyes seemed to leap into flame. He did not answer at once. Carol repeated the question, adding:

"I want him. I want to buy him. What price?"

Towner spoke then. His voice was soft, husky, drawling, yet it seemed to have an edge to it.

"Why," he said, "I figure that he's worth a million dollars—*now.*"

CHAPTER VIII.

"KING O' THE RIVER!"

CAROL'S first concern, when she regained some of her strength, was that her father should not learn of her escapade and narrow escape from the river. It was not until Harriet declared that she was sure no one had seen anything of her log ride or the rescue, that Carol relaxed and let herself sink into the languor brought on by exhaustion and induced also by the comfortable blankets stripped from the piebald pony and Mince.

Cubby carried her home, Harriet riding behind her and supporting her while Towner followed along with the other horses.

Carol insisted on reclining in a chair on the porch in the sun, instead of being

tucked in bed as Mrs. Lester wanted to do with her.

"No," she said, "I want to be where I can see the old river and make faces at it. I'm going to learn to swim now, and to ride a log without falling off. I've been a baby long enough. I'm going to have Cubby—and I want to be able to take a dive on his back—and everything."

Harriet shook her head helplessly over the unrepentant girl.

"You'll never get Cubby," she said.

"Bet you I will! I never wanted anything so much in my life. You wait and see. He'll sell—for a price. Now, you go and telephone to Mr. Henry Kimball's residence that I'm staying at your house for the day. Be home this evening."

Harriet obeyed.

When she was gone Carol sat and stared at the river. The dark, swirling current down there seemed to fascinate her. Perhaps it was because, for the first time in her life, she had been swept helplessly along by an element that was more powerful than she was—but which had failed, quite, to conquer her.

Of course, she realized that but for Towner and Cubby she would probably have been a bit of bedraggled flotsam, somewhere on a sand bar or at the bottom of the stream—but she was unconquered in spirit.

"Anyhow," she told herself, with a thrill, "I've got the roughrider thinking of something else besides Harriet."

She asked for Towner when Harriet came out.

"I didn't even thank him," she complained querulously. "And all the sugar I had saved up for Cubby is melted, I suppose."

"Mr. Towner left almost as soon as we got here, you know," Harriet informed Carol. "He has got to have a powwow with Chief White over the sham fight the Indians are going to stage with the cowboys Sunday night after the pageant. Oh, that is a secret!" she cried. "I wasn't supposed to tell."

Carol winced. So Towner shared secrets with Harriet! She took refuge in dry irony.

"I suppose," she said, "he's afraid I'll shed tears or something. Did he ride Cubby?"

"No, Cubby is being nursed by Bowleg Burns. Hot mash and blankets and no admittance."

"I want to see him."

Carol got to her feet. She was dressed in an outfit Harriet had loaned her. Harriet protested but Carol, declaring she wanted to walk and get up some circulation, and insisting she was all right except when she breathed too deeply, marched off the porch and toward the barn, and Harriet had to follow.

Bowleg Burns met them at the stable door. He shook his head when Carol announced her errand.

"No, ma'am," he said, "Cubby can't see anybody. He needs quiet 'cause he's sleepy an' tired. You can look at any of the other hawses. They're out in the corral back of the barn."

"But I must see Cubby and talk to him!" insisted Carol. "He saved my life a little while ago—and, besides, I am going to buy him."

Bowleg Burns' bushy eyebrows met violently above the bridge of his nose. He tilted a disreputable Stetson almost off his bald head as he scratched his skull.

"Well," he said, "I dunno. It's the boss' orders not to let nobody in the stable—an' he didn't say nothin' to me about *sellin'*. I reckon he would."

"He talked to me about it," Carol declared firmly. "He even set his price. I hope to make terms with him. Cubby's as good as mine already."

Bowleg Burns was nonplused. Harriet's presence embarrassed him more

than Carol's insistence, for he felt under obligation to Harriet. Finally he "allowed" that if they would go in quietly and not talk to Cubby or feed him anything—"no sugar a-tall," they might enter for a minute. But he was dubious about it all, though he eyed Carol with no uncertain expression of respect for her nerve.

"Mustn't bother him, now," he warned as he opened the stable door. "He has got to do his stuff six times a day for three days next week, jumpin' off that platform into the river, and he can't be nervous when he does that."

"You really don't intend," whispered Harriet, when they were inside the old barn, "to pay a million dollars for Cubby?"

"Oh, that was flattery," Carol whispered back. "Towner is good at it. Wanted to make me think he liked to rescue me. What he really meant was that he'd expect a big price for him. Well, I'll pay it—now."

Cubby stood on three legs in a box stall, and through a crack Carol peeked at him. Plainly Cubby was sleepy. His head drooped, his whole body sagged. She smiled at him.

"He's a beauty baby," she whispered to Harriet. "I'll have him if I have to——"

She did not finish. Sounds of a car halting in front of the barn reached her ears, and soon there came loud talk, male voices, and one that Carol recognized. Beckoning to Harriet, she went to the stable door and looked out through its numerous cracks.

A taxi stood before the barn, disgorging half a dozen flushed and unsteady men, in costumes ranging from loud-blue ready-mades to lumber jackets and the conventional O. D. woolen breeches affected by the modern riverman. Prominent among them was Red Rorty and he did the talking.

"Hullo, ol'-timer!" he greeted Bowleg. "Well, you ol' son of a gun! You look jus' like the top sergeant I used to hate in the army. Fer two cents I'd bite that mustache off of yez. I never did like them style of whiskers."

He got a laugh from his adherents, whom both Carol and Harriet recognized as a party of river rats, evidently out on a spree, with Rorty as their leader. He got, also, a bland look from Bowleg which might have warned him, had he known the puncher, and Bowleg's right hand moved ever so slightly toward the region of his thigh. He made no answer, no move, just sat calmly on a box beside the stable door. Rorty weaved up to him, slapped him heavily on the shoulder and announced:

"Guess you don't know me. I'm Red Rorty, champeen log roller of the Northern Lakes and goin' to be the champeen of the world next week. I'm the king of the river, and I don't mean mebbe. I've brung some of my best frien's out here to look over these here so-called wild harses of yours. I want to show 'em the champeen divin' harse. Both of us is champeens."

Bowleg's upper lip seemed to lengthen beneath his drooping mustache. It caused the hirsute adornment to droop lower still. He did not stir. He did not bat an eye.

"The hawses will be on exhibition at the basin next Monday," he said. "A ticket of admission to the park will give you plenty of chanct to look 'em over."

"Is that so?" snorted Rorty, with an ugly look. "Well, I guess it's you'll be paying for admission to see *me* perform. I don't have to buy no tickets to look at a lot of plugs. I guess you don't know who I am, gran'pa."

"I never had the extreme misfortune to see you before that I know of," answered Bowleg softly. "But I heard you hollerin' and it don't make no difference to me if you're king of the river or the Prince of 'Whales,' you can't bother the hawses in this barn."

Rorty had been pressing closer to the

door. He exploded under the scorn of the old puncher. With an oath he made further advertisement.

"I was the champeen, crack rider of Troop A of the —th cavalry down to Fort Atkinson for three years, gran'pa. Mebbe that'll tell you somethin'."

"We had better go out the other way," whispered Harriet to Carol, as Rorty's oaths ripped out. "They are a tough lot."

"I'm going to stay," Carol declared. "I know they are a tough lot and I'm afraid they'll try to break into the stable and frighten Cubby—or even worse. Rorty is looking for trouble. I believe he just wants to find Towner and, with his gang's help, beat him up."

"Why should he want to do anything like that?" inquired Harriet, who had missed the play at the Altamont House.

"Why? Because Towner was foolish enough to strike him in the face and spoil a new hat for him yesterday. And right before his gang, too. But I won't have him bothering Cubby."

She began to push open the stable door. Harriet made only a feeble protest. Her indignation was roused at this intrusion of a gang of drunken roisterers. She had not bargained on the farm becoming a public stamping ground for roughnecks.

Towner's men were quiet, soft-spoken chaps who kept to themselves entirely, and she had not heard one oath from any of them since they had camped on the place. But her indignation and her determination were as nothing to Carol's.

"Well, yore bein' a bobtail out o' the army don't tell me no good news," Bowleg replied to Rorty's last boast. "I'm only a pore ole puncher, but orders is orders to me, and if you was in the army three years you ought to know it. My boss says 'No admittance,' and what he says goes."

"Your boss, eh? Where the hell is that——"

He was off again—but he checked himself as the stable door opened and Carol and Harriet stepped out. Bowleg stood up. He was not a prepossessing figure on his feet, with his bowed legs, his squat form, made to seem shorter by his immense shoulders, long arms and the long, loose chaps he wore.

"You look hyar!" he said to Rorty. "None o' that kind o' talk around hyar! It ain't fit for nobody to listen to—particular ladies. My idea is you better dust out of hyar in that buzz buggy afore the boss does come back, and you better go right to a drug store and look inter the glass. It ought to make you laugh."

CHAPTER IX.

A DARK HORSE.

THE explosion, which had only been sputtering on Rorty's lips up to now, burst forth in a flood of invective. He advanced menacingly on Bowleg.

The puncher snatched for his gun—but his hand met emptiness. His gun—he had forgotten it—was buried deep in his trunk in the loft of the barn, where he slept. Bowleg was so recently from beyond the Rio Grande, where sidearms are still considered wearing apparel, that it had totally slipped his preoccupied mind that he was no longer heeled, and had not been since he had joined Towner's outfit.

His expression changed to chagrin as his fingers clawed at his empty flank. He glanced about for some other weapon, for the odds were heavy.

Rorty's queue of river rats were showing anger and, with Red, seemed bent on mischief. Bowleg was no fist fighter and he knew it. He was too clumsy on his feet, having bent his legs about horses almost all his life—and that was very near threescore years. years.

Rorty took a swinging blow at Bowleg, but it was only a threat and it

missed, partly by intention. But it swung Red about, and when he staggered back to face Bowleg again he faced instead a pair of blazing blue eyes framed with tumbled blond hair—and took a stinging slap in the face from a pink-and-white hand.

It was Carol. She had walked straight between Bowleg and Rorty on a wave of righteous wrath, needless of Harriet's gasping remonstrance, reckless of consequences and imbued with the determination to rout Rorty and protect old Bowleg—as well as to shield Cubby from his noisy crew.

Rorty felt of his cheek and gaped in astonishment at the girl whose head came scarcely to his shoulder and who dared to slap his face. He recognized her. He did not know Harriet. His thick lips twisted into an ugly leer.

"I see," he snorted. "No admittance—eh? Except for purty gals that drive big cars around the streets so rapid a man on foot ain't got much chance of his life, unless he's a timber topper, like me. Little hell cat, eh? What kind of a game of tag d'yez call this? Say, mebbe you don't know it, but every time a gal slaps me—I kiss her again."

Carol did not wince from this rough gibe. She stood, straight and slender, chin up, eyes firm, meeting his bleary gaze steadily. The habit of authority, the consciousness of power was in her pose and look.

"Red Rorty," she said, "you get out of here as quickly as your feet will take you. Quicker, if that's your car. And let me tell you this before you go—that this will be the last roleo you will ever roll. I'll have them bar you—and I can do it! You are a disgrace to the sport. King of the river! A champion, you call yourself. Why, you act like a low-down, half-breed souse."

Rorty's cheek burned from the stinging slap, but every word she uttered was more stinging, and the last ones had a lash in them. They penetrated his exaggerated egotism and struck him hard.

"Can't you act like a gentleman?" Carol went on. "Try it."

Rorty's liquor-inflamed eyes seemed to turn all red. His face seemed to darken. His teeth gritted and his huge fists bulged as he clenched them. It looked as if he intended to strike the girl. Instead he mumbled thickly:

"Gentleman? Well, you don't ack like no lady. I'm goin' to pay you for that crack in the mug—and the rest of it. Don't you think I ain't."

He lunged and swept her off her feet in his powerful arms, holding her helpless, her arms pinned to her sides. Bowleg Burns flung himself into action, but before he could do more than get a hand on Red's arm there came a wild rattle of hoofs, a sliding halt that sent a shower of dust and pebbles flying. The river rats were scattered, one of them being actually knocked down by the impact of a running calico mustang that had charged into their midst.

The horse came to a halt almost on his haunches. A form hurtled out of the saddle, struck the ground running, gave a leap and a sinewy hand clamped down on Red Rorty's bent neck, as he strove to kiss Carol on the lips. The fingers of that hand pressed on Rorty's neck cords with a force that caused Rorty to crumple almost instantly. He released Carol so suddenly that she fell back and would have gone prostrate but that Harriet caught her.

It was Towner who had launched himself suddenly into the situation. He had seen trouble from the road, had sent his horse racing swiftly across the soft grass and nobody had seen or heard him until he was among them.

The mustang, with ears laid back, his teeth bared, slashed and nipped and kicked at the fleeing lumberjacks, drove them to cover, threatened them until not even the boldest of them dared go back to Rorty's rescue. It was 'Bolo,

the most vicious, wildest cow pony in Towner's remuda—a big horse with one wicked-looking white eye that seemed to glare death.

While 'Bolo lifted his heels, Towner applied his boot to Rorty, not only once but several times in quick succession. Rorty, roaring with pain and rage, twisted away from Towner's viselike grip and clinched Towner in a bear's embrace about the waist, applying his strength in the effort to bend Towner backward or to crack ribs.

Instead he got so furious a battery of fists in his midriff that he had to let go. He jumped backward, light as a cat on his feet despite his weight, and sought to deliver the *coup de pied,* the favorite and terrible blow with the swinging foot of the lumber-camp rough-and-tumble fighter.

He found Towner just a little quicker than he was. The sidelong kick missed and almost at the same instant a fist shot to his right jaw and he went flat in the dust and lay still.

Red was down but not out. He was of the breed which does not know when it is licked, and though he was sobered his anger was not knocked out of him. Here was the man, standing over him, whom he had promised the whole town of Kimball he would pound to pulp when he met him.

He had come to the Lester place with mixed motives, but his underlying motive had been to pick a quarrel with Towner if possible and start a rough and tumble.

Red was jealous of his prestige and he had been annoyed beyond words to discover that Towner's Roughriding and Diving Horse Show was creating almost as much interest in Kimball as the roleo itself, with Red the comer-up as world's champion birler.

Log rolling was an old story and rodeo stuff was new to the town. The diving horses were the talk of the whole countryside. Bets had been made and taken that the whole thing was a fake, and one wiseacre had talked learnedly at the Altamont House bar concerning the act, declaring that if he wanted to he could "crab the act," so that there would be no diving done at the carnival. It was all a smart trick, he declared.

Later he and Red Rorty got into a crap game and the stranger was cleaned out. In return for a "loan" from Red he spilled some inside information which Rorty remembered despite his liquored condition, although he had no idea who the stranger was.

It was the roughriding cook whom Towner had discharged. Red had come with his gang to look over Towner's outfit, with a hazy idea of taking advantage of the dearly bought information, for the borrowing stranger had likewise lost the "loan."

As Rorty began scrambling to his feet, half a dozen of Towner's men came running from the corral behind the barn, warned by that sixth sense which every circus man seems to possess, that danger threatened the safety of the show.

From long experience they came armed, not with guns but with cudgels and ropes and all ready to employ their peculiar mode of attack on the gang. Red's men were gathering again, for Bowleg Burns had quieted 'Bolo for the safety of Carol and Harriet. 'Bolo was apt to use his teeth and heels rather indiscriminately.

Towner was ready to flatten Rorty again, but Carol rushed in between them and clutched at Towner's arm. She felt muscles like polished stone, so tense that her fingers slipped from them as she touched his sleeve. The strength that was suggested in that arm startled her. She had not thought human flesh capable of such rigid tension. The fire in his eyes, as he kept his gaze steadily on Rorty, frightened her.

"Don't—don't fight any more!" she begged. "You must not do it. You

must not. One of you or both of you will be badly hurt, and it will spoil everything. Please!"

Towner smiled grimly.

"It won't be me that will get hurt," he assured her.

"Then you must not hurt Rorty. Think! He is our best bet for the roleo title. It means too much to the town—and to me, too—to have him crippled so he can't roll Monday. It was partly my fault. I slapped him when he wasn't looking and he—he tried——"

Her lips quivered. The detestable attack that Rorty had made on her had left her sick. She was still weak from her experience in the river, and to admit herself in the wrong when she had felt so right about her action was a struggle. Her loyalty to Kimball and to her father was strong, though. She appealed to Red Rorty.

"Please, Red! No more fighting. I shouldn't have slapped you. It wasn't —ladylike. I—I know you were only fooling—but you see, Mr. Towner didn't know it."

She managed a smile, and Red Rorty, with a swagger, grinned back at her. This was something new—though Red considered it an old story. His egotism actually allowed him to believe that his caveman tactics had won. And Red had a sense of humor, if you could touch it; he was mostly Irish. It was that other strain in him which made him so savage when he was in liquor.

Carol's taunt had hit him hard, when she told him he acted like a drunken half-breed. He had Indian blood in his veins and was ashamed of it.

Besides his tickled vanity, Red was sober enough to see that if the fight continued he and his gang were likely to be worsted. Those punchers were a hard-looking lot—dark, wiry, hard faced—and they clutched clubs and snaky lariats with suggestive readiness to tangle up his outfit badly.

"Shure, I wasn't lookin' for no fight," Rorty declared, with a belligerency that belied his words. "I was askin' a look at the trick harse and this old runt here, he tried to brush me off. He says nobody ain't allowed to look him over, and here come these ladies out of the stable, right in front of me nose."

"Miss Lester and Miss Kimball," put in Towner dryly. "And you thought that gave you a right to butt in on private property, eh?"

He turned to Carol.

"Do you mean to tell me," he demanded, "that it is considered necessary to let a bohunk like this run loose like a bull in a boat because he can roll timber?"

"No names!" warned Carol, pulling him away from Red. "There is nobody in the Northern Lakes country can wet him on peeled pine. Now, Red, you sober up and get ready for the roleo," she advised, reasserting her authority. "You will take a fall when you don't expect it if you don't keep away from the tanglefoot from now on.

"Suppose you should meet some one in the preliminaries Monday who really can roll! You've always been lucky to have an easy man in the drawing and by the time you got sobered up you were ready for the better rollers. Suppose you drew Joe Madwayosh—drunk."

"Aw, I could wet him with wan foot tied up," growled Red, but Carol's warning had taken effect. What she had said was true. Two falls out of three in the preliminaries would put the mighty Red Rorty out of the running—and he had come dangerously close to being eliminated last year, going into the rolling so badly intoxicated he could scarcely walk, managing to win only after he had been wet once.

"An' what's more," Red went on, with an extra swagger, "I can lick this here trick cowboy, an' I'm goin' to show him up before I'm done with him."

"After the roleo, Red," suggested

Carol, with a look at Towner which begged him to ignore Red's threat.

"*Durin'* the roleo," Red insisted meaningly. "I got somethin' up my sleeve besides my arm. You wait an' see."

"I've an idea," drawled Towner, with a dry laugh, "that you are the one will be shown up, Rorty. I guess you never rolled with any of Paul Bunyan's nephews from the Pacific coast, eh? Those are the lads can spin logs. You never had any one in the roleos out here from that section, did you?"

Red Rorty snorted his defiant scorn.

"No," he said, "they ain't in the same class with us hunkies of the North Woods. Scared to enter."

"There will be an entry from the coast at this roleo," responded Towner quietly. "And I've got a thousand dollars that says he can wet you twice out of three."

The statement and the offer of a wager left Rorty open-mouthed, staring at Towner. The rivermen with him shared his doubting surprise. One of them, a young fellow whom Carol recognized as the prodigal son of a sawmill owner upriver, nudged Rorty and whispered hoarsely to him:

"Cover that bet."

"I'll take yez on that!" Rorty snapped, recovering from his astonishment at the promise of financial backing. "There ain't a roller in the Northwest can wet me when I'm right—and I'll be right. What's more, I'll agree to ride the worst wild harse you got in your string, if I'm wet once out o' three times by anybody else than Madwayosh. No trick raft shover from the coast can roll with me. These here peeled cork-pine logs ain't trained like your harses. Except, I got 'em trained to ack like I want 'em."

"Trained?" inquired Towner softly. "Just what do you mean by that?"

"I mean those harses o' yours ain't wild ones a-tall. Anybody that is dry behind the ears would know it. I'll ride any one of 'em an' never tech leather. I wasn't in the remount detail at Fort Bisbee for nawthin'. What d'you know about that? Have you got any more money to lay on that?"

"Another thousand if you can scrape up as much," was Towner's mild reply.

The man who had given Rorty promise of backing on the first wager began to argue with him against the second. Rorty took him aside and there followed a whispered conference between them. Evidently Rorty convinced his backer that his money was in no danger.

"Take that one!" he announced. "This is goin' to be a roughridin' show and it's goin' to be rough on your bank roll, Towner. I'm goin' to show you up, two ways from the middle. And if that ain't enough, I'll finish you off with me fists. Bring on your bum birler. Who is he?"

"A dark horse," replied Towner. "You'll know soon enough. Watch the entries."

CHAPTER X.

THE BIRLING BUSTER.

THE roleo was on! The official, grand opening performance of the carnival came first, with an evening program which included an Indian pageant of war dances, folk dances and choral singing of Indian songs. In the exhibition rolling in the basin Johnny Murray, the veteran trick and fancy birler, did his stuff on the big, hollow, wooden ball, and on the short log which he turned over end for end in the water, keeping on top of it as he reversed it.

Harriet Lester and the Thompson sisters, sleek, slender nymphs, performed at rope skipping, leapfrog, dancing, balancing on a chair, sitting, standing and hand standing, all on a bobbing, rolling, quivering cylinder of white pine, turned to perfect proportions in a lathe.

The evening ended with Towner's

surprise, the sham battle, reversing the usual procedure, with an attack by cowboys on an Indian encampment. It was flaming arrows against blank cartridges, the scene staged under the natural proscenium of giant trees in an arena by the riverside, great bonfires casting their ruddy glow over all, giant flood lights augmenting the illumination, the arrows falling with a hissing patter into the river, like a shower of skyrockets.

The act won thunderous applause. Towner rode the ugly mustang, 'Bolo, conspicuous with his calico markings, and did a realistic fall with an Indian arrow apparently sticking through his shoulder which brought every one to his feet—including Carol. It looked like an accident, so cleverly was it done.

The real surprise occurred a little later. 'Bolo, frantic from the lights and the arrows and the noise, objected to having Towner mount and ride him again, and when the entire troop of cowboys and Indians swept off after the "curtain," 'Bolo threw a fit. For ten minutes the crowd stood spellbound while Towner rode him.

'Bolo bucked like a demon, sunfishing and exercising all the tricks he knew to dismount his rider. Curiously, this unscheduled feature, although it seemed so real while it lasted, ended so suddenly that the audience, almost without exception, believed that it, too, had been carefully staged. A quick-witted electrician focused a flood light on 'Bolo and so dazzled and blinded the mustang that he quit, as if he had taken his cue.

The talk of "trick horses" had spread swiftly. Nobody save Towner and his riders knew that this had not been rehearsed. Carol herself was deceived —and a little angry when she discovered that all about her breathlessness changed to laughter. She had been clenching her hands until the nails almost cut her palms, as 'Bolo hurled himself this way and that with Towner in the saddle.

Perhaps, after all, Red Rorty was right about the trick horses being trained, Carol considered. She was not a little disappointed, annoyed at herself. She had caught herself hoping that Towner was genuine.

Her annoyance was increased when she overheard Harriet, who had joined the Kimball party after her part in the rolling exhibition, talking to James Herrick about Towner.

"I was afraid 'Bolo would kill him," Harriet said. "That mustang is the wickest piece of devilishness I ever saw. Towner is the only one that can ride him."

"Towner, did you say?" inquired Herrick. "Where does he hail from? They say those busters have a short life if a merry one," he added. "I used to know a Toner, or some such name, when I was stationed at Fort Myers. He was a rider, too. I've always wondered what became of him. He was a college man, had been educated at a military school and might have had a commission but refused it to stay with his horses, as he called them. The cattle boat in which he started for Bordeaux, with a cargo of remounts, was torpedoed. I never heard from or of him afterward. Always wondered what became——"

Carol thought it time to interrupt. She had not maneuvered Herrick and Harriet together to talk about Towner. She was tired of Towner. She was tired, anyway. She had not dared allow her father to know anything of her escapade and had pretended vivacity when she was in the grip of utter fatigue. The house guests had begun to arrive Saturday afternoon and Carol had been caught up in the swirl of the house party.

One thing that annoyed her more than anything else was the fact that the occasion had not arisen for her to express to Towner her gratitude.

On Monday Carol's duties crowded

her harder. Most of the men of the party were to make an inspection trip through the Kimball mills, leaving Carol to entertain the women until the roleo program opened in the afternoon. She had her hands full.

She was glad when the time arrived to guide her guests to the park. For one thing, it brought James Herrick again in contact with Harriet—and he saw her dancing daintily on the whirling pine, sleek in silk and wool, from shoulders to toes, shapely, graceful—and after her act, glowing from her exertion and several dives into the river, she joined Carol and remained with her—and with Herrick.

Carol hardly saw the early preliminaries. They were not too interesting, to her, anyway. The birlers were not yet nerved up to their best. The logs were new to them and fast. It took time for the best to grow accustomed to the buoyant white-pine cylinders, fifteen inches in diameter, fourteen feet long, which had lain in the sun on the river bank to season until they were very much like cork logs, as the rivermen called them.

It was touch and go as pair after pair faced each other on the logs, digging in their calked shoes, tossed their balancing poles, and began to trot timber. One of each pair went splashing into the deep water of the bay within a very few seconds after they had got the word to throw poles. The longest match lasted only eleven seconds.

It was not until the megaphoned announcement of the winners came to her ears that Carol even thought of Ranny Towner again. And then it was because she heard his name:

"John Towner, representing the Pacific Northwest."

She clutched at Harriet's arm.

"Did you hear that?" she demanded.

"I heard it, yes. Do you suppose that——"

Carol did not suppose. She knew. Towner had entered the roleo. There was no other entry from the Northwest. He was the "dark horse" upon whom he had laid a bet to beat Rorty. And he had come through the first round of rolling triumphantly.

The names from the megaphone were of those who, on Wednesday, would enter the semifinals—and those who survived would be eligible for the sectional championship contests on Thursday. On Friday there would be finals between the two who remained out of the entire field.

"Robert James Rorty, representing Kimball and the Northern Lakes."

A roar went up as the crowd caught this. Red Rorty, of course, had come through.

Carol looked into Harriet's eyes, and Harriet returned the significant glance.

Cheers went up for Red Rorty, hailed as: "The next champion!"

The successful contestants were being lined up on a float at the river bank, near the tower that had been erected for Towner's diving horses, where a runway rose from the top of the steep bank, on a gentle slope, to the platform of the tower forty feet above the surface of the stream.

A moving-picture camera man was clicking off yards of celluloid. Red Rorty's close-clipped, sandy poll stuck out above the shoulders of the squad, save for the giant Madwayosh, in red tights. Towner was not to be seen.

But Carol and Harriet wondered if Rorty would be the next champion, after all.

CHAPTER XI.

AN "ACCIDENT" HAPPENS.

HENRY KIMBALL and Carol took all their house guests to the carnival grounds for the first time Monday evening, to see the diving horses in their first exhibition.

An elaborate program of water sports was scheduled; a band played lively

tunes and accompanied Indian soloists from the pageant chorus.

To Carol the principal act on the program was Harriet's diving. She congratulated herself that her plan to throw Harriet and Herrick together and to eliminate Towner from the scene had been fairly successful. Except for Towner's public appearance in the roleo and pageant, neither of the girls had seen anything of him during the day.

Carol was a trifle conscience bitten because she had not seized the opportunity, during Towner's appearance in the rolling, to seek him out and express her gratitude to him, but she excused herself on the ground that it was too public a place and her escapade might become known. She had her stubborn little pride and she hated herself for having failed to ride that log successfully.

Another thing annoyed Carol. James Herrick, amiable young man that he was and seemingly amenable to being paired with Harriet, was showing entirely too much interest in Carol.

She became really alarmed when Herrick began to praise the Northern Lakes country and declared he would like to have a summer home in or near Kimball. He asked Carol's advice as to the possibility of securing such a place. She thought that was too broad a hint, but she was not to be outmaneuvered.

"Why, I know just the place for you!" she exclaimed. "One of our oldest estates, situated right on the river. It has been in the same family for three generations; it is the only large homestead left intact in town. I'll get Harriet Lester to show it to you tomorrow. She knows it better than I do."

"Is it for sale?" inquired Herrick, interested.

"Not exactly, but there are considerations which might lead to your acquiring it as a summer home—if you want it badly enough after you've seen it."

It was the Lester place she meant and she planned a surprise for Herrick, when he should be taken unsuspectingly to Harriet's home, to see her in her own charming setting.

Just here, as if to furnish emphasis to the subject of their conversation, Harriet appeared in the flood light at the top of the high tower, her graceful form limned against the sky as she poised and launched herself in a swan-like plunge into the water, and was surrounded by gleaming spray as she swam easily for shore.

Herrick made no comment save a polite murmur of admiration for the dive, but Carol thought that he looked more interested than he sounded. Certainly he seemed glad to see Harriet when she rejoined the party.

Carol excused herself, giving Harriet her seat next to Herrick, and devoted herself to other guests.

At nine o'clock the diving horses were to appear. Each of the pair was to make three dives into the deep basin from the sturdy platform at the top of the tower. The crowd had its attention focused on the lofty platform, the band was playing "Horses," expectation rose higher—then there came an awkward delay. No horses appeared.

The band was silenced; then it burst out in a long blare of brass and roll of drums, the signal for silence and attention during an announcement. The megaphone man stepped to the float below the tower and raised his loud speaker:

"Ladies and gentlemen, the carnival committee wishes to apologize for the absence of the famous diving horses, Cubby and Mince. An accident has happened——"

Carol's heart leaped into her throat. A picture flashed into her mind, the bucking, biting kicking 'Bolo with Towner topping him.

"——and it will be impossible for the act to proceed," the announcer went on.

"An extra performance will be given to-morrow afternoon."

"An accident!"

Carol's exclamation was but an echo of the voices all over the park. The audience broke into a confused murmur of curiosity and disappointment. The band burst into a loud march as if to drown out demands for further explanation, but loud-voiced men howled to the announcer, demanding more information. He disappeared.

Small boys, the quickest and severest critics of any failure, started a shrill cry of, "Fake! It's a fake!" Adults took it up—particularly the lumberjacks who occupied seats close to the tower, Carol noted.

Among them she caught sight of the huge, bare-headed form of Red Rorty, who apparently had taken a vow not to provide himself with headgear since Towner had spoiled his new hat.

A flash of suspicion stabbed at Carol. She recalled Rorty's threat to show Towner up, to prove his show was faked, particularly in respect to the bucking ponies. Her suspicion, however, had nothing to feed on save this vague threat and Rorty's present loud shouts of "Fake!" roaring above the other voices.

Henry Kimball declared he was going to find Towner and demand details. Carol and Harriet herded the rest along with him. All were willing to go.

At the committee headquarters at the park the harassed secretary told Henry Kimball that Towner had not appeared at the park, nor had the diving horses been sent. And when he phoned the Lester farm for information, at a quarter of nine, a man had answered: "No show to-night. An accident."

"It was the old foreman, Burns, I think," the secretary told Kimball. "He acted as if the house was afire or something and he had to get away from the phone in a hurry."

"Oh!" gasped Harriet.

"I'll drive you out home," offered Herrick quickly. "Would you like to go, too?" he inquired of Carol.

Carol would. Her father needed her car for the transportation of some of the rest of the party back to his home.

"Find out about it and hurry back," he instructed Carol. "I am disgusted with this thing. I feel personally responsible because I urged the committee to take Towner's show. I'll have them cancel his contract."

"You mustn't act too swiftly, dad," Carol warned. "I am sure Mr. Towner wouldn't fail us unless——"

"What do you know about him?" cut in Kimball sharply.

"Well, I—er—Harriet and I have met him and we rode his diving horses and I have been dickering with him—for Cubby. I want him."

"And he won't sell Cubby," Harriet put in quickly. "He thinks too much of his horses to sell them—that pair of blacks, anyway."

"Well, I'll buy 'em and we'll put the act on if it's necessary," growled Kimball. "But has any one actually seen these horses dive?" he demanded, again suspicious.

Carol looked at Harriet, biting her lip. Harriet shook her head, and Henry Kimball took it for a negative answer to his question. Carol pulled Harriet away, and Herrick escorted them through the slowly departing crowd to his car.

Mrs. Lester was not at home. She had gone to the carnival with neighbors, leaving Harriet free to perform her double duty as an entertainer and social secretary of Henry Kimball. But there was a light burning in the kitchen when Herrick drove into the yard, and they found Towner sitting at the phone.

Carol pushed open the door—she led always—and she was the first to see how grim Towner's face was, and that he wore a gun.

"Mr. Towner, what is it?" Carol de-

manded. "They told us there was an accident."

His eyes, burning with something like flame, went to hers and seemed to burn through her. His tone was harsh as if his throat were parched or swollen.

"I guess," he said, "it wasn't any accident. Cubby has been stolen."

CHAPTER XII.

WATCHING THE TELEPHONE.

THE look and the tone stung Carol; it was almost as if he accused her without actually saying so. But she met his eyes steadily, wondering why he kept his hat on, the brim pulled low. He shot a swift glance at Herrick, who came in last.

"Stolen? From where? And whom do you suspect?"

"Right out of his stall. Indians," he answered promptly.

Almost as if reluctant to inform them, Towner gave them the bare facts concerning Cubby's disappearance. It had happened between seven and eight o'clock. Towner and Burns were having a late supper after a long, busy day, the cowboys had gone to the carnival with the rest of the remuda.

The warning had been a frantic nickering from Mince, Cubby's mate. The mare, kept in a stall next to Cubby's, with a half door opening between the stalls, had not been touched but the door had been closed.

Towner had got his men back and all of them were on the roads and trails up the river. It was in that direction he had tracked Cubby, as far as the boom at the jam—then lost the trail.

"They sneaked him out the back door of the barn," Towner said, "and I think it's Indians because they didn't leave any trail themselves. I got back just a few minutes ago to do some telephoning. I'm waiting for calls now. The reservation office doesn't answer. The superintendent is probably at the carnival. Most of the Indians are there, and no way to account for 'em. Fine chance. My dope is they took him into the big woods."

"Have you notified the local authorities?" inquired Herrick.

"No. This is my job. I expect to get him back quick. I don't want to throw a wet blanket over this carnival."

"By the way!" exclaimed Herrick, stepping closer to Towner, with a curious look on his face. "Haven't I——"

"Beg pardon," Towner cut him off. "Will you step outside with me a minute? I want to ask you a favor."

"I was going to say——"

"Have you got your own car here?" Towner interrupted again as if impatient, and moving toward the door.

"Yes."

"Like to talk to you about it."

Herrick pursed his lips, cast a helpless glance at Carol and Harriet, excused himself and went out with Towner.

"He looked at me as if I were a horse thief—and he didn't take off his hat!" complained Carol to Harriet.

"Why, he is all broken up over this," Harriet defended. "I'm surprised he had the patience to answer our questions. I know how much he thinks of Cubby—and of Mince, too. There's a story behind them. I tried to get it out of Bowleg Burns but the old fox told me another long yarn that had nothing to do with Towner before I realized he was just stringing me along."

Carol did not appear to have heard her at all.

"I wonder if he thinks I would stoop to such a thing!" she exclaimed indignantly. "He knows I want Cubby and intend to have him. I'll just ask him."

"Carol! You mustn't be so unreasonably suspicious."

"The way he looked at me!"

Her color was high and her eyes had sparks in them. She was much disturbed.

"After what he did for you, you can't believe he would even dream you capable of such a thing!" gasped Harriet.

"I don't know what he dreams—or thinks! Probably he thinks me an ungrateful, selfish, grasping, thoughtless little beast. But he gave me no chance to thank him. He has been very rude. I hate the sight of him!"

She looked up directly into Towner's steady eyes. He stood in the door—which had suddenly swung noiselessly open.

"I beg your pardon," he said slowly. "Sorry I've been impolite. I'm not used to the way things—ought to be done. I guessed you didn't have much use for me. And so far as my doing anything for you—well, as I told you, that was Cubby. I'd give him to you if it would fetch him back, this minute.

"Nobody knows what Cubby means to me and nobody knows what the rascals that nabbed him will do to him either. Ruin him, maybe, makin' a getaway. He'd run till he dropped. He's no ordinary broncho. He's no ordinary horse. Why, I owe more to Cubby and to Mince than I do to any human beings right now."

He broke off awkwardly, and Carol was silenced by his outburst. It was the first time he had shown emotion and it almost frightened her.

"Well," he drawled in a different tone, "all that is history and not important right now. I came in to say that Mr. Herrick is going to drive me up to the reservation, and to ask you to wait for us till we get back. Miss Harriet, I'd think it fine of you to answer that phone if any of my boys call in. I'll be back by midnight, you tell 'em and—keep on tryin'.

He looked at Carol who still was silent.

"Or I'll wait until Mr. Herrick takes you home, Miss Kimball," he added.

"No!" Carol burst out. "I want Cubby back, too. Get after him and never mind—anything else!"

"I'm much obliged to you."

He stepped back into the darkness, closing the door carefully.

"He's much obliged to me!" muttered Carol. "As Red Rorty says: 'What d'ye know about that?' "

"Oh, Carol!" sighed Harriet helplessly. "What is the matter with you? You act so—odd."

"Harriet, did you hear me mention Red Rorty?" Carol demanded, ignoring the question.

"Yes."

"Did you happen to hear Red Rorty state that he would show Towner up during the roleo?"

"Yes. He must have meant in the birling."

"He didn't know Towner was going to roll when he said that. He meant something about the horses."

"Do you think Red Rorty could be behind this?"

"He isn't at all sorry it happened. I wonder——"

The telephone bell interrupted.

"Let me answer it," she urged and took the instrument.

"Yes? This is Carol Kimball at the Lester place. . . . Yes, Mr. Towner has gone but will be back by midnight, and I am to tell you to keep on rustling. And to make it more interesting I am authorized to offer a reward of one thousand dollars for the return of Cubby. Get that? And double if you get the man behind it all. . . . Yes, the 'main guy' is right. I don't care about Indians. If they did it some one put 'em up to it. . . . Yes, one thousand for Cubby, safe and sound, and another for the 'main guy.' . . . Fine! Any news?"

She listened for a moment, then hung up the receiver, whistling softly.

"My, how that boy can swear!" she exclaimed admiringly. "No, not at me. He thought I couldn't hear him. He

was talking to some one else and he is eloquent with cuss words. He didn't like the reward idea. He thought I was prodding him as if he'd laid down on the job.

"Harriet, they've traced the thieves up the old tote road that runs into where Calkins' sawmill used to be set up two years ago. And Ruddy Calkins is backing Red Rorty's bets. Does that mean anything to you? I can see the fine half-breed hand of Red Rorty in this. I want to get him. The brute tried to kiss me!

"But that isn't what makes me so mad; it's that Cubby is gone—and because Red said: 'Every time a girl slaps me I kiss her again,' and that was Calkins' gang with them at the barn, sizing up the situation. The big bohunk! Oh, I wish I could swear like that cowboy can!"

Harriet covered her ears. Carol pulled her hands down and held them.

"I'm not going to try because I couldn't do it," she laughed. "But I want to tell you this: I hope Towner beats Rorty rolling. To the devil with Kimball and the king of the river!"

"I'm glad you swore a little and I second the motion," Harriet responded. "And I think he can do it."

Carol regarded her sharply.

"What do you know about Towner, you sly little kitten?" she demanded, in a tone which held an edge of something besides curiosity.

"I happen to know that he was a riverman, or at least a lumberman, before he was a cowboy."

"Where?"

"Out in Oregon, the western part of the State."

"So you really think he can roll?" asked Carol.

Harriet shook her head doubtfully.

"I'm not sure, but I think so. I wouldn't be surprised. I think he can do almost anything he sets his mind on."

"Uh-huh! Well, there's no man can birl peeled pine by setting his mind on it; he's got to know how to set his calks in it and pick 'em up again. That is big-timber country, Oregon. No cork pine out there."

"There is cottonwood and that's just as light in the water as white pine."

"You know something," Carol accused her, "and you're holding out on me. And Mr. James Herrick knows something, too, about Towner."

"I don't know a thing more than I've told you."

"Herrick does. He was just about to call him out when Towner cut him off and got him out of the room."

"I didn't notice that. I couldn't see anything but the way Towner looked—his eyes."

"He looked dangerous with that pistol he wore. I'd rather not be a horse thief."

"Why did you—who authorized you to offer that reward?" queried Harriet. "His boys will be just as alive to get Cubby back without any reward."

"I'm offering the reward because I want him to know how much I want Cubby back," Carol answered. "And so the cowboy said, in a different way, when I told him about the reward—that he 'wasn't hesitating to hunt on account of no bonus.' He said it real sharp, too. And if I am instrumental in getting Cubby back—— Didn't you hear Towner say he'd give Cubby to me if —if it——"

"——if it would bring him back, yes," Harriet broke in. "You wouldn't take Cubby that way!"

"Wouldn't I?"

"I'm afraid there would be strings to the gift."

"What strings?"

"Bridle reins."

"Bridal reins?"

Carol flushed to the eyes. She had put a double meaning into Harriet's cryptic words and to hide her quick

flush she attacked Harriet on the charge of being infatuated with Towner.

Another phone call put a stop to her attack and electrified them both. From another phone station, far up the river, a rider reported he had picked up information from a camp watcher, left alone for the summer, that some sort of preparations had been made to bring horses up the west shore, several days ago. They were hitting that trail. Carol repeated her offer of a reward to him—and chuckled at the response. Those cowboys didn't bite on it very hard.

Towner was back half an hour before midnight and without much encouragement from what he had got at the reservation. However, he had run on a wet trail if not a hot one. The agent had not been at the carnival but had been tracing a report of bootleggers peddling liquor to the Indians.

"Said he suspected a man named Rud Calkins," Towner informed them, "or some of his gang."

"Calkins is Red Rorty's financial backer!" Carol exclaimed.

"I see!"

His tone was quiet but Carol was startled at the look in his eyes. He was hard to read but his eyes showed new life, when just now they had been dull with disappointment.

"Mr. Herrick is waiting for you if you want to go home. Miss Kimball."

"Thank you so much!" she replied coldly at this hint. "And will you allow me to express my deep gratitude for pulling me in out of the wet, Saturday? This has been my first opportunity to——"

"You needn't bother," he smiled, his face softening, "because Cubby isn't here to take your bow—and eat your sugar. And when I say it was all Cubby, I mean it. That jump off the boom is the first one Cubby ever took into the water for anybody except Mince."

She was about to ask him what that meant, but he went on rapidly:

"You'll excuse me, now; I've got to go and relieve Bowleg Burns. He's stayin' with Mince. She's apt to hurt herself unless she's watched. I'm obliged to you for waitin'."

He held the door open. Carol passed him, biting her lip because she seemed unable to handle this man, conversationally or in any other way.

Mrs. Lester arrived with a neighbor, Herrick's car was close to the door, and Carol's burning questions were never asked.

All the way to Carol's home Herrick talked about Towner. At last she put a point-blank question to him:

"Have you ever met Towner before?"

"I don't know him," he answered.

She felt that Herrick was lying—for Towner. She liked him for it.

CHAPTER XIII.

A NEW INVITATION.

THE big field of contestants in the roleo necessitated two days of rolling to run off the preliminaries and narrow down the list toward the finals.

To avoid boring their guests Henry Kimball and Carol arranged to take them up the river on Tuesday for a visit to some of the camps maintained by the Kimball Company.

Before she left, Carol got Harriet on the phone for news about Cubby.

"Mr. Towner and all his boys are back except two," Harriet told her, "but no Cubby. He thinks the two missing men may be lost in the woods but he isn't worrying over them; they can take care of themselves. They may be on a hot trail. It leaves him very shorthanded for the rodeo program to-day and to-night, but he will make a show somehow—minus the diving horses, of course."

Carol reported the lack of good news

to her father and very shortly he was at the phone trying to get Towner. He learned that Towner had led another searching party out, northbound.

"Give him this message, please," Kimball instructed Harriet. "He is to stage a diving act to-night with the one horse or forfeit his contract as provided in our agreement."

"I—I——"

"Just tell him that," Kimball cut her off.

He was out of sorts because a part of the program had been spoiled. He wanted to show the Chicago people how smoothly he could run things in his town. He had not expected a demonstration of Kimball as a harbor for horse thieves, among other things.

He called up Marshal Goodwin, chief of the town's small police force, and informed him of the theft of Cubby, surprising that politically minded official not a little with the news and shocking him with blunt orders to get busy right away.

Goodwin was already so busy that he needed extra officers, and if that cowboy really wanted his horse back, why hadn't he notified him?

"My idea is," he declared, "that the whole thing is a frame-up, anyhow."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, the talk is that them horses can't dive, anyway. Towner's a crook and his story is that one horse won't dive without the other. I've seen divin' horses, myself, and they jump when they're given the quirt, whether they got a mate with 'em or not."

"Well, you look into that," Kimball suggested harshly. "I'll see you at the park to-night. Look Towner up and put it right up to him."

For the rest of the day Henry Kimball forgot about Towner, Cubby and the carnival. He sloughed off his mantle as an official of the carnival committee and became entirely the executive of an industry on exhibition, and host to a number of potential buyers of his product.

Carol was as busy and preoccupied as her father, shepherding the women, but she thought of Cubby constantly.

As their cars penetrated the great forest toward the camps, she found herself unconsciously straining her eyes as if to pick up that trail of dainty hoofprints in the tote road, for she did not doubt that Cubby was concealed somewhere in the bush, guarded by the thieves.

Irresistibly the picture of Red Rorty, Rud Calkins and his crew on their visit to the Lester place recurred in her mind, and she began to build up her hunch by piecing circumstances together. She remembered now that she had not seen Calkins at the carnival with Rorty the preceding evening. She remembered how much money he had risked, backing Rorty, and knew he must have laid out other bets of his own on the redheaded roller, originally from Calkins' Mills, Ruddy's home settlement.

Then she reviewed incidents in the past when she had seen or heard of the wild escapades of Calkins' Mills gangs who were famous as fighters and made a river war on Kimball crews when the drives came down in the spring.

Some of that gang had bunched together and preëmpted seats close to the tower, at the carnival—a noisy claque, backing Rorty with profane insistence and making it uncomfortable for other birlers and for those who sat near them. The special officers appointed to help maintain order at the carnival seemed afraid to interfere with them.

Carol began to believe that Red Rorty could not possibly have engineered the theft of Cubby; he did not have the brains nor the cunning. But if Calkins had engineered it, it was with Rorty's knowledge and consent, no doubt.

"Indians," Towner had said. Carol doubted it now. She intended to talk to her father of her growing suspicions,

but the day was so full of affairs that she had no opportunity. It was necessary for her to remain with the women while her father and the men took a by-path to an outlying camp, and she drove back downriver with them to the river cottage, ahead of her father.

Here elaborate preparations had been made for a camp dinner. Harriet Lester was in charge. She had crossed from her home on the boom, prepared to remain with Carol for the evening, here and at the carnival grounds.

Harriet had no good news yet for Carol.

"The two missing men are still away and Mr. Towner is worried about them," Harriet told Carol. "He has been on horseback almost all day since dawn. He got two Indians who can ride fairly well to fill up his saddles for the rodeo show, but the word went around among them that he had charged Indians with the theft of Cubby and they quit, angry or afraid to appear in his outfit. I feel so sorry for him, but he just grins now and makes light of his own hard work and declares he'll get the thieves if it takes him all summer. I wonder who told Marshal Goodwin about it?"

"About what?"

"The theft. He came to our house this morning and hung around, asking questions and looking wise until noon, when Mr. Towner came back from the north. He talked to Towner disgustingly and intimated that the whole thing was a trick, that Cubby couldn't dive, anyway, and probably Mince couldn't either——"

"The old stuffed shirt!" exclaimed Carol.

"——and I think Towner would have knocked him down if I hadn't been there to smooth things over. But the worst thing was that the marshal quoted your father as saying he believed the theft was an excuse to avoid showing the horses, at all. He called it a frame-up. I assured him that I knew Cubby could dive—because I had seen him."

"Did you tell him—about me?"

"No, no! I—I said it was practice for Cubby."

"I don't believe dad said that. He has more sense. I'm going to ask him."

"Don't do that!"

Carol became thoughtful. She shook her head. Then she asked:

"Where is Towner now?"

"He was at our house, hanging to the phone when I left, making a desperate effort to recover Cubby before nine to-night."

"Come with me and keep every one away from me while I telephone," Carol commanded briskly.

She led the way to a phone, installed for the summer at the cottage.

"What are you going to do?" gasped Harriet.

Carol had her number—452—the Lester home.

"Hello. Is this Mr. Towner? Yes, I wanted to speak to you. This is Carol Kimball. You are invited to dinner at our cottage, over at the west end of the log boom where—where Cubby came after sugar. . . . Yes. Entirely informal. Come just as you are; it's a camp dinner—every one in old clothes. . . . Yes, you can wear it if you want to. . . . Right away. . . . You will come? Thank you."

"He is coming?" demanded Harriet incredulously.

"In his working clothes. He wanted to know if he could wear his gun and I told him he could if he wanted to," she giggled.

Harriet shook her head, bit her lip and turned away, as if she dared not trust herself to speak.

"Don't cry, old dear," Carol taunted. "He is to be my own personal guest and, whatever happens, will be on my own bright young head. It's to be a show-down. A surprise for every one, including dad."

CHAPTER XIV.

TOWNER'S TOE HOLD.

IT was a surprise—for Carol, too. She had kept a place vacant at her left, instructing the servants to admit Towner immediately when he came and to show him to the table instantly, without saying a word to any one.

Carol was surprised because Towner wore ordinary business clothes instead of the cowboy outfit in which she last had seen him.

Henry Kimball was too well accustomed to Carol's whims and too good a host to show his surprise at Towner's appearance as a dinner guest, and to say he was surprised would be putting it mildly.

Harriet Lester was surprised that he came at all.

James Herrick looked astounded as Towner sat down opposite him, bowing to Carol, his bronzed face grave, his keen eyes veiled—except when he gave Herrick one sharp look which sent him to devoted attention to the ladies on either side of him. Carol caught it and said to herself:

"Um-hum, old Jimmy, you know more than you want to. Well, because you lied straight I'll let you off this time. But just wait!"

Herrick, however, had ideas of his own. Out of a general conversation which made the meal merry, every one eating with good appetite after the day in the woods, Herrick came out with a bland statement which dropped like a bomb in their midst.

"Yes," he remarked distinctly, as if answering a question or statement one of his table neighbors had propounded, "it is strange how much the intelligence of the horse is overrated. A dog knows twice as much as a horse. Why, just think of it! After all these centuries of association with man, the horse today knows nothing, practically, but 'Giddap!' and 'Whoa!' and 'Back!' Nothing else unless he is drilled to do routine tricks. Not the result of intelligence, but habit-formed tricks."

Every eye was on him—or on Towner. A gleam came into Towner's gray orbs but he said nothing. However, Carol did.

"Oh, Mr. Herrick, I am glad you brought up that subject!" she prattled. "Maybe we can settle an argument. I am sure that Mr. Towner can help us. You see, I am trying to get him to sell Cubby to me. But some one else has got ahead of me. Cubby has been stolen. I understand that his mate, Mince, will not dive unless Cubby is with her. Now, is that the result of intelligence—or just what is it?"

Carol heard Harriet draw in her breath in trembling gasps but refused to look at her. She kept her eyes on Towner's face, smiling, meeting his stone-cold, accusing glance steadily. He really looked as if he hated her. She would not have blamed him had he reached under his coat for a gun.

For a moment that seemed an age he sat, saying nothing, that curious, compelling quality he had of creating suspense holding every one silent. Then he drew his napkin from his lap, wiped his lips with it and placed it on the table, a crushed ball of linen whose folds recoiled slowly from the terrific pressure it had got in his hand.

"I don't know just what you would call it," he began, in a slow, mild drawl, "but Miss Kimball has stated the case very accurately. I am deeply indebted to her for the opportunity to explain to you-all why my diving-horse act is a failure, up to date. It is true that Cubby and Mince are mates."

He paused, with an emphasis on the final word which impressed itself upon every one there.

"I'll have to tell you a little history," he went on. "When I got back from a business engagement at New Orleans in the winter of 1919 I found that I was

what might almost be called a pauper. My holdings in Oregon timber had dropped to less than nothing in value. The after-war slump hit us hard. My ranch in northwestern Nevada was so heavily mortgaged I had to sell it. I was left with a few wild bronchos and two colts, about the same age, both of 'em black as ink and showing the strain of blood in 'em—Cubby and Mince.

"Well, at first it looked as if they might be a handicap to a footloose failure like me. Horses were eating their heads off on many a ranch, costing more money than they were worth. But these little fellows looked to me for their support, and somehow I couldn't turn 'em down. I managed to hire pasturage and stable room for 'em near the little town to which I had pulled in my horns while I looked around for a toe hold."

His dry drawl softened when he spoke of the colts and he did not need to tell his hearers how he loved them.

"Those little fellows were always kept together," he went on, "from the time they were babies until, one day, the man I had hired pasture from decided to put one of them into one pasture, the second in another. One pasture was on one side of a sizable river, the other across. They were yearlings then.

"He put Cubby across the river one morning and left Mince on this side—and that night they were together on this side. Only one way about it, Cubby must have swum the river—and that meant he had to jump down off a bank twenty feet high or more. It happened not once but four or five times—and no matter which horse he put across the river, they'd be together, and sometimes in one pasture, sometimes in the other. He told me about it.

"Well, I knew the answer, because I knew something about horses. Those colts were mates and had to be together. I watched 'em and I found out that was so. There wasn't any fence high enough, no river broad enough to keep 'em apart or else they'd try to kick a fence down and hurt themselves.

"To make a long story short, I began to do some thinking. It was after I stayed awake all one night watching to see how Cubby got across the river—and saw him jump off that bank and swim over. I got an idea that those colts were going to be a bigger asset than a liability and that idea became the Roughriding and Horse Diving Show, a part of which you have seen. It gave me a toe hold.

"I've got my ranch back now, and my timber holdings didn't quite drop out of sight—but I tell you this, that I'd give all my land and timber if I could get Cubby back. Mince is eating her heart out in her stall over there. She would go through fire and water to get to him. She has done it. Cubby is gone. She doesn't know where and she won't dive. It would be the same way with him if she were the one that was gone.

"Maybe a horse isn't as intelligent as a dog, but I want to remark that a horse is intelligent enough so he won't jump into the water after a stick and fetch it back to shore just because somebody wants to see him dive and swim. A horse has got to have a reason for doing things. The reason these horses dive is to get to their mates.

"Maybe you would call it a trick, because we trick 'em into diving. We put one of the horses up on the tower, the other down at the water—and the one on the tower jumps into the water to get to its mate. That is all there is to it. Maybe it's not intelligence. Maybe it's instinct. I call it love.

"If I wanted to start an argument," Towner smiled, "I could begin to tell you things about the intelligence of a horse. Horses lead to a good many arguments, you know—just as they say a difference of opinion makes a horse

race. I'm sorry that I can't make Mince dive for you this evenin'—unless Cubby is back. I *could,* but I wouldn't. They do make horses dive by shooting off a gun behind 'em unexpectedly. I wouldn't.

"Cubby never jumped in the water off anything except to get to Mince—save once. That was a time when he knew it was necessary to save a life, and maybe that was intelligence. But I promised not to argue," he finished, with another smile.

Carol felt a surge of blood rise to her face and then her heart stopped beating. She thought he was going to tell how Cubby had leaped into the river to save her. But he did not. Murmurs of comment came, and most of them were admiring and sympathetic. Carol leaned over and, under cover of the conversation, said to Towner:

"I am much obliged to you; I hoped you would tell them—just that."

He looked steadily into her eyes and she almost winced at the keenness of his regard.

"I didn't want to do it," he said. "I came here, as your guest, because you asked me. I'm much obliged to *you.*"

He was on his feet, saying he must be excused. Henry Kimball came down the room and grasped his hand.

"I'm glad you told us about that," he said frankly. "There have been some ugly rumors afloat."

"I met one of 'em," grinned Towner. "It came out to see me at Lester's place. It called itself 'Marshal.' It said you sent it. I don't believe that it was all true."

Outside the door a man grabbed Towner by the shoulder.

"You damn fool!" he said. "Why are you masquerading like this?" His tone was both accusing and affectionate.

"Because," came Towner's ready answer, in a low tone, "I'm a pore lonesome cowboy—lookin' for my mate. You watch your step, Herrick!"

CHAPTER XV.

HORSE AND RIDER.

HENRY KIMBALL got the carnival committee together early that evening, informed them of the theft of Cubby, gave his word there was no fake about the diving horses, and sent for Marshal Goodwin.

But the wily official was too busy to be located. He could not be found at the carnival grounds.

Through the announcer the committee had the carnival audience informed of the theft, with the explanation that Towner had made of why Mince could not dive alone.

Immediately there arose a new cry of "Fake!" and boos, catcalls, hisses and other evidence that a portion of the crowd, at any rate, considered itself cheated. It was noticeable that the criticism came mostly from the seats nearest the diving tower.

Carol, sitting in a motor boat out at the boom which inclosed the birling basin, where the Kimball guests were placed after the run down from the cottage, leaned over to Herrick. Her face was white, her lips pressed firmly together, her nostrils quivering with emotion.

"Jimmy, do something for me," she begged. "Take a message to the announcer."

"Of course I will."

Carol scribbled on the leaf of a notebook and handed it to Herrick to read. He pursed his lips in a soundless whistle as he perused what she had clearly written.

"Tell him to make that announcement good and loud so that those roaring lumberjacks will hear it, too," she said.

Ten minutes later the megaphone man appeared on the platform at the top of the tower, avoiding the take-off float because it was too close to the noisy crowd near it; but before he could utter a word a howl went up below him. He

was admonished to hire a hall and to give some action and less talk, and the cries of "Fake!" continued.

The booing seemed to have been coached. It was after nine o'clock, the scheduled time for the diving. The evening program was finished, unless a miracle happened. His was a hard position—spokesman for the committee which had been forced to make apology for its entertainment.

As he waved and shouted vainly in the din, unable to make himself heard. there came a thunder of hoofs on the runway leading to the platform. A black horse, with Towner on its back, charged swiftly up to the tower, seeming about to run right off the platform into space.

It was Mince. The unexpected appearance of the horse gained comparative silence and the announcer seized his chance, sized up the situation and made the most of it.

"Ladies and gentlemen, an attempt will be made to get Mince to dive alone. This unprecedented stunt will be the first—— Here she comes!"

Mince dashed up the cleated plank incline. The announcer stepped aside. Mince made the last few steps in long leaps—then halted, while the tower swayed and creaked despite its sturdy construction.

The flood light picked up the pair, limned out a magnificent picture. Mince had her head high, ears up, as she came—suddenly she dropped her head, gave a long look down at the float where Cubby was to stand—and then flung her head high and gave a long, high neigh, which she repeated again and again.

It rang out over the dark waters and echoed from the darker woods across the stream. It was an appealing spectacle and hushed the crowd—save for the half-drunken river rats surrounding Rorty and Calkins.

"Make her dive!" came a bellow from below. "It's a trick harse! Make her do her trick!"

Towner raised his hand. The announcer offered him the megaphone, but he shook his head. He stood up in the skeleton stirrups attached to the surcingle, which was all either horse wore for diving, and could be seen urging Mince to make the jump. Mince pawed and stamped, danced and snorted—then reared and shook her head, whirled and dashed down the runway at a dangerously rapid speed, neighing her heartbroken call.

A message went up to the announcer in the hands of an agile boy, climbing the ladder which ran up the side of the tower, and again he roared out:

"Ladies and gentlemen, a reward of one thousand dollars is offered for the return of Cubby—mate to the horse you have just seen—and heard. An additional reward of one thousand dollars—is offered for the capture—of the thief who stole Cubby from his stall at the Lester farm. This offer," he went on, reading from a slip of paper, "does not apply to sworn officers of the law, but it is open to any other person. I thank you."

A roar of cheers went up. The band played. The program was over. The excitement had just begun, however, with curiosity roused as to who had offered the reward, why the "sworn officers of the law" were barred from receiving it, and general understanding among the wisest that Marshal Goodwin was particularly meant by this prohibition.

The marshal lay low. His phone rang almost constantly into the small hours of the morning, but he did not answer it after the first few calls, for it brought him anonymous jeers and queries, a flood of false rumors, wild reports from all parts of the country.

Cubby was "seen" at widely separated places at the same time, but up to noon of the next day nothing was seen of

Cubby in Kimball. At about that hour Marshal Goodwin took to his bed. He had had an interview with Henry Kimball and he was sick—of his job.

The first round of the semifinals in the roleo that afternoon drew a larger daytime crowd than had yet assembled. There were several reasons for this, among them the advertising given the carnival by the theft of Cubby, the reward offer, Towner's appearance on Mince—and his appearance as a birler.

Up to this time few had taken him seriously. The birling experts of the country were well known and could be counted on the fingers of two hands. The dark-horse entry was discounted as advertising by the knowing rivermen.

The surprise came when Towner, matched with Jake Beaufort, veteran roller from Michigan, wet him twice in succession, eliminated him from the contest and placed himself in position to meet the next rank of rollers.

The field was now reduced to eight, including Red Rorty, Joe Madwayosh, Joe Beauregard, each of them wearing titles they had won in former tourneys. The fact that Towner was among this octet meant something. His staying qualities proved that he was no tyro and his showing won him sympathy and calmed the critics who had cried "Fake!" at him.

After riding his log in the afternoon Towner rode 'Bolo to a mad finish that evening, with forty minutes of such horse insanity as no one there had ever seen.

And then, during the night, he spent hours seeking Cubby. His lost cowboys returned, disgusted and discouraged. They had followed a false trail made by a pack-horse train going into the copper country.

The lead that sent Towner off in a hurry that night was promising. A grizzled old river rat came to him after the rodeo exhibition and told him he believed the horse might be found in an abandoned camp formerly operated by the Calkins' Mills lumbermen. But when Towner got to Calkins' Mills he found he had been preceded by an officious deputy sheriff who had investigated and reported "nothing to it."

Towner, not satisfied, went to the camp and made certain that, if Cubby had been there, he had been taken away.

Carol had driven Harriet home late that night and Towner returned as she was leaving. She met him on the drive and stopped. Before she could say anything he drawled out:

"I am obliged to you again, as I understand it. But you didn't need to put any price on Cubby so far as my outfit is concerned."

"You are not obliged to me at all," Carol declared sharply. "I offered the reward from a purely selfish motive. I want Cubby."

"I see. Well, that will make it necessary for me to refund the reward, when one of us gets him," he mused. "Cubby isn't for sale, lost or found. He never will be. Nor Mince."

"Oh, I'm depending on your word," Carol declared gayly. "You said if it would bring him back you'd give him to me."

He stood in the glare of the headlights. She saw him blink and she smiled with satisfaction, for it was the first time she had been able to make him register confusion.

"If I said that," he remarked, "it goes."

"Oh, I wouldn't take him that way!" Carol laughed. "Only, I thought the reward might prove I didn't have a hand in the theft."

"You see, even if I was to sell Cubby, Mince would have to go along with him," he went on, ignoring her remark, "and I think what I said was that if it would get him back, I'd give him to you."

"I'd take them both, of course," she cried, believing he was weakening, per-

haps playing a shrewd deal—and hoping that it was not true.

"And then I'd go out behind the barn and shoot myself," Towner went on.

As she looked at him she almost believed he would do it. His horse moved restlessly up beside the car. She put a hand on his arm, with its tense muscles holding the reins, and again got that queer shock at his hard strength.

"Do you think as much of them as that?" she asked.

"I love children," he said. "If I was married and had twins I don't think I could love 'em more than those horses. I'm not conceited, Miss Kimball, but I know they love me. If you understood, you wouldn't want to take 'em away from me. Not for my sake but for theirs. I'll tell you something—this is my last show; this is the last time those horses are going to dive—if they do dive. I am going to give up the show business. Not Cubby and Mince, though. They helped me get on my feet when I was down and out, and I mean to make it up to 'em. They don't like to dive. It doesn't hurt 'em any, but it is a trick, playing on their liking for each other, to make 'em do it. So, you see, it isn't for what I can get out of 'em that I want 'em. But I guess you meant well when you offered the reward, and I'm much obliged——"

"Don't say that again!" Carol warned him. "I think you are laughing at me, up your sleeve."

He ran his hand down his arm to the place where hers had rested a moment.

"There isn't a chuckle in there," he said. "There is a spot there that burns as if some one had laid a red-hot dollar on it. But I like it; I like to play with fire, sometimes. However, I promised not to—get fresh with you. I figure I've kept that promise so far. Now you listen to this and see if it sounds like a sleeve snicker: If you want Cubby—*not only his mate but his rider has got to go with him.*"

His eyes were close, the dash light seemed to strike fire in them. A surge of something like electricity went through her.

"You are very close to—to being fresh, Mr. Roughrider," she replied, trying to laugh, but with her voice trembling. "Do you always stick to your word?"

"Yes."

"I—I'll consider—your ultimatum. I do want Cubby, more than anything I've ever wanted in my life. I must have him. Do I have to buy a ranch and hire you as my foreman?"

"You couldn't *hire* me to do anything," he replied, then clucked to his horse and, again, left her before she was ready to go.

CHAPTER XVI.

KIDNAPERS.

FOR once, Carol Kimball drove slowly. It was not because she was tired, though she was very much fatigued, and her lungs were still a little sore from the straining they had got as she fought for life in the river.

It was because she was exceedingly thoughtful. Things seemed to conspire together to remind her of Towner. The hoofprints of many horses in the road, for instance—and then her headlights picked up a car, evidently in trouble, its wheels in the ditch, almost at the spot where she had been stalled when trying to avoid running down Towner and Cubby.

"It was right here," she murmured, "that I began to 'get fresh' with him—and I am to blame for everything. I can't be angry at him. 'Red-hot dollar!' Did he mean something more by that? He didn't really like my offering a reward."

She slowed down still more as she came closer to the car in the ditch. It was a flivver with flapping curtains, and looked like one of the ridiculous old rattletraps the Indians used.

The car had its rear wheels in the ditch and was standing across the road, lurching and shaking as if the driver was trying hard to buck it out of the way. She threw out her gear and halted within a few feet of it.

A man slid out of the rear seat from the concealment of the curtains, stooped down as if looking under the car, then rose and walked toward her. With a gasp she realized that he wore a handkerchief tied about the lower part of his face. Then she thought that perhaps it only seemed so, that it might be one of Towner's cowboys—but something sinister warned her too late. He was at her side, and a big hand gripped the wheel.

"You Miss Kimball?" came the query in a muffled voice. And without waiting for an answer, he went on hurriedly: "You offered a reward for the return of that trick horse, Cubby, from the wild West show. Well, I can take you where he is."

"Who are you?" she demanded, her hand on the shift lever.

"Never mind that now. You follow that car ahead."

As he spoke he opened the door of the roadster and got into the seat beside her. His last words had been a command. She stiffened and almost bristled at it.

"I won't follow that car or any car, with you," she declared. "And I have no money with me. Here is my bag. Look for yourself. Then get out."

She handed him her bag which lay on the seat beside her. He tossed it back to her and repeated his command.

"You follow that car. We ain't after money, that way, but we want the reward. If you want Cubby back, you follow to where he is, that's all."

"Where have you got him hidden?" she demanded sharply.

"Haven't got him at all—but I said, I know where to find him. Did you ever see this?"

He held out his hand and in it was a bright-red rosette which she recognized as exactly like one from Cubby's bridle, with the initial "C" under the glass ornament. She put out her hand to pick it up. The fingers of the hand, dirty and rough, closed over her own. An arm went about her, then the hand went over her mouth and held her helpless to cry out or to move. The rough, muffled voice grated in her ear:

"Now, you follow that car or I'll do you up in a bundle and drive this boat myself. Be sensible. How about it?"

For a wild moment she struggled, tried to bite the hand and could not, then decided to appear to yield, to gain time. The smell of leather and of horse was one thing that decided her. She had not the slightest doubt what the game was.

This, she was sure, was one of the thieves who had stolen Cubby, anxious now to be rid of their dangerous booty and to cash in on it. She had played into his hands with a vengeance, with her offer of a reward. She nodded to answer his question and the grip on her mouth was released, with the warning:

"Any noise from you and you go home in a gunny sack. Just as soon have the horse as the two thousand."

"Oh, then you have got the man who stole him, too?" she queried.

"Follow that car, quick. Somebody likely to be along."

He pushed her horn button twice, sharply, and the flivver started ahead, moving easily out of the ditch. She thrust her car in gear and followed. The headlights from an approaching car lighted the field at their right, as it approached the curve beyond a knoll that hid the roadway.

"More speed!" came the urgent command as the flivver drew away from them. She accelerated until she was close behind it. She noted, with a new thrill of alarm, that there was no registration plate on the rear. She was

tempted to switch off her lights suddenly, try to jump out and signal the approaching car, but something kept her from doing either. It was not fear. The other car whisked by and her opportunity was gone.

Half a mile along the Willow Bend road the flivver turned abruptly off to the left, bumped over a shallow ditch, a knoll, through a gate into a field and followed a hay road toward a grove.

Her companion had his hand on the wheel, and she had no choice but to turn or to risk his anger. She turned. The man snapped off the headlights and the flivver ran dark, too.

She could see nothing at first, and drove so slowly that her captor growled, "Step on it!" and flashed on a tiny pocket torch which picked up the ruts sufficiently for her to make out where they ran.

A tree loomed dangerous close, but he urged speed until she had got close to the flivver again. They entered the grove. The hay road became a winding wood road, rutted deeply, but easier to follow by the tiny spot of the flash light.

The flivver bounced and slued ahead at a reckless speed. The heavier car, with its shock absorbers and balloon tires, rode fairly easily, but Carol was kept very busy guiding it.

They had started north and she tried to keep her directions clear, but gave it up. It was impossible, after a half mile, to be sure she had not circled east or west. She kept her ears open for the sound of running water, in the belief that they might approach Bitter River, but got no sound of it.

For two hours by her dash clock they drove at an average speed of ten miles an hour or so, she judged, though she saw the speedometer only occasionally; it might have been slower. Carol tried to decide just what course she would take. If it was money they were after—and the manner in which they had taken her prisoner indicated so—she would give them money, if they did take her to Cubby. She began to talk to her silent seat mate.

"How will I get the horse back?" she inquired.

"That's for you to figger out, sister," came the short reply. "You got your check book with you?"

"Yes. It's in my bag."

"Fine."

That sounded rather reassuring.

"And I won't stop payment on the check—if you produce the goods," she added after a few minutes.

With a warning honk the flivver halted. The driver got out. He, too, wore a kerchief about his mouth. Carol's companion jumped out and went forward. The pair held a low-toned conversation. She could not catch the words but an argument seemed to be in progress. It ended with evident agreement, and the man who had taken charge of her came back with an, "All right, sister, here we be. Come on."

"I'll not leave this car until I'm sure you are not working a trick on me," she declared. "Where is the horse?"

She fumbled for her bag, not only because she wanted to have a check ready on demand but because the bag contained a long, sharp-pointed nail file with an ivory handle—a handy weapon, if she needed it.

The bag was missing.

"Did you pick up my bag?" she demanded as the man came up.

"No foolin' now, sister! You kept the bag. I didn't touch it, except to toss it back to you."

She pawed about in the seat, then remembered she had dropped it on her left side for safety; but it was not there. She fumbled on the floor at her feet. Her hand came in contact with something cold and hard and her fingers closed on it. The bag must have dropped out beside the road when she chucked it hurriedly away, the car

bouncing and shaking the wheel in her hand.

"You got it?" asked the man harshly. "You better not try any foolishness."

A surge of hope went through her as she muttered something about, "It was right in the seat," for she remembered that before she had made the turn off the Willow Bend road she had tossed the bag to one side. She began to picture Towner, keen eyed, watchful for every sign, riding along that road, coming to the deep ruts where the flivver had been planted, then finding her bag, studying the marks of the wheels and remembering that her tires had diamond treads.

He would muster a troop of hard-riding cowboys and start in pursuit. He might even now—no, that was entirely unlikely; he could not have left the house again.

"Let's see it," demanded the suspicious kidnaper, and popped on his tiny flash. "No stallin'. The gang that's got Cubby may be back any time, and we got to work fast."

"Show me the horse first and I'll see what I'll do," Carol countered, putting her hand behind her. "And don't think you can frighten me—*you horse thief!*"

He was close to her, the flash held up not far from his own face. Wrench in hand, she swung her arm out to strike—and then darkness descended upon her.

Muffling folds of coarse wool smothered her, her arms were pinioned at her sides; she was lifted, carried, then set on her feet, pushed forward over a door sill and thrust into a chair.

CHAPTER XVII.

BACK PAY—OVERDUE.

CAROL wanted time to think, but the time which passed as she sat there, muffled in a horse blanket which almost stifled her, seemed an age.

She heard nothing after her captor hurried out of the building, for a long time. She began to struggle to get free, but found that the blanket had been tied somehow so that it held her to the chair.

She began trying to puzzle out who these men might be. The big man who had sat with her in her car and directed her had been careful, she thought, to disguise his voice, though she could not be sure that it was not the accidental result of the kerchief bound rather tightly about his mouth.

If he feared she would know his voice, it was because he was some one she knew. The more she thought of it the more she began to detect flaws in the explanation he had given of his reason for forcing her to go with him.

He must have known she would not carry the sum of two thousand dollars with her; he had taken a chance on her having a check book with her—unless he knew that it was habitual for her to pay all her bills by check and had seen her in Kimball, shopping.

What would they do to her now, with her check book missing? It looked like a straight case of kidnaping They had used Cubby as a decoy, but whether they really did know where the horse was or not she could not decide, for one reason, because the smell of horse was so strong. The rosette, the blanket, the big man's hand, his clothes, reeked of horse.

She was actually glad to hear a curse outside the door, stumbling footsteps, the glow of light. Rough hands jerked and pulled at the blanket, uncovered her face and held a lantern before her eyes.

She blinked to see who held it, then looked past him into the contorted face of the other.

It was a full minute before she recognized him.

When she did, everything seemed to fit together like a scattered puzzle on an electrified board, the pieces flying together of themselves.

"Red Rorty! So, it is you?"

"You bet it's me!" he snarled. "Now

you look here, you little hell-cat, I told you a'ready what I do to the dames what use their hands too free with me. Well, I didn't tell you the half of it. Tried to get me with a wrench, eh?"

She flinched beneath his look. The first real shock of panic shot through her, but she beat it down and returned his look steadily.

"Tell me just what you want, Rorty. If it's money, you are out of luck now, because my bag is lost—unless you did take it. I was ready to ransome Cubby, but don't think you can collect a ransom for me, if this is a kidnaping. The woods are full of men searching for Cubby right now. What do you suppose they would do to you if they found you had taken me here this way? I called you a horse thief, but you are worse than that. You——"

"You shut up!" cried Rorty. "I'm no horse thief and you lay off that, and you heard what I said about fresh dames. I mean it. I've handled 'em before like you; it's one of my specialties. You chucked away that bag, thinkin' it would stall us, but it won't work. If you want Cubby, you will pay fer him, just as you offered to do. What d'ye know about that?"

Rorty's companion pulled him to a corner of the low, musty-smelling cabin, made of slabs, and began to talk to him argumentatively, evidently trying to calm Rorty down. She heard the words "thousand" and "cash" and "three hours," nothing else she could make sense of, but the conference ended with Rorty apparently agreeable to the other's propositions.

He came back to Carol.

"Here's what you got to do," he said abruptly, "and damn quick, with no stallin'! You're goin' to use the telephone to get us two thousand dollars in cash where we can lay hands onto it. We got to clear outa this place before the gang that stole Cubby gets back. D'you think I'd let you see my face if I stole him? What kind of a damn fool d'you think I am?"

"I knew you were several kinds, Rorty, but I didn't think you were fool enough to do this," she answered. "What is the matter with your playmate's face? Is he ashamed of it?"

To her surprise Rorty, instead of blustering, began an elaborate explanation.

"Because if that gang knowed who he was they'd knife him," he said. "He don't trust you to keep mum, but I do, because I think you got sense. You pay that reward an' we'll show you Cubby, all right. He's not far from here."

Carol believed this last.

"Of course I'll pay the reward," she declared impatiently. "You didn't have to kidnap me to get it, and unless you are mixed up in the theft I don't see why——"

"I got good reason for what I'm doin'," he cut in. "I found the harse and you agree to pay fer that. Two thousand."

"Then you intend to give up the thief, too? That was the offer, one thousand for Cubby and——"

"I'll tell you who the thief—the thieves was," declared Rorty harshly. "That's as far as I can go. They're a bad lot that'd just as soon kill you as look at you, and if you ain't ready to come acrost I'd just as soon leave you here to wait for 'em to come back. I don't want to be here."

"Brave boy!" muttered Carol, more convinced with every word he uttered that he was lying. He blustered badly, drew too dark a picture of the gang and had corrected himself when he said "thieves" after using the singular.

The masked man drew her suspicion now. She began to believe that it must be Calkins himself, from his care to keep his face covered and not to speak so she could hear his voice. The two fitted together as main parts of that

picture puzzle, with the reward she had offered giving them a chance to relieve themselves of the dangerous booty they had got, at a profit.

Their demand was unreasonable, of course, but she comprehended that it might be a cheap price, after all. Rorty evidently had been drinking before he ouched the flask the other gave him, and she knew the result of too much liquor mixed with the dark blood in Rorty's veins. Rorty was not brave; he was bolstering himself with liquor. He was frightened, anxious to get out of a bad place with even money. He was afraid of Towner, on a log.

"You will swear to the identity of the thieves in court, of course," she remarked, parleying with him.

"Think I want my throat cut?" he demanded. "No, sir! I'll give you the dope on 'em; that's as far as I'll go. And you'll agree to keep still about this place and who brung you here. If you don't agree to that, I can fix it so you won't want to say nothin' about the little trip in here with me—and another man."

"If I pay you at all," she said finally, "it will close the deal tight. I want to be sure what I'm getting, though. How can I be sure?"

For answer Rorty signaled to the other man to come over. They stood on each side of her and for a moment she did not breathe, but shrank against the expected touch of their hands. But they took hold of the chair instead and carried her in it, through a door into an even lower room—a lean-to with rotten roof and floor, moldy from rains that had come through and growing with moss and pale grass in crevices.

On a three-legged stool sat a lineman's telephone set, rusty, battered and ancient of design but attached to a wire which ran through a hole in the roof. They set her down close to it, Rorty taking it up in one of his huge hands, the other man going back after the lantern which he set down just inside the door, so that it dimly illumined both rooms.

As she saw Rorty take up the instrument, it flashed over her that she must be somewhere along the long, single-strand logging line which hooked up the camps along the river, was attached to the Kimball string and connected at Calkins' Mills with a tiny exchange there.

Here was her sole chance to get in touch with Kimball.

"We found this here set here when we found Cubby," Rorty explained, and the explanation was, in itself, a revelation of something else. Carol knew that Rorty had worked as a lineman when the logging string was hooked up. Now he held the phone as one accustomed to testing, in one hand, his finger hooked into the receiver support.

"You'll telephone to have two thousand dollars in cash brung to the band stand at Willow Bend park, right away," Rorty instructed her. "There'll be a man there to take it. Maybe more than one if it takes more than one to tote it out there. But we don't want a crowd. After the money is brung there and paid over, the harse is yours and I'll tell you who stole him."

He handed her the phone, saying: "Are you all ready?"

The answer was a tinkle from the phone which startled her, and Rorty, too, seemed astonished to hear it. He stared, then reached for the instrument again, but Carol, quick as a flash, snatched the receiver off and called into the mouthpiece:

"Help—old cabin—twenty miles up —help——"

Then Rorty's hand struck her across the mouth, either by intention or in his clumsy haste to tear the phone away from her. Whichever it was, it hurt so that she cried out and recoiled.

Rorty pressed the receiver tightly to his ear, keeping his hand over the trans-

mitter. As he listened his brows contracted, his little red eyes seemed to grow smaller and more red, his lips moved in silent curses.

After a time he replaced the receiver, laid the phone on the stool, came over and gripped her wrists, recently released from the blanket, although that still held her bound to the chair.

"You double-crossin' hell-cat!" he grated at her. "You've done *your* stuff; now you'll do what I say."

With the final words he pulled her violently toward him and kissed her brutally on the lips. He was pulled away by the other man, who gave an inarticulate warning.

"That's your back pay, overdue!" he snarled, his eyes gleaming. "Part of it. More coin ready—if you want it. Plenty. Now you take that phone and put in the call you ought to and do it *right*. You understand?"

She nodded, beaten.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THROUGH FIRE AND WATER.

QUIVERING with disgust and anger, Carol took the phone in hands that shook so she could scarcely hold it. Her lungs labored for breath.

"Operator—give me Kimball 452. . . . Yes."

"What's that number?" demanded Rorty in a whisper.

"Our house. I'm going to talk to father—to tell him to—send the money. You listen."

"All right. Careful!"

"Hello! Hello, dad! This is Carol. . . . Oh, no, I'm at Harriet's, yet, safe and sound. Listen. I have found Cubby and I've got to have the money to pay the reward. I lost my bag, I think, on the Willow Bend Road. . . . Right away, to-night. It is to be taken to the band stand at the park, where a man will be to get it. . . . It is all right. . . . Yes, all in cold cash —or *red-hot dollars.*" She managed a gasping chuckle. "No, don't bother to come to the park yourself. Send Dawson with it in the runabout. . . . Yes, they found him in the woods, twenty miles——"

Rorty's hand checked her and his savage whisper, "None of that!" warned her.

She was through. Into her consciousness had come a cool, drawling voice:

"Yes—where? Harriet's. . . . Oh, I see! Twenty miles, *you said before.* I'm on the way—*with red-hot dollars!*"

It was Towner. The number she had called was Lester's.

Rorty's face had been close beside hers, listening closely for every word, trying to catch the voice that she tried to confine to her ear and believed she had done. But Rorty took the phone roughly from her.

"I'll just check up on you, sister."

"You'll spoil it!" she gasped.

"Oh, I know my stuff," he chuckled harshly. "Operator? Operator? Test man. Give me the board on Kimball 452. . . . Uh-uh!"

His face was a menace when he hung the receiver up and thrust the instrument on the stool.

"Faked us, did you? Framed us, eh? With that damned cowboy of yours. I'll——"

The phone toppled from the stool and he stooped quickly to pick it up. Carol took her only chance. The other man was standing a few feet away, back in the room.

She got to her feet, gripping the seat of her chair with both hands and scuttled toward the door that joined the two rooms, kicking the lantern over. It went dark.

She heard the crash of bodies striking the door frame, as Rorty and the other came together—then caught a sudden flare and flash.

She heard a hoarse cry, then fell out through the outer door, almost on her face.

The fall was a fortunate accident. It loosened the blanket so that it slipped over the chair back, and she was able to pull free. She staggered up and ran toward her car, tripping on stubs and brush. She fell flat, striking the heel of her hand on a sharp stub so that it felt numb.

She reached the car and turned in time to see a veritable blast of flame and smoke shoot from the cabin, which was on fire. Carol scrambled to the wheel and watched for pursuers. They did not appear.

As she spun the starter the motor responded at once. She switched on her light and saw that in order to turn around she must circle the flivver or risk being stalled in mud or thick brush The clearing was tiny but the ground was solid here, covered with chips and bark.

She drove her car head on against the side of the flivver, the rending crash filling her with satisfaction. The shock sent the lighter car ahead a little. She backed a few feet to make the turn.

The running forms of the two men appeared from around the cabin. The flames had blocked their exit from the front but they had escaped at the back. Swinging into the edge of the brush, she shot the car ahead in second speed and came close to the cabin. She felt the heat flare out, saw a man running close to her, and swerved away from him.

He stumbled, clutched at the running board, went flat and dropped back as her car lunged into the road, headed out the way it had come, the crackle of flames and a volley of oaths following her.

One of the headlights was out from the deliberate, disabling ramming she had given the flivver. The other functioned well, however, and gave her good light. She drove recklessly for a short distance, then, warned by the bouncing and lurching of the car that she might disable her means of escape, she slowed down.

A mile or so out the road a thought struck her that brought her to a halt.

"Cubby!"

Among all the things Rorty had said she believed this, that the horse was not far from that cabin. If the fire spread and ran through the woods it might reach his hiding place, he might be burned to death—and it would be her fault. For her own safety that splendid horse would die in agony.

For a long moment Carol sat and stared fixedly down the avenue of firs and pines, the tree trunks limned as dark pillars in the headlights. No speed, along this road, could take her to Willow Bend Road and back in time to save Cubby, even if the fire did not reach him, for Rorty and Calkins—if it *was* Calkins—would have removed him, their tracks would be obliterated by the fire, her opportunity lost.

There was no sound of pursuit; she believed she had damaged the flivver so that it could not be operated. She drove slowly a few yards, found an opening in the trees, turned into it and pushed the car deep into brush, snapped off the lights and, with a powerful flash light from the car and a long, heavy lug wrench as a weapon, she started back.

She used the light cautiously for fear the pair might be trudging along the road toward her, halted frequently to listen with bated breath, but heard nothing, not even the crackle of flames. Trotted swiftly at times, within twenty minutes she came to a curve—the last long bend in the road before it entered the cabin clearing.

A dim light ahead puzzled her; it did not flicker and flare. Surely the cabin could not have burned down so quickly. She left the road and pushed

through the brush, cutting off the curve, heading straight for the light. A low, brush-covered mound gave her cover as she reached the edge of the clearing. She crawled up and looked over.

She saw the flivver, a lantern beside it, Rorty and Calkins, the latter's face uncovered—squatted at the rear wheel, the car jacked up, a spare wheel ready. The lights of the car were on, too, and shone in the cabin door. The old building was apparently intact. They were trying to repair the car to get it going, either in pursuit or in flight. Her heart went into her throat as Rorty jammed on the extra wheel, with an oath.

"That'll do it!" he exulted. "Hurry the nut on. That little hell-cat may wreck herself; she can't travel that road fast and not ram a tree, and I can push this old trap along and overtake her before she gets to the Bend Road. You take that harse acrost the river, Rud, as far as you can make him travel before daylight, and then you make for Kimball. I'll meet you at the Altamont. And you be sure they ain't any black harsehairs stickin' to your clo'es. It's the best bet. I got old Goodwin fixed and your man at the mills is O. K., ain't he?"

"He better be. He gets it in the neck if he ain't, either way. That's the way my boys feel about him. They'd crack him wide open if he squealed and he gets two hundred to keep quiet. Anyhow, he's sore the reward wasn't open to him."

"It took five hundred to fix Goodwin, damn him, but he's in now and can't back out. Gimme a drink."

Calkins shook his head.

"Look here, you lay off the stuff," he warned. "My boys have got every nickel they can scrape up on you to win Friday. If you lose they lose and—well, I won't answer for what they might do."

"Don't try to scare me," Rorty responded. "I've seen enough of the rotgut go through your hands to put you away for life, Rud. You should worry about a few hundred dollars; you're makin' enough on the stuff durin' the carnival to be able to throw a few hundred into the river for advertisin'."

"I don't intend to have it rolled into the river by you. You got to stay sober and roll Friday, what I mean."

"Who's goin' to bate me? This Towner can't, if he comes through with Madwayosh. He's a trick roller. He's too light for me. I can match his double-reverse stuff with two or three holts of my own. And we're keepin' him awake night and sweatin' with the harse chase. He'll be off on another to-night—up to Twenty Mile Camp, which is on the other side of the river. The gal told him twenty. She didn't know she was in old Ten Mile Camp on this side, any more than a mosquito."

Rorty was in the car now, trying it out. The starter would not work. He stamped on it and swore. Calkins went to the crank and whirled it. The engine sputtered and took hold. Rorty backed the car around.

"Steerin' knuckle's bent, I guess," he shouted. "But I can handle her. How's the front wheels look?"

"All right. Get going."

"Watch my smoke. You ride that harse."

The flivver bounced out of the clearing into the tote road, rattled past Carol and into the forest. Calkins walked to the cabin door, stood there uncertainly with the lantern, shook his head and started around the building. Carol moved to follow. She must keep that lantern in sight; it would lead her to Cubby.

At the lean-to she stopped, flashed her light in a window that had no glass in it, and looked for the phone, but it was gone. She followed Calkins who crashed on, reckless of noise. Her plans were uncertain, except to keep the lantern in sight. She believed she could

handle Calkins more easily than she could Rorty. He was a bootlegger, wild, reckless, unscrupulous—up to a certain point. He was white; he had none of the savage strain that put a knot in Rorty's character.

Calkins went for fifty paces back of the cabin, turned left and suddenly the light of the lantern vanished. It was as if it had been extinguished or had dropped into a hole. Carol held her breath and listened.

She heard scrambling sounds ahead and went forward, gripping her weapon, wondering if this was a trick to trap her. It was so dark that she could see very little and she chanced a flash of her torch after she had taken a dozen steps —and just in time to escape walking off a steep declivity.

After a moment she saw the lantern moving away and she scrambled down the slope into the deep ravine. Risking a fall, she got to a plain trail of sand which covered the floor of the ravine, and her light picked up the marks of horse's hoofs, those same dainty prints her eyes had followed in the sand along Willow Bend Road.

They seemed an omen, those footprints, as if she had been fated to follow them through danger, "through fire and water," as Towner had said of Cubby and Mince.

A rough shelter made of logs loomed before her. The lantern had gone behind it, a finger of light streamed from a crack, the stamp of hoofs was heard, a nicker—then the voice of Calkins speaking to a horse—and she knew she had found Cubby, at last.

CHAPTER XIX.

MATE TO MATE.

CAROL had not given a thought, as she followed Calkins, to the eventuality of punishment to be meted out to these conspirators by the law. It was not because, as she had learned, that the law had been "fixed," but because she knew Towner scorned its aid and because she, too, wanted to win her objective by her own efforts.

She wanted Cubby and she wanted to get him, herself—for herself. He had saved her life. She understood why Towner loved him. She comprehended also that her offer of a reward had been prompted by her own selfish desire to own the beautiful horse, and that this offer was indirectly responsible for her being trapped as she had been. But it was also responsible for her being able, at this moment, with her eye glued to a crack in the stable, to see Cubby—a dark, indistinct shape moving uneasily, snorting at the man who was saddling him.

What was she going to do? An attempt to parley with Calkins might end in him dashing out the door on Cubby's back, leaving her only with the vague directions Rorty had given Calkins for the new place of concealment.

Would Calkins listen to an offer of the whole amount of the reward, turn Cubby over to her, allow her to go out with the horse? She doubted it. He would be afraid of Rorty if he did not distrust her. He might attack her and leave her helpless or senseless here in this hidden old lumber-camp stable, while he fled and framed an alibi.

Carol stepped carefully around toward the open, sagging door and saw with satisfaction that it was too low for a man to ride out on horseback. She waited for Calkins to come out leading Cubby, her finger on the button of the powerful electric torch, her other hand gripping the cold metal of the lug wrench—a shining, long-shafted tool in the shape of a T, with the cross for a handle.

Calkins blew out the lantern and clucked to Cubby. As he stumbled over the door sill Carol snapped the strong light full in his face. He dodged back, Cubby jerked up his head and pulled

back on the reins—and Carol could not strike. She might have missed, to be sure, but it was the staring, startled eyes so close to her that robbed her of courage to aim a blow at his head. She did not hate him as she did Rorty; she only despised him. He had not touched her nor sworn at her; he had pulled Rorty away when Rorty threatened.

She thrust the round, hollow end of the gleaming lug wrench into the light and commanded:

"Hands up, Calkins! Quick, or I'll pull the trigger!"

"Hell!"

His hands went high, the reins held in the fingers of his right hand; he stood still, peering and blinking. She advanced, keeping the light full in his face.

"Lead the horse out," she ordered. "Quick!"

He obeyed. Cubby snorted, resisted a little, but came toward her, his great soft eyes blinking blindly, but his ears cocked and quivering, his nostrils expanding and contracting as he strove to make sure that this was a friend. Never in her life had Carol felt such a thrill of gladness

She spoke to the horse and he blew and sniffed and gave a queer little nicker. She believed he recognized her. It was like a friend's comforting voice to her. She had no longer the slightest fear or nervousness.

"Drop the reins and step back inside, Calkins," she commanded, and enforced her order with a click of the steel wrench against the flash light.

The determined girl with the shining weapon, the glitter of which was all Calkins could see, must have been the last thing in the world he had expected to confront him. His eyes dazzled by the strong light which concealed her, he obeyed her command.

Cubby nosed at her, sniffing daintily, and she hooked her left arm through the bridle rein.

"I'm taking Cubby out," she said. "You stay inside unless you want to meet hot lead. There'll be no cold cash for you, but maybe iron bars, and they are cold enough."

"Look here, I didn't steal the horse, nor neither did Rorty. It was——"

"That pot wrangler that Towner fired," she supplied. "Your information is worthless and you're caught with the goods. You will land in jail—unless you do one thing. Hold your tongue and keep Rorty in Kimball and in the rolling, Friday."

"Yeah?"

"Yes. That'll be your job, Calkins. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Why, he ain't figgerin' not to be in it."

"No, but he is figuring on a spree. I know him. You get to Kimball, quick, and keep him sober. You ought to know how."

"You want him to win, eh?"

Carol hesitated. She did not wish to reveal her play.

"*You* want him to win, don't you?" she countered.

"You bet your life. Look here——"

"That's all. Keep inside until I'm on my way. I don't trust you for a minute."

She dropped the wrench in the soft sawdust which paved the ground all about, and got quickly into the saddle, whirled Cubby quickly and started him straight back the ravine run. The horse shied sidewise as she kept the light going; she snapped it off and gave him his head.

He took her up the ravine, breaking into a lope which told her he knew the way out, not up the steep descent she had made but by the more gradual slope of the stream bed.

It was good to feel the powerful, sure-footed stride of the horse, carrying her swiftly and eagerly along with every indication that he knew just where he was going. The trail curved

out of the ravine and joined the tote road beyond the cabin clearing, not far from the place where she had hidden her car.

Once in the road Cubby stretched out, strained at the bit and increased his speed with the driving, eager, urging lope of the homeward-bound horse. The dark forest slipped past her, branches brushed her hair, twigs whipped her face and hands, but she did not mind these. She clung to the pommel, riding bent over low, and prayed that a sweeping branch might not strike her, remembering that the flivver she had followed all the way in had not struck its top, and Cubby kept in the middle of the road.

As the horse raced on a mood of high exhilaration gripped her. She laughed, then shouted, then began to sing. The swift wind of her passage whistled in her ears, whipped her hair. She sang a wild little song of her own composition, meant only for the startled birds of the forest and for Cubby to hear:

"Through the forest, through fire
And through water we fly,
Cubby and I, Cubby and I!"

She kept time to the regular beat of hoofs, caught up in a transport of triumph, stung and glowing, her blood hot in her cheeks from the night wind and from something within her that thrilled her and threatened to burst her full heart.

It grew slightly less dark. She thought that the clouds which had lowered and made the darkness stygian, must have cleared. Cubby halted in his stride and flung his head up, gave a long, pealing neigh—and it was answered from afar. He leaped on. Carol could not check him. He ran like a wild thing out of control and her heart ran with him. She could have gone on forever, she thought, just like this.

Through the brush of a fringed clearing Cubby dashed, his hoofs thudding faster in the forest soil. Limbs of smaller trees whizzed over Carol's head, brushed her knees. Then came the dull thunder of many horses running on soft ground.

They burst from the woods into the open. Cubby raced and nickered as he ran. A line of horsemen showed dimly against the false dawn in the eastern sky. Sharp reports burst out, flashed flame in the air. She tugged at the reins, Cubby slackened, but only to lift his stentorian neigh and then dashed toward the shape that answered him from the line—a dark shape which lunged forward and dashed toward him, leaving the others behind.

The horses came together with halting lunges, touched noses, flung their heads over each other's necks and nibbled softly.

Towner spoke to her almost sharply. Her faint reply brought a tone of concern to his voice. She was faint with the sudden reaction from her experience, the high excitement of her ride, the hot August night, so still and stifling. She bit her lips to try to conquer the feeling but swayed in the saddle.

"I—I brought Cubby out myself," she murmured. "He has got to be mine now."

She felt herself going and clutched at the pommel, missed it, and it seemed as if Cubby floated away from beneath her. The next she knew she was held in steel-strong arms. Lips burned upon her own. Life rushed back to her and she struggled to free herself. Towner's husky voice was in her ear.

"——the way I said," she caught.

"Not that way!" she cried, pushing herself away from him. "No, no! You must think——"

Words failed her. What did he think of her? How cheaply did he hold her?

"You are worse than a horse thief!"

she cried angrily, brushing her burning lips with her hand.

He set her back on Cubby's saddle as if she were a petulant child.

CHAPTER XX.

NEWS ABOUT HARRIET.

THE riders who had come with Towner dropped back and let the two lead on, as if by tacit understanding that they wanted to be alone.

"It's funny," he said in an ordinary tone. "I was on that line when you cried into the phone for help. Where were you then?"

"I was at Ten Mile Camp, but I didn't know it until later. I guessed at the distance. Where did you go to? Twenty Mile Camp?"

"Started there but stopped at Calkins Mills. Found that deputy sheriff who 'investigated' for us, once. Before we got through investigatin' him we knew somethin'. What became of Rorty?"

"He was headed for the Altamont House in the flivver."

She told him briefly how they had decoyed her, of her first flight, then her return.

"I couldn't stand it to leave Cubby there in danger," she said. "But the old cabin simply didn't catch; it was too damp for even spilled kerosene to start it. Perhaps they did something to put the fire out. Anyway——"

"You went back and got Cubby."

"It saved me having to pay the reward," she went on lightly.

"I see," he drawled out, so slowly he seemed to be thinking of something else. "Well, there's been some excitement tonight."

"You mean about me?"

"Partly, but you see we all thought you had gone home and I reckon your folks thought you had stayed at the Lester's. The first excitement was about Harriet."

She caught her breath, resolved not to yield to the cry that seemed clawing at her throat, determined not to let him see how cruelly she hung in suspense.

"Was she excited about me?" she inquired.

"Well, she is now, but up to two o'clock, when you called in, nobody had missed you, you understand. Jim Herrick came over to the house just after you left and——"

"That was his car!" Carol cried, with memory of the one that had sped past while Rorty sat beside her, directing her to follow the flivver. "He passed me."

"I guess he wasn't lookin' for you," Towner chuckled. "He came and got Harriet and they went and got married."

"Oh!" She began to laugh and had hard work to check herself for hysteria threatened her. "Oh, that was just what I wanted! Now you understand, perhaps, why I—got fresh."

He was silent. The morning sky was beginning to turn blue. She wished she could see his eyes. An absurd wish, she told herself—wondering whether they might have something of the same fire that crept up from the eastern horizon.

"I see," he said flatly. And then: "Red-hot dollars! All spent."

They were at the gate to the Lester place and could see the house ablaze with light. He halted Mince there and turned her head west toward Kimball. "I guess you can get Cubby to go along," he remarked. "Bowleg Burns will take care of him. I reckon I better go and see if Rorty arrived where he headed for."

She was near enough so that she could catch at his arm. Again her fingers slipped from that marble-hard muscle and again a shock went through her—this time as if she had been physically repulsed by him.

"No, no, you must not do that!" she cried. "Leave him alone. If you feel

that you want to beat him—do it with your feet, on a log."

"I see," he answered in a metallic tone. "That's right; I've got a bet on with him."

CHAPTER XXI.

BIRLING AND BRAINS.

RED RORTY appeared at the roleo finals Friday because he dared do nothing else. Calkins had convinced him of that. Calkins should have been there earlier.

When Calkins did arrive, Friday morning, it was to discover that his job of getting Rorty sober was much harder than it might have been to keep him sober. Rorty's courage had needed liquid support and he had taken it.

Calkins knew something about how to unscramble an egg, even such a bad egg in such a bad mess as Rorty was. He went to work at it. With two trusted lieutenants he worked over Rorty until noon, beginning with the drug store and ending with the Bitter River.

The result was that Red Rorty walked the take-off float in the afternoon with steady legs, but with a head that was buzzing and seemingly detached from the rest of his body. He was sober on his feet and dizzy from the neck up and did not know it.

Rorty had won easily in the semi-finals, wetting his older opponent, Beauregard, as he had predicted. He saw Towner topple the mighty Madwayosh to win his round, and he knew then that the dark horse was something more than a trick roller. He did not like to meet Towner now, but he had to do it.

He was equipped with a mental hazard. He begged for a cure, but Calkins, as jealous and as watchful as a mother hen, kept him dry. This was unwise. A drink of good liquor would have steadied Rorty. Perhaps Calkins knew, too well, that there was no such thing left in the country.

Calkins relied heavily upon an agreement he had accomplished with the amiable Marshal Goodwin, whose theory of government was that it should be done very much with the consent of the governed, and whose usual response to an informal appeal for action against certain malefactors of great wetness was: "Well, what can I do? Is there a warrant?"

There were no warrants out for Calkins or for Red Rorty. The stolen horse was back—rather mysteriously and suspiciously, the marshal thought. His previously expressed suspicion seemed to have been proven pretty nearly correct.

A story of how a troop of cowboys, headed by Towner, had swept spectacularly into the woods not far from the Willow Bend Park and rescued Cubby, spread from the gossipy headquarters of the Altamont House.

It did not hurt the carnival, nor did Towner's triumph on the timber, Thursday, capped by the appearance of the diving horses that evening. It all began to look like a cleverly staged scheme to advertise the show, and the carnival committee was jocularly accused of having brought Towner on from the coast to furnish extra thrills in the roleo, as well as with his rodeo show. This was not denied.

It was the roleo finals which now drew the crowds. The tourney had worked up toward a promising finish. Greater throngs were coming to Kimball than the town had ever entertained.

Henry Kimball was happy. Not only was the carnival a huge success, but Jim Herrick, the rascal, had married his private stenographer, his social secretary, and was going to spend half his time in Kimball. Jim had intimated that he intended to draw ninety per cent of his raw materials from the Kimball mills, and that he was planning to rehabilitate the Lester place—and it was almost as good as if Carol herself had married Herrick. Kimball had enter-

tained some hope that this might happen. But—he sighed, as he sat in the back seat of Herrick's car—there was no telling what Carol might do. It was hard to keep track of her.

She wanted that trick horse now. She should have him! Her birthday was coming. Towner was quitting the show business. Probably, for a price, he could be induced to part with the pair. He thought Carol looked dissatisfied, a little restless and unhappy. Had she really thought of Jim Herrick in that way?

"Who are you betting on, dad?" Carol asked him.

"Why, on Red Rorty, of course."

"I'll take you. I'm betting on Towner." Her eyes sparkled.

"All right. I'll bet you—let's see—a good horse against a new car I might have got you next spring, that Rorty wins."

Carol's eyes widened.

"How good a horse?"

"Any one you want."

"Any one? I'll take you! It'll cost you money."

"How much does—how much do you think I ought to pay?"

Carol was nibbling at her lips nervously.

"Make it two horses—dark ones," she whispered in his ear.

"Aha! I thought so! All right, then. But remember—if you lose——"

"I won't lose. Towner can beat Rorty. Don't you think so, Mr. Herrick?"

"I—er—I beg your pardon?"

Herrick pretended he had not been listening.

"Oh, you blushing bridegroom!" Carol taunted.

The fact was, all their faces were flushed. It was a blazing-hot afternoon, the sun beating down fiercely into the sheltered cove, and although the trees gave shade ashore, it was hot there. Out in the basin it was terrible, the water like glass, not a breath of breeze, the sun straight overhead making a glaring mirror out of the still water.

"What do you know about this Towner, Jim?" inquired Kimball.

"Oh, I guess he can roll. He's got wonderful balance. He can ride and I've seen him——" He hesitated. Harriet nodded at him, imperceptibly to any one save himself. "I've seen him do corkscrews in the air that only a born flyer would dare try."

"All ready? Throw your boles!"

The magnified voice of the referee boomed out through a megaphone. It cut many conversations short and drew all eyes to the basin, cleared of swimmers, boats drawn back toward the float and out there in the middle.

Two men were dancing on a sleek, shining new log of cork pine, not a mark of calks on it save those imprinted there by the restless feet that trod it. They held long poles in their hands, dipping an end now and then in the water—and at the command discarded them, sent them skittering and stood, empty-handed, arms outspread, facing each other across a blue band of paint which marked the middle of the log.

CHAPTER XXII.

"WET HIM, COWBOY!"

RED RORTY bloomed red, in an emerald bathing suit with a huge gilt harp on the breast of the jersey, the gift of admirers. Towner was in sheer white, his dark, sun-bronzed skin gleaming like an Indian's, and the contrast between the antagonists extended farther than that.

Rorty was a burly giant. Towner looked slender; his muscles were hidden, trained down fine. Rorty's heavier weight was betrayed by the slightly greater submersion of his end of the fourteen-foot log. It rolled like a live thing, whirling on its own axis, and

water ran up on it and the sun sparkled and flashed upon it until it seemed to be glazed.

The birlers simply trod the log, slowly at first, shifting their feet in little jumps, testing out the feel of it, the texture of its grain beneath the sharp, half-inch calks, which studded the soles and heels of their light, low shoes. The steel points crunched in deep.

Now and then one or the other gave a quick little spin, then a snub to halt the swift revolutions. Each man watched his opponent's feet closely. It was easily seen that the log was touchy and tricky. A short contest was likely, none of those long-drawn-out affairs of the old days which sometimes went two and three hours and even more.

The sun was merciless to the rollers, neither of whom wore head covering. Rorty's brindle bristle showed reddish scalp beneath, sunburned and sun-blooded. Towner's dark hair was longer but no doubt it "drew heat." Every one noticed these little external differences—no one could see inside those heads.

It is a saying among birling enthusiasts, a proverb among promoters of the sport, that birling is done more with the head, in a contest, than with the feet. That is a way of saying that a birler, to triumph, must have brains and use them.

Besides strength, agility and balance, the log roller must be able to outguess his opponent, anticipate a shift, a change of pace, a snub, a long roll with accelerating speed, and meet them all.

He must know when the log is "neutral" and be prepared to "take the timber" away from his antagonist and keep it under his control. But above all, the quality which makes a birling expert is balance.

Red Rorty was a born birler, it was said. Nature had provided him with strength, speed, coördinating muscles, a quick eye, aggressive impulses and that sixth sense which kept him up, without seeming effort, on top of a whirling log. He had birling brains—but he had neglected their development, lately.

He had been sobered up quite suddenly, and his nerves were a little bit "over the edge." However, this gave him an ugly aggressiveness and he started in savagely—and within fifteen seconds from the instant the poles were discarded Towner went off into the water.

Rorty went with him, but it was a fraction of a second later and the rules were explicit; the man who struck the water first was "wet" and lost the fall.

A shout went up that rose to a roar, but most of the crowd did not know which had won until the megaphone boomed out Rorty's name. It would have been a cleaner triumph had Rorty stayed up there, dry. Only Rorty knew how close he had been to striking the water too soon. That cool element had tempted him. He needed the wetting. He was dry, arid, parched. He had been chewing gum and it was like cotton in his mouth.

He gulped some water and this was a mistake, for the Bitter River was well named; it brewed a swamp-root savor from conifer roots and logs that soaked in it. Slime formed on Rorty's lips almost instantly and thickened as he chewed away at his gum. Towner sucked half a lemon as he sat in the boat, which was rushed to pull them out or help them to the float.

"There goes a wheel off your new car," chuckled Henry Kimball to Carol.

She gave him a sickly smile. Her lips were trembling. Her hand, clutching the rug rail, was perspiring.

"Cubby, the divin' horse!" roared a river rat who was wet internally. "The dark horse—he's showin' white!"

A quick answer came from the section on the opposite side of the tower where Towner's cowboys sat.

"Yeah! An' what's the divin' sea

lion lookin' fer? His mate? He'll find one."

They were on the log again. Carol Kimball was on her feet in the car, her lips moving.

"Beat him, beat him, beat him at his own game!" she was praying. "Beat him with your feet—and your brains. Beat him, Ranny Towner!"

"All ready! Throw your poles!"

"Rip-rip-rip-rip!" went calks into wood. The log whirled until spray spurted up at either end.

"Wow!" burst from James Herrick's lips, and he jumped to his feet. "Wow! Go to it, Ranny! Ride him, cowboy! Roll him, cowboy! Wet him, Ranny! You're a bear, you're a wild cat! Crash him up!"

Carol pounded Herrick on the back, accompanying her blows with appropriate words:

"Beat him, beat him, beat him!"

Herrick did not seem to feel her blows. The crowd began to rise, whole sections of it getting on the benches, craning for a better view. Henry Kimball got up, too, literally lifted by the wave of excitement.

Towner was on the offensive, spinning the log so rapidly that Rorty had no time to snub it. He had "taken the timber" suddenly from Rorty, and the bigger man was fighting desperately to keep on top, running with his knees flying up almost to his chin, his calks digging in until splinters flew, his heels just missing the water.

There was no let-up, no change of pace—except to more speed.

An excited river rat flung an empty whisky bottle out into the basin and it bobbed up and down, within a few yards of the log, directly before Rorty's eyes—though it is doubtful that he saw it. Those who did let out a roar of laughter. It looked like "wet bait for the birler," as some one yelled.

"Rip-rip-rip-rip!" without pause—and then a spurt, just when it seemed as if the pace must slacken—and Rorty, his arms waving wildly, his run a succession of plunging stumbles, went off and went under the log, his head bobbing up on the opposite side.

Towner trotted the log to a stop. He had won the second fall.

Rorty swam over to the bottle and, with a show of bravado, tilted it to his lips, then flung it away from him. It was funny, but it was serious, too. He had tasted a lingering drop of the white mule the bottle had contained—and he was dryer than ever, and river water, lemon and gum did no particular good. If he could have got his hands on Ruddy Calkins at this moment, he would have wrung a drink out of him.

"That," exulted Carol, her eyes glowing, "is a horse on you, dad! But wasn't he good!"

"Say, you all seem to be against me!" complanied Kimball in dismay. "You ought to be rooting for Rorty, the Northern Lakes white hope, you know."

"I always did like a dark horse," declared Herrick. "And this one *is* dark," he added in an undertone.

He cast a curious glance at Carol. When she met his eye she flushed still deeper and murmured:

"Aren't we silly?"

Herrick grinned.

Harriet leaned over and whispered in his ear. He shook his head as he squeezed her hand.

"Now," he said, "I am watching my step—and Carol. Let it ride."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE THIRD FALL.

THERE they go again!" Rorty was desperate. He attacked like a tiger. Indeed, he charged so savagely that he almost rolled himself off the log, for Towner offered no resistance to the spurt. Towner seemed to lift himself from the timber and remain suspended in air.

Rorty's recovery was one of those things which make a roleo a breathless contest to watch. He came close to overstepping the blue line and forfeiting the contest on a foul, but he kept up and attacked again with a sudden twist, his calks jabbing deep.

Towner twisted against him and Rorty felt the thrill of his strength through the log and was warned not to let his opponent gain control. On the offensive with his feet, Rorty was mentally on the defensive. Towner had him guessing.

Back and forth the timber twirled in the water. It went in one direction at a rapid rate, stopped dead, turned back, hesitated, started again, shivered, started, stopped and then spun in the long roll. The eye could scarcely follow the twinkle of feet. It was a duel as much as if rapiers were used, a duel of steel spikes on a round bit of pine.

"I'm goin' to wet you," Towner said sharply to Rorty. "First I'm going to make you suffer. I want to see you toasted so you'll sizzle when you go wet."

Rorty knew why. He swore luridly.

"Thought you were a mule skinner," Towner said. "How you goin' to like to ride 'Bolo? Good night!"

The sun bothered Rorty. It flickered in his red-rimmed eye, stabbed at his skull, tortured his thirst. Between rolls Calkins had got to him and reminded him of his bet to ride one of the wild horses—and he knew now that Towner would pick 'Bolo for him. He had been a fool to make that bet. He had been pie-eyed when he made it, he told himself. He doubted his ability to ride. He was sober now. The thing to do was dip Towner and have it all over with.

Ten minutes—and Rorty had the log. He dared not let Towner take it for a second. He rolled hard. He kept it going his way for ten minutes. The sun made the air seem like flame in his lungs. He was dry all over; no sweat came from his skin.

The voice of the crowd was one long surge like water flowing through a gorge along the Bitter River.

Rorty was thirstier now. He wanted —not water, but a *drink*. He snubbed short and looked to see Towner do a squirming recovery. Instead, Rorty clawed the air himself and Towner danced in easy fashion, hands outspread.

"I could have had you that time, horse thief," he said, grinning.

Rorty snorted a half-strangled oath, for his wind was short, his throat contracted.

Right then Towner took the log away from him. The timber twisted under him so swiftly it astonished Rorty. It seemed to come to life. The crowd, growing apathetic as the contest lengthened, sat up and took notice again.

Carol stood up and hammered Herrick on the back. Herrick did not feel it; he was hugging Harriet and she felt it. She had no breath left for cheers. Carol did the yelling. Henry Kimball sat and stared alternately at the birlers and at Carol.

Thirty minutes.

"I've just let you trot along to get you ready for the fall, you pack rat," Towner told the gasping Rorty. "You'd be in a hospital now or under the sod, but I wanted to let you live to beat you at your own game. After I've finished you 'Bolo will bomb you back to life again. Roll, you lump of pork!"

Rorty rolled—he rolled from side to side as his feet labored. He ran the hopeless race of a squirrel in a cage, a horse on a treadmill, getting nowhere, just managing to hold his own. The sun put the whip to him, hot and heavy. His eyes stared, his tongue hung out, he gasped for breath. His thick legs were like wooden things, pounding down on wood.

"In the army, eh? To fight booze?

Why didn't you have 'em shoot you while you could walk? Too bad to let you limp along on crutches, like this. What will Calkins do to you when you go wet? Calkins has a gun. *Watch out!"*

Towner's voice snapped like a whip on the last two words. Rorty jerked his head up and saw steel-gray eyes staring over his shoulder—where Calkins sat beside the tower. The next instant he snatched a glance back—and the log seemed to leap from under him. It left him treading air. He reached with feet and hands for it—and missed it. He went flat, with his body smacking the water, and came up spluttering and cursing like a fiend.

Towner grinned. The roleo was over.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NO PRICE ON CUBBY.

LADIES and gentlemen——" Hoarse-voiced, the announcer made known to the crowd that as a special event for the evening there would be an exhibition of roping and riding by the cowboys, closing with bronchobusting, and that the climax would be an exhibition by Kimball's own doughty log rider, of his skill as a buster—on 'Bolo the outlaw. Preceding the busting show the diving horses would appear, *in their last leap.*

This public announcement, indicating Towner's intention to withdraw Cubby and Mince from exhibition work, sent Henry Kimball hunting for him, in the determination to buy the horses and pay his bet with Carol.

He found Towner the center of a crowd of admirers, all striving to get near enough to shake his hand, and managed with difficulty to get him away and inside the tower house, used as a committee room.

"My daughter," said Kimball with characteristic directness, "wants to own Cubby. I understand that the two horses must go together. What is your price for the pair?"

"There isn't any price on 'em, Mr. Kimball. They're not for sale."

"I'll give you twenty-five thousand for the pair."

"They are not for sale, Mr. Kimball. I'm sorry. I've already told your daughter so. I wouldn't part with 'em for anything."

"But I understood that they were going to be taken out of the show business, that you are going to retire—and that they are procurable. Isn't my offer enough?"

Towner looked at him curiously.

"Did she send you?" he inquired. "Did she tell you that they could be procured?"

"Not exactly. The fact is, Mr. Towner, I'm in an awkward position. I've got to pay a bet."

"A bet?"

"Yes. I bet on Rorty to wet you and lost," Kimball chuckled. "You did a wonderful job, and I want to congratulate you. I wish you were going to live in Kimball. I'd like this town to get the name of the championship roleo town. If you'd consider it at all, I could make it worth while for you to locate here."

Towner's face remained grave but Kimball got the distinct impression that the man was amused.

"I don't mean a mill job," he explained. "We need a new city marshal. We're going to have one, in fact. I think you could handle it splendidly. The salary would be doubled," he added.

"Why, I'd rather like to locate here," Towner answered slowly, "and I thank you for the offer. But I don't think I'd be interested at all, not in the marshal job. If I stayed I'd probably buy up the Calkins Mills and try to make a town out of that place. I like the scenery around here."

"Buy? Er—you realize that that is

a quarter-million-dollar property, with the timber concessions?"

"Oh, yes. I figured I'd have to sell my Western lots."

Henry Kimball bit his tongue. Quite suddenly he realized that he had been talking peanuts to a man who spoke casually of purchasing sawmills and a big acreage of stumpage, an operation in timber almost as big as his own. He returned immediately to his original proposition.

"If I doubled the offer for the horses," he suggested, "would it interest you?"

"I'm afraid not—nor if you made it a million," Towner laughed. "Fact is, I told Miss Kimball that Cubby, alone, was worth a million to me. That was speaking figuratively, but real earnestly and truthfully, too. So you see, Mr. Kimball, she knew when she bet with you that she had you hipped."

Kimball burst into a laugh.

"If I should locate here," Towner went on, "I'd be tickled to let your daughter have the use of Cubby all she wanted to. Fact is, I've already told her so. I guess she didn't mention it to you."

"No, she didn't," said Kimball, becoming serious and again with the uncomfortable feeling of being quietly laughed at. "All she ever has mentioned was wanting the horses—Cubby particularly."

"I *thought* it was Cubby she was interested in," remarked Towner, turning away. "She's let me see that, in fact."

Henry Kimball discovered that the interview was ended and very unsatisfactorily. He had been given much to think about. He was astonished at Towner's casual indication of his resources, nettled at the man's easy, almost insolent manner—though it really had not been insolent in any particular he could name.

He intended to probe Carol pretty carefully concerning her previous acquaintance and conversation with Towner, before he confessed his failure to her. He guessed, shrewdly, that Carol must have snubbed Towner in some manner.

With the quick acumen of the thorough business executive, Kimball began sizing up the situation which might arise if Towner did buy up the Calkins plans. It might mean much to him—and not favorably, for he drew a considerable amount of pulp wood from this source at low prices.

The Calkins Mills were heavily mortgaged, poorly managed. Kimball had planned to take them over himself—when the price went low enough. It would be awkward to have a bidder against him.

"I'll just put the screws on Jim Herrick," he decided. "He knows something about Towner."

He got no opportunity to see either Herrick or Carol during the afternoon, and it was not until the entire party was again assembled at the carnival that evening that the two he intended to question were with him.

He began on Carol but did not get far, for before he had framed his first question Carol suddenly excused herself, left the car and was lost in the crowd.

Kimball turned to Herrick.

"Just who and what is this dark horse friend of yours, Towner?" he demanded. "I've got to know. It may cost you money if I don't know right away. It may cost you money anyhow."

In answer to Herrick's astonished inquiry as to what he meant, Kimball related briefly the result of his interview with Towner.

It was Harriet, not Herrick, who enlightened him. She was not under the weight of a promise.

Meantime, the rodeo exhibition was on, a very creditable exhibition—but

every one was eager for the busting, for Red Rorty and 'Bolo. 'Bolo was ready—but Rorty was not.

CHAPTER XXV.

CAROL ON THE TOWER.

RED RORTY, who had been so dry, was now all wet. He had been trying, quite successfully, for several hours, to drown the disgrace of his defeat and to bolster up his courage to ride the outlaw horse.

He had overdone it. He lay dead drunk in his dressing tent at the carnival grounds, so deeply in a stupor that even Ruddy Calkins could not rouse him, with a thousand dollars at stake.

Calkins was risking more than that thousand by remaining in so conspicuous a place as Willow Bend Park. He had been tipped off that a United States deputy marshal had been at the Odanah reserve, looking up reports of bootlegging to the Indians. He needed to get away and lie low.

Ruddy Calkins was one reason, one of the biggest reasons, why Calkins Mills were mortgaged and ready to be sold. He had gilded his youth with too much of his father's money, yet it had not been enough. He had taken the easiest way he could find to make sure of ready money, and, of course, it had headed him for trouble.

The news of Rorty's default traveled to Towner and he responded characteristically.

"Well, I'll ride 'Bolo, then," he said. "Can't let 'em say our show flunked out on the finale. They forgave us when Cubby was gone—but this would be too much."

"Your saddle is over at the barn," a cowboy informed him. "Somebody brung a McClellan over to the chute for Rorty to use. Said it was his own saddle and he wouldn't use anybody else's."

"A McClellan? Well, it's lighter than mine, but I've used one. I'll have to get along. No time to send for mine. They're waitin' for the bustin' and for the divin', too. Here, you take Cubby up on the tower and keep him there until the bustin' is over. How is 'Bolo actin'?"

"Like hell, as usual, at night. The lights faze him."

Towner shrugged and grinned. He was very tired. The exertions of the past few days had been terrific and his work in the sun on the log had about used up his reserve strength.

It was always a racking experience to ride 'Bolo. The mustang was a bad one. He had tried to kill men, and the fact he had never quite succeeded had not improved his temper. He seemed determined to keep on until he got his man. He seemed to hate Towner more thoroughly than any other man because he had never been able to shake him.

Towner had given instructions to his men to be ready with their ropes when Rorty rode, to prevent any damage to the rider. He had expected the contest between horse and man to be short, ending with Rorty clutching leather and hitting the sod soon after 'Bolo began to buck.

'Bolo's ugly head stuck up, ears flattened, out of the white-painted, narrow chute erected as an entrance for the bucking horses, at one side of the arena.

A man sat on the fence at a respectful distance from 'Bolo, with a saddle flung over the rail beside him. Towner spoke to him and he clutched at the saddle with a snarl and declared he had orders to let nobody touch it until Rorty came.

Towner was impatient. The flood lights glared all about him, the chute and the horse. He would have ended the argument with a short, sharp tussle, taking the saddle away from its guardian but for the knowledge he was in full view of the crowd—and the

crowd was beginning to show its uneasiness.

"Well, you sling that saddle on that broncho, then," he drawled. "The rider's comin'."

The saddle's jealous guardian, a hostler from the local livery stable, chosen by Rorty as his aid because he, too, had been a cavalry trooper, hastened to follow Towner's instructions.

It was no trick to saddle 'Bolo, fortunately for the uninitiated hostler. The mustang accepted the leather as a necessary adjunct to his murderous performance. He *liked* to try to tear a man to pieces on his back, and without the saddle there was never a man on his back.

He had heard and had seen and had smelled Towner, that leech who clung to him and lammed him with his hat—and never went off, no matter what he did. His ears were glued to his head, his teeth bared—but he only moved a little as the cinch went tight. He made ready for the second one—but to his surprise there was only one constricting band about his belly, for the McClellan had a single girth, unlike the Mexican saddles to which he was accustomed.

It was not until Towner was astride the mustang and the gate was flung open at his word that he realized something was wrong. He heard the hostler yell at him but did not catch what he said. He had been prepared for the protest and had intended to ignore it, acting quickly to avoid an argument or an attempt to prevent him using the saddle himself.

The stirrups were as stiff along the mustang's sides as if they were made of iron.

'Bolo shot from the chute with his head down. He, too, felt that something was wrong. That saddle was different. It was not lighter, but heavier than the full-rigged Mexican one Towner always rode. 'Bolo felt stiff bars against his sides, pressing his ribs, and they angered and frightened him—and he remembered that single cinch and began to work on it.

Towner knew in a flash all about the saddle, as the mustang twisted in an upward heave. It was "rodded." He knew, too, why Rorty had dared make the bet to ride 'Bolo. He had depended on that fixed saddle to keep him on top.

It was an old army trick of which Towner had heard but never had seen accomplished. He had seen stirrups tied down, lashed beneath the belly of a horse to keep them from flying up in the bucking, and he had seen a man shot for doing it at a Western rodeo. It was difficult to conceal it. This was a different method of keeping the stirrups down—and rigid.

He could feel the rods, stiff, steel braces, bolted through the top of the wooden stirrups, running up between the double strap to the side bars of the saddle tree and bolted there. He gave an explamation of anger. He was angry at Rorty for planning this trick; he was angry to think he had been so hasty as to use the strange saddle without investigating.

He was annoyed at the stiffness of the stirrups, heavy, clumsy and totally destructive to his technique, for he usually kept his seat by his balance and the grip of his legs on the body of his mount.

Towner did not stop to think that no one in the crowd would know that he rode a rodded saddle. He felt himself a cheat, and in order to use the stirrups at all he had to jam his toes in between the wood and the hood, curl them up and let the upward bounce of 'Bolo come against the pull on his feet and toes. It was easy at first, then painful. He wore the soft-leather boots of his show outfit.

'Bolo set to work with the savage cunning of his breed to try, first, to shake the confidence out of his rider, then to make him momentarily careless,

then to make him shift in the saddle, an inch to one side, an inch too far forward, then to keep him from recovery and try to gain another inch.

He knew how to do it—with the average buster. With Towner it had always been impossible. If a horse could swear, 'Bolo was doing it, fairly roaring his rage, as he sunfished and back-bucked and did the rocking-horse motion, all at the same time, striking the ground with legs like ramrods, as stiff and rigid as those annoying steel rods which pressed his ribs and made him frantic.

He heard the crowd roar and knew they were cheering that human postage stamp that squatted on his back. Well, he would make them cheer *him*. The flood lights glared into his eyes. He kept his head toward them, as if fascinated by them.

He bucked himself over to one edge of the arena. Cowboys stood there with ropes, and he shied from them and did a back-and-forth rolling twist across toward the other side. Towner's hat came down with flapping regularity against his side and the rods dug deeper in his ribs. Towner yelled his "Yip-yip-yip —yeah!" and rode him.

The cowboy whom Towner had ordered to lead Cubby up the runway to the take-off platform, met a young woman at the entrance to the runway. She greeted him pleasantly, and he recognized the "peach" who had visited the Lester place—and who had brought Cubby out of the woods. He blushed and removed his hat.

"Is Cubby going to dive now?" she inquired, stroking the horse's nose, while Cubby sniffed.

"Not just now, miss. The boss wanted him took up to be ready and I guess to give the crowd an eyeful. He thought they'd be uneasy. That man Rorty flunked out on ridin' 'Bolo, you know."

"He isn't? Then who is going to ride 'Bolo?"

"The boss hisself."

"Oh! Oh, I want to see that! Oh, I can't see from here and I can't get back to the car! Can I go up on the tower? Let me—let me ride Cubby up—if he isn't going to dive!"

The cowboy hesitated.

"Mr. Towner said I could ride him any time I wanted to," she declared, and gave her prettiest smile. "You see, I'm all ready."

She wore, beneath a short topcoat, a riding costume. The display seemed to clinch her argument and convince the cowboy that what she had said was correct.

"Well, if you want to," he said, "you can see pretty good from up there. It's dark up there now and——"

She had mounted before he stopped speaking.

"I'll drive him up. He won't jump, will he?"

"Not until Mince is down by the water."

"Yes—I know," she gasped.

"You needn't be afraid of that."

"Oh, I'm not afraid! Am I, Cubby?"

She patted his neck. He arched it and tossed his head.

"I'll go down and see nobody takes Mince there until you get off from Cubby," the cowboy offered.

"All right. And thank you. It will be fine—up there. I have always wanted to—ride Cubby up there."

The cowboy shook his head and heaved a sigh as he watched horse and girl vanish in the upper gloom, made to seem more dark by the lowered flood lights which were focused on the arena far below the tower. The necessity of holding the crowd by exhibiting Cubby on the tower had passed now. Towner was in the saddle, the cynosure of all eyes.

There was a strong bar across the front of the platform, easily removable,

placed to prevent an accident, and as Cubby reached it he leaned over, nickering very softly.

"No, she isn't there, Cubby," Carol told him. "But I wish—she was. I'd like to go with you. I'm a fool, Cubby. I'd like to dive with you. I wonder if you'd like to have me?"

Cubby nodded, a trick he had, whenever a question was asked of him. Carol chuckled, with a queer little catch in her throat.

"I'm just fool enough to like to play with fire—sometimes," she mused. And then: "Red-hot dollars! I suppose he thinks me a little fool." It was not Cubby she accused of thus maligning her, in thought.

'Bolo was out there. Although she had seen Towner conquer him twice before, Carol gripped her hands together and watched, from her dark, lofty vantage point, with the feeling that she was watching a struggle to the death, between a man and a mad beast.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"CUBBY AND I."

'BOLO was doing his worst, but it was not bad enough. Towner stuck to that saddle more tightly than he ever had done before. It was those cruel, hard things which rubbed 'Bolo on the ribs at every jump and seemed to clamp him like a pair of giant tweezers; 'Bolo knew it.

He bulged his sides to try to break them. He twisted and tore sod, and reared and back-bucked—and still Towner stuck. No use. 'Bolo thought of another trick. He crow-hopped for a minute about the arena, shaking his head, thrusting it down between his knees—then he leaped into a rapid run.

The circle of cowboys fended him off with swinging reatas. He did not like the rope. It strangled or it tripped. He circled. The lights struck him full in the eyes. He ran, with bared teeth, toward them—and suddenly felt the ground fall off beneath his feet.

The banking of the river along the front of the arena had been undermined by the sweep of the current during the floods. The autumn before, the Bitter River had risen to unprecedented heights, and in several places had changed its course.

At Willow Bend the high banks had resisted and forced it to flow in the old channel—but the current had shifted violently to this side and had eaten a hollow ten feet into the bank. The limit of safety was marked by a row of white posts with rope strung through holes in their tops, forming also a sort of frame for the great arena and stage where the pageant and rodeo performances were put on.

'Bolo struck the rope with his chest and the strand parted like a string. In one leap he came down on a section of the sagging sod and it caved beneath his forefeet.

He went down, turning completely over, his feet just touching the bank underneath—and Towner, with his toes tucked into the stirrups, went under him, into the water.

A great shout went up. It was like a single voice, a giant voice, in a moan.

For a few seconds there was silence, breathless silence. No one moved, no one breathed. All eyes stared at the spot where horse and man had gone down—out of sight. The water was ten feet deep, the bottom hollowed out by the same erosion which had cut into the bank. Those who remembered that began to laugh a little hysterically.

'Bolo's head appeared above the surface, and a gasp of relief breezed through the crowd—but it became a cry of alarm as it was seen that the saddle had turned so that it hung under 'Bolo's belly—and that the stirrups stuck up above his back stiffly.

For an awful instant it looked as if Towner must be riding upside down,

between those treading, thrusting hoofs —but 'Bolo, frantically trying to land, got his forefeet upon the sloping bank for a moment and showed the saddle empty, grotesque with its curiously upright stirrups.

Cowboys rushed to the edge of the bank, some mounted and some afoot, all with ropes ready. One of them lassoed 'Bolo and helped him scramble out. But they could get no sight of Towner. The flood lights dazzled them; the water was an opaque sheen.

Some one thought of the boats and began clumsily trying to launch one. It had been drawn up on the bank behind the tower and the oars were missing. And it was locked with a chain and padlock. Swimmers who had been thick about the tower and float were as scarce as fish in a stirred pool, at this critical moment.

It was Carol, from her lofty elevation, high above the lights, who caught the first glimpse of Towner. Almost fifty feet above the surface of the deep, dark pool, as she sat Cubby, she was able to look down into the roily water. It astonished her to discover that he had been borne far out.

She saw his hand, clutching—and she remembered her own, and how she had grasped as she sank down, down, to the bottom—looking up at the light.

"Cubby!" she choked out. "Cubby!"

Cubby crowded against the wooden bar. The tower platform had been made large enough, at Towner's instructions, for a horse to turn around —just in case it became necessary to turn a horse around and take him back down the runway. Carol turned Cubby sidewise to the bar, leaned and grasped it, lifted it and thrust it over the side, where it fell and, after what seemed an interminable time, splashed into the water with a *plop!*

Again she saw a hand come up, almost to the surface, clutching.

"Cubby!"

She turned his head toward the open side of the platform.

"Cubby! Jump!"

She wanted to shut her eyes. She went rigid in the skeleton saddle with its little open stirrups, worn for exhibition purposes when Cubby dived.

Cubby snorted, his feet moved in a queer little thundering dance on the platform. He looked down, and Carol followed his example. Mince was not there. No, the cowboy had said he would see to it Mince was kept away —until Carol was ready to get off and let Cubby go.

"Cubby, jump! Oh, Cubby!"

She felt him rise beneath her, his forefeet going up, straightening out— and then the wind whistled in her ears as she went down, down, hanging hard to Cubby's mane with both hands, clinging with her feet. Her eyes were shut now. The wind of her fall seemed to force the lids together.

The swish of water pried them open, but she closed them again, hanging on, wondering if ever she would come up, feeling herself pulled away from Cubby, hanging tighter while a roaring in her ears like a wind or a waterfall told her of the swiftness with which she was passing through water.

Her head came up, and she shook it free of water, opening her eyes, seeing Cubby's erect ears, his head stretched out, swaying back and forth—as he swam, out, out, and not toward the float.

She knew then why he had jumped, she knew then what Towner had meant when he had said that those horses *would* jump if they had a reason to do it, even without the trick of placing a mate down below.

And then a turn of the boiling undercurrent thrust Towner to the surface, close beside her. She had no time to turn Cubby toward him. Cubby was swimming swiftly. She leaned out, tried for his hand, missed it, then re-

leased her feet from the stirrups and, keeping hold of the reins, pushed herself away and into the water.

She got Towner's arm, his sleeve. The pull on the reins brought Cubby around toward her and she struck the stirrup, feeling Cubby's rear hoof pass very close to her ankle. She raised herself by mane and stirrup, holding with one hand to her burden. She was on Cubby's back at last, dragging Towner up, turning Cubby toward him so that the hoofs might not strike. Then, dropping the reins, she used both hands and pulled Towner from the water over the low, flat pommel—and Cubby headed for shore.

She had done everything as if she were an unconscious machine. No effort she had made had seemed difficult. It had seemed entirely natural, entirely possible, and she had done it.

"Cubby and I, Cubby and I," she kept repeating to herself, as if to remember it.

Shouts and splashes were the first realization she had that there was any one in the world anywhere near her except Towner, limp and helpless, lying heavily over the withers of the snorting Cubby. Then a boat hove close and strong hands lifted Towner and would have lifted her, but she fought them off, crying:

"No, no! Cubby and I, Cubby and I!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

"CUBBY AND YOU."

THE doctor—Carol did not like him, for he had ordered her to go straight home and she wouldn't—declared that Towner must have been made unconscious by the force with which he struck the water.

It had saved him, in one way; his lungs had not filled at once. The water had revived him momentarily, but he had gone unconscious again, getting some water inside. But it took only a few minutes' work to revive him completely.

"This young lady," said the doctor to Towner, as Towner blinked at the blanket-wrapped form of Carol, sitting on the floor beside him in the tower house, "this young lady refuses to go home and go to bed until you are able to talk. She pulled you out of the water, you know. On one of your horses. Off the tower. It's Miss Carol Kimball, I believe?"

The doctor was new in town.

"Cubby did it," remarked the young lady thus hesitantly introduced.

Towner blinked again.

"I—I didn't know whether he'd jump or not," Carol chattered, and then her breath went into her lungs in little gasps as if she had been sobbing hard—but she had not..

"Cubby," said Towner, in a strangely strong voice, sitting up suddenly, *"Cubby is yours."*

His eyes were clear, their glance straight and unflinching. Carol's were dim but they never wavered. She met his gaze.

"The way—you said," she choked, and the tears filled her eyes then. "Cubby—*and you.*"

The blanket was big enough to cover both of them. Not even Henry Kimball objected to his daughter sharing it with John Randolph Towner. Herrick had broken his pledge to "watch his step," and really there was no need for him to keep it, now. The "pore, lonesome cowboy," had found his mate, and he was neither poor nor lonesome.

The ORDER of FULL MOON

By William Hemmingway

A strenuous experience that our old friend Mr. Hemmingway had as a young journalist

I AM a member in good standing of the Order of Full Moon. If you don't know what that is, just ask the policeman you know best, then see him wag his head and hear him laugh. For this order is made up of men who have shown certain qualities under police ordeal, chiefly the ability to stand punishment—who have taken their degree, as the boys say, and come through with credit. Just the same, if you are ever invited to join the order, be wise and follow the advice of Omar—oh, take the cash and let the credit go!

Cooley, the news tipster, started the trouble one evening when I was a very young reporter. This was in the Mauve Decade. A row of cheap flats had collapsed over Hell's Kitchen way, killed one man and hurt many. The town rang with it—first page every day. The tipster rushed in and told our night city editor that "Old Man" Rosvig, night watchman of the flats, himself a broken-down builder, had warned the owner of the row—against whom there was now a great hue and cry—and that when the fatal collapse occurred after his warning was ignored, poor old Rosvig killed himself for shame.

Cooley said that Roundsman McGraw of the West Forty-seventh Street police knew all the facts and would tell us all about it—good heart-throb stuff. The night city editor told me to investigate, and if the story proved true he'd play it up big on the first page, with pictures. My rare chance to win glory, and all that sort of thing.

The cub reporter of fiction goes out

on a story like that with teeth clenched and eyes blazing—or maybe with eyes clenched and teeth blazing. But I was never a cub; I was simply a mere beginner. I knew that the first important thing was to get a good dinner, thus fortifying the inner man for a night of hard work. So I took an old school friend, who happened in just then, down to De Lisle's cellar in Fulton Street, where they sold an excellent Swiss table d'hôte dinner of five courses and an honest American Bordeaux—all for fifty cents; demi-tasse, ten cents extra. Johnny Kellman was living dry, so I took his share of the poor but honest American Bordeaux rather than let our amiable Papa De Lisle feel that his vintage was not appreciated.

For the dinner table we went as quickly as the Ninth Avenue Elevated train would carry us to Forty-second Street, and then walked up five blocks to the police station, a big sprawling old house of dingy brick that looked like a survivor of the "Boss" Tweed era —or perhaps earlier, in the days of the Orange riots, when they shot at cops from the roof tops. We climbed the worn stone steps past the green lights that marked the house as an outpost of the law in a strenuous neighborhood, and stepped up to the rail before the desk, where Captain Killion sat in all his glory, smoking a rich cigar and looking at the blotter—the log book of the precinct. A fine figure of a man, Killion, two diamond studs gleaming on a chest like a mountainside, and his broad, ruddy countenance shining above them like the sunset of a clear winter's day. His greeting was a model of noncommittal diplomacy.

"Well, sir?"

"I'd like to see Roundsman McGraw," I told him.

"Come back at twelve o'clock, when he reports for duty," said the captain. "He's just turned in in the dormitory."

"But, captain, he has the facts about a whale of a story—biggest thing in town!—and twelve o'clock will be too late. I've got to see him now or bust."

The picture of distress moved the big captain to action. He pulled a lever beneath the desk, and a gong clanged in the back room. The doorman came in and saluted.

"Go up and bring down Roundsman McGraw," the captain ordered.

"One moment!" I interrupted. "Don't put the roundsman to the trouble of dressing and coming down. I'll go up and see him."

The captain looked me over searchingly from head to foot, as if he were measuring my strength and staying power for an arctic expedition or some other punishing stunt. Then he asked: "Have you ever been in a police dormitory?"

"No."

"And you want to go into this one?"

"Yes."

"All right. Go. Schwartz, take him up."

I climbed two long flights of stairs after my guide, and we turned into a room almost as wide and deep as the house. It was dark, except for scattered pin points of gas barely alight on a few burners in the ancient structure, and these lights faintly revealed long rows of cots, nearly half of which were occupied by men who had just come off the dogwatch at eight o'clock and were settling down to sleep four hours. At the farthest end of the room we found Roundsman McGraw, and I told him the tipster's tale of suicide and asked where I could find poor old Rosvig's people.

"Why, the whole thing's a fake," McGraw assured me. "I never heard of Rosvig, nor of any man around those flats, committing suicide. Whoever brought in that story thought your paper would print it without looking it up. Must be some one with a grudge

against the builder. Absolutely nothing in it."

Even a beginning reporter could see that McGraw was honest and truthful. Well, just one more good story gone bust! Such is life, or such was life on Park Row in the Mauve Decade. I shook my head in sorrow for myself, but soon found something to take my mind off mere newspaper troubles.

While McGraw and I were talking, the gas jets had been quietly turned up one by one, until the big room was all ablaze with light. From every side came the thin, piping notes of the policeman's whistle, sounded from puckered lips—the private hailing sign of that honorable vocation. Perhaps the syllables *"fwee-foo!"* would represent it phonetically. The signal rippled to and from throughout the dormitory and echoed from the farthest corners, like a chorus of tree toads in spring. Yet there was a slinky and menacing note in it, too, as if the burly coppers were gathering by stealth to do some private mischief.

Down the main aisle pranced a swarthy giant, a huge galloglass of a fellow, clad in pants and undershirt and brandishing a long two-handed sword. His black eyes blazed above knobby, high cheek bones that were decked with velvety tips of unshaven black, and his big blue chin stuck out like the bow of a battleship. He advanced in a series of kangaroo leaps, after each leap sweeping the point of the sword in a half circle on the floor, so that it scraped and rattled ominously. And, by way of declaring his ferocious intent, he growled like bellowing Blunderbore.

My skin crept as I stared at this monster. It crept more when another big man followed him, carrying an enormous razor, forged by some blacksmith, its blade two feet long and nicked at the edge, to which clung tufts of bristles and smears of red paint in simulation of blood. At his heels came another menace, bearing a huge pickle bottle, half full of tarry lather, which he stirred with a stout brush.

"Easy now, men!" McGraw warned, as the whole platoon gathered around his cot. "This young fellow is from the *World*. Keep off him."

"But he's got to take his degree! Say, the super himself'd hafta take his degree when he fuyst comes inta a dormitory," protested a globular fellow who seemed at every move to be on the point of bursting through his thin undershirt. His voice had a childish plaint. He was the Master of Full Moon Ceremonies, and he was a picture of sorrow at seeing a victim escape initiation—for no policeman in those days cared to offend the *World*.

I happened to be wearing a new summer suit for which I owed Raymond forty-five dollars, and the prospect of its ruin with tarry lather and red paint in a general rough-house initiation stimulated quick thinking. It wouldn't do, I thought, to deprive the cops of their boyish fun by breaking their rule of mauling every newcomer. I didn't want to have them down on me. Quickly I looked the crowd over. They were all either middle-aged and fat or built so long and thick that they seemed awkward. Not a spry, clever-looking lad among them. That gave inspiration.

"Tell you what I'll do," I volunteered to the plaintive master of ceremonies. "Cut out the lather and shave, and I'll spar four rounds with any man you've got."

"Will ya, young fella, on the level?" His words sounded like a prayer.

"Sure."

"Good! Hey, Jim, go up and bring down Clarkin!"

I felt a sudden chill.

The crowd began to pull aside the cots, and soon cleared a space some eighteen feet square for a "ring"—no ropes, of course; just an open space. I stripped to the waist, folded the pre-

cious new clothes neatly and placed them in an orderly pile far from the ring, where nothing by any chance could drip on them. Took off my shoes, too; for hard heels would slip on the smooth old floor. As I stood up, Clarkin came down the aisle, an Apollo clad in underwear, swinging from side to side as he came, with the short, nippy steps of the old-time Bowery boy, a curious trait surviving from the ancient days when a man who would proclaim himself as a shoulder-hitter always walked that way. Oh, what a surprise was there, my countrymen!

A proper man, if ever I saw one, and evidently the cock of the walk in that police precinct. His bulging chest and shoulder muscles were highly developed —too darned highly, to please his predestined victim, who began to shudder within, though outwardly offering a proud smile and a hard-grappling handshake, according to the prebattle code dear old Mike had taught us. When the newcomer took off his undershirt and thrust his hands into the five-ounce boxing gloves, the rippling play of his swift muscles gave me something very much like a desire to be elsewhere.

My fat friend of the bursting shirt, watch in hand, ceremoniously introduced us at the center of the "ring," and said we must break clean from the clinches—not hold with one hand and hit with the other. Then, as his watch hands marked an even minute, he called, "Time!" Clarkin, newly roused from slumber and not loaded with five courses of rich Swiss food, et cetera, stepped in, brisk and smiling. His opponent, weighing one hundred and fifty-six net to Clarkin's one hundred and sixty-six, conscious of recent food, and clinging to an absurd fragment of hope that he might not suffer much pain in the knock-out, preserved an attitude of watchful waiting.

Mike's coaching suddenly came to mind: "Always show that you're bossing the job. Make the pace, and make him fight your way." So, as the champion of the precinct again moved in with mincing steps to measure his man, feinting with little, hooking blows with either hand, I shot a straight left high on the cheek; not a smash, but just a nice, clean hit that joggled his head a little.

"Whee-ee-ee!" chorused the cops, most of whom probably had been walloped by Clarkin and were glad to see him get hit, even once. The tap on the cheek and the outcries of his comrades set him off like a racing engine. He flew in, swinging a dozen padded fists, as it seemed to the poor victim, busy parrying and ducking. Only his hot-headed haste kept him from scoring a knock-out there and then. The visitor raised his shoulders as a wall of defense, and tucked in his chin as deep as possible in his chest. Yes, deeper than possible. Also he gave ground freely. Plunge after plunge the champion made, buffeting his living target from one side of the ring to the other, but always in too much of a hurry to connect with the point of the chin. In the midst of this turmoil I heard the sweetest word in the language: "Time!" The end of the round.

As a bit of self-defense psychology, I, too, walked back to my corner with short, nippy steps and a swagger, also grinned happily as I sat on the cot while some unknown Samaritan fanned me with a big towel. Heaven knows that was an empty grin; for as I sat there I was speculating about one thing—would it happen to me in the second round or in the third? Then another thought came to mind—how could any one be fool enough to say he'd take on any man in the house? Lord! If I only might live to the finish!

Clarkin tore out of his corner for the second round so fast that he overwhelmed me getting up and bowled me over on the cot. Not a bit hurt, I

slowly counted the seconds of time, so as to stay down and rest as long as possible without having the fatal ten seconds counted by the referee. At eight I arose, and Clarkin charged in again. I ducked and jabbed a long left on his mouth. Again the howls of delight from the crowd, and again the champion whaled away with swings that batted me this way and that. (I found more than a score of knobby, blue-black contusions on my shoulders in the bath next morning.) Clarkin was so anxious to finish the job that he forgot all about hitting in the body—imagine the winning effect of a heavy punch landing on a recent table d'hôte dinner!—and his swings could not find that hidden chin.

Thus sped the second round, the champion throwing away his efforts in wild swings, the victim exerting himself as little as he could, and beginning to hope that by some miracle he might yet cheat the executioner of his kill. Two or three times he knocked me over sidewise on a cot, and each time I silently counted the seconds, so that I got all the respite possible under the good old Queensberry rules. And the hurried killer never hit the fatal spot on the chin.

I stood in the corner at the call for the third round, and just as he leaped at me with a right swing I ducked under it and let him sprawl himself all over the cot. He dove nearly all the way across, and the crowd yelled with delight. The mocking laughs that greeted him as he got back in the ring infuriated him still more, if that can be imagined, and he banged me a swing on the shoulder so that I staggered aside—but was gone before he could jump in to follow up. He jumped in again, and as I sidestepped I both felt and heard De Lisle's dinner and wine going *glug-glug* in my midst. That signified that it wouldn't be long now before the end of the tragedy, for my legs were slowing down, too.

"Well, then, some instinct was asking me, why not try to let him have just one good poke, so that he'd remember that he had met somebody with hands? No sooner thought than done. As he came whirling in again, I drove the left fist straight and hard on his too handsome aquiline nose. He snorted as the blow stung him—and lo! a little stain of red came from both nostrils down on his stiff, bristly yellow mustache.

"Hooray fer th' young fella!" roared twenty lusty throats.

Clarkin rushed again. I side-stepped and flew. He slogged and spilled me over a cot. Same slow business of getting up at count of eight. As I dodged his next killing rush, the table d'hôte feast *glug-glugging* within was worse than ever. My conscience! Was I *ever* going to be knocked out, or was I to be merely disgracefully sick? Horrible dilemma! But the champion was driving in as hard as ever, and I was getting too tired to jump around much. So, propping the right foot well aside as it went in, I drove the left fist, for all it was worth, flush on the handsome nose.

"Hooray fer th' young fella!" came again from the crowd, as the champion sniffed but could not keep the red from running free and down over his chin. Well, I was all gone now, and might as well suffer my knock-out while trying; so I jabbed the left on the nose a few times more, amid a joyous pandemonium from my rooters—no; not my rooters, but his former victims! In the midst of the whirling blows and the retaliatory jabs, the cheers and howls, came the clear, delightful call of "Time!" (How noble and beautiful a thing is time!)

"Hey, Clarkin, y'll have to buy us a new set of gloves!" three or four policemen called to him, as he sat on the edge of the cot, ready to leap out and destroy at the next call. The rest of the crowd laughed at him, made comments about

his damaged nose, and tossed the raspberry his way.

"I'll buy nothing!" the champion replied angrily. "I paid my bit for these gloves, and I'll pay my bit in the next, and that lets me out."

"You'll buy a new pair o' gloves, I'm telling you," said the giant of the two-handed sword. "You've ruined these pair o' gloves, bleedin' all over 'em, and you buy a new pair. Understand?"

"Not for you, you big stiff!" Clarkin began; when a life-saving wave of inspiration surged up in me, and I interrupted him.

"What's the use of spoiling a good set of nice gloves?" I asked, arising and wiping the mess off my left glove with the big towel from my corner. At the same time I stuck out my hand and grabbed Clarkin's deadly right mitt in a friendly shake.

"These gloves are all right now; let's keep 'em right," I urged. "We'll call it a draw, and save the gloves from being ruined."

"That's right: I decide it a draw," ruled the fat referee, who evidently wanted to favor the stranger, who had provided the show.

"Oh—well—all right," said Clarkin, rather unwillingly, as he slowly pulled off his goves. Mine flew off, as it seemed, by some sort of supernatural volition. I stooped over, putting on and lacing my shoes, while the champion went out to the sink to sniff up water and stop the ruddy flow. Soon I was standing beside him, splashing myself from head to waist with the refreshing cold water. His ferocity had vanished, and he smiled a friendly welcome as I came into the washroom. Our conversation was a series of silent smiles while we splashed and dried. Then, seeing he was about to go back to the upper dormitory, I took his hand, to say good-by forever.

Good-by forever? You bet, forever. I knew when I was well off.

"It's been a great pleasure to meet you," I told him. "We'll have to get together some time. When have you an afternoon off?"

"All next week, from four to six," said honest Clarkin.

"I haven't boxed for some months," I told him, "and it would do me good to get a lively workout with a good, fast man like you. I must try to come 'round."

"Sure, any time you like," he agreed, smiling pleasantly; and so went to the stairs.

Downstairs I thanked Captain Killion for his courtesy—but told him nothing of our exercises—and started downtown with my friend Johnny Kellman. And somehow I never met Clarkin again.

Another contribution by William Hemmingway will appear in an early issue.

PROFESSIONALISM IN BOXING

WHAT is the difference between a professional and an amateur boxer? This was put by a member of Congress to Deets Pickett, secretary of the Methodist Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals, when the House Judiciary Committee was holding hearings on a bill to regulate amateur boxing in the District of Columbia. Deets Pickett replied:

"A professional boxer is one who wouldn't even pat his wife on the back without getting paid for it."

DRY WATER

By Talbert & Winsor Josselyn

You'll like Ed Crosby, small-town storekeeper, and the way he handled Subdivider Gorman

"WELL, sir," said Mr. Seeley Gorman, briskly pocketing the newly signed contract, "you sure have bought a fine piece of river property, Mr. Crosby. As you say, just the place for a summer camp for your wife and children. Everything that a man could want."

The heavy, pink hand of subdivider Seeley Gorman swept in a wide gesture. It took in the running water flashing in the June sun, the oaks and sycamores rustling in the up-valley breeze, the drowsing, wooded hills that walled the valley on the far side. The river was a California river, its wide, boulder-strewn course marking where the storms of winter had sent it rolling, bank full, down to the sea, but one which, at the advent of dry summer, had shrunk to brook size, meandering in its rocky bed. Here, before the two men, it broadened into a lazy lagoon.

As the pudgy Gorman hand went revealingly across the landscape, the equally pudgy Gorman face was turned for an instant toward the figure of purchaser Crosby, who sat beside him on a fallen tree trunk. Purchaser Crosby was drinking in the scene as a thirsty man drinks in water.

Subdivider Seeley Gorman's little agate eyes narrowed, then widened, and his hand, at the end of its sweep, was brought swiftly back and down upon purchaser Crosby's knee. At the same time, Mr. Gorman edged along the fallen tree a little closer.

"Say, look here, Crosby." The well-known Gorman voice was now at its

unctuous best. "You're a man who knows a good thing when he sees it. Anybody who buys a sweet piece of river property like this for the missus and kiddies, knows what he's up to. I can just seem to see the missus sittin' here on the porch of the bungalow that you'll build—a nice little one, not the expensive kind—and the kids splashin' down in the river among all them white, smooth stones. And you coming up here from the store after closin' time. And Saturdays and Sundays—— Say, I heard you was thinking of buying out your partner in that store."

Ed Crosby, storekeeper in the town at the mouth of the valley, twenty miles below, shifted suddenly on the log and regarded Mr. Gorman. "Why," he said slowly, "I didn't know that anybody knew about that. It wasn't supposed to be——"

Seeley Gorman chuckled heartily. "Listen here, Crosby. Lots of people aren't supposed to know lots of things in this life, but they do, and if they can turn that knowledge to the other feller's profit, who's to kick? I just happened to hear of it in a roundabout way, and sittin' here on this log it all of a sudden came to me that maybe you and I could fix it up so's you could buy him out on somebody else's money. I mean a little profit money."

The Gorman eyes held Mr. Crosby's eager look.

"The half acre that you've just bought," the real-estate man went on, "is the best thing on this part of the river. You'll want to keep that, of course, for a summer home. But there's still this two-acre strip below you, right on the river; and just think, Mr. Crosby, of how people are going to want to buy that. Just like you have wanted to buy this and was wise enough to do so. Now, why don't you take that two acres on the same terms that you took this piece? You know how easy the terms are, and before the next payment comes due you and I will team up and sell it to somebody at a nice little profit. Why, Crosby"—and a cheery Gorman hand hit Ed on the back—"you'll be the sole owner of that grocery store before you know it."

Ed Crosby swallowed before he spoke. "Now—now, that's wonderful. But I don't know as I've got the money. And if I should take it and it didn't sell——"

"Didn't sell? Why, man, do you mean to tell me that this stuff ain't goin' to sell? Didn't you take this piece the first time you saw it? Ain't somebody else going to take the other off your hands the first time he sees it, too? Well, I guess yes. Sell it to 'em in half-acre pieces—we'll make more that way—and before you know it, there'll be four or five nice little houses up here and everybody just as happy as can be. And long-headed Ed Crosby will be called a lucky guy, and it won't be luck at all."

Seeley Gorman, subdivider who sold his own land in person, took from a well-worn brief case a fresh contract form; took from a vest pocket a heavy-barreled fountain pen. With practiced hand he went down the page filling in a description of the two-acre piece, using the brief case for a desk. Then he handed the ready contract and pen to a man whose face had suddenly filled with lines. Twice Ed Crosby started to speak, and twice Seeley Gorman headed him off without seeming to head him off.

"Yes, sign right there," said Mr. Gorman.

The Gorman pen was as smooth-flowing as the Gorman words. Ed Crosby signed.

"Day's getting late," said Seeley Gorman, suddenly noting the sun, and rising to his feet. "We'll all have to be getting back. But Lord, with country so pretty, and that river a-runnin' across

the stones, a man just hates to leave it, don't he?"

Suiting action to word, Seeley Gorman walked with seeming reluctance back to his big car. As for Ed Crosby, walking along with him, there was in his manner something of one under a drug. Responsibility, swift new responsibility, had come upon him—that and swift new hope. Responsibility and hope grappled and struggled, as El Crosby walked slowly on.

"Now, mother," said Ed Crosby to his wife as he brought their little car to a stop at the side of the road, beneath an oak, "we'll park the car here and walk over. This is the nearest we can drive to the property. It lies right over there. That big sycamore is on it, and the river bank is just beyond. You carry the supper, mother, and I'll carry the baby. You two boys can go on ahead with your bathing suits. There, now we're all set."

Three busy weeks had passed since the ink had dried on Ed Crosby's river contracts. Three weeks so busy that this was the first opportunity he had had for bringing the family up to this much-talked-of half acre that would some time be their summer home. Of the two other acres he had not told his wife; that was to be the surprise. He had planned it all out. Not a word about the other purchase until they stood in the shade of the big sycamore and looked out over the rippling stream. Then he would tell her; tell her, using Gorman's well-chosen words. "All ours. It'll be selling any day now. And then the store, that'll be all ours."

So it was, with expectation surging happy within him, that he lifted his baby girl out from the car and caught step with his wife, and they swung across the short open space toward the late-afternoon shade. The two boys ran whooping on before, swinging their bathing suits around their heads and disappeared beyond the sycamore, bathing suits still aloft.

"Here we are," said Ed Crosby, putting the baby down on the leaf-strewn ground. "Now, I'll gather up some firewood, and we'll have steaks and coffee before you can say Jack Robinson."

He straightened up and looked at his wife; and her gaze, which had been taking it all in, now met his.

"Well, what do you think of it?" he asked in a manner that he tried to make casual.

A radiant Mrs. Crosby started to speak, but was interrupted by the reappearance of the two boys, who now carried their bathing suits trailing.

"Pa," rose their chorus, "where's the river?"

Ed Crosby laughed explosively. "Now, isn't that just like town boys! You have to show a town boy everything. A boy brought up in the country would—— Why, the river's right over there, just below the little bluff."

"But we've been over there," protested the elder of the pair, "and there isn't any river."

"No water at all," said the younger. "Just rocks—white rocks. Where we goin' to swim?"

Ed Crosby started to smile but somehow the smile never got any farther than the start. Something seemed suddenly to pull at his knees. "Nonsense," said the head of the family, his smile fighting its way into a real thing, "you two boys are playing a game on your old dad. Well, I'll fall for it. Come on, I'll show you where the water is."

But as Ed Crosby went toward the river, his step was a little faster than that of a man who goes merely to show where a swimming hole lies. He strode beyond the shade of the sycamore; he came to the low bank. He came, and stopped. The older boy had said there was no river. Well, there was no river. The younger had said there was no wa-

ter. And there was no water. Just stones—white, hard, dry stones. The river had disappeared.

A long-staring Ed Crosby found that his wife, with her hand on his arm, was standing beside him. "Why, Ed," she said, "the boys were right. There isn't any——"

There wasn't. Neither in front of them, nor down lower—down where the two acres stretched—the two acres that were to have bought the store. The two acres of which he had not told his wife, holding the telling until the moment when he would proudly have said —— And now—— The down payment had been made. Another payment would soon be due. Where the money was coming from——

Mrs. Crosby was speaking. "Well," she was saying, "that's too bad. But are you sure, Ed, that this is the right piece? Maybe——"

"Oh, it's the right piece," said Ed Crosby dully. And his eyes took in the section of fallen tree at one side, where he and Seeley Gorman had sat the several weeks before. "I've heard," he went on, his mouth as dry as the river bed before him, "that California rivers sometimes do this in summer; and—and this one has."

"Then we don't get a chance to swim?" came two small voices.

"No, boys, you don't get a chance to swim."

Mrs. Crosby's voice broke the heavy silence that followed. "But maybe it might start flowing again."

"Not till winter," said her husband. "I've heard 'em saying in the store that it was going to be a dry year—and it is."

"Well, anyway," said Mrs. Crosby, her hand again on his arm, "the trees are awful pretty." The hand urged him toward the shade of the big sycamore. "Let's have supper," came her voice.

Ed Crosby did not move. He continued to stare at the white, bleached stones. "There's a big dam," he said slowly, picking his words, "up above here somewhere that supplies water to our town. I guess they've begun keeping everything flowing into it, and there's not enough coming over the spillway to get down this far. I didn't know—— He didn't say—— I guess I should have thought of that."

Mrs. Crosby studied her husand's face. "Why, Ed, it's only half an acre. And we needn't build up here. Anyway, when we get the store we'll need whatever we would put into a cabin to keep the store running."

"Sure," said Ed Crosby, hearing his own voice as though it came from a distance, "when we get the store." He couldn't tell her about the two acres. Not now. The down payment had been sizable; the second payment would soon be due. There would not be enough money to buy the store. And other payments would follow—other payments on the high-priced river land without a river.

The picnic supper was not a success.

That evening, from a pay-telephone booth downtown, Ed Crosby held long-distance conversation with subdivider Seeley Gorman at his home in a neighboring town.

"This is Ed Crosby speaking."

"Who?"

"Ed Crosby. I'm the storekeeper, you remember, who bought that river land from you several weeks ago."

"Oh, yeah, yeah; now I remember." A waiting silence followed. "Well," resumed Ed Crosby, "I was up there to-day—took my family up—and the river isn't flowing. There isn't any river; it's dried up."

"Yeah, I know that," retorted subdivider Gorman.

Again there was silence.

"But don't you see," said Ed Crosby —and something began tapping in his brain—"I can't sell—we can't sell—

those two acres of mine. You can't sell it when there's no river."

"That ain't news to me," came the loud voice of Seeley Gorman. "And say," the voice went on, "I got two hundred acres below you on the river, so we're all in the same boat and we just got to sweat it through. G'by." The telephone clicked at the other end.

For an ordinarily brisk walker, Ed Crosby went slowly, very slowly, toward his little car.

The thing began to prey more and more upon his mind. Waking and sleeping, it crowded in upon him; hedged him closer. Payments to be made, the store to be bought—and not enough money.

It was a Saturday afternoon, but trade was none too brisk. Ed Crosby came out from around the desk in the back of the store. "I'm going out for a while," he said to his partner. And he clambered into his car and started at slow speed.

Where a man's thoughts are centered, he will go. Ed Crosby drove up the winding valley. It was a beautiful day. Golden-brown hills on the left, heavily tree-clad hills on the right, the floor of the valley a shimmering green as the breeze of afternoon swept along it. Green, that is, save where the curving river bed showed white in rock and sand. A California river—a river upside down.

On and on drove Ed Crosby. He neared the two-acre plot and the half-acre one that adjoined it. He slowed down. Then, gripping the steering wheel until knuckles showed white, he suddenly put on power. What was the use of seeing it again? One more twist of the knife.

Ed Crosby's car left behind it a wake of dust. The road grew narrower, steeper. He was now in the upland end of the valley. A branching road, with a locked gate across it, and a sign behind the gate, caught his eye. The sign read: SAN REMO DAM.

He stopped the car. So here was where the dam was. The one that supplied water to the town by a great pipe line; the dam that impounded the upper river; the one that during an extra-dry summer made the lower river disappear.

He pulled the car off to one side of the road. He climbed over the locked gate and went along the branch road. He had no plan in mind; he just went. A quarter mile across a tree-covered flat, a curve—and he was looking down into a rocky gorge. There, just beyond, up the gorge, rose the dam. Ed Crosby walked along an eyebrow of a road and came opposite the crest of the masonry. On the lower side, a sheer drop; on the upper, a lake, cool and blue in the clear sunlight. Water—acres of it. Water that should be going down the dry river course past his land.

A voice came from one side, and Ed Crosby turned to see a man in overalls standing in the doorway of a weather-beaten shack. The watchman.

"You ain't the only one that would like to be fishin' in there," said the man. "They come up here a dozen a day, and ask. But we got our orders, and there ain't no fishin' allowed."

Ed Crosby said that he had no intention of fishing, that he was just looking around. "Lots of water," he added. "I suppose that's why the river below is dry."

"Yep. Impounding everything for the rest of the summer. Only"—the watchman took his pipe out of his mouth and spat, then slowly closed one eye and nodded—"I wouldn't say the river's always goin' to be dry."

"Probably not," said Ed Crosby—"if it rains next winter."

The man laughed. "Now, I don't mean next winter. It may be a blamed sight sooner than that." Here he af-

fected an air of mystery. "It might even be to-morrow; but I ain't sayin'."

"What do you mean?" said Ed Crosby.

"I got orders not to talk," was the retort. "But I'll say this much: Don't pitch no tents in the river bed to-morrow." He knocked the ashes from his pipe against a heel. "Well, it's a fine afternoon for a snooze." And he disappeared through the door of the shack.

Ed Crosby wandered slowly back along the road that led to the locked gate and the car. He turned the talkative watchman's words over and over in his head. Finally he snorted in disgust. Water in the river to-morrow! Humph! Probably half a bottle of jackass whisky inside that watchman. Talked that way with everybody that came there; his idea of humor.

Back down the valley he drove. His trip had meant nothing; it hadn't been intended to mean anything. Once more he passed the half acre and the two acres; once more he kept on going. Several hundred yards beyond he was forced to stop for an approaching truck that had swung wide to enter the field bordering the river course. The truck carried a crew of men and was piled high with rough benches and tables. Another truck followed. Crosby looked across the field. Other men were already there doing some kind of construction work; gay pennants were being strung among the trees. The place was taking on a picnic, a holiday, air.

Ed Crosby turned his car in to follow the second truck.

Tables, benches, strings of pennants in the trees, a barbecue pit. Then his wider-searching gaze took in a white wooden stake, other stakes, bordering the bank of the dry river course. Property stakes—subdivision stakes. Such stakes as had marked the boundaries of his own half acre, and the two acres. Subdivider Seeley Gorman used such stakes.

The Crosby mind picked up speed. Gorman had spoken of two hundred acres below the pieces that Crosby had bought. This must be it, and now men were getting it ready for a big barbecue, with many property stakes standing white among the trees. Lot stakes, newly painted—and a dry river.

"By thunder!" said Ed Crosby, just above a whisper. Maybe the watchman at the dam hadn't been making a fool of him, after all. Maybe the river—— Gorman had played politics with the owners of the dam for one day's water; that's what had happened. To-morrow would be Sunday. City people who had never seen the place before. Country-hungry city people. Seeley Gorman and his salesmen, free food, green trees and a running river, a river for children to paddle in, and subdivision lots to be sold. A clean-up in one day.

Ed Crosby whirled his little car around and bounced back to the main road. He turned up-valley, headed in the road that led to his own land, and with a squeal of brakes stopped beside it. He strode toward the big sycamore and came to the bank above the dry watercourse. To-morrow, if his guess was right, there would be water running past here, running on down past the Seeley Gorman barbecue and subdivision racket.

What could he, Ed Crosby, do? Directly in front of him, if water came, there would again be a three-foot-deep lagoon; downstream the lagoon would narrow, be hedged in by willows. On the far side of the river course the bank was low; beyond lay a fringe of waste land; then, downstream and toward the hills, stretched a flat of alfalfa, backed by fruit trees. A man was working in the alfalfa field.

Crosby swung down into the dry river bed, crossed it, went toward the man in the field.

"Howdy," said Ed Crosby.

"Howdy," replied the man.

"Nice alfalfa you've got."

"Yep, good stand. Pretty near ready to cut."

"Don't need any irrigating, does it?"

"Well, it does pretty good with sub-irrigation."

"Sure it don't need any top irrigation?" asked Ed Crosby.

The rancher looked at the questioner. "Well, of course it would help, a lot. What do you mean?"

"I mean this," said Ed Crosby. And he began to tell of Seeley Gorman. He told from the beginning; and when he had finished, the rancher slowly whistled.

"The hell you say!" was his comment.

"That's the layout," said Ed Crosby. "He's got me over a barrel—bad. But there's one chance that maybe I can get him. And if I can—if you could team up with me—— Say, would you mind walking back along here and let me tell you about an idea I got?"

"Sure," said the rancher. Then he added: "Oh, I've heard about this Gorman. I know his record."

Five minutes later the two had finished a rough survey of the river course abutting the Crosby and the rancher's properties.

"Do you know," said the rancher, "I think it can be done. We'll riprap here at the lower end of the lagoon with cut willows, slam rocks and sand against it with the scraper, and lift the water level in the whole lagoon a couple of feet. Then we'll start the ditch here at the lowest spot on my side and plow it and scrape it out at just enough of an angle to make it reach the upper edge of the alfalfa flat. When they turn the river on, say early to-morrow morning, it'll come slow at first, fortunately, with the sand taking a lot of it up, and I think the riprap will hold. Once she gets goin' in the ditch and starts spreading out in the alfalfa, we're set. You know," he went on, "this Seeley Gorman—I wouldn't mind poking him, to boot. But we've got to jump, if we're going to get anything done."

That evening, when twilight was fast making itself into night, two men came to the barn of the ranch house. One of them turned a pair of work horses into the corral; the other eased an ax down from his shoulder, and flexed stiffened arms. Ed Crosby had not been used to this work since a boy.

"Now, if I could use your telephone," he called to the rancher.

"Right inside the kitchen," said the rancher. "Tell my wife that we'll be ready for supper in a minute."

An anxious voice responded at the other end of the line to Ed Crosby's call. "Ed, I've been so worried——"

"Now, listen, mother," reassured Ed, "it's all right. I haven't had time to call you before. I can't come home, and I'll be away most of to-morrow. I can't tell you more, because this is a party line, but if things work out the way I think they're going to, we're going to be on the top of the wave to-morrow night."

At an hour that seemed around midnight, but one that really had a streak of dawn in the east, Ed Crosby was awakened by the rancher. "We got to be up and at 'em," was the awakening one's comment. "No telling how early they'll be lettin' that water splash loose up at the dam."

The sun was barely above the horizon when Ed Crosby began once more cutting willow branches for additional riprap work on the brush-and-earth barrier that the two had thrown up at the lower end of the dry lagoon, while the rancher began widening with his horse-drawn scraper the furrowed ditch that he had plowed the evening previous. It was a fight against time. The barrier, the ditch—neither was as yet ready. Crosby hacked and heaved and shoveled and built the barrier stouter and

higher; the rancher and horses buckled to the task of widening the ditch. An hour, two hours, later and the work was ready to withstand a flow of water —a small flow. If they threw on a big head of water——

Ed Crosby wiped the sweat from his eyes. What if the water came too fast? Yes, and what if it didn't come at all? What if it was just a crazy hunch on his part, and all this work——

Something was thrusting its way around the upper turn of the dry lagoon. Something brown, liquid. Slowly it came, fingering its way with a forefront of leaves and little twigs, hesitating, stopping, coming on again. The water! Ed Crosby straightened up and whistled. "Here she comes!" he yelled to the rancher. He flung aside the ax and picked up a shovel.

The brown forefront of the flow that was to come ate up the dryness of the lagoon. On and on. Now it was at the foot of the barrier; now it had stopped, now it was lifting. The barrier settled slightly. The water gave another lift. The lagoon slowly filled —was halfway up the riprap's face; the riprap gave another settling motion, as though bracing itself against the increasing pressure.

The level lifted; lifted.

"Phew!" said Ed Crosby. "He sure turned it on."

He measured with his eye the height of the riprap top and the mouth of the outlet ditch. Another six-inch lift before the water would head into the ditch—if the riprap held.

It did hold. Slowly, blindly the rising flood groped for an outlet. It found the ditch. It poked a trickle down it, stopped as though suspicious of some trap, shouldered again at the riprap, then poked again at the ditch. Into the ditch it began to flow.

Ed Crosby took a deep breath. The rancher came quickly along the ditch bank, shovel in hand. He stopped at the ditch mouth and widely grinned. "Guess we're not some hydraulic engineers," he called. "By gad, she works!" Then his voice changed. "Hi! Watch out there, behind you! It's cutting through."

Ed Crosy wheeled. The far corner of the riprap was crumbling away. He flung himself at it. The rancher leaped the ditch and raced to help. They fought the boring outflow, slammed brush and boulders into the gap; closed it. They eased up, shot glances at the ditch. It was running full.

"You watch her here," said the rancher. "I'll go on down the ditch, and wherever she needs coaxin', I'll go after her."

Ed Crosby watched. Perilously high was the water edge; in slow circles the tide eddied the lagoon, seeking other exit than the full-banked ditch. Ceaselessly Ed Crosby reënforced the riprap dam and fought back the overlap.

Time passed.

A figure came bolting into sight from beyond the big sycamore, a large man, running; and so fast did he run that he was up to the bank before Ed Crosby saw him. Then the running figure stopped short, and his fists went up. The natural pink of subdivider Seeley Gorman's face leaped to a brick red. He fought to get out words.

"So that's the reason—— Why—why, damn you!"

The dealer in subdivisions plunged down the low bank and came toward the riprap. Ed Crosby, grim about the mouth, shortened the grip on his shovel and advanced toward him. They met at the end of the riprap.

Gorman seethed with words. "You ——you knock that thing out of there or I'll——"

"Don't come a step nearer," said Ed Crosby, his voice low and cold. He held the shovel like a rifle, with bayonet fixed.

Seeley Gorman halted. "Why, damn

you! I'll—I'll break you in two! Get out of my way. Let that water go on down the river."

"My property," said Ed Crosby. "River's running over my property. Do what I want with the river when it's running over my property. A bird named Seeley Gorman told me that. Good thing to remember."

"Hell!" cried Seeley Gorman. His fists closed, opened tautly. He looked at the riprap, with the water cresting its top; looked over at the ditch, bank full. Then he wheeled and went lumberingly up the bank and disappeared at a run past the big sycamore.

Ed Crosby relaxed. "It's going to take more'n a shovel to stop him when he comes again," he told himself. He gave the riprap a hasty look. It was holding. He skirted it, jumped the ditch and struck off at a swinging lope toward the alfalfa field. The rancher was spreading the flow.

"Goin' fine!" greeted the rancher. Then: "What's up?"

"Gorman," said Ed. Swiftly he told.

"Huh!" said the rancher. "Well, I guess two can play at that game. You get along back, and I won't be a couple of minutes behind you." He drove his shovel into the soft ground and started for his ranch house. Ed Crosby returned along the ditch. He plugged hastily here and there at the seeping dam; then climbed the bank on its road side and took up sentinel duty. The minutes crawled along.

Suddenly, dust, heavy dust, feathered into the air down the valley road approaching at the speed of a fast-driven car—or cars.

Ed Crosby ran a hand across a damp forehead. He planted his feet a little firmer. A halloo sounded behind him. It was the rancher, and he came leaping up the bank. In the crook of his arm were guns—a shotgun and a rifle. He handed Crosby the shotgun. It's all loaded," he said. He reached in a pocket. "Here's extra shells. Buckshot."

"Dust coming," said Ed Crosby. "I reckon it's him, and others."

"Probably. But there's no reason why we can't set down and meet 'em easylike.

The dust boiled to a stop beyond the sycamore. Then men burst into view, with Seeley Gorman in the lead.

"Looks like he's brung his whole workin' force," said the rancher, and his rifle muzzle swung up ever so slightly.

Seeley Gorman and his crew did not see the pair seated under the small tree on the river bank until almost on top of them. When they did see them, and gave them a second look, they stopped and backed up as though they had stepped on something that had biting teeth in it.

"Howdy," greeted the rancher. "I wouldn't come much closer. Suppose you just stay where you are. No, none of that circlin' off there through the brush, you. Halt where you be!" The rancher was now on his feet. So was Ed Crosby.

"This gun," went on the rancher, "has got soft-nosed lead bullets in it. Hisn has got buckshot. Which will you have? Or will you take both?"

Seeley Gorman's face was a deep purple. He looked at his shovel-carrying cohorts. He took a step nearer the gun holders.

"Come on!" he bellowed to the group that flanked him, his lips in a snarl. "They're only four-flushing. Those guns are empty!" He took another step, and the line behind him likewise moved forward.

The rancher's voice rang clear. "Steady! Stay right where you are. Crosby, cover 'em with your shotgun. Aim it right at their bellies. The first one that moves, let him have it." He looked at Gorman. "Not loaded, eh?" He caught up a chip of wood from

the ground, and sailed it out over the lagoon. It struck the water, and as it struck there was the bang of a rifle. The shattered chip disappeared in a spout of water.

"Oh, no—not loaded," said the rancher, ejecting the shell and clicking a fresh one into the firing chamber.

Seeley Gorman's face was several degrees less red. There was a wavering among his shovel carriers. There arose mutterings.

"Hell!" said one. "He said there was only one guy here, wid a shovel."

"What's the bright idea, Gorman?" demanded another. "Want us to get our blocks blowed off?"

Subdivider Seeley Gorman shifted his weight.

Now the rancher's voice went hard. "Beat it!" he said. "All of you clear out, and clear out fast! His gun swiveled toward Gorman. "Beginnin' with you."

The little agate eyes of Seeley Gorman sought the riprap and ditch. The rancher gave a short chuckle.

"Oh, they'll hold, all right—hold all day. Hold longer than any dry-river land-selling barbecue."

A roar came from subdivider Seeley Gorman. For an instant he stood uncertain, then whirled savagely on his army. "Get the hell out of here and back to your jobs! Fine bunch you are to help a man!"

"We're gettin', all right," came the army's answer. "Yeh, and some leader you are, too." They shambled off.

Seeley Gorman brought his jaws together with a snap. "Well," he demanded, "what's your game?"

The rancher grinned. "You talk to him, Ed. I guess it's your lead from now on."

Ed Crosby lowered the shotgun. He looked at the water in the lagoon. "Nice river-front property," he said. "I was wondering if somebody might not want to buy it."

Seeley Gorman gave a stifled exclamation. He checked himself. "You win," he announced. "I'll take your half acre."

"And the two acres," said Ed Crosby. "The two acres that people will be falling over themselves to get, with bungalows under the trees, and the kiddies splashin'——"

Seeley Gorman by now had a check book out. He bent down on one knee, pen in hand, using the other knee to write on.

Ed Crosby shook his head. "No checks," he stated briefly. "Too easy to stop payment on them before Monday morning."

Seeley Gorman got swiftly to his feet. Again he was purple. "I'll see you in hell first. I'll——"

"Hey," put in the rancher, slowly, looking off down the valley, "ain't that the dust like auto busses make, way down there? Auto busses that might be bringin' suckers from the city, coming to the grand barbecue?"

The subdivider's head snapped about. Once again his color became lighter. His hand went for a coat pocket.

"I thought so," said Ed Crosby. "I always heard you shell-game artists went pretty well heeled, so that if you ever needed money for this or that or the other thing you'd be ready."

A thick bill fold appeared in the pink hand of subdivider Gorman. Simultaneously, Ed Crosby drew from a trousers pocket two folded, and by now crumpled, sheets of paper.

"I've been carrying these contracts for some time," said Crosby. "Now, just hand over what I paid you on these two pieces. I'm not going to stick you up, extra. I could, but I'm not going to. Then you can have these contracts back to pin up on your wall or do whatever else you want to do with 'em."

A tight-mouthed Seeley Gorman counted out one big bill after another,

wadded them up, and thrust them at Ed Crosby. The latter unwadded them, counted them, and thrust them into a pocket. "Right," he said. He handed the contracts to Seeley Gorman; and that worthy tore them to bits and flung them underfoot.

"I thought you'd do that," said Ed Crosby. "There've been times when I felt like doing it myself."

Seeley Gorman thrust out his chin and stepped forward. "Now you two bust down that dam, here; and bust it quick! Get the water flowin' on down the river. Do you hear me?"

"Sure," said Ed Crosby. "But it ain't my land any longer. Nor my dam. If you want the dam busted down, do it yourself."

"Get off this property!" seethed Seeley Gorman.

"There's a shovel right over by that tree," was Ed Crosby's amiable rejoinder. "It won't do you any harm to get a few honest blisters, yourself." He glanced down the valley. "Say, I do believe it's those busses coming, at that."

But subdivider Seeley Gorman was already halfway down the bank, racing toward the riprap dam, shovel in hands.

As for Ed Crosby—after a very friendly farewell to his rancher friend and the exchange of a promise to meet again, he started off at a brisk pace for the scene of the barbecue. He had certain things to tell the people who were coming in on those busses.

Warm, friendly stories of real people, like the one you have just finished, are a regular feature of this magazine.

CHEATING OLD FATHER TIME

JACK QUINN, ancient of days, is a star pitcher on one of the best ball teams Connie Mack has ever put on the diamond. He admits he is forty-three years old, but there are sporting writers who, possessed of long memories and the habit of putting two and two together, assert that he is at least forty-eight. And thereby hangs a tale.

Back in 1919 the magnates of baseball issued an order forbidding a pitcher to use any foreign substance on the ball. This hit the spitballers, of whom Quinn was one. A delegation, representing the venerable Jack and the rest of his kind, petitioned the magnates to make an exception to the rule allowing the spitballers to stay in the game. The argument was that there were not many of them, that they would soon fade to the minors anyway, and that it would be all right so long as no newcomers were allowed to throw the deceptive spitter.

Thus the hearts of the magnates were softened, and the old spitters were given permission to stagger through their few remaining seasons. But six of them fooled the big chiefs. Possessed of amazing vitality and arms tough as *lignum-vitæ,* they refused to fade. This is the tenth season since they got their reprieve, and every one of them is going strong.

The immortal six players are Quinn, Burleigh Grimes, "Red" Faber, Stan Coveleskie, Bill Doak, and, finally, the only left-handed spitter under the big tent, Clarence Mitchell. Some of them at one time or another have been traded off by clubs as "through"; some have sojourned a while in the minors; but, by hook or by crook, they all thrust their ancient wings into the Fountain of Youth, returned to the big leagues, and to-day are making the eagle-eyed star hitters break their backs swinging at balls that "ain't where they think they are."

The ISLE of the FATES

Author of "Senator Maguire,"

A strange and fascinating story of a young withdrew to a lonely South Sea isle, because

CHAPTER I.

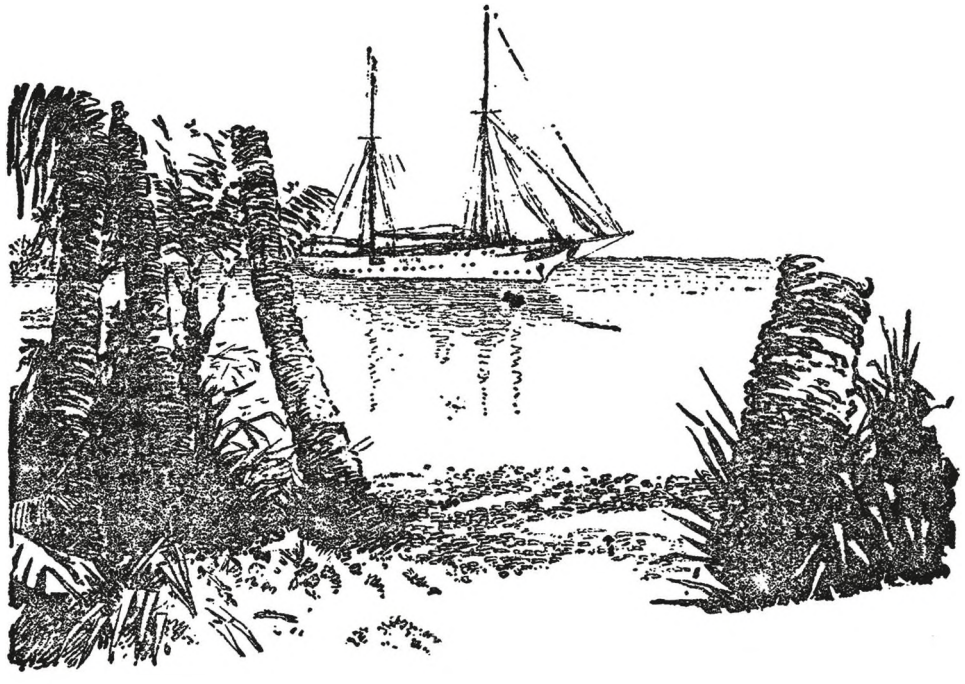
THE MIND READER.

AS a baby Jefferson Willard was unpopular, as a small boy he was disliked, as a youth he was detested, and as a young man he had no friends. Happiness he had never known, humankind he despised, he lived alone because he wanted to be alone and because nobody desired to be with him.

He faced the world with a sneer. His handsome countenance—for he was in no way repulsive, crippled or distorted—was unpleasant because of the contempt that each person read in it for himself. It was fortunate that he was not compelled to earn a living, for he could not have held a job an hour. If a man who lived in an excellent apartment in a fine hotel in New York could be called a hermit, Jefferson Willard was just that.

At twenty-five years of age he had no companions and wished none, while nobody who had ever made his acquaintance sought him out again. Rich, good looking, physically fit, there were no young women eager to acquire him and his money. The man was a misanthrope, and doomed, apparently, to the solitude that such individuals deserve.

Jefferson Willard's father had died a



By Fred MacIsaac *In Four Parts Part I*

Etc.

man who, with every gift the gods bestow,
he hated mankind and mankind hated him

few months after he was born and his mother had been killed in an automobile accident when he was ten years old. A succession of governesses and tutors had been with him during his tender years, paid caretakers who remained with him no longer than it was necessary for them to find another place.

Because he could not get along with other boys, and because he had insulted his teachers, he had been expelled from several preparatory schools, and only his inordinate love of books made it possible for him to enter and remain in Harvard University.

In college he had no intimates, but he had become discreet with years and refrained from infuriating the highest college authorities, though he was often at swords' points with his professors. One thing made him tolerated by the student body: his astounding ability on the football field.

Willard was about five feet eight and weighed a hundred and sixty pounds, and from his freshman year had been a fixture at quarter back. Some people said that it was hatred for his fellows that made him so furious a tackler and line plunger, but nobody could explain his astonishing faculty for diagnosing the plays of the opponents of the college.

As everybody knows, a football

team's offense is operated by means of a set of signals, and nowadays these signals are given in a huddle several yards back of the line; yet the instant the enemy sprang into position, Willard instructed his line and backs as to direction of the play and the ball carrier.

It is the business of the quarter back to play far in the rear of his line when the opponents take kicking formation, and the coach often cursed Jeff Willard for failing to do so, but it did not take him long to discover that Willard was always back when a punt was really intended, and was up with his backs when it was necessary to break up an end run, line buck, or forward pass working from kicking formation.

As strategy is the secret of a successful offense, the opponents of Harvard were confounded and demoralized when they found all their plays successfully blocked by a team which seemed to know where they were going.

Willard always called the turn, Willard was always waiting to spoil a forward pass, to break up interference, and to find the man who was supposed to be concealed with the ball.

He was a demon in the open field and scored many touchdowns from the kick-off, for he always seemed to know where the tacklers expected him to run, and ran somewhere else. When he downed a man the fellow stayed down, and several times he was taken out of a game for unnecessary roughness. So he played three years as quarter on the varsity, made the All-American for three years in succession, and achieved a certain glory thereby. But no popularity. His fellow players disliked him, would not associate with him, and refused to elect him captain during his senior year—a slight which seemed to bother Willard not at all.

Since leaving college he had traveled considerably and finally settled down to his hermitlike existence in a suite in a New York hotel.

A pretty contemptible character, an insolent snob, a surly hound, a sneering devil, an inhuman brute—these were just a few of the definitions of Jefferson Willard by men and women who had been unfortunate enough to encounter him in one way or another. These opinions were amply justified, too, by the behavior of the man, as the reader will agree; and yet he was a person to be pitied rather than despised, for he was accursed.

Some persons are born with a talent for music or art or literature or mechanics, and often these gifts cannot be attributed to heredity, since the parents of the gifted are lacking in the qualities exhibited by the children.

Jefferson Willard was born with a talent for psychology.

Psychology is the most recent of our sciences. It is the science of the human mind, its powers, operations and functions. The psychologist is trying to discover what goes on inside the head and why. Some day this science may develop to a point where humans may communicate without speech because of their knowledge of the processes of thought. And there is some justification for the belief that animals already have that power. Without a language they are certainly able to transmit certain elemental ideas to one another.

The psychology of Jefferson Willard took the form of understanding what those around him were thinking, even if they were saying something entirely different; and if there is any more horrible gift that a bad fairy can present to an innocent child, please mention it now.

The uncanny sapience of the baby disturbed its mother and affrighted its nurses. When they tried to make him believe that a certain medicine was agreeable, he shrieked and squirmed and struggled and submitted to taking it only when completely overpowered.

When he was a toddler his mother

learned that she could not practice innocent deceit upon him, and his ability to detect a lie horrified all around him.

As a child he terrified other children by his knowledge of what they were thinking. Once a little girl approached him with her hand extended and a beguiling smile on her face, and he struck at her and kicked her and chased her off the premises, for which he was soundly whipped. He told his mother that the girl was saying to herself as she smiled on him, "What a nasty little boy!" But his mother paid no attention to that, and laid the slat on harder.

As he grew older he came to understand that this gift of his was not shared by anybody else and that he could practice falsehood and deception with impunity. And he learned, also, that he could not prattle out the secret thoughts of others without paying a penalty of one sort or another, and that therefore he had better keep his talent hidden.

No longer did he throw teachers and visitors and his mother into confusion by indiscreet announcements, but he grew sullen and contemptuous as he came to understand that everybody used the tongue to conceal thoughts.

Being what he was, it was natural that others approached him with unpleasant reactions, so he realized that everybody disliked him and he reciprocated the dislike with a flavor of contempt.

He grew up, therefore, reserved, silent, scornful and defiant, contemptuous of the hypocrites who made the world; but occasionally it burst forth into fury against individuals who supposed their opinion of him their own property.

His mother guessed in time that her child could read thoughts, and her love of him froze with terror of him. She never breathed her suspicion, of course, and died while he was absent at his first boarding school, from which he was sent home as an intractable child.

His guardian was a New York lawyer who interviewed him once and did not like him. But as there was an estate of several millions, the attorney did his duty through hired hands, and when young Willard finally got his college degree, turned over to him his property, with infinite relief.

In books, Jeff Willard found the solace he could not find in friends. Few serious writers were insincere, and most of them set down their honest opinions frankly and fully. There were few young men in America as well read, and therefore as well educated, as this unfortunate youth; and none as cold, as cynical, as intolerant and as wretched.

He hated, even, to dine alone in a hotel restaurant, for all around him was treachery and deceit. He could look at a woman and know what she thought of the man who sat opposite her and who was endeavoring to please her. Men were bad enough, he thought, but women were abominable. He had hardly ever seen a woman with a man whom she loved, and he had seen many men foolishly in love with worthless creatures.

To take one of the beautiful, treacherous beings into his home, to live with her, place himself at her mercy—Willard considered that he would be safer with a royal Bengal tiger; and perhaps he would have been.

Crowds infuriated him. Some plays he liked, but the audiences exasperated him. He had never learned to dance because he would not get close enough to a woman for that. There were beautiful girls who had sought him out before his reputation became general, and these had fled when he had dropped a few bitter but truthful words in their ears.

He sat in his apartment this afternoon in spring and waited for his lawyer. Presently he was announced.

Mr. Foster Garvey was a clean-shaven, ruddy man of fifty—the sort of person who frequents golf links, a man

with a forty-six-inch waist, a high blood pressure, a bad drive, and unfailing good nature.

"Well, Jefferson," he exclaimed, as soon as he was inside the door, "I'm glad to see you."

"You are not," growled his client. "You had a golf date for the afternoon, you hate me, anyway, and you wouldn't come near me, if it wasn't in your own interest."

Garvey looked angry, then laughed. "Right, as usual," he admitted. "I hate the sight of you, I did have a foursome on, and you bet your life I wouldn't call on you for a sight of your beautiful eyes."

"Sit down and have a drink," invited Jefferson Willard. "If people would always say what they think, this world wouldn't be so disgusting."

"On the contrary, my boy," retorted the lawyer, "the only thing that makes the world livable is our ability to conceal our thoughts. Otherwise everybody would be at the throat of everybody else."

"And a darn good thing, too. Well?"

"I have your island, as you know. It is a few hundred miles from Tahiti. It has no inhabitants. It is about twelve miles long by three or four miles wide. The harbor is too small for big vessels, so you will have no visitors. It is very fertile—every kind of tropic fruit and vegetable grows there—and I am sending a contractor and several men down there from San Francisco to clear the place for the kind of a house that you say you want. What in hell is the matter with you, Willard? Here you have everything in the world to live for, money enough to do anything you like, and you want to bury yourself on an uninhabited island in the South Seas. What you need is to fall in love with some fine girl."

"What you need is to mind your own business," said Willard.

"You insolent pup! You're half cracked. Why should a man be a misanthrope at your age?"

Willard laughed. When people spoke their minds, no matter how unpleasant they might be, he rarely took offense; and his laugh was rather agreeable.

"Marriage!" he exclaimed. "You are a happily married man, are you?"

"Married twenty years and perfectly contented."

"Liar," sneered the young man. "You've often wished there was some way you could murder her without being found out."

"Why, damn you!" exclaimed the lawyer, jumping to his feet.

"Shut up and sit down. You lead a cat-and-dog existence and you've been unfaithful to her any number of times and I know it."

Garvey flopped into his chair with pale cheeks and frightened eyes.

"Upon my word!" he gasped. "I believe you're the devil himself! How do you know that?"

"I know, so shut off the flow of advice and do what I tell you. I want you to charter a yacht, a small but seaworthy craft, with a capable master and crew. Get me a Scandinavian skipper; they don't talk much. We sail from New York for this island in a month. What's the name of it?"

"The Isle of Les Parques."

"Who named it that?" he demanded sharply. "Do you know what it means?"

"Nope."

"Island of the Fates."

"It's a French island; at least it is normally under the French flag. I bought it, through an agent, from some old French trader who had abandoned it."

"The Island of the Fates. Good enough. Now, I want a dozen men who know how to shoot and who are willing to live for years on this island. I prefer ex-soldiers, but make them understand that there will be no fighting. I

want a machine gun, plenty of ammunition, and say, two dozen rifles. I prefer divorced men."

"Why, for Heaven's sake?"

"Because a young man thinks of women, a married man has bonds, but a divorced man has no ties and doesn't want any more to do with the female sex. He's disillusioned. Get plenty of stores, of course; and I have four or five thousand books to be boxed and to go with us."

"This is a peaceful island, Jeff. You might save the expense of the bodyguard."

"From what I have read, no South Sea island is peaceful. If there are no natives, there are plenty of adventurers, pirates and scoundrels who might be attracted if they heard that a rich man was living alone. I'll barrack the bodyguard on the other side of the place; but they will be at hand if they are needed."

"Of course you have money enough to do as you like."

"I'm glad the stuff will be of some use to me, at last."

"I certainly will be sorry to see you go," sighed the lawyer.

"You confounded hypocrite, you're tickled to death, and you're plotting already to loot my property during my absence. I've arranged things so you won't, as you'll discover when you get your power of attorney."

"If you feel that way, get another attorney!" stormed the affronted lawyer.

"You're no worse than anybody else," grinned Willard. "You're just human. I trust nobody, and I want you to understand it. Now are you glad I'm going?"

"I shall pray every night that you will be eaten by cannibals," exclaimed Garvey heartily.

"Now you're talking," laughed Willard, in no way offended.

"How about your will? You ought to make it."

"I'll draft it out. I have thought things over very carefully and decided to leave my money to the institution which will appreciate it least and make the poorest use of it—the Cosmopolitan Art Museum."

"You have cousins in poor circumstances in New Hampshire," reminded the lawyer. "They might contest a will like that."

"We'll leave them a small sum with the proviso that they get nothing if they attack the will."

"I hope you're boiled in oil before you're eaten," said Garvey sourly.

Jefferson Willard roared with laughter. "Garvey, I am beginning to like you," he declared. "Only let nature take its course. No plots. No scheme to drown me before I get there."

"There's nothing in it for me, or I would," asserted the attorney.

"That's why there is nothing in it for you. I know human nature."

"You do, like hell," retorted the lawyer, who was at the door. "One gets only what he gives in this world. You give hatred, spite and malice, and you can't complain if you get it back. The world is all right, but you're all wet."

"Keep away from here until everything is ready for me to sail," said Willard. "I'll sign the will on sailing day."

"Good day," snapped the attorney; and he was gone.

CHAPTER II.

A YOUNG MAN JILTED.

"I CAN'T marry you, Joe," said Peggy Withom. "I suppose I do love you, but I have sense enough to control my emotions. You tell me I am ravishingly beautiful, and making allowances for your state of mind, I *am* pretty good looking. A girl, in New York, who keeps her head doesn't have to drudge in a Brooklyn flat for a man with a small income and no future. So I'm not going to marry you; and I wish you would go away somewhere and not bother me any more."

"I will," declared Joseph Louis Egmont—"to the ends of the earth."

She laughed. "That would be Flatbush or Jersey City."

Joe scowled at the heartless but beautiful little thing.

"I'm going so far you'll never hear of me again."

"Now, don't be silly. Can't we just be friends."

"Sure, I can be your escort and errand boy until you find a rich man. Nothing doing, Peggy. If you mean what you have just said, I'm through with you for good."

Peggy eyed him speculatively. "Suit yourself," she said. "Why a man of your age can't earn more than fifty dollars a week is beyond me; and why, if you can't, you have the conceit to imagine that a sensible girl would try to live on it with you——"

"That'll be all," he growled. "I hope you get a man with fifty millions, a bay window, and halitosis."

"Take your hat and go," she said coldly.

"Oh, I'm going."

"See you at the office in the morning."

"Not me. You've seen the last of me; and as for the job, I wouldn't have pushed a pen there for three years, if it hadn't been for you."

"Well, when you have made your fortune, come back. I might change my mind."

Joe strode to the apartment door, opened it, and eyed her contemptuously. "I'd be afraid you would," he declared. "Now that I know what you are I most certainly wouldn't come near you if I *was* rich, for fear you would try to grab me."

"I'll ask my mother to put you out. I never was so insulted——"

"Good night," he shouted; and slammed the door.

"Well, it's a good thing I finally found out what's in her mind," he assured himself, when he reached the street. "I'm through with girls. I never want to see another. I wish there was some place where I could go where they don't exist."

"There is," said a voice right behind him. Joe wasn't aware that he had been talking aloud, and he swung about and faced a man several years his junior—a well-dressed, good-looking man with a dark face, a long nose, and very black hair.

Joe looked angry and then grinned. "Where in heck is it?" he demanded. "Lead me to it."

"I might," said the stranger. "Do you know how to use a rifle?"

"Top sergeant in the First Division. You heard of us, all right."

"Glad to know you," said the stranger. "My name is Jefferson Willard."

"Put it there!" cried Joseph Louis Egmont. "All-American quarter back. I thought your face looked familiar."

Willard shook hands cordially enough. "I've been walking aimlessly around," he explained; "but I'm glad that I happened this way. How would you like to go to the South Sea Islands?"

"You're the answer to a maiden's prayer. The South Seas are exactly where I want to go."

"Do you happen to be divorced?"

"No, but I've been turned down by a girl that I thought I loved. I found out that the only thing she thinks of is money."

"They're all like that," said Willard. "I think you'll qualify. Let's walk along."

"The South Seas!" exulted Joe. "When do we start?"

"In a couple of days. You get a hundred a month and your keep, but you sign an agreement to stay three years on the Island of Les Parques."

"I'll sign. What do I have to do?"

"You have to be ready to defend the

island; but the prospect of attack is about nil, so you'll do nothing, in reality."

"That's the kind of job that I've always dreamed of," Joe cried enthusiastically. "You going?"

"Yes."

"Who are we working for?"

"You're working for me. It's my island."

"Boss, you hired a hand."

"Well, come to my hotel and I'll give you a check for equipment and a month's wages in advance."

"Just a minute. Are there any dames there?"

Willard shook his head gravely. "There will be no women."

Ten minutes later Joseph Louis Egmont left the big hotel with a sizable check. He should have been downcast by his rejection by Peggy Withom. Instead he was jubilant, so maybe he had not loved her as much as he had supposed.

Joe Egmont was a New Yorker by birth and his age was twenty-nine. While the average man of that age has money in the bank and has worked himself into a business position of some importance, Joe had saved nothing and had no prospects worth considering. This was partly due to the war but more to the state of unrest and dissatisfaction in which the war had left him. He had enlisted as soon as the government opened a recruiting office in 1917, and had been discharged some six months after the armistice, in the spring of 1919, and for three or four years had drifted around rather aimlessly, before he found a post in the automobile-finance concern in which Peggy Withom was a stenographer. For three years he had been in love with Peggy, and being in love with Peggy was expensive, because she adored theaters and restaurants and flowers and candy, so he had been unable to put anything by.

Nevertheless he was eager to marry and take a chance, had proposed to her a score of times and had expected her to capitulate sooner or later.

To-night she had talked more frankly than she had ever talked before, and he had left her in a state of indignation at her mercenary spirit; yet he might have continued to hang around had chance not brought Jefferson Willard down his street.

It was a spirit of adventure which had led him into the army ten years ago, before the draft was put into effect, and that same spirit of adventure was nearly as keen in him now as it had been at nineteen. The South Sea Islands! Romance whispered in the three words. A schooner yacht which was to sail all the way—six or eight thousand miles, perhaps—and a chief who was the most famous quarter back of recent years.

That there was anything strange about Jefferson Willard had not suggested itself to him. He was a football player and football players were always great fellows. Willard was rich and full of the same spirit of adventure which thrilled himself, and Willard was able to afford to do anything he liked. So, ho, for the South Seas, the pirates, the sharks, the cannibals and the light-brown native girls—— Well, never mind about them.

It was curious how Willard had caught him up just as he was wishing to go to some remote place. He had not dreamed that he was talking aloud, but he was probably so angry at the time that he was sputtering audibly.

He had been told to report on a pier on the Hudson River at One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street at five o'clock of a certain afternoon, and he was there half an hour before the appointed time.

He carried two suit cases packed with everything important he owned in the world, which he set down at the edge of the pier and looked about him. He was the first to arrive. The yacht lay

out in the stream, a lovely white craft with the lines of a racer—long, low, with two tall masts and an enormous main boom. She had a big overhang at bow and stern. He figured she must be about one hundred and twenty-five feet over all and not more than eighty-five or ninety on the water line.

It was wonderful to think that the white bird out there could weather any gale and sail on any sea, he thought; and more wonderful that he was to be aboard of her on a cruise which would last months, and that afterward he was to live for years on a tropic isle. Maybe Peggy Withom would be sorry when she got his letter telling her of his departure. And he hoped she would. Serve her right. If she had been waiting for him to come back and grovel, she would have a long wait. Little old New York, too. It would be a while before she saw him again; but, after all, it was precious little New York had ever done for him.

Jeff Willard had chosen well when he picked this wholesome, hearty, clean-living and courageous young man to be one of his band. There were no signs of dissipation about his clear blue eyes or of weakness in his large, firm mouth. He had a fighter's chin, too; and the chin was no false advertiser. Joe had learned to use his fists as well as his rifle in the army and he hadn't met anything he was afraid of yet. A broken nose was the relic of the time when he had tackled the heavyweight champion of the regiment. Maybe if it had been straight Peggy would not have been so mercenary.

CHAPTER III.

WOMAN HATERS.

TRAMPING on the boards of the pier announced the coming of others, and Joe turned about and saw two men approaching, carrying baggage. They dropped their bags near his and inspected him.

"Going on the *Charmer?*" asked one of them.

"Yep. Are you?"

"Yep. My name's McLeod—Angus McLeod—and this is Gus Schultz."

"How are you? I'm Joe Egmont."

The trio appraised one another. The Scotchman was short and very stocky, ugly as sin, freckled, minus a front tooth, and hard boiled. The German was big, blond, heavy featured, and good-natured—a sailor, by the swing of him.

"Some trip we've got in front of us," said Joe.

"Yah!" replied Schultz. "Say, did you see this Willard?"

"He hired me personally."

"A lawyer hired us, but we had to go to see Willard. He's only a kid, but I'm scared of him."

"You bet," agreed McLeod. "That feller knows what you're goin' to say before you say it."

"He was the greatest football player in America," Joe informed them.

"What's he want divorced men for?" demanded McLeod. "What are we going after? Treasure?"

"Did he ask you if you were divorced?" asked the surprised Joe.

"Aye. Said he was only taking divorced men because they'd be contented on an island."

"Well, I'm not divorced but he heard me ranting against girls, so I suppose he figured I was just as bad. Here come some more buddies."

A taxicab had disgorged three men, who now came down the wharf.

"Look what's coming!" exclaimed the German. "The first faller looks like a millionaire."

A very dapper young man led the newcomers. He was tall, spare, dressed in gray tweeds, wore a white vest and white spats, and a pair of nose glasses fastened at the left side by a broad, black ribbon.

"That guy ain't goin' with us," de-

clared Joe. "The others look like boiler makers or structural ironworkers; but they all came in the same taxi."

"I say," called the man with the spats. "You men for the *Charmer?*"

"You said it," grunted McLeod.

"So are we. My name's Gregg—Lester Gregg—and this is 'Slugger' Maher, my trainer. And the other man is—— What did you say your name was?"

"Svendsen," said the person addressed. "Jan Svendsen's my name."

Joe introduced the others.

"We came up from the Ludlow Street Jail together, we three," explained Mr. Gregg.

"Jail!" cried McLeod. "Were you fellers in jail?"

Gregg grinned self-consciously.

"That's what. Three jailbirds are we. In for nonpayment of alimony. Willard settled with our wives and we signed up with him. Fair enough, hey what?"

"English, aren't you?" smiled Joe. Three more divorced men, he thought; all divorced except him, and he hated women.

"How did you discover that?" demanded Mr. Gregg. "Yes, I'm an Englishman. An actor, by profession."

Joe inspected the others. Maher, of course, was a pugilist; and the Swede was probably an ironworker. A strangely assorted trio to be in the lockup together. He remembered they called the divorced men down there the "Alimony Club."

An English actor, an Irish fighter, a Swede rivet catcher, a Scotch something-or-other, and a German sailor. He was the only native American, though they all might be citizens. Not a bad lot, he thought. Six more coming. What would they be like?

A church bell somewhere struck five times, and a white launch came around the stern of the yacht and headed for the shore. At the same moment a big, black limousine drove down the incline from Riverside Drive, and a moment later drew up at the head of the pier. From it descended Jefferson Willard and two other men, one of them elderly and fat.

As Willard reached the group the launch came chugging to the landing below.

He nodded, ran his eye over the gathering, and turned to the fat man.

"Seven in all," he said. "I think these will do, Garvey."

"You could have had twelve as well as not. I had thirty men lined up," replied the lawyer.

"These men are the pick of the lot," Willard replied. "Good-by, Garvey. Much obliged for your assistance."

"When do you think you will come back?" asked the attorney.

"Never, I hope," he answered with an unpleasant laugh.

The sextet exchanged perturbed glances. The seventh man, an unusually good-looking individual of thirty-five, well dressed, well groomed, with dark, curling hair and a small black mustache, suddenly drew back.

"I've changed my mind," he said nervously. "I'll give you back what you've paid me, but I'm hanged if I'm going to the South Seas with you."

Willard looked him over. "I expected this, coming up in the cab," he said. "Settle things with Mr. Garvey. I don't want you. The rest of you get into the launch. You"—to the chauffeur of the automobile—"carry my dunnage aboard. Step on it, now; I want to have the anchor up and be under way in fifteen minutes."

McLeod picked up his bag and started down the plank leading to the landing. There was a second's hesitation, then Joe followed him, and the other four decided to carry on. A moment later the launch, steered by a man in whites with a blue yachting cap on his head, was moving out into the river.

The yacht stood higher out of the water than she had seemed to, from the pier, Joe thought, and they climbed to her deck up a narrow accommodation ladder. A middle-aged man in white, with a captain's stripes on his cap, saluted smartly as Willard came aboard.

"Get under way immediately, captain," said Jefferson. "You men follow me down into the cabin."

They descended a companionway into a wide corridor and followed their employer into a square room which ran the full width of the yacht, about twenty-five feet. It was luxuriously furnished, the walls covered with yellow, silken tapestry.

Willard dropped into a seat at a center table and motioned to the sextet to line up on the opposite side.

"You are thinking this is a very queer proceeding," he said sharply. "Some of you are wondering if we are treasure hunters or if we expect to turn pirates. The situation is exactly what I informed each of you when you signed on.

"I have purchased an island in the South Seas, am building a house, and expect to live there for a long time. Three years, anyway. I have engaged you to defend the place, in the remote contingency of its being attacked, and to perform such other duties as circumstances may require. You will be well fed, well paid, and will have little to do. All of you have been badly treated by life and ought to be content with solitude. I picked you out of many because you seemed the least objectionable. One or two of you are no better than you should be, but I could not expect perfection for such service as this.

"I am a peculiar person, as you all have surmised, but I am a better man physically than any of you, as it will give me pleasure to demonstrate should any of you doubt it. Don't try to put anything over on me, because it can't be done. I can detect disloyalty or treachery; and I can punish brutally. Don't doubt that. Obey orders and you will find yourselves well cared for and comfortable. If any one of you wishes to back out like that yellow hound on the pier—— But I see that you do not."

His black eyes seemed to pierce each one of them as they shuffled uncomfortably and stood first on one foot, then on the other.

"Now. This is a small craft. The seamen are occupying all berths forward, so I shall have to quarter you in the staterooms aft of this cabin in luxury such as none of you except Gregg is accustomed to. Don't let this give you the impression that you are guests. The door of this cabin will always be closed and you are not to come in here under any circumstances. I am not a sociable person, and when I wish to talk to any of you I shall address him first. I don't want you men to intrude on my privacy.

"You probably think I am crazy; and I don't give a damn what you think. You will eat in the officers' mess. You can choose your own roommates, and draw lots for staterooms. There are two bathrooms aft, which ought to satisfy you. I expect every man to bathe every day. Later we shall break out arms and have a daily military drill. You can go now. I know what you want to say, Gregg. You do not have to wear a uniform."

The Englishman's astonishment was so great that the eyeglasses slipped off his nose. The others looked uncomfortable and began to shuffle toward the door. Joe was the last, and Willard called him back.

"You are the only man in the outfit, Egmont, who doesn't hate me already, and, what is most unusual for me, I rather like you. I think I am going to make you captain of the band, but what I said about keeping away from me goes for you, as well as the rest."

"I'll remember, boss," said Joe. "Say, some girl must have treated you a whole lot worse than mine treated me."

Willard smiled without mirth. "On the contrary, I have never given a woman an opportunity to treat me well or ill, and I never shall. And you have violated my order regarding speaking to me."

Joe gave him a military salute, turned on his heel and marched out.

"The poor nut," he remarked, when he was safely outside.

CHAPTER IV.

HEADED SOUTH.

JOE EGMONT continued along the passage and up the companion to the deck, where he found the other adventurers assembled to watch the shore line of New York City as the yacht moved slowly past. As sails were still furled and no tug in evidence, it was obvious that the yacht was proceeding under an auxiliary engine, but there was no vibration to proclaim it.

The sun was playing level rays against the millions of windowpanes of the buildings on Riverside Drive. It was a heavenly evening, or would be when the sun finally sank below the Jersey hills.

Joe felt a curious regret at the farewell view of New York, though he had no reason to love his native city. He was distracted by a touch on the arm. Gregg was standing beside him, and he made a sign to draw apart from the others.

"I say, old man," said the actor. "Strikes me you and I have a little more in common than these other chaps. Are you a university man?"

"University of Hard Knocks. I barely got through high school."

"Well, I thought it might be a good idea if we teamed up—shared the same stateroom, you know. Willard said we might pick our companions. Cleanliness is next to godliness, what?"

"O. K. with me," replied Joe. "Say, why didn't you pay your wife her alimony?"

The Englishman smiled apologetically. "Out of a job, Egmont. The little woman was getting a hundred dollars a week, and I had been walking the pavements until I had holes in my shoes. Not very clubby of her to throw me in the hoosegow, as you call it."

"An actress?"

"In the varieties. They're hard boiled, those vaudevillians."

"All right. I'll room with you."

"Spendid. And now, what do you think of our esteemed employer?"

"Oh, he's all right, I guess."

"The fellow's appalling. Did you hear him tell me we didn't need uniforms? Now it happened I had that question on the tip of my tongue. How did he happen to know it?"

"Search me. I suppose he figured it was a question that might be asked."

"But how did he know that I was the one who would ask it?"

"He must be a mind reader," laughed Joe.

"And a blasted good one, old Egg."

"Listen: I had to lick half my regiment for calling me that," Joe informed him.

"But you can't avoid it, laddie. With your name it's inevitable. However, I'll try not to let it slip out. Another thing, he was very emphatic in reminding us that we were employees. Do you know that the business of not addressing one until spoken to is a royal custom? Do you suppose the fellow is balmy and thinks he's a bally king?"

"No," said Joe. "I think he's had a terrible experience of some kind, and he's brooding over it. That's why he wants to go to a South Sea Island. That's why he wants a bodyguard of woman haters."

Gregg laughed. "There's no such

animal, Egg—excuse me, Mr. Egmont. Just because we are divorced doesn't mean we are enemies of womankind; it means we are through with one woman. Now I can think of nothing more delicious than meeting a willowy blonde of about nineteen and holding her little hand——"

Joe was laughing heartily. "If Mr. Willard hears you he's likely to chuck you overboard. Your prospects of meeting a blonde in the South Sea Islands are slight, Mr. Gregg."

"Oh, I don't object especially to brunettes," Gregg assured him. "I have a penchant for blondes, but in the absence of them I could do with a dark damsel."

"What color was your wife's hair?"

"Harriet was a blonde when I married her, but shortly afterward her hair turned greenish, and it developed that she had been a brunette originally. Her disposition was very brunettish."

By this time they had dropped past the Battery and were crossing the harbor, with Bedloe's Island and the Statue of Liberty on their right. The statue loomed up majestically and drew the entire company to that side of the ship.

"She really should wear a short skirt and be holding a bottle of gin instead of a torch," said Gregg. "I trust Mr. Willard doesn't intend to operate his kingdom on a prohibition basis."

"I don't imagine so. Say, Mr. Gregg, why did you call that plug-ugly, Maher, your trainer?"

"Because I used to work out with him in the jail. They didn't treat us victims of female avarice as harshly as they do regular felons, you know, and Mr. Maher was kind enough to give me my exercise."

Joe thought the Englishman amusing, though he did not think him a very good character, and he was not the sort he would have expected to put on the gloves voluntarily with a professional fighter—nor, for that matter, to agree to leave the lights of Broadway for three years on a South Sea island. There must be something to this dandified Britisher.

Mr. Garvey had chartered the *Charmer* for his curious client because his marine adviser told him she was admirably suited for a cruise to the South Seas. A steam yacht would have had so much of her interior occupied by engines and fuel space that passenger accommodation and freight would be limited, but there would be plenty of room on the schooner yacht for the company which Willard was taking with him, and for such supplies as he desired to transport. And of course there was plenty to be taken on a trip like this.

For the voyage she had had her tall topmast removed. Her sail area was ample without them, since she had been built for racing. She contained a small but powerful Diesel engine which could drive her through the water at five or six miles an hour and which occupied only a tiny compartment below, so she was not dependent upon the winds, and she had room for the huge cases of books, the heavy cases of arms and ammunition, and other stores, and provided the spacious passenger quarters described.

She was in command of a Danish-American named George Johnson, a middle-aged, laconic sailor who knew his business and was interested only in his pay day. Her crew consisted of a Yankee mate, Eben Sears; an engineer, Pete Porter; and eight seamen. The cook was a small, gray-headed negro who had been a chef on Pullman dining cars for years and who demonstrated by his first dinner that he was unusually competent.

By the time dinner was over, the yacht gave evidence of being out at sea, for the adventurers heard seamen running and shouting overhead, the creaking of blocks, and the rumble of a donkey engine. And suddenly the vessel

tilted sharply to port and remained at that angle.

She had begun to roll gently as her engine pushed her through the water. Now the rolling ceased, and there was a slight fore-and-aft motion. But she seemed very steady under sail.

The curiously assorted voyagers learned something about one another at dinner and acquired mutual respect. All had been at war. Gregg had been a lieutenant in the British air service, McLeod had gone out with the Canadian Black Watch, Schultz had been a member of the crew of a German cruiser interned in Italy, Maher had enlisted in the U. S. marines and served with the Second Division in France, and Svensden had been a drafted man in the Forty-second Division.

Of course this was not a coincidence, since Willard had specified that his guard must be composed of divorced ex-soldiers; but it interested all to know what the others had done and conversation was brisk upon topics dear to World War veterans—not battle stuff, but girls in rest billets, cafés in queer towns, cognac, and Paris. Toward the end of the meal Svendsen and McLeod excused themselves and made for the deck. Evidently they were not good sailors.

They all sat on deck and spun yarns until the ship's bell clanged musically four times; then, by common consent they sought their cabins. Joe was amused to observe that Gregg rubbed cold cream under his eyes and donned lavender silk pajamas. The stateroom was large and contained two beds at opposite sides of the room—not superimposed bunks, as might have been expected. And the beds were covered with yellow-silk quilts. Truly it was more luxurious than anything that Joe had ever experienced, but it seemed to create no surprise in the Englishman.

Joe was awakened in the morning by squeaks and grunts, and, lifting on one elbow, he was able to look through the open door of the bathroom and get a view of Gregg, who was lying in a tub of what was evidently cold water —by the anguish its contact seemed to cause him. So Englishmen really took an icy bath in the morning, just as was reported in books. Joe liked his tub warm, and considered himself able to take on any cold-tub artist living, including Gregg. He did not have long to wait for the use of the tub, as the actor sprang out of it with chattering teeth, rushed into the cabin, and rubbed himself down with gusto.

"Imagine being on a boat and having a private bathtub," Joe exclaimed as he turned on the hot water. His only previous maritime experience had been on the British steamer that carried his brigade to France. He had been berthed at the bottom of the hold of the steamer, about thirty feet below the water line, minus ventilation, minus bathing facilities, plus rats, and plus too many comrades for the size of the hole. To reach the deck it had been necessary to climb a series of ladders as high as a six-story building.

The messroom of the *Charmer* was a small cabin forward of the companionway from the deck, and only had accommodations for six persons. The skipper had arranged that he, the mate, and the engineer should eat first, and the bodyguard have the second sitting. The breakfast set before them was excellent and all were in good spirits.

"What I like about this," said Gregg, "is that I know where all my meals are coming from for three years. I haven't got to tramp the streets calling on managers, my income is practically net, because I won't be able to spend anything, and my wife won't be able to locate me to make me pay my alimony."

This caused a chuckle from the other alimony dodgers.

"Say," exclaimed the pugilist, "the reason I know this ain't goin' to be so

soft is cause I'm here. I never had any luck in my life, so this scow is goin' to be wrecked or we're all going to get murdered down on this funny island or sumpthin."

"Anyway, your wife can't find you," laughed the Englishman.

"No? Say, it wouldn't be no surprise to me if Maggie was standing on the beach in this joint when we get there, with her paw out demandin' three months' alimony."

"I suggest, lads," said McLeod, "that we find some pleasant subject for conversation. I'm a divorced man but I'm not proud of it. My wife is a good woman, and it may interest ye to know that I have made arrangements for the fifty dollars a month the court awarded her to be paid regularly through Mr. Willard's lawyer."

"You big sap," commented Maher.

Joe thrust his hand at the Scotchman. "Glad to know you, Mac," he declared. "I'm for you. How would you men like it if the women you once promised to love, cherish and obey starved to death because you failed to keep your agreement to pay them an allowance?"

Gregg tittered. "Not my old Dutch. That girl will be a headliner in vaudeville in a few months, and married again inside of a year."

Svendsen grunted. "My wife, she ban married six months yet, but the judge don' know it, and she come down on me for alimony yust the same. Women, py chiminy, they ain't got no heart."

"How about your wife, Egmont?" demanded Schultz. "Did you arrange to leave her half your pay—yes?"

Joe flushed. "Oh, I'm not married. I just got jilted," he explained.

"Then you don't know nothin'," declared the German. "Those kind of woman that take their hsubands into court and get alimony don't starve to death. They ain't the kind."

There was a murmur of approval at this, and then the company ascended to the deck.

The deck of the *Charmer* was clear from stem to stern, broken only by cabin skylights the hatch cover and the cabin companionway. She was lying comfortably on her side and skimming over a smooth sea before a light breeze, although there were three reefs in her gigantic mainsail and the foresail and jib were shortened.

"She must have tremendous weight in her keel to carry these big sticks," said Schultz. "I'd like to be aboard her in a race."

Joe noticed that the steering wheel was some twenty feet forward of the stern, due to her big stern overhang, and that two men stood at the wheel while the skipper walked up and down. Three sailors were scrubbing the snow-white decks and the passengers had already been provided with rubber-soled shoes.

The sky was blue, the sun was warm and bright, the sea was bright green on one side of the ship and deep blue on the other. A long way off to starboard they could distinguish a brown streak which was the land. Of Jefferson Willard there was no sign, nor was there any evidence that the comfort of the passengers on deck was being considered. Joe spoke to Schultz about it.

"Oh, when they get 'round to it, they'll rig up an awning and set out deck chairs," replied the German. "She's a big boat for racing, but there ain't so much deck room. To be cooped up in her for months is not so goot."

"Well," chirped Gregg, "here we are, off on a long yachting cruise on one of the most palatial sailing yachts afloat. The sport of kings and multimillionaires, lads, and it costs us nothing. On the contrary, we are on salary. So be merry and bright and don't begin to repine. Suppose you had to pay the cost of operating this pretty one."

The skipper strolled forward now,

greeted Gregg, who had already talked with him, and was introduced by the Englishman to the other passengers.

"We'll try to fix things up so you can take your ease on deck, gentlemen," said the captain. "Of course a yacht is not like a liner and this craft is built for racing and short cruises rather than a long voyage, as you can see by the lines of her."

"She's safe, though, isn't she?" demanded McLeod.

"Oh, yes, stout and stanch and built of steel. She can go anywhere."

"I suppose we can stretch our legs at Havana and Panama," ventured Joe.

The captain shook his head. "We won't touch at Havana. We'll spend a day in Balboa, taking on fuel oil and fresh meat and vegetables. I suppose you will be able to go ashore in Panama."

"How long will it take us to get to the Isthmus?" asked Joe eagerly.

"Oh, maybe ten days, perhaps fifteen or sixteen; depends on the wind. We don't use the auxiliary unless the breeze fails us."

Later in the day an awning was erected over the cabin skylight and wicker chairs were brought up and two or three folding steamer chairs were set out. Shortly after lunch Jeff Willard came on deck, a book under his arm, and took possession of one of the steamer chairs, drawing it ostentatiously away from the group. However, he nodded to the others and asked perfunctorily if they had anything of which to complain. They spent the afternoon on deck, chatting in desultory fashion, several of them napping.

The first day was a sample of what followed, as the white yacht moved swiftly and smoothly southward over calm waters, but the second evening a poker game started in the mess cabin which began as penny ante but gradually lifted until, in three or four evenings, they were playing a fifty-cent limit game, which is fairly stiff, as all poker players know.

Each man had a month's pay in his pocket and what loose cash he happened to have possessed before signing with Willard, and for some time the game was fairly even. Then a heavy gale made play impossible. The passengers were locked below decks, and the vessel pitched, tossed and wallowed, as she ran before the wind with only a handkerchief of sail on her poles. Even Joe lost his appetite, Gregg did not get out of his bunk for two days, and only the German sailor, Schultz, appeared unaffected by seasickness.

Since the first night Joe had not exchanged a word with his queer employer, and during the storm Willard kept to himself in his big cabin, so that none knew whether he were well or ill.

CHAPTER V.

A SURE-THING GAMBLER.

THE gale lasted three days, after which conditions were as they had been during the early part of the voyage. Everybody showed up at meals, and there was some grumbling because no liquor seemed available.

Being on a private yacht, it was impossible to buy drinks; being forbidden to address their employer, they could not ask for them; and none of the adventurers had brought a bottle with them.

The skipper had informed them that they would probably reach Colon, on the Isthmus of Panama, in four or five days more, and they were already planning how they would amuse themselves ashore. The poker game killed their evenings successfully, but began to empty the pockets of Gregg and Svendsen. On the evening of the tenth day from New York the six card players were astonished to find Jefferson Willard standing in the doorway regarding them with a satirical smile.

"Don't mind me," he said pleasantly. "As a matter of fact, I might take a hand, if I were invited."

A place was made for him at table with the greatest enthusiasm.

Gregg whispered to Joe: "Sick of his own society and ready to be human."

It looked so, for young Willard immediately pressed the button for the steward.

"Poker without something to drink isn't very inspiring," he said. "I am sorry I did not think before to provide you with refreshments."

"We didn't know but this was a dry ship," replied Gregg. "It certainly seemed like it."

"I won't tolerate intoxication," said Willard; "but I do not ask you men to be total abstainers. A bottle of champagne, steward."

Broad smiles and a smacking of lips greeted this order. While Willard had been too distant to awaken personal animosity among his followers, they had no reason for liking him; but it seemed to them all that the famous football player was going to turn out better than they had expected.

"What's your limit?" asked Willard. "Fifty cents? That's all right. Sell me ten dollars' worth of chips."

And then the game began. From the start Willard won steadily. He played with the greatest confidence and astonishing perspicacity and the chips augmented rapidly in front of him. Often he threw down his cards inexplicably. Gregg, who had laid down once, saw him drop a full house and chided him for it.

"I have a hunch it won't do," he replied. The hunch was right, for McLeod had a straight flush. On another occasion, Gregg, who was again out of the game, looked over his shoulder and saw him raise and raise again with three fours, though there were two others betting lustily and it seemed obvious that one of them must have a straight or a full house. When they finally called him, it proved that Joe Egmont was bluffing and Svendsen had two big pairs, so Willard raked in a heavy pot.

They stopped by agreement at eleven o'clock, and Willard proved to be the only winner. He cashed in for a hundred and twenty-five dollars.

"I'll give you your revenge to-morrow night," he smiled. "Unless you've had enough of my medicine."

Polite protests.

"When do you want us to commence work with our rifles, boss?" asked Joe, for the prohibition against speech with him had been laid aside this evening.

"We'll wait until we have left Balboa," he replied.

"I suppose we may go ashore in Panma?" questioned Gregg.

Willard smiled agreeably enough. "Why, you may take a run ashore if you like. I expect we shall be held up there for twenty-four hours."

"Where do we go from Balboa?" asked McLeod. "Whereabouts is this island, sir?"

"We sail for Tahiti, which is about four thousand five hundred miles from Panama. From Tahiti we sail some five or six hundred miles to the Austral group and the Island of Les Parques is said to be west from there a hundred miles or so. It is not upon any of the charts on this ship, but we shall get our sailing directions at Tahiti."

"More than five thousand miles from Panama!" exclaimed Schultz. "It will take us a month or six weeks to get there."

"Perhaps more," said Willard. "But we have three years ahead of us. I wish you all good night."

When he left there was a chorus of enthusiastic approval, in which Gregg did not join.

"Say, he's a great guy!" exclaimed Maher. "Sits in with us and sets up fizz water——"

"And wins our money," grinned Gregg. "No wonder he could afford to set up three quarts of champagne."

"He had the luck to-night. To-morrow night we'll get back at him," declared McLeod.

"I don't know. He's the best poker player I ever saw," Joe said thoughtfully.

"You don't know the half of it," Gregg observed. "I sat next to him and I saw him refuse to play a full house. Somebody happened to have a straight flush. But how did he know? I dealt the cards myself."

"Probably didn't want to take all our money," Joe hazarded. "He knows we haven't got much and he thought his full house was a sure thing, so he laid it down."

"Mr. Willard is a very remarkable man," averred Gregg. "I am sure, however, that kindness of heart is not one of his failings. He felt he was licked. But what made him feel it?"

"Aw, dry up," said Maher. "To-morrow night Mr. Willard will give the party."

The Caribbean was behaving so badly next day that the passengers were miserable and three of them were unable to get out of their beds, so the return engagement with Jefferson Willard did not take place. But on the following night, after dinner, he came out of his cabin and entered the room where the sextet were assembled.

"Have you had enough of my poker?" he asked, with an exasperating smile.

"Not on your life," "Sit in, boss," "You're going to be Santa Claus to-night," were some of the replies.

The game began. The wine circulated and laughter was loud. For a time it looked as though Willard was in for a trimming, as he seemed to draw only bad cards, and his pile dwindled from pushing in ante money without an opportunity to go after a pot. At the end of an hour he began to win. Joe observed that he never made a fight for a pot without collecting it and decided that such amazing luck was too much for him, so he was careful to drop out when Willard was in a raising mood. At the end of the second hour Svendsen was flat broke and retired. Half an hour later McLeod rose and declared he had been cleaned. Gregg and Maher lasted longer, but Maher succumbed, and Joe and the Englishman were the sole survivors in the game.

"I have ten dollars left," said Gregg suddenly. "I'll match coins with you for it, Mr. Willard; but no more poker."

"Shall I match you?" asked Willard politely.

"No, sir. I do the matching."

"As you please," Willard said coldly.

Gregg failed to match, and pushed his ten dollars across the table.

"I see that you have had enough, Egmont," observed Willard. "I'll cash in."

He cashed in for two hundred and eighty dollars.

"You've cleaned out the crowd," said McLeod, almost disrespectfully. "You're a wonderful player, Mr. Willard."

"I presume we must credit it to good fortune," replied the millionaire.

"When do we get to Panama, sir?" asked Gregg.

"The captain says we will arrive at the Canal some time in the afternoon. Good evening."

He thrust the pile of greenbacks in the side pocket of his jacket and left the gloomy gathering. At the door he turned.

"The steward will give you another bottle of wine, if you wish," he said, with a smile that spoke volumes.

Alone the six men sat in silence. Then Gregg said:

"We get to Panama to-morrow. We

can go ashore. What good will it do us?"

"I haven't got a bean," mourned the pugilist.

"I'm busted," Svendsen said sadly.

"A five-dollar bill is all I have. It's my custom never to break my last five dollars. 'Tis a very lucky player, is Mr. Willard." This from McLeod.

"We got to have dough," declared the German. "I think I strike him for an advance, yah?"

The actor laughed scornfully. "Save your breath, Heinie. Why do you suppose the Young Duke condescended to take on his peasants in poker? Why do you suppose I matched him for my last ten dollars instead of risking it on the cards?"

"I bite. Why?" asked Joe.

"Because he was afraid we'd go ashore and have such a wonderful time that we would forget to rejoin the ship. So he decided to take our money away from us."

Joe laughed incredulously, but Svendsen struck the table with a big fist and snarled: "You was right. That yust what he did."

"And the reason I decided to match pennies with him was because I knew I had no chance with cards. That gentleman has a sixth sense that tells him what the other fellow has in his hand. I kept tabs on him to-night. Not once did he go up against a good hand unless he had a better one."

"Say, do you mean he cheated?" roared Maher.

"Oh, no; he doesn't have to cheat. He just plays better than we do."

"Well," Joe stated, "you matched him and failed. You can't accuse him of being responsible for that."

"No-o, that was my bad luck."

"I've a damn good mind to desert," declared Slugger Maher. "If he come in here and cleaned us to keep us from buying a few drinks in Panama, I don't want to work for him."

"Hold yer horses," reproved McLeod. "It was a game. We might have won, if we were lucky."

"You'd have to be the seventh son of a seventh son to win from Mr. Jefferson Willard," declared the actor. "Have you got any money, Egmont?"

"Yes," said Joe. "I have forty dollars. I'll go ashore with you fellows and pay all the bills, and you can settle with me from your next month's pay. You're not going to quit, Maher. What could you do in Panama without a cent? This is a pretty good job we've got, and it's our own fault we gambled away our coin."

"You're right," sighed the fighter. "Just the same, this Willard is mean. It was a dirty trick."

Gregg was laughing now. "Very crafty, I call it. The more I see of that young gentleman the more I admire him. He is younger than any man here—just a laddie—but what a head he has on his shoulders."

"I'd like to get a chance to knock it off," growled the Swede. "Say, Joe, how do you happen to have forty dollars."

Joe laughed. "I saw that he was having phenomenal luck, and I stopped bucking him after a while. I don't think we can say that Mr. Willard got our money unfairly. He held the best cards. Let's go to bed."

CHAPTER VI.

ANGLO-SAXON IMPRESSIONS.

THERE is a hoary delusion prevalent in the United States that an Englishman is as big a fool as he appears to be—a heavy-witted ass, too simple to be dishonest—a delusion, by the way, which is paralleled in England by the impression that a Yankee is preternaturally keen mentally and utterly unprincipled in business. British visitors have been bamboozling Americans for half a century without affecting the popular

point of view regarding them, while the Englishman's equally erroneous idea of the American business man has kept him from going too far with our simple citizens.

This English actor Gregg had impressed Joe Egmont as a harmless and not objectionable nut, much inferior mentally to himself; but Gregg was the first person in years who had come into contact with Jefferson Willard and arrived dangerously close to guessing his secret.

Mr. Gregg passed on Broadway as the younger son of a noble English family, just as nearly all English actors in America endeavor to give an impression of belonging to the aristocracy of the tight little island. English actors are recruited from the same classes in England as American actors in New York, and the percentage of aristocrats among them in each country is rather small.

Gregg had come to America five years before this story opened, after a couple of seasons as a "walking gentleman" in London, and landed a small part in a drawing-room comedy. After that he married a song-and-dance artist who lived in the same theatrical boarding house, and supported her in her vaudeville act until he got a chance at a part in a Broadway production, when he had left her flat. She sued him for divorce and was awarded forty dollars per week alimony, which he paid for one week—and then never gave her another dollar. After he was six months behind she got him jailed for contempt of court, and it was from this durance that he had been rescued by the whim of Willard to employ divorced men on his island.

His manner was bland, his pose faintly imbecilic; but there was a keen brain behind his pale-blue eyes, very little principle, and the sort of physical courage which had taken him into the sky to exchange shots with German aces during the great war.

The purpose of this enterprise of Willard's still eluded him. He was determined to discover it and turn it to his advantage; but the personality of the young man chilled him, for he was almost certain that the American could read thoughts. It behooved him to be very careful.

He had challenged Willard boldly when he matched him for his last ten dollars, and he had seen in the man's eyes that he knew why Gregg preferred to match coins instead of to be matched. Now Gregg was convinced that he was dealing with an exceedingly dangerous individual, and he was prepared to watch his step.

He had diagnosed quite correctly Jeff Willard's reason for joining his employees in their poker game. Willard had intended to take a dozen men with him to the Isle of Parques and had rejected all but seven because he knew that the others were quite untrustworthy. The seventh had withdrawn of his own accord, and Willard had sailed with six guardsmen. He thought it very likely that one or two of these might vanish if permitted to go ashore in gay Panama with pockets lined with bank notes. He feared trouble if he forbade the men to leave the ship during his enforced stay at Balboa, and it appealed to his sardonic humor to take their money from them at the gaming table, so that they would have no temptation to desert ship in the capital of the little Central American republic.

Of course, it was very unfair for a man with his talent to play cards with ordinary persons. But he proposed to give each a bonus with his next pay check to make up for losses. He wanted their good will, since he would be alone with them on the island.

There were four men in the sextet whom he was thought he could depend upon, provided he did not provoke their animosity: Egmont, McLeod, Schultz and Maher. Svendsen he knew to be

surly, suspicious and easily led; and Gregg he had understood to be a schemer from the first. The last two were taken along because they had physical courage and were not completely criminal in mind, like many of those whom Garvey had rounded up for him. He thought he could make them behave.

The voyage had been no more solitary and tedious for Willard than his ordinary life ashore. He had read a large part of the time, slept ten hours a day, and studied mathematics, which was his passion because it is the only honest and entirely exact science. For a man of his age and physique his manner of living was abnormal, his distaste for his fellow man and woman unnatural and likely eventually to unhinge his mind; but as yet he was perfectly sane and of an intelligence beyond his fellows.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ISLE OF LES PARQUES.

THERE came a morning which revealed to their eyes the Isle of Les Parques. The sun rose at the stern of the schooner as she picked her way westward, and its rays painted on the sea a picture that Joe would never be able to forget. The island lay like a crouching lion; for its head, a dome-like hill, tapering along the spine, rising at the hips, and stretching out on the water a long, curving, green line with a group of palm trees at the very end, for the tuft of the tail.

They were some three miles from shore, cautiously approaching a white streak beyond which the water, in the morning light, changed abruptly from indigo to emerald and ended in a glittering, golden beach.

The hill at the north end was thickly wooded, a very dark green, and the color of the vegetation lightened on the body of the lion until it was yellow at the tail, which seemed to be barren sand.

There was a puff of smoke from a point on the shore, and after a long time they heard very faintly the boom of a gun, which proved that they had been seen and were being welcomed. Joe now made out a small schooner anchored close to the point where the gun was located and soon afterward descried a launch putting out to meet them.

The captain joined Willard, and Joe heard it explained that the launch would show them an opening in the reef. The six hired men of Jefferson Willard were vociferously delighted at the end of what seemed to have been an endless voyage, and they would have been enchanted at the sight of a much less delectable isle than this.

From Panama to Tahiti had been a run of four thousand five hundred miles, monotonous enough upon a great passenger steamship with miles of deck promenades, enormous salons, delightful companions of both sexes, and fine weather; but the *Charmer* was small, diversions were nonexistent, and none of these men were naturally congenial to one another.

They had gone ashore in Panama, shepherded by Joe Egmont. seen a motion picture, visited a bad cabaret, indulged in a few drinks and reported on board in good condition, thanks to the stratagem by which Jeff Willard had removed their funds. Their resentment against him had not been entirely placated when he had called them together the day after leaving Balboa and informed them that their second month's pay would be doubled, but his assurance that a reasonable amount of alcoholic refreshment would be at their disposal daily had been received with enthusism.

The *Charmer* had run into dead calm three days out of Balboa, and had crept along for a week at five knots an hour, propelled by her gas engine. It had been frightfully hot and all on board, including Willard, had stripped to

sleeveless shirts and white drill pants. Fortunately there was an ice machine on board, and plenty of electric fans, or they could not have endured the heat. The schooner had arrived at the capital of the Society Islands, Tahiti, on the twenty-ninth day after leaving Balboa, and Willard had very nearly provoked a mutiny by refusing permission to go ashore. If he had not been careful to have the rifles which they had used in target practice removed after each drill and locked up, it is possible that Svendsen, Schultz, McLeod and Gregg would have forced him to rescind the order at the point of a gun. They lay in the harbor of the fascinating French town of Tahiti for twenty-four hours to take on supplies and fuel. Willard, himself, did not leave the ship; but was visited by the agent secured for him in Tahiti by Mr. Garvey, and so got the information needed to find his island.

Gaspard Rantoul was the agent, a short, grossly fat Frenchman with an untrimmed black beard and coal-black eyes. He inspected the American who had purchased a remote French islet, with more than ordinary curiosity. He brought with him charts, an official deed of purchase, and the gift of several cases of good French wine.

Willard received him pleasantly and invited him to dinner, the first to dine with him in the big salon since the *Charmer* left New York.

"I am aware," said the American, "that this island lies somewhere east of the Australs, that it has an endurable climate, and is productive; but I know nothing else about it. What can you tell me?"

"Ver' leetle more, monsieur," replied the agent. "I lif in Tahiti and from here it is fully eight hundred miles to Les Parques. On ze mainland you think these isles are clustered like ze lilypads in a pond. Distances out here are terrible, monsieur, and transportation is irregular and bad. A small government steamer regularly visits the Australs, but Les Parques is two hundred fifty kilometers east of the most eastward. Those waters are almost never navigated; charts ver' bad."

"But there are many trading schooners, pearlers, and exploring craft that wander out that way, are there not?"

"Ze traders sail only where is trade, and there are no natives on Les Parques to prepare ze copra or dive for ze pearls. No longer have we pirates in the South Pacific; at least not so many. I do not think a ship has touched at your isle for years. I am not even sure it is a French island; but no other nation has claimed it, so we assert our title."

"From whom did my attorney purchase it, then?"

"Sixty years ago it was the property of Marquis de Lormigny, who was a frien' of Napoleon Trois. He fight against the republic, refuse to swear allegiance, and sail out to Les Parques, where he live a few years and die. Our government have confiscated the estates of Lormigny in France, and when word comes to Tahiti he is dead, the government here owns his island. You 'ave ver' good title, monsieur. None can dispute."

"Very romantic, I am sure."

"Is it not?" agreed the Frenchman, sipping his wine.

"And the climate. I hope it is better than that of Tahiti?"

"Perhaps. It should be, since it is much more south. I like 'ot weather. It agrees with me. How long you live on Les Parques?"

"If I like it, forever."

"*Mon Dieu!* But you are young, monsieur. And there are no island girls. A young man needs women."

"I have no need of female society."

"Ah, but you will."

"When I do, I shall seek it. Are there any islands near Les Parques?"

"A few coral strands."

"Nothing more?"

Rantoul shrugged his fat shoulders. "Who knows? The Pacific, monsieur, is of a vastness, and travel follows beaten paths. Volcanoes under the sea throw up new islands. Les Parques may have neighbors. It is twenty years since a government ship has visited it."

"I was wondering about savage visitors."

"You 'ave nothing to fear."

"And my expedition from San Francisco is already on the island?"

"*Oui.* Six weeks ago they leave Tahiti. You are ver' rich man, monsieur, and you are young."

Willard smiled grimly, but did not reply.

The Frenchman sighed.

"If *I* was young and ver' rich, I would not go to Les Parques. Not when there is Paris."

"Doubtless we have very different tastes."

"Ah, *oui.* And, now, monsieur, I go. I give you thanks for ver' good dinner. I wish you most pleasant voyage and 'appy life on ze Robinson Crusoe isle. I regret you do not wish to see Tahiti. We 'ave goot hotel, ze best champagne, and *beaucoup belle femmes.*"

"Thank you, no."

"If you change your min' about *les dames,* I think maybe I fin' beautiful girls 'ere to pay visit to Les Parques, *oui?*"

Willard laughed. "Should I decide to import women I shall communicate with you. This yacht returns to America after landing my expedition. I wish you to arrange a vessel to call at Les Parques on the first of January every year with supplies. My attorney in New York will provide you with necessary funds."

"It shall be arrange, monsieur. Shall I say, 'Au revoir'?"

"Better say 'Adieu,'" replied the young man.

With a heavy sigh the Frenchman climbed out of his chair and lumbered down the corridor to the companionway. Glancing in through the open door of the mess cabin he saw six men playing at cards. He grinned. "Now, they would abhor to see women on Les Parques—oh, *oui,*" he said to himself, then ascended to the deck and got into his shore boat.

When the sun rose next morning the *Charmer* was far out at sea. Seven days later she dropped her anchor in shoal water, as close to her destination as the skipper dared to approach in darkness.

The launch from the shore drew within half a mile of the reef, turned to port, and ran parallel with the reef for a couple of miles, while the *Charmer* outside moved slowly in the same direction. When the captain saw the launch swing through an opening he stopped his engine and the yacht drifted until the little craft ran alongside. There were three men in it, one of them a Kanaka, who caught the rope hurled from the deck. The others climbed eagerly aboard.

The first was a seafaring man—a hard-featured, purple-hued, two-fisted drinker of the South Seas, in soiled whites. The second was about thirty, long, strong, clean, and wholesome. He wore a full brown beard.

"Mr. Willard?" the second man demanded, having picked his employer from the group without difficulty.

"You're the contractor," said Willard, coming forward. "How are things going?"

"You're younger than I expected," said the contractor, with a smile that contained some surprise. "Things have gone well, sir. Your residence is finished, furnished, and ready for occupancy. And the servants' quarters are up. And we completed the building on the other side of the island yesterday. We're ready to pull out."

"I congratulate you upon your efficiency."

"Ahem!" coughed the seafaring man. "Excuse me. This is Captain Gordon of the schooner *Miranda,* which you can see at anchor inside. He brought us over and is impatient to get back to Tahiti."

"Will you gentlemen come down to the cabin?" invited Willard.

They followed him, the captain smacking his lips.

"How long have you been here?" demanded Willard, when they had touched glasses.

"Five weeks," said the contractor. "Long enough to be on a desert island. Do you expect to remain here long, sir?"

"Indefinitely."

"Well, I'll be glad to get back to civilization," laughed the young man. "I have a wife waiting for me in Frisco."

"I got three French dames waiting for me in Tahiti," boomed the schooner captain.

Willard looked his disfavor.

"Have you ever visited this island before?" he demanded sharply.

"Who, me? I should say not. It's off my beat."

"Then make sure you do not include it in your beat," Jeff said sharply.

"Say!" exclaimed Captain Gordon, laying down his glass and thrusting out his chin. "What in hell do you mean?"

Willard's black eyes met the red-rimmed and bleary blue ones, which shifted their glance.

"You were considering paying us a return visit. You will not be welcome. You know what I mean."

"I'll be blowed!" exclaimed the schooner captain. "Say, ain't you got no ideas of hospitality?"

"None where you are concerned," said the young man coldly.

Captain Gordon rose with as much dignity as he could muster.

"You go to hell!" he rumbled. "See you on deck, Mr. MacPherson."

The contractor, who had listened to this exchange of compliments with astonishment, ventured to ask a question.

"What made you think he was planning to come back?"

"I guessed it, perhaps," Willard said with a slight smile. "You have no use for the fellow, yourself."

"How do you know that?"

"Another guess, let us say."

"You're right," admitted Mr. MacPherson. "He's an island trader and rather a bad egg, but his vessel was the only one available from Tahiti."

"Well, get your men on board and sail as soon as convenient. You brought servants for me, as instructed?"

"Yes, sir—four yellow boys. They are in the house now."

"Good! Now something is worrying you—something about the island."

MacPherson stared at him. "You are positively uncanny, Mr. Willard. I wanted to talk to you privately about it. We've been all over the island during our occupancy. It's uninhabited and contains no wild beasts. Just the same, two of my men have disappeared. Vanished without a trace."

"Not white men?"

"No, Kanakas. I brought only two white men from Frisco, boss carpenters, and picked up a score of native workmen in Tahiti. These fellows disappeared between darkness and daylight."

"Murdered and thrown into the sea?"

"I don't think so. The others are in a state of terror."

"Well," said Willard indifferently, "get them on board that schooner and back to Tahiti."

"I thought it necessary to warn you that there may be something dangerous lurking on the island."

"Much obliged. I have six good riflemen with me, and we'll make short work of any menace. We seem to be moving in."

"Captain Gordon is piloting your skipper through the opening in the reef."

"Look out he doesn't cut your throat and toss you overboard going back. That fellow is a scoundrel."

"I'll be watchful. However, I have nothing of any value with me. I will get my check for the work we have done from the bank at Tahiti, according to instructions, and go home on the regular British liner to San Francisco."

"Let's go on deck. I want to keep my eye on Captain Gordon."

Willard led the way to the deck and approached the wheel, where Gordon was talking with the captain of the *Charmer*. They were moving very slowly through the opening in the reef. Gordon was instructing the man at the wheel, and turned his back on Willard when he saw him approaching.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CLOSE CALL.

THE *Charmer* was almost in the clear, so it seemed, when Captain Gordon shouted:

"Hard aport!"

The quartermaster grasped the spokes of the wheel to obey, when he was suddenly thrust aside and Jefferson Willard bore down hard in the opposite direction.

Captain Johnson was already at the rail gazing down into the clear water.

"By God!" he shouted. "We almost cut her open on the reef."

Gordon's heavy face paled a trifle and his eyes were fixed in terror at the man at the wheel.

"We're all right now," called the captain of the *Charmer*. "Through the reef and deep water ahead."

Willard turned the wheel over to the seaman and faced the island schooner's master. In his right hand was an automatic.

"You tried to wreck us," he accused. "I am considering emptying this into your worthless carcass."

Gordon lifted protesting hands to heaven. "Before God, sir," he squealed, "I meant to say hard astarboard."

"You're lying!" said Willard menacingly. "It would have been nice pickings for you if the *Charmer* landed on the reef. Now get into your launch and go back to your ship. MacPherson, send your men aboard his vessel and see that he gets out to-day. If you're here by morning, Captain Gordon, I'll sink you."

"I'll report your high-handed actions to the authorities in Tahiti," threatened Gordon, though he moved to the accommodation ladder.

"Please remain on board, Mr. MacPherson," said Willard quietly. "And I do not think you had better sail with Gordon. The *Charmer* will be leaving in a few days and I'll send you and your two white men back on her."

"If you'll tell me how you knew he intended to pile you on the reef," said MacPherson, "I'll be greatly obliged. You have never been here before, and you might have wrecked your ship."

Willard patted him in friendly fashion on the shoulder.

"What was in that fellow's mind was as clear as crystal. We would be at his mercy if we lost the yacht just now, or so he calculated. No doubt he picked the spot where he wanted to pile us up, days ago."

The contractor nodded. "I see it now. My God, but that was a close shave."

"Yes," said Captain Johnson. "We would have slid on the coral and punched a hole in the bottom, but we would not have sunk unless we were blown off into deep water by a gale. That pirate could have run his schooner almost alongside, looted the ship, and sailed away and we couldn't do a thing to him. They told me in Tahiti that no vessel ever visits this island, so he

could have disposed of his salvage at his leisure. And we would be marooned."

"So I suspected," smiled Willard. "In the hold of the yacht are materials for a wireless station with a range of three hundred miles. We can summon aid if there should be need of it in the future, but it would have been inconvenient if we lost the materials with the yacht. Better anchor close to that schooner, captain, so that we can keep an eye on him; and I'll issue rifles to my men immediately." He walked forward, leaving the contractor with the sailing master.

"Do you know how he knew that Gordon intended to put us on the reef at that point?" asked MacPherson.

Captain Johnson shook his head. "Mister," he said gravely, "that is a very strange man. If I was superstitious I'd say he was in league with the devil. What you saw just now is nothing to what I've seen him do during the months I've been shut up in a ship with him."

"He seems a splendid chap," ventured the contractor.

"I don't like him," said the Dane. "I never had no trouble with him because I know my business and behave myself; but I've seen things—— Well, never mind."

"Why on earth does he want to live on a desert island?"

"Because he hates the human race and himself too, I think. I wouldn't be in the boots of those six men that are to stay here with him. Nice fellers, too."

"I like him," declared MacPherson. "He's the most capable and straightforward individual I ever came into contact with."

"You haven't been with him much. I'm telling you I'll be glad to see the last of him."

Willard had given a command to Joe Egmont; and that young man now appeared on deck with an armful of rifles, with which he proceeded to arm the company. Johnson dropped anchor a hundred yards from the schooner, which Gordon had already boarded.

"Joe," commanded Willard, "you and Gregg will go ashore with me. You others remain on the yacht and take orders from Captain Johnson. If he tells you to fire on that schooner, don't hesitate to obey. Pleace get the launch overboard, captain."

Willard descended to his cabin and returned armed with a rifle and a belt of cartridges. By this time the launch was at the ladder and Joe and Gregg were sitting in it with MacPherson, awaiting their leader. Needless to say that the disturbance at the wheel had not passed unnoticed by the bodyguard and the crew forward, but they were too well trained by this time to ask questions.

The yacht was about three hundred yards from the beach, where more than a score of brown men were assembled at the head of the little boat landing. These broke into an unorganized cheer when the launch ran alongside and several ran forward to help the white men ashore. Willard waved them aside and the others did likewise.

The sun was hot, there was not a breath of air stirring, the sea was like glass, and the vegetation beyond the line of golden sand was green and refreshing to sea-weary eyes.

"This way to the house, sir," said the contractor. He conducted them from the beach through a grove of coconut palms, over soft, thick grass, to a long, low house with a roof of green fiber shingles.

The house was built upon a slight elevation, a grassy slope in front of it, thick brush to right and left and rear. It looked cool and inviting, with a broad, screened porch extending along the front. Joe observed that it was lifted clear of the ground about two feet, set on a row of piles. The house proper was gleaming white. They mounted to

the porch by four stone steps, found the front door invitingly open, and four eager, smiling Kanaka servants drawn up to receive their master.

On the porch were half a dozen big chairs in Philippine wicker and a Gloucester hammock.

Willard nodded in approval of all this and stepped inside.

He found himself in a huge, high-ceiled, cheerful room about thirty-five feet by twenty, with a balcony at the farther side from which three doors opened. Under the balcony were three doors leading to the kitchen, and servants' quarters.

"The chambers are off the balcony," explained the contractor. "You are more free from crawling things up high, sir."

Willard inspected the room approvingly. There was a huge open fireplace, a baby-grand piano, two or three big comfortable divans, and half a dozen big chairs. The wall at each end was lined with bookshelves. There were four huge windows neatly curtained, and the floor covered with Japanese straw matting.

"I think you have done well," he said gravely. And MacPherson smiled with pleasure.

"There are three bedrooms furnished with the latest wrinkles," he stated. "The kitchen is perfectly equipped. You have an electric plant, an ice-making plant, a wine cellar, a heating apparatus—everything that a man may require in these latitudes."

"How is the climate?" asked Willard.

"Usually hot, but not very humid, and sometimes quite cool at night, sir; so you may occasionally need a fire."

"Where have you located the quarters of my men?"

"The island is very narrow at this point. They will be about half a mile away, sir. It is a one-story building with twelve small chambers, a dining room, and a large central living room. We have cut a path through the underbrush, so that they can reach you in five or six minutes, and we have installed a telephone line between the two houses. Your servants live in a cottage at the rear."

CHAPTER IX.

THE MALCONTENTS.

THE proprietor of this establishment pushed open one of the doors leading to the rear, and was followed by the contractor. Gregg and Joe remained at the entrance to the living room.

"I say, did you hear that?" asked the Englishman. "He's located us as far from him as he can, on the other side of the island. He certainly loves solitude."

"It begins to dawn on me that we're going to be lonesome, ourselves, in this place," said Joe. "When those vessels sail there won't be anybody here but us fellows and Mr. Willard."

"Correct. We'll be cutting one another's throats in a month. I wonder if he'd let me go back on the *Charmer*."

"Kind of a dirty trick to back out now, when he has brought us out here."

"I wouldn't worry about that, but I doubt if he would accept my resignation if I offered it; and, if he refused, Johnson wouldn't let me aboard. He's abject, so far as Willard is concerned."

"Three years!" sighed Joe. "You know it sounded attractive the way I felt in New York; but, good Lord! imagine living three years in a place like this, with nobody to talk to——"

"Except that surly Swede, that blockhead of a German, the Scotchman, the plug-ugly, and myself," finished Gregg —"though I prefer any of them to the Young Duke. I wonder if this Captain Gordon would let us stow away on his craft. He's at outs with Willard."

"None of that," said Joe sharply. "I gave my word. I stick."

"Oh, certainly. We're in for it, old Egg. But mark my words, we'll be ready to steal a boat and trust ourselves to the briny deep in a few weeks. Even if there were lovely women I doubt if I could endure a desert island very long."

The return of their employer interrupted the conference of discontent.

"Egmont," he said, "you two men will remain in this house. I am returning to the *Charmer*. We will make no move until that fellow Gordon has left the island with the Kanaka workmen. You will watch his schooner and permit no one from it to approach this house. If they disregard your warning, shoot —and shoot to kill. Make yourselves comfortable. The servants will give you drinks and serve your meals. The die is cast, Mr. Gregg. I know you are sick of your bargain, but you are on the island and you remain here." He smiled at the astonishment he saw in the eyes of the Englishman. "When you return to New York at the end of three years, you will have much more money than you would have saved by three years of histrionic effort."

"I had no wish to quit, sir," stammered Gregg.

Willard stepped close to him. "You lie," he said coldly. "And you will find it impossible to shoot me in the back. I take my precautions."

He left the house, leaving Gregg ghastly pale. "Did you hear that?" he ejaculated.

Joe shook his head. "I think the boss must be cracked. Imagine him thinking of an awful thing like that."

"Just imagine it!" sighed Gregg. He was badly shaken, for he *had* had a sudden impulse to empty his rifle into his employer, as he gave him the lie— an impulse to which he would not have yielded, of course. "They used to burn people like Willard," he said to himself. "The fellow would have been called a sorcerer. I wish I was out of this."

Nearly three months of close association with Gregg had not endeared him to Joe Egmont. The man had a better education than the other five and was more appreciative of soap and water, and he had a surface good nature which made him fairly easy to get along with; but down deep inside there was something wrong with him. He had courage enough, apparently, but his selfishness was repellent, and the American thought that any of the others except the Swede was more thoroughly to be trusted.

Gregg was a good boxer and had knocked out McLeod in a fight which had resulted from a poker game. He was an excellent shot with the rifle, as he had demonstrated in target practice on board the yacht, so he could not be called yellow. But there was something odd about him. He seemed the obvious selection for captain of the little band, yet Willard had passed him over in favor of Joe Egmont.

Joe was too practical to take any stock in Gregg's oft-repeated statements that Willard could read a man's mind, but he believed that the boss was a marvelous judge of character, and Willard's contempt for Gregg confirmed what Joe had always felt about him.

"Yet's go out on the porch and take life easy," he replied to Gregg's protest against the awful insinuation made by Willard. "The boss is going to live the life of Riley here. I wonder how we're fixed on the other side of the island. The swimming ought to be good, anyway."

They seated themselves in huge wicker chairs especially constructed for lolling in a tropic clime, chairs with arms so long that a man could rest his legs on them. There were even holes in the arms in which one's heels could be comfortably tucked.

There was a soft, gentle breeze stirring, and the view from the porch was ravishing. The beach formed a huge

crescent; its yellow sand glittering like gold and contrasting vividly with the deep, dark green of the tropic vegetation beyond it. The cove reflected the sunlight like a gigantic sheet of glass, tinted light and dark green and very light blue. The *Charmer* rested on the sea like a swan on the surface of a pond, while the trading schooner was more like a very ugly duck. She was squat and hideous, that schooner, weather-beaten, badly in need of paint, her sails sloppily furled and filthy. They could look down on her deck, which was cluttered with gear, and see half a dozen men moving about on her. On the *Charmer* two men with rifles at right shoulder walked up and down on the snowy deck with military precision, mute warning to Captain Gordon that the yacht could not be caught napping.

A mile out, the restless Pacific hurled long, oily billows at the coral reef, which broke against the rock and turned into milky foam.

A barefooted Kanaka set a small table between the chairs of the two guardsmen, upon it placed a tray which contained two tall, frosted glasses, and silently retreated. Gregg grasped his drink and gulped it thirstily, while Joe sipped his with great satisfaction.

"A paradise, this island," said the Englishman, "in proper company. If it were not for Willard we could do well here, provided there were women."

"I should have thought you had enough of women," Joe answered. But something inside of him responded to the suggestion. After all, he was young and Peggy Withom was eight or nine thousand miles and three months away. With the right girl at a man's side, it would be paradise indeed.

They did not speak for a long time. When men who, after all, have little in common have been together for months, they become talked out. Gregg finished his drink and his head dropped on his breast. Presently he snored.

Remembering the injunction of Willard that one of them should keep awake, Joe shook off the drowsiness which was creeping upon him and got on his feet. He strolled to the edge of the porch and looked down on the beach, where natives were piling their scant belongings on the landing. It was hard to believe that these half-naked Kanakas had built a house which might have been constructed at a highly civilized resort in California. It showed what such men could do with a white man to supervise them.

They would be deck passengers on the schooner to their homes in Tahiti. Probably they had wives and sweethearts eagerly awaiting them there—in which they were in better case than he, thought Joe.

It must have been a job to clear this land for the house, he thought, for it was practically a jungle at right and left. Ferns, bamboo, thorny bushes of every description, were growing there in tropic luxuriance. Snakes, centipedes, and other horrors inhabited that jungle—poisonous things, the thought of which made him shudder.

The lawn was constructed of squares of grass sod transported here from somewhere else. Undoubtedly it also had been jungle, and it would be jungle again unless Willard kept the rapidly growing vegetation from encroaching. Joe and his companions would probably find plenty of work on this island.

Joe picked up his rifle and descended to the lawn, moving slowly toward the beach. No necessity of remaining in the house.

He had strolled no more than fifty feet when that instinct we all possess but which nobody can explain warned him that he was being watched; and he turned suddenly to the right.

Continued in the next issue.

DISTINGUISHED CONDUCT

By Will McMorrow

Author of "All Is Not Gold——" Etc.

Even the stoniest of ten-minute eggs has a soft spot somewhere

DISCIPLINE!" "Old Frisky" accented that second syllable as sharply as a pistol shot, gripping his silver-headed stick more tightly beneath his arm. "That's what counts: disc*ip*line! An' that means knowin' yer blurry job as a soldier should, an' keepin' yer silly heads up an' yer blasted minds clear an' doin' yer bleedin' duty plain an' straight! Stand still, there!"

He swung stiffly on his heel—a thin figure in worn khaki, straight and unyielding as the silver-headed stick that carried the regimental coat of arms engraven on it. He glared from beneath the shining visor of his cap, a sanguine and prominent nose sweeping along the line of recruits to point uncompromisingly at the fresh-faced youth at the end of the line.

"I'll take that grin off yer face with a couple of pack drills, my man," Old Frisky barked. "Wot's yer name? Sharp now!"

The grin vanished. "Clark—Recruit Clark."

The waxed needle points of Old Frisky's gray mustache quivered upward sternly. "Clark wot, you swab?"

"Clark, *sir,*" the recruit amended hastily.

"Aye. An' a better clerk than a soldier, or I'll never draw another ration. Put 'is bloomin' name in the book, sergeant, for bein' idle on parade an' disrespect to a warrant officer. Look to the front, now, Clark, or I'll put you where Fritz an' the blasted Kayser won't see you for the duration of this war!"

The sergeant scribbled in the black book and snapped it back inside his belt. "Got 'im, sir," he reported.

"Put 'im in again to make sure," Old Frisky rasped. "An extra drill will do 'im good. An' take that other chap's name that's behind 'im. The balmy-lookin' camel driver with the 'ump on

his back. 'E looks as if 'e was goin' to fall down. Book 'im fer bein' idle on parade, too. Your name, my man?"

"Wager, sorr," the answer came growlingly in broad Lancashire.

"I'll wager you'll find C. B. useful, too." Old Frisky squared a lean chin grimly. "Stand straight, now, and 'old that rifle still. It isn't a muck shovel. You're a soldier, now, an' Gawd 'elp the pore British Expeditionary Force that's waitin' for your like in France. As dirty an' idle a lot of barrack loafers as ever disgraced the king's uniform in peace or war. Heads up, now! Chins in! Eyes to the front! Next man catches my eye will go to the spud hole on the double. I'll make soldiers of you!"

He returned to the subject of his discourse: discipline, with the accent on the second syllable. Old Frisky—officially listed in the files of the war office as Drill Sergeant Frisbie of the Windsor Rifles, Queen's Sudan Medal, Boer War, Boxer Uprising, Distinguished Conduct Medal with two clasps, service in India, Africa and other places—believed in the virtues of discipline with the fervor of a man who had practiced it, off parade and on, for thirty-five years, from drummer to drill sergeant, from Somaliland to the Somme.

He whipped them into motion again, and raged along the flanks, a stiff and fierce old gentleman, limping slightly from an old wound, his silver-topped stick pointing unerringly at the clumsiest recruits, keen eyes noting for future reference the faces of those newcomers who would need "a bit of stiffening up," awarding punishments with liberal and impartial hand, ordering off to the guard room an unfortunate who had criminally come on parade with a button of his tunic undone.

"Step out, now, the rest of you! I'll warrant you'll all move faster before I'm done!"

Perspiration streamed down the set faces, caking the dust that rose from the burning gravel of the barrack square, as the squad stumbled through their drill, with the blasting voice of Old Frisky rattling out commands, threats, imprecations, with the explosive steadiness of a racing motor, chasing them up and down, round and round, unsparing of himself as he was of them, for his was the unselfish zeal of the fanatic. Discipline was god and Old Frisky was his prophet, and across the Channel the Windsor Rifles were holding the line and waiting for their replacements.

"About turn! About turn! Pick yer feet up, now! Right! Left! Keep that step! Watch 'em, sergeant; they'll be all over the shop in a minute. Like a blowing 'erd of wild 'orses. Right wheel! Put 'im in the book—that damned civvy there that don't know 'is army right yet! About turn! I'll smarten you or make you dizzy, one. Left! Right! Take 'em over, sergeant, an' keep 'em moving."

He spun around, having spotted a slight irregularity in the evolutions of a squad far across the square, and strode quickly in that direction. Old Frisky possessed an eye for delinquents that would have made a bald-headed eagle seem near-sighted by comparison.

He had something the look of an eagle himself—leathery neck pressed rigidly back against the collar of his tunic, commanding beak of a nose turning swiftly this way and that, fiercely alert to swoop down upon the unsuspecting recruit.

In the great square, formed by the gray, dour barracks, the drilling squads labored in the painful throes of their metamorphosis from citizen to soldier, the overworked N. C. Os. filling the air with the clamor of their efforts to turn these plowshares into swords of England. Off to the side, between the modest barrack chapel and the tall, white stem of flagstaff that flowered in a

gaudy burst at the top, the adjutant of the recruit battalion was a cool gleam of monocle and boots and spurs, as he watched the drill appraisingly and did some mental arithmetic concerning the next draft to France.

Passing before this aloof figure, Old Frisky whipped his regimental stick from under his right arm to a position under the left. Three paces from the adjutant Old Frisky's head jerked smartly to the left, his right hand leaped upward to the salute, palm outward, fingers together, forefinger touching the visor of his cap. Three paces beyond and his hand snapped down, his head snapped as smartly toward the front, and the stick flew from left to right—all with a cadenced, automatic precision in strict accordance to the letter of the "King's Regulations," concerning which it is probable that Old Frisky knew more than the king himself, having had a lot more practice.

"Too 'asty by 'alf," Old Frisky passed inaudible criticism on the adjutant's answering salute. "Needs more training in that. 'Is father was always that way in Burmah. Now fer them skivers over there. Idle beggars. I'll make them jump or I'm a Chinese coo——"

"Sergeant major! If you—ah—please——"

Old Frisky halted as if he had run against a stone wall, revolved on his grinding heel, and marched back toward the adjutant, halting a pace away. Stick flashed again, hand reached his cap in perfect coincidence with the click of his heels together.

"Sir!" Old Frisky barked.

"This"—the officer drew forth a scrawled sheet of note paper—"came through the orderly room. I don't know anything about the man—his name was Williams, it seems—but I understand you were in his battalion in France. The letter explains itself. You will be excused from duty after this parade to attend to it. That is all."

"Sir!" Old Frisky barked again. The letter disappeared in a pocket of his worn tunic, hand snapped up, stick flashed into position precisely parallel with the ground, regimental crest pointing menacingly to the front. Old Frisky swung about, all of a piece, like a revolving statue of iron, and struck out again for the doomed squad.

"Bloomin' slave driver, 'e is," Recruit Clark watched the thin figure recede in the dust. "Calls 'isself an Englishman. 'Eart-breakin' swine, I calls 'im. Look wot 'e done to that poor chap last week—the bloke wiv the bad 'eart. Bleedin' well killed 'im. Chased 'im abaht on parade till the bloke up an' dropped. A blarsted, murderin' old slave——"

"Shut up," the sergeant cut in, "an' stand at ease proper, before he fluffs. You don't know 'arf enough about 'im. He'd put 'is own father in jail fer not bein' shaved proper at 'is christening."

"Right!" Trained Soldier Yowe—who had been Corporal Yowe the day before, when Old Frisky detected him good-naturedly easing the pace for a column of "defaulters"—scowled darkly at the sergeant. "He done worse. There was that bloke at Vlamertinghe, eh?"

"Vlamertinghe, aye." The sergeant nodded gloomily.

Across the square, by the side of the shining adjutant, a drummer appeared from nowhere, poised his crossed sticks over his head and crashed them down on the drumhead in a long roll, pounding away with youthful enthusiasm. The ranks of recruits, an orderly square of khaki now, stiffened in the "at ease" position, right arms shoved out grasping the barrels of the grounded rifles. At the final tap a thousand pairs of "ammunition" boots grated on the gravel, a thousand recruits jerked to attention.

The voice of the adjutant came in faint yelps, drowned in the rattle of hands on rifle butts, the cumulative

sound rolling across the parade rhythmically like the tread of marching men. On the far flank Old Frisky watched, bristling.

"Dis-miss!"

The formation broke up, melted away as recruits hurried toward the cool relaxation of barrack room and canteen. Recruit Clark slung his rifle upside down and burst into relieved song:

"Oh, landlord, 'ave you a darter fine,
'Ow do you do?
Landlord, 'ave you a darter fine,
Fit fer a navvy upon the line——"

Old Frisky was upon the singer in two strides.

"Halt—that man there! Here you, and you! Fix bayonets! Fall in—one in front an' one in rear of 'im. Take 'is rifle away, that corp'ral! Sharp, now! March this man off to the guard room an' book him for commanding officer's memoranda for not marching off parade in proper order an' for creatin' a disturbance among the troops! Escort—'shun! Quick—march! Left—right—left! Keep that step!"

They kept it, escort and prisoner hurrying off, treading on each other's heels as if the very devil of discipline pursued them.

Old Frisky turned, plunged through the breaking ranks of soldiers as if they were shadows of men vanishing from his path, and made a bee line for the sergeants' mess.

With a tall glass of lukewarm ale and his silver-headed stick on the table before him, he read the letter, sitting very erect in his chair and frowning down his nose. Then he pulled out a battered watch of gun metal—Old Frisky did not hold with wrist watches—looked at it, planked down three ha'pence on the scarred oak of the table top, and reached for his hat and stick.

On the way out the barrack gate he caught sight of a sentry loitering on his post, wasted a half minute reporting the matter to the sergeant of the guard, before continuing on his way through the monastic gateway, into the roaring activity of Chelsea Bridge Road.

He hailed a tram with a peremptory flicker of his stick and climbed aboard, walking heavily on the heels of several undisciplined civilians who obstinately refused to keep step. After that he sat like a carven image through the bumping journey, holding hard to his stick and glaring straight ahead at an unfortunately round-shouldered gentleman of mild appearance ahead of him. Civilians were bad enough, but a round-shouldered, lounging swab like that was a challenge to decency and order.

At Clapham Common Old Frisky detrained and marched stiffly along Battersea Rise, chin out, head well back, and feet automatically clicking off on the pavement the regulation pace of one hundred and twenty steps to the minute.

"There's a party 'ere"—Old Frisky held the letter before him as if he were reading a general order—"name o' Williams, wishin' to inquire concernin' a casualty—Private David Williams, Third Battalion Windsor Rifles. Tell 'er Drill Sergeant Frisbie reports fer duty. Sharp now, my girl!"

The slatternly woman pushed back a string of black hair and looked at him.

"She carn't come," she whined. "She's dyin'. That were 'er son, my man, wot the bl—wot the army took. She's in there. Doctor says——"

Old Frisky, cap in hand, shoved open the door and stood in the shabby room. On the bed a woman stirred, turning toward him hollow eye sockets in which glowed two distant, fading lights—a woman gray-haired, large-featured, with wide and generous mouth and work-worn, knuckled hands that lay wearily quiet on the coverlet.

Old Frisky did not need to be told she was dying. He had seen quite a bit of death.

"You wrote to the commanding offi-

cer, ma'am." He stood rigidly at attention, heels together, eyes steady. "He turned the matter over to me, I havin' been drill sergeant in yore son's battalion in France and 'aving met up with 'im in the course of my duties. I 'ave a proper memory of 'im."

The shadowed face lighted softly from within. "You were one of 'is comrades. I wanted to 'ear abaht it from one of 'is mates. You—you were a chum of my Davy's, maybe?"

Old Frisky cleared his throat. "In a manner of speakin'. I was drill sergeant—which is somethin' like a color sergeant, ma'am—an' he was a private—which is right an' proper an' according to regulations. But I was, you might say, around when 'e was killed."

He sat down on the rickety chair beside the bed and leaned over to catch the husky whisper.

"The card they sent me said: 'Killed in action.' But they didn't say no more than just that. An' I wanted to know from one of 'is mates 'ow it 'appened, an' if 'e suffered much, an' all. A good boy, my Davy. 'Ard to bring up, an' delicatelike—an' the boys in school teased 'im a bit; but there was no 'arm in Davy. I worked 'ard to raise 'im. An' everybody was again 'im, it seems, but me.

"When the army called 'im, I took on a bit; but I was glad, in a way, too. Glad 'e'd 'ave the chance to prove 'isself, over there—keepin' clean an' doin' wot 'e was told. All them other boys an' my Davy as good as the best——"

She struggled to raise herself, something unconquerable and eager burning within the worn body, fighting off the black inertia of death.

"I been 'opin' and 'opin' some one would come an' tell me about 'ow Davy died. Months ago, an' I been waitin' to 'ear. Sometimes I've fancied 'e was too far in front. 'E was always 'igh-strung an' quick to fight. An' sometimes I've fancied 'e went to 'elp some other of 'is chums, wot was wounded, like I read about in the papers. Davy was like that, too."

Old Frisky frowned at the spotted square of the window beyond the dying woman, like a man marshaling into ordered lines and battalions the broken and fleeing fragments of memory.

"At Guillemont, ma'am." His rasping, parade voice was attuned to the stillness of the sick room. "Guillemont, 'ard by Manetz Wood; an' a hot spot, too. Fritz in every shell hole with a machine gun in 'is fist, an' we 'olding the ditch with the Royal Kildares an' being blown in an' out by 'eavy fire. Our own guns, like as not, there bein' no liaison to speak of. It 'appened there was a German machine gun needed shiftin' out of that or we'd all been casualties. It was a case of a volunteer an' a bag of bombs, fer that job."

Her rattling whisper pleaded with him. "My Davy! I knew it! He would do it!"

"Aye, it was 'im. He 'ad only 'is pistol—he was a warrant officer then, ma'am, 'avin' been promoted fer good behavior—an' he grabbed a couple of Mills 'and grenades an' done the trick. They killed him, but 'e'd saved 'is platoon. I 'ad intended to come to see you before this. It was the adjutant that reminded me, this mornin'. An' 'e inclosed this 'ere to give to you. It was for your son, ma'am, if he'd lived."

He unbuttoned the right breast pocket of his tunic, withdrew a ribboned disk of silver, carefully buttoned the flap of the pocket.

"'For distinguished conduct in the field,'" he read the inscription on the reverse of the glittering medal, in harsh and sonorous tones, and placed it in the woman's blue-veined hand.

A sergeant from the orderly room, dapper and pallid, and a company sergeant major with the brass crown of his

rank shiningly new on his sleeve, sat in the mess that overlooked the turmoil of the sweating square and sipped their ale appreciatively.

"Fair upset, the adjutant was," the sergeant confided. "But it was too late to send after Old Frisky. You see, the adjutant 'ad forgotten who that chap Williams was till I showed 'im the record. An' of all people to send on a delicate job like that 'e had to go an' send Old Frisky—the most 'eartless, 'arshest old blighter in the whole bloomin' army. Blasted shame, I calls it, mate."

The sergeant major wrinkled his nose thoughtfully.

"Williams, eh? I wasn't at that Guillemont show. Wasn't that the bloke——"

"That's the one—him that was shot for cowardice. 'E was a bad lot altogether. Old Frisky found 'im 'iding in a dugout. Some says 'e tried to save the fellow, which don't sound 'arf reasonable. Old Frisky was in charge of the firing squad, anyway; an' he never blinked an eye, so I fancy 'e liked the job. 'E was that kind of a murderin' old swine. Come in this mornin' to apply fer another issue of the D. C. M. they give 'im fer chargin' a German machine-gun nest at Guillemont. Said 'e lost it on parade. I arsked 'im kindlike 'ow he broke the news to that pore woman, an' he cursed me out somethin' outrageous. Called me a damned, penwipin' swab, and sez when I stopped sheddin' ink an' took 'old of a bayonet I could tell 'im 'is duty. A murderin' old swipe. Hark at 'im, now!"

Through the open window came the roar of Old Frisky's voice, raucous, inflexible, unwearying, rising above the haze of dust raised by laggard feet, penetrating the haze of undisciplined minds, bending the thoughts of men to the service of his god.

"Disc*ip*line, you barrack fleas! An' that means keepin' yer silly 'eads up an' yer blasted mouths shut an' doing yer bleedin' duty plain and straight. Keep that line steady, now! Left—right—left——"

The harried squad swept out of earshot.

Stories by Will McMorrow appear frequently in this magazine.

FIGHTING COUSINS

SENATOR JAMES A. REED, of Missouri, and Senator David A. Reed, of Pennsylvania, are cousins. Their grandfathers were brothers, both residents of Pennsylvania. But the Missouri cousin is a Democrat and the Pennsylvania cousin a Republican, and, as each is a fighter from devotion to principle and love of battle, they lock horns all the time when the Senate is in session.

When Jim was putting through his famous resolution providing for an investigation of campaign contributions, Dave fought him tooth and nail. Again, Jim as a battler in chief against the seating of Vare, elected to the Senate from Pennsylvania, had Dave to beat at every stage of the conflict. Privately they are friendly cousins and form a mutual admiration society, but when they step on the Senate floor, they are in an arena where brotherhood ceases and the fur begins to fly.

The BAD-HEALTH FARM

By Mark Reed

Our friend Dugan, the middleweight champion, gets a country bee in his bonnet

IT was a gloomy little party of three in a quiet corner of one of Broadway's famous "steak-and-chop" houses. But for Dugan's veto it might have been a dress-suit banquet with caviar and speeches, a celebration befitting the twenty-ninth birthday anniversary of the world's middleweight champion. But Dugan would have none of it.

"To hell with a splurge!" he had growled. In consequence, the caviar and speeches had been omitted, and the guests reduced to two. On Dugan's right sat Dan Stringer, his manager. On his left slumped his trainer, Ole Linstad, already victim, by contagion, to the guest of honor's attack of blues.

Dugan gazed pensively into the amber depths of his near-beer.

"Think of it!" he muttered. "I'm twenty-nine! I been fighting ten years, and champion two."

"Yah, that's right," chimed in Ole, "we bane fighting ten years, and champion two."

Dugan sighed.

"Ten years! I'm about done."

A faint smile of amusement played around Stringer's mouth. He had managed fighters, gold mines, hotels, and horses; and he had seen the moods and crotchets of his fellow man in about every form. Indeed, he remembered how once, some twenty years ago, when he was still fighting, he himself had

reached the age of twenty-nine and felt totally burned out for a week.

"I don't think, Pete," he said quietly, "that you'll lose your title this year."

"I can begin to feel it coming, Dan." There was a trace of resignation in the champion's voice. "This afternoon my timing was way off, even against a slow mover like Pelky, and my wind's no good, and my bones ache."

"The bones in your head?"

"The ones in my legs."

Ole fastened a pair of anxious blue eyes on his friend and employer and ventured a mild remonstrance.

"March bane bad month, Pete," he said. "Wait till spring gets here. I can work the aches out of you in yust about a day."

"Sure, Pete," put in Stringer. "You'd feel like a colt *to-night*—only it's your birthday."

"No," said Dugan lugubriously. "Next year I'll be thirty. I gotta face it." There was a long pause while he fashioned a bread pellet with his powerful fingers and stacked it on the large pile already in front of him. "What I want, Dan, is some nice, easy business I can retire to when I begin to hit the toboggan."

"Business?" Stringer looked up sharply. "You're no heavy spender. You must have a couple of hundred thousand salted away."

Dugan avoided his manager's shrewd gaze.

"I haven't fifty," he said, lying egregiously.

Stringer laughed.

"Then you must have spent about a hundred and fifty thousand on birthday presents to yourself."

"Anyway," said Dugan evasively, "how much I got doesn't matter. I want to get something solid under my feet, something no guy can get away from me."

A knowing glint came to Ole's eye.

"Pete," he said, "you bant yust talking. You got something definite on your mind."

Dugan's face brightened. He looked from one to the other of them enthusiastically.

"Boys," he said, "I hit on a swell idea this afternoon. It fixes up all three of us for the rest of our lives. I'm going to buy a big place out in the country, and run a health farm. We can train scrappers, and keep fancy stock on the side, and have our own saddle horses. Ain't that a swell idea? Hey now, Dan, I ask you—ain't it?"

At last Stringer found words.

"It's a hell of an idea!" he exploded. "What time have you got for health or any other kind of farming? And what do you know about it, anyway?"

"I trained at enough health farms, ain't I? And what we don't know about regular farming, Ole and me can learn. I aim to have a regular show place that I can make my home."

"Your home's where you hang your boxing gloves."

Dugan's jaw set.

"Not from now on," he said.

In vain did the older man hurl arguments and threats into his fighter's camp. Even a big match already being ballyhooed for the fall had no weight. Dugan was in a mood for farming. He wanted ground under his feet, and he wanted it *now*.

So, the next morning found Dugan and his trainer far out in the country listening to a silver-tongued realtor. Their car was halted in a pebbled driveway before a long, low farmhouse, painted white, with deep porches and blue-green blinds. In front of them on either side of a narrow lane sloped a series of fields and pastures divided off with white fences; and beyond, across the valley, they could see the hazy outlines of the Ramapo Hills.

"Gentlemen," said the realtor, "this is one opportunity in a thousand—nay, ten thousand. Never, but for the un-

timely passing away of the last owner, would this magnificent property have been thrown upon the market. The farm comprises one hundred and ten acres. Sixty of tillage and pasture, forty-five of woodland, and five of water—that little gem of a lake you see glistening in the distance. The cowbarn has cement floors and tiled walls and——"

"Yeah?" said Dugan.

"And the property is stocked and equipped exactly as it was the day Mr. Alford passed away. His herd of prize Guernseys was the talk of the county, and his bull, the famous Hercules II, has over forty blue ribons to his credit. But perhaps you wouldn't care about the stock."

"Sure," said Dugan; "my idea is to raise stock on the side."

As he spoke, Dugan stood up in the car and looked around. He saw himself cantering down that long lane on dewy summer mornings, supervising his prize cattle, while future champions of the ring toiled at roadwork across his pastures, and helped him pay his expenses. It meant a real headquarters, a genuine home, a kingdom of his own after ten years of wandering. His eyes glistened as he turned to Ole.

"Fair layout," he said cautiously.

"It might bane worse."

"That old cowbarn would make a marvelous gym," suggested the realtor briskly.

They looked at the weathered wooden structure to the rear of the modern cement barn. Streaks of daylight six inches wide showed between the loosened boards.

"It's sure got the ventilation," said Dugan.

He bought the farm in April, and a few weeks later motorists on the macadam road which ran through the bottom of the valley were confronted by a large and newly painted sign:

MOUNTAIN VIEW HEALTH FARM
Pete Dugan, Prop.
Gym, Pool, Prize Guernsey Cattle
Hunting, Fishing, Private Lake

After reading the sign these same motorists caught a glimpse far up the hillside of a white farmhouse. Great elms shaded it. An American flag fluttered over it. In the fields in front a herd of cattle grazed. The whole place bespoke serenity, long hours of sleep, the steady upbuilding of muscle, and nerves.

"Ha!" the motorists would resolve, "some day I'll take a month off and go up there and get in the pink of condition!"

Stringer's reaction on his first visit to Mountain View was different, however. Out in the barnyard he came upon Dugan in overalls and greasy shirt, his legs entwined in a piece of machinery. Standing by idly was a farmhand chewing a straw.

"What's the big idea, Pete?" Stringer demanded. "Runnin' a blacksmithin' academy?"

Dugan raised a sweaty, agitated face.

"We can't get this damn corn planter to working."

"Where's 'Squarehead'? He's good with tools."

"He's up in the house. There's a leak in one of the bathrooms. The village is so far off he thought he could do it quicker than send for somebody."

Stringer's eyes twinkled with satisfaction. Already the trials and tribulations of amateur agriculture seemed to be descending upon Mountain View Health Farm.

"Give you ten grand for the whole works," he said.

"Not on your life," said Dugan stanchly. "We'll be going swell in a couple more weeks. Come on out and see the nifty cows that went with the place."

After they had inspected the peace-

fully grazing herd, Dugan took his manager around to the barn. There in a small exercise yard he pointed out Hercules II. At sight of the two men the bull's nostrils quivered and every nerve in his powerful body seemed to twitch with bottled-up fury. He kept moving along inside the fence, his bloodshot eyes fastened on them. Each time his nose ring clanked against the fence Stringer involuntarily stepped back. Dugan expanded with proprietary pride.

"Did yuh ever see a guy more rarin' to go?" he cried. "I come out here and take lessons. His name's Hercules II, whatever the hell that means. He's registered, and has won a flock of ribbons. I'll show 'em to you after dinner. The library's plastered with 'em. He's worth five thousand bucks. Why don't you say something, Dan? Don't he look blue-blooded to you?"

Stringer eyed the mass of infuriated bone and muscle mentally gauging the strength of the fence.

"Sure, he looks blue-blooded, all right. Do—do you handle him yourself?"

"Me or one of my strikers. Just run a stick through that brass ring in his nose and he follows along like a kitten. I'll let you try it when we put him in to-night."

"Thanks," said Stringer. "You will not."

They went around and inspected the swimming pool; then crossed over to the old barn. A ring had been set up in the center of the floor, but it looked painfully new. Stringer indicated the white, unscuffed canvas.

"Don't look like you had many customers."

Dugan hitched up his overalls uncomfortably.

"To tell the truth, Dan, I've advertised, and written letters to all the boys I know, but nobody seems to show up. That's one reason I want to get you out this week-end. I want you to get me some trade."

"I'm no health-farm salesman."

Dugan rubbed his hand over his close-cropped head. "Sure, sure, Dan, I know. But I got an idea. All I gotta do is get one well-known fighter to train at the Mountain View and then my rep as a health farmer is made."

Stringer scowled.

"Damn it, man," he said, "you haven't time for this sort of stuff, anyway. It takes your mind off your own fighting."

"You're crazy," said Dugan. "Soon as we get going I'll have nothing to do but loaf around."

"Loaf, eh?" said Stringer.

He thought of the unmended corn planter, of Ole plumbing up in the bathroom, and of the thousand ills a farm is heir to. However, there was nothing to do but give Dugan and his project plenty of rope. Maybe they'd come to grief. His face brightened with a happy thought.

"You say you want me to find you a customer?" he asked.

"I sure do."

"I know just the guy. 'Doc' Buckley's an old pal of mine, and he's managing 'Gashouse' Holt. I'll persuade Doc to let Gashouse train up here. He's defending his title July first."

Dugan looked dubious.

"But Gashouse don't train in the country, Dan. He's never been off the pavements, that I know of."

Stringer smiled blandly.

"That's just it, Pete," he said. "Think of how he'll get going up here in this air, with fresh vegetables, and Guernsey milk, and the invigorating smell of hay!"

"I don't know. He's a tough egg."

"Afraid you can't handle him?"

Dugan snorted.

"That guy? He's nothing but a welterweight."

"Sure. You'll get along great. But

I may have to quote Doc special rates. He's a close figurer."

"Well," said Dugan grimly, "all right."

The arrival of Gashouse Holt with Doc Buckley and two sparring partners known as "Kid" Ratner and "Sailor" Pease was a gala occasion. When the new depot car drove into the yard, Dugan and Ole, clad in white knickers and sport shirts, were on the front porch, while the new cook, in spotless raiment, was dodging in and out of the kitchen door, impatient for a glimpse of the guest of honor. There was bunting over the door. The flag was up, and even the lawn had been freshly mowed. Dugan came down the steps briskly.

"Hello, Gashouse!" he called. "Welcome to our city!"

"City!" sneered some one in the car.

The welterweight champ was the hard-boiled, snub-nosed type, with a mean curl to his lip; and as he stepped out upon the lawn, his gaze passed from the hospitable figure of Dugan to the white farmhouse, then out across the fields to the distant hills. Not a hotel lobby, not a dance hall, not a corner speakeasy, not even a cop, in sight. He turned back to Dugan, a faintly perplexed expression clouding his face.

"What the hell you in this business for? You gone by?"

Dugan grinned.

"No," he said, "I'm in it to keep the rest of you birds from going by."

Gashouse looked mad.

"Who the hell said I was going by?"

"Nobody," interposed Ole hastily. "Yust a yoke."

"Yeah? Well, I ain't no humorist."

Neither was Gashouse Holt a nature-lover, despite the years he had ganged with the "Gashouse Daisies" on Fourteenth Street. Within an hour he had developed a contempt for Dugan's cows and hay fields, even his mowing machines, that seemed to seethe up from his very soul. At lunch Dugan announced that he had stretched a hammock between two maple trees at the side of the house for the welterweight's comfort and delectation.

"Hammock?" said Gashouse. "Gee, what a hick dump!"

Doc Buckley intervened.

"Shut up!" he said. "Go on out there and lay down. Rest and quiet'll do you good."

"Aw, how can I rest under a tree?"

"Lots of good scrappers have," ventured Buckley dryly.

Gashouse eyed the proprietor of the Mountain View.

"Sure," he said, "hick fighters."

Through it all Dugan held his peace. The reputation of his farm was in the making and he didn't propose to jeopardize it on account of any such specimen as Gashouse. "Let him rave," he said to Ole. "He's a customer."

About a week after he had got there Gashouse came down to breakfast one morning, suit case in hand, and sat down at the table without a word.

"What's the idea of the Gladstone?" said Buckley.

"I'm leavin'."

"Leavin'? What for?"

"I can't sleep."

Dugan laid down his knife and fork, an ominous red flush mounting to his face.

"What do you mean you can't sleep? You've got a hair mattress and the best room in the house."

"It's those damn boids."

"What damn birds?"

"Those ones that keep hollering 'whippoorwill.'"

"Well, that shouldn't get your goat," said Dugan. "Your name ain't Will."

"They ain't getting my goat," said Gashouse savagely. "But I can't sleep. So I'm leavin', see?"

Dugan looked anxiously at Doc Buckley.

"He ought to sleep out here if he can sleep in the city."

"Hell, that's different," said Gashouse, pushing back his chair. "In the city there's so much noise a guy can fall to sleep easy."

Dugan followed him anxiously into the hall.

"Tell you what I'll do, Gashouse," he said. "I'll move the radio up to your bedroom and you can keep it on till you doze off. It oughta make more noise than the birds, an' the static's like the 'L.'"

Finally Gashouse capitulated. But already Dugan was beginning to tell under the strain. Worry lines were appearing about his eyes, and he went around supervising his estate with a preoccupied air, whistling softly through his teeth. Meanwhile a new trouble developed. It began to look as though Gashouse would have a hard time to come down to his fighting weight.

"It bane the fresh eggs and Guernsey milk," said Ole.

"Yeah," said Dugan gloomily, "I suppose so."

Road work was lengthened, and finally, two days before the fight, Gashouse was within two pounds of being a welterweight. Another day's workout should bring him within the limit, which only left him the day of the fight to lay off in. It was close, but it could be done. At breakfast Dugan told Ole to saddle his horse and ride into town for some A batteries. The radio was getting weak.

"This is his last night here," he said. "We don't want the whippoorwills to bother him."

Ole gone, Dugan strolled out on the porch. Picking himself a cool spot from which he could survey his acres and grazing herd, he sat down for a quiet hour with the morning paper. Upstairs he could hear Gashouse and his two sparring partners arguing and waiting for their breakfast to digest before setting out for some roadwork.

He must have dozed off, for the next thing he knew he was awakened by a clatter of hoofs. In a moment Ole appeared, lashing his mare up the pebbled drive. The Swede's eyes were round with disaster.

"Pete!" he yelled. "Hell bane broke loose!"

Dugan jumped over the porch railing.

"Yeah?" he said.

"Hercules bane out, and he yust charged Gashouse."

"Yeah?"

"Gashouse, Kid Ratner and Sailor were running down the lane when Hercules saw 'em, and smashed through the fence. He musta thrown a hate on their jerseys."

"I told 'em not to wear anything red."

"They didn't. Gashouse had on a yellow one."

"Where are they now?"

"Up in two apple trees in the lower pasture. I was yust coming back when it happened."

"Yeah? Where's the bull?"

"He bane hanging 'round."

"Give me that horse and go saddle another for yourself."

When Dugan came in sight of the two apple trees his trainer had specified he caught a glimpse of several bright-colored jerseys agitating among the branches. Which tree held the welterweight champion of the world? He was not left long in doubt. From the nearest tree poured down a flood of invective. Dugan reined in.

"All right, Gashouse; keep your shirt on."

"Never mind my shoit! Get that damn bull out of here!"

"That's what I come for."

"Let's see yuh catch him, guy; you're so good," jeered Kid Ratner from his perch.

"Aw, pipe down, all of you!" yelled Dugan. "You're more scared than hurt!"

"When we get out of this tree we'll show you whether we're scared or not!"

"You don't need to show me. I know."

While this exchange of pleasantries was taking place Dugan was edging his horse cautiously around a clump of hazel bushes that obscured his view into the pasture. He could hear Hercules snorting. The bull was about fifty feet from his victims, and pawing up the ground briskly, apparently working up his emotions for another charge at the apple trees. When Ole arrived he and Dugan went into conference behind the hazel bushes.

"Hey, hurry it up!" yelled Gashouse.

"Listen, you!" yelled back Dugan. "Me and Ole will ride into the field and attract his attention. When he ain't lookin' you birds streak it up to the house. Then we'll drive him into the barn."

"Drive him into the barn *foist*."

"He won't drive past you guys. You gotta get out of his sight."

The first part of the plan worked as if rehearsed. Dugan and Ole, entering the pasture, circled to the left of Hercules, who began to shift his position in an effort to hold both groups of men within his line of vision. When the two horseback riders had gained the farther side of the arena, they began to yell, canter in closer, and then as quickly draw back. Hercules, baffled and somewhat hesitant, followed. When they had lured him a good hundred yards from the pugilists' apple trees, the time seemed ripe.

"All right, you birds," yelled Dugan. "Beat it!"

At the moment Gashouse and his two partners dropped to the ground Hercules was facing, head down, toward the opposite end of the pasture. But the mere thud of their heels was enough. With a snort he wheeled, hesitated for a moment, as though laying his course, and then fairly leaped forward.

Dugan raised himself in his stirrups.

"For God's sake, run, boys!" he called hoarsely. "He's after you!"

Dugan and Ole came in sight of the front porch just in time to hear the screen door slam and to see Hercules swerve off at the high steps and disappear around the corner of the house.

"Boy!" muttered Dugan, "that was close."

He reined up before the house and, pulling out a handkerchief, began to wipe the sweat from his brow. Ole kept stepping his horse about, eying the corners of the house apprehensively.

"I wonder where Hercules bane now."

Doc Buckley appeared on the porch.

"Listen, Pete," he called in a guarded tone. "Gashouse says if you don't have that bull under lock and key within ten minutes he's pulling out for the city."

"Aw, tell him to stay in the house, where he's safe, and shut up!" said Dugan.

The two men walked their horses cautiously around the house, but there was neither sight nor sound of Hercules. In the doorway of the gym they saw John, the hired man, armed with a pitchfork.

"I think the dumb fool headed for the swamp," he shouted.

It was one o'clock before Dugan and Ole got back. They found John still in front of the arn.

"Gashouse hasn't gone, has he?" demanded Dugan.

"They ain't none of 'em stuck foot out of the house since you left, Mr. Dugan. One of 'em hollered down and wanted to know if I had the key to the car, and I hollered back I didn't know how to run it if I did!"

"You did right, John," said Dugan,

dismounting stiffly. "Wash the mud off these horses and give 'em a double ration of oats. We'll want 'em again right after we eat."

When they entered the house they found Gashouse and his staff already at the dinner table. They looked up sulkily.

"Got him?" asked Buckley.

"To get," said Dugan laconically.

Gashouse laid down his knife and fork and turned to his manager.

"Soon's we've finished eatin' we leave," he announced.

Dugan thought fast.

"Listen, Gashouse," he said, "you ain't leaving us just because a bull's loose on the place, are you?"

"I got two pounds to work off yet," said Gashouse evasively.

"You oughta lost two pounds on that sprint up the lane."

"*Ssst!*" whispered Ole warningly. "Don't kid him."

"I ain't kidding him," said Dugan. "That bull won't hurt any one. He's stuck in the mud somewheres down in the swamp. Anyway, while I was out I telephoned for some help——"

"If you had a phone in this Godforsaken place," put in Gashouse, "I wouldn't be here now. I'd phoned for a taxi."

Dugan grinned.

"You ain't afraid of that bull, Gashouse? Oh, no!"

Kid Ratner rushed to his employer's defense.

"It ain't the bull," he explained. "It's your whole cockeyed farm. It gets on a guy's nerves. Jeez, didn't Gashouse step on a black snake eight feet long the second day he got here? And ain't we been driven mad ever since by roosters crowin', and mosquitoes, and——"

"Yes," put in Buckley, "and those damn birds."

"Sure," said Gashouse, "them whippoorwills!"

Dugan turned on him.

"Did yuh ever see a health farm without whippoorwills, and roosters, and black snakes?"

"I never seen *any* health farm before. And believe me, I'll never see another!"

"All the same," said Dugan, smothering his rage with diplomacy, "it's done you good here. You're going fine."

"I'm going *now,*" said Gashouse, rising.

When he was out the door they cornered Buckley.

"Now, listen, Doc," said Dugan. "You're crazy to let Gashouse go in town this afternoon. The thermometer's ninety. The heat in the city will ruin him."

"That bane right," said Ole, with professional gravity. "The heat will yust soak all the fight out of Gashouse. Now, why don't you let him take quiet little nap—yust till Hercules bane captured?"

Buckley took several distracted turns around the room.

"I'll go make Gashouse stick it out till to-morrow," he announced finally.

The door slammed behind him. Dugan sank down, disgusted, upon the couch. His clothes were torn, and there was swamp mud all over him, even in his ears. Ole drew from his pocket a letter which he had forgotten in the morning's excitement. It was from Stringer:

DEAR PETE: Folgercy wants to sign you up for a bout with Buck Sullivan for some time in September. Offers $40,000 guarantee. How about it?

Regards to Ole and the customers. Hope Gashouse likes his fresh air and vegetables well as ever.

Cordially,

DAN STRINGER.

P. S. Better start training at once.

Dugan tossed the letter into the fireplace.

"Huh!" he muttered. "I can't be bothered with a fight this summer."

"But, Pete——" began Ole.

A clatter of hoofs interrupted. Dugan rushed to the window, but it was only the two State troopers he had phoned for before dinner, accompanied by several neighboring farmers. The troopers had rifles slung across their saddles. Dugan hurried out.

"A hundred bucks if you get him within an hour," he said.

"Dead or alive?"

"Alive! That bull cost me five thousand dollars."

One of the farmers spoke up.

"Ain't much use trying to keep one of the critters, Mr. Dugan—not after he's had a taste of freedom and hell-raising."

"Yeah?" said Dugan gloomily. "Well, let's not shoot unless we have to."

After the posse had rescoured the swamp through which Dugan and Ole had splashed all morning, they visited the farms which adjoined it. Then one of the troopers commandeered a telephone and sent out inquiries in all directions. But no one had seen or heard of Hercules. The flower and cynosure of Mountain View farm seemed to have vanished from the face of the earth. Around six the farmers, tired and disgusted, went home to their milking, while Dugan, Ole, and the two troopers rode slowly up the lane home. Suddenly Dugan reined in short, gazing intently to his left.

"I'll be darned!" he said.

"What bane matter?"

"Look!"

Ole looked. In the next pasture, amid the peacefully grazing Guernseys, was Hercules. He was pawing the ground thoughtfully, and had evidently seen the men on horseback long before they had seen him. For a moment he stood with the herd behind him, magnificently defiant; then his head lowered.

"He bane coming for us," said Ole.

"I guess you gotta shoot," said Dugan.

The two troopers unslung their rifles, and the click of the locks sounded ominously in the shady lane, already still with the hush of approaching evening. Dugan turned his eyes away. But there was no sound of a shot.

"What you tank of that!" exclaimed Ole.

Looking around Dugan saw that the grazing cattle had suddenly wheeled into a circular formation and were milling rapidly around their threatened leader. The troopers raised their rifles again, but the shifting bulwark of tawny flanks and yellow horns made Hercules a difficult target to locate.

"Don't shoot!" shouted Dugan. "Maybe we can drive 'em all into the barn together."

Slowly and patiently the four men on horseback surrounded the embattled herd and began to coax them toward the bars. The herd began to filter up the lane, with Hercules still in their midst. But he was moving rebelliously, pressed forward like a criminal being brought in under heavy guard. The leaders had begun to enter the barn, when there was a sudden whirlpool of heaving backs, and Hercules was over the wall, crashing through a dozen cold frames, and out upon the lawn.

Dugan exploded with disgust.

"Aw, let the damn fool have it," he said.

The two troopers raised their rifles and fired. A clod of earth was flipped up from the lawn and one of the milk pails on the stand by the kitchen door spun around dizzily; but Hercules went on unimpaired. Jumping their horses over the wall, the troopers raced after him around the corner of the barn, firing as rapidly as they could take aim. The entire farmyard echoed with the noise of battle.

Dugan was seized with a new fear. This was a tough climax for a fighter

whose nerves were already jumpy. He tiptoed into the house, bracing himself for an outburst. Doc Buckley was sitting in a rocking-chair before the door to Gashouse's room, puffing at a fat cigar.

"How—how's Gashouse?" asked Dugan cautiously.

"Sleepin' since two o'clock."

"I thought maybe the firing outside might have bothered him."

Buckley shook his head.

"Shootin' don't bother him none," he said. "He's used to it, brought up in the district he was."

There came a renewed outburst of firing from the distance.

"I see you found the bull," said Buckley.

Dugan nodded.

"They're shooting him now," he said.

Buckley rose to his feet briskly.

"Good!" he said. "I'll wake Gashouse and tell him everything is O. K."

Dugan walked sadly to the window and stood looking out. The death of Hercules meant a cool five thousand loss, and the entire four weeks Gashouse and his gang had put up at the farm wouldn't net a fifty-dollar profit.

While he was still under a financial cloud, the door opened and Gashouse strode in, followed by Buckley. The champ had on a purple-and-green dressing gown over his trunks, and he came across the room so fast that Dugan thought he was going to hit him.

"Hey, look out," he said.

"It's too late to look out," said Gashouse, so mad there were tears in his eyes. "You know what you and your lousy hick farm have done? You've lost me my title, that's what you've done! But get this, guy. You're goin' to pay for it, and you're goin' to pay for it plenty. Me and Doc are goin' to sue you to the tune of a hundred thousand bucks."

Dugan turned to Buckley wearily.

"What's the matter with him now?"

"You've lost us the title, that's the matter."

"Yeah?"

"I just had Gashouse on the scales. He's taken on two pounds this afternoon. Now he's four pounds over."

"You shouldn't have let him sleep all afternoon."

Gashouse wheeled so sharply his dressing gown stood out in a straight line behind him.

"I couldn't do anything else, could I? Unless I wanted to go out and have my block butted off!"

Before Dugan could gather himself together Gashouse crossed to Buckley.

"Come on," he said, "let's see our lawyers and get this suit started. We gotta get into town, some way."

Dugan took out his watch and looked at it.

"Doc," he said, addressing himself to the one of the pair who seemed the more nearly rational, "I'm not worried about any lawsuit. You haven't a chance. But on the other hand, I want to see Gashouse win and I don't want anybody feeling sore at this farm. It's only seven o'clock. There's still time for your boy to work off his four pounds by midnight, get a good night's sleep, and then lay off to-morrow, just as you planned."

Gashouse looked at his manager dubiously.

"It'll take three hours to get into town," said Buckley. "And you can't work off any weight on the train."

Gashouse tore off his dressing gown.

"Mother in heaven!" he yelled. "Won't I ever get out of this dump!"

The whole staff went out to the gym on the run. Dugan stood in the double doors for a while and watched them. Then he sent in Ole to bring out the radio and set it up near the ring, with the idea that some jazz might cheer them up a little. But Gashouse was still grouchy and there was a mean curl to his lips. It was getting dark when

Dugan heard the troopers returning. He went out to meet them.

"Well, boys?" he said.

The two troopers looked at each other sheepishly.

"We're sorry, Mr. Dugan," said one of them, "I guess we didn't hit him. He put a stone wall between us and him, and managed somehow to escape into the woods. We been hunting for him, but we couldn't locate him."

Dugan cast an anxious glance over his shoulder into the brightly lighted gym.

"Sssh! For the love of Mike!" he whispered. "Don't let those birds in there hear you. They think he's dead."

The imperative thing now was to protect Gashouse from all disturbance. With this in mind, Dugan had John, the hired man, surreptitiously called, and he with Ole and the two troopers were detailed to patrol softly around outside the gym at a distance of fifty yards. When the patrol was working smoothly, its duties clearly outlined, Dugan himself strolled back into the gym. Selecting a comfortable chair, he tipped back with his feet on a packing case and endeavored to give an air of peace and security to the evening's activities.

Outside the gym twilight wore into darkness. The whippoorwills began to call in the distant woods, but the raucous jazz of the radio drowned out their disturbing notes. The fighters said little, but went mechanically from skip ropes to the bags, and from the bags to the ring. The barn was like an oven. At eight thirty Gashouse was down to one hundred and forty-nine and one half. At nine thirty he tipped the scales at one hundred and forty-eight and a quarter, and when Buckley had him step on again an hour later, the needle quivered at one hundred and forty-seven. The manager's face brightened.

He waved a sweaty hand in the direction of the track.

"A dozen times around the boards, kid," he said, "and you're all set."

Gashouse began to trot slowly around the gym, close to the walls. In his circuit he had to pass the double doors and also a narrower door at the opposite end of the building which had originally opened into the stanchions of the old barn. As he warmed up, he began to step out faster. He raised his knees high and came down very springily on his toes.

"You're going swell," encouraged Dugan.

Kid Ratner and Sailor soon quit, but Gashouse was keeping on, when suddenly he stopped short at a point about a dozen feet from the narrow door, and stood there as if glued. His mouth opened, but no sound issued forth. Dugan, rising from his chair, saw the bulky head and shoulders of Hercules framed against the darkness outside. One cloven hoof was already pawing the sill. Then, abruptly, the animal turned, as though to meet an adversary from the rear, and two shots rang out.

Buckley and Kid Ratner had rushed to Gashouse and were supporting him in their arms. For a moment he lay there with closed eyes, his face deathly pale, then his face flushed, and he struggled to his feet.

"It's a frame-up," he said; "that's what it is!"

Sailor threw himself at Dugan.

"Frame us up, will yuh, yuh big bum?" he yelled, "I'll show yuh!"

Outside Dugan heard the thud of a heavy body falling, and a prolonged groan.

"Helluva frame-up that costs me five thousand bucks," he muttered.

Buckley grabbed Sailor by one arm and Gashouse by the other. "Let's get out!" he said.

Dugan shrugged wearily.

"I don't blame you, boys," he said. "I'll have the depot wagon take you down right off."

When Gashouse and his retinue and all the bags and paraphernalia were stowed away and Ole had the engine

running, Dugan made one last effort at reconciliation.

"Listen, Gashouse," he began, "I'm sorry as hell——"

A wrathful figure leaned out of the car.

"Listen yourself, guy," it said. "I got friends, and if I lose to-morrow night I'll——"

The rest of the threat was swallowed up in the darkness and the roar of the motor, but there was no mistaking the state of Gashouse's mind. He wasn't writing out any testimonials for the Mountain View Health Farm. As Dugan went slowly around the empty gym putting out the lights and straightening up the chairs, he was prey to a heavy melancholy. It would be a rotten thing to have queered another scrapper's fight. When Ole returned he told him to get ready to go in town. The Swede looked rebellious.

"But you said this morning we bant going in to see the fight. We hear it over the radio."

Dugan shook his head.

"I've gotta be on the spot," he said. "Maybe I can buck Gashouse up."

Gashouse was to defend his crown outdoors, and when Dugan, Ole and Stringer reached the Stadium the big bowl of wooden seats was already half filled. The air was cool and a thin crescent moon hung just above the flagstaff on the stands. Dugan sighed. Not a chance for rain. He left Stringer and Ole, and went down underneath to the dressing rooms. On his way he made several inquiries. The betting was still even. This was encouraging, and showed that Gashouse had not started to talk yet, at least not publicly.

Dugan found Buckley in front of the dressing room.

"Hello, Doc," he said. "Mind if I step in and wish Gashouse luck?"

Buckley started to refuse, then changed his mind.

"Aw, go on in," he growled. "You can't make him any worse than you have already."

Gashouse was sitting on a bench with his back to the wall and his feet on the rubbing table, staring into space. He had not shaved since leaving the country and the growth of beard for some reason killed his hard-boiled look. He looked spineless, as though he ought to be on a park bench. He saw Dugan out of the corner of his eye.

"Hey, guy," he said, "can't I ever shake you?"

Dugan sat down on the table beside him.

"Now, listen, Gashouse," he said. "You gotta snap out of this. I know you had a tough break yesterday out at my place. But one bum day never queered a real scrapper."

"No?"

"No!" said Dugan. "And I know what I'm talking about. I was razzed and hounded about like a crook for five days before I fought for my title—and I came through."

"Sure, you're good. You can run a health farm, too, can't you?"

Dugan soon gave up in disgust and went up to his seats.

"Well, how does he look?" demanded Ole anxiously.

Dugan shrugged.

"He looks bad; but I can't tell."

Ole tried to be encouraging.

"Many a scrapper looks sick when he bane in his dressing room, Pete. Wait till he hears the yelling."

But when the champion climbed into the ring and heard the yelling his face wore a more listless and devil-may-care leer than ever. The crowd gave him a great hand, but he ignored them and sat down in his corner without even scuffing his shoes in the resin.

"He oughta be more nervous," said Dugan. "He acts like his mind is made up."

The gong rang.

The challenger came out with a rush. He was a thick-built, dynamic chap, who, from his tactics, evidently aspired to be a welterweight Dempsey. He came out so fast that he met Gashouse three quarters across, leaving as many openings as a sieve to his own body. But despite these openings Gashouse went into a clinch. Four times he fairly rushed into a clinch. Dugan clenched his fists till the nails cut into the skin. Even a dub, to say nothing of a champion, could have got in half a dozen telling socks.

"Get in and fight!" yelled the crowd. "Cut the necking!"

Thus goaded, the titleholder condescended to trade a few blows. But when he could not seem to locate his target, he got wary and was back clinching again. The round ended with the fact pretty obvious to all that unless he turned over a new leaf Gashouse was likely to live up to his name. Ole turned incredulously.

"It yust don't seem possible Hercules bane able to slow Gashouse up this much."

"Gashouse never looked so good to me," said Stringer. "I think he got the title on a fluke."

"Yeah?" muttered Dugan suspiciously. "Then what did you send him up to me as a star customer for?"

The second round started off, and prevented Stringer from replying.

With his first blow, the challenger drew blood from Gashouse's uptilted and slightly insolent nose. The tap seemed to strike forth real fire. The sleeping champion let drive a couple of lefts to the body that brought Dugan to his feet with joy. Then he followed with a right hook to the jaw. The challenger's head bobbed around as though mounted on a swivel.

But that ended it. Dugan's glee changed to a grunt of disgust, for Gashouse, instead of following up his advantage, was again smitten with caution. He went into another clinch and the round dragged on in sparring.

It was an opportunity fatally lost, from Gashouse's standpoint. As the newcomer got over his nervousness his boxing became faster and surer, his defense more impregnable. He kept testing out his right, as though measuring the distance to the champion's chin, and the latter's devil-may-care expression began to change to a look of dazed perplexity.

"Gashouse looks like he was hearing whippoorwills," said Dugan.

"He bane going to hear all kinds of birdies in just a minute," said Ole.

The Swede's prophecy came true with a rush in the third. Even then a little skill might have held off the impending haymaker. But the champion's feet seemed to have taken root in the canvas. A beautiful right hook whistled through the air, and it was all over but the referee's counting.

There was a rush of excited fans, and Dugan found himself swept close to the loser's corner. Gashouse had been dragged to his seat and was already coming up for air. He raised his head and looked around.

"I didn't have a chancet," he said. "My trainin' queered me."

A crowd of reporters were climbing up over the ropes, greedy for the inside dope. Gashouse was nothing loathe.

"They framed me, boys!" he yelled, working himself into a fury. "Out at the hick health farm I was at! They had a bull gore me!"

Dugan's fists clenched and he started to climb into the ring. Then he saw the excited faces of the press. It was too good a story. Nothing short of a machine gun used immediately could stop those boys from publishing it. Mountain View Health Farm was licked at the start. With set face he shoved his way back to Stringer and Ole.

"I gotta send a telegram," he said.

They went into the telegraph office

under the stands. For some moments Dugan toyed with a pencil, then inspiration seemed to flow rapidly. He handed them what he had written.

It read:

BERGEN COUNTY REALTY CO.,
Mahway, New Jersey.

Put Mountain View Health Farm on market at once. Also equipment and herd of Guernseys. PETE DUGAN.

Stringer gave a quiet grunt of satisfaction. Putting his hand in his waistcoat pocket he drew forth a well-worn wallet, from which he extracted a check.

"By the way, here's Folgerey's guarantee for your next fight," he said carelessly. "I drove him up to fifty thousand dollars when I told him what a fighting mood you was getting into out in the country."

Dugan cast a look of sudden enlightenment at his manager.

"By jeez!" he exclaimed. "You sent that guy Gashouse out on purpose to queer my farm."

Stringer nodded.

"It had to be done, young feller," he said. "I had my own idea of what kind of a fighter Gashouse was; and I figured country life would just about finish the job—for him and for you. Maybe I was high-handed, Pete, but you're too darn good to quit the ring yet a while."

"Yeah?" Dugan's tone was peppery.

"All the same, Pete," sympathized Ole gloomily, "it bane tough to give up a nice place like that."

Dugan shook his head.

"It's not giving up the place that gets me sore," he said. "It's thinking of that bull. We oughta shot Gashouse and let the bull live. He was twice the scrapper."

Other stories by Mark Reed will appear in future issues.

METEORIC STUFF

IN 1909 Doctor Robert Orville Matthews started out as a Methodist preacher. He became president of the historic Lincoln Memorial University at Harrogate, Tennessee, in 1923. Now he is president of the Airway Limited and vice president of the Airway Electric Appliance Corporation, both of Toledo, Ohio, with an annual salary of seventy-five thousand dollars.

"Ours," said a friend of his, introducing him as a speaker at a banquet soon after his appointment to the big job, "is the land of opportunity. When a preacher can work up to a salary of seventy-five thousand a year, who will deny it?"

A GREAT ACTOR-ATHLETE

FRED STONE is the greatest athlete on the stage to-day. James J. Corbett, with whom he used to spar for fun, declared that if Stone had taken up boxing seriously, he would have become the middleweight champion of the world. John J. McGraw, after seeing him catch a ball game, said he could easily develop into a star catcher in the big leagues.

Stone is a first-class polo player. In one of his shows he put on an ice-skating stunt, although he had never done any ice skating until a year before that. In another show he got away with a bareback-riding act that was the envy of cowboys. In still others he did marvelous stunts with a lariat. He has featured all of his shows with performances beyond the capacity of many star athletes. He is always in perfect physical condition, and attributes his stamina and strength to regular hours and clean living.

The DOUBLE-CROSSING LEG

By Ernest Douglas

Another corking wooden-leg story—both comic and dramatic.

HERMOSILLO was boiling with gossip and rumors of a sensational jewel robbery. There was no great mystery about it; few doubted that Colonel Amos Reeb, Yankee soldier of fortune, had General Espinoza's pearls and was awaiting an opportunity to smuggle them across the border. All that Joe Bonner and his wooden leg and I had to do was to get them away from him and return them to their legal, if not moral, owner.

The commission was rather out of our line, and unwelcome, even to Joe, who was usually ready to tackle anything dangerous and hopeless. But the request came from our friend and patron, the governor of Sonora, in such a way that we could not well refuse.

"The State police have failed utterly," said the governor, when he called us into his private office at the *palacio*. "Espinoza is charging that my whole administration is incompetent and threatening to lead an armed force against Reeb's 'castle' down on the Rio Yaqui. Such a disturbance could easily start rebellion and banditry to flaming all over this end of Mexico.

"I have persuaded Espinoza to wait a few days by promising to put two very clever Americans on the case. You have my personal assurance that if you succeed he shall pay you the five thousand pesos reward that he has offered."

"Say, how did that cross-eyed old drunkard happen to have a set of pearls worth thirty thousand pesos?" grunted Joe.

"He was a leader on the right side in the last revolution. I understand that the gems belonged to an aristocratic family that he exterminated."

"Humph! So they're just as much Reeb's as Espinoza's."

"As a matter of fact, Reeb claimed them at the time they were seized. He was the general's lieutenant in the revolution, you know. They quarreled bitterly over the spoils, but later patched it up.

"Two weeks ago Reeb came up to the city and was guest of honor at a very gay and riotous party in Espinoza's

home. The pearls were worn as a necklace by a handsome *mestizo* girl who now lives with him and leads him around by the nose.

"There was much dancing and feasting and drinking, and by midnight every one was intoxicated. Revelers went to sleep all over the house. The next morning the girl's necklace was gone. So was Reeb.

"Espinoza made complaint at once. When Reeb was overtaken he was back on his ranch. He laughed at the officers while they ransacked his *casa*. They arrested him and brought him back here; but he is still an American citizen, and when the consul demanded his release, we had to let him go, there being no direct evidence."

"I should say not!" commented Joe. "If he'd had the pearls he'd have hit for the international line."

"And thereby admitted his guilt and left his estate open to confiscation? It is far more valuable than the jewels.

"Every precaution has been taken to prevent him sending them out. Espinoza thinks that he has them hidden somewhere on his ranch, and so do I."

"So Pete Wayland and I are just to walk in on him some fine afternoon, say 'Hand them over,' and he'll oblige. That ought to be a cinch."

"I have an even better plan than that. A good friend of mine, Carlos Ugalde, owns the hacienda next to Reeb's. My suggestion is that you go there as his guests; then you can become acquainted with Reeb and gain his confidence, as compatriots. Perhaps he will even ask you to dispose of the pearls for him."

"Governor, you're some schemer. I don't like that sort of a job at all, but if Pete is willing, we'll at least try to find out for sure whether Reeb has the pebbles. Write out our credentials to Ugalde."

"I have already taken the liberty of telegraphing him to expect two capitalists seeking investments in agricultural lands. He will meet you at Cajeme with his car. His *rancho* is about twenty-five miles west of there."

"Twenty-five miles west of Cajeme? Say, isn't that right in the middle of El Guapo's country?"

"True; but he and his bandit band have been inactive for a long time. The military made the Rio Yaqui district a little too hot for them. There is a report that they have moved down to Sinaloa."

So we went south on the night train, and early the next morning got off at an adobe village set down in a wide, barren *llano*. There was no automobile of any kind in sight, and upon inquiry we learned that there was nobody from Ugalde's place in town. Therefore we gave our bags to a couple of urchins and followed them toward a dismal one-story hotel.

It was necessary to thread our way through the usual throng of tamale venders, dogs and beggars, here commingled with a sprinkling of soldiers from the barracks down the street.

One of the mendicants, a filthy vulture with matted gray hair, smoked goggles, only one visible arm, and a leg drawn into the shape of a bow, made himself particularly obnoxious. He hobbled directly in front of us, held a grimy hand up to Joe, and moaned, *"Limosna! Limosna!* For the mercy of the good God, alms."

"Out of the way," said Joe, throwing him a ten-cent piece.

"What? The rich foreigner has only ten cents for a fellow cripple? For shame!"

"Fellow cripple?" barked Joe. "Keep a civil tongue in your head, you old liar!"

"I lie?" The beggar's eyes, amazingly keen and bright for such a hoary ancient, blazed with hate. "If the gringo is not a cripple, why does he hobble on a wooden leg?"

Now that was rubbing Joe Bonner

in his rawest spot. It was his fondest belief, almost true, that the contraption of wood, rubber and metal which he wore in place of the lower right leg he lost at St. Mihiel, was practically as good as the original and that he walked without the trace of a limp. And here this Mexican *limosnero* had penetrated his secret at a glance.

"Clear the way, you dog, before I soil my shoes on you," roared Joe, his face as red as his hair.

"A dog? He calls Catalino a dog and a liar. Apologize, gringo, or it will be the worse for you."

"Apologize? To you? With this, my wooden leg."

Joe reached down, twisted the shrieking Catalino about, and gave him a light kick in the seat of the pants. Ignoring his frantic vows to have vengeance, and the threatening growls of the crowd, we hurried on to the hotel. I berated Joe for losing his temper, but had to admit that he acted under severe provocation.

Ugalde rolled in a few minutes later, with many regrets that tire trouble had delayed him. We piled into his decrepit flivver and lurched along a road so chucky that it sadly disturbed the breakfasts we had eaten in the dining car.

Soon we left the sandy plain. The highway here was lined with lush fields of corn and rice, interspersed with forests of palms, oaks and quayacánes that were smothered under climbing vines and flamboyant orchids. During stops to repair several punctures and a blowout, we had plenty of time to marvel at the rank tropical vegetation.

Shortly before noon we passed a vast rice plantation that Ugalde said was the property of Colonel Reeb, "an agreeable neighbor but a dangerous man to cross." Behind a cactus hedge were a blacksmith shop, a group of peon shacks, and other buildings. Farther back was a large, flat-roofed stone house densely shaded by *ahuehuete* trees. In the distance were the lush, steaming jungles of the Yaqui River bottom.

Ugalde's hacienda, half a mile farther on, was much the same but on a smaller scale. He and his fat wife and their flock of barefoot servants made us comfortable in an enormous whitewashed room where there were two big beds with *pavillones* of netting to foil the swarms of ravenous mosquitoes. We sipped cooling drinks, stared out into the central patio with its wealth of flowering shrubs and its cages of twittering birds, wondered what would happen next if anything, and finally dozed off.

After our siesta Ugalde took us for a stroll around his gardens and orchards. Playing the part that the governor had thrust upon us, we made inquiries about lands for sale in the vicinity.

Down the lane swept a cloud of dust. From the cloud emerged a beautiful, glossy, chestnut horse, glistening with silver trappings. In the showy American saddle sat a tall, lank individual whom we took at first to be a Mexican dandy, for he wore an embroidered black sombrero, a purple kerchief about his neck, and skin-tight velvet trousers under bespangled chaparajos.

"Perhaps Colonel Reeb would sell out to you," remarked our host. "I think he is tired of Mexico. Would you like to meet him?"

"Very much," I replied.

"His temper is capricious and often violent but it is possible to gain his good will by praising his horse."

Ugalde stepped to the fence and held up a hand. Reeb waved, and although he apparently gave the reins only a twitch, the chestnut sat back on its haunches.

"Colonel Reeb, allow me to present two countrymen of yours, Señor Bonner and Señor Wayland. They think of becoming *hacenderos* somewhere in Sonora."

Reeb dismounted with a flourish to

shake hands across the cactus. He was a tall, loose-lipped, stringy individual, with pale-blue eyes and a hooked nose setting off a gaunt face that appeared to be peeling from a perpetual sunburn, except where a bullet scar cut a yellow trail across one cheek. A silver-mounted revolver grip at his ornate belt, and a machete in a swinging scabbard, did not soften his sinister aspect.

"We were admiring your place as we came by," Joe said heartily. "Now we are admiring your horse even more. Man, he's a beauty, and a thoroughbred, if I ever saw one. What a riot he'd cause at a blue-grass show!"

"You like fine horseflesh?" Reeb's forbidding countenance was instantly alight with friendliness. "Cornado is a pretty fair plug. You must come over to my little *ranchito* and let me show you some colts of the same imported stock."

Reeb accepted an urgent invitation to dine at Ugalde's that night. And the next day he took us for a tour of his ranch in a battered but still powerful touring car that was piloted by a mozo named Gavino. In the evening the Ugaldes went to dine with us at what the people of the neighborhood called *"El Castillo de Reeb."*

A castle it was, inside. Reeb had a passion for ornamentation of his home as well as his person. Our feet sank into thick carpets; chairs and sofas were richly upholstered; expensive if garish pictures adorned the walls.

The table was set with monogrammed china and silver. Although the food prepared by his native *cocinera* was greasy and soggy, the half dozen different wines served were excellent. Joe and I would have been on the floor in fifteen minutes if we had drunk all the liquor that he pressed upon us. Reeb tossed off glass after glass until he was undeniably tipsy and more than normally voluble; but he never mentioned General Espinoza nor pearls.

After coffee an orchestra composed of his own employees entertained us in the patio. The concert over, Reeb conducted us into a room where a splendid collection of pottery was displayed on shelves erected for the purpose.

"The meddlesome State police were down here not long ago, searching my house on some trumped-up charge," he rumbled. "They shook and looked into every jar and broke several of my choicest pieces. I'm going to send the governor a bill for the damage.

"Most of this is Guadalajara ware. These antiques, though, I picked up in a shop at San Luis Potosi."

He indicated a pair of massive, black-iron urns, standing waist-high to a man and with their bases screwed to the hardwood floor.

Two or three days passed, and although we were on terms almost of intimacy with Reeb, I could not see that we were making any progress in our sleuthing. Joe, always trusting and impressionable, argued that he could not possibly have stolen the necklace, and that if he did, he was just as much entitled to it as Espinoza. I had other opinions.

"Reeb is just an amiable blackguard," I declared. "Not extra amiable, at that. Did you ever notice how his hired hands jump and cringe in terror as he swaggers around and swears at them? Ugalde tells me that he keeps them so deeply in debt to him that they can't quit. They're bondslaves, nothing more."

"That's the usual system in Mexico. And these lazy breeds have to be handled sternly to get any work out of them."

Nearly every evening we went over to Reeb's to swap yarns and play an occasional game of poker. Sometimes Ugalde was with us, sometimes not. It happened that he stayed home the night of the holdup.

It was about eleven o'clock and a dim

quarter-moon rode in the sky when we said *buenas noches* to Reeb and tramped down the lane that connected the two ranches. We were better than halfway when, from out the shadows of the densely massed prickly pear hedge, crackled a sharp *"Manos arribas!"* that was backed up by ten or a dozen rifle barrels.

Completely surrounded, we reached for the stars and made no suicidal motions toward the revolvers stowed in our hip pockets. These, as well as our watches and purses, were deftly removed by a slim, booted, dapper young Mexican.

"Aha!" He snapped his fingers dramatically under Joe's nose. "Why don't you laugh at El Guapo now, gringo? Kick me again. I dare you."

He turned his back on us contemptuously, grinning over his shoulder.

"El Guapo?" gasped Joe. "The bandit chieftain? I never laughed at you. I never saw you before in my life."

"No? Think again. What of the poor, defenseless beggar whom you so foully cursed and so brutally assaulted at Cajeme?

"The barbarian did not know that he was abusing El Guapo, no? El Guapo, who must assume many disguises to escape and spy upon his enemies. Anyway, it is high time that you were taught to respect your betters."

"You must grant that you were most annoying," retorted Joe. "Still, I'll apologize, if that will satisfy you."

"It will not. The wounded honor of a Sonora gentleman demands something more than empty words. You shall be made to realize that El Guapo's reputation for being an artist in revenge, as well as along other lines, is justly earned.

"Give me the wooden leg with which you kicked me."

"I will not!" howled Joe. "You can go to——"

"Less noise, dog, or you die." El Guapo—"the Handsome One"—pressed the point of a machete against my partner's stomach.

"I guessed correctly; you prize the leg very highly. Or perhaps you dread the humiliation of appearing in public as a limping cripple. No matter. Hand it over."

Joe emphatically and luridly refused, despite my advice to save his breath. He was still refusing when a pair of the brigands approached him from the rear and caught his arms. He jerked loose and knocked them into the cactus, but four others immediately wrestled him to earth. It took all of them to hold him, too, while El Guapo slashed at his trousers and unstrapped his lucky leg.

"Ah!" El Guapo held the limb aloft and squinted at it in the moonlight. "So you are not a *cojo?* You are crippled now, no mistake. And with this instrument you will never ill treat another *mendigo.* It will be the most precious memento in El Guapo's collection.

"Let him up, men."

Joe sat up. With a mocking bow, El Guapo handed him a crooked root.

"With the compliments of Catalino. Stand up for some of the same gallant treatment you gave him."

His attention was arrested by a whinny from behind the hedge on the left. A bunch of horses, headed by the magnificent Cornado, stood looking on curiously.

"Caramba!" hissed our captor. "Reeb's *caballo!* I must have that animal. A steed worthy of El Guapo!

"Still, gringos. I am not yet ready to have you give the alarm. Cut a gate, my bravos."

His followers obediently hacked away with their machetes until they had made a narrow opening into the pasture. Cornado, gentle as a kitten, was led forth with a rope around his neck.

"Now, Señor Redhead. And you, the plump one. Be off, and if one of you lets out a yell it means bullets for you.

"Patience, men. When I get through giving them the boot you shall have your turn. Pretend that you are *Americanos* showing charity to the poor."

I prefer to draw a veil over the occurrences of the next two or three minutes. When we were left alone with our bruises and our indignation, and hoofbeats had died away down a side road leading toward the river, I raced on to Ugalde's. There I borrowed a rifle and emptied it into the air.

Reeb came tearing over, accompanied by several of his mozos. They stopped when they came to Joe, lurching along and announcing that he would pay a million pesos, more or less, to any one who would recover his peg.

"Ye gods!" ejaculated Reeb. "Somebody has cut the man's leg off. He'll bleed to death."

"Oh, you double-jointed idiot!" groaned Joe. "Get after El Guapo. He stole my wooden leg."

"Wooden? I'll be blowed! Who'd have thought it, from your gait?

"What's this about El Guapo? That *ladron* fled to Sinaloa weeks ago. Besides, what would he want with a wooden leg? You're loco."

Joe tried to explain but his incoherence only confirmed Reeb in the opinion that my buddy had gone clean daft. Finally I dragged Reeb away and gave him the details succinctly.

"But why such a fuss?" he puzzled. "He can get a new leg, can't he?"

"Joe is—well, you might say he's superstitious about that particular leg. He thinks it's a luck charm, that it saves our bacon whenever we get into a jam, and that every little while it puts us in the way of making a piece of change. Sounds like nonsense, but darned if it doesn't seem that sometimes there must be something to it. Anyway, he believes it implicitly. He'd rather part with his good leg than with that substitute."

"Well, if El Guapo carried it away, he'll have to get along with another one."

"And you'll have to get along with another horse. Didn't I tell you that El Guapo took Cornado?"

"What!" If there had been a ceiling anything under twenty feet above, Reeb would have crashed through it. "That *cabron* rustled my thoroughbred? If you're not lying, his days of banditry are over. He never bothered me before, and I thought he had better sense."

"With two deadly avengers like you and Joe Bonner on his trail, I see where he's plumb out of luck. When do we start?"

"Now. Hey, Cosme Avenente! Where are you? Come here."

One of Reeb's peons, a bent, gray-whiskered chap in a tattered jumper, approached obsequiously.

"Your misbegotten nephew has gone too far this time, Cosme. He has stolen Cornado. Now you will lead us to his hang-out by the river."

"No, no, colonel!" faltered Avenente, piteously frightened. "I cannot do that. It is true that I am his uncle, but I have not spoken to the scamp since he disgraced our family by turning outlaw. I do not know where the place is."

"Fool!" Reeb shook him violently by the shoulder. "You'd better know.

"Come on, fellows. I can fit you out with horses and weapons. A small party will be best, I think, for a surprise attack. Most of these cowards would desert, anyway. But Cosme won't desert. Oh, no!"

Half an hour later we were on our way, armed with rifles and revolvers from Reeb's small arsenal. He rode ahead with the trembling Cosme, who continued to protest his ignorance of El Guapo's possible whereabouts until clouted over the head and warned to keep his mouth shut and not notify the whole countryside what we were about.

"Do you really think he knows something?" Joe inquired anxiously.

"Sure! Being a bandit captain's relative makes him a person of distinction hereabouts. He used to slip away to visit El Guapo regularly. He's a worthless idler and I kept him on the pay roll only on the off chance that I might want to use him some time as a guide or a go-between. Lucky I did. Have to be foresighted to get by in this country.

"El Guapo has escaped capture this long only because there's room for two or three armies to hide in the brakes along the Rio Yaqui. He has one favorite retreat, but the federals never had brains or nerve enough to find it. I'm playing a hunch that he has gone straight there. If not, our job of hunting him down has just begun."

"Maybe he has left my leg there, even if he has gone on," Joe speculated hopefully.

"Better can the conversation now," said Reeb. "Voices carry a long way in this stillness."

The jungle loomed nearer, until we could smell its humid, poisonous breath. Cosme, in the lead under Reeb's watchful eye, swung northward. We crossed many sandbars, some dry and bare, some damp and carpeted with lush weeds. We splashed through several sloughs and had more than one battle with quicksand that threatened to engulf us.

Scarlet dawn tinged the eastern sky when Cosme turned squarely into the forest on one of numerous faintly discernible paths.

"We'd have been completely at sea without him to guide us," Reeb whispered to me.

"Hey, Cosme! You understand, don't you, that one treacherous move, one squawk to warn anybody ahead, means death for you? Many times you have observed that Reeb shoots straight."

The Mexican nodded mournfully.

"I must obey your commands, colonel. But is there not a better way? I am sure that I can persuade my nephew to give up the horse of my *patron*. Why not let me go ahead and——"

"Help them lay an ambush for us? I am not a child, Cosme."

Cosme heaved a disconsolate sigh.

"He was a bright and lovable boy once, Rufo Avenente, my brother's child. It grieves my heart to be the agent for his undoing, even though I know that he has done wrong. Cannot you be merciful for this once, Colonel Reeb? That is, do not shoot him unless it is absolutely necessary to protect your life."

"Sure thing, Cosme. We just want our horse and leg, that's all. We'll spare the youngster—if he'll let us."

Reeb turned in his saddle and broadly winked one of his fishy blue eyes.

Parrots and other birds—crimson, yellow, green—fluttered among the lianas and moss in the palms and cedars that met over our heads. Their chatter completely drowned out the noise made by our horses, even the slaps of flailing branches against our faces. My hopes of a successful surprise, under cover of this feathered medley, began to mount.

Of course it looked like a foolhardy venture; three men against a crew of desperadoes known to number twelve or fifteen. My misgivings, however, were somewhat relieved by Cosme.

"I have a plan, *señores*," he said, reining in. "One which may enable us to triumph without bloodshed."

"Spit it out," Reeb invited.

The peon dismounted and drew a rough sketch in the mold.

"Here is a long *ramada*, a shed of palm leaves, under which Rufo's men eat and sleep. About it are several huts. At this end, to the south, is the corral where they keep their horses.

"Now we can easily slip through the brush and command the corral, where Cornado must be with the other animals. If the three of you will fire very rapidly and shout very loudly, the *ban-*

didos will think that a large force is upon them and flee in the other direction. Then we can take what we want and speed homeward."

"That's all right, if they don't flee with my leg," Joe objected.

"They will have no time to take anything except guns. As they think that their sanctuary is too well hidden to be discovered, it will be a very great surprise indeed."

Cosme's idea impressed me as sound strategy, but Reeb was oddly suspicious. He asked a thousand questions before giving a qualified assent.

"I don't trust the old devil," he confided to us, when our cautious advance had been resumed. "He intends to betray us."

"My opinion is that he is acting in good faith," I asserted. "His one thought is to save his nephew."

"You don't know these Rio Yaqui Mexicans," Reeb sniffed. "Natural born cutthroats, every one."

"Then why not gag him and tie him up as soon as we get the *ramada* located?"

"There's a simpler way to deal with him."

Soon Cosme stated that we were near our goal and suggested that we proceed afoot. Reeb frowned at Joe's empty stirrup.

"Never mind about me," said Joe. "We'll have to travel on our bellies, likely, and you fellows won't have any advantage over me. Anyway, a rifle makes a pretty fair crutch."

A minute or two after we had left our mounts, securely tied, Reeb called a halt.

"Cosme says that the camp's just this side of that tallest willow," he informed us in a husky undertone. "We'd better spread out—ten or fifteen yards apart, anyway.

"I'll give you boys plenty of time to get set. When you hear me shoot, that's the signal for the bombardment to begin. You can use your own judgment, but if I see any outlaws I'm shooting to kill. Above all, don't let them get to the corral.

"Better take this right-hand path, Bonner, because it ought to be the shortest. I'll keep to the center with Cosme. Wayland, you'll be our left flank. Not one unnecessary noise, now."

We nodded understandingly and went our separate ways. To pierce the almost impenetrable mass of bunch grass and ferns I had to drop upon my hands and knees. Gnats buzzed in my eyes and ears; mosquitoes sank their beaks into every unprotected spot; ants crawled up my sleeves and into my shoes; scorpions hoisted their tails menacingly; I itched at every pore.

A small hummock intervened, and there the going was easier. Upon attaining its crest I was able to stand erect glimpse a rude thatch of palm leaves.

I looked to my right, wondering how Joe was faring. He was completely out of sight, but through the interlaced foliage I perceived Reeb and Cosme stealing along like Indians.

Cosme held up his hand. Stealthily he rose to look ahead. To support his weight he caught at a twisted vine.

There was a sharp crack in the tree above, coupled with the shrill cries of startled birds. The vine came tumbling down, half burying him in a cascade of purple blossoms.

Such an expression of uncontrollable rage as overspread Reeb's ruddy face! He sprang upon Cosme like a jaguar. His machete flashed just once, in a shaft of sunlight sifting through the leafage.

Cosme never knew what happened to him. He sprawled upon the mucky earth, his head nigh severed from his body.

My rifle leaped to my shoulder. But I did not press the trigger, for I realized that to do so would disclose our presence to El Guapo and his band.

Sick at the stomach, I turned away. When I looked again, Reeb had disappeared.

Revolted and dazed, I almost blundered into a clearing. Just in time, I shrank back into concealment.

Thirty steps away was a stockade of poles and a pile of hay. I caught the sheen of Cornado's coat among the scrawny ponies that champed and switched flies inside.

The *ramada,* just beyond the corral, was exactly as Cosme had described it. No one was visible there except one man who seemed to be repairing a revolver.

Scarcely had I finished a cursory survey when Reeb's Winchester spoke. Joe was only a fraction of a jiffy behind him; then I got my artillery into action, but all my lead was directed straight up.

Over the corral fence hurtled a human form, and streaked for the palm thicket to the west. Under a broad sombrero were the swarthy features of El Guapo.

All that I had to do was to lower my muzzle and drill him through the heart; I could not have missed. I remembered the indignities to which I had been subjected by that debonair villain a few hours before; but I also remembered Reeb's pledge to the murdered uncle and withheld my fire until Rufo Avenente was lost to view.

The fellow with the revolver grabbed a rifle and sprinted for the bush, screeching as he went. Others bobbed up from here and there in various stages of deshabille, and they also made themselves scarce; all but two that fell victims to Reeb's deadly aim. A few shots rattled in the distance as the fugitives stampeded into the fastnesses.

Joe recklessly broke cover and floundered toward the shed. I was there before him. By the time we had located his leg, our six-shooters, and even our pocketbooks, in a hut that had evidently been occupied by El Guapo, Reeb had Cornado out of the corral and was yelling for us to follow him. The ponies were scampering to freedom through an open gate.

Whooping with delight, Joe replaced his leg where it belonged. We charged after Reeb, frightening every bird and beast in Sonora in our headlong flight.

When we overtook Reeb he was holding the reins of our saddle horses and still bawling for us to get a move on. Cosme's sorrel had been turned loose to follow its mates, but not Cornado.

Reeb hilariously slapped us on the back. Thinking of that corpse back in the undergrowth, I shrank from his touch.

"We sure did scatter 'em, eh? Three white men are equal to three hundred chili pickers any day.

"I hate to go away without El Guapo's scalp, though. Either of you see anything of him?"

"Not I," replied Joe. "Where's Cosme?"

"I had to kill the traitor to keep him from tipping off the *bandidos.* He blame near spilled the beans for us as it was. Knew all the time that the two-faced sneak was fixing to double-cross us.

"Anyway, I've got Cornado and the Guapo has two dead *compadres* to remind him to steer clear of Reeb's hacienda hereafter. What's a peon more or less?"

"And I've got my leg," jubilated Joe. "A million thanks to you, colonel. That sure was helping out a countryman in distress."

"Don't mention it. Hurry! Let's get out of here and celebrate."

We hurried. Breathlessly we plunged eastward for open country, fearful that the Guapistas would return and take our trail. Joe continually guffawed in triumph and relief over the recovery of his leg.

When we came in sight of the "castle," Reeb gleefully peppered a treeful of buzzards with his revolver, and began to croak a ribald song expressing his profound contempt of all "greasers."

"There's some hombre!" Joe chuckled admiringly. "Nerve unlimited. How the dickens am I ever going to repay him for helping us to get my leg back?"

"There's some murderer, you mean," I snapped, and briefly recounted the butchery that I had witnessed.

"You're mistaken, Pete," Joe contended stubbornly. "Reeb's an honest-to-John square shooter. He had to kill Cosme to save our hides. You say yourself that Cosme pulled a vine down and made a lot of racket."

"That was a pure accident," I maintained hotly.

There was no time for further debate then. Arrived at the house, Reeb turned Cornado over to a flunky for a rubdown. He escorted us into the patio, called for unlimited quantities of champagne to be brought up from the cellar, decided that the occasion justified something stronger, and switched his order to tequila.

With a quart of that brimstone essence apiece, we sat around the table and reviewed the glorious victory. Joe and Reeb vied with each other in fulsome mutual compliments and felicitations, and in thinking up scandalous toasts to El Guapo. Ugalde dropped in for a time, heard a greatly exaggerated story, and was dragged away by his wife.

We had a big lunch. By the time it was over, Reeb and Joe had well nigh emptied their bottles and were bosom pals.

"By golly, it's a treat to meet a couple of regular guys!" chortled Reeb, bringing his mighty fist down with a thwack. "Real Yanks, with Yankee guts.

"I'm glad all this happened. Yes, I am, 'cause I need help in a little deal and now I know you fellows are friends that can be depended on. Come with me."

As unsteady as he was grave, Reeb ushered us into the room where he kept his pottery collection. There was a modern spring lock on the mahogany door that he opened with a key from his ring. Inside, he pulled down all the window shades and lighted a candle.

"Better hold your eyes now, or they'll pop out of your heads."

He staggered to one of the large iron urns, gave its rim a twist, and off came a heavy circle.

We leaned over. At the bottom of the groove into which the detachable crown screwed part way, were several glittering objects.

Reeb fumbled until he hauled forth seven lustrous white pearls, as perfect gems as I had ever seen.

"What do you think of them? Pretty, huh?"

"You bet!" I agreed enthusiastically, accepting one of the jewels in my hand. "Where did you buy them? Must have cost a fortune."

"Didn't buy 'em, took 'em," he corrected with bibulous veracity. "What a man takes in Mexico is his—if he can hold it. Much mine as anybody's, by rights.

"Slick hiding place, eh? Not a sign of a break when the jar's all in one piece. The State police—haw! haw!

"Supposed to be worth thirty thousand pesos, but they'd bring a lot more than that north of the line in the U. S. A. That's where I want you to take 'em and sell 'em. Split fifty-fifty. You on?"

"Why don't you take them yourself?"

"There's reasons. Never mind. It'll be safe enough for you. Pay the duty; don't break any law. Then send me a draft for my half. I know you're honest—you'll keep your word."

Joe passed back the pearl that he had been fondling. Tears stood in his eyes.

"C-can't do it, Reeb. Not without double-crossing a friend. I'm no double-crosser."

"He means that they're too valuable for us to undertake the responsibility," I interposed hastily.

"'S all right! 'S all right! You boys got guts. You'll take care o' my pretties. Men o' your word."

"Don't argue with him now," I whispered to Reeb. "Can't you see that he's drunk?"

"All right. C-come out where it's cooler. We'll talk it over after while."

Reeb returned the pearls to their concealment. Joe was first out and I was last. While Reeb clamored for more tequila he looked back to make sure that I pulled the door shut.

He did not observe that I pressed one of the two little sunken buttons under the bolt, so that it could be worked by turning the knob.

It was not half an hour more before Reeb went entirely under, and I helped Gavino, his chauffeur and general house servant, to dump him on his bed. Joe had not drunk more than half as much as our host—partly because I had filled his glass with water at every opportunity—and so he could still walk fairly steady.

And I made him walk. Although he protested that it was too hot to stir, I herded him over to Ugalde's. While he snored in a chair I had a private conversation with Ugalde and arranged to borrow the flivver that had brought us out from Cajeme. Our baggage was deposited in the tonneau, I helped Joe to the seat, and we were off.

"What's all the excitement, Pete?" Joe yawned as we rolled through the gate. "Where we going?"

"Taking you for a ride to blow the cobwebs out of your brain cavity, you drunken yap."

The tires on that superannuated bus were as rotten as a mummy's shroud, and there was no spare. Scarcely were we past Reeb's when we had our first blow-out. Knowing that to drive on the rim over that road would be to break every spring, I patched the tube with a dinky patent vulcanizer and stuck canvas into the casing for a boot.

A little farther on another tire picked up a thorn. And so it went most of the way to Cajeme. I would have abandoned the wretched wreck and taken to shanks' mare had it not been for Joe's wooden leg and the jag that he was now sleeping off.

It was a little after four o'clock when we started, and I figured that if we could connect with the northbound train due at nine we would be all to the merry.

Dusk came and I switched on the car's feeble lights, which took their current from the magneto. We pulled out of the lowlands eventually and I breathed a thankful sigh as the lamps of the railroad station winked across the *llano*.

With a loud bang another tire blew out. Wearily I crawled down and yanked it from the rim. One more repair, I resolved, and we'd either finish on a naked wheel or Joe would have to walk.

It was now pitch dark. To have light I left the noisy old engine running quite rapidly, and carried the tube around in front.

I had reasons of my own for feeling a trifle apprehensive. Now and then I scanned the road behind. Once I thought I saw the flash of twin beams, but they did not appear again and I decided that I must have been mistaken. A lone Mexican jogged by on a mule, and a coyote yowled somewhere out in the wastes.

"Stick 'em straight up there, you lousy rats!"

I "stuck 'em up." I had to, or die.

There was no mistaking that rasping,

jarring voice. Moreover, Reeb's towering frame bulked in the gloom by the roadside. Clustered behind him were six or seven of his workmen, all with upraised rifles.

In my haste, likewise my confidence that Reeb was paralyzed for the night at least, I had been guilty of criminal carelessness. That flash had been his headlights, after all. When he saw the flivver he left his car, and the noise of our motor made it easy to approach rapidly without being heard.

"Hey, what's going on?" Joe inquired drowsily from the rear seat.

"Get down here, you sorrel-topped sneak thief."

Before Joe had fairly blinked his eyes open, Reeb hauled him forth, stood him beside me, and frisked us both. He took quite a long time at it, growling fervent curses, and evidently did not find what he sought in our pockets.

"Where are they, you contemptible sons of hop-toads?"

"Where's what, you triple-starred, double-dashed lunatic?" snarled Joe.

Reeb glanced at his mozos.

"I don't have to tell you pickpockets what I'm talking about. What I showed you in the pottery room. Produce 'em *pronto.*"

The accusation shocked Joe almost sober. And mad! Lord, but he was mad. He let out a yelp that could have been heard in Cajeme, I expect.

Reeb countered with a torrid blast of invective. He burned us up, particularly Joe.

"And after I risked my life to get back your leg, too. Got me pie-eyed and—— Wouldn't double-cross a friend! Oh, no!"

"I never double-crossed anybody," denied Joe. "If they're gone, one of your *criados* took 'em. Anybody that says I'm a double-crosser is a——"

"Shut up! Throw out their valises, Gavino. I'll find the plunder and then we'll all have some target practice. We'll fill the skunks so full of lead that somebody will locate 'em for a mining claim."

Reeb pawed through our spare clothing, hurling it right and left and trampling it underfoot. He ripped the lining out of the bags and probed about in swiftly rising fury. He poked at the machine's shreds of upholstery, emptied the tool box, peered into the gas tank with an electric torch.

I trembled in my shoes when he turned to us and ripped off our shirts, crushed them in his great hands and flung them aside. He forced us to shed our garments one by one until we stood as naked as kids at the old swimmin' hole. He even wrenched off Joe's phony leg and punched at the padding in the socket.

All this time Reeb was bellowing like an enraged bull, and Joe was bellowing right back at him. It was apparent that in another minute or two Reeb would be furious enough to give the word for "target practice" to begin. Nothing could save us short of the arrival of help, and help could come only by a miracle.

Perhaps the lucky leg was working for us. Joe says it was, and I am content to let it go at that. Anyway, a troop of cavalry from the barracks at Cajeme, out on some scouting expedition, suddenly materialized out of the night.

Reeb, who was making a second examination of Joe's pants, straightened up with an exasperated oath.

"*Qué pasa aquí?*" demanded a trooper in a captain's uniform. "Naked men! *Americanos!* What is the meaning of this, Colonel Reeb?"

"They're thieves," muttered Reeb, taken utterly aback. "They stole from me. I overtook them, and now I'm searching them."

"Yes? And what did they steal, may I ask?"

Reeb was in a jack pot right. Tell

a Federal army officer that we had stolen General Espinoza's pearls—from him! He could only bluster and rave.

"Go ahead, Reeb," Joe jeered. "Tell him what we stole. Or shall we tell him?"

"He's drunk," I declared boldly, gripping Joe's hand fiercely. "Too much tequila and *marihuana* smoke. He went hog wild and accused us of stealing something from him. Now he can't even remember what it was. This is a fine way to treat peaceful travelers. No wonder the people of the United States think that Mexico is a nation of bandits."

"What shall we do with him?" asked the captain. "Do you wish to file a charge against him?"

"You can just bet your home in heaven that we do," replied Joe.

"We do not," I contradicted, grabbing for my underwear. "Got too much urgent business up the line to fool around here. Do what you please with him, captain. Might be a good idea to lock him in the *cuartel* long enough to sober up.

"Come on, Joe. There's just time for us to catch that train. We can hire somebody in town to look after Ugalde's limousine and get it back to him in good shape."

To this day I don't know the outcome of the argument between Reeb and the cavalry captain. But I do know the outcome of a little confab that Joe and I had in a closed Pullman compartment on the ride up to Hermosillo.

The longer my buddy cogitated upon the accusations that Reeb had made, the vulgar epithets that he had heaped upon us while we stood powerless to resent them, the angrier he got.

"I didn't dream that he was that sort of a reptile," Joe raged. "You must have been right, Pete, about him murdering Cosme in cold blood. He ought to be prosecuted and shot for that."

"I'm willing to testify. We'll report the matter to the governor and leave it up to him."

"Such a foul-mouthed, dirty-minded cur! The idea of saying that I double-crossed him! I wish to the Almighty that I had. I wish we'd taken the pearls and skipped with them when we had the chance."

"Do you think that would have been square?"

"Square? Anything would be square with such a——"

"That's settled, then. Now take that brass plate off the calf of your wooden leg and look inside."

If you like Ernest Douglas' stories, look for more of them in future issues.

WHERE BULLFROGS COME FROM

LOUISIANA is the banner bullfrog State of the Union. Abounding in swamp and marsh lands, it markets two million frogs annually. Wherever the food connoisseur enters a restaurant in this country and orders bullfrog legs, he has the safer side of the wager if he bets that they came from Louisiana, producer of four million frog legs a year. Nor is that all. The State is so famous for the quality of this unique crop that Japan recently imported ten thousand Louisiana bullfrogs in order to populate the island kingdom with the aristocracy of frogdom.

In Two Parts
Part II

The Imperfect Crime

By W. B. M. Ferguson

Two men, who look exactly alike, come face to face in the subway. One is poor, the other well-to-do. The poor one is Joe Caskey, an automobile salesman; the other is Joe Bowker, an insurance man. Only Caskey realizes their resemblance. Though he puts the incident out of his mind, it fills his thoughts. Then their paths cross again. Caskey plans murder, and one night he drives Bowker into New Jersey to demonstrate a car.

Later, at the Bowker residence, a man calling himself Joe Bowker tries to climb in a window, arousing the watchman's suspicions.

Mrs. Bowker, who has been away, returns suddenly, and sees that her husband is different. Thinking he is deceiving her, she grows jealous.

The body of Caskey is found in a quarry, where the car has been wrecked. Cluer, a detective, has been tracing Caskey. His case now seems to be ended. But he gets a hunch that Caskey had a double!

CHAPTER VII—*(Continued.)*

CLUER HAS AN IDEA.

CLUER was afoot early the following morning, his first port of call being Rosenbloom's office. "What about this party you thought was going to buy the car that Caskey stole?" he asked. "Did you ever see him or hear his name?"

"How could I now when there never was no such party?" demanded Rosenbloom. "Ain't I told you Caskey only said that so's he could get the ottermobile?"

"But why that car particularly? If a man's going to wreck it and himself, why pick and choose?"

"Yes, but Caskey didn't mean to do that first off; it was only after he'd learned about Mrs. Whelan. And we don't know it was suicide."

"But we know he'd no intention of trying to make money out of the car," persisted Cluer. "He meant to abandon it, as we've proof. That being the case, why pick and choose? Wouldn't any old automobile have done? All he wanted was a method of transportation."

Mr. Rosenbloom put on his spectacles.

"That's now an idear, Mr. Cluer. Why take my best car, like you say? It ain't as if he'd had a spite against me. Caskey was always a considerate feller and he wouldn't now insist on killing himself with my best car. Yes, any old ottermobile would have done."

"Supposing he actually had a customer for it?" suggested Cluer. "It would have been quite possible for such a party to come here and for nobody but Caskey to know anything about him?"

"Sure, if he came around eleven at night. What's working in your head now, Mr. Cluer?"

"Never mind," said Cluer, and he left to make further inquiries in the neighborhood.

These proved fruitless, as he had expected. Previous inquiries had shown that no one had noticed or remembered Caskey leaving in the car, and now nobody could tell of any late visitor to Rosenbloom's place. Nor was any evidence forthcoming tending to show that there ever had been two people in the neighborhood who looked like Caskey. But Cluer was not discouraged and, with the good-humored patience of a veteran bloodhound, he went over to Jersey.

He went out to the scene of the putative accident, but here, though examining every foot of ground, he learned nothing new. It was too late now to look for finger prints on the wreck as it had been handled by scores of sensation seekers. Highly doubtful in any case if telltale prints had ever existed; a man who could stage that "accident" would not make a slip like that. If it was a crime, then this part of its execution was flawless. The only flaw in the case was the garters. But was that a law? Caskey might actually have worn a pair that did not match. Instead of an error it might be the finishing touch of a great artist.

Cluer saw the coroner's physician who ridiculed the idea of the accident having occurred at two or three o'clock. The thing was impossible and he gave many learned and technical reasons why. Cluer nodded patiently; he had expected nothing else, but it was his business and nature to make dead sure.

"Well, now, about that head wound, doc. Could it have been caused by anything else but a rock?"

Certainly. It might have been made by part of the car, though one could not be positive what had produced it or how precisely it had happened. But why these questions? Cluer gave an evasive answer and set sail for Center Street, his old professional home.

If Caskey was alive then there was somebody who was dead. No doubt of that. And this somebody must be missed somewhere by somebody. A man can't disappear without provoking some comment or inquiry.

But though Cluer gave an accurate description of Caskey to some of his old friends on the force, displaying an ancient photograph he possessed; and though he scanned closely a list of men reported as missing within the past forty-eight hours, he came on nothing to support his theory.

Nothing daunted, he went uptown and called on Caskey's old landlady, Mrs. Schmaltz, then on to The Winthrop and back to Columbus Circle where he caught Rosenbloom as the other was about to leave.

"Nothing doing about that trunk," he announced. "There's no sign of it now, if it ever was there."

"How do you mean, 'if it ever was there'?" demanded Rosenbloom. "It's gotta be, ain't it? Where else could it be?"

"Well, I don't know. Mrs. Whelan had only two trunks and she was evidently going to take them with her in a taxi, for they hadn't been sent and I can't locate any expressman who was to call. Those two trunks have been pretty nearly destroyed—nearly but not quite; there's enough left to show that they're hers. But there's also the remains of a brand-new suit case and that suit case was Caskey's. At least, it's packed with a man's clothes—or what's left of 'em."

"And the money, Mr. Cluer?"

"Not a kopeck. Not even the ashes of a dollar bill."

Rosenbloom looked pained and shocked. Then, after pondering the catastrophe, he put on his spectacles.

"But look here, Mr. Cluer. Why now should Caskey send a suit case to the flat and not his trunk? Where's the good sense in that, I ask you?"

"Well, you see, Caskey didn't have a suit case when he left his rooming house; he'd nothing but his trunk. His landlady's positive about that. And those clothes also were brand-new. We can tell that even if there's hardly anything left of 'em. They'd never been worn, Mr. Rosenbloom. So I figure that Caskey must have bought them and the suit case only the other day."

"I see. What you now might call a trousseau?" said Rosenbloom. "He buys now an outfit for his honeymoon and, the trunk not being able to hold it, he ships the outfit to his fiancy. But why, Mr. Cluer? Couldn't he now have checked it wherever he checked his trunk?"

"I guess he must have forwarded the trunk, called at some express office in the taxi," said Cluer, contemplating his ample feet. "I've got to locate the driver who took him, find out where Caskey went that morning before turning up for work. You say he wasn't late, so he couldn't have taken much time."

"Them things now couldn't have belonged to Mrs. Whelan's husband?" suggested Rosenbloom.

Cluer shook his head.

"I tell you, they've never been worn. And I've no reason to think that Mrs. Whelan was a grass widow. From all accounts she was entirely respectable and with no more money than she needed. Not a high stepper. Nobody seems to know much about her, where she came from originally, but she lived very quietly and apparently Caskey was her only real friend. No, I guess there's no husband in the background."

"Well, this is not so good about the trunk, Mr. Cluer. I hate to think of cash money being lost, but maybe it'll turn up yet. Meanwhile, we can't keep Caskey, poor feller, no longer on ice. Every day it costs money, Mr. Cluer. Like the realtors say, it's cheaper to buy a home than pay rent. So, as you insist on going shares on the expenses, Mr. Cluer——"

"I don't know that I do."

"What! Now, now, Mr. Cluer. Of course I ain't got no written agreement but I got a witness. You says to me, before that cop Browne, you says——"

"I know what I said. But I've no particular interest in helping to pay for the funeral of somebody I may never have met. It won't do any harm, Mr. Rosenbloom, to have your brother-in-law delay the ceremony a while longer. Yes, I mean Joe Caskey may be alive—but keep that idea strictly secret."

CHAPTER VIII.

NOT A DOUBT LEFT.

"THE low life!" exclaimed the dumfounded Rosenbloom when Cluer had finished giving his reasons for the astounding theory he had advanced. "Such a feller, Mr. Cluer!"

"I'm not saying it's so."

"But such a feller, Mr. Cluer! He now not only steals and wrecks my best ottermobile but he tries to get me to bury his victim free and for nothing! I never heard nothing like it. Why, now, Mr. Cluer, if you're right, this feller ain't not only a crook but a cold-blooded killer. And here I had him working right by me! Such an escape, Mr. Cluer!"

"Keep it under your hat," cautioned Cluer. "It's only a theory but I had to tell you. Yes, a cold-blooded killer, if I'm right. I didn't think Joe Caskey would finish like this, but you never can tell. First petty larceny, then forgery, then murder. That's the way it goes. Yes, a clever lad but not quite clever enough—if I'm right. And I tell you for a fact, Mr. Rosenbloom, that I'm hoping I'm not. I'd a million times rather help to put Joe Caskey in his grave than help to put him in the chair."

No one would have thought the middle-aged and rather corpulent detective capable of sentiment and romance, nor had he ever allowed either to interfere with his sense of duty; yet there had been a time when Cluer was both young and slender, when he had lived in an up-State town and gone to high school with Caskey's sister.

Well, she was dead now and in all likelihood she would never have known of Cluer's dumb adoration nor reciprocated if she had. And then fate had arranged it for him to hunt down her young brother. An ancient romance that had never come to flower nor prevented Cluer from becoming a widower with several children; still it had its place in his heart and it helped to explain why, though Caskey had no official record, Dan Cluer knew so much about him. It also furnished the real reason why he had intended to see that Caskey got decent burial, and why he hoped his theory was wrong.

Yet all this did not prevent Cluer from attempting to prove his theory, persuade him to lift his nose one inch from the new scent he thought he had struck. An old sweetheart's young brother or not, Caskey, if still alive, must be brought to justice even though it should mean the "Room with the Little Door." Cluer would have acted precisely the same had it been his own brother. If there were not men so constituted the law would cease to function.

The photograph that Cluer had of Caskey was possibly the only one in existence. It was an amateur affair, showing Caskey with a mustache, which Cluer had unearthed in the up-State town when he returned in his official capacity to take up the chase of the other.

As Caskey's theoretical victim still remained unreported as missing, this photograph, enlarged and with the small mustache deleted, appeared one morning in all the principal metropolitan papers. It was captioned, "Do you know this man?" and there followed a description of Caskey, but no name was mentioned. It was signed "Friend Bob," who offered a reward, and gave a box-office address care of the different papers, for information leading to his meeting with the picture's original.

At first the result of this enterprise was more ludicrous than informative, but Cluer had expected that. He received replies from, not only those who had actually known Caskey, but many who positively identified the picture as some one else. He even got letters from Mrs. Schmaltz and the janitor of The Winthrop. All this alleged information had to be examined lest he miss a grain of wheat among the chaff. And then at length he met young Anderson of the Empire Insurance Company.

"That's the picture of Joe Bowker, one of our outside men," said the youth. "If it isn't, it's a dead ringer for him. Lots of fellows at the office saw the resemblance but they thought it a double

or some kind of advertising stunt. Anyway, I decided to write and see. Is Bowker your friend's name?"

"Sure!" said Cluer heartily. "Joe Bowker, that's the name. Where's he living now?"

"Stratford, New Jersey. But if you haven't happened to meet him round town, and he hasn't seen this picture, it's because he's sick. He hasn't been to the office for over a week. Look here," finished the young man with sudden suspicion, "you aren't trying to string me? Maybe Bowker isn't really sick and this is just one of his selling dodges, eh? He's full of schemes like that."

"Nothing of the kind, son," said Cluer paternally. "He's an old acquaintance I lost track of when I went out West, and I want to get in touch with him. It's a matter of business, important business. I thought he was here in New York, but I couldn't find him in any directory and I didn't know where he worked. So I tried this stunt, having no time to waste, and I didn't want to give his name for special business reasons. I knew if he saw the ad he'd answer, recognize my name. No wonder he isn't in the directory if he's living in New Jersey. Ha-ha! Well, so he's sick, eh? Nothing serious?"

"It's flu," said Anderson. "He got it a week ago Monday; caught a chill."

Monday! The night of the tragedy, of the alleged accident. Cluer's hunch that he had struck the right trail was confirmed.

"Is he in hospital?" he asked, producing a wallet and fingering a yellowback.

"No, his wife's nursing him."

So there was a wife. Could a wife be fooled, too? What did Mrs. Bowker suspect, if anything? What sort of woman was she? So this was why nobody had been reported as missing. These thoughts, and others, engaged Cluer as he set out across the river.

In Stratford his first step was to look up a photograph of Joe Bowker, nor did Cluer have to do much looking. Indeed, as he walked down Main Street, one of the first faces he saw was the counterpart of Caskey's. It stared at him from a cabinet-size picture in the sidewalk showcase of the principal photographer. Cluer knew small towns and their ways, knew where to find the pictures of the leading citizens.

Yes, of course it was Bowker; the photographer told him so in answer to an adroit question. Cluer's hunch was right and young Anderson had earned his reward; this was Caskey's double, as like him as the proverbial two peas, and the long chase was shortening to its close. This was the last lap.

Cluer went down to the local police headquarters and introduced himself to Chief Johnson who, it developed, had gone to school with Bowker's father.

"Great Scott!" said Johnson when he had heard the tale. "Why, the thing's impossible! It couldn't happen." No, especially in a small town where nothing ever happened.

And then Cluer showed him the photo of Caskey.

"Still, I can't believe it," repeated Johnson, and walked to the window. "It's too incredible. But—well, come to think of it, there's one or two things. You see, Mrs. Bowker ought to be away by rights. She was to have visited her mother in Buffalo."

"Ah," said Cluer when he had heard the full account, "that clears up a foggy patch. Came back unexpectedly, eh?"

"And here's another thing," said Johnson in the same astonished, reflective manner. "It's inside information and I'd tell it in no other circumstances. I'm supposed not to know, of course. I've a relative in the bank, and he happened to mention it."

"Ah," said Cluer again when the tale was finished. "Transferred from the Thrift Account, eh? So he's up and

around even though he hasn't gone back to work?"

"Out to-day for the first time," said Johnson. "I don't think he'd a bad case of flu—maybe only a cold. I guess he'd have been out sooner if Mrs. Bowker had let him."

"I dare say," nodded Cluer. "Do you know anything of Bowker's movements on that Monday night?"

"Well, now that's another funny thing. I heard that he didn't get home until four o'clock in the morning and that he had to get in through a window. He said he'd lost his key—something that never happened to Joe Bowker before. They say he'd been on the loose, and I never knew him to drink. Why, he's one of the leaders of the Drys!"

"Must have been a surprise, something he hadn't figured on, when Mrs. Bowker walked in the next morning," said Cluer at length. "It's things like that that help to make perfect crimes imperfect. Well, now, chief, I guess there isn't a ghost of a doubt left. Of course, I can't serve a warrant, so that's why I came to you."

CHAPTER IX.

"WHY, JOE?"

JOE," said Mrs. Bowker at about the time Cluer was concluding his interview with Johnson, "there are one or two things I've been wanting to speak about, but I didn't like to bother you while you were ill."

Joe looked at her furtively over the newspaper he had picked up quickly when she entered the study. He had felt this thing coming, for, though her attentions had been unremitting during the past week—indeed far too constant for comfort—there had been something in her manner that warned him. Well, if he was unable to avoid this encounter, he must meet it.

"Fire away," he said, elaborately casual. "What's on your mind?"

Mrs. Bowker was drawing imaginary circles on the desk, a trick of hers that irritated mightily. It suggested too much thought.

"Well, Joe, what happened to the car? Where is it?"

"Why, it's sold."

"*Sold!* When? What did you sell it for? Why didn't you tell me?"

"I—well, I wanted it for a surprise. I wanted to have the new one here the day you came back. I traded the old one in part payment, took it in the day you left."

"In where?"

"New York. I couldn't have kept it a surprise if I'd got it through an agent here; somebody would have been sure to tell you. I wanted to surprise you with it."

"How perfectly sweet of you," said Mrs. Bowker. "So that's the explanation?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, Joe, you know I don't wish to worry you, and I don't mean to seem inquisitive, but really I'd like to know about that money."

"What money? I told you I wasn't paid for the car; I've simply traded it in."

"Yes, I understand; I don't mean *that money*. I mean all that money in your bureau upstairs, enough to buy two or three cars."

That was an example of how she opened a subject that reached one's vitals; apparently casual, apparently thinking of something else, seemingly more interested in drawing those infernal circles while all the time—— Well, what was she really thinking?

"You mustn't think I was prying, Joe; I just came on it now by accident when I came to put away your laundry. And naturally I'm curious."

Prying? Of course she'd been prying. No place was safe from her, nothing could escape those gray-green eyes that generally seemed to be looking

somewhere else. Could he himself never escape them? They had been watching him for the past week like those of a jailer—no, like a cat watching a mouse. Yes, that was it. A healthy cat and a sick mouse. And, if she had not displayed her claws again, he had a lively sense of their presence. They were there, even while she petted him, under the velvet paws.

"I think it's terribly foolish and dangerous to keep all that money in the house," continued the sweet voice. "I didn't count it, of course, but I'm sure there must be ten thousand dollars there. Ten thousand! Where did you get it, Joe?"

"Where do you think I got it? Where does anybody usually get money?"

"Well, I'm not prying or inquisitive, but I think you might have told me it was in the house. You used to tell me everything."

He felt like strangling her, but he smiled and patted the hand that was still busy with those maddening circles.

"I'd have told you, of course, if you'd given me a chance, or if you hadn't been out when I got back today."

"Oh, so that's why you insisted on going downtown? You mean you only drew it from the bank this morning?"

"Of course. You see I—well, I got a good tip on an investment last week, and I should have played it if I hadn't got sick."

"What stock is it, Joe?"

"Never you mind now, but it has Motors or Steel or Oil beat forty ways."

"But, Joe, why cash? Of course, I don't know much about business but wouldn't a certified check have done just as well and been ever so much safer? Isn't that what one always does in buying stocks?"

"Did I say this was a stock? No, my dear, it isn't. And there are transactions where only cash will do—such as diamond buying. But I'm not saying this is diamonds. Never you mind what it is; you'll know some day when you get the best fur coat that was ever seen on Main Street. I can't tell you about the deal now because it's a secret."

"You do love to tease me," said Mrs. Bowker. "But, Joe, what a place to put it in—hidden in one of your clean shirts! I just happened to examine the shirt to see if it required a button and there were all those lovely yellowbacks tucked inside. I never got such a surprise. What a place to put it!"

Joe laughed loudly, though he was feeling more murderous than mirthful.

"I'm the boy to fool the burglars. You never can tell and we might have a visit to-night. Things get round in a small town and it may be known by more than the bank that I drew all that money. I wasn't taking any chances."

"You're very clever," said Mrs. Bowker, with an admiring glance. "It's certainly the last place any one would think of looking. You must forgive me for thinking you didn't mean to tell me about it. I don't know what made me imagine it, but I got the idea the money had been there some time and that you were hiding it from me."

"What nonsense! Why should I hide it from you? As I've explained, I can't tell you about the business deal because it's a dead secret and I gave my word. But that's the only thing I have to hide."

"I'm so glad of that," said Mrs. Bowker, still intent on her imaginary circles. "Then who are Bunny and Blanche? You never told me about them."

"Bunny and Blanche? What do you mean? Is this a joke?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Bowker. She was looking at him now, looking with somewhat the same expression as on that unforgetable Tuesday morning. The claws were beginning to show at last. "It may be a joke but, if it is,

I'd like to share it. You never used to keep things from me, Joe."

"I'm not keeping anything from you. I don't know what you're talking about. Where did you hear those names?"

"Here in this house," said Mrs. Bowker, her smoldering eyes suddenly flaming. "And Carrie Esplen didn't tell me, either; *you* did."

"I? Why—why I did nothing of the kind! How could I when I don't know anybody with names like that? When did I mention them?"

"The first night you were ill, when you had a temperature. You talked a good deal that night in your sleep. Yes, a good deal."

His heart skipped a beat. So she had known all this time, yet never said a word until now. Oh, the slyness of her! She had been saving it up for him, awaiting the appropriate moment. What else had she heard? How can one provide against the babbling tongue of fever? Had he let drop anything about that most imperfect perfect crime?

"Yes, it must have been a joke," continued Mrs. Bowker, "for you laughed with the invisible Blanche and Bunny. Oh, yes, a very fine joke and I wish to share it. *Who* are these women, Joe?"

"There aren't any women, I tell you. If I really mentioned those names they —they're just figments of the imagination. Great John! is any one responsible for what he says in his sleep? You surely don't believe seriously that I actually know any one by those names?"

"Yes, I do believe seriously. Nobody could say all you said, even in sleep, unless there was fact behind it. These women are *real* people and one of them is that blonde that Carrie Esplen saw you with. You lied to me about that and I was fool enough to believe you. But now it isn't a case of what Carrie Esplen says, it's what you yourself said. And it can't be explained by claiming that there's somebody who looks like you. It wasn't your mythical double speaking; it was *you.*"

He made a gesture of assumed righteous indignation but genuine exasperation.

"Your infernal jealousy again, and after all you promised following your last display! You can't even wait until I'm fully better before starting another barrage of nonsense. Now I can't even mention some fictitious name but you jump to the conclusion that she's a rival. It's preposterous."

He continued for some time in the same strain but, unlike the former occasion, Mrs. Bowker did not begin to wilt and weep. Her eyes remained hard and bright, her mouth determined.

"Yes, I'm jealous and I've every right to be," she said, with a cold anger that he found even worse than her tearful periods. "I've been loyal to you, Joe Bowker, but you haven't been loyal to me. This sort of thing has been going on for some time, but I was fool enough not to see it. You haven't started to deceive me only now. My instinct was right, and I haven't been jealous for nothing.

"No, you're not going to leave the room. You can't run away from this; we're going to have it out. A whole lot happened the night I was away, a great deal more than selling insurance— a great deal you never meant to tell me about."

He shrugged and resumed his chair, forcing a resigned and tolerant smile. He must learn the full sum of her knowledge.

"You'll have to revise that story about a business engagement," said Mrs. Bowker, with an icy smile. "I happen to know how and when you got home Tuesday morning. One of the maids next door saw you, heard you talking with Officer Milligan and was curious enough to get up and look.

And she saw you climbing in the window. I dare say it's all over town that you'd been drinking, celebrating my departure. You a Bowker, the Sunday-school teacher, the pillar of the church! Well, the town would think you must have been very drunk indeed if it knew you'd lost, not only your latchkey, but got hold of some man's garter that didn't belong to you."

The garter! He felt as though a circle of fire were searing his left leg. The garter, that small flaw in the perfect crime which he had not discovered until that night when he came to undress. He had put it on when he arose because there was none other available; he would buy a pair first thing, throw this telltale one down a sewer or some place where it would never be found. No one could ever know he had it. And then, not only had Mrs. Bowker walked in, but he had been taken ill and been forced to go to bed. And yet some fools claimed that there was no such thing as luck.

He had hidden the infernal thing as best he could, having no opportunity to destroy it with those gray-green eyes surreptitiously following him everywhere, and this woman had found it as she had found the money. Oh, trust her for that! She had let him put it on this morning, conniving at his supposed secrecy, pretending ignorance. Curse it all! she was worse than any detective. And now what inference had she drawn from it?

"Where did you get that blue garter, Joe? You know you never had a blue pair since the day you were married. You always said anything but black was vulgar. It's very strange; you put on two black ones Monday morning, and a blue and a black one Tuesday morning. Why, Joe?"

"There's nothing strange about it," he said, trying desperately to remain cool and coherent. "A garter can break, can't it? One of mine snapped and—and a fellow at the office lent me one of his. That's all there's to it."

"But why should anybody lend you one? Why should you accept such a thing? Why didn't you buy a new pair?"

"Because I didn't!" he almost shouted. "Any more questions? You'd drive a person mad. Well, if you want to know the truth, I was drunk that night. Are you satisfied now? I met some old friends, went to supper with them. *Men* friends. One of them had a flask and he said it was ginger wine. I didn't know the difference and I believed him. They did it for a joke. The stuff went to my head. It knocked me silly, and it was a couple of hours before I could walk. That's why I was so late, why I lost my latchkey. Now that's the whole story—you've wormed it out of me—and it happened just as I've told you."

"And did it happen before or after the fire, Joe?"

"Fire? W-what fire?" He stared at her foolishly, balefully. "Fire?" he repeated. "What do you mean?"

"I mean the fire you talked so much about in your sleep."

"Did I really?" he said, and tried to laugh. "Oh, it must have been that business at the office I've been worrying over. We've been having a hard settlement case, a suspected incendiary job. Dirty business."

"Is that why you washed your shirt cuffs when you came home that night?" asked Mrs. Bowker naïvely. "You put on a shirt with nice clean starched cuffs and I find it in the laundry bag with all the starch washed out. Why, Joe?"

Why, Joe? If she said that again he—he would brain her. By George! he would. His head felt bursting. He was not well, and a fellow could stand only so much. The past week of strain, of physical, mental, and spiritual suffering had been intolerable. He couldn't invent any more lies, and what was the

use? She trumped every ace. If all this got out to the police—— And how many cards had she still up her sleeve?

CHAPTER X.

THE SURVIVOR.

"IT'S no use trying to make up any more stories," said Mrs. Bowker, as though she could even read his thoughts. "I'm tired of fiction and I want to know what really happened on Monday night. It had something to do with those women, Blanche and Bunny—or perhaps it's the one woman? Bunny's your pet name for her?"

He made no reply. He had none to make.

"Yes, it had something to do with that woman, Joe; with the fact that you're wearing a strange garter, with your washing those cuffs, with the fact that we no longer have a car. It had something to do with an automobile ride and a fire. Was it the big fire in New York that night?"

"Find out!" he exclaimed, as though stung to the quick, stung beyond endurance. "I've had enough of your infernal suspicion and questions. Go and cross-examine somebody else. Find out."

"Yes, you may be quite sure I'll find cried, her face suddenly congested. "The money you drew from the bank was to squander on that woman. I know it was. You were in her company that night. It's what I said at the first; you planned to get me away, you deceiver and hypocrite. You were out joy riding with that woman, *that's* where you were. And there was an accident or something. That was blood on your cuffs. I know it was.

"Yes, you may be quite sure I'll find out all about it, if not from you then from the police. You've forfeited all my love and respect by your treachery and deceit. Time and again I've asked for the truth and received nothing but lies. Lies, lies, lies! You're not the man I married but a changeling, an odious hypocrite and philanderer."

"You're crazy." He could think of nothing else to say.

"I have been but I'm not now. Let me tell you that you never had influenza. Doctor Strong said it was only a cold, but that you were on the verge of a nervous collapse. You'd worked yourself into a fever over something. He told me privately you must have been through some great mental and physical strain. I gave it out as flu because I was ready to protect you. I was ready to forgive anything if you'd told me the truth. But no; you continued to lie to your wife, the woman who was entitled to know the truth. And now if you still refuse to tell me the truth, everything about that woman and what happened Monday night, I say I'll make inquiries from the police. There must have been an accident, and they'll be able to find out all about it. Are you going to tell me or are you not?"

Escape! He must get out of this somehow, anyhow. And then, as she repeated her question and barred his way to the door, the tension snapped and his hatred, rage, and fear found expression in a sudden violent blow.

As she staggered and fell without a cry, with a look of wonder in the gray-green eyes, her head struck a corner of the desk and she lay still.

He looked down at her with a dull, unseeing stare. How ugly she appeared! Fancy any fellow, poor devil, being tied to that for life. And the Bowkers were supposed to be such a happily married couple. Ha-ha! Well, her infernal tongue was still at last. Dead? Another crime?

No, she was breathing; unconscious but very much alive. Simply a knockout that had been coming to her. She would come round presently only to find him gone. Escape, that was it; escape before she had time to tell anything to

the police. There was the money upstairs, the get-away fund. A new name and identity, let the police search for him as they pleased. He would make for Honduras where no extradition treaty existed. Away from this house and its memories, away from that infernal woman. Away for good.

He locked the study door behind him and went upstairs. Evidently the servants had heard nothing unusual for he met no one. But, once in his room, he could not find the money, not a single bill. That infernal woman must have hidden it some place else. Where?

He began to hunt. The search became frantic as failure persisted, and the inexorable ticking of the clock warned him of the passing minutes. He must get away before that woman regained power over her tongue. But what could he do without money? Curse her! what had she done with it? Where had she hidden it? Though lying unconscious, she still had power to hamper his efforts at escape.

He had worked himself into a fever, as on that tragic Monday night, and his search had degenerated into a mad orgy of disorder and destruction. He flung things here, there, everywhere, tearing or trampling them in senseless fury. The rooms looked as though a minor cyclone had struck them.

He felt as though from the first he had been the plaything of an amused and cynical fate. He proposed but it disposed. But, by George! in spite of fate or that woman, he'd find the money; he'd find it if he had to tear down the whole house.

Increasing darkness and the clock striking the half hour brought him to his senses. Five thirty! Why, in half an hour he would be summoned to dinner, and if Mrs. Bowker had not regained consciousness the servants would find her. But she might come round, they might discover her at any moment now.

Mary would go to the study door and, finding it locked—he could picture the ensuing scene. He must escape before that happened; he had been a fool to stay so long. Let the cursed money go; infinitely better the few dollars he possessed and liberty, than a fortune and jail.

Fate and that woman, by keeping him vainly searching for the money, had tried to lure him to his doom. It was their last throw and they had nearly succeeded. But he was sane now and he'd show them; he would escape, money or no money. They couldn't keep him, no matter what they did. Liberty, freedom! Away from this cursed town, this cursed house, this cursed woman. Away!

He was slipping down the street, merging with its shadows, when stopped by Police Chief Johnson and a somewhat corpulent stranger.

"Hello, Caskey," said the latter. "Where are you going and what's your hurry? And what are you doing here in Jersey?"

"D-doing? Why, I live here. And my name isn't Caskey. You've made a mistake."

"Well, maybe I have," said Cluer; "but let's see your garters."

"G-garters? What do you mean? Are you crazy?"

"Maybe," said Cluer again, "but I'm betting you haven't had time to change 'em. Let's see."

Despite the other's struggles the telltale garters were exposed to the light of a street lamp.

"One black and one blue," said Cluer. "You still deny you're Caskey?"

"Of course I deny it! And I'll have you punished for this outrage. My name's Bowker. Ask Chief Johnson here, if you don't believe it."

"That's right," said Johnson, and cleared his throat. "I'm very sorry, Mr. Bowker, but I've a warrant for your arrest on a charge of murder."

"Murder? W-what do you mean?"

"For the murder of Joe Caskey," said Cluer. "Bowker or Caskey, it's all the same. The two of you started out together Monday night and only one of you came back alive; so, as I say, whether Caskey killed Bowker or Bowker killed Caskey, it's all the same where the law's concerned. The survivor has to meet a murder charge, and *you're* the survivor. But, of course, you're Bowker; I just wanted to see how you'd react to Caskey's name. Apart from all else, Bowker—but we can talk it over later."

"You'd better come on down with us to the house," said Chief Johnson heavily.

And Joe Bowker, like a man dazed and broken by the last shattering blow of fate, gave a discordant laugh as he turned and walked numbly between his captors.

CHAPTER XI.

A WILD THEORY?

THE possibility that it might be Caskey's double who had survived the tragedy had occurred to Cluer, but he had never given it a moment's serious consideration, nor thought of it again, until Rosenbloom declared that the picture of Mrs. Whelan looked nothing like the woman he had seen with Caskey. That sent Cluer mentally backtracking, though he said nothing to Rosenbloom.

The possibility that Caskey was the victim and his double the murderer suggested itself initially to Cluer simply as a theory that might remove all remaining traces of "unreasonableness" from the case. For though Cluer knew the rule that once a man has turned criminal he may be capable of anything, he knew also that there is an exception to every rule.

Caskey might kill, as any man may kill in the heat of passion or the cold panic of fear, but Caskey, as Cluer thought he knew him, was not the premeditated-murder type.

Again, the incontrovertible fact that Caskey had been trying to go straight, that he had been working honestly for Rosenbloom, hardly squared with the idea of him being guilty of such a heinous crime. Still, one never can tell and Cluer was fully aware that, sentiment ruling, his wish might be father to the thought. Assuredly he did not want to believe Caskey guilty of the crime.

It was only a wild theory but, when Rosenbloom failed to recognize the picture of Mrs. Whelan, Cluer got a copy of the paper and went again to see Mrs. Schmaltz; and here the straw at which he had begun to clutch was transformed into something more substantial.

Caskey's ex-landlady stated positively that it could not be the picture of the girl who had called at the house. Unlike Rosenbloom, Mrs. Schmaltz had scrutinized the girl at leisure; hers had been no single passing look.

"Mr. Caskey's girl vas bretty, yes, but nod as bretty as dis," asserted Mrs. Schmaltz. "She vas also younger in der face, und a different type A vorking girl und younger, I say you. Nod more than eighteen, I dink."

Of course, there was nothing to prevent a man having two girls, even two blondes, especially as this one had not been near Caskey's house for some time. But would that be reasonable? Cluer did not think so. Caskey had no money to throw about in such fashion, nor time either. Further inquiry showed that he had been seen in the neighborhood of The Winthrop when, by all accounts, he should have been at Rosenbloom's. Cluer's straw became a plank, and then his meeting with Rose Delaney made it into a regular raft.

Miss Delaney was the girl who had called at Caskey's rooming house, and she introduced herself as the direct result of the "Do you know this man?"

advertisement, her visit preceding that of young Anderson of the Empire Insurance Company. She did not know Caskey was dead, nor supposed to be dead, for she had failed to see the subsequent small newspaper item that gave the name of the victim of the alleged accident. Her motive, like Anderson's, in communicating with Cluer was the very natural one of earning some easy money.

She told Cluer she had known Caskey for several months, an irregular meeting that developed into friendship. Once or twice she called at his home and they went to the park or the pictures. He was a morose fellow and would never take the padlocks off his pockets.

She had not seen him for weeks as she was now keeping "steady company" with a gentleman friend—a real spender, who objected to her walking out with any one else. Caskey had never written to her nor called her Bunny. So far as she knew, he had no other girl friends.

Cluer's next find was the chauffeur who had driven Caskey in the taxi that morning, and on his information the missing trunk was located at an express office where it was to be held until Caskey, who said his name was Jones, gave further directions concerning it.

To Rosenbloom's regret, but not Cluer's surprise, no money was found in it. Caskey was not rich, despite Rosenbloom's talk about the generous wages he paid. No doubt the few dollars found on the corpse represented Caskey's entire capital.

Would a wife not know her own husband? Cluer, like Caskey, believed that she would. Though two men were as physically similar as the two Dromios, something must tell her the true from the false if she were given adequate opportunity. Thus when Cluer learned about Bowker, that he had been sick for over a week under the care of his wife, he was practically certain that the surviving double was not Caskey. Mrs. Bowker had been given more than adequate opportunity to detect the false from the true and, unless a woman was an idiot, no man could deceive her in such circumstances.

No matter how remarkable the resemblance, no matter how much Caskey might have learned of Bowker's private life, he would betray himself in a dozen different ways if constantly under the woman's eyes for over a week. There were things he could not possibly know. Cluer based this belief on his own personal experience of married life.

The belief was sustained by his talk with Police Chief Johnson. Caskey had been an admirable forger and might have deceived the local bank as easily with his pen as with his physical resemblance to Bowker, but the sum of money of which Johnson spoke had been transferred from the thrift account and checked out almost a week before the tragedy happened.

Would Caskey have done that? Was it reasonable to suppose that he had visited Stratford in broad daylight and carried out the forgery while his intended victim was still alive? But then had it been reasonable it would have been physically impossible, for, as Cluer knew, Caskey had been working at Rosenbloom's that day. And, if Bowker himself had drawn the money, why? To take a flyer in some speculation, as he had privately informed the cashier? Cluer did not think so. No, the survivor was Joe Bowker; there could be no question of it.

"But what on earth was the motive?" the astonished and dismayed chief of police had asked. "Bowker has everything a man can want; he's rich, respected, happily married. He has everything that that poor fellow Caskey hadn't. Why should he want to change places with him?"

"Don't most of us want to change

places with somebody?" Cluer had replied. "We think life has given the other fellow a better part to play because we only see what goes on before the footlights and not behind the scenes. I'm betting that Joe Caskey had one great thing that Joe Bowker hasn't—freedom. I'm betting that Bowker isn't so happily married as this town thinks. Of course, Blanche Whelan was the motive."

"But—*murder!*" expostulated Johnson. "If he was in love with Mrs. Whelan, couldn't he simply have run off with her like any regular fellow?"

"And have the name of Bowker scandalized in Stratford?" asked Cluer, with a lifted eyebrow. "Human nature's funny, chief, and never funnier than in a small town. I'm a small-town man myself originally and I know. I'll say Bowker suffers from the small-town complex. His family's been the leader of respectability here for three generations and he'd rather commit murder than be thought guilty of anything that wasn't respectable.

"The point is he thought nobody would *know* if he committed this murder, while everybody would know if he ran off with another woman. Yes, it may sound funny but, believe me, many a crime has been committed for really funnier reasons than that.

"And here's another point," said Cluer. "You may bet your life that Bowker's insured. It wouldn't be respectable to leave his wife broke, yet he must have a good stake for the other woman. Well, he could salve his conscience with the insurance company; let them pay Mrs. Bowker for what he takes. That money he checked out would have been thought to be lost in some gamble.

"Lastly," concluded Cluer, "if he'd taken up boldly with another woman, would Mrs. Bowker have given him a divorce? Not on your life, if I'm judging her character right. He thinks he sees a fine chance of escaping all scandal and all possibility of his wife chasing him up, a chance of leaving a respectable and honored memory while he's away enjoying a new life somewhere else. That's how I figure it and I guess Bowker's own story, when he comes through, will bear me out."

CHAPTER XII.

THE IMPERFECT CRIME.

AND Bowker's story did bear out Cluer's guess. He told it in Chief Johnson's private room after being warned that anything he chose to say would be used against him and that his best course would be to send for his lawyer. There were no third-degree methods attempted and Bowker told his story without compulsion of any kind; indeed, he seemed anxious and relieved to get it off his mind.

"What's the use?" he said. "I know when I'm beaten. Those garters alone would hang me, and if you know I was with Caskey that night, then you know everything. Yes, I could make you prove it, fight the case to the last ditch—and I know my wife couldn't give evidence against me—but I've no fight left in me. What's the use of bucking fate? It was against me all through; *I* didn't make a mess of things, *it* did. Blanche Whelan's dead and I don't care now what happens to me.

"Anyway," he finished, with a bitter smile, "I'd rather be here than at home with that wife of mine. It's only exchanging one jail for another. I'll even be willing to fade out to get my freedom; it's the only way I'll ever get it."

Like the old Adam he put the whole blame on the woman, not Blanche Whelan but his wife. Her jealousy and eternal watchfulness had turned his love to hatred.

"Nobody knows what I suffered," he said. "She hid it from everybody but

me, and I was too proud to let any one know. She told the world we were the happiest couple that ever lived, and I agreed. I was afraid of her, for she has the devil's own temper under all that smiling sweetness. She watched me like a hawk while posing as a dove. I had to account for every minute of my time. From the first day of our marriage she never let me out of her sight, if she could help it, and she was always suspecting me of wanting to flirt with some other woman. I got fed up to the back teeth."

Whatever the truth of this, it is clear, as was shown later, that Bowker never became seriously involved with another woman until he met Blanche Whelan for the second time. It is clear also that Mrs. Bowker's only fault was excess of affection. Clear again that Bowker was a fundamentally weak character and suffered from more than a small-town complex. Small soul would be nearer the truth. He had not the courage to battle openly against his wife's increasing domination, to assert those natural rights for which he longed.

Then there was the question of environment and his heritage of ultra-respectability. There were so many things he wanted to do that he dare not do in Stratford, so many things he had to do because he was a Bowker. Even his marriage in a sense, like his position in the church, had been expected of him.

It is obvious that he had never loved his wife in the true sense of the term. Hemmed in by convention and bound by marital ties that galled, realizing that his youth was passing and feeling he had been cheated of the romance we all crave and regard as our just due, he met Mrs. Whelan, whom he had known in New York before she became a widow and he a benedict.

Such, at least, was his explanation; and in the same introspective and analytical manner, with plenty of excuses for himself and blame for others and fate, he went on to tell about his chance meeting with Caskey and how it had suggested the way out for which he was groping.

"I've always believed I could perpetrate a perfect crime," he said. "I knew others made mistakes but that I wouldn't. But if I'd never seen Caskey I should never have thought of such a thing. It was fate that put him in my way. Some damned inexorable fate, some power outside myself, seemed to force me into the thing. I'd never hurt any one in my life and physical violence was abhorrent to me. I never dreamed that some day I'd plan to kill a man in cold blood, not only plan it but do it.

"I can't understand it even now, and it's awful to think what may be deep down in us just waiting a chance to come out. Why, as Chief Johnson knows, I've always been a decent, law-abiding fellow, and now here I am suddenly a first-degree murderer! No, I can't understand it; I feel it must have been somebody else. But nobody else would have been worked on by fate like me."

It is curious to reflect that Caskey, who also thought himself the one and only person capable of achieving the perfect crime, had been even more "worked on" in a sense, for he had not sought out Bowker after their first sight of each other, where as Bowker had sought out him.

And thus it will be seen that all those incidents which Caskey attributed to luck were in reality the result of careful human planning. Curious also to reflect how Caskey had envied Bowker and how, noting Mrs. Whelan's wedding ring, he had assumed she was the other's wife.

Lastly there is the grimly cynical truth that each of these men, while pretending good-fellowship, was consider-

ing the murder of the other. And each thought himself highly original.

Having told how he had seen Caskey that night in the subway, and how, noting their remarkable physical similarity, the murder seed had been sown in his mind, Bowker went on to explain that he had noted the station where Caskey left the train.

"I knew he must live somewhere in that neighborhood," he said, "for it was too late for him to be going anywhere but home. I'd been to a show with Mrs. Whelan, for it was one of the nights when I was supposed to be working late."

He then described how he had hunted Caskey down.

"I knew that all I had to do was to stick around that station until I saw him again, but as he went to work early and came home late, and I knew nothing of his movements, seeing him again was far harder than I thought. But, as my work was outside and I wasn't tied to the office, I'd plenty of opportunity to scout around. And I finally located the place where Caskey worked, not by seeing him again and following him there, but by somebody mistaking me for him and giving me the clew to Rosenbloom's place."

Cluer asked at this stage if Mrs. Whelan had known anything of the contemplated crime, and Bowker stated vehemently that she had not. She had agreed to an elopement, and she knew he meant to change his name, but she would never have consented to murder. She had not noticed Caskey that night in the subway and was ignorant that such a person existed. Cluer was somewhat skeptical of all this, though he said nothing. He had formed his own opinion of Bunny.

Further evidence of the care and cunning Bowker had displayed in planning the affair was shown by the incident of the suit case sent to The Winthrop. Any missing baggage or clothes of his own could not fail to be noted by his wife. He had overlooked no detail.

"As for the automobile," he said, "of course the model I ordered from Caskey was exactly the same as one I owned; that's one reason I was particular about those extra fittings. Under an assumed name I arranged to sell my car to a dealer in the Bronx, and I did it the day my wife left. Of course, she didn't know anything about it, but I had to tell her to-day."

"You mean," said Johnson, "that Rosenbloom's automobile would be thought to be yours?"

"Of course. Mine was pretty new anyway and, after a smash-up and fire, nobody could tell the difference. And it would be thought, you see, that Caskey had got safely away in Rosenbloom's car. The disappearance of it would account for his disappearance."

"What about the license number?" asked Cluer. "That wasn't damaged so badly. We were able to make it out and it was Rosenbloom's."

"Yes," said Bowker, "but I'd planned that it would be mine. And for a time it was mine, just as for a time I was Caskey. Oh, I didn't forget anything; it was just luck that beat me—a malignant fate."

This brought him down to the actual night of the tragedy and, recounting his movements, he told how he had gone home in the evening as usual, left Stratford in his car and with the money from the bank in his pocket. He had turned the automobile over to the Bronx dealer and then gone to Rosenbloom's about eleven o'clock.

To Cluer there was little or nothing new in the recital of the crime; of course Bowker had carefully selected the scene beforehand, making experiments in his own car, while Caskey had never been over the route. At least, he had professed ignorance of it to Bowker.

A sudden blow knocked Caskey un-

conscious and then Bowker jumped from the car when it was headed for certain destruction. That part of the scheme worked perfectly, and indeed, the whole affair would have been without a flaw but for Mrs. Whelan's death. Bowker could claim with truth that fate had been against him.

"The whole thing for which I had planned and worked, for which I had even done murder, was suddenly snatched from me beyond recall," he said. "I loved Blanche Whelan and freedom without her meant nothing. When I learned that she'd been killed I thought I might as well go back to Stratford as anywhere else. My heart was broken and I didn't care."

This might be so, but one is permitted to think that the tragedy brought to Bowker a realizing sense of values. Why sacrifice his position now, become a respectable and honored memory for nothing? Why give up a good home and income, the security of his place in society, and become a flung stone? For a heartbroken man he had displayed a lively care for his own comfort and skin. One can see here plainly, if never before, that his marital yoke was not the prime factor in the crime, though it undoubtedly played its part. But if it had galled him as he claimed, he would not have returned to it. Stripped of its euphemisms and fictions, the motive, as Cluer held, seems to have been the very ordinary but powerful one of an infatuation for another party.

"So," said Cluer, "after having changed clothes with Caskey, down to the last stitch, you went and changed back again?"

"Yes. It was awful but it had to be done. I had to go back to the quarry hole and go through the thing again. It was then I made a mistake about the garters."

"And that letter from Bunny," said Cluer.

"Yes," agreed Bowker. "I forgot to take it out of the pocket when I put Caskey's clothes back on him. It's only a wonder I didn't make more mistakes than that, feeling as I did. I lost my latchkey, too. I could do the thing right once, but I never counted on having to do it twice."

Dan Cluer, when relating this strange case of the two Joes, always ends up by saying:

"And I tell you I felt all along that Joe Caskey couldn't do such a thing. He wasn't the premeditated-murder type. I felt it, and I was right."

But was Cluer right about Caskey's type? Had Caskey simply been forestalled by Bowker's action? Was his prayer answered and had he been delivered from evil, from murdering Bowker, at the cost of his own life? Did he die that he might live?

Did you enjoy this mystery tale? Soon another story by W. B. M. Ferguson will appear in this magazine. Watch for it.

A RARITY AMONG HOBBIES

THERE is in Washington a government employee whose hobby is the collection of menus of the last meals eaten by condemned men and women before being executed. He has ridden the hobby since his youth, but cannot explain why he took it up, except that he was interested in the subject from the first time he read about a legal execution.

HEROES — AND HOW!

By Fitzhugh Green

Creator of Grogan and Mitten

The two gobs—one big, one little—quite unexpectedly risk their lives to save each other

PEACE seemed at last to have descended upon the life of big Ed Grogan, seaman first class, U. S. navy. For three weeks Grogan had managed to exist without a single battle of any sort. He was getting along well with his shipmates and his division officer. He had had no narrow escapes from death. His wife had sent him two cheerful post cards from San Pedro; and Mr. Epstein of South Brooklyn had written that the last three dollars on Grogan's fifty-dollar loan was not due and payable for another fortnight.

What was more, there seemed likely to be no change for some time to come —which, of course, was just the very moment when a wild skate like Ed Grogan ought to have been on the lookout for disaster.

Even the navy department had unwittingly conspired to make his life simple and pleasant. There he sat on the sun-warmed forecastle of the U. S. S. *Dixie,* station ship of the navy's submarine base at New London. The *Dixie* had not seen blue water for six years. She was training ship for the Submarine Officers Diving School. From her ancient decks one shiny "loot" after another learned to wear a bronze helmet and rubber diving suit which enabled them in turn to walk about the bottom of the Sound at the end of a rubber hose.

Ed Grogan, he of the long back and powerful shoulders, was chief pumper. His job was to wrangle a crossbar slowly around in the guardian launch that the trusting young graduate of An-

napolis might get his life-giving air while prowling with the lobsters over the ocean's slimy bed.

At the moment Grogan was polishing a holding-down bolt that helped secure one of the diving helmets to its suit.

"Wonder how it feels to go down in one of these things," he ruminated.

At this a slight figure lying at his side and also wearing a seaman's uniform stirred so that a white canvas hat fell from its owner's face, baring a pinched and freckled countenance to the noonday glare of the scorching August sun. "Little" Mitten, Ed's pal in the fleet, had recently joined the *Dixie* as an extra deck hand.

"Hunh?" he queried sleepily.

Grogan apparently took the grunt as sufficient encouragement to continue.

"Must be a great feeling to be walking down there among the fishes. Sorta spooky, though. All dark, and you might run on a deader."

By this time Little Mitten was sitting up. His big friend had been too silent of late. No fights, no new ideas, no excitement of any sort. Perhaps the present discussion might lead to something. He grasped at the straw.

"Say, Ed," he asked, "do deaders sink?"

But something more gripping than dead men on the sea bottom was beginning to take shape under Grogan's vertical black hair. Energetically he wiped his mouth with his huge hand.

"Know what I'm going to do?" he burst out.

Little Mitten's face brightened until its scablike freckles fairly shone.

"Nope," he responded eagerly. "What?"

"Going down in one of these here things the first chance I get."

"Without learnin'?"

"I'm learning every day."

"How?"

"Watching officers do it."

Mitten's voice fairly shook with anticipation. He felt that the change from drab monotony of routine was at hand. It usually happened so when Ed got an idea. He didn't always mean his ideas to stir things up, but somehow they always did.

"An' askin' no permission?"

Mitten was bound to wring the last drop of promise from a situation so full of potentialities. Inside him he had a creepy feeling already. It would be dangerous enough, he knew by daily observation, for an untrained man to go down in a diving suit without proper supervision. To take such a chance without even official sanction was a deed so daring that for the moment he felt impelled to protest. But before he could speak Grogan rose to his full six feet and more, walked to the rail and peered down in the dark depths below.

"Easy enough," declared Ed. "That is, for a man like me," he added. He turned on his pal. "What say, Mitt?"

Little Mitten assented with the meekness of a man who knows it is futile to argue with a lunatic.

Grogan's chance to carry out his perilous plan came the very next day. As heavy fog blanketed the Sound the routine diving class was called off. This freed Grogan for dock patrol, for which Little Mitten chanced already to be scheduled.

The duties of the pair consisted entirely of standing about the boat landing with leggins and nightsticks, in the vague hope that some one might break the law and afford them the exquisite pleasure of using their authority. But since the soupy fog had practically stopped all boating, and as there wasn't any one around besides themselves even to tamper with the law, both Grogan and Mitten soon relapsed into dreary silence. They sat illegally, being on duty, upon a large bale or bundle addressed to the *Dixie*.

Mitten, glancing down between his knees, idly read the label on the bale:

"'One diving suit——'"

"How's that, Mitt?" grunted the other.

"It says we're sitting on one diving suit shipped from the Navy Yard, New York, to the U. S. S. *Dixie*. The date is——"

By this time Grogan was on his feet. Even his slow-moving mind instantly divined that here might just possibly be the chance he had been waiting for.

They dragged the ponderous, burlap-covered bundle into the shelter of a small coal shed that filled one end of the dock. It was a matter of but a few seconds to cut a few of the twine stitches, revealing the folded diving suit within.

Mitten suddenly began to be troubled by his conscience. "Gee, Ed," he said timidly, "suppose they found us fooling with it?"

Grogan lowered his knife.

"Well, ain't we just taking a look? I ask you, ain't it our duties to investigate shipments and make sure they're sent to the right ship?"

"Sure. But this one says it's a diving suit and it's addressed to the *Dixie*, the only ship here."

Grogan shook his head in disgust.

"Dumb," he countered in a tone of profound contempt. "Absolutely dumb and—and unresourceable. Say, Mitt, didn't you ever hear of a label being wrong? And with all that fog out there, mightn't there come a whole fleet of warships and anchor, with you or me knowing nothing about it?"

For a moment Mitten was tempted to criticize the speciousness of this argument. But when Grogan drew out the contents of the bale, curiosity got the better of him.

It was a fine new navy diving suit of latest design. The rubber fabric of which it was made was of a soft, creamy texture that could not possibly impede the progress of the wearer. The helmet was packed in soft wrappings beside the suit and fairly sparkled in its pristine freshness. Evidently the whole rig had just come from the manufacturer and probably hadn't even been given more than the shop tests.

Grogan stood up, holding the suit against his tall body and broad shoulders. "A fit," he murmured raptly. By his tone Mitten knew the spell of romance was upon his friend.

With his small pal's help Ed Grogan began to dress the part of a deep-sea diver for the first time in his life.

"Want to try this helmet, too?" queried the former when the milk-white costume finally covered Ed to his neck.

"Sure!"

Ed sat on a bag of coal and helped in front while Mitt tugged at the heavy metal headpiece from behind. As the thick glass window permitted vision on the front side only and since Mitten's mechanical knowledge of diving suits was slight, the task took some little time.

Once the helmet was over the big man's head, conversation went on through a short length of rubber hose that had been left attached to the air vent.

Just as Mitten got the helmet locked he heard voices out on the dock. He grabbed the hose and hissed into it:

"Boat in, Ed. Wait until I see what they want."

It was the *Dixie's* mail launch. The mail orderly hurried up the dock, but the launch lingered. Its coxswain leaned out and shouted up at the patrol:

"Hey, Grogan."

Little Mitten leaned over.

"Ed's away for a minute," he said. "Can I do it?"

"Right. The O. D. says you guys are to return with us now for dinner. Soon as the mail orderly is ready, we'll shove off. Tell Ed to get a move on."

Mitten hurried to his friend. He saw that, due to lack of time, they'd have to

leave the suit in the shed until they came back, so that it could be repacked.

He found Grogan awkwardly reaching for the rear bolt of the helmet.

"Got to go aboard for chow, Ed," Mitt sent down the tube.

Muffled words came from within, borne on a jet of warm, sticky air.

"All right, Mitt. Now get this thing off. It's hotter'n hell."

First Mitt loosened the fastening. Then, putting his arms around the headpiece, he tugged gently so as not to damage his friend in case it slipped. To his surprise the helmet did not budge.

"Come on, Mitt," trickled through the tube. "Get it off."

Mitten now embraced the headpiece and threw his weight upon it. The result was unnerving. Grogan, powerful as he was, had not expected this sudden attack. Consequently he was thrown heavily from the coal bag on which he sat, and sprawled across the floor. Mitten fell underneath the ponderous metal dome; for a moment he thought most of his ribs were broken.

As he struggled, gasping, to his feet a sharp fear stabbed him. Grogan was stuck in the diving suit. Could he escape without outside help? If not, there'd be the devil to pay.

Custardlike profanity now oozed out of the rubber hose. It was some moments before Mitten could get his mouth close enough to say:

"Brace yerself, Ed. She's mighty hard on."

More hot language in vicious form.

But the tussle was in vain. With Grogan's sweating hands on the helmet and Mitten's straining arms around it, both men twisting with all the strength they could apply under such awkward positions, there came no success. Ed Grogan was a prisoner in a one-man cell.

Suddenly Grogan reached out and seized a handful of flesh and clothing in Mitten's short ribs, with a grip that caused the latter to squeal in pain. With this help Ed rose and crossed the shed floor, appearing in the dim light like some monster that might have descended from the planet Mars. When he reached the wall he drew back a pace, then threw himself against it so that the helmet struck with a crash that shook the whole structure.

He sat down abruptly, no doubt a little dazed by the concussion. He motioned to Mitten to give her another try. But this whole scheme, like the other, proved abortive.

In a panic Mitten thought of going to the ship for help; as a last resort a gunner's mate could be brought in. But such a course must only lead to ridicule by his messmates and disciplining action by the authorities.

More language was dripping out of the tube. Grogan held its mouth toward Mitten much the way a deaf old lady holds out her ear trumpet.

"Go get a wrench and a hammer, Mitt."

"All right, Ed. I'll see what I can do."

But even as he said it Mitten's heart sank. He heard the hail of the mail clerk. It was time to return to the ship. He dared not divulge Grogan's predicament either to the clerk or the coxswain, as it was their sacred duty to bring shipments out to the ship. They were both petty officers and might find little sympathy for a seaman in foolish trouble.

He seized the tube end.

"Mail clerk's back, Ed," he shot into his unhappy friend. "I'll say you don't want no dinner. And I'll bring some tools when I come in."

What fiery retort Grogan had for this cheerless bit of information Mitten gladly missed by the simple method of running out of the shed and hopping aboard the launch.

"Guess Ed'll get some chow ashore," he told the coxswain nonchalantly.

"Likely get in a jam, too," growled the coxswain. "Patrol's supposed to stick around."

"Right," agreed Mitten pleasantly, and began to whistle to keep up his courage.

Mitten planned to take the very first boat back to the dock that he could catch after dinner, and take with him by hook or by crook the tools with which he could get the helmet off poor Grogan. He felt his big buddy was in no great danger of his life. Still, he knew that suffocation might follow if anything happened to the hose. Anyway, official vengeance would be swift and sure if Grogan was discovered wearing the suit.

However, Mitten was delayed at the ship by an unexpected accident. During his meal the sun had come out and burned off much of the fog. As he came on deck a commotion aft drew his attention. The officer of the watch stood at the gangway motioning wildly to a motor launch astern.

"Come alongside quarterboom!" roared the officer.

At the same moment a messenger darted down the deck and disappeared in the direction of Sick Bay. Ten seconds later two men with a stretcher ran out of the superstructure.

"Somebody must 'a' been hurt," thought Little Mitten, and quickened his step.

The skipper was there and the executive officer. A group of men stood at the rail near the starboard counter. Behind them were many more men—most of the ship's company, in fact.

"He'll be dead," Mitten heard some one say, in the buzz of low conversation that was recurrently punctuated with sharp orders and the clatter of gear or the creak of tackle.

"Sure, drowned."

It developed that a man had gone down in a diving suit to clear the *Dixie's* propeller of a line that had fouled it. Now something had happened to foul the air hose and the man had signaled that he was suffocating. But when those in charge attempted to draw him up the diver could not be lifted. It was not until the launch came alongside that the imperiled man was freed and lifted toward the surface.

Mitten prayed that Grogan was not only still safely above water, but that he was having the good sense to keep out of sight. Any crazy attempt to try his luck overboard was sure to end fatally.

"Where is that new suit?" asked the skipper loudly. "Wasn't it supposed to be here yesterday?"

Mitten pricked up his ears.

"Yes, sir," replied the executive. "Should have been on the dock this morning."

For an instant Mitten was tempted to step up importantly and say that it was. Then he thought better of the idea.

The skipper snorted. "Outrageous not to have a single spare suit available!"

The diver was unconscious when his helmet came off. But he was quickly revived by the ship's surgeon.

When the strain had cleared a bit, the executive officer's feelings, which had been bruised by the skipper's public reprimand, broke out in angry remonstrance to the senior diving officer.

"Nearly lost a man. Would have been culpable negligence, too, if we had. Some one has been tampering with that suit!"

The diving officer nodded agreement.

"Yes, sir. Probably one of our ambitious young student officers has been trying to see what makes the wheels go around."

"Well, it won't happen again," barked the executive. "From this moment on it is a court-martial offense for any one to tamper in any way with a diving

suit. You can publish that order at once. And I think I can assure the guilty man of jail!"

"Aye, aye, sir."

With this ultimatum the executive turned sharply on his heel and strode away, almost running over Little Mitten as he did so.

With sinking heart Mitten caught the first boat ashore. He had managed to secure a helmet wrench and a book of diving instructions from the gunner's mate's locker on the main deck. He carried these wrapped in an old sweater which the officer of the deck tried to separate him from on his going over the gangway.

"I got a bad cold, sir," lied Mitten. "Might need it when it gets dark."

He found Grogan sitting disconsolately among the coal bags, still all dressed up and no place to go. The monstrous apparition that rose as he entered startled Little Mitten for a moment. The white suit and massive helmet combined to make Grogan an impressive spectacle.

"Ed'd scare the fish, all right," he thought as he came forward, holding out his package of help. The next instant Grogan grappled him with the clutch of an octopus. A loud booming came from within the vapored window at the front of the headpiece Mitten seized the hose and held it up so he could hear.

"Why did you take so long? I'm *dying!*"

"If you are you don't feel like it!" squealed Little Mitten, struggling to loose himself from the tormenting grip that held him.

"Why did you take so long?" came through the rubber hose again.

"Lootenant Ellis near drowned. Some one had been fooling with his suit."

Suddenly the executive's words shot into Little Mitten's mind.

"Hurry up, Ed. We gotta get it off quick. The first luff says he's going to give a general court to the next fellow he finds tampering with a diving suit."

"Well, ain't I been waiting here for you to help me? Who's to blame?"

"I——"

"*You* are. You're the one that's kept me here. Just let 'em try a court and see who gets it in the neck!"

Instinctively Mitten felt that Grogan would be as good as his word. Made no difference who had put the suit on, it would turn out Mitten's fault. The thought hurried Mitten's fingers as he turned to the diagram of a diving helmet in the instruction book he had brought. Grogan towered over him, one-eyed and vindictive.

"You got to come outside," Mitten said presently. "I can't see nothing in here."

He took a look out on the dock. It was clear.

Over by the door Grogan seated himself again. The convulsive movements of his hands revealed the awful anguish that existed inside the hot helmet. Once he seized the book out of Mitten's hands and tried to read through the glass. But his hot breath kept the thick window too clouded to make out a word.

Presently Mitten laid the book down and took up his wrench.

"I got it now," he called hopefully through the hose. "We been trying to turn it the wrong way."

The monster before him bowed its dreadful head and clenched a threatening fist.

Mitten opened the wrench until it fitted the nut at the back, pushed it on and braced himself for a last effort.

"Don't flop, Ed," he called through the tube.

"Trying to be funny?" came sarcastically back.

But there wasn't room for the trick. The narrow door prevented both Grogan or Mitten from getting their legs

properly braced. Inside it was too dark. Out on the main deck was the only place that would do.

Mitten passed this fact to his suffering buddy and went out for a good look around. The fog had settled down again. There wasn't a boat in sight. And, while there were a good many launches about, none seemed headed toward the dock.

This time they stood by the edge where Grogan could get a firm hold on one of the piles that stuck up several feet through the decking.

"Ready?" from Mitten.

The milky-skinned monster bowed its head and took a firm grip on the pile.

Little Mitten mounted the dock's coaming and braced himself for a moment. Then with all the drive he could put into his legs he swung sidewise on the wrench, at the same moment jerking his knee against Grogan's leg to indicate that the latter should hold stiff.

The attempt might have been a success had not the wrench slipped. For a moment the casual observer of the strange struggle might have thought Little Mitten was going to plunge overboard. Indeed, he would have, except that instinctively he let go the wrench and flung himself like a football tackler against Grogan's stiffened legs, catching them in a viselike grip. The precious wrench splashed into the Sound at least fifteen feet from the dock.

Before either man could recover himself the chug-chug of a marine motor issued from the murk and a white launch swung in for a landing.

There was no time for argument. Apparently Grogan heard the boat, too, for he strode crouching across the dock back toward the protecting coal shed. Before Mitten could prevent him he crashed blindly into the door, rebounded, then fled to the pile of coal bags.

Mitten seized the rubber hose that led from the helmet.

"It's the diving officer, Ed," he called as loud as he dared. "He'll be looking for the suit. Remember it's a general court. Lie down."

Obediently Grogan sank to the floor. In a frenzy Little Mitten picked up handfuls of coal dust and scattered them across the heaving body of his shipmate. In a few seconds Ed Grogan, though clad in one of Uncle Sam's finest and newest diving suits, could not be distinguished from the surrounding coal bags save by a scrutiny far more than casual.

"Where's that patrol?" the diving officer was saying when Mitten emerged from the shed.

"Here, sir." Mitten saluted with all the conciliatory smartness at his command.

"What are you doing in there?"

"Nothing, sir. Only—only I just thought I heard somebody in there, sir."

The officer shot a suspicious glance at the door, then eyed the little seaman again.

"Where's the other patrol? Have you seen anything of a diving suit? Or a large package or case addressed to the ship?"

"Not at all, sir," said Mitten promptly. And when this seemed not to impress the officer favorably he added: "I believe there was a delivery man down here this morning, sir."

"Did you hear me ask you where the other patrol was?"

"Yes, sir. No, sir. He'll be back in a minute, sir." Mitten was getting excited now. He thought he heard a movement in the shed behind him. He knew that Grogan couldn't hear very well, if at all. It would be terrible if he suddenly appeared. Involuntarily he shot an apprehensive glance over his shoulder. His anxiety was not lost on the diving officer.

"I'll have a look," said the latter.

In a fever of apprehension Mitten followed him to the door. When they

reached it Mitten made a remark in a loud voice. Plainly he could see the rubber-clad shoulders of Ed Grogan among the bags, camouflaged but far from invisible.

"Hum-m," said the officer.

Apparently the sprinkled coal dust had done its work. He had not noticed the amateur diver among the bags.

But just as Little Mitten was beginning to breathe easily again, the hissing of exhaust steam became audible. A navy tug came out of the fog and moored to the dock ahead of the launch.

"Patrol there?" called the tug's master.

"Yup—yes, sir," replied Mitten.

"We've come to take off fifty bags of coal."

Mitten groaned.

When the lines were made fast several men climbed up from the tug's deck and called for a small truck with which to cart the coal bags from the shed to the edge of the dock.

Surely there was no hope now. The first foray among the coal pile was bound to reveal Grogan in his grotesque costume. As the diving officer seemed disposed to linger about the dock in hopes the expected diving suit would show up, he would be bound to be present when the discovery were made.

This meant that the last resort, an appeal to the enlisted personnel to keep mum about Grogan's foolish prank, was swept away. The finding of a prone body garbed in diving costume was bound to excite noisy comment that would attract the officer.

Mitten's mind worked desperately. Forces beyond his control had closed in upon his helpless friend. He well knew that court-martial would mean loss of pay and restriction to the ship. For months Grogan had been looking forward to an honorable discharge, a visit West to his wife and the chance of getting a good job as a civilian. Now these hopes seemed doomed.

He began to hurry nervously about. There was no way of getting Grogan out of the shed; that was clear. He couldn't possibly head off the working party or entice the officer away. It was too late to seek tools for the helmet.

But even as the thought crossed his mind Mitten saw his chance. On the narrow after deck of the tug lay spread on canvas the integral parts of a gas engine under repair. Strewn among the parts were wrenches, hammers and other tools.

Another bit of unlooked-for luck came in the shape of a delay on the truck that was to take the coal bags out.

Mitten saw that if he could pilfer from the tug the tools he needed, there was still a gambler's chance that he might free his friend—provided, of course, Grogan had the sense to lie doggo meanwhile.

No one heeded the small seaman who clambered down the dock and over on the tug's deck. No one even notived that he swiftly gathered up three tools and started hurriedly to climb back up again. And only one man, by the will of Providence, chanced to glance up as Little Mitten dashed along the dock edge, slipped, struck his head a terrible blow on the coaming and *splashed into the dark waters below!*

Three smaller splashes followed when the three tools Mitten had secured followed him in.

His body did not reappear, for the very good reason that he was knocked unconscious by the blow.

"Man overboard!"

The cry was taken up by the others. All came running to the spot where the ripples were still closing over the watery grave of the dock patrol..

The lad who had seen the tragedy spoke rapidly for the benefit of the others.

"He slipped and hit his head! Must 'a' cracked the poor kid's bean!"

Had any one glanced in the direction

of the shed door at that moment he would have been startled by the bulbous apparition that peered with one eye out of the gloom from a level of about two feet. Grogan had heard the cry.

"Bring a grapnel!" sank out the diving officer.

At the same moment two cool-headed swimmers, who had slipped off overshirts and shoes, went overboard.

From the deck of the tug another rescuer went in. Along her superstructure a boatswain ran with an armful of line attached to a steel casting with projecting hooks, a standard navy grapnel.

"Heave it and drag!" ordered the officer.

The grapnel went over the side with a splash, nearly hitting the skull of one of the swimmers who came up at that moment.

"No; farther out!" cried the man who had seen Mitten go in. The next moment he, too, in his excitement toppled over. His rescue took precious minutes from that of the injured man.

Two minutes must have passed.

In the dark rectangle of the shed's door the bulbous mass was now more plainly visible. It seemed to sway slightly to and fro, like the head of some gigantic beast in captivity. But in the tumult none had noticed it yet.

The officer had his uniform off. Before he dived he called out: "Line up, boys. We're sure to get him if we do."

"If the tide hasn't got him already," observed the tug's boatswain after the officer had gone under.

At this moment the *thing* in the door of the shed rose, took the form of a gigantic man clad in white with a massive globular head. Some one shouted in amazement as it passed through the crowd to the edge of the dock.

Ed Grogan was about to make his first dive. In one hand he carried a bag of coal to take him down; in the other he held the loose end of the hose through which he had been conversing when occasion offered.

Professional divers climb overboard down a ladder. Ed Grogan simply walked in. It was said afterward that his splash was like that made by the sheet anchor of a first-class battleship.

The swimmers, some of whom were regular divers, paused and marveled at the daring of a man who would go down without a pump line and only a bag of coal to hold him on the bottom. They knew that the suit might contain enough air to last a man a few minutes. But after that he would have to act with dispatch or he would drown like a kitten in a sack.

A fearful silence descended upon the group. Not even the officer could think of any appropriate action to offset this mad heroism which all had just witnessed.

Then with a *plop!* the bulbous diving helmet clove the surface. Grogan's body shot up after it, carried by the weightless buoyancy of the watertight garment that covered him. In his milk-white arms the audience saw the limp body of the missing man.

A wild cheer broke out.

"Hook him in!" bellowed the officer.

The grapnel caught and hung to the seat of Grogan's erstwhile pants. Willing hands hauled him and Mitten over the side. A gunner's mate skilled in such matters had the helmet off in ten seconds.

The diving officer was first to shake the big seaman's hand.

"You're going to get a medal and promotion for this, Grogan!" he exclaimed. "You deserve it. Quickest piece of work I ever saw. Awfully glad you didn't take time to ask permission to use the suit."

"Yes, sir," panted Grogan, the sweat streaming across his open lips.

One of the professional divers, no doubt animated by a sense of jealousy, muttered something about it being im-

possible for even a lunatic to put a suit on by himself. But the remark was lost in the general plaudits that were showered upon the hero.

When Grogan was well clear of the hateful garment he sought Little Mitten in the tug's cabin where the latter had been resuscitated by the pharmacist's mate aboard.

"You're some guy, Mitt," he said, laying his hand on the damp brow of his small friend. "Took brains, lad, to think of jumping in so's I could go after you." Grogan swallowed hard. "An' I won't forgit it soon, old cheese," he added emotionally.

"Thanks, Ed," said Mitten weakly. "And you won't do no more diving, will you, Ed?"

"Never," came the firm reply from Grogan.

There will be more of these amusing Grogan and Mitten stories in future issues.

THE HECTORED UMPIRE

DOCTOR HOWARD RINK, of Pittsburgh, dyed-in-the-wool baseball fan, tells this story about a game played in his home town by a visiting colored nine and a white team of the Smoky City.

The whites had a white umpire to represent them, and the visitors a little bantam-roosterlike darky named Pete who strutted around as if he owned the diamond and feared neither man nor devil. Moreover, he was fair, and when he gave a decision, he stuck to it, no matter how his colored associates kicked.

The ninth inning came with the score tied at four to four, the visitors at bat, and Pete umpiring the bases. The first two hitters struck out. Then up came a giant of a darky named Jackson, resolute to win the game. With the count three and two, he hit a single which the right fielder threw wild to first base. Pete was right on top of the play, and, when Jackson reached first on the clean single, called him "Safe!" with a roar that could have been heard a mile away. But when the wild throw was made, Jackson dashed for second, and as he ran, he hissed out of the corner of his mouth to little Pete, puffing along at his side:

"If you call me out at second, I'll bust your skull with a brick!"

The shortstop muffed the throw to second, letting it roll toward center field, and Jackson dashed for another base, with Pete hanging to him like grim death. As he ran, Jackson gave him another promise:

"If you call me out at third, I'll empty my six-shooter into that crooked heart of yours!"

Pete, nothing dismayed, ran elbow to elbow with him, but by this time the whites were thoroughly up in the air, and the center fielder who had recovered the muffed ball threw it over the third baseman's head. Jackson made for home, informing Pete in venomous tones:

"If you call me out at the plate, I'll take my razor and carve out your jugular vein!"

Just then Jackson went into the plate on a long, spectacular slide, but the pitcher, who had backed up the third baseman, threw the ball to the catcher, who put it on the incoming runner. Thereupon Pete, the fearless, the fair, seeing what was going to happen, halted midway between third and home and, with a gallant bow to the umpire at the plate, said politely:

"You take him."

A Chat With You

IT must have been around the middle of the recent autumn. We remember, anyway, that it was near midnight, and a storm had broken over the city. The day had not been hot, and because of that it seemed strange that a thunderstorm should come, and so late at night. It seemed—supernatural. As if a huge, shaggy-headed griffon had suddenly lifted his black head over the rim of the world and bellowed and darted forth his long, yellow fangs at the tiny human beings below him.

* * * *

MIDNIGHT is the time for moods. You can enjoy rare ones then. The world sleeps all around you, silent. The sky is black and deep—making the mystery of everything seem more insoluble than ever.

So it was that the storm created a mood for us. Sitting and listening to its warlike reverberations, and growing tense at each brilliant spear of lightning, we were impressed by the power, the tremendous, unchained force of the elements. And, like many another beholder of a storm, we felt the majesty of the tempest.

Not inappropriately, then, we fell to thinking of Beethoven.

* * * *

IN Ludwig van Beethoven there were force and grandeur. His physical appearance alone is awe-inspiring. Study a picture of him. That great leonine head, that high, Shakespearean forehead which has been likened to the "vault of a temple," those rebellious, moody eyes and bushy brows, the blunt, determined nose, the strong, straight, contemptuous mouth and rocklike jaw. Somehow he always makes one think of Vulcan, or a symbolical figure of Force—as if by the concentration of his mind alone he could cause solar systems to revolve, explode or disintegrate. He is like the Zeus of old who cast thunderbolts from the skies.

Beethoven suffered. At nineteen he was carrying the responsibilities of his family on his shoulders—and making a name for himself in the musical world. In those days Mozart and Haydn were alive, too, and were thought to be the greatest composers in the world. Those two masters did not know that the stubborn, independent young man who studied, at various times, under them both, was to outdo them and become the very Shakespeare of music.

* * * *

YES, he suffered. Bitterly. Despising the social world, he nevertheless mixed with it, knowing that he must have audiences and contacts for his music. Yet he refused to adopt the graces of the drawing-room, and remained contemptuous of humanity. His friends, therefore, were few. Added to that, his family brought him nothing but trouble; and his short, strong body, though it seemed as full of energy as a dynamo, was actually weakening. The final blow that life dealt him was his deafness.

But it is his triumph—and the lesson ought to be shouted forever from the housetops for every generation to hear! —that he composed his best music after that blow, composed immortal music which he would never, could never, hear.

THAT is where the grandeur comes in. Beethoven's deafness and his victory over it is only typical of his entire life and the way he rose above his troubles.

No one, surely, will deny that it is fine, admirable for a man to control and direct himself and his abilities with an iron hand, fight stubbornly through the tangled forest of his personal troubles, and achieve greatness.

How pitiful is a man who is weak, wishy-washy, and how splendid a man who stands like an oak! It is not physical strength. The wishy-washy man may be a muscular giant, the oaklike man a bedridden invalid. It is the mind and the inner self that count. A rugged nobility of spirit—that is the finest ideal.

* * * *

AND that is the ideal that we have for THE POPULAR. You may be sure that you will find nothing wishy-washy in our stories. Instead you will find ruggedness, strength—but not strength exalted for itself alone. There has always been and always will be something more, something healthy and fine in every story—a touch, a flavor. You might call it a spirit.

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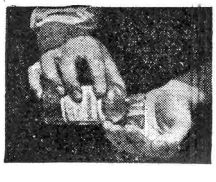

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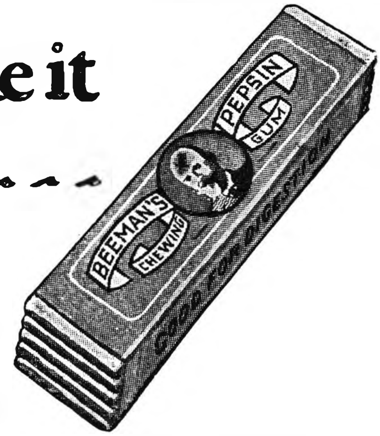

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