THE BIG NATIONAL FICTION MAGAZINE
TWICE-A-MONTH

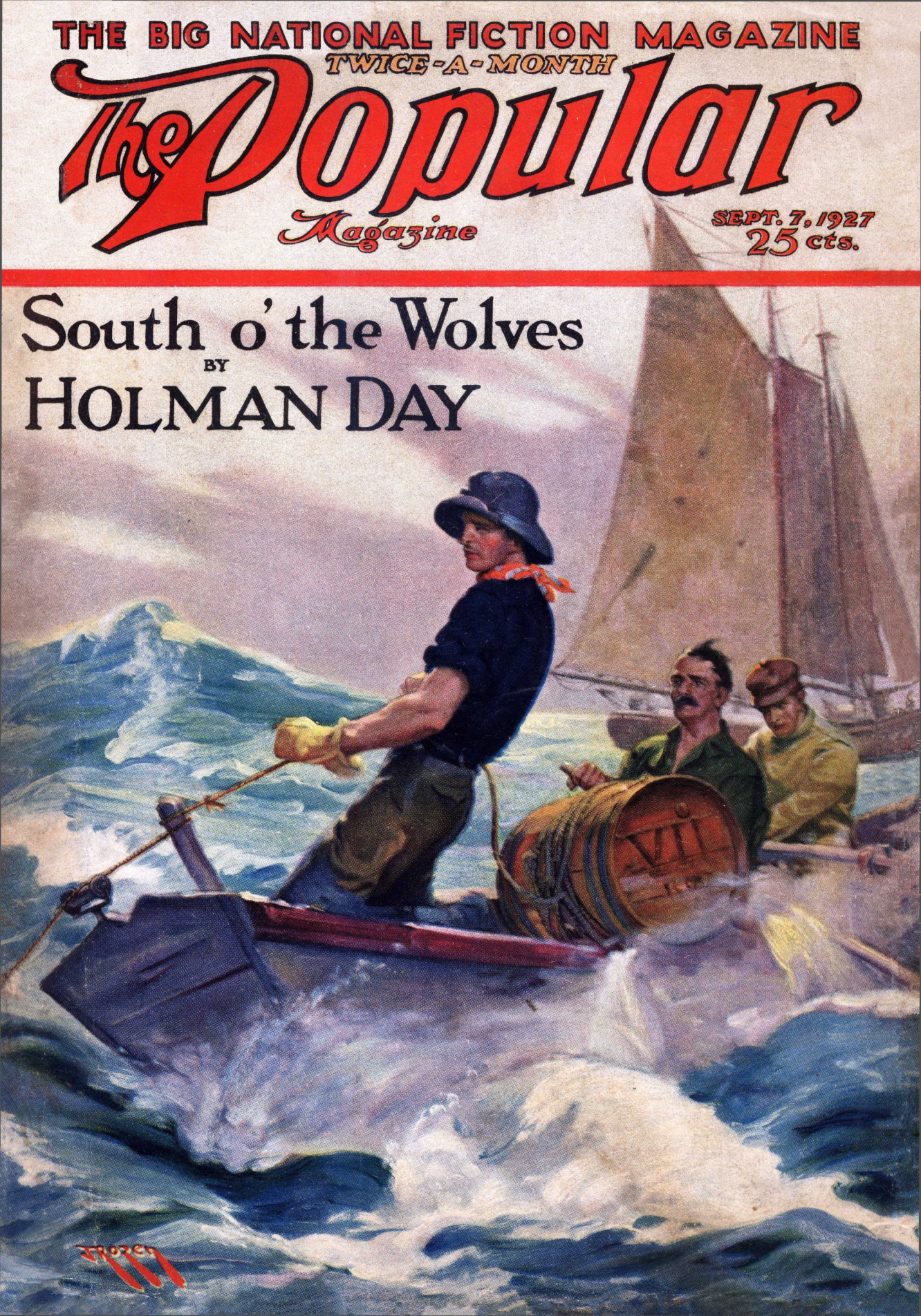
The Popular Magazine

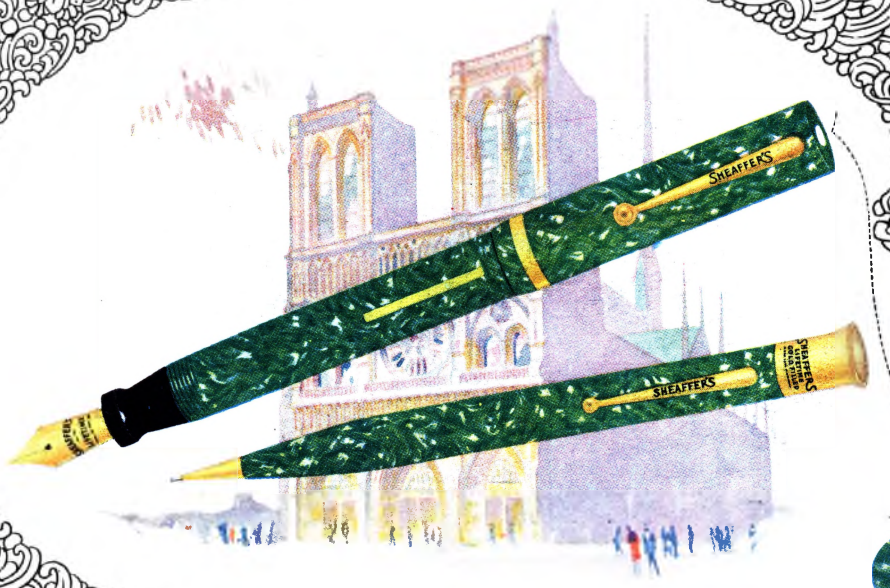
SEPT. 7, 1927
25 cts.

South o' the Wolves

BY

HOLMAN DAY





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In the next number of THE POPULAR, September 24th, the opening story will be "A Fool and Some Money," by Bertrand W. Sinclair. It's a Western tale, but quite different in idea from anything you have read. Also, a new serial will start in that number, W. B. M. Ferguson's powerful football story, "The Dollar God." Do not miss that issue, and remember the date, September 24th. See page 124 for an announcement of interest.

Volume LXXXV Number 4

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

Title Registered U. S. Patent Office.

CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER 7, 1927

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

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

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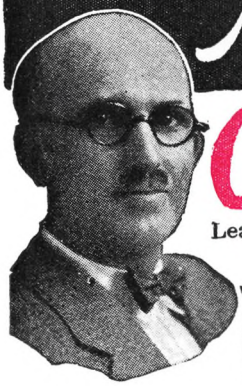

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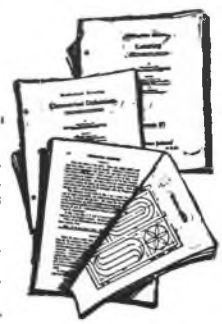

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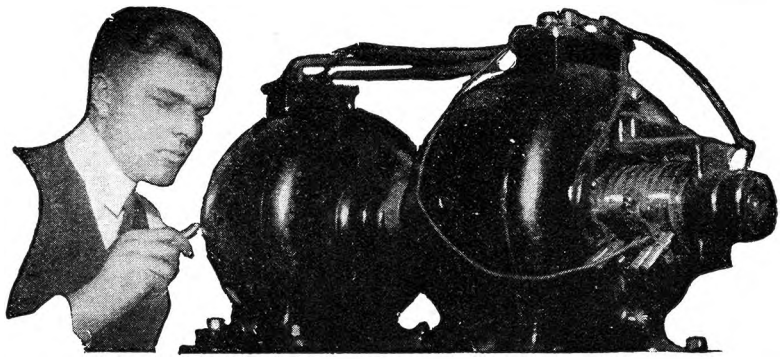

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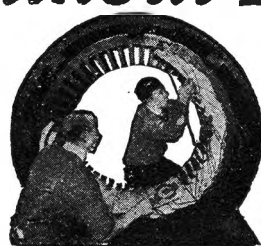

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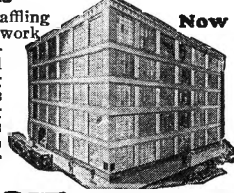

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"Can he really play?" a girl whispered. "Heavens no!" Arthur exclaimed. "He never played a note in his life."

They Laughed When I Sat Down At the Piano But When I Started to Play!—

ARTHUR had just played "The Rosary." The room rang with applause. Then to the amazement of all my friends, I strode confidently over to the piano and sat down.

"Jack is up to his old tricks," somebody chuckled. The crowd laughed. They were all certain that I couldn't play a single note.

"Can he really play?" I heard a girl whisper to Arthur.

"Heavens, no!" Arthur exclaimed. "He never played a note in all his life. . . . ."

I decided to make the most of the situation. With mock dignity I drew out a silk handkerchief and lightly dusted off the piano keys. Then I rose and gave the revolving piano stool a quarter of a turn. The crowd laughed merrily. Then I started to play.

Instantly a tense silence fell on the guests. I played the first few bars of Liszt's immortal Liebesträume. I heard gasps of amazement. My friends sat breathless—spellbound! I played on.

A Complete Triumph!

As the last notes of Liebesträume died away, the room resounded with a sudden roar of applause. I found myself surrounded by excited faces. Everybody was exclaiming with delight—plying me with rapid questions . . . "Jack! Why didn't you tell us you could play like that?" . . . "Where *did* you learn?"—"Who *was* your teacher?"

"I have never even *seen* my teacher," I replied. "And just a short while ago I couldn't play a note."

"Quit your kidding," laughed Arthur, himself an accomplished pianist. "You've been studying for years. I can tell."

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"I have been studying only a short while," I insisted. "I kept it a secret so that I could surprise you folks."

No Teacher Needed

Then I told them the whole story.

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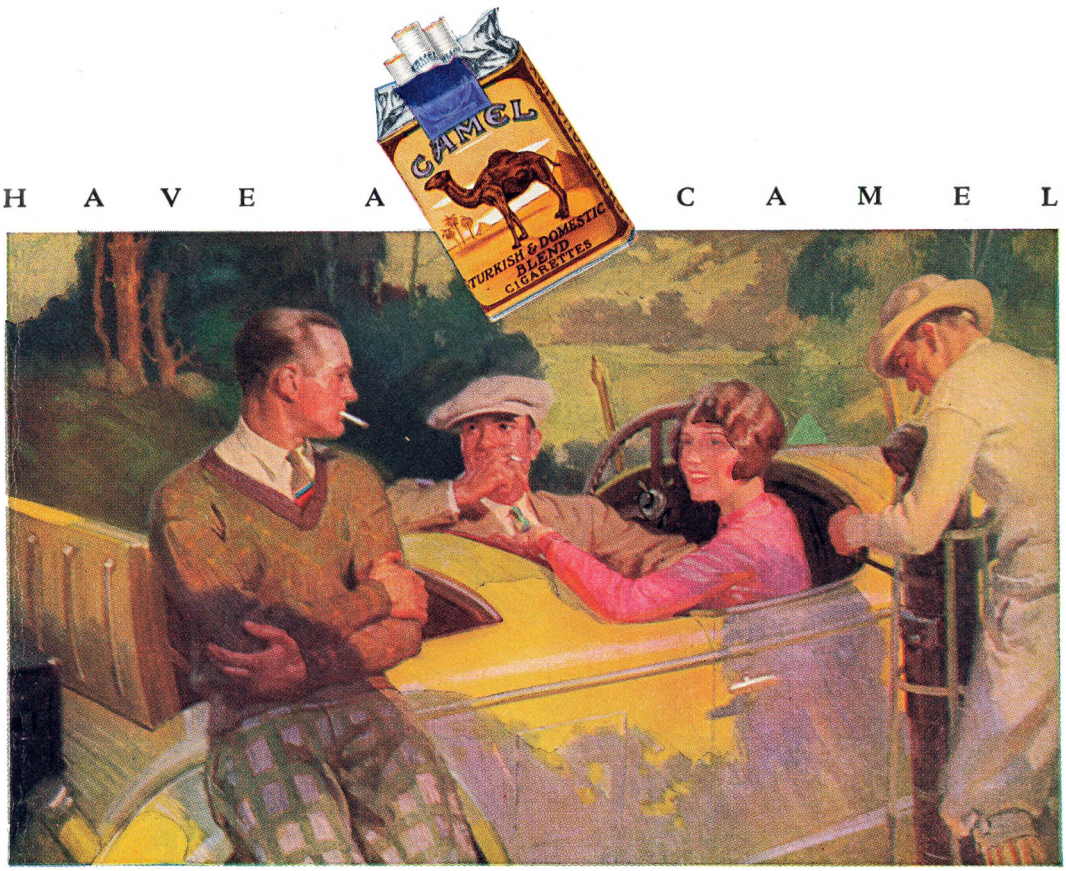

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A short story with a long moral

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"Don't laugh, darling. I'm going to have your kind of complexion or die in the attempt."

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THE POPULAR

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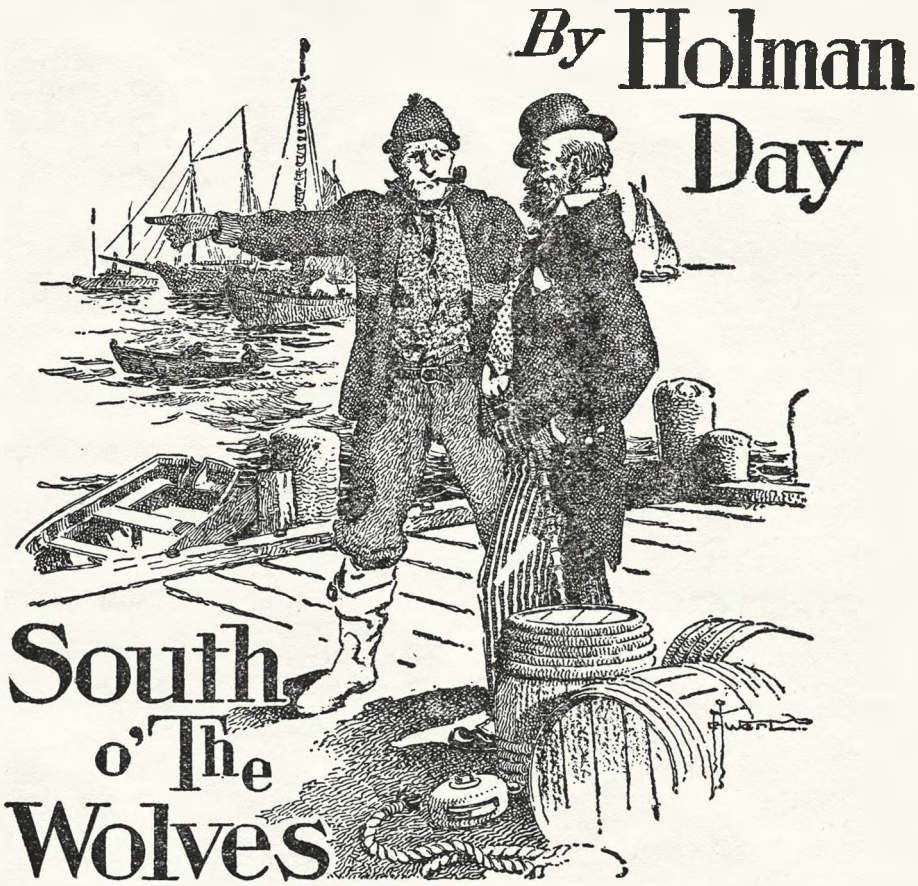


By Holman Day

South o' The Wolves

By the Author of "So Sailed We," "In the Tall Timber," Etc.

"Scotty," the young Scotchman, and his delightful side kick, old Ben Tuzzer, the cockney, sail out into the Nova Scotian waters on a sturdy project, in the defense of the fair damsel of Scotty's heart.

CHAPTER I.

A WRECKED CANOE.

TAKING for help the six-knot flood of the rushing tide—and the spring tide twice each lunar month climbs to nigh thirty feet in the Quoddy waters—two men headed in through Lubec Narrows in a sponson canoe.

In the stern, vigorously young, alert for more adventure, though he was ending a vacation which already had been unexpectedly crammed with plenty of novelty and lively action, Argyll Scott relished the sparkle of the forenoon in late August, and hummed a tune to time his paddle strokes.

In the bow, Ben Tuzzer, ancient mari-

ner, his jowls creased with the signet prints of all the seven seas, dipped paddle stolidly to the tempo of jaws managing a tobacco quid.

Mr. Tuzzer kept turning his chin over his shoulder, squinting astern. It was as if he had given up the hope of seeing rosy hues ahead in his own life, and had set himself to gaze behind and bask in the good cheer of his young companion. However, Mr. Tuzzer's glances toward the other's jovial countenance were brief. He devoted most of his gloomy attention to the landscape.

"Where are your good spirits this day, 'Johnny Ranzo?'" demanded Scott. "You're carrying the mug of a dying codfish."

Tuzzer promptly turned his visage away and to the front.

"I've a'ready told ye, Scotty," he stated in a tone full of grouch. "Plenty o' talk on it, too."

"The talk of telling me to be afraid, and run away from a coward whom I've licked good and plenty—that's not speech to my taste, matey."

Tuzzer delivered himself anew on the subject of cowards, using emphatic profanity. His text contained the trite truism that cowards, full of the venom of revenge, are in the class of scorpions, vipers and other pests with stingers fore or aft, and are to be feared by brave men —and small wonder!

"Yus, and no shyme in being afeared of 'em, neither!" repeated Mr. Tuzzer, who stressed his cockney singsong when he was particularly moved. "Ye calls it being bryve, and ye pooh-pooh the snyke in the grass, as ye tromps along with yer head high. And all the time ye're only giving the snyke his chance to nick ye in the heel when ye ain't looking." He curled his lip. "Bryve, ye calls it! It's only bryve, that style o' open dealing, when ye meets the fair fighter, face on. Shuffling your feet all careless through the grass, looking up at the sky so blue, because your thoughts are running on a lass —— That's giving the snyke a blooming fine show at your heel. Bryve, hey? Ye're a bally fool!"

Tuzzer swung his face over his shoulder to register scorn by a stare. Upon the glowering countenance Scott flickered a spattering of water from the edge of his paddle blade.

"But we're not in the grass now, old bullfrog, unless ye're so twisted ye're thinking it's dew I've splashed on you. We're out where the only snake to be afraid of is the sea serpent. By the same token, ye shall not keep me away from Ward Harbor just because Louis March may be there. I'm thinking he'll have no more appetite for me, after what has been fed to him."

"And playing his kind all wrong, lad," Tuzzer warned, "because ye've trained with square men for the most part. In the case of young March, ye was against a renegade, a hijacker, a cuss who was even cheating his own uncle in reg'lar business, and making a big swagger to git a nice girl. And now that the mucker has been kicked out of home and showed up to the girl and shooed off Grand Tremont, he's laying all his downfall to you, and thinks, I'll bet ye, that ye're laying your plans to git the girl and——"

Scott leaned forward and threatened Tuzzer with the upraised paddle. And now there was no jest in the young man's demeanor.

"You're free to speak o' past rough and tumble, Tuzzer, because you were in it; but, you gray old spider, I'll have none o' your spinning o' cobwebs up in that special and reserved corner o' the future."

Tuzzer faced forward and resumed his work with the paddle.

"Scotty," he said at last. "I'll let all the 'ahead-of-us' alone, except what I've been dwelling on. Louis March, I mean. And now I'm not asking ye to run away from any square fighting; I know ye too well to beg for that. But you know even better 'n I do what's up and out about on these waters, in these harbors and reaches in these pertickler times. The damnation webfooted buzzards are at it tough and tight, hooking their beaks into each other. The two gangs are ready to turn to and tear honest men into strips, if 'foresaid honest men are fools enough to drift anigh the scrimmage. All is, March is the kind to pass the word that you're dangerous to them that's in the

rum business. That'll be the p'ison in his stinger!"

"Thank ye, Ben Tuzzer! I'll pass ye the compliment of my saying you're probably right. These are ticklish times hereabouts."

Scott was silent after that, giving thought to the situation. His reflections were without any personal bias. In fact, so it seemed to him, he was in a position to be especially impartial in viewing this vexed question which was making such a stir throughout a great nation.

Geographically, he was on the edge of that nation, on the outside, looking in, so to speak. At that moment, paddling through Lubec Narrows, he was traversing the watery boundary line between the States and Canada.

Although born in Aberdeen, out of a family of whisky distillers down through three generations, Scott was a teetotaler by preference, the principle of the thing playing small part in his stand, bigotry no part at all.

He had come adventuring to Canada when he was sixteen, and for ten years had sailed out of Sydney, Cape Breton Island, cruising with huskies of the province. In that environment, wholly concerned with the hazards of trawlsmen on the Grand Banks, he and his mates spent no thought on the reform topic that was agitating the Yankees. Even when the wallowing sea wagons went sneaking down the seas across the Banks, going to take places of vantage along Rum Row, between Georges and the Capes, Scott and his fellows merely gossiped languidly.

But now Rum Row had shifted its base. Harassment by the prohibition fleet had pushed the illicit trade to the north and east, to waters bordering the Scotia coast, to the offshore of Canadian rule, where another line than the maritime twelve-mile limit aided in protecting the trade from the coast guardsmen—leaving it more open to the inroads of the hijackers, however.

Outside the jaws of the Bay of Fundy, braving the jagged waters south of The Wolves, the liquor purveyors sauntered to and fro on the sea, soliciting illicit bargaining, winking o' nights at the leering eyes of signal lights, pointing jib booms jeeringly at the States, the jibs above the sprits flapping like derisive fingers.

Said Mr. Tuzzer, breaking the silence:

"These seas and the shores around these seas is hell, right now, Scotty. You and me don't belong in the mess, and we don't give a cuss whuther peddlers, prohibitioners, hijackers or guzzlers come out on top. So, I says, let's not git mixed in."

Scott took thought, and retreated from his stand of bravado.

"So says I, matey. I'm admitting you're right about the prospect o' running into March and his grudge up here in the bay. But we'll mind our business careful; we'll simply paddle to Ward Harbor, and ship ourselves and the canoe back to Sydney where we started from."

With better cheer in his countenance and with a chirrup of a chantey in his mouth, Tuzzer paddled on. Then he checked the song to say:

"Scotty, March must be guessing we'll come this way to ship back to Breton. It's a awful sharp peak of a grudge he's a-setting uneasy on! So uneasy, it's like him to be skirmishing to ketch us foul offshore. And if he sees his chance, it'll be like him to run us under with that speed bo't o' his."

"Now you're explaining your long squints astern, Johnny Ranzo," stated Scott jocularly.

"It's no kind of a prospect to be grinning about," insisted Tuzzer. "A coward will fight like a coward, says I!" He peered under his palm, facing forward after a circling glance to seaward. "By the jig-sawed tailbrace, I'm a-telling ye, Scotty, there he comes!"

Framed between trailing streaks of mounting foam, with the likeness of an upcocked snout, decorated with sweeping mustaches of white, a speed boat was heading straight at them from the direction in which Ward Harbor lay.

"Let's be sensible, instead o' brash," implored Tuzzer. "That schooner out in the bay is too far away to take note o' what March may do to us, and March knows as much. We can't make yon island, heading back against this run o' tide. Let's duck across to the striper." He pointed his paddle at a black-and-

red can buoy that marked reefs in the fairway, swaying and ducking half under, as the tide rush dragged at it.

Scott dipped deep, and swung the stern of the canoe. The two men strove with their best strength. Immediately it was made apparent that Tuzzer's warning suggestion was wise; the speed boat was swinging in its aim at the canoe.

"Damn him!" yelped Scott. "He's as raw and rank in the way o' grudge as you've said, Ben Tuzzer."

And Tuzzer panted, between strokes: "He's a coward, I say! With a hot grudge, and a-laying the torching of it to you. That's how cowards is easy made crazy."

On the face of it, it was an insane freak of the man who was alone in the speed boat. He was driving his craft with all the power he could get out of his motors; he kept easing his helm, heading inexorably toward the canoe. It was murderous spite, touched with the lunacy of revenge. Furthermore, opportunity was kind to the knave at that moment; the sea was clean of craft, except for the one distant schooner mentioned by Tuzzer, and it was not in the line of reason that her lazy lookout would take note of the speck of a canoe, swept under in the froth of the speed boat's rush.

"No two guesses, Ben. He means to run us under. We can't fetch that buoy, first ratch. Stand by to make a quick spin."

They held on, paddling across the course of the oncoming boat, the bow of which was out of water, the stern crouching low in the hollow at the crotch of her wake. The helmsman's head was projecting over the taffrail. At the distance of a few fathoms, apparently sure of his target, he pulled in his head, and came on in a blind plunge.

Scott grabbed the few seconds of that opportunity. He yelped to Tuzzer, and the two spun the canoe right-about and parallel to the line of rush. At best, it would be touch and go! Between the sides of the canoe and the boat a wave was crowded, and the crown of it slapped over into the smaller craft. With a twenty-knot speed, the motor boat roared on its way, leaving the canoe leaping wildly in the upflung short waves of the wake. As the face faded quickly in the mist of spume, the two paddlers caught a glimpse of the helmsman's malevolent visage. He had missed his target, and his expression proved that more rage had been added to his mad determination.

Both the fugitives knew that he would circle and come back at them with extra venom, and they spent strength accordingly. The canoe was half filled with water, but there was no time for work with the bailing dish. However, March's momentum meant that his circle must be a wide one, and all this time of respite was needed.

They had barely reached the big can, when he was on them once more. He was risking his boat in his malignant resolve; he was shading his course to inches, in order to sweep close to the buoy. Scott and his mate were obliged to choose instantly and desperately, in their choice surrendering the canoe to destruction. On the can there were tackle rings. The two men leaped and set two-handed clutches on the nearest rings. Then, almost in the click of the same instant, the canoe was crushed under the forefoot of the speed boat, which scaled past, leaving scant clearage between its hull and the men who dangled against the side of the big can, only half their bodies above water.

Twice did the man in the motor craft circle the buoy and the drifting wreck of the canoe. He squealed crazy oaths, and threatened to smash them where they clung; they were dipping as the can rode under with the tide. But the human limpets were safe from such an attack as would have wrecked the speed boat. Moreover, the attacker saw something that complicated the situation. A sardine-seine boat was in the distance, heading into the narrows from the sea, bound for the harbor canneries.

The rogue, baffled, put his helm over and made off up the bay toward harbor, overtaking and plowing disdainfully through the tide-borne fragments of the wrecked canoe and the flotsam of the owners' belongings.

Scott, lifting with the can, caught a glimpse of the wreckage. He remarked

to the old man, who clung doggedly to the adjacent ring:

"Ben, it's too bad about our boatie—but she died game."

"Lad, I've had many a hull slide out from under me, in my life on the sea," returned Tuzzer, after he had controlled his flood of profanity. "But they was only adopted—not real relatives. That canoe was nigh to being a son o' mine; and I hopes as how I'm going to have a hack, some day, at that scuttle butt who killed it—not saying a word as to how nigh it was that he come to killing you and me."

Particular sentiment was attached to that canoe, swept away from them in bobbing fragments. The two, old man and young had patiently built the craft, with pride in each touch of draw shave and slap of varnish brush. It had served them stanchly in the adventurings which had brought them into unexpected contact with the unsavory affairs in which one Louis March was engaged.

"Ben Tuzzer," said Scott, "naturally I have my feelings in regard to the renegade who has just now done this to us. But I'm thinking you're wise in what you have said about your dealings with a coward. I hope neither you nor I will be called on to take another hack at March."

"Thankee for swallering my advice," retorted Tuzzer sourly. "But now, with this grudge in me, I'm sorry I'm so handy in advising. I'd like ye to say that, ye'll be hunting him up along with me, and killing him."

"I'm speaking as a Grand Banksman. I see no profit in hunting for sharks and dogfish. We'll be going about our own and more profitable business, Ben Tuzzer."

"Going to swim or fly—which?" demanded the old man, scrubbing his sore knees against the barnacles of the dipping can.

"Yon sardine lugger, in the jaws of the narrows, will save us from doing either, so I'm thinking."

"Little chance o' them noticing us. Slapped like a couple o' wet rags against this old tin wash boiler!"

"I'm saving my breath for something else than argument with you, old wet rag!"

Only agility beyond the ordinary and muscles toughened by a sailor's toil, could have availed in that exigency. By taking advantage of the lift of the can, Scott flung himself far enough up the truncated cone so that he was able to set his foot in the ring to which he had been clinging. Then he heaved himself to the top of the buoy, making his kneeling figure sufficient of a mark to attract the notice of men on the sardine boat. He helped matters by dragging off his soaked mackinaw and flapping it.

In the fairway opposite the buoy, the steamer reversed and sent off a tender.

"We were in a canoe, and it hit something, sprung a leak and sunk under us," Scott explained to the men who quizzed him.

When they were aboard, Scott and Tuzzer sat in the sun on a hatch coaming, and dried out.

While the steamer was later skirting the wharves at slow speed, the two beheld March's boat tied up in a dock. Nobody was aboard.

"Mind ye this, Ben Tuzzer!" adjured Scott, when he and the old man were walking up into town from the wharf. "If we chance to meet the scalawag, keep your eyes straight ahead and your tongue between your teeth."

"Will ye be able to do that much yourself?" queried the other. "You, with your Scotch temper?" It was asked with satiric unbelief.

The tone prompted Scott to deliver lofty counsel on the point of prudent conduct on a city's streets.

"You take pattern by me, Ben Tuzzer, and you'll keep out of trouble," the young man promised rashly.

CHAPTER II.

CAVALIER AND GLADIATOR.

THE street from the wharf led Scott and his companion to the edge of the city's main square. They had settled upon a simple program; they would buy a few necessary articles to take the place of those lost with their duffel; they would eat a noon meal at the handiest restau-

rant, and kill the few hours as best they could till the sailing time of the eastbound steamer.

"And we'll not go far out o' the bustle o' the square, Tuzzer. We're outlanders in a strange city, and we'll risk no more from a coward's tricks."

"Aye, lad. This ought to be safe enough—on a city street, and with the sun bright and fair overhead."

Sauntering, they came to an old lady, who had set her market basket on the edge of the sidewalk, and was peering anxiously here and there to make sure of a safe progress across the broad square. The automobiles, entering and departing by side streets, zigzagged in the traffic, and made for the confusion of the scurrying pedestrians.

Scott's chivalrous regard for the aged was roused.

"A dangerous passage of it the dame will be making, tacking in yon rough waters, Tuzzer. I'll be taking her arm and her basket. Follow after. I see across there a sign, promising that we eat."

The old lady beamed on this providential squire, when he proffered his services. As soon as she was across the square, she embarrassed Scott by her gratitude, saying much about his gentle thoughtfulness. Several other women had followed in the wake of the stalwart young man. The women complimented him while they paced behind, and were assured by Mr. Tuzzer that his friend deserved all the best that could be said.

While his come-by-chance protégé was praising him with the motherly frankness of old age, Scott, cap in hand, glanced about, abashed, and apprehensive lest bystanders might be finding the situation a bit ridiculous; the dame was overfulsome in her compliments.

The sun of noonday was in his eyes, and for a moment he suspected that his uncertain vision was playing him a trick; the girl who had halted at a little distance, surveying him with amiable amusement, truly had the features of a maid whom circumstances had lately made a very important figure in his thoughts.

Scott blinked, stared again, and discovered that the girl he constantly dreamed about was standing there on a city street, in reality. He dodged around the old lady, and started toward the young one.

The dame cackled understandingly. With the same permitted frankness of age in this fresh affair, she called:

"The prettiest faces grow wrinkled, my lass. But he has just now shown that he can be also kind to wrinkled faces. Good luck to ye, both!"

Passers stopped, gazed and grinned appreciatively.

"Miss Osborn," gasped Scott, standing humbly before the young woman, "little did I think the old noddikin would speak her mind and draw a crowd. Else I'd have kept my eyes off you and walked away."

Her smile persisted.

"A very ungallant act that would be, after all your gallantry in the other matter; I've been watching you beau her across the square." She put her hand up and checked his stammerings. "I'm drawing conclusions for myself, sir! Quite by chance you have given me a fine insight into your character."

He protested.

" 'Twas naught but the commonest passing civility, Miss Osborn."

"But the little things tell the biggest story, when one has good understanding." Earnestness succeeded what was subdued raillery. "Out on Grand Tremont, sir, you did me a great service by being brave and even reckless in ridding me of the attentions of a very distasteful person. I'm mentioning Louis March only in the way of warning you that he was become almost a maniac in the matter of getting revenge. He is in this city, and you are not safe here."

Scott resolutely refrained from exposing how this safety had already been threatened; the next moment he was glad that he had been so reticent.

"I cannot help feeling," she went on, "that the most of his savage hatred of you comes from his belief that you spoiled the prospect of his marriage with me. I think you know that any such marriage was out of the question. He was more interested in my property than in me."

"He can do nothing to me in the way of harm," he assured her boldly. "Whatever he may try on, it'll be because I

showed him up on Grand Tremont as a renegade hijacker. And on the heels of the showing-up, his uncle kicked him off and out. So let no blame rest on your mind, Miss Osborn, if anything does happen later between March and me." He watched her face sharply when he added: "And he'll have to chase me to Cape Breton to make anything happen. I'm leaving for there on the next boat."

He saw what he hoped for, the sudden sag of disappointment, the instant twitch of honest regret before she could manage her features. Then she controlled her quick emotion of regret, and smiled on him cordially.

"All my best wishes for your safe journey! So that's your home—Cape Breton. I have some property interests there—left to me by my aunt. In Sydney!"

He nodded.

"For ten years I've been sailing from there."

"You may be able to give me information on certain matters."

He obeyed her quick gesture, and followed her into the shade under a store awning. She was paying no attention to groups of persons; some of them had halted when the old woman had spoken out; all of them who were lingering displayed much interest in the two who were absorbed in each other's company.

On the face of it, the tête-à-tête was a bit out of the ordinary. A handsome young woman, attired smartly, was in vivacious and confidential conversation with a young man who might have been a panhandler—if one estimated carelessly by garb and other externals. During his cruise and his sojourn on Grand Tremont, Scott had permitted his hair to grow long. Now he was unshaven, and his rough clothing had dried on him in folds and wrinkles. The gear disguised the young man's real personality and good looks.

One of several men who had stopped to gaze and consider, expressed his reactions. He muttered profane amazement because the stepdaughter of Fletcher March, high lord of Grand Tremont, was having a "buzz" with a hobo in the main square of the city.

Over at one side, Ben Tuzzer had been surrounded by the women for whom he had served as rear guard and garrulous informant. Now that Scott's attention was wholly taken up, Tuzzer spouted in safety.

"But," broke in one of the women, "no matter if he is this or that or the other, as you say, that's the rich Tamlyn Osborn of Grand Tremont he's talking with."

"And why shouldn't he pick the best?" demanded Mr. Tuzzer, in the swagger of his singsong. "The syme as she is picking him, not minding about the clothes he's wearing for reasons of his own. Rich, is she? I'm knowing to it he's got twenty-five thousand dollars in a Sydney bank, only in the w'y o' loose chynge." He flapped his hand with lordly indifference.

Mr. Tuzzer was putting a fanciful superstructure on a basis of solid truth, referring to a legacy which represented Scott's sole fortune, and which was put away in a bank with firm resolve to leave it there sacred and untouched.

Noting that his hearers' eyes were wide open, Mr. Tuzzer determined to snap open their mouths in a bit of extra amazement. He put his finger against his nose and winked.

"He'll be passing on his way from here this day, and ye may carry it in your minds as how ye've seen a toff of the real blue blood." On the momentum of the financial truth which he previously told, he was swept away into perfectly reckless falsehood, relishing its effect. "It's his taste to go about as he does now, to view strange lands and not be bothered by kotowers. Ye can all brag to the end o' your lives as how ye was teamed safe across a street by a high-class gent who'll soon be going back to be a duke."

They gasped in wonderment.

They gasped once more—this time in horrified amazement.

The stranger, advertised as a high-class gentleman, whirled suddenly on three men who had come close to him and the girl. There was a quick exchange of angry words.

Tuzzer left his party and rushed to the scene, recognizing Louis March, and scenting trouble.

The trouble started instantly. Scott

swung a vicious hook to March's jaw and dropped him. The two companions launched themselves at the young man. Tuzzer, arriving, drove headlong between the legs of one of the attackers and tripped him. He was a big man, and he fell heavily across March. Scott did for the other assailant, who had brawn, but lacked agility. He went down on top of the other two.

While the spectators came rushing to this startling affair on the main square of the city at high noon, the girl escaped with all the haste possible.

Men massed closely about the combatants, and the husky few in the mob laid hands upon Scott and Tuzzer. Others restrained the two beefy roughs who had struggled to their feet, leaving March where he lay.

Scott looked over the surrounding heads, and saw that Tamlyn Osborn was safely away from the mess. He grunted his satisfaction, and shook off the hands of the men who were holding him.

"There's no call for more o' that, lads! Keep those hellions away from me, that's all!"

A police officer came plunging through the crowd, his club aloft, forcing his passage. He pulled his gun when he was within the circle.

"Will you rowdies walk to the station, without the wagon?" He promptly recognized the two men who had attacked Scott. He seemed, also, to recognize significant aspects of the situation. He glanced from the men to March, who was coming back to life on the sidewalk. "Hired again on a job, hey? And trying to pull it off in Union Square!"

Volunteers helped March to his feet. He pointed to Scott.

"Arrest that man, officer!"

"You're all arrested for affray and disturbance."

March was shut off in his angry protests.

The officer pushed him along, saying: "This isn't the courtroom. We don't try cases out here."

He herded the five prisoners in front of him, and teamed them away along the sidewalk. Side by side, Scott and Tuzzer marched obediently in the van.

The old man vouchsafed in an undertone:

"Says you, all so high and lofty: 'Tyke pattern by me, Ben Tuzzer, and ye'll keep out o' trouble!' "

"Lay off your cheap comics, Tuzzer," growled Scott. "I could do nothing else. The whelp brought a couple of plug-uglies to guard him, while he waggled his poison tongue." He surveyed his bruised knuckles. "As we've agreed, he's a coward, and he's gone fair crazy."

"Aye, picking time and place like he's done!"

"But it's not a bad job he's put over, after all," admitted the young man ruefully. "Getting me pulled for a rowdy show in public; making me shame myself under the eyes of Tamlyn Osborn; making her despise and hate me from now on forever."

"I dunno about that," philosophized Mr. Tuzzer. "She's got an eyeful o' ye being nice to the old uns. Then ye turned right around and was nice to the young un. Ye licked him, didn't ye, for something he said to her, or about her?"

"I wasn't fighting for myself, of course."

"Though ye had all reason to wallop the phiz off him, after what he done to us to-day," grumbled the old man.

"I was thinking of it when I punched his jaw. It was a hefty poke! But I wasn't settling my own grudge, Ben Tuzzer—taking a street corner for the job. It all happened on account of Miss Osborn."

"And there ye have it! One way to court a girl is to lug posies to her, but the best way is to belt the snoot off the cheap cuss who sasses her. March was doing something like that, wasn't he?"

"Damn him, he said she had chased me over here from Grand Tremont, ready to elope with me."

"Paying ye a blooming fine compliment, o' course. And then ye hit him! But I reckon she'll overlook your seeming to git mad over the prospects hinted."

"That'll be enough on that line, Tuzzer!"

Scott turned his head, to look into the face of a man who had come shouldering through the accompanying throng,

and who spoke to the prisoner, tramping along by his side.

"Know me, don't you?"

"Sure I do, Captain Dorrance!" It was cordial recognition of a friend, made in past time on the wintry Grand Banks, master of a Halifax fisherman.

"I'm settled ashore these days, Scott. I turned Yankee a few years ago." The captain was distinctly a solid citizen, from his iron-gray hair down to his square-toed boots. "In a bit of a scrape, hey, lad?"

At the risk of failing to exculpate himself, Scott was determined to keep Tamlyn Osborn's name and identity out of the affair if he were able.

"A couple of roughs, captain, bumped into me and made cheap talk, and I lost my temper."

"I happened along after it was all over. How does Louis March from Grand Tremont fit into the thing?"

Still afraid of revealing too much, the young man dodged the query by asking a question of his own:

"You know young March, do you?"

The captain glanced over his shoulder, to make sure that March was at a safe distance.

"Of course I know him! And if you don't feel like talking, I'll be perfectly frank and say I know about the run-in you had with him out on Grand Tremont. Too many on the side lines over there not to have the news get here to the main mighty sudden." He chuckled. "No friend of rum, are you, Scott, if I get it straight?"

The other opened up a bit, under this cordial appreciation.

"March and his gang and others were digging up what was left of the whisky cargo from the wreck of the old *Bohemian,* sir, working on a tip. I did my bit in making them smash the whole darn lot."

"After it had been buried twenty years in bottles. My, my!" The captain clucked with mock horror. "What a terrible loss for the thirsty."

"However, it wouldn't have been good whisky, sir, when they had split it and dosed it. And they were meaning to smuggle the stuff in where the law says no. I was glad to have a hand in stopping such dirty business."

Captain Dorrance, walking shoulder to shoulder, stroked his palm down over Scott's broad back.

"And I didn't feel a trace of sprouting wings!" he joked.

"I'll never be growing anything that fits an angel, sir. I have no grudge against whisky, as long as it's good, and is kept where it belongs, by the law. But when it's handled as it's dealt in by blackguards in these parts, these days, I'm as stiff as any other of the ramrodders."

"You sound mighty honest in that," said Dorrance.

"I am honest on that special point, sir."

Now Captain Dorrance clapped the young man's back smartly.

"I've been on the hunt for just such a chap as you line up to be! As soon as you're clean of this mess—and you leave it to me to tend to it all shipshape—you're coming down to my office for a talk."

"For your help I'll be mighty grateful, sir. But as to the talk—if I go free all so easy as you seem to think—I'm leaving for Cape Breton by the first boat out."

"The hell you are!" retorted the captain, with mariner bluntness. "You're what I've been looking for, and I'll hang onto you, even if I haul you before the court and have you put in my charge as your special probation officer. That's enough! We're here at the lockup. We'll do our talking later."

He led the way into the police station.

The chief rose promptly from behind his desk and saluted. He addressed the captain respectfully as "Alderman Dorrance."

The alderman winked at Scott.

"I've come up a bit in politics, lad, since last you heard me damning fog on the Banks." He stepped aside with Scott when the arresting officer herded March and the other two prisoners into the guardroom.

Dorrence glanced inquiringly at Tuzzer, who snuggled up beside Scott.

"This is Ben Tuzzer, my matey, sir.

What he has been all his life you have a sailor's eye to see."

Immediately on his entrance, Louis March began to declaim charges against Scott, patting a bruised jaw.

Alderman Dorrance caught the official eye.

"Chief Fallon, this man ought to keep better company on our streets, if he expects to stay out of trouble. You don't need any word from me, of course, regarding the couple he's with."

"I should say not, Alderman Dorrance. Just a moment, Mr. March! In this city you haven't the same pull you have out on Grand Tremont, where your uncle has all the say. I must warn you that, for a year past, I've been hearing stories about your actions, from time to time, in Ward Harbor. For some reason or other you've been training with a tough bunch; and these two are fair samples. Do you insist on going into court with this present case?"

"I was knocked down on the main street." He jabbed a finger at Scott. "That man did it. I want him held and tried."

"Do you want it to go into court?" murmured the alderman in Scott's ear.

The latter shook his head; he was guarding against revelations that would bring the girl into the business.

"No matter why!" snapped Dorrance, when the young man started to stammer vague explanations. "Leave it all to me. I'm not an alderman for nothing!"

He strode across the room, and confronted March.

"If you insist on taking that man into court, young fellow, I'll go now to the city prosecutor, and post him on the line of questions he's to put to you."

"How long since a plaintiff could be put on trial?" blustered March.

"I don't know how long it's *been*. But I can tell you how soon it *will* be, mister! Blast you, I'm whittling a peaked end onto my own stick in this thing! You know well enough why!"

March displayed uneasy confusion, but he persisted in remarks about threats and duress, till Dorrance checked him sharply.

"You have spoiled crew after crew for me, tolling away my men. Two of my best captains you have dragged into your hellish business. Now if you want to have that business shown up good and proper in court, come on!"

There was a full minute of silence.

The chief obeyed a muted suggestion from the alderman, who had taken his stand beside the desk.

"Mr. March," invited Fallon, "please step here and sign the complaint, if you are bound to go ahead."

The plaintiff swapped looks with his two henchmen. They growled advice; and he took it.

"Will the whole thing be called off, chief, if I walk out with these men, and say no more?"

"We'll overlook the fracas, whatever it was," promised the officer.

March and his followers retreated from the room.

Then the alderman presented his protégé.

"Chief, this is Argyll Scott, honest Banksman and a square chap. The only mistake he made was that he started a good job and stopped short of putting March and those hired thugs in a hospital."

"I'll make no more trouble for your city, chief," Scott promised. "I'm leaving for Cape Breton as soon as I can catch a boat."

Dorrance said nothing until he was outside with Scott and Tuzzer.

"Come along down to my office with me. Bring along your friend. To blazes with your boat! You don't scoot away from me as easy as all that, lad!"

"You can now judge for yourself, sir, what'll be happening later, if I stay in this city!"

"And you're not going to stay in the city," Dorrance promised gruffly.

As if his declaration had settled the matter, he trudged on, giving his attention to men who greeted him in passing, or stopping for a moment to say something special; the alderman was plainly a man of affairs in his city. To one citizen he at last gave several minutes of time, discussing a matter of business, while Scott and the old man waited at a little distance.

"Scotty, he's sure spry and handy in

heaving his half hitches. Going to let him moor you as he plans?"

"I'll go to his office, yes. There's time for it. But stay in these parts at his bidding, no."

"Seems to be a nice kind of a man, even if he is bossy," opined Mr. Tuzzer, rubbing his nose. "Best not be too hasty in turning down any good thing. You seem to suit him."

"Howe'er, my mind is made up," affirmed Scott stoutly. "I have no interest in this region, not any more. I want to get away."

And then, coming from behind, Tamlyn Osborn put her hand on his arm, and said with earnest regret:

"I'm sorry to hear you say that, sir."

Instantly, Tuzzer scuttled away out of earshot, glad to note that the imperious Captain Dorrance was still busily engaged.

Dragging off his cap, Scott stood in humility in front of the girl.

"I'm ashamed to look your way, Miss Osborn. You know why."

"And I'm equally sorry to hear you say *that*." There was a smile in her eyes, though her face was grave. "You did shift a bit suddenly from cavalier to gladiator, and I was startled, I'll confess. But I do think the occasion deserved all the attention you gave it. I've been hovering in the offing, in order to thank you."

He was not gaining his poise readily, and she took advantage of his silence.

"Let's say no more about what happened. But as to what I hope may happen, I'm going to be very outspoken."

She was watching Dorrance; he was clapping the other man on the shoulder, and his demeanor indicated that the interview was ending.

"I have only a few moments, I see, Mr. Scott. I must be quick and bold. Forgive me if I am. I have come to the city to-day in order to consult a lawyer. He can help me in matters of law. But I desperately need help of another sort. The helper must be somebody who is not afraid, who cannot be bought over or bulldozed; somebody from the outside, as you are. I cannot explain my need just now. The matter is not in shape to be handled at this time, anyway."

"I volunteer," he blurted. "Heart and hand I'm in it, whatever it is you want."

She blessed him with a cordial smile.

"I did think you'd be willing to help. I've been thinking so, ever since you took a hand in matters out on Grand Tremont. But this must seem strange to you."

"Most everybody in the world needs help at some time—some folks more than others, Miss Osborn. I'm mighty glad I've happened along just when you see a place where I can fit in."

Dorrance was turning from his man, and swung a glance in their direction.

She hastily concluded her say:

"That's all for now, Mr. Scott. Only this: Promise me you'll stay in this region for a time. When you find a good opportunity—and you need not hurry about it—come to Grand Tremont, and I'll explain. Till then, God bless you for being so willing to help me."

She hurried away before he could manage his tongue.

Dorrance, stumping along with his mariner's stiff-legged swing, cocked an eyebrow when he glanced at Scott.

The two walked side by side for some moments before the captain said anything.

"Beg pardon, Scott, if I'm taking any liberties. But did you get anyways well acquainted with Tamlyn Osborn when you were on Grand Tremont?"

"No, sir!"

"She comes of a fine father. Too bad he had to die and leave his widow to marry Fletcher March. I'm not so sure that March isn't milking the Osborn estate for his own profit. He's crazy over money. Of course, you heard, out there, that old March was trying to rig a marriage between the girl and Nephew Louis, so as to tie up the March and Osborn estates into one bundle?"

"Everybody seemed to know about such plans, sir."

"So it was a dandy job when young March was dished. Even Fletcher March's gall wasn't proof against the show-up."

"He did seem to be very much hurt by finding out that the nephew was mixed up in the dirty rum game."

Without turning his head, Captain Dorrance gave Scott a slanting stare from wide-open, sardonic eyes. He emitted the cryptic syllables:

"Rum! Wah! Whoo! Hell! Hurt? Wow!"

"But——"

Dorrance flung up his hand.

"I've got only time and talk for my own business. Will you stop talking foolishness about the next boat to Breton, and take the job?"

"Yes!" pledged the young man emphatically. Then he looked over his shoulder, and grinned into the amazed, demanding eyes of the old man trudging at his heels.

CHAPTER III.

THE NEW CAPTAIN.

THE Dorrance business office was situated in the end of a wharf loft. Along the roof of the long building was painted:

DORRANCE FISHING FLEET.

"I've been able to pull in some capital, Scott; and the investors have made me general manager. And, believe me, it's a hellish job managing any fleet in these parts, now that the old Rum Row has been broken up and the gang shoved nor'ward into these waters. The devil always was in whisky! But he's in there now, with seventeen spiked tails and red-hot horns and hoofs."

Dorrance relighted his cigar.

"Over and over I've caught my crews smuggling in rum—a thin layer of fish over a cargo of cases. Men have gone crazy over easy money, that's what. Bottles even stuffed down the gullets of big codfish! Crews deserting to hitch up with hijacking outfits. Captains of smacks selling themselves out, body and soul. Through that window you'll see the masts of the *Kestrel*. Had to fire the skipper and half the crew yesterday, for being mixed into the rum game. Never would have believed that otherwise decent men would go down greased chutes to Tophet, like they've done since this thing hit the coast."

"It has been my own thought, like yours, since I've had a bit of a look, sir."

"This is near the wind-up of the swordfishing for this year, Scott. We've been stocking mighty good money. But, dammit, my men haven't been satisfied even with big lays. I want the *Kestrel* to grab in on the tail end of this swordfish season. I'm offering you the command. I know you to be a good man offshore. But, best of all in this pinch, you're one who seems to be vaccinated against this cussed epidemic. We'll pick a crew, you and I together, and I'll leave it to you to keep the smack clean of the dirty mess south o' The Wolves. Are you on?"

"Yes, sir! I'm glad to have the chance."

There sounded a queer grunt from the depths of Mr. Tuzzer, who stood at the window surveying the *Kestrel*.

A bit apprehensive as to what sort of an eruption of amazement might come from those depths and endanger a secret, Scott walked over to the old man, murmuring in Tuzzer's ear:

"I've changed my mind about the captain's proposition. I'm staying——"

"And next ye'll be telling me there's two masts in that smack," broke in Tuzzer indignantly. "Gimme some credit for having eyes and common sense. When she looked at you, and you looked back at her, didn't I know your killick was overboard and hooked? O' course, you're staying! Else I'd be ashamed o' you." He had begun his speech in a muffled grumble, but, as his emotions surged, his voice rose with the tide of them.

Scott set hand on the old man's shoulder, and shook him into silence.

"Suppose you take a trip outside of here, Johnny Ranzo! Go aboard the *Kestrel*, and if you must talk, put your mouth close to the capstan head, and whisper into one of the bar holes."

"I'll do it! The capstan won't be trying to tell me that water is wet." He *clump-clumped* to the door, banged it behind him, and went down the outside stairway.

Scott turned to Dorrance, who was leaning back in his chair, nesting his head in clasped hands, and grinning broadly.

"How do you happen to be in a double hitch with that old tar, Scott?"

"Probably because he's always talking back to me, just as you heard a jiffy ago," confessed Scott, returning the captain's grin. "He has plenty of pepper to go with his natural salt, and it's all for my relish."

"Where'd you find him?"

"He found *me,* sir! After twenty years of waiting for the chance to cash in, he came over the big water, with the secret of where he and a couple of mateys of the crew of the old *Bohemian* had hidden a few hundred cases of whisky; they buried it when they had been set over the wreck on Grand Tremont as caretakers. The others are dead, and Tuzzer made up his mind that the whisky would buy him a snug harbor in his old age."

"So it would have done."

"But he was set on making a big profit out of smuggling it into Yankeeland, sir. I wouldn't help in any such job, but I did go with him to stop others from stealing the stuff, after they had stolen a tip from Tuzzer. The fact that the old chap turned square around in his notions, and helped me in the destruction of the whisky, speaks mighty well for Tuzzer's better qualities. So I've taken it on myself to help him make his fortune in a decent way." Though Scott was smiling, there was earnestness in his declaration.

"Well," confided Captain Dorrance cordially, "I've found still another man, it seems, who is to my way of thinking on the rum matter. Take the old boy with you as first mate. He must needs know a ship like you know the fishing part."

"I was intending to ask as much of you, sir. You'll be sure of your officers this trip, if nothing else."

At this point, Dorrance modified the positive manner in which he had been conducting the previous matters of ordinary business. He looked away from Scott, and pawed among papers on his desk, making only a pretense of that occupation. He was distinctly not at ease. He muttered, and occasionally glanced at the young man, displaying uncertainty.

Scott ventured a remark after the silence had been prolonged.

"Is there something in our business, sir, that doesn't quite suit, on second thought?"

"Not in *our* business. No, no! We'll be getting to the papers of agreement right away." Again he hesitated; then he flung himself around in his chair, and confronted the young man with decision. "What I'm going to say hasn't anything to do with our business, and I'm a devilish fool, I guess, in bringing another matter up. But you can blame my impudence on the similar streak shown by Tuzzer. I couldn't help hearing a part of what he said. I understand now, well enough, that you changed your mind in regard to me, because you were influenced in some way by Tamlyn Osborn." He hastened to add, noting Scott's frown: "I don't mean to pry into your affairs or meddle with them, lad! But the fact that you shifted your tack all sudden, after a talk with her, does seem to have a hitch-up with your and my business, after all. Eh?" He permitted the flick of a smile to gloss the situation. "Scott, I want your permission to speak frankly about Tamlyn. It has nothing to do with any sentimental foolishness. It's about her business."

Scott flushed when he declared:

"Mighty little chance is there for sentiment, sir, or talk about it. My meetings with Miss Osborn have been few and always in public—and in the middle of a fuss of some kind, it has so happened. To-day she has asked me to help her in some matter; she did not explain what. I know I can trust you with that information."

"You bet you can trust me!" declared Dorrance, banging his fist on the chair arm. "I wish she would trust me with the whole of her affair. But she won't do it. She won't even talk matters over with me. She knows how much I'm tied up in business relations, and all that, and she is afraid to draw me into trouble. She wants to get the help of a rank outsider who isn't afraid of man or devil—or the Marches. She won't let me mess in, I repeat, because she is afraid of the wallops I may get in my business connections.

And that's a tough break for me, the friend of her father and very fond of her ever since she was a tot. Now, lad, down to cases! She promised, did she, to let you in later on what you can do for her help?"

"Yes, sir. She asked me to go to her on Grand Tremont, when I found a good chance."

"You go!" directed Dorrance, with vigor. "Grab the excuse of a haven in a storm or anything else. You'll have the *Kestrel*. Use her with my permission. By gad, I can be of help to that extent! And now that we're down on more of a confidential basis, son, I'm going to explain some of that popping-off of mine out on the street, when Fletcher March's name was brought up. As you know yourself, he's magistrate, high lord, big boss, and all that, on Grand Tremont. Sets himself up mighty high, eh? But I'm in the inside ring of banks, politics and most everything else in this city. I have my own way of knowing about the flow of money, and the men who are dipping their paddles in it. Fletcher March is in the game of a rum-running syndicate! Sits high up and well away, and thinks he is watching all details. But it's working for him like it's working for most men who trust business to others—business that's low and that makes knaves out of men otherwise decent. He is being trimmed good and plenty, Scott. But he has kept dumping in good money, following the hide with the tail, in order to get back what he has lost. There's a devil of a comic side to a part of the affair, if you want to look at it that way. Nephew Louis hasn't the least notion what his uncle is mixed in; and Louis has been blasted busy egging on his gang to hijack syndicate rum carriers. Guess you can now understand better some of Fletcher March's 'virtuous' indignation, when you had shown up Louis as chief of a hijacking gang!"

"The uncle did seem to be quite harsh when he drove young March off Grand Tremont," admitted the listener, with demure conversatism.

"You're cautiously Scotch, all right," chuckled Dorrance. "Fletcher March must have wanted to skin a skunk, and tack the hide on the sunny side of the big store. And he must have it in for others who have been doing him. I don't give a damn if he loses every cent he's gouged out of the poor devils he keeps under his thumb on his island. But he's using his power as an unbonded executor of Tamlyn's mother's will, and as manager of the Osborn estate; and I'm knowing to the mortgages he has been plastering on. Tamlyn's money is going along with the rest. Fletcher March is as crazy over money as his nephew is over general hellishness. That girl does need some help, somehow."

Scott twisted in his chair, and ground his calloused palms together.

"It's a high compliment she pays me—thinking I can help. But how—how?"

"She's a bright girl. She has been doing some thinking. She'll tell you how, don't worry."

"It isn't worry, Captain Dorrance. I do little worrying—too little for my own good, I fear. But I'm only a sailor, with no head for big affairs."

"I have told her to start a lawyer busy on the 'big affairs,' as we may call them. I get what you mean in that line. But she's probably in the know as to some things that can't be handled by the law. And she wants a stranger, an outsider, as I've said. She has had her chance to see that you're bold and brisk in undertakings. You have proved on Grand Tremont that you can't be pulled into camp by the rum crowd—and there are devilish few in these parts who can stack up to that extent, when whisky profit is concerned. Lad, go to it! Of course, I expect you to wind up the swordfishing season with a bang. But the job makes a handy cover for the side line, whatever she may want you to do. In my own case, I find that the more lines I set, the more fish I can pull in." He grinned broadly, jerked himself from between the arms of his chair, and shook Scott's hand. "I say, go to it! Tamlyn has been the means of helping me get hold of and hang onto a reliable skipper. I owe her a lot. Go ahead, and pay my debt."

He walked with the new captain on the way to inspect the schooner.

"A few men have stuck by all sum-

mer. I think you can depend on them, Captain Scott. We'll fill up the crew with the best we can grab. Better head straight to the grounds."

"I'll do so, sir. I'll make no call at Grand Tremont, until I have a good reason for doing so."

"I'm going to advise you on one point, Scott. I don't know, of course, what Tamlyn has up her sleeve for a bind on Fletcher March. But if you do come to any personal clinch with him, and need to make a stand-off, you tell him that Peter Dorrance sends word that the high-ups are looking into conditions in these waters. I've been nothing but friendly with Fletcher, on account of business and other reasons. Tell him I'm advising him to look out for himself. If he wants to hurt you, he can call on a tough gang out there. My tip, through you, may dull his stinger."

"I hope he'll not try to use it again on me, sir. He did it when I was there last time, and I may not come off as well with my temper as I managed to do then."

"I can see something hot ahead, at any rate. But I say again, go to it, lad!" counseled Dorrance, with a bang of his flattened hand on Scott's shoulder.

CHAPTER IV.

HEAVE!

DORRANCE was a man of action, and found his new captain a zealous co-operator. The *Kestrel* already had her stores and her ice on board, and her gear was in shipshape order. Dorrance took Scott and Tuzzer to a hole-in-the-wall eating shop for a belated noonday meal.

It had been decided that Scott would sail that afternoon on the late ebb, reaching the fishing grounds by morning, perhaps using the gas kicker as soon as the breeze let go after sundown, as it usually did in August.

"Suppose you go aboard and stay there, checking up on everything," suggested Dorrance. "I'll circle uptown and send down likely chaps for your once-over. One of the men who are sticking is a good harpooner. Want another?"

"I'll be handling my own harpoon, sir. And Tuzzer for the helm. We'll be needing only nimble dorymen to chase the kegs, along with some husky lads for the cleaning."

"Fine-o and all dandy!" commended the boss heartily. He straddled away on his mission, and Scott and the old man returned to the schooner moored at the wharf; they had visited her before lunch for a quick inspection, in the company of Manager Dorrance. She was a trim fifty tonner, and promised to be lively in the twirl of a seaway, as was necessary in the case of a swordfish chaser. In the lockers aft they found oilskins and boots.

"We need naught but the usual chickle fixings we lost with our duffel, Tuzzer. You go up to a handy store and stock us. The men will soon be drifting along to keep me busy."

After Tuzzer trotted away on his errand, Scott set himself to make a survey in detail.

He scrambled up out of the fore hatch when he heard a hail on deck. He expected to see the first product from Dorrance's skirmishing.

A naval lieutenant was waiting near the mainmast. With him was a young man, in the natty attire of a yachtsman.

"My name is Barron, Captain Scott. Lieutenant in command of C G.-709, prohibition fleet, anchored in port. I've just heard uptown that you have been made captain of this schooner."

"Yes, sir," admitted Scott. "And looks to me like news flies fast in this city."

"Along the main street, yes." The lieutenant returned Scott's smile. "And the news of what happened out on Grand Tremont in a rum matter has also reached me. Through my good friend here—pardon me, I haven't introduced Harry Tasker." He indicated the other caller, who stepped forward and shook hands with Scott. "Harry owns the *Northwind*, that schooner yacht you see off there. He's making this his home port for the summer."

"Just can't bear to leave the old Quoddy waters," explained Tasker amiably. "Cruised down from New York three months ago, and here I stay, letting her foul her bottom."

Barron clapped his friend on the shoulder.

"You're lucky, old sport. You don't have to dodge here and there on orders, or worry about a pay check. But excuse me, Captain Scott. You want to know what I'm here for, of course. I'd like to include in my next report the facts about your seizure of that whisky on Tremont—all you can tell me about the case." He pulled a notebook off his hip, and produced a fountain pen.

"I've nothing whatever to say about the matter," declared Scott curtly.

"But in the case of a seizure——"

"It was not seizing, as you handle such matters. I was minded to keep the stuff away from renegades who would mishandle it."

"However, you have shown yourself to be against the rum business; and there are mighty few men around here who seem inclined to help me. I'm——"

Again Scott broke in sharply:

"I have only this one job to keep me busy, sir. I'll meddle nowise in matters outside." In his thoughts, after what Dorrance had said, he was making the affair of Tamlyn Osborn an integral part of the *Kestrel's* business.

The officer stiffened. He was young, and his job was new; he displayed his sense of importance.

"It'll be no outset to you, Captain Scott, to report to me conditions outside, when you come back here with your fare. My boat, of course, is spotted too quickly if I go reconnoitering."

"I'm an alien, with no hand in making, breaking, or meddling as to your laws. I have my ship to protect. I'll run no risks by dipping into the devilment in these waters."

"Won't you allow me to put one of my under-cover men aboard here, to make the trip and report to me?"

"No, sir!"

Barron controlled his temper with effort.

"Look here, Captain Scott. I'll come down to cases. You punched the jaw of Louis March on the main square today."

"Ye'd best keep your tongue off that," warned the other.

"But I have a right to speak of what is no secret. March is the one man we're after in these parts, because we feel sure he's working the trick by which contraband is pouring past our guard, in spite of all we can do. Your own personal grudge ought to pull you in with us, to the extent of getting the hooks into March."

"I'll take no part in your whisky row, no time, nohow. Is that language plain?"

The officer shook his shoulders, and gritted his teeth; then he swung and walked across the deck to the rail, with the air of one who was not trusting his tether of restraint.

Tasker took a part, blandly, placatingly.

"There's no need of getting hot bearings, Captain Scott. The 'loot' is trying to make good, but he's up against a tough proposition. Enforcing the rum law is no business of mine, of course. But I've become very friendly with Barron since I've been hanging around this port, and I've been helping him on the side with all the tips I've been able to scrape up."

"I'm making no friends on either side, sir!"

"Not on one side, so I judged, when I saw you knock March down," returned Tasker, grinning. "I hurried to post Barron on one man in the region who might be willing to help in tackling March. Just a moment, captain! There's a devilish queer twist in the situation up here. Nothing like it anywhere else on the coast. There's a regular sluice gate for incoming liquor, and the gap can't be located. The high-ups have threatened Barron with the bounce. I'll hate like blazes to see him fired." Tasker promptly shaded his acutely anxious tone and manner. "As a friend, of course. Wholly outside any prejudice for or against prohibition."

"If you're meaning to start arguments or palaver me into tie-ups of any sort or kind, you're wasting time." Scott bored Tasker with a keen gaze, as he delivered this declaration with a snap of finality. He was conscious that he did not like the style of this urbane stranger; there was a wriggling slipperi-

ness in Tasker's personality. In that queer double twist, from strictly personal anxiety to the semblance of altruist's friendly concern, the wriggle was especially marked for a chap of Scott's experience in man-to-man relations; he felt a fisherman's impulse to sand his palms in handling this particular eel.

"Honestly, I'm sorry to find you uppish," Tasker deplored. "Barron is a good egg and means the best. But he's young, rather new in the game, and figures that the man who isn't for him is against him. He might take a notion to fight back."

"Aye! Enough whisky might be found aboard the *Kestrel* some fine day in port—enough for a libel and a hang-up," remarked Scott sagaciously.

"You don't think Barron would do a dirty trick of that kind, do you?" flashed Tasker angrily.

"I'm only telling you I know *all* the tricks along the shore in these times, naming no names, making no predictions."

Scott turned from Tasker and walked to Barron at the rail.

"I'm sorry, sir, if ye're finding yourself up against puzzles. But, I say again, the two kinds of business, yours and mine, don't have the edges right for stitching together. That's all—and ye'll be excusing me if I go about my own concerns."

The men, evidently crew candidates, were coming over the rail from the wharf, and Scott busied himself with them.

The officer and his friend departed.

Then, a bit later, came Tuzzer and his bag of purchases. He followed Scott down the companionway aft, and dumped the articles on the swing table.

"I forgot to buy ye complexion cream, and the barber wouldn't send a hair cut to ye, C. O. D. But seeing as how we'll prob'ly be standing well clear o' Grand Tremont, I reckon ye can do without."

Scott paid no heed to the pleasantry. He immediately adopted shipboard manner.

"Go forward, Mr. Tuzzer, and set those two men to filing the lily irons." He had named the detachable parts of the harpoon heads. He explained what he meant to Tuzzer, who was a neophyte in fishing, and added other information, which would serve the mate in giving orders. "And come in a hurry to me, if you're in doubt about anything. We're not letting this crew know you're not an old fist at the swordfish game."

Just before the turn of the tide from flood, Dorrance came with the rest of the crew complement.

"I'll vouch for 'em as knowing fishing, Captain Scott, but I'm not wise enough to predict they'll stay all regular, if the renegades get afoul of 'em offshore. It's up to you to fight off the renegades, and keep your men straight."

Scott flourished his hand, making the gesture serve as a promise.

The two were in the master's house.

"Yes, Captain Scott, keep everything straight. I've picked you as a square dealer in the rum line, Scott, but I hope you ain't too notional as a fisherman—swordfisherman especially, I mean."

The young man had been waiting for it; he knew well enough it was coming. He decided to gratify the overlord by grabbing a situation first—seizing it with a vigor that would be reassuring.

"Sharks, eh, sir?"

"Yes, son, sharks," agreed Dorrance, relaxing from his anxiety. "Think with me, do you?"

"Certainly, if you think sharks are a better food fish than the lads with the horn snoots."

"Guess there's bootlegging in every kind of business," admitted Dorrance placidly. "A shark, as you know, Scott, in these cold northern waters, furnishes cleaner flesh any day than a swordfish. For myself, I'll eat shark meat when I won't touch the other."

He was stating a truth well known by the initiated in North Atlantic waters.

"It's only the cussed name o' the fish," he added. "What's been your way of handling it?"

"Cut it at sea, and bluster to the crew that it's only for the Chinese trade in Boston and New York, and must be kept by itself. Ship it to the wholesalers, privately marked. If it gets mixed with swordfish cuts in going to the small jobbers or retailers, it's none of my business, Captain Dorrance."

The latter swung over to Scott and indorsed the agreement with one of his ready palm smacks.

"Enough said! You're on, and riding with both feet off the ground! Glad you don't think you've got to fly, using angel wings in the fish business."

"There's only a bit of a word to you, in warning," Scott went on. "Barron of the coast guard was aboard here to-day. He tried to enlist me as a spy. I turned him down hard, and so I'm in a way to make an enemy of him. Of course, Captain Dorrance, he isn't on the job of fish sniffing. But he's a job holder of the government; and there are government inspectors always ready to make a fuss."

"Yah!" bawled the boss. "Because they won't allow, like all fishermen know, that shark is honestly better meat than swordfish."

"A tip to them from an enemy who knows how we work up here. Well, I've made the enemy, and I'll stand the gaff, sir, if it's jabbed."

"Not by a damn sight!"

"But I insist, sir. It's better for one man to get a bit of pitch than a whole business concern to be tripped into the tar bucket."

"Let's hope it won't come to that."

"If it does, we're working on a good understanding, sir."

"And working just as honest as the rest of 'em!" declared Dorrance with heat. "Was anybody in on your gab with the officer?"

"A gilt-edged yachtsman, name o' Tasker. A crony of Barron's."

The boss sawed a forefinger across his chin, and puckered his eyelids.

"That Tasker man has sure got me puzzled, Scott. He's been in port all summer, and hardly ever moves from mooring. I'm a devil of a booster for Quoddy attractions, but I'll be cussed if I see why a city chap wants to spend all of his time here. He seems to be O. K. in standing, is member of a big yacht club, and has proved up in that line all right with the local club."

"He tried to work a pry on me by saying he had been helping Barron in tips, and so forth, and hinted I'm not too good to do the same."

"I've had all the trouble I want from my men mixing in with the rum crowd, lad. Messing with the prohibitioners is exactly as bad, from a business standpoint. Just as dangerous, anyway, in these parts, as matters are running. Barron is up against a queer something that's getting his goat. I can't figure it out, myself, either. For that matter, I haven't tried to. Got plenty o' troubles of my own. Anything else on your mind?" he demanded briskly, hopping up from the locker.

"No, sir. We seem to be all set. I'll be casting off."

Halfway up the companionway, Dorrance halted.

"Oh, I saw Tamlyn again, on the street. Told her you and I have hitched up." He winked. "I held off and allowed her to tell me about her talk with you. That's all she said as how you two had chatted."

"I'm truly much obliged, sir, for you not letting her know I have shook out any sail on the thing in your case. She might think I'm not safe to trust with secrets."

"She sure does know how to hold one herself, all right; and it's best for her to think you're sailing on the same tack. She wouldn't loosen to me on what she's carrying in the back of her head. Handle it as best you can, the two of you."

Scott followed the boss on deck, waved a parting salute, and gave full attention to his duties.

Lines were cast off, bow, breast and stern, and the *Kestrel* drove slowly on her way with the push of the gas kicker, while the crew got sail on her.

Setting his teeth on a fresh quid, Tuzzer took the helm.

Scott's orders were to go to sea by way of the narrows, instead of to the east of Campobello; he had a reason which was based on hope, taking this usual route of small craft, bound for Grand Tremont.

The hope was gratified before the smack reached the mouth of the narrows.

Skimming in her speed boat, alone, Tamlyn Osborn overtook the *Kestrel*, and forged past close aboard.

She had discarded the small hat she

had worn in the city. Her tawny curls were wind ruffled, and their bronze glints were touched up by the slanting rays of the low sun.

Abreast the schooner, she rose to her feet, a sure-poised, reliant figure in her close-buttoned reefer. She saluted smartly, putting much significance into her hail of the new skipper.

He returned the salute, gravely and formally, giving his peering men no excuse for a sneer that he was flirting with the heiress of Grand Tremont.

Then he turned to the taffrail, and resumed his deck pacing behind the helmsman. The two were alone on the quarter-deck.

Tuzzer looked over his shoulder at the young man.

"If I'm allowed to remark, Captain Scott, I'll be bold enough to say as how there's red enough in her hair to show she's perfectly capable o' making it plenty hot for anybody she's got it in for."

The skipper was grave, and rebukingly professional.

"Mr. Tuzzer, ease her to fetch that striper on port, and keep all your canvas drawing. Mind on the helm!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

But Tuzzer ventured to break the silence a bit later. The *Kestrel* had overtaken flotsam of all varieties that had been brought in on the flood, and now was going out with the ebb.

"Excuse me, sir, but close over yonder there seems to be what's left of a damn fine canoe."

"So my own eyes tell me, Mr. Tuzzer."

"Going to give her eight bells, like they do at Lloyd's in London town, and mark her as total loss?"

"No, Mr. Tuzzer. Seeing as how we're staying in these parts where we probably can collect, that canoe is going to be paid for."

"Speaking for myself, I'd ruther have a patch o' hide than the same size o' paper, even with a thousand dollars printed on it."

"It would be hard to pay for that canoe with cash, Mr. Tuzzer."

After bringing West Quoddy light on the starboard beam, the *Kestrel* was headed southeast across the jaws of Fundy, its broad muzzle spouting tide torrents.

CHAPTER V.

NEWS OF OLD ENEMIES.

IN the second dogwatch, soon after sunset, Captain Scott took the wheel from Tuzzer, who had supplanted the man previously set to steer while supper was served aft.

Scott directed the mate to go forward and make a general size-up of the men as best he was able, chinning with them democratically while they loafed on deck. An old sailor, the skipper knew, would be able to get a more or less accurate line on these strangers, their prejudices and points of view, to the end that they might be handled to better advantage.

The helm needed little attention. The weight of the wind had gone down with the sun; with her wheel in beckets, fanned along by a lazy night breeze, the *Kestrel* loafed out into the open sea, not needing to aim sharply for a particular goal, merely making her offing.

After something like an hour, Tuzzer came leisurely back to the quarter-deck, and paced with Scott.

"Odds-and-ends lot, I'll s'y they are, sir. Neither this nor that, as the blind Shoreditch peddler sayed, when somebody tied a goat's horns onto his donkey. But if it's true, as they s'y, that the best liars make the best fishermen, then we do be having an A-1 bunch forrard."

"Smart liars, you found 'em, eh?"

"Extry! And do they know the news? They tell as how Louis March will sure be getting the upper hand o' you, and they want me to warn ye. That's only one sample o' both lie and o' knowing latest news about the run-in, and I mentioned it first because I promised."

"It's not so far off, what he'll be trying to do—so I'm thinking, myself," acknowledged Scott. "As I've said before, the man has become a fair bit of a lunatic where I'm concerned, and has been proving it. And I'm not wondering, the while I've been giving it thought."

He had been mulling the matter in his mind while he paced, waiting for Tuzzer. Scott realized that he had assumed re-

sponsibilities in that region, and was now the custodian of valuable property and of the lives of men. On Grand Tremont March had deserved what he received, but he had been put through an ordeal of bitter humiliation that might well torch the spirit of revenge into a consuming mania. Within a few hours Scott had been the object of two malicious attacks; the frustration of both attempts had undoubtedly merely aggravated March's ugly desperation.

"Ben Tuzzer, the knave we're speaking of is more in love with himself than with anybody else. That night, when we fair made him a jackass, breaking his back, scarring those pet soft hands of his in lugging cases of whisky to toss over a cliff, he was gouged worse and rawer than by the show-up of him next day, in front of his uncle and the lass he was trying to fool." He gazed astern over the slow roll of the sea. "March knows, of course, that I've been hired for this job. He's thanking his friend, old Splithoof of Tophet, because I've taken it—because he can come out and try the game on me in the open water."

"Like I've seen in the mellerdrammys for the Woolwich navvies," suggested Tuzzer, with a half chuckle. "The villun was sure never no quitter."

"Such stuff looks silly in a stage play, matey. However, I've got a lunatic on my heels. I may owe March something, as it stands. But he has gone mad on the point, and he'll try to collect in some crazy fashion. I have no right to be fighting with him, holding this job, with a schooner and her men on my hands. Gad, he made me wreck my self-respect to-day, fairly forcing me to the point of hitting him, right in public!"

"You could do no less nor that, sir. The lass was miscalled by him."

"But it isn't real man-to-man stuff—fighting with a shrimp like him. It won't be, either when he comes chasing me out here on the open sea."

"The gang forrard know as much, and so they allow he'll get the upper hand. But I s'y it's a lie!"

Scott patted Tuzzer's shoulder.

"I'll be doing my best to prove it's one. But I'm remembering all you said to me this morning, about the danger in fighting a coward, and I'm not fool enough to say there's no danger. March, we agree, will chase me offshore."

"Of course he will! At any rate, he'll be coming out to his office, won't he? This is where his business headquarters is."

"As a rumster, yes."

"And speaking of spirits, those 'galumps' there"—Tuzzer jerked a thumb gesture over his shoulder—"have been doing their best lying about ghost motor boats. They say there's a spot up in some one o' the reaches o' Quoddy where boats fade right out o' sight betwixt blinks o' your eyes."

"Another quirk in the rum-handling game, probably," was Scott's sagacious comment. "Even hard-headed Dorrance admits there's something specially queer going on round here."

"I'm naturally of a inquiring turn o' mind. I wish we wasn't tied up so close in this swordfishing business," mourned the old man. "Seems like, considering what may be going on in that reach, we're settling down to awful tame stuff—swordfishing!"

Scott laughed.

"It's tame, eh? You've still got something to learn, matey!" Immediately he pushed Tuzzer toward the companionway. "Turn in for your snooze, Mr. Tuzzer. I'm taking ship for a time, till eight bells midnight, anyway. Helm, too." He leaped on the house and hallooed, hailing the men forward, while Tuzzer was demurring. "All below, hearties! I'll be needing no help on deck in this bit o' breeze."

With the democracy of the fishing fleet, they shouted their approval of this generosity, and chorused their good nights.

"But I'm not sleepy, Ben Tuzzer, and I have much to con over in my mind," stated the skipper, overriding his mate's objections. "I'll take my four hours below after midnight. Get on with ye, out from underfoot!"

Scott, pacing in the serene silence, set himself into the mood of complete enjoyment of this opportunity to be alone with his new thoughts; his meeting with

Tamlyn Osborn had put a fresh aspect on life. Topping all reflections on sinister possibilities, he was aware of the dominating joy of being called to her assistance.

Under the counter of the smack, the slow ripples gurgled in laughter; there was no need to use the motors; the wind in the hollows of the sails breathed murmurs of content. The slow heave of the old surges came shouldering under the keel with rhythmic motion.

Craft lights, red, green and white, glimmered here and there in the distance; he took note of bearings occasionally, and decided that his far neighbors were jogging only, sauntering on the sea; they would be the stragglers of the rum fleet, no doubt. He gave them no especial thought, having small interest in their affairs.

At the end of an hour, he was aware of the pur of a marine motor, borne to him on the sounding board of the sea.

The sound rapidly increased in volume, and he knew the craft was nearing him; he could determine its location fairly well on the night-shrouded waters; but no lights were showing. This breach of maritime law was an unmistakable hint that the parties on board might have little respect for the law in general.

Scott's first quick suspicion was that this was March in his speed craft. Then he dismissed the idea as too strong a stressing of what Tuzzer had called "mellerdrammy." Making all allowance for the grudge March was lugging, this precipitate chase by the villain in the case would be an unreasonable piling on of agony.

The skipper hung boldly over the taffrail and waited, using his eyes and ears as best he was able. The boat was coming from a point abeam the *Kestrel*. There were ship lights off in that direction.

Scott got a bit of a jump when the stranger swept past the stern; a glaring searchlight flashed for a moment, and was instantly turned off. The motor stopped humming, and the boat came drifting in the wake of the smack.

"Ahoy, *Kestrel!*" was the cautious hail, from somebody who had made sure of the name in the beam from the searchlight.

"Ahoy to you! Who are you?" queried Scott, guarding his tone. He meant to be very careful.

"Call Captain Paulett on deck. I want to speak to him."

This was the name of the skipper who had been recently deposed. The new captain decided to make no secret of facts or identity. Here was a rum fleet emissary, beyond question.

"Captain Paulett is no longer in command, sir. This is Captain Argyll Scott speaking. And fend off; you're coming too near!"

"Well, I'll be baw-hoovered!" blurted the other. Again the searchlight was momentarily flashed on, and it was swung inboard so that its flare revealed the speaker. Then, out of the darkness, there was eager query from the one whose identity had been disclosed. "Know me, don't you? Old shipmate on the Banks."

"Aye, for sure, Tom Quinson."

"It was said hearty, lad, and so I'll come over your rail for a more quiet word wi' you."

The motor boat was put abreast the quarter of the sluggishly moving smack, and Quinson swung up over the low freeboard.

"Sheer off, man, and come 'longside again at three flicks o' my flasher," he directed the fellow who was handling the boat.

Scott gave his former mate a cordial hand, and inspected him in such light as was offered by the stars.

Quinson was tall, angular, a typical Prince Edward Islander. He grinned rather sheepishly back at Scott's quizzical grin.

"Yes, I've come to it, Scotty."

"You always agreed with me it was a mean business, when we'd see the luggers heading sou'west."

"I haven't changed my mind, lad; but you know well why I've changed my trade. For the more money, like all the others."

"Aye! And I'm passing no comments."

"That's friendly and kind, considering what I hear ye've done to others on Grand Tremont."

Scott grunted his disgust.

"Is there naught else in the way o' gossip, for jaws to wag on in these parts?"

The other chuckled.

"What do you expect, Scotty? Ye rigged a derrick so that all o' three hundred cases o' twenty-year-old whisky, buried from the old wreck o' the *Bohemian,* was smashed down a cliff. That's so queer, where all in these parts is for rum and money, it's small wonder they talk it over day and night."

"And at sea, as well as ashore, hey? How do you know so much?"

"Because, out to the rum fleet, have sailed the soreheads of the brig *Canaquin.*"

This was illuminating. The crew of the *Canaquin* had stolen from Ben Tuzzer the tip about the treasure stock of buried whisky, and had been most ingloriously done up by Scott's maneuvers in the scrimmage over its possession.

"Mawson and Kragg say they'll get you good, some day, somehow," pursued Quinson. "But out o' friendship, Scotty, I'll not tip 'em off that you're here so handy. After swordfish, are you?"

"After what else, with a pulpit on the sprit and the coil tubs lining the bulwarks?"

Quinson fiddled a forefinger under his nose, and bent close to Scott, squinting incredulously.

"I mean that, Tom!" insisted Scott. "Paulett was fired for chancing it with the rumsters. I'm not to be tempted, and I think ye know me too well to try."

"Ye're one kind o' Scotch I'll not tamper with," admitted Quinson twisting a smile. "I'm glad you have the backbone to stay out o' this game I'm in. I like you the better for it, and I'll swing my service your way, lad, if you're forced into any run-in with Mawson and Kragg." He put his mouth close to Scott's ear and mumbled: "That's saying a good bit in the way o' friendship, because Mawson is a big boss—he's my boss."

"I guessed he was of some importance in the business, Tom."

"He hops from ship to ship, to make sure of his men, to set the greenhorns into running shape. And by happening to be on the *Canaquin,* he got into *some* mess with you, I'll say, if what he says is true. The bruise he's nursing on his jaw is bad enough, but I guess the worst blow he ever did get was when you made him help in wrecking that rum. It's a tip for 'Old Horny,' what? He'll be setting the bootleggers in Hades to a steady job of smashing bottles of twenty-year-old whisky."

Scott allowed his friend to babble on without interruption. Nor did he display curiosity, though the edge of it was nicking him. He realized that, under the open aspects of this game, there was something peculiar, Dorrance had said so; the men on the *Kestrel* had been gossiping to Tuzzer along the same line. Always with Scott was the anxious interest on behalf of Tamlyn Osborn who had solicited his aid; and such help was undoubtedly involved in the affairs of the whisky men, who were endangering her fortune through Fletcher March. Whatever information the garrulous Quinson might drop would certainly be arrows in the quiver of preparedness.

The scout boosted himself onto the edge of the house, and lighted a cigar, the gilt band of which proclaimed prosperity. In the glow of the tip, his countenance exuded triumphant content.

"I ain't going to spill any beans, Scotty, but I'll tip the edge o' the pot just enough to let you peek in. You've said you can't be tempted. All right. But once you dove overboard and saved my life, when a dory tripped under me 'longside the smack on the Banks. You're working at this cussed job, ain't you, for money? I ask you not to draw off and hit me if I'm grateful enough to let you see how you can drag down easier money, and all safe."

In the interests of information to be secured, Scott permitted himself to deal with a bit of guile.

"A fool would I be, Tom, to close my ears against a friend who means all well, as he sees the light. What ye feel like telling, tell it on. Ye scarcely need word from me that I'll be mum."

Quinson sliced air with his palm, and flicked a cigar ash.

"Aw, I know how safe ye are, and that's why I'm talking. Ye see, Scotty, the whole point in the game I'm playing

is making the stuff worth something, by getting it in from where it can be bought for cents, to the place where men tumble over each other, glad to pay dollars. That's the scheme the wise guys up atop o' me have got all greased and going. Nothing like it was ever thought of before. The coast guarders up this way go to sleep, guessing, and have the nightmare till they wake up to do some more guessing. They ain't getting anywhere. A nightmare is all up-and-down motion," he added with a snicker. "All jounce and go-ahead! Bet ye're a-straddle of a big guess, Scotty, and are up in the air, mighty anxious to go somewhere."

"How could I be otherwise?" snapped the young man.

"But I'll have to leave your guessing—that is, unless—well, you know what I mean."

"I do know—and it's *too* mean! I'll gobble none o' your bait, Tom, and I'm too spry for your harpoon."

"Then I'll still be owing you for one life, Scotty. Worth not much, as goody-goodies would value it; but I'm cashing in very nicely on it. I've given ye a tip about Mawson and Kragg, and I hope ye'll be looking over your shoulder often from now on. If I hear more that's for your good, I'll post you damn prompt! My job is scouting, y'know, and it takes me all about on these waters, from boat to boat. The *Canaquin* is shipping on a cargo out there, from a supply ship that's going back for more." He slid off the house roof, and said, cautiously low: "It's blasted hard to stay out of all trouble on these waters in these times, Scotty, even taking the stand you do. You may have to call on a friend who stands in with the dangerous crowd. I owe——"

"No more talk o' that, Tom!" Scotty said.

"All right. But there'll be doing instead of talking, if any pinch comes in your case. It might come, hey?"

"Yes, Tom, it might."

Scott had been doing some quick thinking while Quinson talked, proffering friendly services. Still at a loss to know exactly what service the girl might require from him, he realized that he naturally would be questing for her property, in the circles where the money had been dumped by the fatuous March.

The skipper took Quinson's extended hand.

"Tom, I have a matter of my own, and, as it concerns others, as in your case, I can't talk of it to you just now. But the pinch may come, as you've said. Then I'll ask you to betray nobody. But I will ask for such help as you may be able to give me. Let it stand at that."

"Aye! Let it stand just that way, Scotty."

Quinson gave the other's hand a quick squeeze of pledge.

"Whenever you need to get in touch with me, Scotty, hang three lights a yard apart under your main boom. Then burn a blue Coston." He chuckled. "I'm giving you a special signal—three lights, instead of two. If you hang two, you'll get a load o' rum over your rail P. D. Q.!"

Then the rum skirmisher pulled a flash light from his pocket. He blinked it with the agreed signal, and straddled the rail, waiting for the motor craft, the hum of the engine announcing prompt service.

"By the way, Scotty. Some of the horned snooters seem to be ugly right now. Two days ago one of the fore-and-afters in our fleet got a poke in the strake, clean through four inches of plank and sheathing. If the fish's sword hadn't broke and plugged the hole, guess the old skimmer would have foundered. I'm wondering if the prohibitioners have put swordfish on the pay roll."

Laughing, after that piece of humor, he dropped from the rail into his craft; and it whirred away into the night.

CHAPTER VI.

PLEASURABLE BUSINESS.

AT midnight the skipper routed Mate Tuzzer; a word called down the companionway was sufficient for the alert old sea dog. Scott took Tuzzer into confidence to the extent of stating that a former Banksman mate had dropped aboard, and had proved that real friendship could strike its roots deeply through the mean soil of whisky hitch-ups.

"He has warned me that Mawson and Kragg are hanging about these waters in

the *Canaquin,* with a whetted edge on their grudge. In case you're still sorry, Ben Tuzzer, because you can't go chasing a ghost boat, mayhap you'll be having the tame work o' swordfishing, pepped up by spirits, just the same. At any rate, by dealers in spirits!"

"At my age, and having a bit of an itch to know something about the future, I'd rather have dealings with ghosts than go banging any more against them scoundrels on the *Canaquin,*" declared Tuzzer glumly. "And wasn't you telling me that swordfishing ain't tame?"

"It all depends on 'Old Hard-snoot's' notions, afer the notions have been stirred up by a lily iron."

"And we've already got a couple o' two-leggers, with harpoons in 'em! For a trip that started out as a mild and happy vacation in a canoe, Scotty, we're sure winding up in a hearty spell o' weather."

"Beefing about it?"

"Not a bit! I'm a sailor, ain't I?"

He trudged to the rail, and took account of breeze and conditions. The schooner was making easy way in the light airs.

Scott adopted the formal tone and manner of a skipper.

"We'll let her run as she heads, Mr. Tuzzer. There'll be a bit more heft in the wind just before sunup. Better rout your watch on deck."

Tuzzer went forward and attended to that commission. Then he took the wheel; and Scott went below, asking for a call at eight bells, morning watch, a summons that would bring him on deck at four o'clock, shortly before dawn.

"We'll be sighting fish by daylight," he prophesied.

The prophecy was in a way to be realized, he perceived, when he took a quick squint at the dial of the log on the taffrail, as soon as he was up from below, at four in the morning. Out of his experience, he knew locations well, and saw that the *Kestrel* had made a handsome offing, and was still bowling along under the thrust of a good breeze.

"We'll be over the Gully, west o' Hubbard's, by the time the lookout can make eyesight serve," Tuzzer was informed One of the favorite fishing grounds had been named.

Scott was well aware that he was on trial, where his crew was concerned, a new skipper put to the test by fishermen who knew the game and would be quick in criticism; and criticism might easily lead to slack service under the command of a stranger who fell down on the job.

After his breakfast he went into the waist, and made a final survey of coiled lines and attached kegs.

Then he inspected the line that would serve the first harpoon, its length between coil and pulpit running on the starboard outside the rail. He found it free and flexible, and noted that the thirty-foot pole of the harpoon was lashed handily to the side of the pulpit, a narrow platform rigged for the harpooner, with a breast-high railing of iron rounds.

A man whom he knew as Wooster, signed on the day before, came to the skipper at the fore capstan while Scott was making sure of the pulpit and its gear.

"I'm an A-1 striker, if you'll let me say as much, Cap'n Scott."

"I'll bet you are!" agreed the skipper cordially, patting Wooster's corded arm. "But I mean to take the pulpit for the first one. I'm asking you to stand by as gaffer, in the dory that goes after it."

Wooster saluted to the skipper, who had in this manner announced himself as the real goods in leadership.

Two lookouts were already aloft, one in each of the crow's nests fore and aft.

Scott secured and pocketed two small squares of canvas, and climbed the foremast, passing the crosstree nest and shinning the short topmast as far as the hitch of the wire jib stay. Here was provided a foot support for the lookout. This added elevation gave Scott a better advantage. It was not merely boyish hankering to be first to spot a fish; his anxiety was to establish himself securely in the estimation of these strangers, whose earnest coöperation he might need in something else than fishing.

The weight of the wind died with the rising of the sun, to haul later in the day to the regular sou'wester of that season of the year.

The big, slow roll of those troubled waters continued; but the surges soon were curving in smooth convolutions, unvexed by the whippings of a breeze. The man at the masthead could see far and could distinguish any unusual disturbance of the surface. He chose to range with eyesight as far as possible, not peering for a betraying near-by thrust of top fluke or fan of a lazy fin—any kind of a lookout could spot such a telltale. Scott was eager to locate quarry outside the usual ken of fishermen; and on Georges in past times he had worked certain knowledge to advantage. He knew a favorite trick of an idling swordfish, and set himself to watch for it.

After a time he saw what he was looking for—a lengthening ripple, broken by unmistakable cross-counterings in short undulations; these marked the indolent pattings by a swordfish's tail..

Scott swung a bit and looked down into the upturned face of Tuzzer at the wheel.

"Ease her two points to port, Mr. Tuzzer, and keep her swinging slowly as I lay out my arm." By this arc of divagation Scott was purposing to intercept the tangent of the fish's sluggish course.

The man in the fore crow's nest called up guardedly, admiringly:

"You've sure got an eye for 'em, Captain Scott! Where aways, sir, if you please?"

"Favoring two points to port, Dobbett."

There was a long silence while the other searched for a sign of the fish.

"Guess I'm needing to have an extra peel rasped off my eyeball, sir. Can't spot the critter, nohow!"

"I've got the advantage of you in elevation, Dobbett—and the fish is all of a mile ahead of us," returned Scott, soothing the man's discomfiture. "I just glimpsed his back fin, and I'm checking him as all of eleven feet." It was a fisherman's guess, based on the running sizes of the extra big fellows.

The morning breeze was fanning more lightly, but Scott estimated that it would hold for its purpose. He was averse to resorting to the gas kicker, even though, in many cases, a swordfish pays small heed to the beat of engine or thrash of propeller. However, this might be a notional fish, on edge for alarms.

A few minutes later the skipper felt alarm of his own. He heard the far, slow barking of the unmuffled exhaust of a heavy-duty marine motor. Looking aft over his shoulder, he beheld the oncoming craft, quartering in astern. It was a big sloop, using both mainsail and motor.

Scott cursed, with a flow of anathema which would have stirred professional jealousy even in the skipper of the *Flying Dutchman.* He looked down into the grinning face of the man in the crow's nest below.

"What the hell are you finding that's funny in that old 'pug-wallop' yapping off yonder, Dobbett?"

"Excuse me, sir, but I'm tickled by thinking how the lady might talk back, if she could hear you cussing her out so scientific!"

"Lady! What lady?"

"Skipper of the *Annie Estelle,* sir, the sloop yonder. Y' see, I've got an eye for that sloop, even if I'm blind in the case o' that swordfish. Everybody in these waters can spot the *Annie,* even by exhaust."

Interest, as well as anger, was aroused in Scott. It was his sour reflection that he had plenty of time for getting information about a craft that was captained by a woman—would have all day, perhaps, if the woman persisted in scaring his fish. Gazing under his palm, he observed that the sloop carried no pulpit; therefore his quarry was not endangered by a rival, except in the matter of noise.

"What's she doing with her sloop, Dobbett? Delivering washings?"

The lookout showed appreciation of his captain's humor, and, after a series of cackles, reported:

"She's Missus Annie Todd, sir, and sails codfishing out o' Grand Tremont. Has a crew o' four nephys. She has been married five times and always to sea cap'ns—and all five have gone to their last sleep under a wet sheet. All of 'em in wrecks! So some folks call her 'Annie's Reef,' and say she ought to be marked by a danger buoy. But her reg'lar nickname is 'Eight Bells Annie.' "

Scott did not need to probe for the meaning of that sobriquet; eight bells signify the sailors' requiem.

"By gad, there's no need of her putting herself out so as to hoodoo *me!*" raged Scott, finding no humor in the lady's nickname at that juncture. "As a fisher, she ought to have decency and sense enough to sheer off from a pulpit chap's range."

Dobbett, again taking note of the sloop's course, set a crease of perplexity into his forehead.

"It ain't a bit like Annie to come slam-banging into the wake of a swordfisher, sir. Never knew her to be thoughtless like this before. Mebbe she has some reason for speaking to you, Captain Scott."

"Of course she hasn't!" opined the skipper curtly. "Moreover, she won't get near enough, unless all language fails aboard here." Again he made sure of the course of the idling fish, and gave arm direction to the attentive Tuzzer. Scott added some vocal instructions. "Call a man to the wheel, grab the megaphone out o' the companionway, Mr. Tuzzer, and tell that sloop something about manners. Do it A-1 and shipshape!"

With rancor of his own, Tuzzer obeyed promptly. He possessed a sailor's volume of tone. His orders through the megaphone lacked distinctness of phraseology; but the words of his profanity were sharply pointed.

With keen relish in the fact that Mr. Tuzzer was entirely unconscious of the fact that he was addressing a woman, Dobbett hung over the rail of the crow's nest, and wriggled in silent glee.

After a minute or so of howling and dervish dancing on the quarter-deck, Mr. Tuzzer's authority prevailed, so it seemed, when the sloop's motor stopped its barking, and the pursuing craft swung around into the eye of the wind, and lay to, rolling on the slow surges well astern.

"Thank you, Mr. Tuzzer," commended Scott, from his perch. "It was a seaman-like bit of work."

"He's been in deep water a lot, I take it, sir!" opined Dobbett, from below.

"At any rate, he has waded across a clam flat at low tide," admitted Scott, not minded to inform a fisherman that the new mate was a greenhorn in this work in soundings.

"Guess Eight Bells Annie is ketching onto same, by the tone of his voice, and is relishing the fact," suggested the look-out. "Them five she married was all deep-water men. She seems to be flapping her handkercher."

Now that the sloop had swung about, her sail no longer shielded her quarter. A person, posted near the wheel, was waving something small and white, a gesture indicative of polite salutation.

"Mr. Tuzzer, make it your way to cast a glance astern," Scott called down, with a youth's impish impulse to tease. "I'm informed that a lady captains yon sloop. She seems to be flirting with you."

In all cases, ashore or afloat, the humor of the boss must be acclaimed with hearty and complimentary zest; immediately on the *Kestrel*, aloft and alow, there was a chorus of hilarity.

Tuzzer glared up at the tantalizer, after shifting his incredulous stare from the party who was waving a handkerchief. The old man opened his mouth; then he closed it with a snap, and shook his head, with the air of one who had no language for dealing with this latest situation.

In this grim silence of the mate, Scott found a rebuke for levity at that time when serious business was ahead.

"Silence below, men! Stand to your places!" He swung around, and peered under his palm. "Mr. Tuzzer, pinch her to starboard three points, and make course good!"

The finning fish had circled, and was patting along nearer to the schooner.

It was time to take full advantage of striking distance.

Scott pulled out his bits of canvas, and, with them in his palms for protection against the wire, he slid down the jib stay to his place in the pulpit.

By the time he had the haft of the harpoon in hand and had poised his weapon, he could see ahead of the cut-water the shimmering bulk of the fish, now swimming leisurely a few feet under the surface. The quarry rolled slightly

and disclosed one of its goggling blue-green eyes, the largest eye in any creature on land or in the sea. There is mystery as well as menace in that eye, especially when it is partly shrouded by a layer of water between fish and observer.

Skillfully, Scott allowed for distance and refraction, and struck with all the power of his arm when the dip of the schooner's bow aided his thrust. The quick twist and swerving dive of the fish showed that the lily iron had been imbedded.

Instantly, the striker gave the line a turn around a butt, and the stick was jerked away from the iron.

"She's in, and he's away!" yelled Scott, scrambling back along the sprit. "Make sure o' toggle, aft there."

A man seized the line running from the hundred or more fathoms of coil, and a tremendous yank against his clutch satisfied him.

"Well toggled, sir!" he yelled. He let the line run, grabbed the coil and keg, and hurled them over the rail.

By this time, a dory was over and alongside, and Scott joined the two men who were in it. He took the sweep at the stern as steersman, and the two oarsmen gave way at his command. Over his shoulder he called back:

"Jog her, Mr, Tuzzer, till we signal to come 'longside."

Away off abeam the keg was bounding over the surface like a stone skipped by a boy in play. To and fro, hither and thither, it rushed in a zigzag course, until its slower bobbing indicated that the fish, fighting this relentless drag, was partly spent.

Finally, the pursuers were able to capture the keg, and Scott pulled it into the dory while the men poised the craft for the purpose.

Into a hole in the stern gunwale Scott inserted the prop of an iron roller, and over this he slowly, testingly drew the line, satisfied and at ease as long as it remained taut. He stood doubled over, and no command from him was required to keep his two men on their feet. At that moment, they all knew, the tortured fish might cease from its tense struggle to get away, and then would rush up from the depths at express speed, following that telltale line, to drive the sword into the enemy above with all the force of tremendous momentum; many a fisher has been slain by that attack.

But in this case—and Scott thanked his good fortune in his first capture—there were no untoward complications.

The big fish fought long and stubbornly against the taut line, sounded again and again, running the warp over the chuckling roller, then came heaving and rolling to the surface, the great eyes glaring impotently.

Wooster reached and thrust with the lance through the gills. There were crimson swirls in the green water. The fish quivered, rolled and lay inert on its side.

While one man lifted with a stout gaff, the other set the bight of a seizing around the tail flukes; and with this warp the giant was hoisted by tackle on board the *Kestrel,* as soon as she had been maneuvered alongside the dory.

The fish was a ten-footer and would run well over five hundred pounds, so Scott's estimate told him.

Mate Tuzzer had left his wheel in beckets, and lent a hand with the hoisting tackle. In his enthusiasm at beholding a new spectacle, he would have betrayed himself, had not Scott guessed at what his profane stammerings were leading to. The skipper kicked his mate, unseen by the others.

"Chew your tongue, Johnny Ranzo, if you haven't got a quid handy," was the whisper in Mr. Tuzzer's ear. "I don't want these lads to know I've a greenhorn mate."

However, the spectacle, while the last life of the fish was ebbing there on deck, was of a kind to jab speech out of any person beholding for the first time.

Slowly the gills turned coppery, and the body assumed a hue of deep cobalt blue, pricked out with bronze glints along the back. Later the color was purple; then came the shades of light blue. At last, wholly lifeless, a glorious creature became merely a dead fish, doomed to the knives of the market—dull brown, dirty white.

But through all the changes and after

the last quiver, those huge eyes were wide and baleful with prismatic colorings.

Mr. Tuzzer finally wheezed a deep sigh, and grabbed an ax from the hand of one of the crew.

"I'm going to chop off that horn snoot, and add it to the rest I've got together while I've been in the swordfishing business." He gave Scott a wide-eyed stare, full of triumphant zest in having surmounted a situation. "When I settle down from the sea, skipper, I'm going to use 'em all to make a picket fence around my house. Reckon I've got most enough a'ready!" He set himself to vigorous whacking at the base of the horn.

Just then Scott's attention was taken off his fish by a hail from alongside. He stepped to the rail, and was accosted by one of two men in a dory.

"Captain Scott, we're from the sloop *Annie Estelle* over yonder. We have brought a note for you."

From a wet hand the skipper took a folded paper. He read the few words of the missive with amazement, in which quick joy flared:

DEAR CAPTAIN SCOTT: I have ventured to follow you out upon the high seas because our matter may need prompt attention. I hope you'll forgive me for bothering you. Shall I come aboard the *Kestrel,* or can you find it convenient to come to me?

TAMLYN OSBORN.

Scott put the paper carefully away in his breast pocket, and buttoned the reefer, with the air of one safeguarding a precious jewel. Also did he guard his tones when he leaned over the rail and spoke to the messenger.

"Please carry word from me that I'll come immediately." He spun on his heel and addressed Wooster: "I'm putting matters in your charge, for a bit. Clean and dress fish as usual, Wooster, and ice before the sun gets high. Keep the schooner into the wind as she lies."

Wooster saluted and promised.

Scott was earnestly anxious to keep distance between the crafts; he feared what gossip these tongues might carry back to the main, regarding any association of his with Tamlyn Osborn.

"Mr. Tuzzer," called the skipper, "take an oar with me. We're rowing over to yon sloop on a matter of business."

When the two went over the rail, there were some covert glances from man to man on the *Kestrel.* After the dory was safely out of earshot, and while fins and flukes were being chopped off, gossip was busy, in regard to their skipper's prompt obedience to a call from Eight Bells Annie.

CHAPTER VII.

DOUGHNUTS AND CHIVALRY.

MR. TUZZER, pulling the bow oar, maintained a gloomy silence as long as he could endure that attitude of constraint.

Scott's tempo as stroke was setting a good pace for the helper, and the old man had not much breath to spare. But when they were a cable's length from the sloop, Tuzzer exclaimed:

"How the hell was I to know I was talking to a woman?"

"Oh, I had forgotten all about that," returned Scott, indifferently.

"Ain't she writ that note to you, telling you she wants to be apologized to? Ain't that why you've fetched me along over here?"

"You're not of so much account as that, all of a sudden, Ben Tuzzer. Miss Osborn is here, and has something important to say to me."

"Ow!" wailed the old man. "She, too? Cuss me if I don't jump overboard right here and now!"

He leaped to his feet. But he did not jump overboard. The dory was swinging alongside the sloop, and the sense of sailor's duty overrode panic in Tuzzer. He grabbed for the mainmast stays and held the dory, while Scott clambered on board. Then Mr. Tuzzer hastily pushed off and drifted away to what he considered a safe distance.

More than ever before was Tamlyn cordial, when she greeted the young man, even though anxiety shaded her expression. Just behind her was a tall, buxom woman whose rubber boots and khaki knickerbockers proclaimed that she was resolved to wear garb fitted for her work on the sea. She flourished a mannish salute when Scott was presented

The three were in the sloop's cockpit; the four nephews were grouped well forward, and were attempting to draw the glum Mr. Tuzzer into conversation, after he had nervously and curtly declined to pull up and come aboard.

"Mrs. Todd is my neighbor and my mother's good friend," stated Tamlyn.

"Like I am to you, Tammie. Twice as much, maybe, because you need me more." With broad, strong hand, she patted the girl's shoulder.

"I do need friends more than ever at this time," confessed Tamlyn, not weakly, but with honest appreciation of what friendship meant. "Mother Todd and I talked over matters after I got home from the main, and that's why I have hurried out here to get in touch with you, Captain Scott."

"Your being here has made the sunshine brighter—I can tell you that!" declared the young man, flushing when he made the bold speech.

The skipper of the *Annie Estelle* laughed, noting the mutual confusion of the couple.

"I've had five sailors for husbands, but I dunno as ary one of 'em ever said anything prettier 'n that."

"I was only trying to have Miss Osborn understand—I hope she knows——" Scott was stammeringly addressing the older woman.

"Of course she knows, sir! *She's* bright!"

"I do know you're willing to help me all you can, Captain Scott," put in the girl. Then she hastened to take all suggestion of sentiment out of the situation. "My affairs are wretched enough, sir, but your own case is now tied up somewhat with mine, because Mr. Fletcher March had a spy on my heels yesterday in the city, and has been told that you and I were in conversation on two occasions." The color deepened in her cheeks. "I can't bring myself to speak of one of his accusations, but it's——"

"He thinks you're courting her," snapped Mrs. Todd, with blunt disregard of sensibilities.

"We'll have no talk about his wicked nonsense in that line!" cried the girl sharply. "His suspicion of something else is more to the point, Captain Scott. In the past I foolishly made threats in my talk with him. He now believes I have enlisted you to help in carrying out those threats. Last night he made horrible threats of his own. He means to get word to the whisky syndicate bosses that you're dangerous while you're in these waters. The affair on Grand Tremont gives him a good basis for such talk."

"I have been well advertised as more of a prohibitionist than I really am," admitted Scott ruefully.

"But you'll be in great danger out here!" cried Tamlyn, with anxiety. "It will be on account of me, through Fletcher March."

Scott put up a disclaiming hand.

"Miss Osborn, the mischief was all stirred by me alone, long ago, when I blocked certain men in the matter of the old *Bohemian's* whisky treasure. Whatever may happen now, it will be through no fault of yours."

"But if it were not for me—I mean," she corrected in confusion, "if I had not asked you to help me, you would now be safely on your way to Cape Breton."

"Aye, perhaps." He stepped a bit closer to her. "But it's your asking for my help that has made the Quoddy waters the finest place in the whole world for my real peace of mind. There's a lot more I could say—and want to say—but I hope you'll not stir me now to the saying of it. If you speak more of any fault of yours in having me where I can look ahead to a lot of worth-while stuff, I much fear the lid will blow off my feelings. Please help me in keeping the lid on."

It was a whimsical threat, but it was particularly effective at that juncture; his stress of emotion was evident, and the girl dared not go farther, even for the sake of her own peace of mind.

The discerning mistress of the sloop relieved the tension in shrewd style.

"Speaking of lids blowing off, Captain Scott, who was it hopped out o' the language pot a bit ago aboard your packet?"

"I ought to take it all on myself, Mrs. Todd, having given the orders. But under these circumstances"—he stole a side

glance at Tamlyn—"I'm coward enough to shift blame. My mate did the talking."

"Huh! Deep-water, I take it!"

"Very deep-water, madam. Mr. Tuzzer doesn't like being even on as high land as this. Afraid he'll get his feet muddy!"

"I enjoyed it—really did! Sent Tammie down into the cuddy, of course, and shut the hatch. Then I had a good time, listening. Seemed homelike and natural, after having had five deep-water chaps for husbands. I wish you had brought that mate over here."

"I did," reported Scott, feeling more at ease as to the status of Mr. Tuzzer. "He's yon there in the dory."

"Kindly call him aboard. Deep-water men are all too scarce these days."

It was necessary to hail Tuzzer three times, and to talk rather roughly in the way of commands before he would dip oars.

Mrs. Todd grabbed his hand while he was halfway over the rail. He was in a lamentable state of sheepishness before she began to speak. Even when she lauded his recent language, with a heartiness which was honest and had no touch of sarcasm, he was considerably more agitated.

"It's an honor and a pleasure to meet a man from real deep water, Mr. Tuzzer. I'm a sailor's widow," she added conservatively.

Her guest brightened a bit.

"Wull, marm, it take that kind to overlook failings in them as has to cuss as a part o' the job." He gazed at her, with the ready admiration of a small man for a bouncing woman. "I'll say, for my part, that there's never no hard feelings, not before, during nor after the cussing is ended."

"I'll meet you halfway on that, Mr. Tuzzer," she assured him. Briskly, she demanded: "Do you like doughnuts?"

"Many a time I got licked for clubbing a doughnut tree, when I was a younger, marm. Can't stay away from 'em!"

"Step below with me into the cuddy, Mr. Tuzzer. You must sample some of my make."

Mrs. Todd understood the glances of gratitude she received from Tamlyn and Scott as she executed this sortie.

Scott entreated the girl earnestly, as soon as the two were alone:

"Please put out of your mind, Miss Osborn, all thought of what Fletcher March or his gang may try to do to me. It'll only be a part of the rest of the game I started myself. In your note you mentioned something that might need prompt attention," he reminded her, in order to dismiss the other topic.

"Yesterday I consulted a lawyer, Captain Scott. He can take legal steps, he says, to prevent further mismanagement of my property by my stepfather as the executor of mother's will. And whether an attorney can recover for me what has been taken illegally depends on the amount of assets Fletcher March still has. I'm afraid his estate is much involved."

"Captain Dorrance hinted as much to me, and he's probably in a position to know."

Wistfully, she besought:

"Don't think I'm grasping or mercenary, Captain Scott. If Mr. March had lost his property by ill luck in honest and regular business, I'd give him my money to help him through difficulty. But he seems to have given up all judgment and sense, since he has been meddling in liquor affairs. He is like a reckless gambler who has lost, and is plunging all the more wildly in order to make good. He has cut loose from all business caution."

"You have named it," averred Scott. "It's the curse of what seems easy money. It's all gambling! I've been seeing some of my friends lose their heads the same way."

"The Osborns worked hard for their money," she went on, with plaintive earnestness. "They were thrifty, and hoarded a little fortune, dollar by dollar. I am the only one left alive to see it wasted, thrown away, grabbed from March by the wretches who are squandering it, I'm sure, in vice, just as Louis March has been doing with whatever he could lay hands on. It isn't the mere loss of my money, Captain Scott. It's the thought of how hard my folks worked to save it—the thought of how it is now

passing through vile hands. That's the torture!" She placed her palm against her lips, shielding the quivering that might betray feminine weakness. Her eyes flashed above the hand. "It shall not go on farther, sir! My plan may be only a girl's foolish desperation. But in the case of men who are not in real business but in law-breaking, men who cannot be got at in the courts, there's no other way except to be desperate."

"In a game played against men worse than devils on the other side o' the table —yes!" agreed Scott, with sailor's bluntness. "But if there's any desperate stuff going, Miss Osborn, that's my part of the job, not yours."

"But what I have in mind must be done by me, personally. Perhaps, after all, it's not so much desperate as it is foolish. But I cannot think of another way." She turned from him.

"If you'll tell me——" he suggested after a silence, on his part pausing in uncertainty.

"Now that I am face to face with you —and with the subject, I'm realizing how ridiculous it may seem. I'm afraid it's truly only a girl's idea, and will be laughed at by a man. Let me say something else while I'm steadying my thoughts, Captain Scott."

She nodded, repressing a desire to tell her that listening to her had become the supreme delight of his life.

"There must be something queer back of all this pulling of money away from Mr. March. A grudge! Somebody trying to get revenge on him! He has made many enemies during his life."

"I can understand that well enough," stated Scott, with considerable venom of his own. "In all my dealings with men, I've never been against one who had such a rasping effect on my temper as when March bullyragged me on Grand Tremont. The rogues are making money with whisky offshore here. If March is hitched with the gang and isn't getting his share, then there's something amiss in the porridge pot, as my uncle used to say."

"I get hints of what is reported to him, Captain Scott. A schooner lost, cargo confiscated by officers, a rich haul made by the hijackers. All the losses, it would seem, are passed on to the special venture in which my stepfather is concerned. If it were anything else than the whisky business, he'd be showing some common sense in his suspicions."

"The tricky trade rattles the wits of the best of 'em," said the young man.

The sloop's wheel was lashed, and she was edging into the light breeze and falling off repeatedly, making scant headway. Scott glanced over his shoulder to note the distance of the schooner.

The girl entirely misinterpreted this action.

"You are uneasy—you're anxious to get back to your vessel, sir!" She paid no heed to his declaimer. "You're polite—and I'm merely puzzling you. So I'll out with it! Captain, I'm told there is a fairly decent man at the head of this syndicate or combination, or whatever the organization is. I don't know his name. I haven't been able to find out. A man in that position keeps very much under cover, of course. He must be a Canadian, a man of New Brunswick, Scotia or Cape Breton. It has been my thought that you may know who this man is."

He shook his head, sorry to dash the hope that glowed in the eyes upraised to his. He was getting a glimmer of her reasons for asking him to help her.

"You are from those regions—you have been out and about offshore where the operations are going on—so I hoped you'd know."

"I've been careful to keep away from the mess, Miss Osborn. Have been glad because I did—now I'm sorry."

"I mean to be very frank with you, though you may think I'm foolish when I confess," she went on. "Whoever that man happens to be, he may lack the decency to have any consideration for Fletcher March in working out a grudge. But I find it hard to believe that anybody except an ogre would take a girl's little fortune along with the rest, if he knew what he was doing. If you did know that man, I've been hoping you would be my escort or guide to him. I want him to hear the truth from me. You see," she added, shading her earnestness with a smile, "I'm anxious to test whether there's

any chivalry in this overlord of the whisky pirates."

"You make me very proud, even by thinking of me in the way o' your help in anything, Miss Osborn. But you're speaking of an errand I'd be sorry——"

"I'm not going to him to beg!" she cried, her flush deeper, her eyes sparkling. "I want to face him with the truth, I say! Then, if he refuses to be a man in this matter, I want to tell him what I think of a renegade who will steal a girl's money."

"I'd hate to think of you even as talking to a scalawag of his stripe and trade," Scott insisted. "Give the job over to me."

"You can do everything well, Captain Scott. I'm sure of that. But in this case, talking for myself and for my own, I can do better."

He gazed at her, finding her proud, capable, intrepid, her quality expressed in all her personality and poise, and admitted to himself that she could do well for herself under all circumstances. Nevertheless, he felt bitterly that it would be humiliation if she exposed herself to any contact such as that which she had in mind.

"Again I say, Captain Scott, all this may seem like a streak of lunacy in me. If you refuse to help, I shall understand very well your feelings."

He retorted curtly:

"You don't understand me at all, Miss Osborn, if you think for one moment I'd refuse to do anything you may ask of me. The only point is, I want to do it all—to keep you away from any such business——"

She tried to interrupt; but he went on sturdily:

"No longer than last night I had a proof of friendship, and the offer of more of it, if I should need it. I can find out for you who this head is. And I will find out. Perhaps we can well let it rest at that for now, and make plans when we know who the man is and where we have to go."

Impulsively, she stretched her hand to him. He wanted to kiss it. But he restrained himself to a grip of her fingers. They were silent for a few moments, standing there, balancing to the slow heave of the smooth rollers.

As she had served earlier in clearing decks for a tête-à-tête, now Skipper Todd came on deck, and relieved a tension that was a bit embarrassing for two young persons. She hailed them heartily as her head came above the coaming of the cuddy companionway.

Scott dropped Tamlyn's hand.

"Excuse me for staying away so long," pleaded the skipper lady, tactfully refraining from a suggestion that the young man and the girl had anything of importance in business or otherwise to discuss. "But when I come across a man who likes deep water and my doughnuts, one as well as the other, I just nat'rally lose count o' time."

Mr. Tuzzer followed Mrs. Todd on deck. He was munching, with cheeks puffed out squirrel fashion, and each of his thumbs was ringed with a couple of doughnuts, held as reserve provender.

"Yes, Johnny Ranzo, you do seem to like 'em!" Scott suggested.

Mr. Tuzzer waggled his head, making no attempt to speak past the mass in his mouth.

Skipper Todd whirled and faced forward; one of the nephews had spoken to her, drawing her attention by a pointed digit. She ducked under the main boom, and stared long and searchingly shoreward. Then she announced her sentiments, with nautical freedom of speech:

"Well, I'll be damned!"

Tamlyn caught the tone of mingled ire and alarm. The leach of the mainsail obscured her view.

"What's the trouble, Mother Todd?"

"Here comes Fletcher March's big launch, tophety-lick, and probably he's aboard. Might know he'd come chasing."

"Let him come," returned the girl composedly. "I don't have to ask his permission to cruise with you, Mother Todd." To Scott she said: "Perhaps you will find it more pleasant to go back aboard your schooner."

"Will it please you if I do? Are you asking me to go?"

"By no means, Captain Scott! I'm sure I'd be asking you to make your

self feel cheap, probably, by running away."

"Then I'll stay."

She thanked him with a smile.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TYRANT DEFIED.

MARCH was a passenger in a big launch—the packet which was used by him for small freight between Grand Tremont and the mainland. Four men formed his crew.

The personnel of the sloop awaited his arrival in silence; they were well aware of the mood which was accompanying the island autocrat, and they had no taste for discussing it.

He stood up, after the motor had been shut off, and leaned over the high gunwale, propping himself and projecting a bodeful, blood-suffused countenance. As the launch drifted closer, they could see how passion was twitching the muscles of his bulky body.

"You're plenty near enough, Mr. March," declared the skipper of *Annie Estelle,* when the launch was a biscuit toss away. She set her foot on the sloop's rail and waved him back.

March loftily disregarded her, addressing Tamlyn:

"You jump aboard here as soon as I'm alongside, young lady!"

Mrs. Todd intervened, with haste and violence.

"I have the say as to who comes 'longside my boat on the high seas, Mr. March. You may be boss o' Grand Tremont, but what you say ain't no account out here." She called sharply to her crew of nephews. She ordered them to grab boat hooks and oars and fend the launch off.

March swore at her.

She swore back at him, in a way that stirred admiration in Mr. Tuzzer. He slipped a doughnut from a thumb, and munched placidly, with an air of feeling that the situation was handled with thorough efficiency without need of interference by him.

Scott was prudently silent, making himself merely an onlooker.

The fending oars were used effectively, and the launch was held off.

Tamlyn stepped to the rail and confronted her stepfather.

"I have come out to the fishing grounds with Mother Todd, as I often do. You know I do."

"I know why you have come this time," he growled balefully.

"If you do happen to know or even guess at the real truth, Mr. March, I advise you to discuss the matter elsewhere, at another time."

"That time will be in about two minutes, and on board my launch, when we start back for Grand Tremont."

"I shall go back as I came—with *Mother* Todd, *Mister* March!"

It was deliberate repudiation of relationship to him, stressed by the affectionate title she gave Mrs. Todd.

It was a match applied to the tinder of rage piled by him on the way out in pursuit of her. All restraint and prudent regard for listeners were swept away like tissue in a flame.

"Or else stay here with Sweetheart Scott!" was March's rabid taunt.

The young man had apprehended that some such remark to the girl would come early in the affair. He was prepared, and his act and impulse worked in unison. He ran across the sloop's deck and employed the momentum for a leap into the cockpit of the launch, bumping into March in alighting. The cursing man was knocked back upon the cushion in the stern sheets.

"This is piracy, as the law views it, on the high seas!" March shouted. "You—one of you men! Smash him with a boat hook! Kill him! I'll back you with the law."

A boat hook was handy to Scott's needs in the cockpit. He seized it. The man at the engine and the three forward remained in their places when he whirled and faced them.

"Better not start anything, lads!" he counseled, with friendly heartiness. "I'm not meaning to hurt your boss."

He turned to confront the tyrant, who bellowed additional orders. But it was evident, as Scott had before observed on Grand Tremont, that understrappers gave only half-heartedly in service when they were called on by March.

The intruder promptly broke in on demands spiced with maledictions.

"How dare I come aboard here—that's what you want to know, Mr. March? You should know you cannot lay tongue to my name, as you just now did, without fetching me on the jump in front o' you." He leaned forward and set his hands on the shoulders of March, who was slumped in the stern. Scott looked the man in the eye, nose to nose. "You also know better than to make more talk along that line!"

The other shifted his gaze and was silent; the stare of that man who stood with heavy hands on the cringing shoulders was too eloquent with menace.

Scott bent lower, closer to the captive's ear, muting his voice.

"Right now I'm doing you a service, holding private a matter between the two of us. I know why you have come rushing out here. But I tell you to keep all blame of your stepdaughter out of this business. It's from others I know all about your hitch-up with the rum gang. You can guess the name o' one man who told me to take word to you from him. But I'm keeping the thing between us two, just as it lies. You're a fool, March! You're tossing away your own money, but worse than that, you're stealing money that doesn't belong to you, throwing that with the rest."

The raging lord of Grand Tremont strove to rise against the sturdy palms which held him down.

"Piracy, assault, and now accusing me of a prison crime!" he retorted.

"Aye! And all for your own good in the end. Mark ye, March—I'm in this thing from now on, and I'm glad to have this chance to tell you I'm there. Right now I know what's in the back o' your head. You mean to get word to the 'hard-nuts' about me. Mean to have 'em put me under. Well, if I'm dumped by 'em, you'll be losing the one man who maybe can keep you from the poorhouse. And mark ye once more! If you open your mouth again while you're in hearing of the sloop, I'll stand up and bawl to the rim o' the sea and sky that you're of the rum gang, as well as being a magistrate on Grand Tremont. Good day to ye!"

He stepped back from March and seized the end of a boat hook extended by one of Skipper Todd's crew; by this aid he was pulled to the side of the sloop.

For a few moments after Scott had departed from the launch, March twisted himself about on the stern cushion, his countenance and thick neck purplish red. But he managed, in the end, to keep back speech; bulked at the rail, Scott was an inexorable threat, and one flaming word would light the bomb, March well realized. He did not even voice a command to start the engine; his gesture informed one of his crew. The launch went away.

"Wull," vouchsafed Mr. Tuzzer, gazing at the white wake of the craft, "even if he didn't git what he come for, he's had a fine day of it for a napthy boat jaunt."

"I was not trying to keep from *you* what I said to him," Scott hastened to inform the girl. "I only did my best to shut his mouth."

"I understand," was her grateful assurance. "I have entire confidence in your good sense, Captain Scott."

"At any rate, that's a fine compliment. And I'll do my best to make matters no worse, if you'll allow me to go ahead to find out who that top-high man is."

"But that's only what I've already asked you to do!"

"When I have found out, I mean to ask, too, something of you—to let me go ahead, somehow, some way, to take the whole mean business off your hands. It's no sort o' job for you, Miss Osborn, what you've planned to do!" he declared hotly.

"My thought has been that I could test a man's decency by going myself," she urged.

But he was doggedly set on keeping her from any such humiliation.

"We can talk about that later, when I've got a line on him. But there must be a way to get man-style decency, by keeping you out of the mess."

She refrained from any argument at that time; she had done her errand; there was no excuse for keeping Scott longer from his duties. She told him so, wishing him luck.

"I'll run in to Grand Tremont on the

way back to port," he assured her. "Captain Dorrance has given me leave—it's his orders, almost," he said with a smile. "But I'm worried when I think of what March may say or do, as soon as you're back home."

Skipper Todd overheard.

"Well, you can slip that worry off your mind mighty sudden, sir! Not that Tammie needs any help from me, where her stepfather is concerned. But if she *does!*" She slapped her breast, and straightened significantly.

Tuzzer beamed on this manifest capability, as he consumed the last doughnut, its generous mouthful muffling any speech of commendation.

He obeyed Scott's gesture and with him embarked in the dory, after the young man had said good-by.

The two rowed back to the *Kestrel* in a silence which was broken only once, when Mr. Tuzzer remarked, with soulful emphasis:

"Master fine woman, Scotty! Master fine!"

As soon as the skipper was on deck, his attention was called to a couple of six-foot sharks, laid out in the waist.

Stated Wooster:

"We had a little time to dicker with, sir, after dressing the sworder, so we baited up and dragged in these critters. Shall we sling 'em back?"

Scott met this tacit test of ethics with frank and matter-of-fact directness, returning:

"Good work, Wooster! Clean 'em, cut 'em, and ice 'em for the Chinese trade." He marched aft, calling a man to start the motor; the breeze had gone flat.

Wooster grinned when he and his helpers pitched into the job on the sharks.

"He stacks right, lads, eh? No foolish notions. This fishing means a fare double-quick and a good lay."

Scott took the wheel from Tuzzer, as soon as the schooner was forging ahead with the thrust of the propeller. The skipper intended to zigzag on the trail of promising signs, and did not care to trust the work to a greenhorn. Two lookouts were aloft.

The mate went forward, making a bit of a swagger in his pretense of supervising the work of cutting up the sharks. He was saved from asking silly questions, having been posted by Scott on the shark side line as a profitable adjunct in a swordfish venture.

Manners on a fishing craft, where all parties share in profits, are not turned to rigorous shipboard discipline; furthermore, Mr. Tuzzer had made himself very free and easy the night before, in his quest of information for the uses of Scott.

Wooster cocked a jovial eyebrow.

"Did ye find her all sociable, mate?"

"Find who sociable?" queried Mr. Tuzzer, with a stiffness that should have contained warning.

"Eight Bells Annie, o' course! Skipper o' the sloop."

Wooster's tone and manner made the nickname an offensive slur, and Tuzzer caught the significance. The crumbs of the lady's doughnuts were even then sticking in the corners of Tuzzer's mouth; her hearty cordiality was ringing in his ears. He did not understand what Wooster was driving at, but there seemed to be a twist in what had been said.

Mr. Tuzzer jumped up and down and clacked his fists together.

"Ye're going to fight, for saying that!" he yelled.

Wooster, amazed, stood gaping, his knife in his hand.

"Fight! Knife or ax or fists! I don't care which or tother," insisted the mate.

"I don't fight 'less I know what I'm fighting about."

"Ain't an insult to a lady enough? If it ain't, then this is like to be plenty enough!" The mate lunged forward and hit Wooster behind the ear.

While the man was staggering backward, the skipper's raucous bellow halted all action until the master arrived on the run, after lashing the wheel.

"Wooster only give her the reg'lar nickname, sir," Dobbett hastened to explain in an aside to Scott. "Like I explained to you it was."

"Shake hands, you two men," commanded Scott. "I'll have no grudges aboard here. Both of you know, without my telling you, you made fools of yourselves, each in his own way. Go aft, Mr. Tuzzer."

To the men he said, after the mate had departed: "It's always bad business, lads, making free with women's names. I want your word you'll keep off such talk from now on."

They promised willingly enough.

Wooster, holding his hand to his bruised head, looked sullen, and mumbled. Scott took him by the arm and led him to the rail.

"I hope you'll overlook an old man's touchiness, Wooster. In the matter of straight ship's business he's too good a sailor to lay hands on a man, breaking seamen's laws."

"Of course, I know my rights and——"

Scott broke in on the grumbling.

"And you could make trouble by laying a claim. But I don't believe you'll do it, Wooster. Because"—he dropped his voice—"Mate Tuzzer has become very much interested in that lady skipper of the sloop."

Wooster turned a side glance and Scott tipped a humorous wink. For two reasons, the young man was pursuing this attitude in the matter; he required absolute harmony on his schooner—and he had youth's relish for a joke.

"There's no old tar on the seas, Wooster, who is more soaked in superstitions than Mr. Tuzzer is. If he's had any inkling of the lady's hoodoo record in husbands, he would have jumped overboard off that sloop. You get me, don't you?"

"I sure do, Captain Scott!" admitted the man, chuckling, taking his palm off the hurt, as if the pain had been healed suddenly. "It'll be something worth watching as it goes on further."

"Put the other men wise, and see that they keep mum."

"I'll plug 'em for keeps, sir. By the way, I'm told she's got all o' fifty thousand dollars laid up—insurance money and so forth."

"I'll try to fix it so she doesn't collect on Tuzzer, by sending him to sea."

Scott walked aft, reflecting on his promise to make Mr. Tuzzer's fortune as recompense for the loss of the whisky treasure of the old *Bohemian*. Ben Tuzzer, settled ashore, might be assured as to his future, despite the dolorous experiences of Eight Bells Annie in the case of husbands who had gone venturing on deep water.

CHAPTER IX.

A CONFERENCE AT NIGHT.

BEFORE sunset, four more swordfish had been added to stock.

A moderate sou'wester had prevailed during the afternoon, and Scott maneuvered the ship in the breeze, letting Wooster serve as striker. Therefore, the day closed with fine satisfaction as to luck, with this teamwork.

Mate Tuzzer, relieved from duty aft, had posted himself on the forepeak to watch Wooster's snappy work with the harpoon. After each fish was securely toggled, the mate bawled high compliments. In this way a very cordial new understanding was established between Tuzzer and Wooster.

As soon as an opportunity offered, the mate had something private to say to Wooster.

"Wimmen ain't to be spoke of 'board ship, as you'll prob'ly agree!"

"It ain't noways safe, and I'm sorry I done it," agreed Wooster.

"Only this! And then I'm through." Mr. Tuzzer put much feeling into his declaration, eying Wooster sharply, as if to test that gentleman's sentiments. "She a master fine woman. *Master* fine!"

"She is all o' that, Mr. Tuzzer. Able and A 1! And has saved and salted something like fifty thousand flukes, so I'm told."

Tuzzer's eyelids dropped to veil the glitter of vivid interest.

"Should most think she'd 'a' been snapped up 'fore this."

"Guess nobody but a real deep-water man can ketch her. That's the understanding in these parts, anyway."

"Much obleeged for a nice understanding with you, Wooster. Ship's work will now go on, pleasant and to taste."

"Aye, aye, sir. All O. K. with me."

That night it fell calm again. Using all the breeze till after sundown, Scott ran to the eastward, desiring to get into the neighborhood of the whisky boats.

For the skipper it had been a crowded day since turning out before the dawn;

but in his determination to get in touch with Tom Quinson that evening, if possible, he again took watch and helm at eight bells, first night watch; he ordered below all his men, including Tuzzer. This consideration pleased the crew. Mr. Tuzzer, though, was distinctly displeased by Scott making a slave of himself, and undertook to stay on deck and do his share, despite orders. He halted on the upper lift of the companionway ladder and mutinied from that post of vantage.

"Look you, Ben Tuzzer," said the skipper, coming close. "I had a caller aboard here last night."

"I'm knowing to it. But I didn't stick my ear out to ketch any secrets."

"It wouldn't have been the style of a friend if you had. It was a man who did talking in a way to help the both of us in a big job. Go to your berth and stay there. If you're up here, you'll be trigging a handy tongue."

The mate grunted his understanding, and went below.

During the next half hour, Scott walked the deck and permitted matters to ride as they were. He was making sure that the weary men were sunk into their first deep slumber.

To the east he beheld scattered running lights, and hoped they marked the rum fleet as well as loafing coasters.

Then, as he had been instructed by Quinson, he slung three lanterns at three-foot spaces under the main boom, to serve as steady beacons, and lighted a blue Coston flare to draw attention to the set signal.

The spirit of friendship was on the alert that night; Quinson arrived in his fast launch and was aboard inside a scant half hour. As before, he sent his man out of hearing. Then he queried, grinning, making a jest of any such possibility:

"Any change o' heart, Scotty, since last night?"

Scott shook his head.

"I'm only a hired man, you know," pursued Quinson. "Had to ease my conscience about taking time off to scoot over here. Now that I've had my dab at my regular business, what's on your mind, lad, in your line?"

Scott was determined to keep Tamlyn Osborn totally out of the affair, if he could manage to do so. He knew Quinson as a warm-hearted chap, who could be enlisted readily on behalf of a girl, but Scott chose to deal with the thing without any injection of sentiment.

"Tom, if you've got to betray anybody, or carry away any of your own sail by letting me on the inside, don't help me. But I have a mighty pressing reason for wanting to talk to the main squeeze in your outfit. You're in the big ring, aren't you?"

"I sure am!"

"And the big boss—who is he?"

"Why and whaffor?" demanded the other bluntly.

"Can't tell you, Tom. I can only say it's personal. Doesn't mean any spy work on him or his trade. While you're thinking it over, you can tell me one thing about him, at any rate. As a man, outside just the rum business, is he decent? You know what I mean."

"He's a square dealer! Almighty dangerous in that line, Scotty. If anybody does him dirt, he'll have the hide off that cuss, and he don't care how much meat he takes along with the pelt. That's why I'm up in the wind in your case, just now, with all sails flapping. I may be doing him dirt if I yip to you."

Scott waited for a minute. Then:

"You think you'd better not, eh?"

"That's sure what I do think, Scotty—meaning all best to you. But you must have a damn good reason for seeing him—that makes the matter important. Perhaps I'll be stubbing my toe if I go up against such an important thing."

There was no help for it. Scott saw that he must unravel the knot a bit, in fairness to a friend. At least, Fletcher March deserved no consideration for himself.

"I suppose it's no secret among you boys that the big boss of Grand Tremont is in the game."

Quinson snickered.

"Damnation deep in it. Up to his chin in it! Head just above water, financially, I'm told. In a little while, I guess, he'll have to bore holes in the top o' his head, if he wants to keep breathing."

Scott blurted the truth, without thought of how greatly Quinson would find that truth amazing and stark, without the shading of explanation.

"I want to get at your high-up to ask him to lay off Fletcher March."

"Blue-gilled holy mackerel! How long since you fell in love with that old hell raiser?"

"I love him like you love an undercover prohibition agent, Tom. I don't give a bawbee what happens to him, personally. It's what he's taking with him when he sinks—there's where my interest lies."

Quinson squinted appraisingly.

"It sure enough isn't because you're caring for the interests of Nephew Louis. It's all abroad through the rum crowd how you smacked young March a sweet swat a bit ago in the city. You're standing high with our gang on account of it. The only reason he's still alive, Scotty, is because nobody in our crowd wants to be hung for killing a polecat. No, you're not begging old March off for the sake of the heir's prospects. In another line I'm doing a little guessing. Now that you've hammered in the wedge, suppose you split her wide."

"I say no more, Tom. Not because I don't trust you, but because it's—it's—— Well, I want to keep it between men."

The other nodded. Then he took a swing to the rail, and pondered, rubbing his ear: Returning to Scott, he remarked: "You've put all ears below decks, so I see."

"Aye. At the same time making myself a popular skipper." He returned Quinson's grin.

"It gives me a fine chance to blow on my big boss." He halted; and Scott surveyed him with hopeful anxiety. "But I'm not going to do it, lad. This is a touchy game. I'm cleaning up in it, and I'm afraid of how the king-pin would take such a trick from me."

"I'm blaming ye no bit," asserted Scott, though hope faded in his countenance.

"But I'm going as far as I dare. And ye'll be called on to do a little daring of your own. Will ye let me take you to-night to your old pal, Mawson?"

The query jumped the young man. Quinson's expression hinted that he had calculated the effect of such a demand, and relished the result.

"It jabbed ye, hey?" Quinson said.

"I'll say it did! I have no taste for killing a man to-night, nor for being killed."

"I'm putting ye in the way o' neither risk, Scotty. First of all, since I saw ye last, I've slipped a word to Mawson, telling him what kind of a friend ye've been to me and still are. That counted, because I've had a few chances to show the gang out here that my teeth are filed for raw meat. And something else is now counting with Mawson, no matter how much hot stuff he has been saying while he's been spitting on the stone and whetting the old grudge. He hates young March so much for the hijacking stuff that he's fair willing to cross accounts with even *you*, for what was done to the sneaking whelp on Grand Tremont, and for licking him in Ward Harbor. Ye see, Scotty, I slanted Mawson into a new train o' thought by my talk," he added significantly. "He is now setting the rum business with me ahead o' the pleasure he might get with you by doing ye up."

"If Mawson lays off from doing me up, what can he do for me?" Scott demanded bluntly.

"I don't know, exactly, right now," confessed Quinson. "But Mawson's up close to the real high-up. Knows him well—is always in touch with him. I've bumped into him only once, and that's when he hired me. I'll say he is iron cased and double riveted! And if it's his personal knife that's out for old March—well, good night, with the quilts tucked in!"

"Mawson is one step nearer, at any rate. I'll take the step to him, and much obliged to you, Tom."

"Don't call anybody on deck till I'm over the side." Quinson signaled with his flasher, and dropped into his launch when it arrived under the schooner's counter.

Then Scott hastened to the mate's berth and routed Tuzzer.

"Take watch, Ben! It's a flat calm, and you can let the rest of 'em snooze.

Leave those three lights on the main boom as they hang. They're a beacon to serve me in coming back."

He ran up the companionway before the old man could manage his tongue in questioning.

The skipper dropped into the waiting craft, the clutch was instantly thrown in, and they were off into the night.

Scott and Quinson did no talking while they sat side by side in the stern, after the latter had remarked, for the benefit of the helper who handled the motor:

"I'll be able to show you some mighty slick pieces o' goods, captain."

That statement, voiced for the man to overhear, made this expedition matter of fact and merely a part of Quinson's usual routine.

The launch was headed eastward. In that direction were red and green lights, here and there. Occasionally, Quinson called orders to the launch's engineer, and the latter flashed signals with the searchlight, coding numbers. It was inquiry—a call for a craft to show its location by flashing the corresponding number.

Eventually, the expected signal was blinked in the distance, and the helm of the launch was shifted and the prow headed for a telltale grouping of lights, which were set in steady, continuing beacon after the flashes.

"As I've told you, captain," stated Quinson, making himself heard by the engineer above the noise of the motor, "I'm taking you to the brig *Canaquin*. She's just been stocked." He added, in an undertone: "It does sound like I'm taking you into the tiger's den. Mawson, o' course, won't hug and kiss you; on the other hand, he won't kill you. Willing to let it go at that, ain't ye?"

"I sure am!"

CHAPTER X.

CLOSING IN.

A LADDER was lowered down the *Canaquin's* side, after an exchange of reassuring hails. Quinson climbed up in the lead, and Scott followed. Mawson, disclosed in the light of a hanging lantern, came along the port alley as far as the break o' the poop of the old-fashioned craft.

He cursed roundly and amazedly, the moment he beheld Quinson's companion.

"Stow it, Mawson!" Quinson snapped. "You know how Captain Scott stands with me—and he's neither spy nor hijacker."

"Nor customer! Any man who will make me help in smashing——"

"Better get rid of that cud and never try to chew it again. Take us below. The captain has come with me for a sociable call on you, so that bygones can be nailed down as bygones."

Mawson, grunting, turned and tramped in the lead.

Confronting Scott in the cabin, the host was plainly in a more amiable mood, after self-communing.

"Man, I'll say this much: You made it a good stand-up fight when you tackled me on Grand Tremont. Considering how that was the way of it, I've probably got no kick coming, because I was licked fine and proper. What has rankled, I guess, was being rammed into the job of smashing three hundred cases of twenty-year-old whisky. That left you stacking, with me, too much like a prohibitionist. No wonder, is it?"

"Not a bit, Mr. Mawson."

"But you also stopped me from killing that damnation hijacker of a Louis March and getting hung for the same, probably. So we'll call it all square, and no more to say about it."

"Now, Mawson, you're spouting!" indorsed Quinson. "Pass around your cigars, and Scott and I will squat for a few minutes."

The three chatted inconsequentially for some time.

Quinson made the break into the topic that was absorbing all of Scott's anxious thought.

"You spoke of young March a little while ago, Mawson. It's easy enough to understand why the bunch has got it in for him, but whaffor the plaster put on old March?"

Mawson flicked a quick glance over Scott's blandly unexpressive face, then stare hard at Quinson.

"What d'ye mean—'plaster?' "

"Oh, I guess it ain't no partickler deep secret that old March is an offside dabbler in our game. Or that he is out o' luck, when it comes to profits."

"He has had some mighty good slices in profits handed to him," insisted the other. "Of course, there've been bad breaks where he didn't cash in. That happens to all of us. Maybe he has hit a worse run o' luck than some—taking wrecks, seizures and hijackers."

Quinson was boldly frank.

"This is all among friends—and old March doesn't belong in the party. So I'm going to say it looks to me like he's only been let in once in a while to bite the bait off a few hooks. Tolled on to be landed proper a little later!"

"You do too much talking, Quinson. But it may be all right in this case, because I know what a raw deal Scott got from old March out on Grand Tremont. It was the same as everybody else has got from March, whenever the old hellion has seen his chance in past times. Got to expect that somebody will wham back at him, when the whamming is good."

"That's the way o' the world," agreed Quinson. "Going to ask you a sassy question, Mawson—still all between friends. Is this a case o' your personal comeback at March?"

"Not a bit!" barked the smuggler, with convincing sincerity. "On Grand Tremont he took my word to the extent of believing that his nephew was a hijacker. That was compliment enough to dull even a grudge if I'd had one."

Out of the stateroom off the saloon lurched a tall man, who greeted Scott with a flourish of a hand. It was Kragg, another whom Quinson had previously mentioned to Scott as holding the spirit of revenge after what had happened on Grand Tremont. But Mr. Kragg, it was evident, had been sampling his own wares, and was mellowed to the extent of loving all the world.

"I've been listening to the peace meeting, gents, and I want to be counted in with the angels here present. No more grudges. Not aboard here. Not even against old March. The special man who does hold a grudge can tend to it aplenty, and he don't need none of our help."

"Blast you, Kragg, close that trap!" commanded Mawson, with heat.

"Oh, I ain't naming no names." Kragg winked. "That wouldn't do, y' know. 'Cause, if old March had the least guess about that p'tickler party having the big swing in this whisky business, well, old March wouldn't no more be dumping in his coin than the devil would wear a celluloid collar! Oh, it's' sure a sweet——"

Mawson had leaped off a locker when Kragg mentioned the unknown personality. The latter had kept on gabbling, despite the other's profane protests. The babble was broken off when Mawson clutched the man and ran him into the stateroom, pulling shut the door from the outside and locking it.

He returned to the callers, his hard face awry with ugly disgust.

"If it wasn't for the easy money in this business, I'd be a prohibitionist. A drunken man can do a lot of harm with his fists, but he can do a lot worse with his tongue."

"All that's been said has slipped past us—don't worry," he was assured by Quinson. "However, let me say that I relish the news that March is in for a proper wallop."

"He is, all right," announced Mawson, with venom. "As I've told you, it isn't my own grudge a-working. But I do know what the grudge is, I'll say that much. And, even if he drops his whole bundle, paying for what he once done to a man, it'll be less 'n fifty cents on a dollar, as such things ought to be figgered."

"Some grudge!"

"Yes. Some grudge!"

Scott wreathed his features with cigar smoke, and strove to keep smooth his mask of placidity.

Mawson's suspicions, however, were not allayed. There were doubt and sarcasm in his next remark.

"Much obliged to you, Scott, for coming aboard to have a better understanding. Too bad you had to put yourself out so much."

"It was no put-out, sir. Nothing doing aboard my own packet in this dead calm. Friend Tom has given me a nice ride."

Mawson surveyed the young man calculatingly, for some minutes.

"I don't want to have any more trouble with you, Scott. Quinson likes you; and I'm really inclined the same way, after what he has told me about you. I wonder whether you're going to fly off the handle if I touch on a matter that may be a little speck delicate."

In sudden hope the young man was meek.

"I'll certainly meet good intentions halfway."

"My intentions are O. K., Scott. I had a sharp eye out on Grand Tremont. I'm in mighty close touch with shore matters. We have quite a few callers out here, you know," he suggested, with a grin. "So I get all the gossip that's running. Now, look at it right," he urged. "As it comes to me, you're taking a little special interest in the March family —outside o' hating old March and punching the nephew. A couple o' very sociable talks on the street! You get me, don't you?"

Scott controlled his feelings, and measured his words in reply:

"I understand how gossip twists little nothings, Mawson."

"Not saying much right now in the way of opening up to me, Scott! But that's all right. Hardly expected you would. However, I'm in a business that keeps a sharp edge honed on a man's wits. You're not out to-night just simply for a ride, or because you like my company." He put up his hand. "And shut up, Quinson! I'm in my own cabin, remember. Scott, you can't be blamed for any interest you're taking in a certain line. Even an interest in the March property. You don't give a damn, of course, if there's nothing left for the nephew as a possible heir. In the case of *another* heir, it's different. Hey?"

The young man stared at Mawson, wondering whether revenge was going ahead blindly in this affair, intent on wrecking Fletcher March, without regard for the interests of the stepdaughter's estate. Did the unknown have no particular knowledge of how March was misusing his position as executor?

Scott tested this understrapper

"You're shooting all wrong, Mawson, if you think I've any interest in anything that may be coming from Fletcher March to anybody. But has your party, whoever he may be, stopped to think that March may be dumping in money that isn't his?"

"I know what you mean. And some thinking has been done about it. But the old fox is too shrewd and thinks too much of himself to run any risks as an embezzler. As a magistrate, he has sent too many prisoners over to the Province pen to take chances on any such wallop for himself."

"That's only guessing," retorted Scott sharply. "I don't know whether your party has any conscience in this——"

Mawson jumped to his feet. "What do *you* know? Looks like you're more or less on the inside. What about your own line o' guessing?" His eyes sparkled. "Do you *know* that Fletcher March is an embezzler?"

"No," Scott admitted. He was considerably flustered by the blunt demand. He was invited to assume the hazard of denouncing March to his enemies as a criminal, and was not prepared to go to that extent; he was afraid that such an accusation might complicate matters seriously. He might be endangering Tamlyn's interests, by forcing the issue at that time. As a sailor, he had scant knowledge of legal precautions. Remembering keenly what the girl had said about steps already taken by her counsel, and anxious for her real and legitimate succor, he restrained his longing to convey to the avenger any hint that a girl's fortune was involved in the wrecking of Marsh. Furthermore, Mawson was not the principal in the affair, and might have ulterior motives in digging into the matter. Scott resolved to stay on the safe side, until he could have word with Captain Dorrance or consult Tamlyn's attorney.

Mawson broke in on the young man's troubled meditations:

"Your looks are giving me a good line on you, Scott. However, I'll take your word for it that you're not in the dumps because old March won't be leaving anything for his heirs."

"You show good judgment!" rasped the other.

"And keeping all friendly between us," added Mawson, with a satiric twist of his mouth. "I've talked out pretty open to you, I'll say. But I know well enough that, even if you should run to old March and warn him about how he is being done in the game, he'd heave a brick or a kick at you."

Tamlyn's champion grinned ruefully, his thoughts on the run-in with March that day.

"You're doing no more guessing when you say that, Mawson."

"Nor in the other matter, lad. March has turned into a sucker in one line, because he has been tolled along proper and scientific, and he is now turning it into a hot gamble like the foxiest do, some time or other in their lives. But he ain't fool enough to put himself behind bars. It's his own money in the sponge, and, by the blue hell, the sponge will be twisted dry. If I could tell you what he's now paying for, you'd be giving three cheers for what is being done. But I won't tell you; I might be giving away a line on the one who's doing the job." He stretched and yawned; and Scott slowly arose from the locker; on this hint that the host was ready to turn in.

Mawson stood up also and pulled off his necktie and began to unbutton his flannel shirt.

"Getting any fish?" he asked listlessly.

"We're having fair luck for this late in the season, sir."

"I'm glad you're out here," stated Mawson, after another wide yawn. "You seem in a way to be bait for a fish I'm after. I hear all the shore talk, as I've told you. Louis March is on a drunk and is shooting off his mouth in the city. Says he's going to come out here and get you, some way. If it wasn't for you, he wouldn't be taking any such chances, poking around near our boats. So you're good bait!" He went to the door of his stateroom, calling over his shoulder: "Harpoon the damn sculpin for me, and I'll make it worth your while."

Scott followed Quinson on deck; the latter stopped to light the fresh cigar he had taken from Mawson's box.

"Well, Scotty, I don't know as you got much for your use, except as you now understand better how the land lays."

"I couldn't hope to get a whole lot, Tom, for straightening out the tough tangle I see ahead."

They walked to the head of the ladder, and Quinson made sure that no eavesdroppers were near.

"It *is* a bad mess, hey?"

"Tom, no matter what Mawson says or guesses," returned Scott, with emotion, "Fletcher March has gone fair crazy and has been throwing away his stepdaughter's property. I get that from Captain Dorrance, and he's in a position to know the inside."

"He sure is! Dammit, Scotty, I've given my word to you that a certain man is decent—as a man. He ought to know how this thing is running. You're the man to tell him. But getting to him is hard. I can't even do that, myself. If you were any ordinary slob, you couldn't do it, either. But I've seen you take chances and turn tricks, and I know your style. But I can't even tell you how to get to that man. If you give me a little time, though, I can hand you some tips on where he can be found."

"That'll be help enough, Tom."

"At any rate, if you know who he is and where he is, that'll be part of the battle."

"I'm going to call it the most important part, Tom. I can't begin to fight until I know."

Quinson, in his emotion, bit off a chunk of the cigar and spat it over the rail.

"Taking it by and large, I'm in a bad state of mind, Scotty. One way o' looking at it—I'm doing the only thing I can to help you. On tother hand, I'm heaving you over the rail to sink or swim."

"I'm a good swimmer."

"Good enough at it to save my life out on the Banks Before you get through with the job, you'll be thinking, I reckon, as how I've showed my gratitude in a blasted queer way."

"I've been begging for the chance you're thinking of giving me."

"No more 'thinking'—I'll be *doing*, Scotty."

Taking advantage of the elevation of the deck, Quinson spotted the three lights that marked the *Kestrel's* location in the distance.

He followed Scott into the launch, and gave instructions to the helmsman.

Midway between brig and schooner, a speed boat swept past them, coming from the opposite direction. It carried no lights.

Scott recognized the identity of that craft with his ears, rather than with his eyes. The motor had its peculiar tone pitch. He recently had heard that characteristic hum when it had been full of menace in Lubec Narrows, and his memory was keenly alive.

The heads of several men showed above the rail of the boat, silhouetted against the gray shimmer of starlighted sea. These parties did not appear to be interested in the other launch; in fact, the speed boat swung wide to avoid proximity.

"That's Louis March, all right enough," Scott agreed, when Quinson had ventured his own guess.

"Then Mawson is sure a good judge o' bait," chuckled Quinson. "If March came out to call on you, too bad you wasn't at home."

The speed boat had come from the direction of the *Kestrel.* Still convinced that young March had become not much less than a lunatic on the subject of revenge, Scott was having his misgivings and was agreeing with Quinson.

"But I'm hoping it wasn't *too* bad because I wasn't there," the skipper muttered.

CHAPTER XI.

SUSPICIONS.

WHILE Quinson's boat drifted slowly alongside the *Kestrel,* Scott vaulted over the freeboard of the waist; the launch purred away into the darkness. Mate Tuzzer came on the trot to meet the skipper.

"Something beyond my figgering happened forards, sir, a little while ago. I'll own up I was dozing 'side the wheel. I'm blarsted sorry if I was letting anything be put over." Tuzzer's tone was tremulous in self-reproach.

The skipper patted the old man's shoulder, and reassured him:

"No blame for your grabbing time for a nap, Ben. I routed you from your watch below, and the helm needed naught from you in this weather."

On the quarter-deck Scott queried:

"Do you say you can't figure on what happened?"

"Me eyes popped open only in time to see not much more 'n the shadow of a rowboat offside. I hailed mighty hot, but no word came back. Then I high-stepped it forrards. Men was all below and was asleep or making believe they was snoozing when I nosed into the fo'c's'le. Whatever hen was setting, I left it on the nest, not ruffling a feather. Thought I'd wait until I had a chance to make a report to you, sir."

"Good judgment. If it's a case o' tricks aboard, you'd have got little by asking questions."

They discussed the affair in undertones for some time.

Scott summed up his view of the situation:

"If somebody came over the rail from that dinghy and got away without stirring you from a sailor's cat nap, then the somebody had an understanding with a party aboard here. All fixed up beforehand. Else there'd have been some stir forward. Pussyfoot stuff, Ben Tuzzer."

"I took a lantern and peeked into every dark corner. My thought was that the crazy March had sneaked a bomb aboard and left it lighted."

"That would be too raw stuff, Ben, though I've been told this night that March is on a drunk and uglier 'n ever. Whoever 'twas came on board, if anybody did, he took his chance after a tip that the field was clear. Probably the tipper had stocking-hoofed it aft and spotted you asleep. And he'd be shy about being in cahoots on any bomb proposition. All the men are in their berths, you say?"

"Every lad. Counted 'em."

"We may have a double-crosser in our nest, Ben, but the sneak isn't helping plant a bomb, then curl up under a blanket afterward. We'll let the thing

swing as she hangs, till morning. I'll take ship till midnight. I'm wide awake."

"Prob'ly are!" growled Mr. Tuzzer. "But if ever there was a hoot owl wider awake than I be right now, after what I've let happen, that same owl was gitting a buzz by roosting on a streak o' lightning. I can't sleep. You turn in, you, yourself!"

The skipper did not demur. He realized that something was amiss aboard his schooner, and that he must get to the job of investigation, next morning, with sharp wits. He ordered Tuzzer to call him at first streak of dawn, then tumbled into his berth.

THE morning was serene when Scott came on deck. Dawn was hinted by a flush above the gray sea. The cook was no laggard. Smoke wisps from his galley funnel told that he was astir.

"Run forward, mate, and rout 'em all on deck before you turn in," commanded Scott, adding grimly: "This is where the coddling stops."

The skipper had turned in with suspicions aggravatingly vague, as he pondered on the matter of the surreptitious visitor. Naturally, Scott was linking Louis March with the affair; but in talking with the mate, he was keeping his own counsel in regard to meeting the March speed boat, cautious about putting the unstable temper of Tuzzer to extra test at that juncture. The old man's tongue was dangerous; the skipper did not want to tip off the traitor in the crew.

Suspicions were more sharply defined in Scott's mind as soon as he was out and about in the morning. It was his conviction that March had come for no idle reconnoitering, but on a specific errand. In his talk with the lieutenant of the dry cruiser, Scott had made tart reference to a trick employed by unscrupulous parties. In the past, captains and crafts had been put in limbo by the planting of liquor on board.

To the best of his ability, Scott sought to forestall developments, endeavoring to guess as shrewdly as possible where and how guilt on his vessel might be detected.

If March had already accomplished the plant trick in the case of the *Kestrel,* he might have used a confederate, smuggled into the crew, or have bribed in the city one of the men hired hastily by Dorrance. A prolonged search would be necessary before discovery of any cache, so Scott realized.

Or, possibly, one of the old crew had been fixed. Undoubtedly Captain Paulett had contrived some hiding places with much ingenuity. Men who had been aboard with Paulett would have some line on the operations.

His suspicion whetted to a keen edge on this last and more probable supposition, Scott decided to give the new men a clean bill for the time being. He even eliminated the possibility that Paulett, nursing a grudge, might have stood in with March, the two of them planting a traitor. As the skipper's thoughts were running at that moment, he chose to figure on the simpler ruse—that one of the old crew had been won over to use his knowledge of secret tinkering on the schooner; such a man would have a valuable secret to sell.

There were three of the former crew—Wooster. Dobbett and a young chap named Turner.

When Tuzzer came aft from his service as clarion of the morn, the skipper inquired casually:

"What's your size-up of the lad, Turner?"

"Ow, he's only a common one in the run o' lunkheads, sir," answered the mate, in his matter-of-fact singsong.

"Did you happen to pay any especial attention to him when you nosed in the fo'c's'le last night?"

"I pipe what ye mean. The only note I took o' him was that his mouth was open a little wider in the night, while he snored, than it is in the daytime on deck, when he's walking round half asleep."

"That's all, mate. Turn in for your four hours."

"I'm asking ye to make it less, Scotty, if a fish is sighted afore eight bells," pleaded Tuzzer, more on the footing of a friend. "I'm begging the special privilege of taking an oar in the first dory that goes over the side."

"We have been playing in extra luck

so far. But we're about due for a notional one—a stabber," Scott warned.

"That's just the feller I want to meet up with," boasted the old man. "I can hang up that special horn, with a red ribbon tied round it—and have a good yarn to spin."

"All right. I'll give you a call," the skipper promised,

Scott called two men aft. One he set at the wheel, and directed the other to start the motor. There was some breeze, but he decided on a sortie in the way of precaution—to sail well to the east, in order to be more securely in Canadian waters until he could give his attention to the puzzle that had developed on the *Kestrel.*

While the schooner made eastward, he took his time in attending to his usual inspection of gear after he had eaten his breakfast. During his promenade forward, he made an extra and critical survey of his men, but found no outward evidence of a guilty conscience.

Dobbett was lighting his pipe before climbing to his perch in the crow's nest.

Scott halted beside the man.

"Dobbett, I've been wondering whether by any chance Captain Paulett overlooked some of the stuff he was smuggling into port. He must have had a number of hiding places aboard, and it's easy to forget, you know, when a man is yanked out of a vessel in a hurry, as I'm told was the case with Paulett."

Dobbett was unflustered, and was frank.

"The cap didn't let me in on the thing anyways close, sir. Knowed I was agin' the stuff. But I was wise to a storeroom ceiled off the lazaret. I was aft yistiddy for cord to make a new bob line, and the storeroom door was wide open from the main lazaret. Nothing in there! 'Nother hiding place he fixed up was back o' the sheathing in the forepeak. But the place is all empty now. Of course, there may be a dozen other places, but I don't know northing 'bout 'em."

"All right, Dobbett. That probably accounts for the main stock. But a few bottles will damn us just as much as a lot o' cases o' the stuff, if somebody has a private reason for catching us foul." He was thinking of the "reason" he had given by his rebuff to the young officer, reflecting that resentment is not always easy to rule in youthful natures.

Wooster, overhearing, had something to say—and he, too, seemed to have nothing on his conscience.

"Schooner *Alpheus Dodge* was libeled and sold at marshal's auction for having only eight bottles on her, sir. O' course, the charge was that the stuff found was evidence to show there had been more rum that had been got rid of. Such was the way it was put, at any rate. Law seems to jump a long ways in these rum cases. Guess a lot depends on how mad the prohibitioners are feeling at the time."

His thoughts still on the exasperated young lieutenant, Scott's uneasiness was not soothed.

He went aft and noted the nautical miles registered on the indicator dial of the patent log. As best as he could estimate, the Scotia coast was now giving him a lee against some of the perils of prohibition.

Before returning into Yankee waters, he hoped to get at the bottom of conditions on board the *Kestrel.*

Later he secured his marine glasses and examined a craft, far astern. The early sun slanted illumination against the object, and revealed it as unmistakably of the type of the dry-navy scouts. The boat was broadside on, and this fact comforted Scott, even in what he considered was a safe offing; he had heard of too many cases where vessels of American register were tackled on suspicion, anywhere and everywhere. In his doubts he would have driven still farther to the east, where a dry scout would have small excuse for venturing so far afield. But Dobbett hailed and reported a fish.

Tuzzer heard the hail and did not need the skipper's call; the volunteer was up and at the rail, ready to launch the dory, fingering tackle before the striker had taken his place in the pulpit.

While the *Kestrel* went stealthily on under sail after the motor had been shut off, Scott climbed the main shrouds and made a survey astern, with better command of the seascape. The small cruiser

had shifted its course and was pointing up in pursuit. Just ahead of it, splitting the slow rollers of the half calm, was a smaller object, a speed boat.

The young man slid down, and went to Tuzzer at the rail. In the mate's ear he reported:

"Back yon is coming a shark with the pilot fish. You understand, don't you?"

"I twig!" Tuzzer added some profanity in a deep rumble.

"We're due for a clinch, I'm afraid. Listen, Ben. On account o' what is climbing on us from astern, it's pretty plain to me that March managed to plant rum aboard here last night. The prohibitioner has his boyish grudge, and is only too willing to take a tip from March, and stretch the law. I don't know what's like to happen, but if we see any way to make our bigness, we must miss no chance."

"I tyke it you mean—no chance short o' killing somebody!" gritted the old man. "As for me, I mean worse, and I'm wishing I had a gun."

Scott ran forward without reply, his attention devoted to Wooster in the pulpit.

"He's swimming deep, sir," reported the man, after peering long under his palm. "Shall I take a chance on him?"

"Strike with the dip of the next deep roller," the skipper commanded.

Wooster drove with a grunt of effort, and the water seethed under the *Kestrel's* bow.

However, the line hung slack. After a moment, the striker pulled up the dangling harpoon.

"I think I nicked him, sir! But he was all o' two fathoms under."

While he spoke, the fish rose from its soundings with express-train speed. It broke water and leaped high in air, a glistening scimitar blade of flashing color, ivory and bronze. It fell, and disappeared in a swirl of foam.

"Aye, Wooster, he got a nick," agreed Scott. "No blame on you for missing. I was a bit nervous and rushed you too much. Hold your place. If we've made him ugly, he'll be dogging to see what hurt him."

Wooster nodded his head, and took a fresh chew of tobacco. Scott had named one of the tricks of a notional fish.

CHAPTER XII.

TUZZER GETS A FISH.

AN occasional break of flukes at some distance on the beam gave Scott reason to believe that the nicked fish was smarting with the wound, and was lingering in the vicinity to give battle to an object less forbidding in bulk than the schooner. Disappearing and reappearing at points widely separated, the fish was skirmishing too actively to make pursuit feasible.

In a little while Dobbett reported game in another quarter, "a patter" that was moving leisurely. The skipper ordered the helmsman to steer in the direction indicated by the lookout's arm.

When he was within striking distance, Wooster did a good job of it. His turn on the butts yanked the shaft from the lily iron, and the line ran free.

Scott leaped, seized the cord, and made sure that the quarry had been toggled. Then he hurled the keg over the rail, and told Tuzzer and his mates to go to it!

"And keep a sharp eye out for that nicked devil, men! He may be ready to tackle a dory."

The toggled fish was a good fighter, and kept the keg zigzagging and circling on the run. Tuzzer and his mates did not waste their strength in chase after the bobbing snub; they rested on their oars, waiting for the fish to tire itself.

The *Kestrel* came into the wind, and was heaved to in a slow drift, at the skipper's command. Conditions were a bit complicated. The free and ugly fish might be attracted by the struggles of the other; in case of attack on the dory, Scott wanted to be close enough to give quick aid.

He divided his attention between his dorymen and the oncoming crafts. Whatever might be the object of this sortie on him, they would find him attending strictly to his regular job, at all events.

The speed boat swept to the scene in a foaming circle, giving the schooner a wide berth. Scott used his glass and saw that Louis March was in the boat, and alone.

In a short time he threw out the clutch and drifted, approaching the dory slowly.

The dry cruiser was still at a considerable distance.

Scott resisted a temptation to reach for his megaphone and express his sentiments. He knew it would be dangerous to advertise the situation. He feared that Mate Tuzzer would be less circumspect. But the old man kept his back turned on March.

As soon as the keg halted in its gyrations, the rowers had pulled to it briskly, and Tuzzer took it into the dory.

He drew in slack, tested, made sure of a taut line, and began to overhand, slowly and cautiously. The fish remained in soundings, lurking, resisting doggedly, swimming against the tug of the cord. This pull and progress carried the dory toward March's speed boat. The young man made no move to get out of the way. He was taking apparently idle interest in the affair of the fish, giving the most of his malicious attention to the schooner and the approaching cruiser.

Even when the dory was pulled along close to the stern of March's boat, he lolled on a cushion, exhibiting placid belief that the small craft would pass without any interference with him.

Tuzzer was keeping his eyes strictly on the matter in hand. His demeanor indicated that he was not allowing himself to be aggravated by this intruder, who was so manifestly on the scene in order to make sure of a triumph in mean revenge.

All at once Tuzzer moved in a certain matter with astonishing snap of action. He dropped to his knees, leaned far over the side of the dory, doubled a section of the loose cord that extended between his hands and the keg, and slipped the line through the space between the boat's skeg and overhang; he dipped his arms deeply, and wound the line about the propeller shaft, slipping loops over the blades.

March, fuddled by liquor, was not alert at first to the significance of Tuzzer's performance; the overhang screened the details of what the old man was doing; it seemed like some operation in handling the catch. However, the spy obeyed a quick impulse—anxiety to get away from any meddling with his boat. He threw in the clutch of the engine that was idling in neutral. Tuzzer got his hands out of the way just in time to escape the blades whirring in foam. The shaft quickly wound up what slack there was, and the motor stalled.

Tuzzer scrambled to his feet and yelled to his rowers to give way. That quick yanking on the slack must have given the toggled fish a vicious pang, he knew!

"Dig in, lads! There'll be somebody scooting up to arsk sassy what it's all about."

Nobody has ever determined the extent of a swordfish's reasoning power. But harpooners and keg chasers have frequently had evidence that the wounded fish associates the restraining line with his difficulties, and follows up in vengeful attack on what is at the other end. Mr. Tuzzer, in his spare time, had been sedulously collecting all available information regarding a swordfish's tricks and notions.

Before the dory was a biscuit toss from the danger, the fish rushed from below with a quarter ton of driving weight behind its sword. The tremendous jolt of impact hoisted the stern of the speed boat out of water. Tuzzer caught sight of the piercing sword. It drove through hull, stern seat and cushion, on one end of which March was seated, his hands on the engine lever. He was tipped forward and fell sprawling across the motor.

For the other fish, this tumult served as challenge to hasty attack, and directed its attention to the object. The fish shot its bulk in furious onslaught, and drove its sword through the boat at a point amidships. This assailant broke water just before it struck, coming at an acute angle from a shallow depth. The momentum tripped the boat and rolled it over, the fish rolling with it, showing its flashing bulk. It continued to thrash alongside.

One of the men in the dory leaped up and poised the lance.

"Put me close, lads!" he bellowed. "That sworder's snoot is stuck!"

Tuzzer, sculling hard to help the single oarsman, was facing forward, and saw

March. The victim came up from under the overturned boat, clutching a cork cushion. He was coughing and spouting water, half drowned, incapable of speech.

When the lancer had done his work, March drifted away in a swirl of crimson water that daubed his visage when the partial support of the cushion failed to keep his face above the surface.

The dying fish was gaffed, grappled and secured to the dory in the usual fashion.

"Going to pull that man in now, Mr. Tuzzer?" inquired one of the helpers.

"We ain't out to ketch sculpins. We're after real goods," returned the old man grimly.

Over his shoulder he had spied the toggled fish, floating, stunned, its sword broken off by the twist of the speed boat when the other attacker had given its blow; the horn remained stuck in the hull.

For a few moments the overturned boat floated, half submerged, held up partly by imprisoned air, partly by the support of the horn with which the second fish had impaled the hull; then the craft sagged heavily, slipped off the sword and sank.

"That's too cussed bad!" lamented Mr. Tuzzer. "I've lost that other horn—and it's one less picket for my fence."

"And ain't ye saying northing 'bout a corking fine speed boat?" demanded one of the men.

"Not a word! 'Tain't worth it."

The mates found the old man's reply cryptic and his manner amazing; he was beaming placidly, licking his lips, contented as a cat. When that speed boat shut the ocean hatch over itself, Mr. Tuzzer had remembered a sponson canoe and was in on the settlement of a debt; he was supremely satisfied.

He was hailed, and turned to behold Scott and two men making all haste in a dory.

"Hold where you are, Mr. Tuzzer! We'll gaff the other fish."

"Taking swordfish style in operation, and all the rest," observed the mate to his men. "I'll say this is some teamwork!"

The toggled captive was on its side, fanning its flukes torpidly, its huge eyes malevolent with blue-green fires. A thrust of the lance ended its struggles.

Tuzzer called over to the skipper, while the helpers were getting the lashing around the tail flukes.

"I call your attention, Cap'n Scott, as how a gent has settled in fine style for a sponson canoe."

"Aye, Mister Tuzzer. Very handsomely done, it was."

The mate preserved the formal manner.

"Cap'n Scott, considering the thoughtfulness he showed in squaring the account, maybe we'd better show him the kindness of saving him from gitting his feet wet, walking to shore from here."

"Mr. Tuzzer," returned Scott, with gravity, "if you can work your dory over that way, you may give the gentleman a lift, if he doesn't care to walk or swim."

"A lift, eh, Cap'n Scott? Aye, sir."

Time and effort were required to move the dory, with its dead weight of fish, across the gap to a place where Tuzzerd could twist the gaff into the slack of March's coat.

Having promised a lift, the mate rendered the service in a mariner's hearty fashion; he dragged the partly conscious man across the dory rail, March still clinging with a death grip to the cork cushion. Tuzzer allowed this human salvage to lie when March fell in a huddle, the dirty bilge swashing against him.

Grimly rancorous, pondering on the persecutor's hateful malice, the old man sucked on the sweet morsel of retaliation as long as possible.

Scott made no comment, allowing the mate full say as to management of affairs in his own dory. Tuzzer's fish was hoisted aboard with tackle as soon as the *Kestrel* hove to in readiness to receive. The other fish followed.

"Le's see," remarked Mr. Tuzzer, when these jobs were completed. "Oh, yus! Might as well save this shark for the Chinese trade!" He slipped a double hitch around March's ankles, and shouted orders to heave away. March, struggling, his face purple with rage and congestion, was swung over the rail head down and landed on deck.

"Going it a bit strong, aren't you, Mr. Tuzzer?" reproved Scott mildly, watching the operation from his dory.

"Ow, excuse me, sir! But it's second natur' for an old swordfisher like I be to h'ist anything by the tail flukes."

"Well, don't go so far as to forget and have him dressed for icing," Scott admonished.

"Shan't run the desk o' gitting arrested for p'isoning the Chinese trade, sir."

CHAPTER XIII.

BOARDED!

BEFORE the dories had been taken aboard, a power tender came off from the dry cruiser which had arrived and halted at a little distance, keeping prudently away from the rather threatening upheaval marking the capture of the two monsters.

Lieutenant Barron, steering, was on his feet, a tiller rope in each hand. He hailed Captain Scott peremptorily, and declared an intention to board the schooner.

"Searching for liquor, sir?" queried the skipper.

"Of course! That's my business. Now it's *specially* my duty."

"On information?" probed Scott.

"Yes, sir!"

"On whose say-so?"

"That's my affair."

"It's on the word o' Louis March, that's plain enough. By his engineering of a scheme to catch me foul, sir, unless my guess is wrong."

"I know nothing about that, sir! I intend to board you. Are you showing resistance?"

"I'm only protesting, sir. I suppose you have the right, if you mean to be a bit high handed."

Barron, it was evident, was still nursing his grudge.

"That's the common howl offshore, that we're high handed when we do our duty as it's laid down for us."

A moment later he was over the rail, accompanied by a quartermaster. The latter carried a combination ax and spry.

March, released from his ankle bonds, had recovered sufficiently to crawl to a hatch coaming and seat himself.

Barron made a rather elaborate display of paying no attention to the informer, turning his back on March.

"Captain Scott, I'll be sorry to smash open lockers or cut into sheathing. If you'll frankly declare any liquor and give me your excuse for having it on board, you'll have some protection in court. If you force me to find hidden contraband, you'll stand convicted as a lawbreaker."

"I have no knowledge that there's liquor aboard the *Kestrel,* sir," stated Scott stiffly.

"Then, we'll search."

March mumbled something when the lieutenant and the quartermaster passed him; Barron nodded slightly, in a gesture of understanding.

Scott tugged at the arm of the mate who was edging toward a rack, hand outstretched for a belaying pin.

"Come aft with me, Ben Tuzzer! Ye'll gain naught, going daft to beat up that whelp."

"They're going to find something, as sure as wooden latches ain't used on the kitchen door o' hell!" raged Tuzzer, under his breath. "If I git jugged for handling rum, I may be too old to kill him when I git outside again. Scotty, lemme have something real and honest to go to jail for!"

However, the old man trudged aft, slack in the grip of the skipper.

While the two were pacing abaft the binnacle, the boy Turner came to the entrance of the port alley and saluted.

"May I step to the quarter-deck, captain?"

"Come along, Turner."

"I'm asking you not to kick me, sir, or throw me over the rail till it's all out o' me."

"If anything is coming out true and honest, Turner," returned Scott reassuringly, when the youth confronted the master, "you'll be sure o' square treatment from me." Scott was adopting this friendly attitude in his anxiety to get at the bottom of the situation. This chap was unmistakably a dim-wit, a handy tool for a schemer. "I can guess at a lot of

what you have to tell me," went on the skipper, in encouragement. "The best of us get on a wrong tack sometimes, Turner. Now come across shipshape and seamanlike, and you'll get no hurt from me, lad. March bought you up, eh?"

"Yes, sir. Got afoul o' me in the city 'fore we sailed. I'm easy fooled, sir," the young fellow whimpered. "Ain't got good sense like a lot have."

"So he bribed you, eh? He came out here with liquor and you slyed the stuff aboard and planted it, did you?"

"Yes, sir. I sneaked aft barefooted, and the mate was sound asleep right there!" He pointed to the deck; and Mr. Tuzzer growled like a dog stalking a cat. "Then March handed two cases o' whisky over the rail to me, and I hid it in a place I helped Cap'n Paulett to make."

"And before March went away, you told him just how that place could be found, hey?"

"Yes, sir!"

With his hands behind his back, Scott walked to and fro:

"Much obliged, Turner. Now you're matching wrong with right, fair and honest."

In the silence they heard the whine of drawn nails forward in the hold.

"Omigosh!" wailed Tuzzer. "What ye waiting for, Scotty?"

"For the prohibitioners to find what they've come here for," returned the skipper placidly.

"No, no! That ain't what I mean. About killing this beetle-brained, jeecrimered son of a pot o' marmalade! Lemme do it now, if you're too busy."

The mate was dancing wildly, pounding his fists over his head.

The youth retreated behind the bulk of the skipper.

"Cap'n Scott, don't let him kill me till it's all out o' me. 'Tain't all out yit!"

"My word to you is good, Turner. Let's have it all."

"They won't find what they've come after, sir. There ain't no stuff aboard here."

Scott blinked, wholly mystified by this pop-weasel business.

"After you went off to git the toggled fish, sir, I grabbed my chance and sprung the secret slide, and slipped the whisky over into the drink, Cap'n Scott. Them critters is now hammering open the empty place."

"What the devil does this mean, anyway?" Scott demanded sharply.

"The whole story is, sir, I wasn't in a way to git the pay what has been promised me. Says March, when he traded for what I done: 'This ain't no place for me, in Quoddy waters, no more. I'm going off forever and ever. I want to git back at them who has done me dirt. So you do what I say to help me, and I'll give you my speed boat!'" Turner scrubbed his sleeve across his snuffling nose. "Lord knows how I've al'ays hankered for a speed boat. I'd chase my grammy with rocks in a stocking so's to git a speed boat."

Mr. Tuzzer folded his arms, and looked pacified and important.

"So when I had fixed it up nice and proper with a couple o' swordfish, and had made it so's you wouldn't git your pay, you simply called it off—that's it, hey, young feller? Ye ain't come aft here looking for thanks, have ye?"

"No, sir! I cal'late I'm going to git kicked. But there wa'n't no sense in me keeping still, after I wa'n't in no way to be paid."

"Didn't ye know the cuss-fired liar never meant to give ye no boat?" Tuzzer demanded.

"He said he would," was the meek reply.

Tuzzer flung up his hands, and waggled his head helplessly.

"It's no use, Scotty! I ain't got the words."

"Turner," declared the master, with severity, "you were in a plot by which this schooner was in a way to be libeled and sold and the officers put in jail. For one yip from you, now or later, as to the inside o' this thing, I'll have you in jail. Go forward!"

"Only for keeping my mouth shut from now on, do I git off as easy as that?" asked the fellow, gaping.

"Yes! Go forward, and pitch into your work on those fish."

Paying no attention to the malefic mut-

terings of the unsatisfied Mate Tuzzer, Scott walked forward slowly, after Turner had gone on his way at a trot.

In the waist he confronted the two dry officers when they came from below decks.

"Are you satisfied, Lieutenant?"

"I'm not satisfied, sir. But I have found no liquor."

"Then I'm asking you to go over the rail as soon as possible, sir. Take your informer along with you." He brandished his fist in the direction of March.

"I'll have nothing further to do with that man," said the officer stoutly. "He has brought us away out here on a wild-goose chase, and now he can swim ashore for all I care."

He and his associate leaped into the tender, and it buzzed away toward the cruiser.

Scott went to the hatch coaming and looked on March, who did not raise his eyes. The skipper opened his mouth; then he shut it, not trusting himself in speech in the hearing of his men.

He turned to the attentive Wooster.

"Lock this man in that place opening off the lazaret."

Scott was finding it impossible to feel any pity for this knave who had stuck to a course of revenge with insane fanaticism. March, as the skipper had learned on Grand Tremont, had operated as a hijacker by putting other men forward to take the thwacks, while he lurked in the background. In that business there had been killings, the responsibility for which had been shirked by March. In this latest attempt to get at Scott, the same cowardly tactics had been employed.

Indubitably, Scott reflected, something was coming to the rascal, but the young man had no stomach for fitting reprisal.

When he returned to the mate on the quarter-deck, he scowled at Tuzzer. Under that deck was the lazaret, and the old man was stamping back and forth on it, voicing various plans of punishment, talking loudly enough to be overheard by the captive.

Scott reproved in muted tones.

"We'll try none o' those tricks, Johnny Ranzo! They'd be cuds that would leave a bad taste in our mouths."

"But we've got him now, right where we want him."

"No, right where I don't want him! As master of this vessel, I'm obliged to make sure that no hurt comes to him until he can be landed." He added regretfully: "Then he'll go all free, I suppose. I know of no direct charge that can be laid against him."

"Aye! Go free to keep on hijacking! Let loose to hack some more at you and me! Can't you think of something better, Scotty?"

The master for a time centered his attention on ship's affairs, giving the helmsman a course, sending a lookout aloft. Then he beckoned Tuzzer to the rail, where the two could not be overheard.

"Ben, let's call it that the man below there has settled with us. But he still owes, in other quarters."

Mr. Tuzzer perked up. He even cackled dry mirth.

"Blymme! *Wot* a present for Mawson! Mawson'll kill him!"

"Daub less blood on the moon, old hyampus! Mawson will have no taste for putting his head into the noose, account o' such a scalawag. Anyway, I'll have a good understanding before I turn March over. There's the real and the fine way of making him pay." He beamed on Tuzzer. "Down below us is a lad who has had a rich uncle, plenty o' money, nothing to do except wear fancy clothes, put on airs, swagger it in the city with liquor and lassies——"

"And hire hijackers to pull off jobs for him!"

"There'll be no more frolics when Mawson has him. There'll be one less risk for Mawson's trade. Every day Mawson will find plenty o' relish. Every day March will be bouncing on a hot lid of his special hell. It may make a better man of him in the end."

Tuzzer rolled up his eyes in mock rectitude.

"Aye! A better man. Scotty, 'tis fine doings on our part when we can be helping in shifting a mucker from his bad ways. At the same time," he added, smacking his lips, "not really hurting our own feelings when we do it!"

Inspired by these virtuous intentions,

Scott and Tuzzer, after nightfall, headed back toward the cruising waters of the whisky fleet.

In the course of the evening, the skipper suspended the three signal lights under the main boom and burned a Coston flare.

CHAPTER XIV.

KINDLY REVENGE.

SHORTLY before midnight Quinson came alongside, apologizing because a press of business in other directions had occupied him. He heard what Scott had to say about a captive in the lazaret. Mr. Quinson was profanely and profoundly pleased.

"Eh? What? Use fists or clubs?" he echoed, when Scott broached certain stipulations. "Why, Scotty, that egg won't even have his shell nicked. Mawson will keep him healthy, so as to have all the more fun with him. I've never yet seen a tomcat that wasn't sorry when the mouse wouldn't scoot any longer under a paw pat." He flashed his electric torch, summoning his boat that lay offside. "I'll go and bring Mawson here. The *Canaquin* is near by."

Before long Quinson was back with his man.

Mawson came over the side, exhibiting a broad smile. Promptly he pump-handled Scott.

"I've said we had squared accounts. Now, by the blazes, I owe you something, Captain Scott."

"Pay the bill by taking good care of my friend who is waiting to take a bit of a sea trip for his health."

Mawson clapped a pledging palm on the skipper's shoulder.

"I sure will, sir. He'll like the *Canaquin* so well he won't be going ashore for a long time."

Tacitly, the attitude of extreme friendliness was adopted in the case of March. When he was escorted into the cabin by the skipper, his jaw sagged in frightened amazement as he gazed into the benignant countenances of the men who were assembled. One after the other, Mawson, Tuzzer and Quinson joggled him with hearty handshakes, jamming his soft fingers until he gritted his teeth in pain.

"It's too bad you lost such a nice boat, March," declared Mawson sympathetically. "I know how much you like the water. But don't get in the dumps. You've got friends. I'm going to take you aboard my brig so you can keep on cruising."

"It means murder," March gasped.

The other opened his eyes and mouth in masterly affectation of horrified protests.

"Kindness won't kill you, will it? Kindness is all you'll get with me. Have a cigar!"

"I don't smoke anything except cigarettes," stammered March.

"I'm afraid yours must have got soaked to-day. Too bad. So a cigar will have to do you!" Mawson pinched off the end of a black, fat Havana, thrust the cigar between March's jaws and held a lighted match, obliging the victim to suck in smoke. "Sorry I can't ask you to have a drink," the tormentor went on. "But Captain Scott's is a prohibition boat, and aboard the *Canaquin* we're in the whisky trade and know too much to consume our own goods. Again, all thanks to you, Captain Scott, for bringing me in contact with your friend. I'm promising him a nice trip. And we'll be on our way. It's late and lots yet to do."

In a hysteria of fear which now swept to its climax, March leaped across the cabin to Scott, selecting him as the least dangerous in this congress of foes.

"You have every reason to knock me off, and I realize it, Captain Scott. I can't ask favors from you. But don't turn me over to hellions to be put through what they plan."

The captive dropped his cigar from his shaking hands. Mawson picked up the gift and pushed it again into March's mouth.

"Having done so much dirt to everybody else all your life, you don't know friendship when you see it. Smoke up, sport, and have a good time!"

Scott put in with emphasis:

"You're getting a better deal than you deserve, March. You know what I mean. Get away from me. I hope I never lay eyes on you again." He obeyed Quinson's beckoning finger, and walked away,

"Mawson," Quinson called, "my boat will take you to the brig and come back here for me later."

"I thank you. And Brother March thanks you. And that reminds me!" Mawson swung across the cabin to Scott, saying cordially: "I can't leave without thanking you again, Captain Scott, for all favors done." He dropped his voice to a mutter when he grasped Scott's hand. "Also telling you you needn't worry about that puppy, March—about the deal I'll give him. For the first time in his life, he's going down on his knees. He'll stay there most of the time, too! Scraping decks, galley pot-walloping, scrubbing paint. There are dirty jobs aboard that brig. He'll draw the dirtiest ones. He's afraid of my killing him, hey? He'll be begging me for a quick end 'fore I get through with him." Whirling from Scott, Mawson started back toward March, bellowing jovially: "I was only telling your friend that he needn't worry about you! But why the hell ain't you smoking that bully cigar?"

"It's making me sick." whined the victim.

Mawson grabbed the limp arm, doubled it violently, and caused March to jam the cigar back into the drooling mouth.

"When I give you a cigar, you'll smoke it to the end, even if it's bitter." He pushed the captive toward the companionway, adding significantly, with a glance over his shoulder at Scott: "Like you'll smoke up on some other things I'll hand you." With hands gripping the slack of March's coat, Mawson rushed his new serf up the steps and out of sight.

"And that's that!" stated Quinson laconically. He took Scott by the sleeve and pulled him inside the master's stateroom, closing the door. "Buddy, have you by chance heard any rumors about ghost boats, up in one of the reaches off Quoddy Bay?"

"My men were yarning to Ben Tuzzer on that line, our first night out."

"It isn't only sailors' yarning. I'm coming to you, Scotty, like I promised. In handling the thing, you're going to use good judgment in protecting me and my mates in the booze game. I know that. You needn't tell me. Listen now, old pal. At the head of that reach, where the funny business has been going on, is located a reduction plant. Anybody can tell you where it is. Right now, and for the next few weeks, the big fellow can be found in that locality. He's building up a new plan for handling our stuff. We have to keep changing plans in our line, you know. Our crowd owns the reduction plant. It's a blind, with old Tillson bought over and managing; he used to own it, and we're cashing in on his good reputation. Right beside the plant is a narrow cove. It has been masked by a swing bridge of pontoons. On the pontoons has been heaped plenty o' dirt, with saplings and bushes stuck into it. They swing out the floating bridge, and in pops the rum motor boat! See?"

Scott nodded, admiringly, understandingly.

"We're running a big still night and day to get the 'alky' to cut our regular stuff. We've got a line o' specially built limousines, each carrying from twenty to thirty dozens o' bottled goods, all out o' sight and with only nice old ladies and gents in sight! Hired stalls, see? Never a one of our cars has been stopped yet on the State highways. But we're now shifting into new plans to keep the prohibitioners guessing—and them plans are none o' your business."

"And all the rest will be none of my business, Tom, just as soon as I've attended to the special errand."

In the close confines of the stateroom, perspiration was trickling down Quinson's face, and his expression indicated that it was partly from anxiety.

"I've told you the layout, and where the big fellow can be found. And you're still set on seeing him, are you?"

"Absolutely!"

"I can *wish* you luck, but I'll be hanged if I'm thinking you'll *have* the good luck to fetch the job off. Oh, I know you're a smart one, Scotty. But that cove is cased in with steep bluffs, and gunmen are hidden in trees, roundabout. I've never been near the cove. None of us understrappers is let in to know the whole works. I'm kept out here, skipping around as

scout, and so forth, proving up on the right luggers, reporting the suspicious ones. The boys who handle the landing job are blasted mum, and they have to be, else the law hits 'em. I do catch a hint, though, as how there's a very special hitch-up in the harbor for fooling the dry snoopers and running the gantlet. Don't know what it is; can't guess. If you can find out, it may give you a boost. Gosh, though! I wish you could pull your stunt some other way, lad, than by trying to buck the old he-tiger in his den."

"I wish to blazes I could think of another way," Scott admitted, with honesty; "but my only way seems to be in getting to him."

"You see, when he's out from there, I can't tell you how to get to him," declared Quinson, swabbing his damp forehead. "He has half a dozen names for use here and there, as he needs 'em for this or that business in special places. But if you do ever get into that cove, you won't need a name for him. You'll bump into the big boss all right—and you'll know damn well he's the boss."

"O' course, it'll be neither hug nor kiss. As for any possibility of kill—I'll know how to lay out a sheet anchor to make myself safe. And I'll keep you safe, too, Tom. I'll abuse none o' the trust you've put in me."

He stretched forth his hand and made the pact with his friend, gripping with honest vigor.

"How soon will you be trying it on?" asked Quinson anxiously.

"After getting back to port with a full fare. If luck keeps on, I ought to be stocked in a couple o' days."

"It'll be the *Kestrel's* wind-up trip, I'm thinking," suggested the other, with full knowledge of the seasonal habits of the swordfish.

"Such was Dorrance's hint."

"Then I'll not be seeing you again for a time, at any rate. But try to get word to me, Scotty, of how the big thing swings in the pull-off. It's my push that's sending you into it, and I'll be in Tophet till I know what's what."

This was getting as near to the edge of sentiment as two men of the sea cared to venture. Quinson relieved the embarrassment by flinging open the stateroom door and lunging out into the main cabin, now deserted, Tuzzer having ascended to his watch on deck. The skipper and his friend joined the mate, and the three paced and chatted until the launch returned for Quinson.

He went over the rail, and called from the darkness:

"Hope you pull in all you're after, Scotty!"

"Thanks, Tom!" returned the skipper, understanding what was below the surface of the casual good wish. "I'm not worrying over prospects."

CHAPTER XV.

BACK TO PORT.

THREE days later Scott was forced into the conviction that the swordfish were leaving. The summer sun was no longer warming the surface of the polar current that sweeps down the north Atlantic coast, pouring through the funnel of the Straits of Belle Isle. First a scud obscured the sun, then the skies settled into a hue of slaty gray. A swordfish could not bask in warmth, "patting" with idling flukes.

Scott had been chasing the stragglers well offshore to the s'uth'ard. When the weather seemed about to change into temper more sullen, he decided to play safe. Therefore, he hove the *Kestrel* to, and set his crew at the work of fishing for sharks, baiting the scavengers with livers of captured swordfish. In this way he was making up the poundage he had set as a full fare.

He was still a bit short when he decided to give over and run for port. The glass was dropping bodingly below thirty, and all the signs were for a northeaster.

In his offing he had sunk all land below the northern horizon. However, he had regularly jotted his courses and log distances, and was able to make a sharp guess at a compass course to take him back into Quoddy waters. At nightfall he nested the dories, and arranged everything for his run. With sunset had come the wind, and with it a misty rain driving from the northeast.

The skipper and Tuzzer took watch in

company, with two men on deck—lookout and operator of the horn bellows.

At midnight the weather was thick, and a nasty sea was running. Twice during the night, the mate had called the crew for reefing. Now, obeying the skipper's orders, the men let the mainsail run and furled it.

Scott's watch of the log dial had informed him that the schooner had made up her offing rapidly.

"We'll take no chances on running into the bay till daylight, Mr. Tuzzer."

"Cuss this nippety-pucker stuff in soundings, anyway," grumbled the old deep-water man.

"We'll stay out where the rags can't worry us," promised Scott, making reference to the colored bits of cloth marking fathoms in the plummet line. He headed the schooner up, and rode easily under reefed foresail and jumbo.

Occasionally, like an echo from their own horn, they heard the faint squawk of a signal from another sailing craft.

"He'll be a Bluenose coaster caught offshore," said the skipper to the mate. "Seems as if their noses can't smell dirty weather ahead. And most o' those fellows carry a glass, given free to advertise something—and I've never seen one yet that wasn't roiled up to the tornado mark. So, the skippers have quit worrying long ago."

Reminded of his own glass by that mention of barometers, Scott stepped below and inspected. The glass was falling. There was no dangerous weight in the wind at that juncture. But more of a storm was on the way, undoubtedly.

"We'll be getting the real heft at daylight," the skipper predicted to the mate. "Right now we're paying off with wind and tide, and we're in a way to drift close to the s'uth'ard o' Grand Tremont."

"Going to run in there for shelter?" queried Mr. Tuzzer, with a shade of significance in his tone.

Scott's unperturbed manner shed that crafty hint, even as his oilskins were shedding rain. Gravely, he replied:

"It may be a wise thing to do, Mr. Tuzzer, if we can sight the Tremont light 'tween now and morning. Or, better still, run in by daylight. With this wind, we'll have to beat up the bay, and it'll be tricky business, on account o' the islands."

Despite all their eager peering, they failed to sight the Tremont light on the harbor headland. The rain was driving in sheets that balked eyesight and radiance.

However, in a dawn as dull as tarnished pewter, they at last caught the distant loom of Grand Tremont's swelling bulk dimly silhouetted against the pall of the storm.

A few moments later they caught sight of a schooner yacht, pointing up under short canvas. The craft was beyond the *Kestrel,* a mile or so farther offshore. She was broadside on, and showed a black hull when she rolled.

Scott made a prolonged survey through his glass, and informed the mate that the yacht had the rig and hull of the *Northwind.*

"But it isn't that packet, o' course. I was told she hardly ever moves from moorings, and the Ward Harbor storm signals must have been flying well ahead o' this blow. The dude would sure have taken a squint at 'em, and then he wouldn't start out for a slosh of this kind."

"By the way he's hove to and heading, it must 'a' been his tooter we was hearing in the night," averred the mate.

"Maybe so," agreed the skipper, with indifference, and turned his attention to his affairs. He ordered the mainstail up with double reefs; from his position he was able to catch the wind right for a starboard tack, straight for the harbor of Grand Tremont.

A little later he noted that the yacht was chasing him in, or, at least, had adopted his choice of a haven to ride out the blow.

In the half hour required to make port, Scott earnestly put thought on what should be his course of procedure when he reached the island.

The urge to hurry ashore was strong. Anxiety to see Tamlyn Osborn and talk with her once more, eagerness to find out whether she had been taken under Mrs. Todd's wing and was protected from the wrath of Fletcher March, the conviction

that she would be worried, possibly offended, if he entered harbor and sailed away—all these elements argued insistently that her champion ought to present himself.

On the other hand, he would not be able to avoid observation by the angry March. The persecutor would be more than ever convinced that Tamlyn had enlisted a protector and agent. Her difficulties at home would be aggravated, her peace of mind ravaged still more brutally.

Furthermore, Scott feared that, in her impetuous avidity for information, she might be able to drag from him hints of the project he intended to undertake. Conscious of her power to sway him, the young man was honestly afraid to run the risk of meeting her. He would not be able to hide from her the danger involved in hunting down a certain ruthless god of the machine. He would be handing her an extra burden to carry with the rest of her troubles.

In the end, viewing all sides, he determined to remain aboard his vessel, giving her only the minor disquiet of wondering why he kept aloof.

Perhaps Mate Tuzzer guessed something of the puzzle of the situation, while Scott faced the driving rain and paced the steep slant of the deck. Tuzzer, at any rate, was careful to warily keep his mouth shut.

Inside the tongue of land, on the tip of which the lighthouse was located, the shielded surface calmed into the smoothness of a rippled mill pond.

Scott ordered over the anchor well down the harbor, hoping that the *Kestrel's* identity would not be distinguished; few persons would be out and about in the village during that driving storm which obscured objects on the water.

Before long, the following schooner yacht forged in from the sea, and dropped killick as far from the *Kestrel* as the width of the harbor permitted. As soon as she had been anchored, the yacht's men disappeared below.

With a sailor's curiosity in port, and having time to kill, Scott studied the craft through his glass. If this were not the *Northwind,* the vessel was certainly a counterpart. She was not flying the club nor owner's flag; but such oversight might be due to the weather.

"Tuzzer, you have a good eye for lines and rig. You had a good look at the *Northwind* in Ward Harbor the other day, didn't you?"

"Two looks. For a slick yacht and a peachy lass I've got two looks, al'ays, and maybe three!"

"Well, over yon is a dead ringer, as I make it." Under his sou'wester, Scott's features were puckered.

The mate buttoned his slicker to his chin.

"I've been doing some guessing of me own, ever since she hooked herself 'way over there, acting like she don't want to be chummy. I'll row across and take a squint at the name she's sporting astern."

The crew had been allowed to go below to snooze and loaf. Scott, gratified by Tuzzer's offer, helped the old man lower a dory.

The mate did not aim directly for the yacht, but his apparently aimless circles brought him around to her close enough for inspection.

He returned to the *Kestrel,* and reported when he was alongside:

"She's the *Northwind!*"

Scott displayed merely the interest of one whose judgment had been vindicated.

"Then the dude was caught off!"

"Or he may be taking a dip into the rum business, offshore," suggested Tuzzer acridly. "It seems to be getting the roughnecks and high-toners, too."

Scott hoisted at his end of the tackle.

"I'm afraid your guess is far-fetched, Johnny Ranzo. Though I'll admit I felt I'd need to palm some sandpaper before starting to handle Tasker. He seems slippery. You caught no sight of him aboard, eh?"

"Nobody stuck head above coaming," was Mr. Tuzzer's succinct report.

Before noon the clouds thinned in the east; the glass was rising; the wind gave signs of letting go.

Anxious to sail, ere his shield of misty rain ceased to protect him from eyes in the village, Scott gave orders to get under way.

Rounding the headland, he expected to see the yacht's crew preparing to take

advantage of the new conditions. But nobody was in sight on her deck.

The wind had hauled by the time he was out in the Bay of Fundy. Under the thrust of a stiff breeze, he made a fast run of it into Ward Harbor. Using the kick of his motor, he was nosing through the shipping toward the Dorrance wharf, at the wheel in person and eyes on his task, when he was jumped by a thumb jab and was startled by a yelp in his ear.

Mate Tuzzer was aiming a digit as rigid as a gat barrel.

"Gad-haskets, Scotty, there's one o' the ghosts!"

Scott's eyes found it a very real object, however. It was a schooner yacht at moorings, and he could see the name on her stern. The name was *"Northwind."*

"One or tother is a ghost," insisted Tuzzer. "Only question is, which is the one?"

"Trig your clapper, Johnny Ranzo!" commanded the skipper, savagely. He was afraid Tuzzer would be overheard. "You're seeing no ghost now; you saw none at Grand Tremont. But there's sure a question, in spite o' that. We'll try to answer the question later."

Tuzzer had no more opportunity for argument or wonderment. He was obliged to attend to the business of hawsers and breastlines.

Manager Dorrance had seen the arrival from his office; he hurried to the wharf, and leaped on board ere the lines were made fast.

"What luck, Captain Scott?" he demanded cheerily.

"All the best, sir! A bit short o' full fare as I'd planned it, but we had to run in ahead o' the blow."

Dorrance came closer, and cocked an eyebrow meaningly.

"Small chance you had, then, to tend to anything else except fishing."

"I've been able to turn a few tricks, sir, without losing any time from fishing. If you'll step below with me. I'll report."

He informed Dorrance of the happenings south of The Wolves. But of the queer doubling of the yacht *Northwind,* and of his suspicions as to what this thing might mean in the handling of some of his plans, already taking shape in his mind, Scott said not a word. He was afraid he might be joggling a touchy situation.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DEVIL, IN PERSON.

THE remainder of Scott's day was taken up by duties which busied his hands, but left his mind fairly free for the puzzle he was purposing to solve. He was guessing shrewdly at a certain truth; he saw how advantage for himself could be worked from that truth, if he ventured boldly.

After discharging her fare, the *Kestrel* remained tied up at the fish wharf. To the men were paid wages, and each one's share of the lay. They went their ways into the city. The cook was a fixture, and remained on board. After supper, so Scott took note on a patrol of inspection, the "doctor" was lost to the world, sprawled in his berth with a lurid cowboy tale in his fist and his prized cat purring at his feet.

Scott rejoined Tuzzer in the master's cabin.

Dorrance had urged the two to make their home on board the schooner, until it could be refitted for the usual winter cruise to the Grand Banks. He had also tried to get from Scott a promise that the latter would captain the vessel; and the young man had not definitely refused the billet. However, he was deferring final consent; and Dorrance knew why, and was indulgent.

"Ben Tuzzer," stated the skipper, "I've had something on my mind all day, since spotting the double of the *Northwind."*

"Aye; so I've noted!"

"And I'm hoping I'll be able to unload my mind before this night is ended. Now I'm asking for your help, and you're to ask me no questions."

Tuzzer's eyes flickered, but he nodded and shut his jaws on his quid.

Scott went into his stateroom, stripped, and donned a one-piece bathing suit that he had bought that afternoon, scampering uptown for the errand. He then put on a full suit of slickers, with rubber boots.

Then he passed the staring and silent Mr. Tuzzer, entered the engine room, and

secured a plentiful quantity of lubricating oil and hard grease.

"We're ready," he informed the mate. "Come along!"

The helper followed the skipper up the companionway, and in silence they got a dory over the rail. Needing no orders, Tuzzer took the oars and rowed away into the darkness, proceeding down the harbor, in obedience to gestures from the master.

Scott managed the steer oar, avoiding the shipping in locations marked by riding lights.

Finally he circled the *Northwind* at a prudent distance. The yacht's mooring was far down the harbor, some distance from the docks, and considerably at one side of the fairway, a spot favorable and excusable in the case of a yachtsman who wanted privacy and avoidance of scarring risks from careless luggers.

Scott, warning Tuzzer to make no sound with his oars, cruised about until he located a mooring buoy not in use; by means of this hillick he saved Tuzzer from fighting the tide.

The dory was at some distance from the *Northwind*, and the small craft's presence was well concealed from the yacht by the darkness. However, the masts and bulk of the schooner were visible to Scott's keen gaze.

There was a long wait. Far up the harbor a double clang announced two bells—nine o'clock; undoubtedly struck by the anchor watch of the dry cruiser, Scott decided. The ordinary shipping in port would not bother with such maritime formality.

He chuckled silently. Considering what he was guessing, this bell's evidence of sleepless vigilance was comical.

"Right under their noses!" was the hilarious conviction.

Tuzzer was doing his own share of staring at the craft that he had hailed as a phantom in his first hysteria of amazement. He grunted when he beheld, a bit later, what Scott had been waiting for as a signal that something out of the ordinary was about to take place.

The *Northwind's* riding light was doused.

"This is when I get busy, Johnny Ranzo," the skipper announced, in a whisper. He shed the oilers and boots in a hurry, and stood up.

He unscrewed the top of a can and slapped oil over his body with his palm.

"Plaster me with the hard grease," he commanded his mate. "Plenty o' butter on this hunk o' hard-tack."

As soon as he had been smeared from top to toe, Scott slid over the rail. Even at the height of summer heat, the coast waters of the north Atlantic are bone chilling. To do what he intended to put over, he knew he would be obliged to remain in the water for some time; this grease coating would protect him against the disabling cold, would help in forfending dangerous cramps.

He slipped away, silent as tide-borne flotsam, his blackened face merged with the night shadows.

Shortly, on the sounding board of the sea, he heard the yacht's motor purring. Its exhaust was perfectly muffled. He stopped in his strokes, treading water, and saw the black hull slipping away down harbor.

Going on, he beheld something else that was mightily interesting. The yacht had left a tender at her mooring, and in the small boat were several men.

At that moment he could merely continue in his line of guessing, of course. But, so he told himself, if one of the men in that waiting tender was not Owner Tasker, stool pigeon and dude yachtsman, a blind for the big syndicate of the rum runners, then none of the shrewdness of Scotch ancestors had come down to a chap who had always kept his wits well honed! Tasker would be staying on the job, always on board the *Northwind* whose identity as an innocent sojourner in harbor had been recognized.

Scott edged down nearer the tender, hoping for a little extra evidence. After a time, the evidence was secured. A man in the dinghy lighted a cigarette, using a patent torch. His features were revealed. He was Tasker.

The swimmer was feeling the numbing chill of the water. He knew he would be needing all his vigor and muscle, undertaking still another exploit in his program for the night. Therefore, he

swung silently and drove back toward the dory, exerting his strength to the utmost, warming his blood, flexing his limbs into condition.

He appeared to Mr. Tuzzer, rising from the dun flood, and gripping the dory rail with black paws.

"Gee!" gasped the old man. "For a jiffy I thought ye was the 'Old He One' from hell!"

"Glad I'm looking that way," panted Scott. "That's just the effect I want to have on somebody else."

He waited a short time, recovering his breath.

"You've been a good boy, Tuzzer, asking no questions. Now I'll tell you something. Not that there are two *Northwinds*. You know it. But this! Tasker is sitting at moorings in a tender, waiting for the crew to bring in tother *Northwind* with a cargo o' whisky."

While Tuzzer was expressing himself, Scott lifted his body with a strong tug at the rail, and tumbled into the dory. He pulled on his oilskins and took an oar. Certain plans, contingent on his discoveries in the recent skirmish work, must be executed in a hurry.

"Back to the *Kestrel*, Ben!" The skipper put all his muscle into rowing, in order to make good time and to keep warm.

On the schooner, accompanied by the mate, he trotted down into the cabin, and secured the carbon pad, furnished by Dorrance so that ship's accounts might be made in duplicate. Wiping his right hand free from grease, Scott wrote, asking Tuzzer to read as the pencil moved:

CAPTAIN DORRANCE.

SIR: I am writing this in late evening of August 28th. If I am not back on board the *Kestrel* at noon of the 29th, when this paper will be put in your hands by a trusted friend, will you please notify officers of law, or come for me yourself with men and guns? In the close neighborhood of the Tillson plant, you can find me or get news of me. In a sealed packet I have left with same friend a full statement of what is under cover at the Tillson place. In case you do not find me, this statement will be handed to you, and you can use your judgment in acting.

ARGYLL SCOTT.

The skipper folded the carbon sheet, making its blurred lines evidence that an original copy existed, and placed it on the top of his black, glazed sou'wester, which he lashed on his head with strings tied under his chin.

"Now we'll be getting back to business, Ben."

"But how about that other writing?" demurred the mate.

"There'll be no need of it, I'm thinking. And I've not time nor taste for the job right now. The threat of it will be enough for a guilty conscience."

Scott skirmished in lockers and brought out rope ends.

"If it moves as I'm figuring, mate, you'll be doing your part o' the job with these ropes. Noose 'em with slipknots that you can depend on."

He helped Tuzzer in the task; then the two hustled over the rail into the dory and set off down the harbor.

Scott had provided himself with his ordinary garments, rolled in a bundle. He had been shaping his plans, with allowances for hazards and with forethought for needs.

Observing from a safe distance, he beheld a riding light, marking a craft at the *Northwind's* mooring.

"Now, Ben Tuzzer, listen sharp. A lot o' what's ahead must be done by guess and begad. But I do know what I'm going to try to do. The whisky is here. The lugger will soon be coming for a load. The ghost-boat thing is plain enough now, eh? There's a masked cove, and the lugger launch plays 'pop-goes-the-weasel.' I'm going into the drink once more, so as to get close to the yacht. Near enough to spy on how many stay aboard after the lugger goes away on the firs. trip. If I think I can manage, I'll sneak onto her by way o' the spritshrouds, and my first job will be to douse that riding light. It's your signal. Follow me down as close as you dare, and when that light pops out, you hop aboard a-flying. I aim to have packages laid out, ready to be tied up all shipshape."

Tuzzer looped his nooses around his neck, and growled his understanding.

Discarding all but the sou'wester, Scott

slipped overboard and struck away. Keeping at a distance, he circled the yacht.

Soon the riding light in the foreshrouds enabled him to see that the lugger was already alongside the schooner in the lee, taking on a load. Scouts and system, it was plain to Scott, wasted no time.

A half dozen men were in sight on deck in line, passing cases from hand to hand. They worked in profound silence, the pale glimmer from the lantern forward giving them light enough for their purposes.

The swing of their arms was as steady as the regular motion of a grandfather's clock pendulum. Every second, almost, a case went over the rail. With celerity the launch was loaded, cast off, and sent on its way.

Scott was not able to count accurately the dim shadows crouching on the cargo and in the cockpit of the launch when it drove silently toward the north. Unmistakably, there were many; the crew would be required in unloading at the destination up the reach.

For a short time, two men, dimly revealed, remained in sight on the yacht deck. One of them went below. The other flapped squares of canvas over the rail, shaking off betraying litter, so Scott judged. The man carefully replaced the canvas—an indication that the launch would be returning for another load. Then he, too, disappeared.

The swimmer made his venture boldly, instantly, not shading his resolution by calculating the odds.

His glazed headpiece, his grease-blackened face made him indistinguishable when he rolled with cautious understand strokes toward the bow of the yacht. Clutching the spritshrouds, he climbed noiselessly onto the deck of the forepeak, twisted out the bottom of the riding light with a half turn, and tossed the oil chamber overboard.

Then he padded cautiously aft, going very slowly, in order to give Tuzzer time to get within striking distance of the rail. Over his shoulder Scott caught sight of the froth at the prow of the oncoming dory.

On the way to the quarter-deck, halfway up the alley, the adventurer halted opposite the gold of light from the lifted half of a glazed ventilator skylight.

He heard the impatient command:

"Down your drink, Billy, and get back on deck. We've got to know the field is clear before the boys come back."

Scott stepped on the house and crouched back of the companion slide.

A quick glance informed him that Tuzzer was over the rail, making a half hitch with the painter of the dory.

A man's head appeared in the square of light from the open companion hatchway. He was wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, clearing his throat with the satisfaction of one who has had a satisfying draft.

Scott thrust a sturdy arm and struck him behind the ear, with precision and calculated force. The victim pitched forward on his face, and lay stunned and silent across a deck mat.

Tuzzer, rushing up the alley, barefooted, soundless as a cat, needed merely Scott's pointing finger—saw his duty, and he did it. He pulled the prostrate man's limp arms behind his back, and noosed them securely.

More than one man was still below; Scott heard voices. He was not relishing the prospect of the dare-devil job of tackling two or more in the confines of a yacht cabin. He was posted on the habits of rum runners; they carried guns in readiness against the danger of hijackers. To cut one more out of the bunch below, to bring another on deck into the open Scott tried a ruse that he hoped would be effective, striving to stir curiosity rather than alarm.

He flapped his wet feet on the house.

From the open skylight came in tones of alarm and wonder:

"What the blue hell is that?"

"Sounds like flippers. Maybe seals have started in hijacking."

"Pull your gat and see what 'tis!"

"Guess 'tain't much, else Billy would be saying something."

But the emissary was on the way, so the flick of a shadow on the ventilator glass informed Scott. He rushed to the hatch, and this time favored his aching

fist; he violently drove his heel against the back of the head that emerged. As the man lunged forward, falling, barking a cry, Scott saw Tuzzer leap from behind the canvas-sheathed circle of the covered wheel.

Assured that the mate was well able to attend to the tying of this second "package," Scott plunged and took the supreme risk.

He dropped feet first through the open hatch, caught the edge of the slide in the grip of both hands, swung himself forward, and landed in the middle of the saloon.

He was forgetting how much of a horrific figure he was presenting. He was black from toes to top, the brim of the sou'wester shading his face on which grease was streaked in a fantastic arabesque. Smeared, glossy, a living statue of ebony, he stood for an instant in the middle of the cabin's luxury, a dreadful apparition, as much in discord with his surroundings as an imp straight from Tophet would have been.

Tasker was alone in the cabin. He had a six-shooter in his grip, but he was plainly unable to break from his paralysis of fright, or control his muscles sufficiently to raise his arm.

Scott took full advantage of the momentary torper. He swung, caught Tasker under the ear and dropped him, kicking away the gun when it fell out of the limp hand.

"Have you finished reefing aloft there, Mister Tuzzer?"

"Aye, aye, sir!" reported the mate, and he came leaping down the steps.

"Here's the mains'l o' the craft! Double reef!"

Scott made a hasty inspection of the staterooms, and satisfied himself that no others were aboard.

With the help of Tuzzer he brought the two trussed-up captives down from the deck, and left them in a stateroom in bonds, turning the key on them.

"If you'll fetch the bundle o' my clothes from the dory, I'll be obligated, Mr. Tuzzer." It was said in command purposely stilted, and the sound of it from the grotesque figure evoked a snicker from the mate.

He shot a side glance at the motionless, recumbent Tasker.

"Ow, I s'y, sir, do ye think he'll ever come to his senses?"

"Why not?"

"It might not be the crack you handed him. But I'm thinking he's been scared to death. I can't git used to the looks o' you, meself!" With that declaration, Mr. Tuzzer went on his errand.

Scott took the bundle when it was passed over. He started for the yacht bathroom.

"Sit beside Owner Tasker, mate! When he wakes up, you can calm him with kind words."

A few minutes later, fixing the blinking eyes of Tasker with a stern gaze, Mr. Tuzzer consoled, as ordered, in reply to a stuttered query:

"O' course 'twas the devil, Old He One himself! D'ye mean to let on to me it's got so a man in your line o' cussedness don't reckernize his own brother when he's met up with?"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MYSTERIOUS COVE.

SCOTT came upon the scene, attired, glowing in reaction, and cleanliness. Tasker was lying on the carpet. In no gentle manner, Scott lifted the man and tossed him upon a cushioned locker.

"There's little time for talk, and I have no taste for gab, Mr. Tasker. You remember me, don't you?"

"Yes, better than I did a few minutes ago," was the surly reply.

"I'm serving notice on you that I know all about your doubling of the *Northwind* and the trick you're working—gulling Barron, the yacht club, and all the rest. Now, if you think I'm starting in to blackmail you, you'd better not say what you think. It may be blackmail, in a way, but it's not for money, sir. I'll tell you plain, short, and honest what it's for. You're going to put me aboard that lugger launch when it comes back for another load. Put me aboard right, understand! So I can ride into the masked cove up yon, taken along as one o' the regular crew. You're going to tell me you won't do it, eh?"

"You bet your life I won't."

"Then I'll blow this whole business to the government, the sheriff and the police."

Tasker yanked at his relentless bonds, and stared helplessly around the cabin.

"If I fix it for you to go where you say you want to go, I'll only be giving you more to blow about."

"No, sir! You'll be shutting my mouth. Absolutely! I swear that, Tasker."

The other was impressed by this earnest declaration. But his forehead was creased deeply with his doubts, his features twisted in amazed wonderment.

"I have a reason of my own for getting in there, sir," Scott went on. "That reason isn't tied up with any exposure of this game of your crowd. I don't belong in the States, and as far as I'm concerned this prohibition thing is simply what I've called it—a game—and let the best brains win. Frankly, sir, I have something strictly personal to say to your big muckamuck. I want to get to him. That's all!"

"It means hell for me, helping you in that line, Scott."

"It'll mean more for you, if you don't put the thing over as I've asked you to do. For I shall manage to slip the word to him later in another way that it was through you I got the tip-off about this cove. That'll be after the big raid. You see, I mean to be perfectly unscrupulous in going after what I want. I'm telling you again, man to man and on my oath, that my jaws will stay nailed on the rum thing. That'll be gratitude working in me."

Tasker displayed a more friendly interest in this case.

"Listen, Scott. Speaking some more of being in hell! That's where you're going, if you stick your nose into that cove. The moment you brace the big boss for whatever it is you want, you'll get yours, and good and plenty!"

"Leave all that to me, sir."

"But how——"

"After I step onto that launch, it's all my own business, not yours. I'll come out honest to the big boss. I'll tell him that I put the twist on you. I'll explain how you had the sense to save the situation by sending me along to him. He'll see the point, and see it right. Don't you worry. You're going to do it, aren't you?"

"Good gad! I can't do anything else!" wailed Tasker.

"I want it straighter than that. A clean promise."

"I'll do it."

Scott unloosed Tasker's hands.

The skipper turned on his mate.

"Into your dory, and back to the shore, Mr. Tuzzer. And follow all instructions."

"Aye, aye, sir!" It was shipboard obedience with a snap, and it impressed Tasker.

The mate hurried away.

"This means, sir," Scott informed the yacht owner, "that if anything happens to me on the *Northwind* or up in that cove, there'll be a blow-up that'll shake this corner o' the country. We're all sitting on dynamite right at present. Let's be careful o' matches."

"Where are my men?"

"Locked in that stateroom. Here's the key. Go in, untie 'em, tell 'em it's case o' clamped jaws all 'round. You ought to know what to tell 'em."

Tasker, rubbing his wrists, went to perform.

After some minutes he came into the saloon, followed by the men; they were submissive and silent.

"They understand how it lies," reported the owner. "What are we to say to the lugger crew? Show it all up?"

"There's no need of that, sir." He grinned. "Let 'em stay ignorant and innocent. I've been running over a good lie in my mind. Tell 'em I'm a new gunman you sent for. You do that once in a while, don't you?"

"Yes," Tasker admitted. "I've got an underworld pull in New York, and it's left to me to attend to such matters. All I need say is that you had full instructions sent you, and got a boatman to set you off to the yacht to-night."

"All set," indorsed Scott. "Lend me a gun to stick on my hip, in the way o' credentials. But you needn't bother to load it."

During the wait for the return of the

launch, Tasker volunteered the exculpation of Lieutenant Barron.

"The kid is square, but he's an easy mark when he's tackled on the friendship side. It's on his word that the other dry snoopers lay off me. And for that matter," he added, cocking ironical eyebrows, "the *Northwind,* whichever one it may be, is wet in this port only between days. Always dry as a bone from sunrise till it's dark again."

"It's a bit of a tidy plan, sir! If it's ever spoiled, 'twill be by no loose word o' mine."

"I'm considerably ashamed of myself," confessed Tasker dolefully. "It's making me pretty much of a blackleg for the sake of money. But it's the regular and old story in my case, Scott. Dropped my bundle in the Street, was always used to living high—and now I'm cashing in on my good reputation of the past, on my yacht-club standing, and all the rest."

"The thing is raising the devil with a lot of men who were straight before this easy-money temptation came along," returned the skipper, his thoughts crowded with examples.

"Oh, I suppose I'm no worse than plenty others!"

Tasker shrugged his shoulders, slipping from under the uncomfortable topic, and chatted with the skipper concerning maritime matters until the launch came again for a load.

With the aloofness of one of his supposed calling, Scott paced the deck and gave no hand to the transfer of cargo. When the launch was loaded, he took a position forward in the company of the lookout, an "official" gun in his grip; he had made sure that its chambers were empty.

Scott had his hat slouched over his eyes. He twisted his mouth and talked through the corner of it.

"Been having any hot stuff with hijacks lately, bo?"

"We've had the speed over all that's tried to tackle us, mister. Till within a week or so. A feller named March has now come over from Grand Tremont to make the bay a new stamping ground. Has been hijacking with his gang offshore. He's come nigh overlaying us two or three times. Has the speed over us when we're loaded. But we was always able to do the duck in the reach. Guess he's thinking like some of these fisher fellers—that he's been chasing a ghost boat."

"He's a special guy I've been sent for to git," stated Scott, making a grand gesture with his gun.

"Don't your conscience never trouble you about killing men?"

"I hocked my conscience, bo, when I took up this line."

The lookout turned his back on this self-declared miscreant, and gave attention to the wires of his searchlight.

Later, under the loom of the high shores of a reach, he flashed his signals and was answered by a glimmer furtively dim.

With understanding assured, the launch slowed, and swung around the end of what Scott perceived to be the swinging pontoon described by Quinson. It was immediately swung back, and closed the mouth of the little cove.

The launch came to a halt at a landing place, faintly illuminated by hooded lanterns.

A stalwart, gruff, important man appeared from somewhere and bossed the job of unloading. Fastened in his sleeve was a flash light which served him for inspection of details. He saw the new face and grunted a demand.

Scott replied, copying the blunt manner:

"From New York! By Mr. Tasker."

"Huh! O. K.! Stay in the boat." He snapped around, swore at his crew, urging haste, and disappeared in the blackness of the cliff-guarded gorge.

The impulse of youth, eager to get to the business of his errand, urged Scott to follow; but the Scotch cautiousness of his nature kept him in the place where he was ordered to remain.

Under this manner of compulsion he returned to the *Northwind* as guard, clutching his empty weapon and irritated by the grim jest of the situation.

During the periods in the cove, between trips, he studied the big boss and estimated him so far as was possible. He was peremptory and profane; but Scott

took courage, because the man was big and emanated wholesomeness through his brusque manner. The young man had found often that big men of the style of this blusterer were not to be judged by the bark of the voice nor the rind of exterior. Scott would have felt less courage regarding the particular nature of his mission were this person repressed and cynical, grunt, malignant, austere. The big man laughed heartily on several occasions, and there was a reassuring ring in the merriment.

When the final trip had been made, after the last case had been landed, Scott nerved himself and chased the boss into the shadows, calling to him.

"Well, son!" It was snapped curtly when the big man halted, flashing his light on the accoster's face.

"I have something very particular to say to you, sir."

"Why specially to *me?*"

"You're the big boss."

"I'm boss of landing goods. I'm big. Yes! But you mean something else, probably," he quizzed.

It was evasion, Scott was sure. More of the elusive quality of the man who made it a point to hide his identity as much as possible, so Quinson had said.

But here was opportunity at last.

"I mean to say that you're the head o' this whole proposition, sir. Brains, power and all! And I have business to do with you—only you."

"You're hired to do business with that gun you carry. Tasker hands you your money. There's not a damnation thing else that's any concern of mine. There's a bunk house yonder. Pile into it and shut up."

But Scott caught the boss' sleeve when he started away.

"My business with you, sir, is outside this rum running."

"The devil it is!"

"I'm no gunman from New York. I got a twist on Tasker and forced his hand. He has passed the buck to you because he had to do it to save this rum game. You can understand it's *some* twist, Mister Boss! And you'd best listen to me, because your proposition is mighty joggly right now."

The big man held his light on Scott's features, and his own face was concealed.

"Joggly on account of you? What *you* can do? Is that it?"

"It is, sir."

"You understand well that a lot can happen to you in this place, and damn sudden! Understand that much, don't you?"

"If anything does happen, sir," returned Scott stoutly, "your whole proposition here will tip over—just as sudden. I've left a big bomb outside. A trusty man is standing by it with a match. He'll touch that match at noon of this day that's now dawning."

"Say, what's your name, anyway?"

"I'm Argyll Scott, captain of the *Kestrel* of the Dorrance fishing fleet. On my word, sir, I'm not here as a spy or a trouble maker for your business. I'm hoping you'll keep on doing well in it. But there's a matter outside that business where you can help me. Treat me right, and I'll hand you back dealing that's just as square."

There was honesty in the face in the glare of the light; and the big man, scrutinizing, recognized the candor of this intruder. He snapped off the electric torch.

"It isn't up to *me*, Captain Scott."

"By the gods, it is up to you, sir!" Scott was continuing; but the other snapped a forefinger against the insistent mouth.

"Shut up! You don't know what you're talking about. Give me your gun."

The young man readily surrendered it to him.

"It isn't loaded, sir. I dumped the cartridges overboard."

The big man's shoulders shook, and he rumbled a laugh.

"You'd have been a great help if that sneak of a Louis March had tackled our men to-night with his gang."

"Listen, sir. By tricks in which I had a part, while I was offshore for swordfish, young March's speed boat has been sent to bottom, and I have turned March over to Mawson. Probably you'll get word of it right soon."

"My-y-y L-o-r-r-d!" It was aston-

ished satisfaction, long and sweetly drawn out. "And my only highest hope has been that a gunman would get him! Son, you ought to have shown that admission ticket o' yours at the gate here, first off. It entitles you to a reserved seat. You had better just come along with me."

He led the way to a building.

"You stand outside here, Captain Scott. I'm taking in your admission ticket. Whatever it is you're carrying—that other thing—you can take it in yourself after your ticket has been O. K.'d. Guess you needn't be worrying." He entered and slammed the door.

With better hope, Scott waited in the graying dawn.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LION'S DEN.

SCOTT waited while the dawn's gray was shot through with red. The daylight enabled him to make a general survey of the masked cove from where he was standing. He was in front of a small structure, set well away from other buildings and elevated part way up the steep slope of a cliff.

Whatever operations might have been in progress were hidden under roofs or in a cave, the location of which was revealed when men entered or reappeared through a dangling mass of shrubbery hiding the opening.

Scott caught sight of motionless sentinels at the top of the walling cliffs. Bushes screened them from detection by persons coming toward the rims of the slopes. A sluiceway of boards ran almost straight up from the water to the cliff summit. Early though it was, men were pulling up parcels with a wire cable—stock on its way to waiting automobiles, Scott was certain, remembering what Quinson had imparted. Furthermore, Scott perceived how necessary it must be to keep formulating new schemes in order to maintain this traffic. The risk of traitors within, spies without, the mischance of accidental discovery of the secret of the disappearing luggers, the still for alcohol operating night and day and disguised only partially by the odors from the reduction plant—all these elements must be taken into account.

The big man had brawn aplenty; but did he furnish the brains for the tricks required in these operations and their quick shifts of policy? Scott was speculating during the prolonged wait, and gave especial thought to the big man's declaration that the problem was not up to him.

Unmistakably, there was somebody higher up. Scott thanked the good fortune of the affair with March; it enabled the big man to carry in that "admission ticket" so comfortingly indorsed by the understrapper.

Finally, the intermediary came to the door and beckoned; he turned immediately and Scott followed into the house.

In the small room to which he was led there were no chairs except one placed behind a table; in that chair was seated a man with a hatchet face. He was lanky and rawboned. Spectacles, with thick lenses distorted, made vague the expression in the man's eyes. In order to face this person, the visitor was obliged to stand in the full light from a window through which the rising sun poured radiance.

For some moments Scott was the object of a prolonged stare through the thick lenses. He endured the inspection with composure, his face frank and unclouded.

The guest passed muster, evidently, because the overlord signaled with a flap of a skinny hand to the big man, and the guardian went out and shut the door.

The lantern jaw was lowered slightly, merely enough for, "State your business!" to be edged through the slit of a mouth.

Scott stated! He had given thought to what he intended to say. He was concise; he wasted not a word.

The man in the chair laid two thin fingers together, and on them rested his bony chin. He edged out more words:

"Thank you, sir, for going direct to the point. You understand, so you tell me, that Fletcher March is bankrupt, or nearly so?"

Scott nodded. Here was no blustering roughneck, such as he had expected to

go up against. The man was cold, supercilious, but he suggested by manner that he was educated—somewhat of a gentleman.

"You have knowledge, you inform me, that March has been dipping into the estate of his stepdaughter?"

"I have been told so by parties who are in a position to know."

"Who told you that I am in any way connected with the whisky ring?"

Scott was resolved to protect Quinson.

"I simply followed up the clew given by the twin yachts. As I've said, the storm turned the trick for me. That's why I'm here at headquarters—passed along by Tasker, and by your big chap who brought me in here."

"Did Miss Tamlyn Osborn ask you to risk yourself in the lion's den?"

"She asked me to find out for her who is at the head of this business. It was her intention to go to that man herself, alone. She doesn't know I've taken over the job."

"Such devotion hints at strong attachment," drawled the other. "Are you and she engaged to be married?"

Scott's negative was explosive and convincing.

"And I'm only a sailor! Miss Osborn is a lady! I'd never presume——"

"Sir, I'm not a bit interested in a lover's doubts. You're in love with the young lady, of course. But that's none of my affair. I asked you the question about an engagement, wanting to know to what extent you qualify as her agent in business matters. You have no commission from her, eh?"

"None! But I have made up my mind to take you to Miss Osborn," declared Scott stoutly. "Saving her the trouble o' coming to you!"

"Boldly spoken, 'Jack the Giant Killer.'" The drawl was extremely satiric. "You are depending on those sealed papers to be delivered this noon to parties in power. That is your threat, as I note from this!" He tapped his forefinger on the sheet of carbon copy put in his hand by Scott.

"I don't mean it as a threat, sir. I've only put out a kedge for safety in case of a squall."

"A seamanlike precaution. But I view it as a threat. I do not relish threats. In fact, I'm always put in a very savage temper by threats." He pulled open a drawer of the table and produced a heavy revolver. "Without a bit of risk to myself, I am able to shoot you where you stand. If you make a move, I *shall* shoot. Much can be done in a few hours. Before noon this cove can be cleared clean as a whistle. The squall is on, my man! How is your kedge holding?"

"It doesn't seem to be well hooked, sir, with the wind blowing in a quarter I didn't expect." Scott did not flinch before the gun.

"Have you anything else to say?"

"Nothing worth while—figuring that a man in your line hasn't much of any conscience!"

"However, there's something on your mind. Say it."

"It isn't to twit you because you may kill a poor devil who has come to help honestly a girl, if he can. Killings are all a part of this rum game, anyway. But I do hate to be killed by the kind of a renegade who is stealing from that girl the little money her father worked for and saved to help her through life. Nothing more to say to you, sir. Shoot!"

"We seem to have come to a perfect understanding, young man. That's fine! I have set myself to do a certain thing; I've been doing it; I'll finish the job—and all hell can't stop me." His mouth twisted into an ugly grimace, and the eyes behind the lenses glittered. Nevertheless, he dropped the revolver into the open drawer. "But the thing has a new shading now. I've been seeing only Fletcher March, damn him! seeing him through red! I knew he was rotten. But I never hoped high enough to think he'd do anything to put himself behind bars. You have brought to me a fine present this morning, sir! I'll certainly meet you halfway in generosity."

For a startled instant, Scott felt that this man's idea of generosity was balefully peculiar, for he yanked open again the drawer and grabbed the revolver. But he merely fired three shots into the ceiling of the hut.

"We haven't electric bells here," he

explained dryly, pointing with the gun to indicate many other bullet holes in the sheathing.

With matter-of-fact leisureness, the big man came at the summons.

"I'll be away for the day," stated the master. "I'm going on business with this gentleman. Give me only one man for the launch—the engineer." It was commonplace command, but Scott found in this dispensing with guards a comforting and covert testimony of faith in his sincerity.

When the door closed behind the departing emissary, the cadaverous man leaned over the side of the chair and picked up from the floor two heavy canes. With the aid of them, he struggled to his feet. He toddled rather than walked, needing the support of the canes for each uncertain step.

As he passed around the table, his eyes thanked Scott for the mute sympathy the young man was expressing.

"I was born this way, sir. I hope you tell Heaven every morning when you open your eyes how glad you are that you have two good legs." In front of Scott he halted, leaning against the table. "To get my bread and butter through life, I've had to use what little I have in my head. Before this day is over, you'll know what a man did to dull the only tool Heaven gave me. By that same Heaven, I'll tear off that man what's left of his hide!"

Sagging, swaying, tottering, he went on his way out of the cottage; Scott, at his heels, pitied the man whom he had come to arraign in the cause of a girl.

In the launch, with a man to overhear, there was no more talk. They were willing to keep silent.

CHAPTER XIX.

BOUND FOR GRAND TREMONT!

BY the time the launch reached the broad waters of the bay, a wind which was sucked out of the northwest by the rising sun was whipping up whitecaps. Running with a following sea, in the reach and the upper bay, the boat made good weather of it. However, bucking that welter in the open ocean would certainly be a wet experience, and might be dangerous.

"Captain Scott, you understand, of course, that my business to-day must be attended to on Grand Tremont Island." The gaunt man had been giving the seascape apprehensive scrutiny.

"Yes, sir. After I have attended to my own business of stopping the delivery of the document we have spoken of."

"Have you authority to put your schooner across to the island?"

"I have a full understanding with Captain Dorrance in regard to the *Kestrel*. I was about to ask you to be a passenger with me."

"I'm grateful."

Scott had the tiller; he swung in the lee of the land to make a heading for Ward Harbor.

After a silence, the companion said:

"I have heard of Captain Dorrance as a fair and square man. Have you found him that way?"

"He's solid goods, A 1, sir!"

"Do you think he'll go with us to Grand Tremont?"

Fully aware of the captain's keen interest in the affairs of Tamlyn, Scott promised:

"I can answer for his going, sir.'

"I'll not embarrass you by asking questions about what Captain Dorrance may have told you. I'm stating what I believe to be facts. Dorrance, so I know, has his fingers deep in banks and business matters. There's probably no man in Ward Harbor who knows better how Fletcher March stands financially at the present time—and how he has been managing the Osborn estate. I'm sure Captain Dorrance will be a very valuable addition to the party."

That statement ended speech until the *Kestrel* was reached.

"My arms are strong," the cripple declared, noting Scott's hesitation. "If you two men will lift me so I can grasp the shrouds, I'll be able to manage."

"Let me call for a bos'n's chair, sir." The skipper was wondering why Tuzzer had not come hurrying to the rail. The cook appeared, answering a loud call.

"Where's the mate, Doctor?"

"He dolled himself regardless, and

went off uptown with Missus Eight Bells Annie, sir."

Scott repressed speech.

"Her sloop was docked over yonder unloading shack fish," prattled the cook. "Mister Tuzzer went over to call; then he come back, rushed off uptown, come back ag'in with a lot o' bundles, togged hisself out, and then him and she sa'ntered."

The skipper curtly barked a command to lend a hand, shutting off the flow of information.

He and the engineer boosted the cripple, and the cook gave both his hands into the grasp of the disabled man. He was placed on the deck. He hobbled to the companionway and descended, refusing the assistance proffered by Scott.

The ship's clock tapped off four bells in staccato double clips.

"Two hours to go before the explosion planned for high noon," remarked the guest, ironically. He took note of the skipper's troubled countenance. "Is your mate trotting around with the bomb under one arm and a lady clinging to the other?"

"I certainly expected the old fool to stay aboard and keep in touch until the last minute," declared Scott angrily. "But you needn't worry, sir. I'll quickly put a stopper on everything."

"Through Captain Dorrance, I suppose," returned the other placidly, understanding. "But no leak to him, I trust."

"Whatever he may have was carefully sealed by me," prevaricated Scott, hoping that Tuzzer, at any rate, had been prudent to that extent, if he had placed the note with the captain in order to be free to go gallivanting. "If you'll make yourself comfortable, sir——"

"Be on your way! You can attend to two errands when you see Captain Dorrance."

SCOTT ran up into the manager's office, and found no indication in the captain's manner that he was aware of anything out of the ordinary.

"Trust you had a comfortable night ashore with your friends, skipper. Your mate told me you had an invitation. Here's a note he left for you."

He handed over a big envelope, which Tuzzer had sealed with numerous pasters.

"Told me to open it if you didn't show up by noon, sharp. Anything important?"

"It can't be—not in the case of Mr. Tuzzer, sir. He's a rattle-headed old coot." Scott stuffed the paper into the pocket of his reefer, after a glance of apparent cursory interest. It was his own writing, and was not accompanied by any message from Tuzzer. "Nothing of account, sir."

"I hope 'tis a warning to you about that new rig he's wearing. I would have fixed myself out with smoked glasses if I'd had a bit of notice ahead."

"However, I do have something of account to tell you, sir," Scott declared, grave while Dorrance jested.

The other snapped into sober attention.

"It concerns the March case, Captain Dorrance. A man is aboard the *Kestrel*, waiting for us. I have reason to believe that he's the one at the head of the scheme to smash Fletcher March. He is asking you to go to Grand Tremont with him. As a witness, an umpire, or something of the sort. Sir," he entreated earnestly, "as to how I have come in touch with this man, please don't ask me. That part has nothing to do with what's ahead."

"Certainly I'll go! Using the *Kestrel*, of course, in this blow!"

"Thank you, sir. That's the plan."

"What's the man's name? You can tell me that much, I reckon, if I'm to meet him."

"I don't know his name, sir."

"Oh, that's all right. The name may not mean anything much to me. I've been settled in these parts only a few years, as you know. But you've reason to believe, eh, as how he's the man with the big grudge?"

"He strikes sparks when he says so, Captain Dorrance."

The manager locked his desk, and started for the door.

"We'll move while the iron is hot."

Down on the wharf level, he stuck his head into the open doorway of one of his fish houses.

"Hi, you! Mike! Pete! Drop your jobs there. Bring along a couple of other

huskies to man the *Kestrel.*" Dorrance turned on Scott and grinned. "I'm bringing crew aplenty, skipper. I take it you'll be setting spinnakers to make a smart run of it."

"Aye, sir! Getting there while that iron is hot."

"You have a few spare minutes, skipper, while the men are casting off and letting her drift into the stream. Step below with me, and tell him I'm Dorrance and glad to oblige."

Noting the expressions on the faces of the men when they met, Scott perceived that each was a stranger to the other. In fact, Dorrance blurted:

"Don't remember of ever seeing you before, Mr.——" He paused, his significant silence a query as to name.

The stranger as significantly permitted that silence to continue; it was mute reply to the query; he was declining to give his name, it was evident. He remained in his seat.

"I thank you for coming, and for your promptness, sir. Excuse me for not rising. I'm a cripple, as you see, and it's somewhat of a struggle for me to get on my feet."

"Perfectly excusable, sir! I'll squat, too, while Scott looks out for things above."

The skipper hurried to his duties.

Before Dorrance reappeared on deck, the schooner was outside, slathering across the mouth of the Bay of Fundy, the northwester tautening her canvas to drumhead tension, her bows buried in foam to the catheads under the thrust of the following wind.

Scott had the wheel.

Dorrance steadied himself by a clutch on the binnacle hood, his mouth close to the skipper's ear.

"Hasn't told me his name yet. Has been gimleting me with all kinds of questions about how much Fletcher March has stolen from the Osborn estate, and how it has been done."

"Do you think it is much, sir?" asked Scott anxiously.

"No telling how much. By the fool will of that mother, March is guardian, executor and manager without bonds, and he hasn't had to render any court accounts. He has used all the cash, as I'm knowing to. As to money raised by mortgages, it's hard telling; the property is tied together in all sorts of ways. But March has done enough to put him behind bars, no doubt about that, lad!"

Dorrance swung to and fro across the quarter-deck for a time, taking a sailor's relish in the flight of the schooner.

"I know her, skipper! Like you do, I reckon, by this time. What's your thought about that balloon jib?"

"It seems to be blanketed a bit, sir. I was thinking of pulling it aboard and setting another spinnaker."

"So do! That'll be her style."

It surely was her style, Scott agreed, when the shift had been made. The *Kestrel* was developing steamer speed. She bounded to the tattoo of the reef points like a dancer with castanets.

"Looks like we're carrying trouble with a rush to old March," suggested Dorrance, again taking his stand at the binnacle. "That fellow below is backward about giving his name, but he ain't bashful about showing his grudge. He pounded out sparks aplenty while I was down there with him. And he told me the both of us would be let in on it, all in good time."

"I'm hoping that too much time hasn't already been given Fletcher March, sir."

"Well, at any rate, he hasn't been able to pick up the Osborn land and lug it off Grand Tremont. And the Osborn fishing smacks are still in the water out there." He pointed to the bulk of the big island, looming against the horizon, dead ahead. "With the right management and some ready cash, Tamlyn can be pulled through."

In his heart Scott thanked Heaven and the memory of the uncle who had left a generous legacy. In a Cape Breton bank, untouched since its receipt, there lay the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars. Through Captain Dorrance, this money could be tendered for the aid of the girl in her tangled affairs, with the proviso that Tamlyn should not be told whose money it was.

After he had made that resolve, it seemed to Scott that the *Kestrel* leaped more joyfully.

Presently Dorrance, pacing, again swung over to the skipper.

"Yes, the girl's property must be handled as a going concern, in order to work it free. As I've said, she must have money. I'm hoping March hasn't pasted everything so deep with mortgages that I can't fix things for her at the banks. I'd lend my own cash, but my fleet has me tied up with double knots."

Scott blurted a statement of his own financial condition.

"And I'm asking you to offer the whole sum, Captain Dorrance, as your own money. She'll take it from an old friend like you."

"You think she'd buck up if you offered it, hey?"

"I'm sure she would, sir. Girls are very notional."

"That's right! Notional they are," agreed the veteran, giving Scott sharp scrutiny. "But what about your security, if her affairs are in a bad mess?"

"The security matter doesn't interest me one mite, sir. I'm throwing that money like I'd heave a life buoy to somebody overboard. Right now I'm not calculating on whether I'll get the buoy back."

"Of course, I see what's ailing you," remarked the old sea dog, grinning.

"Nothing is ailing me," returned Scott stiffly. "I'm depending on you to use your best judgment in getting that money into Miss Osborn's affairs."

"You'll back me if I use my best judgment, will you?"

"Absolutely!"

"Then it's a bargain. And if I'm called on to remind you of that best judgment part, I hope your memory won't fail."

Dorrance's ready promise seemed like a gift horse at that moment of Scott's eager desire to serve; the young man was in no mood to examine the teeth.

CHAPTER XX.

FATE.

FLETCHER MARCH, busy in his office at his books of account, heard men's high-pitched voices. Loafers on his platform outside his big store and warehouse were babbling interested comment on the performance of a craft freshly arriving in the harbor.

"Look at her whale around in the wind! See 'em stow them spinnakers! She's come acrost with all that washing out. Them dude yachters don't care a hoot whuther they carry away masts or not. Plenty o' money to buy new ones."

"That ain't no yacht. Ye're gitting blind in your old age, Jeff. Ye can't even see the pulpit. It's a swordfisher."

"Sartin it's a sworder," declared another. "I know the lines of her, and the pitch of her masts. She's the *Kestrel,* one of the Dorrance fleet."

March slapped shut the ledger, and hurried to the window that overlooked the harbor. Then he squinted a telescope on a tripod; he used the instrument regularly to spy upon the men he hired.

He identified the craft as the *Kestrel.* He recognized Scott and Dorrance. He peered with special intentness when they assisted a man into a lowered dory. Scott took the oars.

March's expression was the puzzled frown of a man who was wondering what the arrival of this trio portended. There was a shadow of apprehension in the wonderment. He stood away from the spyglass and rubbed his ear, and blinked in apparent effort at stirring memory. Then he returned to his armchair and drummed his fingers on the table, staring vacantly, having the air of one who was working out a vexing problem.

After long thought, he went again to the window.

Scott had rowed briskly; the dory had arrived in the lee of the March fish houses and was hidden by the buildings.

In a little while a man, who struggled along with the aid of two canes, came into view around the end of a structure on the wharf. His companions accompanied him, walking slowly to accommodate his pace. March could hear the dull *thump-thump* of the canes on the blanks of the wharf. Now he had come to the recollection of something unpleasant—so his scowl indicated.

He left the window and sat in his chair, elbows on the arms, tapping together the tips of his fingers in nervous irritation.

He looked like a vexed debtor who was awaiting the arrival of a pest with a dun; he was irritated, not afraid.

He heard the scrape of gravel under the tips of the canes while the cripple was climbing the slope between the end of the wharf and the platform of the store.

One of March's clerks went tiptoeing up the short flight of steps that conducted to the island magnate's office.

"Mr. March, three men are coming here from the wharf. Have you looked out and sized 'em as parties you want to see?"

"If they ask for me, send them along to the office, Timson!"

The master settled his bulky figure between the arms of the chair, hooked his glasses to a firmer pinch on his nose, and seemed to be centering all his attention on the figures in a ledger which he flapped open.

Though his eyes were on the book, his ears were otherwise engaged. He heard the thumping of the canes on the platform outside; then their isochronal beat came along the aisle between the counters of the spacious store. Later, nearer and louder, the shuffling of the cripple's unsteady feet, as he climbed the stairs! More determined, the thumping of the supporting canes!

It was such devilishly slow progress—the heralding of it so leisurely, balefully prolonged.

March's nerves had been set on edge. He leaped to his feet when the cripple tottered into the office. The tyrant of Tremont barked:

"In Heaven's name, don't be so slow!"

"You're going to wish I had been slower," returned the other, ominously repressed. He slumped with weary relaxation into the one extra chair in the office.

Scott and Dorrance entered and stood side by side, leaning against the wall.

March glared evilly at Scott, but turned a more gracious look on the alderman from Ward Harbor.

"What's the idea, Captain Dorrance? Has old Ike Kroston's whelp got you interested in his fake claim against me?"

"I never heard of Ike Kroston, nor do I know the whelp you speak of," stated Dorrance quietly.

"If we take Fletcher March's naming, I'm the whelp," vouchsafed the cripple, without emotion. "Just a moment, Mr. March, before you waste more time in calling names. Captain Dorrance never saw me until a few hours ago, and he knows nothing about my business with you. He is here merely to listen to that business, as a fair-minded man. I asked him to come."

March was raging, unable to choke back his venom. He jabbed a thumb jerk toward Scott.

"And why have you brought that plug-ugly? To beat me up because you can't do it yourself?"

"An interesting story goes with Captain Scott's presence here, Mr. March. But I'll not humor you by telling it. I have something else to tell, and I shall use very few words."

"I know just what kind of a lie it's going to be, and you shan't poison the air of my office with it."

The visitor swung his chair about, turned his back on March, ignoring the vilifier.

"Captains Dorrance and Scott," he said, a bit stilted in gravity and earnestness, "I've not come here to swap insults with this man. Will you use your influence in keeping Mr. March from breaking in on what I have to say?"

Dorrance stepped across to the desk.

"Are you afraid to listen to anything this man may have to spout, March?" It was bluff demand; the tone suggested that refusal to listen would require explanation.

"No! But he is going to plaster me with lies."

"He isn't going behind your back to lie about you, at any rate. If you'll take my advice, better let him talk." There was a hint of hostility in the veteran mariner's attitude.

March settled back in his chair and glared, but he was silent.

"Go ahead, sir," Dorrance admonished. "Bail bilge!"

"You've given a fitting name to the truth about this man, Captain Dorrance. I have collected a lot of it. However, I

shall spare your feelings as much as possible by bringing up only that which concerns myself. Years ago, my father mortgaged everything he owned in order to give me an education. A cripple has a poor show in the world if his head is empty. Fletcher March loaned the money at usurer's rates. My father was only another of the poor devils on this island who were under the March thumb. That thumb squeezed! It jammed my father flat when I was halfway through law school. He lost the roof over the head of my mother. He had left me, as he supposed, stranded, a poor wreck, only partly educated, not able to make my way in life. He went crazy and killed himself. I got no more schooling. I did what jobs a cripple could do, to support my mother and myself. There's the story. In a few words, as I promised."

March turned to Dorrance, a sneer in the twist of the lip under the gray mustache.

"*My* story is told in fewer words. I lent my money. I collected it. You'd do the same thing as a business man."

"Of course, I collect what is due me," acknowledged Dorrance.

"Of course!" March flung himself back in his chair, with the air of one who has settled an affair.

"However," proceeded the mariner, his eyes narrowing, his countenance now frankly expressing the hostility that had been veiled, "I'll say this: I don't go collecting with an ax." He put up his hand when the tyrant snarled more speech. "When I 'bout ship, I don't hang with the sails flapping! Meaning by that, March, I head up to make my port by the straightest line. Here's port, in this case. And I'm unloading! You have gouged the eternal daylights out of every human being on this island. That's my say, and you can like it or lump it!"

Still concealing his emotions, the cripple put in:

"And none of those victims could or did touch the person or the pride or the pocketbook of the lord of Tremont. Not until now. Not until I have taken up the job of settling scores for all. You're getting your punishment, Fletcher March!"

"Getting punished, hey? How? By your coming in here and blah-blahing your grouch?"

Kroston took the pose which Scott had found peculiar during the interview at the masked cove. The gaunt figure bent forward, the thin forefingers were raised as a double prop under the jutting chin. For a long time the hard eyes held the wavering gaze of March.

"'Lord Financier,' you have bragged of your smartness as a collector of money. Do you think you can get back the money you have poured into a certain hole in the ocean? We'll call it a hole in order to keep away from names. You know what I mean."

"I'm not discussing my business affairs with any twist-legged whelp."

The caller pulled from his breast pocket a bulky sheaf of papers, and tossed the packet to March across the desk.

"Glance at them! They are copies. The originals are safely deposited. Don't they indicate that I'm on the inside of some of your business affairs?"

"They indicate to me," declared March, after he had leafed the packet for a few moments, his jowls sagging in panic, but his eyes glittering with rage, "that you must be a spy and sneak thief, getting copies of private papers in this way."

"A poor guess by you, March! Those letters were sent by you to the address of a certain company in Halifax. Envelopes indorsed, 'Attention of the president.' Each communication received my profound attention. Because" —he halted a moment to lend emphasis —"I am the president."

He struck down one of his canes across the desk with a mighty thwack. Into the gray, drawn face of March he shouted:

"My chief reason for making myself the head of a rum-running crowd has been to do what I have done! I have teased your greed, I have baited you, I have tolled you on! I have cleaned you out. My game is outside the law, Mister Magistrate of Grand Tremont. I can stick out my tongue at you, daring you to try to get back one penny. There's a confession in that last letter you wrote."

The cane was banged on the sheaf of papers. "You beg for money out of profits promised you, to save yourself from serious difficulties. You're on your knees in that letter. Thought you were appealing to partners in Halifax on the basis of honor among thieves, eh? You were appealing to *me*—me *only*, damn you! What do you think of your chances of getting help?"

March was blinking into a visage of malevolent hatred. He swung his gaze to Dorrance, who stood at the end of the desk, stern and uncompromising.

The captain spoke out:

"I want to impress on you, March, that I'm not tied up in any way with this enemy of yours. Never laid eyes on him till to-day, as I've told you. Hadn't the least idea what he was going to say to you. Now I'm going to say something of my own! It's pretty well known on the main that you're in cahoots financially with a rum-running gang. That'll be a hard thing for a magistrate to explain to the government. I'm hitched in with the banks, and am knowing a lot about your finances. That's your own business, and I shan't meddle. But I'm making the business of Tamlyn Osborn my own, from this time on. I'm warning you that proceedings have already been started. If you've got any defense to keep you from going behind bars, you'd better get busy with it."

The stricken man looked away from the threat he found in Dorrance's countenance; he stared at the damning papers on the desk; he shuttled a side glance at the malefic visage of the cripple. Then he faced Dorrance again.

"Dorrance, you have just heard a dirty enemy confess how he has rammed me down where I am. I've been thinking I could lay my hands on money in a few days, so as to square the accounts of the estate, at least."

"I reckon you've now found out you can't," Dorrance commented dryly.

"If you're representing Tamlyn——"

"I'm not! I haven't even talked the matter over with her. And I won't mention it to her. It's easy for a girl to have silly notions about a man of your standing going to jail. I haven't any such notions in your case, March. I'm taking the whole thing away from Tamlyn, and putting it in the hands of the law, where it belongs. That's final! No talk. Look out for yourself, that's all!" The blunt master mariner marched away from the desk, and joined Scott.

On that decision, manifestly unalterable, silence followed.

A bit later, from the platform outside, the same high-pitched voice that had announced the arrival of the *Kestrel* gave further intelligence.

"Hullo! Here comes Eight Bells Annie a-swashing in. Got *her* spinnaker set, too! Showing courage and puhrading style."

Another loafer prefaced a guess with a cackle of mirth.

"Or else she has signed on another deep-water feller who ain't afeared of a capful o' wind."

The silly merriment outside was aggravating discord in the tense silence in the office of the lord of Tremont. March flung himself out of his chair and started for the window, cursing. But he snapped quickly about, and addressed Dorrance:

"I want to go away by myself for a few minutes. I've got to think this thing over. I'll come back with some papers, and they may help us in seeing a way out of the infernal mess."

"Take your time," consented Dorrance, after getting a nod of confirmation from Kroston, who was sitting like a grim effigy of vengeance.

The three men remained silent, after the cripple had suggested:

"You might be glancing over these copies, gentlemen. They have considerable bearing on the matter. Allow me to add as my last word: I have fought a reptile with the tactics of a reptile, and I make no excuses."

March descended into the store, and by way of a covered passage, went into the warehouse at the rear. By an exit which could not be observed from his office, he went out, and climbed the slope to a small structure made of field stones cemented together.

After a short stay within this building, he came out with a bundle under his arm and trudged down to a wharf, where his

launch was tied up. He went by a circuitous route, keeping in the lee of buildings as much as possible.

A bit later, the launch went foaming out into the harbor.

"Hullo!" proclaimed the high-pitched voice. "The jedge is off on a 'scursion, all by his lonesome!"

Dorrance heard, flung on the floor the papers he had been examining, and ran to the spyglass, swinging it on the tripod.

"Well, we have been played for suckers, all right! There goes March licketysplit, getting away from us."

Kroston made no demonstration, even by change of expression.

"Man, what had we ought to do?" Dorrance demanded.

"I have done my part," returned the avenger placidly. "If he is running away from the law, I'm pleased. I'm a lawbreaker, myself!" A sardonic grin drew the lank features awry.

Dorrance remained at the telescope, muttering.

"He'll have tough going outside, trying to make headway toward shore in this sea, Captain Dorrance," was Scott's opinion. "Using motor and sails, I think we can saw across his course in a few tacks."

"Just a moment!" counseled Dorrance. "He doesn't look like he's making for outside. He's holding over toward shore, cutting away from the shipping out there." Then he yelled: "Look!"

Far out on the harbor waters, where the speed launch slowed down, there was a sudden blowing of gray smoke that was shot through with flying fragments. A few seconds later, they felt the jarring shock of the explosion.

"Gasoline tank?" gasped Scott in query.

"No. Dynamite!" stated Dorrance, driving the spyglass shut with a blow of his palm. "The 'down-thunk' told the story."

With effort he forced himself into partial composure.

"I'm hurrying over to the house, Scott. I want to get to Tamlyn before some fool stampedes in and bangs this thing at her. Do you want to go along with me?"

The young man shook his head, not willing to put into speech the falsehood involved in declaring that he did not want to go.

Dorrance departed on the run.

The cripple got slowly upon his feet, propping his body with the canes.

"Will you be kind enough to see me off to the schooner, Captain Scott? I'll wait there until Captain Dorrance comes aboard with you later."

"Certainly, sir! It'll help me kill time."

With thumping canes, Kroston slowly made his way out of the arena where he had accompished vengeance suited to his taste; his countenance revealed that he was eminently satisfied. Scott followed, maintaining a morose silence; the affair was hideously hateful, as he viewed it.

While he paused in the doorway of the office, waiting for the cripple to make a slow and clumsy descent of the stairs, the young man's nerves were rasped again by the high-pitched voice. He muttered oaths of disgust while he heard what the voice uttered.

March had been a cruel despot, money mad, heartless in his dealings with the folks of his island. Scott knew all that. However, his resentment flared when he listened to an attempt at humor, egregiously bad.

"I've been noticing that Squire March has showed signs of failing in health and spirits of late, but I really didn't expect him to go to pieces quite so sudden!"

Scott did not stay for Kroston's slow progress; the captain hurried past the man, giving a side glance at the cripple's unperturbed countenance.

"I'll be getting the boat ready, Mr. Kroston."

"Very well, captain."

Before turning the corner of a fish house, Scott flung a look over his shoulder.

Coming behind, countenance serene, body swinging pendulumlike from the supports, moved the personification of fate in a misshapen body. Fate had gone bodefully, leisurely, up the slope, had overtaken its object, and was now returning, unhurried and undismayed. Scott gritted his teeth, and said things under his breath. He was admitting the justice of punishment of roguery some-

how, at some time. But his experience had been with quick and open accusations, face to face, with the arbitrament of fists, man style. This implacable, long-calculated, undeviating pursuit of revenge which had attacked March in his pride, his pocket and his very soul, possessed abhorrent qualities for a man of Scott's open fashion of dealing.

Therefore, when the two were in the dory and Scott was rowing off to the schooner, the young man looked from side to side, up at the sky—everywhere except at the visage of the man in the stern sheets.

"You haven't much relish for my company, Captain Scott, I perceive," remarked Kroston dryly. "Though you were willing to risk your life in getting to me a few hours ago."

"You'll have to excuse me, sir, for the way I'm looking and acting right now." But there was no apology in Scott's manner. He pulled on doggedly.

"Oh, it's quite all right, captain. Men don't like me. You'd stir my suspicion of motives if you should try to be really sociable with me."

"Then I'll take no chances on stirring suspicion, sir."

"I'll refer again to your recent great hankering to get to me," proceeded Kroston ironically. "Now I'll be honest, for once. I can guess that you had heard a great deal about the 'Big Man,' the man at the top rung of the concern. You had made up your mind that he had horns and breathed fire and smoke. So, I'm going to compliment you for your bravery in bucking through the lines of defense. I repeat, I'll be honest for once. You have good grit in your craw!"

Scott remained silent.

The other went on:

"And then all you found in the high seat was a cripple with a grudge! Heh! Quite a let-down of pride in a big performance."

"There's no call for such talk, sir! I expected to find another sort of a man, I'll admit. But you were plenty dangerous enough, if you had taken the notion."

"Quite so, undoubtedly, if I had taken that notion. You see, captain, I have to make my way without the aids most men can use in getting what they want—and *whom* they want!" He squinted a queer look at certain flotsam, through which the dory was passing. "Whatever wit and shrewdness there may be in this crooked body and brain, I use to get what I want. The men I handle as rum smugglers let me stay in the high seat, because I am able to sit there and think up new tricks. They're numbheads who can't think for themselves. I lied to March a little while ago. I'm not president of anything. He could have investigated any real company or corporation. But this rum smuggling must be made a mysterious affair, anyway. And the sucker lists, even over in the land of shrewd Yankees, show how men can be tricked out of money by this buttonhole, whisper-in-the-ear stuff—the same men who'd dissect a legitimate investment down to its ravelings!"

He paused for a few moments of meditation.

"Captain Scott, I don't want that girl's money, whatever amount of it March may have dumped in. Probably Captain Dorrance, later, may be able to figure out what rightfully belongs to her."

"You'd best talk all that over with him, Mr. Kroston. I'm not meddling."

This reference to Tamlyn's money indicated that Kroston had a decent streak; but his warped nature immediately asserted itself in another direction.

"I may as well tell you, Captain Scott, I am keeping right along in the line which I'm following. That's frankly said, you'll admit. If you use against me what you have found out, you can put a big nick into my plans."

"What you carry on for a business is no affair of mine, sir. I have already said so to you. I also said I'd keep my mouth shut."

"Yes! Very good! Thank you! But suppose you and Miss Osborn and Dorrance, acting as one party, deal with me on the basis of a trade in this matter? You all keep mum about me and my crowd, and I'll turn back the girl's money in course of time."

Scott stopped rowing, and poised a menacing oar.

"I was never more of a mind to welt

a man's face with the flat of an oar blade! For one more yap along that line, I'll slam ye!"

"Hi! Hi!" protested the cripple. "Why all the temper?"

"Because you're doubting my pledged word to the extent of dickering on it! That's why. Let my business with you stand as it is. If you have any conscience, you'll pay back to Miss Osborn."

"My conscience doesn't *work* me. It only works *for* me when I ask it to do duty, Captain Scott. Probably I'll pay back the money. But only after I've waited to make sure of what drops." His hard eyes relentlessly met those of the young man.

With his thoughts full of his own plan for the assistance of Tamlyn, Scott blurted:

"Thank Heaven, nobody on our side needs any trade or traffic with you."

"Entirely O. K. with me. So the knave will go back to his job. You're sailing, I presume, after Dorrance has been brought off?"

"The schooner will sail," stated Scott, nipping his lips.

After that, silence.

Kroston clambered over the rail with the help of the men of the *Kestrel*.

"Terrible thing, Captain Scott," ventured one of the crew. "We put off in a dory, but we couldn't find anything to pick up."

There was eager query in the faces to which Scott raised his gaze.

"It'll be explained later, lads. I haven't time for the job just now."

He rowed away.

CHAPTER XXI.

FRIENDSHIP—LOVE—FINIS.

RETURNING from the *Kestrel* to the wharf, Scott found Mate Tuzzer waiting alone on the landing stage. Nearing the float, the skipper glanced over his shoulder several times, getting eyefuls. Tuzzer was togged. His trousers sported broad stripes, his cockney aping of the "toffs" had inspired the purchase of light-gray spats, his coat had long tails; and the billycock hat, perched saucily on one side of his head, was the final touch to a sense of new importance in the world. And he swung a bamboo cane!

"Ben Tuzzer," stated Scott, confronting his delinquent mate, and scowling when the old man saluted smartly, "I'm thinking I don't want to pass speech with you while my feelings are kicking up in general as they are, after what's happened in the harbor."

Mr. Tuzzer was not a whit put down by this austerity. He twirled his cane and set his head aslant.

"Ow, it m'y be best to have me s'y to ye later, when ye're on the simmer after the b'iling! Hows'ever, I can remark as how I've resigned me job, hoping that the news will help cool ye summat!"

"Your job was jacked, Tuzzer, when you left hell to happen to me, for all o' your knowing."

"I handed the writing over to Captain Dorrance, to be looked after by him."

"Aye, without a word as to its importance," retorted Scott hotly. "It might easy have been overlooked or forgotten. But I can say now I didn't need your help—nor will I ever need it later, you old deserting eel!"

The skipper started on his way; but Tuzzer flung down his cane, and set the clutch of both hands into the slack of Scott's reefer.

"I'll tackle ye while ye're b'iling, if that's your style in breaking a friendship."

The skipper was sourly tolerant, and halted.

"I'm not twitting ye as how I was made to toss aw'y my chance for a snug old age when the *Bohemian's* whisky was split. I'm only *reminding* ye 'twas so! I done what ye told me to do. This forenoon I was waiting to do something else, so told by you. And a mighty fine woman sails into dock. Mighty fine woman! So I goes over to pass time o' day. And I found me chance for a good understanding—sudden! Deep water, that's what I've been. She likes the kind. Said so! And I says I like 'em bouncing, able and on the go, and not afraid o' sailor langwidge, when it's called for. And there comes a time in a man's life, Scotty, when he's simply *got* to tend to his own business, and pay strick 'tention to his best

interests. And, o' course, though 'tain't so awful important, I've fell into love with Mis' Todd. But it ain't hurting that love none to know she's tucked aw'y fifty thousand dollars." He tipped the billycock hat to a sharper angle. "All them things have to be thought of at my age."

"You mean to say, do you," Scott demanded, "that you ducked out from under what I'd set you to do, and trotted uptown to-day to get married?"

"Yep! Special license. She fixed it. Smart's a clipper, that woman!"

"Yes; in this case I know why she moved so smart."

"She and me grabbed each other while the grabbing was good," boasted Tuzzer.

Scott controlled his honest and hearty hankering to smack his old friend on the back and give him sailor's cheer in good fortune. But the serene selfishness shown by Tuzzer, in shunting responsibility in an exigency, still had power to rankle. Scott's nerves were on edge. He felt an impish desire to get back at the old man.

"Look ye, Ben Tuzzer! She hurried the thing to make sure of you, before you'd be finding out she already has had five husbands, all deep-water men, all lost at sea."

Tuzzer took off his hat and scrubbed his forehead with his forearm, and blinked dubiously, his lower jaw sagging.

"And that's why her nickname is Eight Bells Annie, bold Johnny Ranzo!"

Scott started on, casting a grin of rather juvenile malice over his shouder.

"If ever she wants you to go out to swim, Ben Tuzzer, hang your clothes on a hickory limb, and *don't* go near the water."

At the end of the wharf Tuzzer caught up with Scott. All the alarm had vanished from the old man's countenance.

"Scotty," he gasped, panting after his run, "I sure did go under for a minute! But now I'm riding high and safe on a buoy—and she throwed the same to me. Because she is looking on me diff'runt from all the rest. She ain't a-going to take no chances with her new prize, even if I do have to brag o' meself. Because she made me swear on her pocket Bible that I'd never, never go on salt water again. She's even going to sell the fishing sloop. We're all agreed to settle on shore and then we will be happy forever after!"

Scott promptly pumphandled the bridegroom, and blessed him with a beaming smile.

"Then it's all right, Ben Tuzzer. Excuse my sour looks and speech a few minutes ago. I was afraid I stood in a way to lose a good friend."

Tuzzer paced with Scott as far as the platform of the March store.

" 'Twas a turrible bust-up, hey, Scotty? I ain't sp'iling my new peace o' mind by talking about the thing."

"Aye, mate, an awful end!"

"I hope ye ain't a-going to leave such a nice girl to fight her troubles alone."

"I'll do my best in help—— You know that, Ben Tuzzer."

The mate grasped Scott's hand.

"This ain't no good-by! You'll be staying in these parts. I'll have to be trotting back home!" He stressed that last word complacently. "Ye see, Scotty, I had to beg and coax afore she'd let me off to go down even nigh the water, to meet you and say me say. I may git struck by lightning some day, but I ain't never going to be drownded, not so long's I mind her say to me."

Scott walked slowly on alone, waiting for Dorrance to come from the mansion on the hill, the home of the Osborn family.

In a short time Dorrance appeared, hurrying.

"All clewed up, skipper! Everything was flapping, of course, and I had a tough job of it. But I've fixed it shipshape and left it so!"

Scott understood and nodded.

Dorrance laid his hand on the young man's shoulder.

"Now, lad, I don't need to tell you that Tamlyn needs a lot of help, honest help, man's help. I'll do all I can in the law and business end over on the main. Fletcher March has disinherited his nephew. March put his new will in Tamlyn's hands. He did do that much for her. This property here must have a manager; the fleet must be fitted and kept at sea. You're the man for the

job, and I've promised Tamlyn you'd take it."

The impetuous regulator of affairs did not wait for Scott's spoken consent. The flare of joy in the young man's eyes made words needless.

"She's a bright girl, herself, in business, Scott. She'll work with you. Why, right off, she spoke of the probable need of ready money, and I assured her on that point, mighty sudden."

"That's right, sir! Told her, of course, you could advance——"

"What? Lie to her at the start-off? Try to fool a smart girl? No, sir! I told her you have plenty of spare cash, and that you will put it in and be damned thankful for the privilege of doing so for her help. You ought to have seen her eyes then!"

"Ye gods!" wailed Scott. "I didn't want——"

"I know what you want! I know what she wants! You two are dead in love with each other. She's waiting for you to come and tell her your side of it. You told me to use my best judgment, didn't you? What for are you looking at me, sick-calf style?"

"You're not giving me time to think—to pull myself together," bleated Scott, moving toward the big house under the thrust of Dorrance's hands.

"Dang-rang it! I'll be using more o' that best judgment on you in a jiffy. Unless you hoof it straight up to that front door, I'll grab you by the slack of the pants and the scruff of the neck and lug you up and heave you in. Guess she thinks I'll be doing it. She's holding the door open!"

Scott peered through the mist with which his emotions had filmed his eyes.

He beheld Tamlyn in the doorway.

He pulled off his cap, and went toward her with dogged haste.

Captain Dorrance remained in his tracks and grinned and dusted his hands, with the significant gesture of one who had finished a job to his complete satisfaction.

"Guess it's a self-acting proposition from now on," he muttered, chuckling.

When the door closed upon the two, he stamped down to the wharf, and rowed out to the *Kestrel*, his back to the fragments of tragedy littered on the water, his face toward the house, the door of which had been closed on tragedy and opened on love.

The opening novel in the next number of THE POPULAR *will be "A Fool and Some Money," by Bertrand W. Sinclair, takes places in the West as it really exists, and deals with a situation that is entirely out of the ordinary.*

ABOUT THE DESPISED COYOTE

THE coyote has become a synonym for a slinking, cowardly, thieving wretch—and no wonder, for the coyote is the worst enemy of the sheepmen of the West. But it has been declared, recently, that coyote fur is valuable, even more so than wool, and in this revelation the detested animal has a doubtful victory. Its pelt is tough and until now has never been considered good for anything, but it is known now to be warm, and convertible without difficulty into good apparel.

There is another reason for the increasing value of coyote fur. Like the wolf, the mountain lion, the bobcat, the lynx and the bear, the coyote is fast being exterminated. In a country where there is much cattle and sheep raising, predatory animals such as these cause untold losses. Some years ago the government was asked to help in the war against them, for nearly twenty million dollars' worth of sheep and cattle was being lost yearly because of them. Some people protested at the wholesale war waged on them, arguing conservation of fur, but it was a question of which was the more valuable to the country—the furs or the live stock. And the rancher won.

In the Bad Lands

By Bertrand W. Sinclair

Author of "Out of the Blue," "Easy Money," Etc.

"Bad Land" Bill, the new rider, was a likable kid, but he was a mystery to the bunch at the Wineglass range. And when another strange individual stumbled into the light of the camp fire one night, the mystery deepened.

AGAINST a window that faced the west bank of Plentywater, Charlie Shaw flattened his nose for a minute. April showers bring May flowers. Charlie grinned—because the April shower had become a snowstorm. The morning rain had turned into wet flakes the size of a thumb nail, eddying out of a darkened air. Now the ground lay six inches under a coat of arctic down. Tough on the sheepmen with lambing in full swing. Charlie grinned again. Cattle could stand it. The tougher the better. Sheep were a thorn in the rangeman's tenderest side. They were becoming too plentiful for cow outfits to regard them with indifference. Shaw was not vindictive—but the less lambs the more grass for cattle.

Most of the stuff floating through his brain was idle thought. But his looking was not idle. The Benton trail skirted the rim of the plateau that flowed up to the hollow of Plentywater, and one of his riders was due from the stage road with mail. Bad weather had penned Charlie close for days. He was bored. Lacking action, he craved something to read. There might be letters. He stared through a brief let-up in the ballet of the snowflakes. Then the white curtain closed so that looking was vain. Charlie went back to the fireplace and yawned over a cigarette.

Boots thumped on the porch. Jerry Smith came in with the mail, cursed the water, clanked his spurs out again. Charlie looked over a letter or two, and buried

himself in a Fort Benton newspaper until the cook called him to supper.

He marked a new face at the long table. A slim, dark youngster, thin faced, thin lipped, neatly dressed. He had white, even teeth that shone when he opened his mouth. But he only opened it for the purpose of stowing food. Charlie looked him over once. Riders came and went at all seasons. In the spring they drifted, and restless ones, from one range to another, looking for a job, looking for variety, looking for horses—genial nomads.

But as he sat before his fireplace, toasting his stockinged feet and studying a letter from the Sutherland range boss, a knock sounded at his door.

"Come in," he grunted.

The slim, dark stranger faced him. His words were as spare as his frame.

"Full handed?" he asked.

Now Charlie Shaw had a full crew of able riders—the only kind suffered on the Wineglass pay roll. Ordinarily, he would have said: "Yeah. Full up, unless somebody breaks his neck." That would have ended it. But something about this youngster caught Charlie's fancy. Neat, but not gaudy. Slender and keen—like a new sword. So he asked a question.

"Where you from?"

"Bad Lands."

"That's a lot of territory," Charlie remarked. "All kinds of people use it."

The boy smiled slightly.

"Oh, I'm no outlaw. My folks has a one-horse outfit down on a fork of Sand Coulee. Nothin' much for me at home, so I ride round-up. I been up in the Sun River Basin breakin' horses all winter."

"Sand Coulee, eh." Charlie glanced at the letter in his hand. It was a friendly suggestion from the Block S that the Wineglass come down and work with them and the Picador, as northwesterly blizzards had drifted several thousand Wineglass cattle to the heart of that range. And there was mention of this place in the letter. "That the Sand Coulee down on the Sutherland range?"

"Uh-huh. I worked for the Block S two seasons back," the boy answered.

"Good outfit," Charlie commented.

"Sure. They say the Wineglass is a good outfit to ride for, too," the other said. "I could go to work for Sutherland again, I guess. Thought I'd try you."

"I guess I can use you," Charlie said on impulse. He could. A good man always fitted in, and somehow this boy in three sentences and a look impressed him as being more than capable. Horses *did* fall on men. Occasionally a rider yearned for distant pastures and left. "What's your name?"

"Bill Mather."

"All right, Bill," Charlie nodded. "I guess you know how to make yourself at home in a bunk house."

Mather nodded and withdrew.

At ten o'clock Charlie looked out before he went to bed. All white, and more falling. A foot of snow in mid-April. Erratic weather.

It continued to be erratic. The Wineglass floundered in a white world for thirty-six hours. A touch of frost. Then warm rain. Dirty slush. More rain, like ice water on the bare face, slashing out of a lowering sky. Then the sun, smiling wanly, as if conscious of some seasonal aberration, and new grass slowly thrusting up green blades to surround the blue windflowers that spread petals bravely before the snow was fairly gone.

The Wineglass gathered the last of its saddle stock, and moved across the sodden plains to join the Block S south of the Bear Paws by the tenth of May, in a spring the like of which none of the old-timers recalled. Snow, rain, hail and sunshine—all in a twenty-four-hour day. Riders were crabbed, horses fractious. The plains wind whipped their faces and their tempers raw. But while a wheel could roll from one creek to another and cattle be bunched on a round-up ground, work went on.

Bill Mather lived up to Charlie Shaw's first estimate. He more than held up his end. Did it with a peculiar sort of concentration on the job. For a youngster he was uncommonly self-contained. He would answer with a nod or a smile rather than a word. The rough joking of a round-up crew slid off him as rain off a slicker. In camp he would sit staring at nothing, chin in hand, his lean, dark face as impassive as a Buddha's.

Charlie learned more about him from the Block S.

"Nice kid," their range foreman said. "Made a good hand for me one season. Folks ain't much. Old man's no account. Got a brother that's slick as hell at a lot of things, but lazy. Girl down there, sister or something, wild as a hawk. Keep their ranch like a boar's nest. Got a few stock in the edge of the breaks. Scrap among themselves all the time. Bill's all right. He'll amount to somethin'. 'Bad Land,' we used to call him."

Bad Land Bill. The Block S had christened him that. The Wineglass revived it. The name fitted the boy. He was like some wild, dynamic creature out of that desolate and distorted region which lies like a barrier on both sides of the Missouri River. The round-up moved its wagons along the edge of this sinister jumble of canyons, gullies, washouts, sagebrush, thickets of scrub pine, cut banks banded with layers of varicolored earth, like stripes of Indian paint. They reached down long, narrow plateaus winding through a network of impassable crevices, driving range cattle out ahead of them. It was like a vast maze, the Bad Land country. Yet it had its good points for a cattleman—also for others whose business was not so legitimate. There lay pasture and shelter for winter-driven stock. Aridity and bitter water kept sheep out in summer, and left a heavy stand of bunch grass where grass could grow. If, now and then, some sheriff cursed the country because he had to hunt a lawbreaker fruitlessly, it was no matter. It was a hard country to get about in on horseback, impossible for wheeled traffic.

In the edge of the Bad Lands, on a fork of Birch Creek, a furious rainstorm tied up the round-up. After twelve hours of downpour the gumbo soil softened so that a horse sank ankle-deep in stuff like putty, withdrawing his hoof with a curious sucking *plop!* The wagon tires cut inch by inch into the earth where they stood. It was like the Flood, with the Bear Paws a distant Ararat on the north, hidden in the murk, and not for their saving. They had to stay in the flats and take it. Day-herders on the cattle herd, the horse wrangler with his saddle bunch, in slicker and chaps, humped backs to the storm and endured their hours on watch. The rain grew colder, became sleety squalls. The second evening snow drove thick and fast, hard, stinging particles, out of the northwest. Overnight it piled fourteen inches deep. Noon laid two feet of this unwelcome white purity on the levels. The two round-up bosses held confab and turned their herds loose. It was too much to ask men to face day and night the blast of that untimely storm, to grow numb in their saddles on night guard. Their saddle stock they had to hold—they were the tools of their trade. They marshaled the cowboys into regular watches with the horse wranglers, standing two-hour shifts. There was no fenced pasture within thirty miles to relieve them of that necessity.

"What the hell's the country comin' to?" Bud Cole complained to Bill Mather. "The world musta slipped a couple of cogs north."

"Maybe," Bad Land agreed. "Tough on cowboys."

The others slept, killed time with penny ante, cursed the weather, swapped range lore. Charlie Shaw brooded in the cook tent. It would clear with a hard frost. New-born calves dying in snowbanks in the last of May. April showers bring May flowers! Damn such weather!

Upon a convenient hillock a dozen riders laid ropes on a varied collection of dead-pine snags, dragged them down before the bed tent. They were saturated with pitch. One father of roots would burn for three days. They made bets on its duration. Once ignited, neither snow, wind, rain nor buckets of water could extinguish that pitch-fed flame. It made a pleasant glow between the opened flaps of the tent. Also it made a serviceable beacon in the dark, a mark for the relief men on night guard, a wavering yellow tongue like a lighthouse on a rocky coast.

The third night of the deep snow, when the fall had ceased, when the blustering northwest wind sank to a murmur, and sharp frost was setting a crust on the damp drifts, a man staggered into the circle of light. He had on overalls and a short sheepskin coat. He was an oldish

man, with a tangled beard extending fanwise from his chin, a black beard like those of the prophets.

All but two of the Wineglass crew were in their blankets. These two were Charlie Shaw and Bud Cole, squatting between the bed tent and the glowing pine snag, talking in undertones. They looked at this apparition, wavering on its feet. He didn't belong in either outfit.

"Hello," Charlie greeted. "This is tough weather to be runnin' around loose. You lost, or are you just goin' some place?"

"Both, I guess. What outfit is this?"

"The Wineglass from Lonesome Prairie," Charlie told him. "Come on up to the fire."

They rose from their boot heels with an exclamation. The man took a step, swayed, moved uncertainly.

"Don't be scared," Charlie said kindly. It struck him that this old fellow was furtive—and he had seen men on the dodge, edging cautiously into a camp for food and shelter.

"I ain't scared," the man mumbled, in little more than a whisper. "I'm played out, that's all."

"You been wanderin' afoot in this snow?" Bud asked.

"Since last night," he answered.

As if shelter, warmth and the presence of men jarred loose some prop which had sustained him, he put one hand to his face and lurched, and would have fallen if Bud and Charlie had not caught him. He sagged in their grip. His head dropped to his breast.

"For the love of Pete!" Bud said. "The old boy's certainly all in. Now what in blazes——"

"Pack him over to the chuck tent an' get some dry clothes on him, an' throw some hot coffee into him," Charlie answered, with the practical wisdom born of experience.

Bill Mather thrust in between them and dropped on his knee beside the old man. He was in his sock feet. His black hair stood in a tangle. His dark face was alight with troubled inquiry. And he spoke to the unconscious man, as if he expected, indeed, as if he demanded, an answer:

"How'd you get here, dad? What's happened?"

"He's out, Bill. No use askin' yet. You know him?"

"'S my old man," young Bill muttered. "I wonder what's up?"

"Let's get him over to the tent," Charlie suggested. "An' bring him to an' get him warmed an' fed. Then he'll tell us. He said he's been out in this since last night. So I guess the old boy had a license to fade away."

The three picked the man up as if he had been a sack of oats. Bill Mather strode sock-footed, in his underclothes, through the trampled snow between the two tents. Charlie's quick mind took stock of the elements. Three feet of snow in a mid-May night, a lost old man, and an agitated cow-puncher who looked at the elderly whiskered one with an agony of apprehension in his eyes. It never rained but it poured. Charlie dragged his rolled bed close to the stove, in which a few coals still glowed.

"Hop into your pants, Sam," he ordered the cook, lifting an inquiring eye above his own blankets in one corner. "Make some coffee. We got a half-froze gent on our hands."

They laid their burden on Charlie's bed, listened for a moment to his breathing. Bill stripped off his father's sodden foot gear. Bud stoked the fire. Sam Barnes shuffled into his clothes. They were all sympathy, commiseration. That dead faint troubed them, too. They chafed the cold hands and icy feet. In the end, as the kettle began to steam, the old man sat up. A lantern, slung over the stove, shed a dull light on his unkempt features. Something flickered in his old eyes at sight of Bill. The boy himself didn't speak, at first, only stared.

The old man's teeth set up a sudden chatter.

"Here, throw this hot coffee into you." Charlie passed him the cup.

He gulped it in two swallows.

"Thank you all," he said. "That sure tasted good."

"You're all wet," Bill said. "Drink some more coffee an' peel off your clothes. I'll rustle you dry ones outa my war bag."

He went off to the bed tent. In a minute, when the old man had finished his second cup of coffee and accepted the makings of a cigarette, and the cook was setting out food for him, Charlie and Bud withdrew. They found Mather in the glow of the burning root, digging clothes out of his bag. He stamped his feet into boots, and went back to the chuck tent with an armful of clothes.

"That kid's the original clam," Bud Cole remarked. "He don't never say nothin'. He's worried. I wonder what that old hombre's hoofin' it forty miles from nowhere in a snowstorm for?"

"I ain't no clairvoyant," Charlie answered.

After a few minutes Bill joined them. He squatted on his heels, rolled a smoke, silent.

"How's the old man?" Charlie asked.

"Stowin' some fodder," Bill replied. "Sam's gone back to bed."

He stared into the flames, brooding, abstracted, frowning.

Bud Cole yawned.

"I'm goin' to turn in," he said, and departed to his bed.

Mather volunteered no information. A cow-puncher's respect for other people's private concerns does not lessen his natural curiosity. Charlie contemplated his toes. He was young—one of the youngest range bosses in Montana. Life, for Charlie, had embraced a number of stirring episodes, and he had not been unconscious of the drama. He had uncanny perception, a reflective. imaginative quality, allied to a capacity for action. He looked up at young Bill and he knew the boy was troubled, out of all proportion to the fact of his father having got astray in a snowstorm.

"He can roll in with you when he's fed an' warmed, Bill," he said.

Mather nodded. He opened his mouth as if to speak, then turned without a word back to the cook tent. He was there quite a time. When he came back he brought his father with him. Bill overtopped him by a head. The tangled beard and unkempt hair made the old fellow a wild-looking figure. Bill stowed him in his own bed. Then he came back to the fire, to Charlie Shaw, and sat humped on his boot heels, with a face like a mask.

"Like a frozen man," Charlie thought. " 'Tain't natural for a kid like him. Make a good gambler with that poker face. Never tell what went on behind it."

"Somethin's happened," Bill broke the silence abruptly, speaking in an undertone. "He won't tell me. I got to go see for myself."

"Where? When?" Charlie could be concise, himself.

"Right now. Down to our place."

"In the middle of the night, an' three foot of snow? How far is it?"

"About twelve miles. Fork of Sand Coulee, a couple of miles down in the breaks."

"Gosh, man," Charlie remonstrated. "Unless it's a case of life an' death this ain't no night to flounder that far in the Bad Lands. Chances are you wouldn't find it till daylight."

"I could find that ranch blindfold," young Bill said, with conviction. "It worries me. He won't tell me nothin'. I got to go. He's been wanderin' around in this for twenty hours. He ain't the flighty kind, either. Took somethin' to scare him out."

"Just what are you afraid might have come off?" Charlie asked. He had the impression that Bill Mather wanted to tell him something and couldn't, wouldn't, without encouragement. "What's the trouble, Bill?"

"Maybe none—till I get there," the youngster said moodily. "Maybe—well, there's a girl there. Aw, shucks! there's no use talkin'. She was raised with us, but she ain't no kin. I used to think a heap of her. I got a brother, Jed. There's a feller name uh Munson got a holdout a ways below our place. I don't know what there is about Dolly, but she gets men crazy. Them two's been ready to lock horns over her for a year. I had to get out. Don't matter why. Now somethin's happened. Somethin' fierce, to make the old man light out in weather like it was last night. He won't say. He's that kind. I got to go see."

There was that in his tone which moved Charlie.

"No matter what's come off," he said kindly, "you couldn't hardly make it tonight, Bill. Wait till daybreak. I'll ride down with you, myself."

"I got to go *now*," Mather replied. "She's alone down there—with them two locoed fools. An' somethin's happened."

"Oh, well, gosh darn it, go ahead," Charlie acquiesced. "You got me all excited, kid. I'll come along, if you like. I'm tired layin' around camp lookin' at snowdrifts, anyway."

A dozen saddled horses stood tied to the bed wagon. The night men all kept horses ready. Mather had a mount there. So did Shaw. They drew on chaps, overcoats. Deep breathing, punctuated by snores, filled the bed tent. Every man was sound asleep. The light was out in the cook tent. They stumbled in there for a last cup of coffee out of the still warm pot, and Charlie left a word with the cook for Bud Cole, who was his second in command. As they came back by the fire, old Mather sat up in bed. He peered out at his son dressed for travel. He beckoned and Bill halted in the mouth of the tent.

"Yo' a damn fool," he grumbled. "Leave 'em settle their own troubles."

"If you'd tell me," Bill said. A weary patience sounded in his voice.

"It's that hellcat of a girl," the old man sputtered. "She's got Munson on the warpath. He's bad, Munson is. Like a crazy man. Jed ain't much better, as fur as that goes."

"You're a fine head of a family," young Bill said scornfully, "runnin' away, leavin' Dolly to two fellers like that."

"I got scared," the old fellow muttered. "But I didn't exactly run. Just lit out till they cooled off or got it settled. Then I couldn't find my way back. Mighty nigh perishin' in that there storm."

"You won't perish here," Bill said shortly. He turned to his horse. Mounted, he said to Charlie: "There ain't really no call for you to ride down there with me. I'll bring back a horse for the old man to ride home to-morrow."

"If you're goin' into the Bad Lands to interfere with two fellers that have gone bughouse over a girl," Charlie said cheerfully, "you better have company. You sure this ain't no false alarm?"

Mather shook his head.

"Well, I'd as soon ride as lay thinkin ," Charlie declared; "so let's hit the trail."

The crust on the snow was steadily hardening. The frost had teeth. Clear of that fire they moved in a luminous darkness. Clouds made the sky very black above. Underfoot the snow made a pale glimmer. The way became deceptive. Left to himself, Charlie Shaw would scarcely have known north from south, east from west, except for the run of the coulee, dipping uniformly from the flats to the valley of the Missouri. He would have had difficulty finding his way back to the round-up camp. But Mather plodded at a slow trot, at a walk where the snow lay deeper. Here and there it took a horse to the belly. He never hesitated. They crossed plateaus, slid into gulches, floundered in high sage, passed clumps of pine that made black blotches on the snow. And at last he angled down a steep hillside into a narrow bottom where they passed ghastly cottonwoods, and suddenly buildings loomed before them, the high pole wall of a round corral. Mather stopped.

"Dark as the grave," he whispered. "I don't like it. There always used to be a couple of hounds that made a row when anybody rode up."

They tied their horses to the pole corral.

"You stay here," Bill whispered. "I don't like this quiet. I'm goin' to the house. If it's all right, I'll holler for you."

"Everybody asleep, most likely," Charlie commented. "It's past midnight, man."

"I know," the boy muttered. "Just the same—you wait till I look in the house. I got a funny feelin'."

He moved away. Cracks had opened here and there in the cloud bank. Charlie could see him dimly, crossing the yard. The house was a vague blur, black walls under a snow-capped roof. He heard the creak of a door. After that, no sound for a minute.

Then a match flared yellow through a window. It went dark, flared again, be-

came the steady glow of a lamp. But there was no hail. Once a shadow fell on the uncurtained panes.

Charlie's feet grew cold in the snow. He grew impatient. No way to leave a man, cooling his heels on a frosty night.

"Gosh darn these fool people an' their family troubles," he grumbled.

Then, between impatience and discomfort, he started for the house. It was a low-walled structure. The windows opened on a level with his waist. The door stood ajar, casting a knife-blade gleam. The window laid a bright square on the snow. Abreast of it Charlie stopped.

A man lay face down on the floor, his head turned sidewise, arms spread in a crooked curve. He had black hair like Bill Mather's. His face, white in the lamplight, was very like Bad Land Bill's, only it was curiously twisted, the mouth open, slack jawed. A white-handled gun lay just beyond the finger tips of one hand. Bill Mather stood over him, staring like a man shocked and bewildered.

Charlie stepped into the doorway. His rider turned like a cat. His gun came halfway out of its holster on his hip.

"Looks like your hunch was right." Charlie said.

"She's gone," young Mather said. "Munson's killed Jed an' took her. He's stone cold. Stiff as a board. Must 'a' been done yesterday."

"Your brother?"

Bill nodded.

"We never hitched good," he said, after a long interval. "But he was my brother. An' Dolly's gone. Munson's took her away. An' she hated the sight of him."

"Gosh, Bill, that don't follow," Charlie declared. "A killin' is a killin'. It happens now an' then. But men don't steal women against their will."

"This feller would," young Mather replied slowly. "So would he"—he nodded at the dead man—"an' you don't know Dolly. I should never 'a' left here."

"Maybe she did the same as your old man," Charlie suggested. "Got scared an' lit out when the trouble started."

"No. She'd stay an' laugh at them," Bill muttered. "Well, I can soon find out. Help me pick him up, Charlie. I'd rather he was on a bed."

"Better leave him where he lays," Charlie said. "There'll be county officers wantin' to look into this in a day or two."

"Let 'em look," young Bill said. "I don't like him layin' all this time on a cold, bare floor."

Two rooms opened off the larger one, which was at once kitchen, dining and living quarters. One of these had a bunk in each corner—a man's room, with blankets tumbled as they were last slept in. They laid the stiff body on one bunk and closed the door. Bill looked at his watch.

"It lacks hours till daylight," said he. "Let's put up our horses an' start a fire."

They walked back to the house under a sky now beginning to show stars. A south wind whistled forlornly down that gut in the Bad Lands. Pines loomed in dark patches against white canyon walls. Frost-crisp snow crunched underfoot. The south wind would soften that soon, but for the present the frost still had its teeth bare. Bill found wood in a box and stoked a kitchen range. He looked with distaste at the crimson-stained floor. Eventually he found a piece of canvas and covered that dark patch on the raw wood. Lamp in hand, while the fire crackled, he roamed about the room, examining floor, walls, doorways, windows. Charlie Shaw pulled off his boots, put his feet on the oven door, rolled a cigarette, and watched this survey. Bill set the lamp on a table and joined him by the stove.

"There was only one shot fired," he said at last. "Jed never even drawed his gun. It was laid there by his hand after he was down. They fought first. Jed's face is marked. His knuckles is skinned."

He slumped in a chair by the stove, chin on his breast. Passion had flared and death taken its toll in that room. An atmosphere intangible but sobering, with a touch of the sinister, remained. Charlie felt it as something unpleasant. How it affected young Bill, he did not know. The boy stared at the stove, his dark face darker still with the shadow of

brooding. They sat waiting in silence for the dawn, each occupied with his own obscure thoughts.

Young Bill drew out his watch again. In an hour it would be day. He looked at Charlie.

"I'm goin' after Munson," he said.

Charlie nodded. There was no use trying to dissuade a man with that look in his eyes, no use to speak of the law and county officers. But he did. And young Bill only shook his head, as Charlie suspected he would.

"The law," he said slowly, "is a long way off. An' I'm here. There's a woman in this, too."

There generally was, Charlie reflected, a woman somewhere in the background of things like this.

"I should never have left here," young Mather said again. "Munson was afraid of me. I thought he was afraid of Jed. Seems like he wasn't. I got to make it good. I expect we better feed ourselves. It's a long way back to the Wineglass on an empty stomach."

"I'm not hungry," Charlie replied. "But a cup of coffee wouldn't do no harm."

They had that. There was food, cold meat and bread. But coffee seemed to satisfy them. They resaddled their mounts. The cloud bank of the night had become scattered wraiths, fleeing across a luminous sky. Touches of color streaked the east.

"I forgot," Mather said from his saddle. "I was goin' to send a horse back for the old man to ride home. You could take him."

"It'll be three or four days before we move a wheel, maybe longer," Charlie answered. "Can't work cattle in snowbanks. Your old man can stay at the wagon, or, if he wants to ride home, there's plenty of extra horses there. Somebody ought to send word to Benton about this killin'. Listen, kid. Your business is your own. I'm askin' you friendly. What are you aimin' to do?"

"Find Munson an' Dolly."

"Yeah. But how? An' what about when you find 'em?"

"Munson has a place about two miles down this bottom," said young Bill. "I expect they'll be there. Munson'll claim self-defense. What I'll do—well, that depends."

"If you're goin' straight to that place, I'll be along," Charlie said, wondering, as he uttered the words, why he should, what impulse prompted him to commit himself so, what curious motive prompted him to ride with this grave-faced boy on a blood feud. For it was nothing else, now.

"You ain't interested in this," young Bill answered.

"I'm interested in *you*," Charlie told him. "Gosh darn it, I don't blame you, but these family feuds are hell. I'll ride as far as this feller's place with you just for luck. If he ain't there and you still aim to camp on his trail, I'll go back to the round-up."

"All right," young Bill muttered "That's white of you. But don't mix in, Charlie. 'Tain't your funeral."

Light grew as they rode down a winding bottom between high walls of earth, where stunted trees clung precariously. Snow masked short sagebrush. A white world with pines black on the rim of the canyon. Their horses floundered deep. The hard crust tinkled as hoofs broke through.

"Hell of a May mornin', this is." Charlie Shaw thought of weak cattle dying by the hundred in this untimely burst of arctic weather. What Bill Mather thought lay behind the mask of his unsmiling face.

The canyon wound a tortuous course. The sun laid a sparkling beam on the western bank. A log cabin stood on the flat. A small corral looped from the end of a low stable. A pole fence, from wall to wall of the gorge above and below the buildings, inclosed a few acres of pasture.

Mather rode straight for the house. Considering the circumstances and his errand, Charlie reckoned that foolhardy, but he said nothing. Between house and stable Bill drew rein for a moment, looking down. Fresh tracks in the snow. Some one had walked to the stable. The footprints were paralleled by the track of a horse leading away, past the house toward the canyon wall, where a cleft notch lifted to the upper levels. Then

young Bill rode on to the door and swung down.

Charlie crowded at his heels when he shoved open the door. Light streamed through frosted windows. A shaft of sunshine played on the figure of a man lying on the floor.

Unlike Jed Mather, this dead man lay on his back. The rawhide-bound handle of a knife stood up above his breast, like a pin thrust in a cushion.

"Ah," young Bill whispered, "she beat me to it."

They stared at the corpse.

"This Munson?" Charlie asked.

Young Bill nodded.

"I gave her that knife once," said he. "Made it myself out of an old flat file. Look! Didn't I say they must 'a' fought?"

Munson's face was bruised, marked by knuckles. Charlie laid a hand on him. He was cold, rigid.

"Let's get outa here," young Mather said. "Gives me the creeps. But I was right. He got what he deserved."

He walked the fresh tracks to the stable, looked in, came back on the trail of the horse, mounted, and followed the hoof marks into that notch. A barrier of poles lay in the mouth. The bars were down. They breasted that steep slope. Their horses were blown when they reached the plateau above. The trail in the snow turned sharply southward, skirting the canyon's rim. It led straight to the Mather ranch and dipped into the canyon again and doubled back to the stable. Only—at a point two hundred yards above the ranch the trail stopped under a cottonwood tree. There was trampled snow there, and foot marks, as if some one had tarried there.

Smoke lifted from the stovepipe. They dismounted. A face pressed briefly at the window. Then the door opened and a girl faced them.

"Somethin' about her gets men crazy." Charlie remembered that. He looked at this girl and he wondered. No Helen to lure a Paris. A mop of tawny, yellow hair. White skin with freckled spots across the bridge of a straight nose. But her cheek bones were too high, her mouth too wide. Her eyes were twin heralds of temper. Steel-bright blue eyes that looked on young Bill with surprise, anger, resentment. She was like a willow for slenderness. How could that slight arm drive home a knife?

He got light on that a moment later. Bill Mather's dark face went pale. He caught the girl by the wrists.

"What happened?" he demanded.

One quick wrench of her body and she was free. Her right hand popped on Bill's cheek, and red welts sprang out on his dark skin. She stood poised, her hands clenched—like a young lioness.

"Dolly!" Bill's tone was like a cry. "What happened?"

She stared at him. The blaze went out of her eyes. Her bosom heaved. The poised tensity went out of her body.

"Nothing, nothing," she said, in a tone tremulous like a frightened child's. "Munson an' Jed fought, an' your dad got scared an' lit out. Jed beat him. After—*he* come back an' shot Jed through a window. That was yesterday. He took me down to his place. I got away in the evenin'. I saw the light here an' I was afraid to come in till I saw you leave this morning. I didn't know who it was. If you'd only stayed home, Bill!"

Young Bill put his arms around her.

" 'S all right, Dolly," he murmured. "I didn't know. You said—you know, you said——"

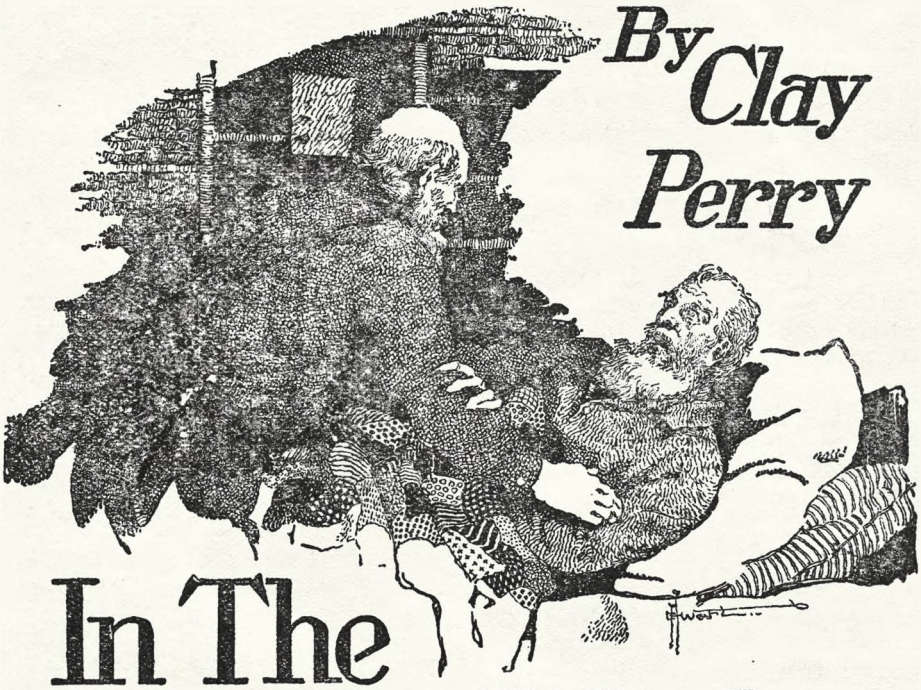
"Bill," she lifted her face. "Don't you know me yet, at all? Take me away from here—take me away."

Bill patted her shoulder. Her face was buried against his breast. He put one hand on her forehead and tilted her head back—and kissed her.

"You killed him?" he whispered.

"I did," she gritted. "I've carried that knife you made for me for six months. I jabbed it into him the first time he tried to lay his hands on me. Will they hang me, Bill?"

"Hang you! Good Lord!" Young Bill threw back his head and laughed—the first time Charlie had ever heard him laugh like that, a laugh of sheer relief and happiness. "They ought to give you a medal. Go get your clothes together, Doll. We're goin' away from here for good, you an' me together."



By Clay Perry

In The Windigo Wind

By the author of "The Wood Thrush," "Duke of Doukhaboor Island," Etc.

The wilds had claimed "Soldier" MacRea, a fugitive for years from a thoughtless youthful act. The wilds, woven through with Indian legends and superstitions, sheltered MacRea—and more than that. They struck fear into him, they almost took his life—and they gave him new life!

THE wailing whine of the first norther of autumn closed about the log house, set on a cleared peninsula that jutted into the narrows at the upper end of Lake Windigo. All about, everywhere else, were timber-clad rocks, ragged, rough country; the water was studded with rock islands. In a thousand square miles there was not another clearing or inhabited cabin. This was the home of "Soldier" MacRea, who had lived in this terrible wilderness for fifty years.

MacRea had been a soldier in the service of the king, during the Fenian rebellions, when a youth of nineteen. One evening, posted on sentry go, he had shot a man, his friend. He had fled the army, a deserter, a fugitive, fleeing from the memory of a curly-haired boy staggering, falling, clutching at the air—to hide in the wilds.

The story of why he remained, long after the first, unreasoning, heartbroken panic had passed, is summed up in the single word—gold.

It was strange that always, when the *windigo* wind began to blow, MacRea thought of that terrible day. Perhaps this was because the voice of the October tempest was like the shriek of a wild, wailing voice. The Indians called this first, fierce, wintry blast out of the north, the *windigo* wind, because they believed it to

be the spirit of Lake Windigo, seeking its hunting ground, after the red gods of spring had driven it away and kept it away for a season, a lost, hungry creature of the wilds.

Soldier MacRea! No one called him that, to his face; but the name, a shred of the tradition of his past which was all men remembered of it, seemed to suit his spare, straight form, with a face and bearing suggestive of a Scottish officer.

MacRea was grim, silent, preoccupied, now as the wind .owled, and he sat apart from the other two occupants of the cabin, his daughter Ellen, and Louis Dufour, the fur hunter, who had brought up a letter from Smollett, the mining engineer, and who alone, of all men who came to the door of the cabin, did not talk of gold.

There came a sound like a knocking at the door. It was a portal of plank, opening south toward the savage hill of rock across the broad bay, where rose the lofty tipple of the abandoned Rotten Reef Mine, its steep, high roof serving, now, only as a reminder of the proud hopes and bitter failure of gold seekers who had come and gone. Soldier MacRea sprang from his chair and went to the door, while Ellen looked up in startled surprise.

"It's only the wind," she murmured. But her father spoke sharply:

"Well, what d'ye want?"

Ellen was astonished, then, to see a figure standing there, in the swirl of snow —a figure which might have sprung from the *windigo* wind, itself, it was so ghostly white. Then the wind whisked the door from MacRea's hand and slammed it shut and the white figure was blotted out. Ellen brushed her hand across her eyes and looked up at Dufour, questioningly.

"Only the *windigo*," he said.

Dufour had not seen anything outside, but then, he had been looking at Ellen.

"She is the bad wind which blow nobody good," Dufour murmured, in the soft accents which Ellen loved because her mother, whom she could just remember, had talked a little like that. "But for the *windigo* I shall not be here tonight, but on my way up the waterway to Wabigoon."

MacRea pulled the door open again, and then all three saw the figure plainly enough, transformed into something more human, but grotesque enough. It was a grizzled, bearded man in clothing which might have been gathered from several chance sources, tattered and patched and seeming entirely inadequate to protect him from the cold. His footgear, revealed on the high stone step where he stood, consisted of one rubber shoe pac, one Indian moccasin, badly torn, and a pair of frayed leggings, which served to hold together the footgear and the ragged denim trousers. His face was covered and almost masked by a thick growth of iron-gray hair, tobacco stained where it might have been, naturally, white. His hooked nose, evidently slashed and battered at some time, jutted at an unusual angle from beneath eyebrows so shaggy and tangled they might have been tufts of dry moss. His eyes were small, red and watery.

"I was jes' wantin' to git outa the wind," he said, in a husky, rusty voice, and began brushing more snow from his garments, the snow that had covered him and made him look so ghostly.

MacRea stared at him as if he saw something more ghostly now than ever, and did not bid him enter. Ellen's lips parted in astonishment, as if she were about to chide her father for his lack of hospitality. His door stood unlatched for all who might enter the Windigo wilderness, at all times, white or Indian. There were not a few who came, for MacRea had been the first man to discover gold here, almost half a century ago. Men came over hard ways to find him.

"Ye have been here a week," MacRea challenged the man, gruffly. "I've seen the smoke from the old shack beyond the tipple. Why didn't ye call before?"

Ellen was too distressed to speak, at all. She gave Dufour a glance and rose. Dufour followed her into the kitchen.

"Father has been in a strange mood for a week," she said. "I did not know why, for the *windigo* has blown only since yesterday. He never told me of the smoke. That man must be one of those rock-rat prospectors. He has squatted at the old Rotten Reef Mine."

She lowered her voice. "Father has not yet staked his new claim," she said, "and it should be registered at Fort Frances soon. When do you go down again?"

"I do not go down, now. I go north, by Wabigoon, to Winnipeg, on business of the new fur company which I am organize——"

Louis halted short, for it was on his tongue to let out his secret, that he was coming back at Christmas and that the most important part of his errand was to procure in Winnipeg a gift for Ellen, a gift of gold, beaten into a ring, with a precious stone set in it.

"Now I know," Ellen said. "Father is worried because of this man being here, just as he has made his big strike. It seems as if the secret must have leaked out on the wings of the wind. Of course, he told Smollett, but Smollett is to be trusted, and, of course, you know——"

"Perhap' I should not know," broke in Dufour.

"You? Why, you never even speak of gold, as the men do who come here to see father!"

"No, I do not talk of gold—and I do not come just to see your father," murmured Dufour, and flushed at his own boldness—and Ellen flushed, too.

Still Soldier MacRea stood at the door in the other room, but did not bid the stranger enter. He continued to stare at the man. The little red eyes were steady, however, and there was a keen, searching look in them.

"My name is 'Bannock' Bill," he said. "That's the name I got up to Red Lake. I guess every one knows Bannock Bill. I come over to see if ye've any oakum or sech for to calk up a boat. My canoe went to pieces and I been buildin' me a boat outa loose lumber I found about the old mine, over thar. It wants calkin'."

"Well, come in," MacRea invited him, rather harshly. "Set and warm yourself."

The man stumbled in and took the seat offered him before the fireplace.

"Buildin' a boat, eh?" queried MacRea sharply. "Those boards do rip off rather easily. Ye won't need much with a boat, now the *windigo* wind has set in. Ye'll be needing snowshoes, more."

"Sure enough. And I'll be askin' for some strips of rawhide to mend my old b'ar paws with. I ain't too well equipped, but I got a poke of dust from Red Lake. That is a great country, now—Red Lake!"

MacRea flared up, losing caution:

"Why, this country, here," he declared, "will show more color in a week than Red Lake has shown since they struck color. And already Red Lake is playing out."

"Jest what I figured," was Bannock Bill's disconcerting response. "So I pulled stakes and cast off and nosed down into the Windigo. Well, ye ought to know color, when ye see it. Ye've struck it rich, I hear. Ye won't need any help to stake out your claim—the new one? I'd like to take a crack at follerin' down the vein, if I could help you any, stakin' out your claim."

MacRea's scalp prickled and he started at this evidence that the rock rat had somehow nosed out his secret.

"I'm purty husky," the man went on, clenching a horny fist and squaring his stooped shoulders. "I'm used to all sorts o' wind and weather, and I jest eat rough rock. Now, a man along your time o' life, he don't want to take too many chances, out in this country, in this sort o' weather."

MacRea snorted like the tempest itself, which was bringing the snow thicker and growing colder and fiercer every moment. Its shrieks were more and more like the fiendish howling of the fabled *windigo* spirit, racing the wilds. Out in the kitchen, Ellen caught Bannock Bill's remark, and nodded at its import. For long she had tried to keep her father from going out alone on the long prospecting trips he took, but her warnings seemed to drive him into a choleric mood and to doing more hazardous things, just to prove he was as good as he ever had been.

"'At my time of life!'" MacRea roared, "Now just about how old might you think I be, Bannock Bill?"

The unkempt old rock rat squinted a watery eye at MacRea's ruddy but seamed face, with its bristling, white mustache, and said calculatingly:

"Why, not much below eighty."

MacRea glared at him as if he would throttle him, were he not a guest on his hearth.

"Eighty!" he cried, and did not know his voice cracked. "I'm not seventy. I reckon your eyes must be failin' ye, a little. Some men it gets, that way, when *they* get old."

Bannock Bill nodded, seeming impervious to irony.

"It does beat all how a man loses track o' time, even of the years, when he's in the wilderness," he said. "Why, I jest bet you I've forgot how old I be, too. But I lay that I'm younger than you be, jest the same. I'd be much obliged," he added persistently, "if I might help ye stake the new claim and get the chanct to foller down the vein. Any day."

MacRea said nothing, but he looked his refusal. The impudent assurance of the man was beyond words. How had he gained knowledge of the new claim? MacRea had hinted at it to Smollett because Smollett was going up to Red Lake and MacRea feared he might switch his interest from the Windigo to Red Lake, and this man had come from Red Lake —but MacRea did not believe the engineer would betray his confidence. Was it Dufour? No. The trapper scarcely took talk of gold seriously. He was interested only in furs, which could be turned into minted gold, and in Ellen; and besides, MacRea told himself, Dufour could not have seen this man.

"I'm a teetotal stranger to this country, o' course," Bannock Bill went on pleasantly. "I come down the narrows in my old canoe, leakin' like a sieve, and I see that thar tipple stickin' up above the hill, and I says to myself: 'Bill, whar they's a tipple, they's been minin', and this here rock does look like it might have color into it. I'm goin' to stop and have a look around.' I didn't like the look o' that big lake, anyhow. So, I landed, and what do I find? A gold mine, but nobody workin' her. Signs tell me the story. They run out the vein and didn't even strip rock around the hill to try to pick it up again. Jest quit. Left her. Anybody payin' taxes on the prope'ty?"

Again MacRea started.

"I am," he said shortly.

"Oh! Well, in that case, o' course, bein' as we're neighbors, I wouldn't try to squat it. I'll jest use the old shack, with your permission, and build me a boat, agin' spring, so's I kin git out. I'll scratch rock for a while. This wind ain't goin' to last long. I hope ye got that new claim located so you kin find it, if it comes on to snow hard."

MacRea reddened angrily, but there was something in those keen little eyes which looked so directly into his own that haunted him. They appealed to him with a poignant power beyond all account of the evident wretchedness of this rock rat. Beyond the claims of hospitality, this feeling went, as if he owed it to this man to let him "foller down the vein," and, perhaps, pick up a good streak of color; this was despite the snooping he had done, despite his brazen bid for the "tailings" from his own strike.

He fought the feeling, and was nearer to a panic than he had been in fifty years, at the very idea of sharing his secret with any one. MacRea was no coward, though he had run into the bush, a deserter. No man can be a coward and face the Windigo wilderness for as long as he had done. But the knowledge had come to him and grown with him, that in his flight he had been worse than a coward; he had run away, leaving an unpaid debt behind him, and the debt would hang over him always, to the end. It was too late to go back and pay it, now. But, something told him, he could pay something on it, now.

"You're welcome to make any use ye can of the Rotten Reef," he found himself saying. "I don't own the property. I've paid taxes on it long enough to have a claim on it, if the owners don't redeem it. One more tax payment and I can register it for myself."

MacRea wondered at himself for this frank statement. Why was he doing this? Smollett, in his letter, had indicated that his concern might try the Rotten Reef as a smelting center, to crush and smelt the ore from some claims they might work about the Windigo region, some of them sold to him by MacRea. And here he was, as much as giving the rock rat a toe hold on the Rotten Reef!

"However," he added cannily, yet just as truthfully, "it wouldn't be any use to try to foller down the vein of my new claim, because, near as I can make out, she runs into three hundred feet of water."

"Then your claim's on a island?" Bannock Bill caught him up.

MacRea cursed himself and snapped out:

"I didn't say so! The mainland is built pretty close to the shore up here, if ye notice."

Bannock Bill snickered, then he sniffed, as if just aware of the odor of cooking food from the kitchen. Ellen had opened the oven door out there, to look in.

"Says I to myself," he remarked oddly: "What if your new claim was the other end of the real mother lode that might lie in the Rotten Reef hill? And what if I stripped rock and found it whar's its rottener than the false vein they worked out, over thar?"

MacRea stiffened, and marveled at the keenness of the man. Some such wild idea had occurred to him, too, as he had squinted along the run of the vein he had bared, running the ridge of the rock island, and pointing across the end of the lake directly toward the hill upon which rose the Rotten Reef tipple.

To cover his confusion and to smother the gnawing, irritating feeling of a debt he owed to this vagrant prospector, he called to Ellen to "fetch in a little snack of something hot."

Ellen appeared with a huge plate on which was a sandwich drowned in steaming gravy. Bannock Bill, giving it one swift, hungry glance, looked up into the girl's face with a stare so wild she almost recoiled. He seemed stricken motionless and dumb and made no effort to eat, when the food was set down on a table at his elbow, with a tumbler of rhubarb wine beside it. His little eyes remained fixed on Ellen. MacRea noted his curious look, and he was stricken, for the first time, with a stab of jealousy. To be sure, he had been on guard at all times, for her.

It was, perhaps, because his preceptions were sharpened by the prejudice built up in his mind against Bannock Bill, and the conflict between that and the strange impulse of generosity, that MacRea was so stirred to a fierce, protective emotion, for Ellen.

"The old rascal," was his mildest thought, as Bannock Bill kept staring.

Bannock Bill thought he was seeing a ghost. It was a strange sort of ghost, a woman; and, added to the fact that he had not seen a woman in ten years, was the disturbing contradiction that she ought to have been a man. A man of about her age. His emotions were marvelously confused. He was ready to fall down on his bony knees and worship this woman, yet he wanted to scud for the door and run away into the storm. He was terrified, yet hypnotized.

MacRea moved and cleared his throat harshly.

"Set up and eat something," he urged.

Bannock Bill blinked, as if he had forgotten MacRea; then his stare went to MacRea's face.

"Your daughter?" he inquired huskily.

"My daughter, my only child, my only family," MacRea answered, accenting the possessive. "My wife died twelve years ago. Ellen, isn't that the white calf, bellerin' in the barn? I wonder if he's tangled himself in the rope?"

Ellen's blue eyes widened in surprise, then she caught her father's desire that she leave the room.

"I'll ask Louis to go with me and see," she said, and vanished.

Bannock Bill rose abruptly, leaving the food and the wine untouched:

"Well, I got to git goin'," he said, in a strained voice. "The wind's worse, and if I want to git back afore——"

He halted in his speech, but continued toward the door and pulled it open swiftly, against the powerful suction of the wind. On the threshold he turned and looked back at MacRea and shook his head a little. His shoulders shook, too, as if he were shivering.

MacRea sat, unable to speak, though he wanted to—unable to get from his chair and go to the door, at least. He wanted to bid him come back and eat, to stay the night; he knew he ought to do it. He was afraid to do it, because of the compulsion of the other impulse.

Soldier MacRea, sixty-nine years of age, with fifty years of grubbing and scratching rock and soil and bargaining with gold-mad fools for a little minted gold they brought to pay for the dust he had found, in crevices and ridges, and never a real, rich strike! And now he had found the "Ellie Girl" vein, which he had named after his daughter. The strike of a lifetime—yes, of a lifetime. His lifetime was almost at its end. And now a rock rat, poking, sneaking, came out of nowhere and tried to pinch in on his find. And he felt, in spite of all his righteous resentment and hostility, that he ought to give him a chance. He could not do it.

It had got him, the gold. Laws of hospitality, instincts of generosity, went for nothing. The burden of an unpaid debt, an atonement undone, the debt he owed for a human life, a friend, the curly-haired youth he had not meant to kill—and yet he could not say to Bannock Bill: "Come and help me stake the claim. Wait till the wind stops; stay here and wait, and help me, and you can foller down the vein."

Bannock Bill closed the door and was swallowed up in the storm. The *windigo* wind howled over the wilderness and twisted trees and flung them flat, cracking their stems. It piled the sullen waters of Windigo Lake high against the rocky shores, and swooped up into the narrows and whistled about MacRea's cabin and down the chimney and scattered ashes onto the hearth, like snow.

It was warm in the cabin, though winter had come; but MacRea, when he got up at last, went close to the fire, leaned on the mantel, and for the first time in his life it seemed that he needed the fire, closer, closer. He felt old and cold.

A harsh laugh burst from his lips.

"I didn't even think to give him the oakum and rawhide," he muttered; "and he didn't eat anything. Damn his soul, why didn't he wait a minute!"

He had the uneasy conviction that Bannock Bill's sudden departure had been because he had shown his hostility so plainly. But why should he care? The man was nothing more than a beggar!

Ellen and Louis Dufour came stamping and laughing into the cabin from their venture outside, their faces rosy, their eyes sparkling—young, warm blooded, happy.

"Louis Dufour is the man for her," MacRea told himself. "He ain't gold rotten. I guess that's what's happened to me. I've had the gold fever so long it's rotted me to the heart. Rotten Reef! Good name for a gold mine!"

He had used the word a thousand times to describe rich ore, and never before had it struck him with this bitter significance.

"When she stop blowin', I got to get goin' to the north," Dufour announced uneasily. "I got jes' about time to make it to Winnipeg and do the business I got and get back for Christmas and——" He halted, his glowing face burning redder as he checked the bursting secret on his lips.

Neither Ellen nor Louis thought to inquire about the departed guest.

All night long the *windigo* howled across the wastes. Soldier MacRea passed a restless night, harassed by the spirit of the wind, haunted by his thoughts. But in the morning the wind had stopped, and at dawn it was so still that all nature seemed holding its breath, waiting for something terrible to happen. The sky was leaden and seemed pressing close to earth. Soldier MacRea knew it for a "weather breeder," but he said nothing, when Louis Dufour announced his intention of starting out in his canoe. Dufour knew how to take care of himself. He had a pair of snowshoes strapped to his back, a sharp ax at his belt. The narrows were clear of ice, as yet, save for where the waves had dashed high and wrapped the rocks and trees, on shore, in glittering armor.

Ellen was too wrapped up in the fact of Louis' departure to sense her father's mood. She had knitted Louis a pair of mittens as a Christmas present, and the struggle against sentiment and practical considerations—and love, occupied her, until she gave them to him for the trip. He tucked them under his shirt—for his hands were warm, almost as warm as his heart, from the tingle that re-

mained in his fingers, where they had touched Ellen's as they both held the bucking, lunging white calf, in the log barn, the previous evening.

As Dufour departed, Soldier MacRea made off in his canoe to the west, avoiding the open water where one who stood in the high tipple, over at Rotten Reef, might see him. Ellen only realized her father had gone when she dragged her eyes away from the vanishing speck up the narrows, which was Louis Dufour's canoe, and saw her father's craft round a big island which hid from view other islands—among them the ridge rock upthrust, which was the place of her father's big strike. She knew where it lay, its sharp nose pointing southeast, driving like a wedge into the wide, unspecked expanse of the lake. That lake was so deep it had no islands in it, and so long and broad that winds could sweep across it for miles; so dangerous that the Indians halted, always, at either end, to offer up prayers and sacrifices to the red gods that held the *windigo* in check, at times.

She saw her father turn the point, then looked up uneasily into the sullen sky, and she gasped as she saw the new-bred storm about to strike.

It was such a storm as had not visited the Windigo in many years. It broke upon the waters like a mighty downward blow from the sky. At first the lake was merely fretted with tiny wavelets, then the surface seemed to shiver, and long serrations appeared. The water became alive, without making progress in any direction. It was as if it shrank beneath the wind and withdrew into its dark, cold depths. Snow began to fall again, then hail, and finally, with a whining shriek, the *windigo* wind renewed its wailing attack upon the woods and waters, and everything was blotted out.

Ellen was appalled. Very well she knew what must happen to her father, alone in that wind and hail, in a frail canoe. At the best, he must be marooned on whatever wretched island he might gain. Otherwise—the *windigo* had him. She judged, however, that he had had time to make the rock ridge where the stripped rock had exposed the rich vein. This worried her the more, for the island was an almost treeless expanse of rock, save in the middle, where bushes had taken root in the "rotten rock," a stratum of crumbling, grayish quartz with dark flecks in it, which weighed like lead in the hand. No soil on the rock; only the ancient droppings of old and slain forests, in the cracks.

Louis Dufour was young and strong, and he would be sheltered by the close shores of the narrows, the little long waters which led up to Wabigoon. He had plenty of food with him to stand a siege of days; she had seen to that. But her father was old, older than he would admit; and she had seen him shiver a little before he went to bed, the night before. She blamed herself for allowing him to go—as if she could have stopped him, had she known he was going!

Help? From where? There was only one source from which it might come. In an unaccountable lull in the storm which came, after hours of driving, blinding, frozen sleet, Ellen opened the front door of the cabin and stared across the wind-lashed bay toward the Rotten Reef, seeking the smoke plume which, alone in all the wilderness, might testify to the presence of a living soul. Not a sign of smoke appeared. Then the storm dropped a thick veil between her and the tipple and drove her indoors.

SOLDIER MACREA had been caught in the storm almost as soon as he landed on the rock island. He was about to chisel the first hole in the rock to insert an iron peg, when the wind swooped upon him. He ran to the place where he had dragged out his canoe—not too high, for fear it would be seen from the southeast—and he found that the wind had got under it and lifted it and rolled it over, and it had gone into the water. He saw it, vanishing, a dark bobbing shape, floating off onto Lake Windigo.

He had his old pack; he was wearing an ancient leather coat, and he found matches in the pockets. But it was impossible to build a fire on that bare rock, in the wind. All he could do he did.

which was to hunt blindly for such saplings as had found foothold in the crevices, and cut them with his knife and weave bits of brush and branches across them, and force ragged cedar foliage into the openings, and then huddle under the half shelter to wait until the worst of the storm might pass.

The rude shelter reminded him of the first camp he had made in the Windigo, when, lacking even a tent, he had made his precipitate flight. And then, for some unaccountable reason, he thought of Bannock Bill and how his eyes had looked, piercingly, into his own, after that stare at Ellen, and how he had allowed the man to go off into the storm, at night, without eating, without even the trifles of oakum and rawhide he had sought.

"Wanted to help me stake this claim," he muttered, to ease his conscience. "Pretended he thought I was getting too old to take care of myself!"

He laughed, but the laugh went into a shudder of cold and he got up and tried to stamp some warmth into his feet. But it was too cold to stay out in the wind. He huddled again in his miserable, wind-leaking shelter, and swung his arms about his body—and returned to thinking of Bannock Bill.

He kept shivering, and grew angry with himself. A man ought not to mind a little wind and snow. Of course, this was the first time he had been out in the wind this winter. After he got used to it, it would not be so bad.

Two hours later Soldier MacRea found himself pacing up and down, back and forth, before the half shelter, turning at the end of a certain distance and marching back again, like a soldier on sentry go.

"One—two—three—four——" He was counting his steps, up to ten, then turning. He halted, in surprise; then he stumbled on, peering into the storm. There was nothing to be seen in the white swirl, but Soldier MacRae was seeing through it, back of it, down the years. His feet followed his memories, and he was again, after fifty years, a soldier of the king, on guard on a lonely patrol beat.

It was as if he had resumed duty where he had left off, deserting the army; it was as if he had tried to get back, at last, to pay off his debt to the king, as a soldier in arms—and to face another debt which, perhaps, he never could pay. Memories that had been dim became sharp and clear. The face of Will Rawlins, his friend, loomed up before him, indistinct at first, but recognizable, as it had been in the twilight that evening, when MacRea had challenged him to halt and Will had made a foolish, awkward effort to run—and then MacRea had leveled his musket.

To rid himself of the image, MacRea set to building a fire. He succeeded, by chiseling a depression in the rotten rock. He built a fire in the vein of gold. He boiled some tea in a pannikin always kept in his pack, ate a beef sandwich—— all the food he had brought with him—and lighted his pipe. Then his fire went out for lack of fuel.

It was not long before he resumed his pacing up and down, with a right-about at the end of each ten steps. His feet kept him going and kept him from freezing stiff. His shelter was pitifully inadequate; he could find no more brush. The gold-riddled rock beneath it was like ice. He dared not lie down.

MORNING came. A man could scarcely be aware of it, the air was so thick with snow, the clouds hung so black and low. The island, however, held hardly any snow, for the wind swept it off the stark surface, and the black waters of the lake ate it as it fell.

Asleep on his feet, his feet asleep, touched with frost, Soldier MacRea marched on. One of his cheeks was numb. His patrol paralleled the narrow strip where he had picked away the broken rock, some time ago, and had bared the richest rift of quartz any man had seen in all the Windigo. He trod on gold, but it did not warm his feet or his heart, and he would have given the entire island for a log of jack pine which would blaze up, smoky and hot. Yes, he would have given the island, and all the gold he knew lay in it, for a chance to pay his debt to Will Rawlins, who haunted him —and strangely, in the growing delirium,

MacRea found the face of Will Rawlins constantly changing to the face of Bannock Bill, the rock rat. He told himself now that he would give anything to be able to call Bannock Bill back out of the storm and tell him he could follow down the vein, in any direction he chose, and that he could have, for his own, the Rotten Reef Mine and its "loose lumber," and all the oakum and rawhide he wanted.

"Why, if I'd only treated Bannock Bill decent, Will Rawlins might have been satisfied," he muttered. "Gold rotted! I was a man when I come into the Windigo, a man with a heart, even if it was shaking and broken. The gold got into me and rotted me to the heart."

So he mused, with striking lucidity at times, at other times crazily. He talked to the *windigo*, and the *windigo* shrieked back at him, and he bowed his head before it.

He stumbled and fell. When he got up there was a pain in one knee. He had struck it on sharp rock. The cloth of his trousers was torn—like Bannock Bill's poor, thin clothing.

"One—two—three——" Very soon he stumbled against his shelter, having wandered from the straight line, and he grew afraid lest he walk off the island into the water. He must stay awake. Red eyes looked into his keenly. The eyes of the *windigo?* No, he was not superstitious; they were the eyes of Bannock Bill—Will Rawlins——

He came to himself, lying under the half shelter, whither his fatigued, numb legs had carried him and then had collapsed beneath him. When he tried to, he could not get up.

"Ellie girl," he mumbled, and he was not addressing the unstaked gold claim. He had forgotten it, he had forgotten gold. He was calling to Ellen to come. He had given up, at last. He was too old to fight it out alone.

ELLEN sat by the fire, shivering, holding her trembling hands tightly. A knock at the door brought her to her feet with a cry. She had not slept all night long. She had stayed up and awake, to keep the fire high and to move up and down, in a window to the southeast, a lamp, as a beacon for her father, but more as a signal for help, a signal to Bannock Bill.

He had come! Bannock Bill stood on the doorstep when she opened the door. He was bent over, breathing heavily. His tattered clothing was well mended—with ice. His beard was laden with icicles and his very eyebrows were penthouses of frost. He rattled in, a northern Don Quixote, in icy mail, and rubbed his palms together before the fire, and as they warmed, they bled.

"I made her in my boat," he husked out, with weary pride. "It was a tough pull, but I made her. I been tryin' since daylight. I figgered we'd need the boat or I'd 'a' come around the bay. That's a bad trail, though. I know."

Ellen could not speak; her heart was choking her. He had come in the boat! Seven hours of battling the wind and cold and waves in a handmade rowboat, built of such boards as he might have ripped off the Rotten Reef tipple. He had managed to make it, but at what cost she could read in his condition.

"You—you saw the light?" she whispered.

"Yeah. I reckoned your dad must 'a' went out to stake his claim, yestiddy, and got ketched in the storm. It's the real *windigo* wind, all right, this time. But, as I told your dad, I'm purty husky and used to all sorts of weather."

Ellen rushed to the kitchen and put on the teakettle, and then got some blankets and some clothing from her father's bedroom. She brought Bannock Bill a cup of scalding tea and motioned to the clothing.

"I'll go and get ready," she said, "while you change into dry clothes."

Bannock Bill did not seem surprised at her assumption that he would go on with her to the rescue. He swallowed tea so hot it smoked on his breath in the well-warmed room.

"Aye," he said, "we've got to go get him, right away."

After he had discarded his melting armor and was clad in warm, dry clothes and had eaten something hot and drunk a tumbler of warming rhubarb wine, and

Ellen, in the kitchen, had put on woolens over her dress, and had come in, he looked up at her and said softly:

"If it hadn't been for seein' you, before, I wouldn't 'a' come. You look so like father—did."

Ellen clipped her trembling lip in her teeth.

"Like her father *did?*" The man spoke as if—as if he thought her father was no more!

Then she burst out with: "Hurry! We must hurry! I'll help you row. There's an old pair of oars in the barn and——"

"I kin row some more," Bannock Bill interrupted. "No oarlocks for extry oars, anyhow."

He could row. Ellen thought she never had seen a man with such cunning and powerful arms, as he swung the rude oars he had fashioned for himself. They were merely spiked to the gunwales, loosely, so they would swing and yet stay secure; and the gunwales were not braced, but were merely bent boards. The boat had a plank bottom, flat and heavy and without calking. But the boat was water-tight now, for when Bannock Bill had landed he had dragged it out of water and turned it upside down, so that ice had frozen all over it as the spray dashed onto it.

"That's how I calked her afore I started," he told Ellen proudly, and with no reproof in his tone. But Ellen, too, thought of the oakum.

She used an extra oar as a rudder, and that helped mightily to keep the clumsy craft headed straight and out of the trough of the waves. They hugged the western shore of the narrows and then shot across the point of the big island, just managing to keep off the jagged reef over which the waves thundered, and spray was flung up to the tops of the already bending, ice-laden spruces. Then they ran more with the wind, which was in the northeast. The snow was thick as wool. Their feet became buried in it, in the bottom of the boat. Ellen steered by instinct, rather than by sight. The boat bounced like a great cork as the waves got under its broad bottom, but Bannock Bill, with arms like whipcord, held it out of the trough with Ellen's help, and they kept on westward.

They were driven past the rock island, just seeing it at their right, and were being swept out into the black, surging expanse of the lake, and had to turn back into the teeth of the wind. Ellen's heart was in her throat, but she did not know that she screamed as she worked the oar like a sweep over the high stern, until Bannock Bill, later, said that if screaming like that would scare the *windigo* and put "gimp into a body," he would "holler like a loon" when they came to start back. His humor flooded her with courage.

It took them half an hour to land on the south point of the wedge-shaped island, and almost as long to get the boat out of water onto the icy rock, so that it would not be battered to bits. They had to crouch down and rest before they could climb the steep slope to the rounding rock of the island. Bannock Bill pointed into the southeast.

"This here," he said, "is whar the vein would run into the water. Over thar, on the mainland, the ridge crops out again. I was jest finishin' strippin' rock by lantern light, when I seen your lamp jigglin' up and down in the winder. If I hadn't been a crazy ol' rock rat I'd never been on this side of the hill, at all, or seen the light."

He was silent for a moment, then he chuckled as he rose.

"Gold!" he croaked. "I struck gold, over thar—rotten quartz that looks like it'd pay—I don't know how much to the ton. And I don't keer!" he almost shrieked. "Gold! I'd ruther have a friend than have all the gold in the world!"

He kicked at some ice and stamped his feet and reached for Ellen's hand, and they dived into the smother, staggering up the slippery slope.

They found Soldier MacRea, bivouacked in his shelter, and it looked as if his rude camp, the same sort of shelter he had built himself when he fled, a heartbroken youth, into the wild country of the *windigo*, was his last. He was unconscious, but there was life in him. How much life, they could not tell.

But for Louis Dufour they might not have made it back to the mainland, and the *windigo* would have claimed three victims. The fur hunter came scudding back down the narrows in his splendid canoe, riding the waves easily, which had almost swamped the heavy rowboat. He came upon them where they were battling desperately, almost beaten, in mid-channel. He sacrificed his canoe to the *windigo*. He got into the boat, with his paddle, and, kneeling in the bow, he kept the lumbering, cranky craft from swinging broadside into the high waves, lashed by a wind that rose to a veritable fury, as if the *windigo* was angry at being cheated.

Soldier MacRea was old, but he was tough and wiry, too. Frosted feet and hands and a bruised knee meant little to a man who has braved fifty winters in the Windigo, but he was slow in returning to consciousness. He was old and he had admitted it and had given up.

Gold had not warmed him nor steeled his heart nor brought him the stimulus to fight on and on.

Bannock Bill refused to move away from the cot by the fireplace, where they laid MacRea. He hung over him constantly. Thus it was that when MacRea's gray eyes came open, at last, the first thing he saw was the bearded face of the rock rat, bending over him. The little red eyes looked into his with an appeal.

"Ye can foller down the vein," he said.

Bannock Bill made a queer sound.

"Angus MacRea," he said, "I've already follered down the vein, and it's rotten with gold. Rotten!"

MacRea's eyes opened wider at the name that had been used and which no one had ever used, to him, since he was a youth. He struggled to sit up.

"Will Rawlins! It's you! Alive?"

Bannock Bill cackled.

"Alive an' kickin', and I guess ye got to admit *I* ain't so old."

"Will Rawlins—I thought—I had killed ye!"

Bannock Bill fumbled at his scarred, misshapen nose, with gnarled fingers that trembled a little.

"Ye only busted my bugle," he said, laughing, to conceal a deeper emotion. "Bullet glanced off and killed another mule. And I been lookin' for ye for fifty year, Angus MacRea—with a leetle scratchin' of rock, on the side."

"Ah, yes, ye've been lookin' for me," groaned MacRea, shifting his head. "I owe ye somethin'. What d'ye want of me, Will Rawlins? I know, I got a debt to pay. Ye can foller down the vein. Yes, ye can stake out the new claim if ye want to, fifty-fifty. I owe it to ye, Will Rawlins. I owe it to Bannock Bill, too. Fifty-fifty, between ye."

Ellen thought his mind was wandering and she shook her head; but her father caught the gesture.

"I mean it, Ellen," he said. "The whole claim for him. Ye wouldn't deny him?"

"Oh, father. I'd give him—anything."

"Then it's all right."

"Why, I don't want it!" burst out Bannock Bill, almost rudely. "What d'ye suppose I wanted of ye, Angus MacRea? Why d'ye suppose I been lookin' for ye? We was friends. Ye were a better soldier than I was, that's all. Ye did your duty as ordered. Don't ye suppose I know ye didn't mean to kill me? The worst ye did was to run away, so I lost a friend. Gold ain't no friend to a man. It's a curse. When I come to your door, lookin' like a rock rat, tryin' to pinch in on your claim, ye could see what gold'll do to a man. If ye'd knowed me ye'd have said: 'Shore, ye can foller down the vein; ye're a friend o' mine.' But ye didn't know me and I didn't know you. Smollett didn't tell me your name, when he told me they was a man down here had just made the first rich strike in the Windigo. I only guessed it was you, when I come here and asked ye——"

"Ye didn't know me?" queried MacRea, astonished.

"Not till I sot eyes on Ellen," Bannock Bill declared.

"Then ye knew me? And Smollett, he told ye about the strike, eh?" MacRea's tone was a little resentful, but more sad.

"Why, yes, he told *me*," Bannock Bill responded. "Smollett knew me, an' he thought I wasn't no rotten claim jumper, and he knew that I was the man made

the last big strike up to Red Lake and didn't need no more gold; but when I struck color, over on the hill, thar, I guess I went crazy again for gold. Funny thing, though—if I hadn't been gold crazy I'd 'a' missed Ellen's signal light. Funny thing. Smollett, he knowed I was really lookin' for a friend——"

MacRea was trying, unsuccessfully, to get hold of Bannock Bill's hand with one of his own, but he had to use the other, not so badly frozen.

"I didn't know ye was a friend," he said, "but I knew I owed ye—a debt—Bannock Bill. I like to 'a' took your life, once, and then I drive ye out in the storm, because—because—I was gold rotted. And then ye come and save my life! Lord! that's a friend!"

Ellen retired to the kitchen. Louis Dufour was waiting for her. He wanted to explain, privately, how disappointed he was at being turned back from Winnipeg, by the *windigo* wind. However, he seemed willing to be comforted.

"I tell you, mostly, why I want to go to Winnipeg," he said. "'Cause I want to get for you wan little, narrow, stylish gol' ring, with nice stone into it. I want to put heem on your fingair an' hask you—an' hask you, bleese, if you lak to be *ma femme*."

"Oh, I don't want a gold ring!" cried Ellen, in a queer voice. "I have one."

"You have wan?" Dufour choked and went white. "Who geev heem to you?"

Ellen drew from her bosom a shining gold band on a soft, deerskin thong.

"That, she is a wedding ring!" whispered Dufour, his lips trembling. "Is it—Smollett?"

Ellen shook her head, and somehow her fingers got tangled with Louis', the ring in them.

"My mother," she said softly, "she wanted me to save it to tell the man that I truly loved, she said—to put it on my finger."

She dropped the ring in his hand. It was warm. It was still attached to the thong about her neck, and, as Louis hooped one of her fingers with the band, that hand became useless, and, since he held the other tightly to his breast, she was entirely defenseless.

None of the four persons in the cabin cared any more about the *windigo* wind, because of what it had brought them.

THE COLONEL AND THE COLLECTOR

COLONEL JAMES ARMSTRONG, who is eighty-four years old, has been harbor master of Charleston, South Carolina, ever since 1873 and marine news reporter for *The News and Courier* of that city for the past sixty years.

He was telling one day about conditions in South Carolina soon after the Civil War, particularly about the burdensome taxes that were levied. His patience gave out, he said, when a tax collector who had relieved him of all the money he was required to pay, returned with a demand that he hand it over a second time.

"He came stamping into my office," the colonel related, "all dressed up in a high hat, brief case, heavy riding whip and a pair of those old-fashioned, long-roweled spurs, and he insisted I hadn't paid the money and, if I had, I must do it again."

"Well," inquired a listener, "what did you do?"

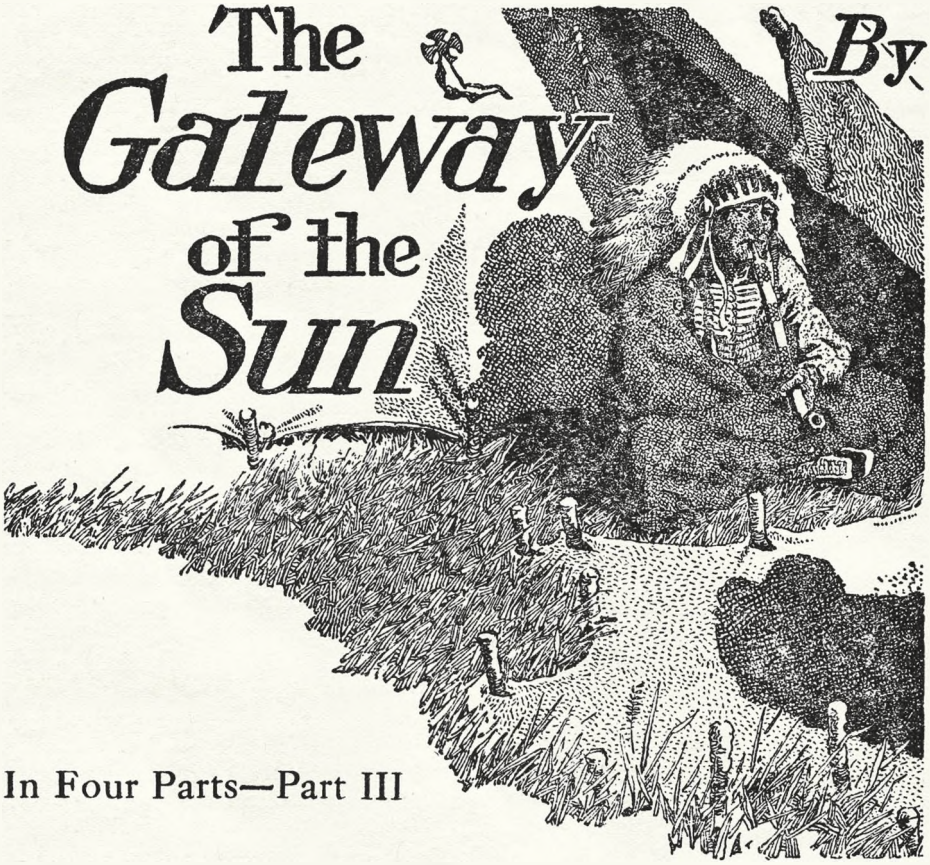
"Why," Colonel Armstrong replied, "I remonstrated with him, naturally."

"To what effect?" insisted the listener who knew his man.

"I don't know to what effect," the colonel answered with a yawn, "but the poker was bent."

The Gateway of the Sun

By



In Four Parts—Part III

Espejo, the terrible chief of the Comanches, finally takes her far away to his great encampment; while

THE STORY

Boone Helms and Arapahoe Brown, after a trapping expedition in the old Southwestern Indian country, took refuge from the Indians in the fortified ranch estate of Sieur Charles Perrault de Hautcœur, a French nobleman who had been granted an immense tract of land in New Mexico, and who was disliked by the Americans as an airy individual who ran his ranch like a feudal manor. But Perro welcomed the trappers now, for he was threatened with attack by a host of Comanches under Chief Espejo. Espejo agreed not to attack if Hautcœur would give him his beautiful young daughter, Luz, in marriage, the next year.

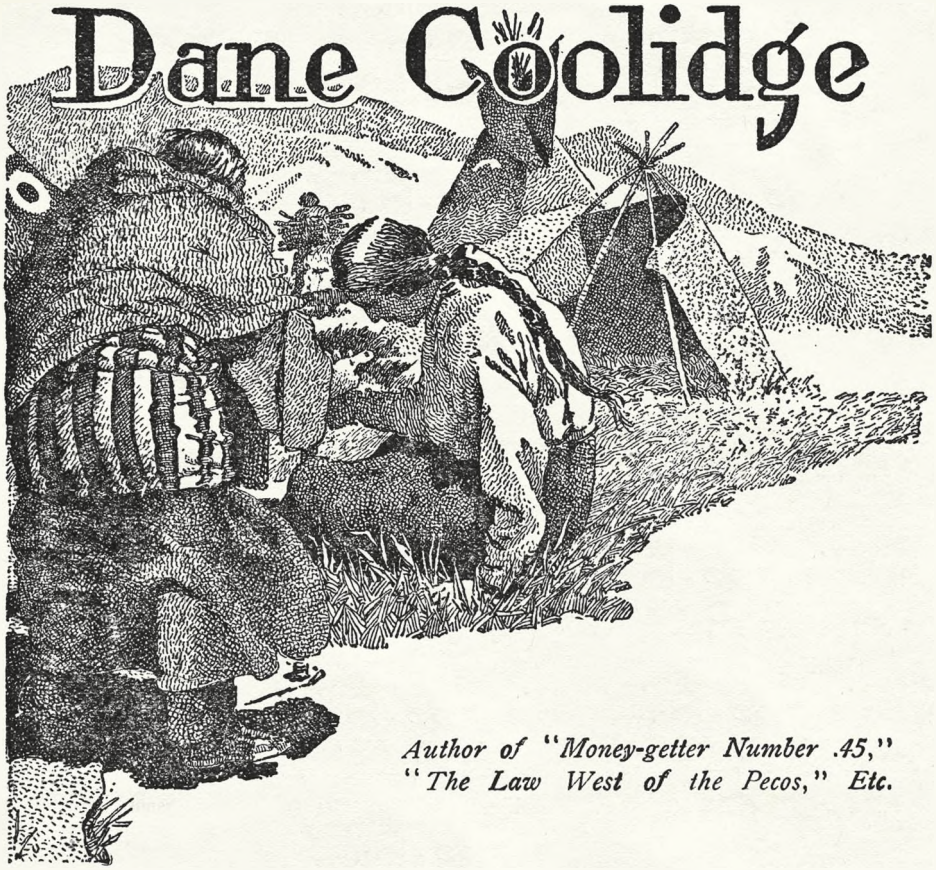
After the Indians departed, Hautcœur persuaded Boone and Arapahoe to build and man a fort outside of The Gateway of the Sun, the mountain pass that led to the palatial ranch.

Then a Mormon wagon train camped near by and Arapahoe took a powerful fancy to Honey Starbuck, who was promised in marriage to a Mormon bishop she had never seen. He had to let her depart with the train, but saw his opportunity when a Mormon messenger came back and asked help in recovering horses and cattle stolen by the Indians. Boone and Arapahoe led the Utes in hot pursuit of the raiding Comanches, and defeated them in a thrilling fight.

Arapahoe then took the willing Honey away from the Mormons and married her. Boone contrived a short conversation with Luz and felt he had some reason for hope.

In due time Espejo came back for his bride. Hautcœur had his man, Warlemount, fire on the Indians, making a particular effort to kill the chief. This they failed to do. Espejo escaped, only to return later with a great host. He attacked the fort and was repulsed. Then he turned to Haut Cœur, took it, and massacred every one except Luz and her younger sister.

Under cover of darkness, Boone slipped past the lines and rode to Fort Hancock. Colonel Latimer agreed to try to recover the two girls from the Indians, but was so slow in getting his men ready and started that Boone almost despaired of catching Espejo.



succeeds in capturing the lovely Luz Hautcœur, an Boone Helms rides dispiritedly in a vain search for her.

CHAPTER XVII.

ESPEJO LAUGHS.

AFTER hiding like a mouse in the corner of a dark closet while the sounds of battle drew nearer, Luz Hautcœur had heard the door of her mother's room smashed in —and then one terror-stricken scream. There were blows, a sickening fall, and the guttural voices of Indians as they ransacked the chamber for loot. Then a rude hand had snatched at the buffalo robe that covered her, and she had looked up into the face of Espejo.

His fierce, exultant eyes had a wild, killing look in their depths; but when he beheld Luz, he smiled.

"Ola!" he cried in Spanish. "So here you are, my sweetheart!" And he dragged her forth, triumphantly.

On the floor before her eyes lay the body of her mother—their serving maid had been killed by the door; but as Luz, sensing death, covered her face and turned away, Espejo burst into a laugh.

"Pero no," he said. "Would I kill my own wife?" And he turned her quickly over to a warrior.

He was an old and wrinkled man, whose placating smile revealed teeth worn down nearly to the gums; but there was no blood lust in his eyes, for all the scalps tied to his leggings, and he patted her like a child.

"Have no fear," he comforted; and while the battle raged outside, he held her by the hand, leading her around as

he searched the room for loot. But those who had first burst in, striking down the helpless women and snatching up plunder as they passed, had stripped the inner chamber of its best. Only the bed lay undisturbed, with the fleur-de-lis above it; and old Stumbling Bear spied the swords on the wall. They were both long and straight, ancient Italian spadroons made to thrust and cut alike; and, releasing her hand, he leaped up and snatched one down, then caught her back laughingly as she fled.

"No! No teme!" he soothed, and turned to gaze admiringly at the sword. But as his ferretlike eyes took in the bulk of the huge bed, he detected a suspicious bulge in its depths.

"What is this?" he exclaimed in Mexican, and, stripping off the blankets, he uncovered a shrinking child.

"That's my sister!" cried Luz, as Stumbling Bear drew back; and once more his genial grin returned.

"Come, sister," he said, and, catching Alicia by the arm, he set her down on the floor. And so Espejo found them when, the last of his killing done, he returned to lead Luz away.

They passed out through the patio, now a shambles of wounded forms where the bravest of the defenders had fallen; and while the Indians shouted exultantly, Espejo picked Luz up and tied her by the feet on a horse. Alicia was mounted also, too alarmed to make an outcry; and while the flames behind them crackled, devouring the heart of their home, the sisters rode away in his train. Hundreds of warriors had been slain, but Espejo's pride had been vindicated—he had come back and taken his bride. He was a conqueror!

Then had followed the triumphal procession before the walls of Boone's Fort, while about them in endless circlings the naked Comanches dipped and doubled, brandishing their weapons and yelling forth their hate. They had beaten down the walls of Hautcœur's border castle, and to-morrow they would wipe out the fort. None would be left to tell the story, except these two daughters of Hautcœur, who had thought to make a fool of their chief. But Espejo had conquered, his medicine was good, and the Frenchmen lay dead in the ruins.

All that night, as Luz lay guarded in a tepee made of buffalo skins, she heard the sound of singing, the beating of drums and the war cries of the victorious Indians. They were doing a war dance about the scalps of the slain, lashing themselves into a fury, oblivious of rest or sleep. They would attack at dawn. Then, as she dropped off to sleep, she was roused by the sound of a bugle, and all except old Stumbling Bear were gone.

There was a thunder of running hoofs, the distant boom of buffalo guns; then in a rattling fusillade she heard a hundred shots at once, and knew that the battle was on. Stumbling Bear stood listening intently, humming a song to invoke his medicine and bring victory to the warriors of his tribe; but as the firing died down and no war whoops rent the air, he stopped singing and ran up on the hill. Luz felt of the bands of rawhide which bound her wrists like iron, and tugged at them with all her strength; but when Stumbling Bear returned, she was still tied to her stake. He struck her, once, with his bow.

"Be careful!" he warned her. And she saw that his eyes were grim. Then warriors came flying back, bringing the dead and the wounded, and went galloping off to join in the fight; and again for over an hour the shooting and yelling went on, until suddenly Espejo returned.

He was stern and angry now, and grimed with dust; and behind him, bringing the wounded and dragging in the dead, followed hundreds of wicked-looking warriors. They had been defeated again, and while they went to tie up their ponies, the medicine drum began its *tump! tump!* All day until almost evening the solemn chanting was kept up; then Espejo mounted his horse and, with the two Comanche medicine men, rode up to the brow of the hill. Luz saw him between them as he sat outlined against the sky, but she did not see him fall from his horse.

There was a yell, an anguished outcry, a hundred warriors galloping at once; and he was brought back, wounded in the neck. Then in a turmoil of mad wailing

the camp was thrown into confusion; and Luz hid her face and wept. In that horde of savage monsters she was so pitifully small and weak that no one even gave her a thought; but she was afraid to move, lest some warrior, mad with rage, should kill her out of petty spite.

Once more the resounding medicine drum roused the echoes of the night, and in a wild and savage chant the Comanches invoked the gods who had struck their brave leader down. They were the gods, of course, of evil—some demons of earth or air who had been slighted and must now be propitiated; and over the body of Espejo the shamans sang till dawn, exorcising the spirits that possessed him. And in the morning Espejo rose up, as well as before, and called for another attack.

But this time no white man's bugle gave the order to charge. They circled the hill in silence, except for the deep "Ow! Ow!" which rose to a shrill, wolf-like yell. Closer and closer they swept, and then a volley of shots showed that the trappers were not to be surprised. Stumbling Bear glanced back hatefully at the child of the Frenchman who had located this fort in their midst, but the rattle of rifle fire had risen to a roar, and he ran up the hill to look down. Luz saw him leaning forward to watch the distant battle, and she murmured a prayer for Boone.

If he died there was no hope that she would ever be rescued, and even yet she clung to that thought. When Haut Cœur had been first attacked, Boone and Arapahoe had ridden down and dashed in to help defend the fort. Theirs was a bravery which took no count of numbers or danger as long as a woman needed help. But if they, too, perished, she had no one to save her, for her father and Pete Warlemount were dead.

On the brow of the hill, Stumbling Bear stood shading his eyes, as he peered down at the whirlwind of fighting, then suddenly he threw up his hands, and began running in circles. The wounded in the camp set up a wail. Some misfortune had occurred, some catastrophe as disconcerting as when Espejo had been shot from his horse; and now suddenly a rush of hoofs announced the return of the first fugitives, riding double with the wounded and the dead. They came back wild eyed and snarling, looking behind them, as if some devil had launched himself on their trail; and in their wake, stunned and bleeding, but still sitting his horse, followed Espejo, their ill-omened chief. For in a charge his mount had fallen, throwing him violently to the ground, and his breath, his "living part," had been knocked out of him.

Espejo sat his horse groggily, making motions to wipe his face and stanch the reopened wound at his throat; but not a warrior rode to help him although he was their chief, for he was considered to be possessed by a devil. Some demon, wished on him by a shaman or secret enemy, had seized him and thrown his horse to the ground; and in the fall his essential spirit, the inner being which gave him life, had been struck from his body with his breath. He was a man doomed to death, unless the medicine men could restore him, and they gathered at a distance in silence.

But, stricken as he was, Espejo's spirit was indomitable, and he rode up and dismounted at Luz's tepee.

"Get up!" he ordered, stumbling in and cutting her bonds with a reckless slash of his knife. "Get up and take care of me! These ignorant Indians——" And he fell down, muttering to himself.

Luz rose up, glancing fearfully from the silent group of onlookers to the huge wounded man at her feet. Then she straightened him on the bed, and seized a gourd of water which she held to his lips while he drank.

"Ah—good, good!" he said. "Now tie up my neck."

She bound up the wound as he directed, and Espejo from his pillow fixed his eyes on the savage crowd.

"Quita se!" he shouted in Spanish. "Go away from me, you dogs!" And as they fled before his wrath, he smiled. "I am their chief, yet," he muttered grimly. "Now bring me something to eat, and I will show them which is best—me, or some devil."

He lay back on his robe, following Luz, as she hurried about, with those curious eyes—half Indian, half white. She felt them as she brought him some ribs of half-cooked beef and lit a fire to boil him strong coffee; but even when he spoke, she did not meet his glance, for suddenly she was terribly afraid. He was her master now—he had bought her from her father and taken her captive at the price of much blood—but never while she lived could she see his cruel face without thinking of murder and death.

With his own hands he had struck down her mother and their maid; and, led by their chief, his savage warriors had killed her father and doughty Pete Warlemount and his band. Haut Cœur had been strewn with their bodies before the purifying fire had reduced them to ashes and dust; and now, wounded and bleeding, he lay winning back his strength for other and more cruel deeds.

"Come here!" he ordered at last, after he had eaten and gulped his coffee; and when she came near, he caught her by the hand.

"You are my woman now," he said. "I will keep you for my wife. But if you try to run away, I will kill you."

"I will not be your wife!" she cried, in a frenzy. "You can kill me if you wish." And she sank down sobbing in the tent.

"No," he decided. "I will not kill you—not now. You are a white woman—you are smart—but these superstitious Indians are afraid even to give me a drink."

He motioned toward the gourd; and, trembling in every limb, she held it up to his lips. Then for a long time he lay, suffering.

Night came, and, after eating and drinking, he sank back in a brutish lethargy; while outside, the fearful Indians paced silently past, looking in to see if he still lived.

He was their chief, even yet, and with no one to command them they lingered like lost dogs near his door; but his medicine was gone, and one by one, during the night, the Kiowas and Indian allies slipped away. Never before had the Comanches had a war chief like Espejo; but some enemy even more powerful had cast a spell upon him, and now he was under a curse. Bullets had come through the air, shot by some medicine man's magic, and knocked him off his horse. And again, when he had mounted to lead the charge at dawn, the same devil had struck him to the ground. It was a sign no one could doubt, and the superstitious savages had slunk away into the night.

In the morning only the Comanches remained in the big camp, where before a thousand Apaches and Cheyennes and Kiowas had awaited the summons to war. When he led them to victory they had followed Espejo everywhere, but now they had returned to their homes. But Espejo was not dead—the strength of a grizzly bear seemed to repose in his mighty limbs; and in the morning, when the young men brought up the hobbled ponies, he rose up and caught out his own. Then as they watched him, wondering, he ate a mighty breakfast; after which, at his orders, Luz set out his magnificent headdress where it would catch the full rays of the sun.

She was his wife now, his woman, doomed to follow where he led to cook and wash and care for his tepee; and after watching her with a smile, Espejo saddled his pinto war horse and rode back to where she stood trembling.

"Come here!" he commanded, and without waiting for her to obey, he set her across the saddle before him. Then, whooping and laughing, he loped up the slope and halted on the summit of the butte.

He shouted insultingly, at the men at the fort, and held Luz in the air like a child.

"You go to hell!" he taunted. "This girl—she my wife!" And with loud shouts of laughter and a string of Mexican oaths, he rode out of sight down the hill.

"Now," he said to Luz, "you get up on that horse!" But at the thought of riding away to become an Indian's slave, the proud spirit of the Hautcœurs rebelled.

"No!" she cried, stamping her foot

defiantly; and while the other Comanches laughed, Espejo raised the haft of his lance. With one blow he struck her down, then, leaping off his horse, he beat her with savage violence.

"Now!" he said. "You are my woman —understand?" And throwing her face down across the back of the pony, he tied her, hand and foot, and started off. Behind followed his warriors, their spare horses loaded with plunder, the wounded as cruelly bound as Luz. With a last look at the mountains, she turned away and wept, for now she could hope only for death.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WITH THE WAGONS.

ON the same morning that Luz, tied face down across a pony, went out across the plains at a gallop, Boone Helms left Fort Hancock in advance of three troops of cavalry—but they did not travel so fast. Dragging along in the rear came the baggage train of wagons, and, though the teamsters whipped their mules to a trot, the column had to match their pace. Scouts were thrown out on both sides to avoid the dangers of a surprise, a strong advance guard rode ahead; and so, while Boone spurred anxiously on before, the little army crawled behind.

The old saying of Napoleon that an army travels on its belly was behind this snaillike pace, for soldiers will not fight unless they can eat—and mules will not pull their loads. There was flour and bacon and coffee in the wagons, grain to feed to the animals, ammunition enough for a battle and ambulances for the wounded and dead. Every emergency was provided for except the one most probable—that Espejo and his warriors would have fled. But Espejo had proved more than once during the summer that naked Indians could overcome soldiers; and the memory of two detachments, wiped out on the Santa Fe Trail, made Colonel Latimer doubly cautious.

With twenty mountain men at his back, Boone would have ridden in one day from Fort Hancock to the ruins of Haut Cœur. The column of troopers jogged thirty miles to Wagon Mound, where they came upon a melancholy spectacle. Here, only a week before, the caravan of Mexican freighters had been attacked by Espejo and his band, and now the old camping ground was littered with half-burned wagons and the carcasses of horses and mules. Only one man had escaped—the messenger who had galloped to Haut Cœur—and in answer to his summons, Captain Gildersleeve and his gray-horse troop had trotted off down the road. But when they arrived the wagon train had been taken, and, after burying the dead, the captain had ridden south to report to Colonel Latimer.

The next morning at dawn Boone's Fort had been attacked, and before the sun had set a pillar of fire had ascended from proud Haut Cœur. The soldiers who had been stationed there had been deliberately drawn away by the attack on the caravan below; and now, summoned once more, they returned to the fair valley which had been laid waste in a single day. But as the bugle blew and they prepared to make camp, Boone knew they would fail again.

All day he had ridden a mile ahead with the scouts, and his horse was still fresh and strong. Given the pick of the troops, he could have made a night ride and reached the besieged fort before dawn. But orders were orders—he was in the army now—and all he could do was wait. As night came on every precaution was taken to prevent a surprise attack, for the wily Comanches more than once had approached Fort Hancock and run off or stampeded the stock.

Cossack posts of four men each were thrown out after dark. A double line of sentinels was posted. Behind them in military order were stationed the reliefs and the reserves, to be rushed up in case of attack. For, though he was new to the West, the doughty colonel had been seasoned by long years of war. He had served under Grant in the campaign against Richmond and thoroughly understood his profession; but whenever the bugles blew, warning the Indians for miles around, Boone turned in the saddle and frowned.

Espejo, himself, had adopted the white

man's bugle calls, but he did not rouse his men with the reveille nor send them to bed with taps. For him there were but two calls—the charge and the retreat; and to sound the long tattoo for his men to retire was a folly never dreamed of. There were other follies as great, in the eyes of a plainsman, but every horse and man must be present or accounted for or the colonel would be censured. Every article of equipment, every pound of food or grain, every horse and mule and wagon, was in his charge; and far in the East a hard-headed war department kept watch over the voluminous reports.

But at dawn, when the reveille and assembly summoned the men for duty, Boone took new heart, for another day of riding would bring them in sight of the fort. Then, if Espejo and his warriors still besieged the tiny garrison, the eager troopers would charge in and rout them. Or if Espejo chose to stand and give battle, they would at least relieve the attack on the fort.

With the six-mule teams following along at a trot and the pack train jogging behind, the long column of soldiers stretched out across the plain, following the guidons where the captains rode. In the lead went Colonel Latimer, with his adjutant and orderly, a roly-poly figure on his tall, prancing race horse, but a soldier of the old, bearded school. War to him had lost its tragedy after four years of hard campaigning, and while he led his little command at a good, stiff pace, he was careful not to overheat the horses. He had been sent from the East to guard the emigrants on the trail and the few settlers who occupied the land; but it was only the scouts, riding ahead from knoll to knoll, who displayed any anxiety for the fort.

At their head spurred Boone Helms, drawn on by a stark fear which choked him as it gripped at his heart. For two days and nights, while Arapahoe and his trappers stood alone against the horde of Comanches, he had been absent, waiting on the soldiers; and what had been the outcome of the charges and treacherous attacks was more than he cared to guess. Perhaps already the fort lay in ruins, its brave defenders dead and Honey Brown carried off as Luz and her sister had been. And what of Luz, whom he had seen in the train of Espejo, her feet bound together beneath a horse?

The soldiers did not know what tragedy and grief awaited her or they would have put their mounts to a gallop, and over and over there came to his mind the words she had spoken to Honey. Rather than be the wife of Espejo she would take her own life—and now she was in his power! But even yet there was hope, for Espejo had been shot; and though two days had passed he might still in his stubborn rage be camped outside the walls of Boone's Fort. Anything and everything was possible still; but the column seemed to drag like a snail.

To save their horses the troopers proceeded at a walk, then a trot and a heart-joying gallop; but when the baggage train fell behind they pulled their mounts to a walk, even dismounting and plodding through the dust. And always the noisy bugles announced their approach to the Indians, until at last the distant fort came in sight. Boone topped the last roll and viewed the landscape, with a beating heart. The fort was safe but the Comanches were gone.

"I'm going ahead," he announced, and set off at a gallop, while the sergeant shouted after him to halt. But if Luz had been led away, every moment was precious, for it was the custom of the Comanches on beginning a retreat to split up, thus destroying their trail. Already the sun was low, but with a picked troop of soldiers it was still possible to take up the chase.

"Hello!" he called, as he rode up to the fort, where Arapahoe and his men stood waiting. "Where's the Injuns? Did they take Luz away?"

"Yes, she's gone," answered Arapahoe, after an ominous silence. "Thought you might cut 'em off at the Crossing."

"The damned soldiers wouldn't start!" cried Boone in a passion. "I got there before dawn, but they had to have their wagons! Do you reckon we can follow the trail?"

"Don't think so," returned Arapahoe. "They left yesterday morning. But Es-

pejo was hit—had a rag around his neck—so he may not travel very far."

"Let's take after him!" proposed Boone eagerly. "They've split up by this time—and the soldiers will guard the fort."

"Ain't one chance in a thousand to ketch him——" began Arapahoe.

But Honey did not wait to hear more.

"You go!" she said, giving him a shove toward the corral. "Just think of those poor girls! I know you'll get them back, if you start!"

"Git the horses, boys!" ordered Arapahoe. "And Honey, you tell them soldiers to camp hyer—and twiddle their thumbs."

He skinned his teeth in a sneering smile as the trim squadron came in sight, and at a gallop the brave trappers struck out.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE COVERED TRAIL.

TO trail one Indian among a thousand, and that Indian Espejo, was like following an eagle's flight; yet there are men who can trace down eagles and kill them in their aeries, and Boone Helms had sworn an oath. He would never give up his search until he had found Espejo and killed him, and brought Luz back to the fort. But the cunning Comanche had anticipated pursuit and his answer had been headlong flight.

Tied face down on a galloping pony, Luz had felt its wild rush as it fled before the lance jabs of Espejo. For long hours, never stopping, the Indians raced across the plains, until the wounded cried out to die. Like her, they were bound tight across the buffalo robes used for saddles; and at the crossing of the Canadian when they paused for a drink, eleven had given up the ghost. But dead or alive, they bore them ruthlessly on, scattering out in every direction to throw the white men off their trail, lest they trace them to their camps and wreak vengeance.

Night came, but the bandage which blindfolded her eyes was not lifted to give comfort to Luz. She was a captive, a slave, not the wife of Espejo, and he flogged her stumbling pony unmercifully. If she had taken his hand when he had offered to help her, she might now be riding at his side, but she had stamped her foot in anger and refused the name of wife, and now she was feeling his displeasure. For eleven hours without ever dismounting, she lay helpless across the back of her horse, until at last, with the wounded, she cried out in agony and gave up all hope, except for death.

She had lost all consciousness, when at last her pony stopped and she was untied and laid on the ground. A day and half a night had passed by in a long agony; and now, when she revived at the dash of water in her face, she had forgotten all but the pain. Every tendon and nerve was wrenched, her tender body was bruised and her spirit broken at last. She had no strength, even for hate, when Espejo raised her up and ordered her to eat and drink. What he gave her she tried to swallow, and then, falling back, she hovered between sleep and death.

It was morning when she awoke, and around her were hundreds of Indians, grimly mounting their horses to go. Some were wounded, some sick, but all who could not ride were bound across the saddle, face down. By the fire sat Espejo, cutting meat from a freshly killed horse, and as he saw Luz rise up he beckoned her to eat; but the sight of the horse carcass sickened her.

"Eat!" ordered Espejo. "You must ride all day. Eat now or by night you will die."

"I will die, then," she answered; and he glanced at her dourly as he reached for his ready lance.

"Eat!" he said again, throwing meat to her like a dog; and to escape his displeasure she ate. He was her master now and if she dared to disobey him he beat her as he had once before. But when he brought up her pony he did not tie her down, but permitted her to sit erect. Then, bandaging her eyes, he started off across the prairie, driving her horse before him on the run. All day, without resting, without mercy on her or the worn-out pony she rode, Espejo pressed on across a huge, empty plain, until at last Luz fell fainting from her

horse. When she came to she was riding face down across its back, and Espejo was cursing behind. There was no way to escape his will—except death.

Darkness came, and with it a cold wind that chilled the marrow; and at last, riding down into a heavily timbered river bottom, Espejo camped for the night. From beneath the pad of his saddle he produced a thick strip of horse meat, which he wolfed down raw, like a dog. Old Stumbling Bear, who had joined them somewhere on the trail, ate his share with the greatest delight. But Luz was too weak either to eat or fear a beating, and Espejo let her lie where she fell.

Yet now the hot haste which had driven him like a devil had fallen away from the chief. In the morning Luz was roused by the sound of a rifle shot and the running and grunting of buffalo. All the day before they had passed through grazing herds, spread out over their winter range; and at dawn one had come so close that Espejo, being afoot, had shot it down with his gun. Already Stumbling Bear was running with his butcher knife to cut out the best of the meat. Later, as Luz caught the fragrance of broiling buffalo hump, she rose and crept to the fire.

"How!" greeted Stumbling Bear, looking up from his cooking, and smiling, he offered her some meat. "You sick?" he inquired. "Pretty soon—get well." And he laughed.

"Yes—I am sick," Luz answered. But as she tasted the delicate meat, her appetite returned and she ate until he laughed again.

"No sick now!" he said and, winking mysteriously, he stripped the meat from his long roasting spit. "You know that?" he asked: and with a cry of pleasure Luz recognized her father's old sword. It was the ancient spadroon, now reduced to such base uses that it served to spit meat.

"Too long!" complained Stumbling Bear, patting his butcher knife to show his preference, and he cast the sword negligently aside. Luz watched it as it lay there, half buried in the sand, while the old man practiced his Spanish; and when he leaped up hastily at Espejo's return, she buried it with a quick flirt of her foot. It was a weapon, a defense, if worst came to worst, and already with her first strength she had begun to plot escape. Every day took her farther from the men at Boone's Fort, whom she knew would be riding to her aid.

Hardly had she covered the sword with sand when she was ordered to mount and ride. Once more, with a grim smile, Espejo bandaged her eyes and tied her feet beneath the belly of her horse; then, crossing the wide river, he rode with the wind, which Luz had observed to be coming from the north. But now, his ponies spent with hard riding, he was compelled to slacken his pace. From that day on he gave over his headlong flight, for the buffaloes had trampled out his trail. Whoever followed him now would not have even a pony track to guide them to the Indians' camp, for the broad plains swarmed with thousands of buffalo whose running made a rumble like thunder. Nor could Luz, if she escaped, hope to find her way home. She was cut off, lost to the world.

At evening, when they camped and her bandage was removed, she looked about for some landmark or sign; but Espejo was careful to stop in the timbered bottoms, and never was she left by herself. Stumbling Bear alone, of all the Indians who had gone out with him, now followed the great Comanche war chief; for the two successive disasters after the attack on Haut Cœur had aroused their superstitious dread. Espejo was possessed of a devil, an evil spirit so malevolent that first it had guided a bullet that struck him down, then had thrown him with great violence from his horse. And that, of the two, was the greater disaster, for the wound had almost healed; but his *anima,* his vital spirit, had been knocked out of his body, and soon he was doomed to death.

All but Stumbling Bear avoided him, then, lest the devil should attack them, as well. But Stumbling Bear was a shaman himself, and as he rode in the rear he sang a song to his guardian spirit, which had protected him from evil so long. So, for more than a week, appar-

ently wandering aimlessly, they rode across wide plains and winding rivers. And at last, topping the bluff above a wide stretch of bottom land, Espejo quickly plucked off Luz's blindfold and whooped.

Answering whoops, long and shrill, rose from the timber below where smoke came curling up through the trees; and out into an opening surrounded by many white tepees the people of the village swarmed. It was Espejo's winter camp, located far from the frontier where no soldiers could discover it in his absence; and here, while the warriors had ridden forth to take Haut Cœur, their women and children had been hid. But now, when he returned with his captured bride—and many ponies loaded with plunder—the shouting ceased and the people stood still.

Their great chief had returned, but many warriors who had gone with him had been slain by the white men's guns; and he himself had lost the wonderful medicine which had made him their leader in war. Some enemy had bewitched him, shooting his "p'ison" through the air to bring him misfortune and disaster; and the white girl he brought as a token of triumph was to them only an omen of bad luck. It was to win her he had ridden forth, after the summer's fighting had been over and they were safely hidden away from their enemies; and as he rode down the bluff and into the circle of tepees, they gazed at Luz as if fascinated.

Was it for this drooping child that hundreds of warriors had been slain and the Frenchman's house burned to the ground? Yet Espejo rode in proudly and, before the biggest tepee of all, he dismounted and lifted her down. Then in sonorous Comanche he made a speech to all the people, and beckoned her into his tent. Lux followed him meekly, for she had learned her lesson well, but as she stepped inside the lodge she halted and drew back, for two women stood regarding her, hatefully. One was a Comanche, huge and dark, with a virile, pock-marked face and an eye as cruel as a snake's; the other was small and comely, wearing her hair in the Kiowa fashion, but her face was contorted with rage.

Espejo confronted them, unsmilingly, his arrogant head held high as if asserting his marital rights; then, pointing at Luz, he spoke to them sternly, and beckoned her once more to come in.

"These are my wives," he announced in Spanish; and as Luz hesitated, bewildered, he caught her by the arm and sent her whirling.

"Stay there!" he ordered, as she fell among some buffalo robes and, laying hold on his Kiowa wife, he hurled her outside and advanced on Tave Pete, the Comanche. But as he did so he reached down and picked up a broken lodgepole, and she gave over her belligerent pose. At his loud commands they unloaded the broken-down ponies and brought the plunder into the tent—sacks of sugar, bolts of cloth, the pick of the loot that had been taken from doomed Haut Cœur.

"Aye!" exclaimed the young Kiowa, catching up a red shawl and draping it coquettishly over her head; and Espejo's stern face relaxed.

"You can have it," he smiled. The young Kiowa reached out again for another gorgeous bits of loot. But the snaky eyes of Tave Pete had begun to gleam with jealousy, and she snatched it angrily away.

"It is for you," indicated Espejo by a proud nod of his head; and Tave Pete grabbed again. The Kiowa wife rushed forward to claim another present; but suddenly Espejo seized his club and drove them forth to their work. Load after load of loot and stolen treasures was carried in and dropped on the floor, and soon with gay laughter the young Kiowa reached down and held up another gewgaw. Espejo nodded, and again the contest was on, each wife striving by smiles or scoldings to gain for herself the best of the finery he had brought.

There were silks from old France and garish serapes from Mexico, rich strips of brocade from Hautcœur's ravished chamber, and rings from the fingers of his wife. All the dear, sweet mementos which the señora had loved and cherished were striven for in savage glee;

while in a corner, unnoticed, Luz lay, hiding the bitter tears that washed channels down her grimy cheeks. Like a bit of trampled silk, she, too, had been snatched away, and now she was Espejo's third wife.

CHAPTER XX.

ESPEJO'S COURTING.

THE camp of the Comanches was pitched beneath the bluff on the bank of a rushing stream—a hundred and fifty tepees, set in a crescent that opened to the east. Each tent of white buffalo skin was decorated with crude pictures, representing the totem or guardian animal of the owner—here a wolf, there a buffalo, a deer or an otter. Espejo's lodge was the largest, save one. His sign was the eagle, the greatest of all the birds, since he flies where no man can reach him; and his white-and-black feathers, symbolizing day and night, give their swiftness to both horse and man. But the largest tepee of all was the medicine lodge, where already the drums were beating.

For the time had come when the lost *anima* of Espejo must be conjured back into his body, lest it stray too far into the spirit land and become lost. The bargain had been struck and the chief medicine man and his assistants were preparing for their four-day chant, nor were five hundred horses considered too many for a chief as famous as Espejo. He had agreed to it gladly, for one raid in the spring would bring him back five hundred more; and now, as the place was prepared for his coming, he set his own tepee in order.

It was piled high with bundles brought in from his last raid, besides which his wives had laid in a great store of dried buffalo meat, and berries and pecan nuts. Over behind the bundles, just as he had flung her among the buffalo robes, lay his new wife, the daughter of Hautcœur. Frowning angrily at Tave Pete and his Kiowa wife, he motioned them out the door, then, lifting Luz up, he wiped away her tears and for the first time spoke to her kindly.

"Do not weep," he said in Spanish; "this tepee is your home. You are my wife now, so do not try to escape. It is hundreds of miles over the trail we have come, and no white man has ever been to this place. But if any should follow now, I will send out spies to watch, and so every one will be killed. All your people are dead except your little sister, whom I gave to the chief of the Kiowas, so is it not better to stop thinking of getting away, and be happy here, as my wife?"

He sat down by the fire and drew her close beside her, but when he tried to kiss her she hid her face.

"My little one is shy," he smiled, "but soon she will learn to like me. I am not a common Indian—I am half white man and a great chief. I am Espejo, the greatest war chief on the plains. My people are the Comanches, the bravest of all warriors; but I like the white people's ways. That is why I asked your father to let me have you for my wife. But he lied to me—and for that I killed him. As for the little man, the *correcuervo*—if he follows us I will kill him, too. You are my woman, understand? And any man that tries to steal you shall die."

He took both her hands in one huge fist and looked her straight in the eyes, then rose and left her sitting by the fire.

"Here is a dress," he said, coming back from the pile of plunder. "Put it on; I wish you to be beautiful. Anything that is here you can have for your own. You are my woman, now—the wife of a chief. But I must hurry away to the medicine tent. I shall be gone four days and nights, while the medicine men bring back my spirit. You do not understand—but when I come back I shall be well."

He put his arm around her, and Luz rose up trembling. Then, with a sudden, frightened cry, she broke away from him and fled—but at the doorway she came to a halt. Two pairs of jealous eyes were glaring in through the tent flap, and she turned back and ran to Espejo. He at least was kind, but the venomous glare of the Indian women seemed to strike her like a blow.

"Go away!" stormed Espejo, and then, in a towering rage, he snatched up a

club and rushed forth. Seizing Tave Pete, he beat her until she cried out for mercy; then she turned on him and fought back viciously. They swayed back and forth in front of the tepee, while women, children and dogs came running by scores to witness the uneven war. For though Tave Pete was strong and as vengeful as a rattlesnake, she was still no match for the powerful war chief, whose business it was to kill men. He struck her brutally, and as long as she resisted, he beat her with his club; but when at last she yielded, he threw the stick away and dragged her through the door of the tepee. Then, returning to the entrance, he picked up his lodgepole and called for his Kiowa wife.

"Potine!" he yelled; and White Beaver came running, to slip through the open door. Espejo followed close behind her, throwing the flap down as he passed, and stood glowering at the three women, his wives. In the corner Tave Pete cowered back and shed tears over her wounds; Potine, smiled up at the chief beseechingly, while Luz stood with downcast eyes.

Wano!" spoke up Espejo, throwing away his bruising club; and then in Mexican and Comanche he admonished his Indian wives, meanwhile pointing with his chin at Luz.

"I have told them," he announced at last, "that you are my wife, and they must treat you with every respect. But my first wife, this big woman, is the head of the tepee; so be sure to do what she says."

He strode out the tent and, without looking right or left, made his way to the medicine lodge. All day the monotonous chant of the medicine men went on, as, to the beat of a drum and the shaking of rattles, they exorcized the malevolent spirit.

But Tave Pete was possessed of a greater devil than the one which had entered Espejo. At first she stood cringing, shedding tears of thwarted rage as she felt of her burning wounds; but when the medicine chant struck up and she knew Espejo was gone, she raised her head and looked at Luz.

It was then that the demon of hate peeped out from her eyes, and Luz turned to the other wife, appealingly. But Potine, the deposed favorite, met her glance with a smile so poisonous that Luz slipped away out of sight. To the horror of marrying Espejo was added the double terror of living with his two jealous wives. And now, in petty spite, though they cooked and ate themselves, no food was set out for the dark-eyed beauty who had won the fickle favor of their lord. But when darkness came and she heard them both sleeping, Luz ventured out softly, picking up scraps around the fireplace, for she had not eaten that day. She was like a furtive mouse that starts and runs at every sound, yet comes back again and again until its hunger is appeased and it can creep off and hide from sight.

In the morning at dawn Tave Pete rose up and started a fire in the hole, then Potine took two kettles and went down to the creek for water, and so the new day began. Luz woke at the first sound, and, as the Indian women ignored her, she came and sat by the fire, even helping herself to the food. But if the memory of her beating held Tave Pete's anger in leash, Potine, the White Beaver, eyed the favorite with a glance of such cruel hate that she was glad to retire to her hiding place.

This was a shelter of untanned buffalo hides, leaned up against the lodgepoles, and there Luz sat, pondering on the fate which lay before her, while the village dogs snuffed and barked outside the tent. Ever since she had come, bringing the odor of the hated paleface, a score of starveling curs had gathered around the tepee, rushing forward with angry growls when she appeared. They were a guard, night and day, and until their anger abated she dare not think of escape. Yet unless she fled quickly Espejo would return and her heart almost stopped at the thought.

Compared to remaining there as his wife a death on the lonely prairie was infinitely to be preferred, and now as her strength and courage came back she began to prepare for flight. From the sacks of dried meat behind her she drew out strips of jerky, pilfering *panochas* of

Mexican sugar and a hard cheese from the plunder and hid them under her robe; then, as her clothes were worn and ragged, she put on the blue dress which Espejo had given her when he left. It was one she had worn within the walls of old Haut Cœur when she had dwelt there, protected and secure, and as she smoothed it down and stepped out into the tepee, she felt like her old, spirited self.

All the horror of death and battle, which had beaten her down until the world seemed coming to an end, fell away from her now, and despite her brutal treatment she found courage to hold up her head. For three more days Espejo would be in the medicine lodge or sweating in the blanket-covered *temescal,* and in three days Boone Helms and the trappers at the fort might come riding to save her from her fate. But if they did not come she had hid a knife in the folds of her dress, though for what purpose she hardly knew. To protect herself, perhaps; or, if worst came to worst, she could die and end it all.

With a club to fight off the dogs she hurried down to the creek where she washed and did up her hair, and then, coming back, she glanced in at every tepee in the hope of finding some friend. But men and women alike met her gaze with agate-cold eyes that seemed to emanate hate, and when she stepped inside the tepee White Beaver rose up scowling, while Tave Pete erupted in bad Spanish.

"Ho!" she cried. "See the white Mexican. Only yesterday she lay crying, but now she washes her face and puts on a bright dress for Espejo!"

"She shall never wear it!" burst out White Beaver vindictively, springing forward to strip it off. But in the long hours of the night Luz had steeled herself for battle, and, as White Beaver snatched at her, she struck. The Indian woman fell back, her face smarting from the blow; and as the two wives charged together against the hated intruder, Stumbling Bear appeared in the doorway. His little eyes were smiling, his deep-lined face marked deeper as he laughd at their women's war. When Luz turned and saw him she ran to him for help, and he patted her on the head like a child.

"Do not fear, chiquita," he said; and Luz remembered suddenly the scene in the chamber at Haut Cœur. With those same words he had soothed her, while her mother lay dead and the air reeked with blood and smoke. Murderer though he was, she clung to him sobbing, and he led her away to his tent.

"No tiene miedo," he said again, as he handed her over to his wife. But how could she be content when in three short days Espejo would claim her for his wife? Far into the winter night she lay listening to the drum and the barbarous chant of the medicine men. If she fled now he could not follow her, and perhaps on the trail she would meet her lover, Boone. He would follow her, she knew, unless he had been killed.

Now old Stumbling Bear lay still. With his wife beside him and his feet to the fire he was stretched out, wrapped up in warm robes. She rose up, her heart throbbing, her hand on the butcher knife, and peeped out through the flap of the tepee.

At sundown the old chief had brought in his war horse and tied him to a stake before the tent, and beside him two other horses stood sleeping, while others showed dimly in the moonlight. Kneeling down inside the tepee, Luz drew her sharp butcher knife, and, as the chant of the medicine men rose once more to a high howl, she cut a long gash in the tent and slipped out. Only that evening she had made friends with the pinto war horse, which was used only for running buffalo and on the warpath, but as she crept over to his picket and cut loose the rawhide lariat, he snorted and flew back on the rope. And then, as the other horses caught the scent of the paleface, they made her disaster complete.

Every dog in the village seemed to rouse up at once; the horses fought and tugged at their ropes; and the next moment old Stumbling Bear came bounding from his tepee and snatched her back out of sight.

"Be careful!" he whispered hoarsely, flinging her down and covering her with

a robe; then running out again, he caught his straying war pony and led it back to its stake. The gap in his tepee was sewed tight by daylight and no one discovered the slit; but Stumbling Bear and his wife kept watch after that, for Luz was Espejo's wife. To win her hand hundreds of warriors had been slain, and the man who let her escape would have to answer with his life when the war chief demanded his bride. So, despite the fear that choked her like a hand at her heart, Luz found herself still waiting, her hand clutching the knife, when her husband, Espejo, came back.

There was a burst of exultant shouts as he emerged from the medicine lodge, and now all the warriors who had avoided him before pressed closer to observe the miracle. He was healed, made whole, and his wandering spirit self had been restored to its human abode. But Espejo, though he smiled, returned straightway to his tepee—then came running to Stumbling Bear's lodge.

"Where is my wife?" he demanded, and as the curtain was thrown back he strode in and stood gazing at Luz.

"Come!" he said, reaching out his hand; but she turned pale and drew away.

"No!" she answered, her eyes beginning to burn; and when he grabbed at her she whipped out the knife.

"If you touch me I will kill you!" she cried defiantly. "I will never, never be your wife! And if I have to, I will kill myself!"

"Ho-ho!" laughed Stumbling Bear, as she faced them angrily. "She is *brava* —she will make a good wife. Her children will be great warriors.

"So," said Espejo, fixing his eyes on her sternly, "she would make me out a fool, even after her lying father has died by Espejo's lance."

"But she is so small," protested Stumbling, Bear, pityingly. "Let her live with us a while, until she grows up and learns our ways. We have no daughter now, and when she marries the great chief——"

"No!" broke in Espejo. "I have looked into her heart. She has forgotten she was promised as my wife. There is another—the small man, the *correcuervo*—and it is to him she wishes to fly."

"I do not!" cried Luz; but the telltale blood rose up and mantled her cheek .

"Ho!" exclaimed Stumbling Bear, striking his mouth to indicate astonishment; and then like a flash Espejo slapped aside the knife and caught Luz roughly.

"Come!" he said, imprisoning both her hands; and while the whole village looked on, he led her back to his tepee, for he had bought her with many men's lives.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SWORD OF HAUTCŒUR.

IN her shelter behind the buffalo robes Luz lay sobbing after her beating, but the proud heart of Espejo had had to yield at last or see her fall dead at his feet. She was his woman, bought and paid for after the Indian custom; but Indian ways were not her ways, and rather than submit to that custom, she would die.

"Ho!" he blustered. "Must Espejo beg for a wife? Here is White Beaver waiting, the daughter of a chief, and Tave Pete, who shall now have you for her slave. If you will not marry Espejo you shall be Tave Pete's servant, and learn to starve like a dog. Get up, now, and bring us some water!"

He picked her up with one hand and passed her on to Tave Pete, who thrust two brass kettles into her hands; and so, with drooping head, Luz hurried off toward the creek while the squaws and Indian children jeered. But when she came back she raised her eyes to the west where the bluff rose, a straight line, against the sky. Somewhere beneath the sun that was sinking toward the horizon, Boone Helms still followed on her trail. He was as brave as the *correcuervo*, the little bird which without fear meets the eagle and puts it to flight. If he lived he would come, with Arapahoe and the trappers, and save her from this living death. He would kill the brutal savage who had made her a slave, but now she could only wait.

But the trail of the Comanches was

two days old when the trappers rode down to the Crossing. Herds of buffalo had chopped it up, flying sand had half filled the footprints, and night was already at hand.

"We'll camp, boys," decided Boone, after they had crossed the Canadian and found where the Indian trails spread.

At dawn he was up again, cutting sign across the prairie, seeking out some token of Luz.

"They've scattered," he admitted, as Arapahoe met his eye; "but any track there will take us to the rendezvous. They've split, but they'll all come together again."

"Well, let's start," grumbled Arapahoe. "Ain't one chance in a thousand, but——"

"We've got to take it!" ended Boone. "And when you turn back I'll follow the trail alone."

"Yes, and git yore scalp lifted," responded Arapahoe sarcastically. "That's Injun country!" And he waved his hand to the East.

It stretched out before them, a rolling plain where extinct craters rose up among flat-topped buttes, reaching on to the distant horizon. Creeks and coulees broke up the trail, and wide flats covered with cinders where the tracks were almost lost; but the trappers traveled by landmarks, riding forward from pass to pass, until at last they came to the camp. Here after traveling day and night the Comanches had come together, many trails converging into one; and by the skeleton of the dead horse from which Espejo had cut meat they found the torn fragment of a dress.

The ground around the water hole was strewn with rags, where the wounded had bound up their hurts; but this fragment of lace and silk lay in a hollow against the bank, where robes had been spread out for a bed. Boone looked about carefully for some sign left by Luz, some proof that they were on the right trail, and at last, as he combed the soft sand with his fingers, he came across a long, silky hair. No wire-haired Comanche had slept in that spot—Luz had been there; but the trail was old.

As they rode forth at dawn a cold wind from the north let the trappers know that winter had come; for they in their haste had ridden away in their hunting shirts, without even blankets for coats. Yet the tracks led on, spreading out as before to throw the pursuers off the trail; and though Arapahoe shook his head they pressed on doggedly until even the horse tracks were gone. Thousands of buffaloes, drifting in from the north to feed on the grassy plains, had trampled the ground into dust. Only the landmarks were left, and in a biting storm of sleet they pushed on to the brakes of the Canadian.

Here, beneath the high banks, the timbered bottom lands gave them shelter; but after two days of search up and down the winding river bed, the trappers threw up their hands.

"It's no use, Boone," said Arapahoe kindly. "The danged Injuns have scattered and this storm has wiped out their tracks. Luz is gone—that's all there is to it."

"Yes, she's gone," assented Boone, "and you boys are due home. But me—I'm going to stay here a few days. Then I'll head south, or follow downstream."

"Now, hyer," argued Arapahoe; "ain't you got a lick of sense? Either Espejo is in Mexico or he's hundreds of miles away, off yonder in eastern Texas. He's gone, I tell ye, and you cain't find him till spring, when he comes back to raid on the emigrants. What's the use of gitting killed, rambling around hyer alone, when you might do some good in the spring?"

"I'll tell you," said Boone at last, as the trappers awaited his answer. "I can't sit idle at home. If they get me, all right; I'll get some of them. But spring will be too late—for Luz."

"Well, mebbe so," admitted Arapahoe. "Them Injuns have got her, and I reckon we all know Espejo. But the best thing now is to buy Luz back; and I tell you what I'll do, in the spring. I'll git a bunch of Arapahoes that are friendly with the Comanches to go down among 'em, trading, and I'll give a hundred ponies and all the trade stuff he can pack to the buck that brings Luz in.

But you know and I know that these murdering Comanches raid clear into Mexico in the winter. They may be down in Durango by this time, and it's no use taking their trail. They'd jest kill you, anyhow; but I'd go with you, Boone, only—well, I've got Honey, now."

"Sure!" responded Boone, shooting out his hand. "We've been pardners now for many a long year, Arapahoe, but here's where our trail splits. Good-by!"

He shook hands all around, but as they saddled to go Arapahoe came back again.

"If you don't find her," he said, "we'll look for you, in the spring." And with a grim nod he turned back toward home.

Boone watched them ride away, and then, with furtive eyes, he made his way down into the brakes. He was alone now, and the prowling Indians who had been watching from afar would come in to look over their camp. If they found him there would be a battle, and he did not wish to fight—it was better to drag out his tracks. Pushing cautiously into the thicket, he left his horse in a little opening, where at some time there had been a small fire, then with the stub of a dead limb he went back down the narrow path and artfully raked out his trail.

The wintry storm had caked down the dead ashes in the fireplace, but he knew it was an Indian camp. The fire had been a small one, in a hole to escape the wind; and at one side a bed of coals had been laid to roast meat, while sucked-out marrow bones lay everywhere. Stepping about from place to place, his mind far away, he was raking the ground idly when up out of the sand there came the gleaming hilt of a sword. It was of silver, beautifully chased, and, set deep in its haft, he saw a jewel incrusted with dirt. Boone snatched it up, and like a flash he remembered it.

It was the sword of Hautcœur that had once hung on the wall beneath the blue fleur-de-lis of France; but now some savage had used it to spit his meat and left it behind in his haste. Boone balanced it in his hand, essaying a cut and a thrust as he thought of the battles it had fought; then, swinging it over his head, he struck a swift blow and spoke, as if the sword could hear.

"Sword," he said, "we will kill Espejo." And he smiled as he thrust it through his belt.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MIRACLE.

ON the hard ground outside her tepee Tave Pete had stretched a buffalo skin, pegging it out after its soaking in the creek, and now, with loud scoldings and impatient kicks, she drove her slave as she scraped off the flesh. The fragrance of spring was in the air, the cottonwood buds were bursting, and the Indian children gamboled in the sun; but, bowed over the unpleasant hide, Luz could not even look up without inviting a screech of rage.

"Shameless creature!" cried Tave. "You are worse than the laziest Mexican." And as Luz scraped harder with her buffalo-rib flesher, the old squaw struck her again. But at the sound of the blow Espejo glanced out, and Tave Pete slunk away.

He sat long by the fire now, smoking his pipe, while his gaudy war bonnet hung fluttering in the sun and wind. It was spring and the young warriors were eager for the war trail, but Espejo still brooded in his tepee. At his side but behind him, White Beaver beaded the moccasins which only she could make to suit her husband. When he looked up at the loud scolding, Tave Pete caught his eye and smiled. She was happy now, for the daughter of the Frenchman had not come to take her place. She was afraid of Espejo; but White Beaver knew his ways—her fingers were heavy with rings.

The great hide was fleshed, scraped clean of fat and meat, and now over a log Luz dragged it back and forth and beat it with a round, smooth rock. For hours she tugged and kneaded until every part was soft and pliable, then at a harsh word from her taskmistress she set her teeth in the hard edge, chewing it soft as she looked around. But

as Espejo glanced out she bowed her head and turned away; and he stirred impatiently by the fire.

"Go and bring in some wood," he said to White Beaver and, wondering, she slipped away. It was the work of the Mexican to drag up the wood, but Espejo was master in his tepee.

"Take these hides," he said, as Tave Pete came bustling in, "and put them in the creek to soak." And, after a bold, defiant look, Tave Pete remembered her beating and bore them reluctantly away. Then for a long time he sat in silence, watching Luz at her work, before he rose up and stepped out.

"You are strong now," he said, as he laid hold of her flexing arms, and Luz hung her head in shame. It was always so, when he sent his wives away; and now he laid hold of her hands.

"Do you forget," he asked, "how soft your hands were when I asked you to become my wife? But now they are greasy, fit only for dogs to lick!" And he threw them away in disgust.

Luz spread out the hide and went on with her labor, rubbing a mixture of brains and fat into the drying skin while he towered above her, watching.

"You are crazy!" he exclaimed at last. "Are all Mexicans born fools? Then why will you work and spoil your pretty hands when Espejo will still take you for his wife? Look at me now—and stop your working! I have seen how you watch the bluff—do you still think your lover will come?"

"I have no lover," she answered indignantly; but once more, as always, the hot blood mantled her cheeks. Espejo swore a great oath.

"I am the fool!" he cursed. "You cry, and I stop beating you—and then my women laugh. All the women of the village are watching us now and they whisper that Espejo is a squaw. When my horse bucks and fights me I tie him to a stake and starve him until he yields. Are you better than the horse that I stole from your father? Then you too shall starve—until you die!"

He snatched her up from the ground and carried her inside, and, as the children came running to peep in through the flap, he tied her by the neck to a lodgepole.

"Stay there," he said, "until you learn to obey. And if you untie the rope——" He touched his knife.

White Beaver came hurrying back, bowed down beneath her wood, and threw off the load outside; but when she saw Luz tied and Espejo sitting by, she clapped her hand to her mouth and went out. Tave Pete came hurrying also, for the news had spread like wildfire; but one glance at her husband, with a club at his hand, sent her hurrying after her mate. Luz sat alone, gazing off into space, and her hand crept up to her neck. But it fell away, and like a wounded forest creature she lay down and waited to die.

It was better so, after the long months of abuse and the beatings which were now her daily lot; but as she gazed out at the trees and saw the buds unfolding, a new hope crept into her heart. Summer had come, and the Indians, according to custom, would follow the buffalo north. Already the young men had brought up their ponies; the women were packing to go. It was hard to die at last, after enduring so much, and even yet Boone might be coming. Or if perchance he had been killed in the fighting—then Arapahoe, with the trappers at his back. She lay quiet, dreaming as she rested her tired limbs, and once more in a kind of vision she saw Boone on his buckskin pony ride out on the bluff above.

"Oh!" she cried, rousing up to look again; and Espejo glanced out of the tent. He, too, had formed the habit of watching the western trail, but now he turned back with a grunt. There was no band of trappers, no dashing column of soldiers, pouring down to ride through his camp; yet something besides the springtime made Espejo uneasy, and he strode out and looked around.

Already the laughing squaws were packing their new robes to carry up the trail for trade. Their tepees were piled with furs and soft buckskins, to exchange for the things that they loved—silk handkerchiefs and fine cloth, and stores of sugar and coffee and the wondrous fruits sold in cans. The war-

riors sat by their tepees, their headdresses and medicine bags set proudly out on three spears. Up the trail, sneaking off, the chief beheld another band of young men, riding forth to raid and steal. Yet he, their chief, sat silent in his tepee—Espejo, the greatest chief of all.

He turned back into his tent and stood scowling at Luz, then untied the rope from her neck.

"Get up!" he scolded. "Do I keep you to lie and sleep, when my buffalo skins still wait to be tanned? Get up and go to work and you will starve all the quicker, you worthless Mexican. But you shall never eat again until you know who is your master. I hate you!"

Tave Pete, appearing from nowhere, rushed about to bring new hides and peg them down on the sod, and until the dusk fell she drove Luz to her task with the vindictive spite of her kind. But White Beaver, sitting demurely behind the back of her husband, did not add to the storm of abuse. If the Mexican woman yielded, Espejo would forget his favorite—all her jewels would go to Luz. So she looked on, saying nothing, and in the darkness before the dawn she crept over to her hated rival's couch. There was a tug at the buffalo robe, a slender hand reached out, and Luz found a huge bundle of meat.

That day she worked long, and Espejo gazed in wonder, not unmixed with a superstitious fear. The bad medicine of the *wahkeitcha*, her French-Canadian father who had outwitted the Comanches for years, had helped her to trick him again. Perhaps—and there he paused—she had the gift of witchcraft, which enabled her to live without food. And two great disasters, which had almost destroyed his prestige, had followed on the heels of his victory. The day after he captured Luz a bullet had come from nowhere and knocked him off his horse.

He turned it over in his mind as he watched her at her work—to make sure that she ate none of the fleshed meat; but Espejo was only half Indian. The white blood in his veins had caused him to look with scorn on the ignorance and superstition of his people, and that evening he took his lariat and fastened her stoutly, with many knots, for perhaps she stole food in the dark. But once more, in the dead of night, the mysterious hand brought Luz meat; and she endured the heavy labor another day.

"You are strong, eh?" he said at evening, as he felt her flexing arms; and Luz gazed up at him with her dark, calm eyes.

"Yes," she answered, reading the fear in his savage countenance; and Espejo moved away. That night he sat long in the tepee of Stumbling Bear, and the next morning at dawn he threw Luz a piece of meat, taken hot from the coals of the fire.

"Eat!" he commanded, and watched her under his eyebrows as she gnawed it and put it down. Nor was it assumed, this air of complete safety, for White Beaver had fed her to the full.

Stumbling Bear came hurrying over and gazed at her curiously, meanwhile humming a little song to his medicine; then the warriors stalked away, and Luz resumed her labors, while in her heart a new hope sprang up. They were afraid, and Tave Pete no longer kicked and scolded; only Potine, the White Beaver, remained undisturbed as she gazed on the miracle she had wrought.

That night the scouts came riding with news from up the trail, and in the morning the great camp was gone. Hundreds of ponies, bucking and plunging under their unaccustomed loads, led off on the long journey north; and while the women whipped and scolded, stopping often to relash the packs, the warriors rode adventurously ahead. All was haste and confusion—the wild rush of stampeding pack animals and the yelling of galloping squaws, while everywhere dogs and children added their share to the babel so dear to the savage heart. For here no enemy had ever come to attack them—they were safe, and the traders were ahead.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT THE RENDEZVOUS.

THE route of the Comanches lay over an immense, treeless plain, cut here and there by the winding ribbons of water courses, now green with budding

cottonwoods. On the prairie the first grass was sprouting up around the buffalo chips, tempting the horses to nip as they passed; and everywhere in the brown distance dark masses moved along —herds of buffalo, migrating north.

In advance of the long column of packed horses, where the women shrieked and wrangled and galloped about, the warriors, well mounted but each leading his cherished war horse, searched out the country ahead. Each carried on his saddle his war bag of gorgeous trappings, tall bonnets of eagle feathers, beaded vests and bundles of ocher with which to paint man and horse. Lances gleamed and bull-hide shields flaunted heraldic devices, but the rifles which they brandished were no better than clubs, for the last of their cartridges were gone.

Yet Espejo and his Comanches had no fear, for the plunder of years of warfare was stowed away on their stolen ponies, and the traders would seek them out at their rendezvous. Soon their pouches would be filled with more bullets to kill the white men and shoot at the hated soldiers, for the half-breeds and northern Indians would swarm in from the trading posts to barter their own cartridges at a profit. Old rivalries and ancient hatreds would be forgotten for the time, and Pawnees and Arapahoes would advance under the peace sign to gamble and race horses and trade.

Every spring at some fixed rendezvous the Comanches and Kiowas met to plan their summer campaign; and one morning in the distance slim signal smokes could be seen, ascending from the summit of a bluff. Scouts came riding from knoll to knoll, waving their blankets in welcome; and soon, far in advance, the friendly outposts came together and sat down on the prairie for a talk. But as they approached the great encampment, Espejo fell back to where Luz and his Indian wives rode.

"Remember!" he said, touching his knife significantly as he fixed his sullen eyes on Luz. "If you try to escape I will kill you."

He turned to Tave Pete, who grinned and slapped her butcher knife; but White Beaver, while she nodded and smiled up at her master, gave no sign of murderous hate. If the Mexican slave escaped, her own place would be the safer, and no longer would Espejo be bewitched.

He drew out the metal looking-glass from which he derived his name, painting his face with meticulous care; then, mounting his war horse, he rode forth in full regalia to exchange greetings with the Kiowa chiefs. The fringe on his buckskin leggings hung a foot below the stirrup of the saddle he had taken from Hautcœur, a gorgeous blanket was draped across the pommel; while his white horse, gay with eagle plumes, spurned the ground with resistless speed, making the war bonnet float out behind.

Luz gazed after him, sad and fearful, yet half admiring the savage pomp with which he carried off his part; but she had not forgotten the grim warning from his lips, though her heart was rebellious still. They camped in long rows of tepees along the level bank of the stream. As the animals were unpacked the young men drove them forth to graze on the open plains. Thousands and thousands of ponies, the money and wealth of the Comanches, were herded there with jealous care, while the chiefs and older warriors sat in council with the Kiowas or traded with the Pawnees and Delawares.

All was bustle and confusion as the tepees were set up and the robes safely stored inside; then, as camp was made and the cooking pots began to bubble, the visiting and formal calls began. Espejo sat in state in his huge white tepee with the eagle painted on its front, and chief after chief of the neighboring tribes arrived, to enter and eat and talk. Deputations came and went as affairs of state were brought up; and Luz as she worked felt the eyes of the Indians upon her, for the story of her rebellion had spread.

After sacrificing hundreds of his warriors for the sake of the white woman, Espejo had found her determined only to escape, and so he had made her his slave. But she was there, a white captive; and the Kiowas were uneasy, for there were soldiers not far to the north.

Already many of their people had been widowed and orphaned because of the mad attack on Haut Cœur, and when the soldiers heard that the two girls were held prisoners, there would be fresh demands, and more war. And since the daughter of the Frenchman had refused to become his wife, it was better to sell her to the traders. But to any suggestions that he part with Luz, Espejo responded with a scowl.

It was the chief of the Kiowas who first broached the subject, and to give point to his proposal he brought in an Arapahoe, who had expressed a great interest in Luz.

"The great chief knows," he said, "that the Arapahoes are his friends. They have fought with the Comanches against the Sioux and the Utes, but now they come to trade. It is said that this white woman whom you took from the Frenchman has the gift of the evil eye, that she can live without eating and has the power to bring misfortune on any one who gains her ill will. But the white men at the forts ask all the Indians if they have seen her, and offer to buy her back. So if the great chief wishes I will give twenty-five ponies and sell her back to her people."

"She is my wife," returned Espejo.

"Then I will trade you," proposed the Arapahoe, "ten thousand loaded cartridges to use in your empty rifles. Can the great chief fight the soldiers without cartridges for his guns? And this year there are soldiers everywhere."

"I will kill them with lances," answered Espejo scornfully, "and take away their cartridges and guns. But this woman is my wife—I will never give her up." And he waved the Arapahoe away.

But only a month before nearly a thousand galloping soldiers had descended on a Kiowa village, where the Cheyennes, their allies, had two prisoners; and for the sake of this white woman and her daughter the entire encampment had been destroyed. The Kiowas had been driven into the sand hills, without clothing, without blankets, without food; and in revenge for the woman, who had been killed by the Cheyennes, the Long Knives had harried them for days.

"My brother knows," said the Kiowa, "how Yellow Hair, the white chief, marched against us to get back two women. Many of my people were killed in the fighting, many died of hunger and cold. It is better to sell back these two daughters of the Frenchman before the soldiers come against us."

"If my brother is afraid," retorted Espejo angrily, "I will fight off the soldiers myself. But I know that this Arapahoe has been sent by my enemy, because I saw his brand on his horse."

He strode out the tepee and pointed at the iron on the hip of the Arapahoe's mount. It was HB in a circle, the horse brand of Arapahoe Brown.

"That is the mark of Brown," went on Espejo, beginning to shout, "the tall man at the Frenchman's lower fort! He has given this Arapahoe the ponies to buy my wife—but he does not buy her for himself. It is the little man, the *correcuervo,* who wishes the Frenchman's daughter, but he is too weak, too cowardly to fight. So he sends all these traders, to try to buy her back. But Espejo is not a squaw. He is a big chief, a warrior, and he will not sell his wife. But if the Kiowas are afraid of the Long Knives, I will take her and go away."

He went inside his tepee and sat down by the fire, covering his face and refusing to talk; and that night by the council fire the chiefs argued and exhorted, without coming to any decision. The hotheads of both tribes remained loyal to Espejo; but the old men, who were wiser, recalled the slaughter of their warriors and gave their voices for peace. So the council broke up, with the leader of the Arapahoes offering five hundred ponies for Luz.

"The Kiowas are squaws!" declared Espejo insolently, as their chiefs came to see him in his tent. "But the little man, the *correcuervo,* will never get my wife. In the morning Espejo will go."

He drew his blanket over his head in token of dismissal, and the Kiowas went away; but in the night, when Espejo slept, a silent form leaned over Luz and opened a long slit in the tent. It was White Beaver, the Kiowa woman, who had kept her from starving, and now she

offered freedom, though at a price. For if Luz slipped through the opening so cunningly cut and laced, Espejo would fullfil his vow. He would follow her and kill her unless, riding fast, she escaped to some frontier fort.

Yet if she held back, if she feared to take this last, desperate chance, what else could she look for, except death? Espejo would kill her or bend her to his will; and she rose up, her heart in her throat.

"Run to the tepee of my father, the head chief of the Kiowas," whispered White Beaver, giving her a push; but just as Luz leaned forward, there was the sound of a blow behind her, and White Beaver uttered a wail.

"Ho!" cried a big voice, the voice of her husband; and, grabbing her, he beat her with a club until she fell at his feet in a faint. Then, whipping out his lariat, Espejo tied them side by side, threatening Luz with instant death if she fled. The next morning at dawn, while all the Indians stared, the tall tepee of Espejo came down; and with the young men of his band, who knew no other leader, the war chief rode off to the south. Luz looked back through her tears at the tepees of the friendly Kiowas, and in her heart she prayed for death.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A MESSENGER FROM THE SOUTH.

THE grass was high at Boone's Fort, and the first wagon trains had come when Arapahoe, still searching the plains for his partner, spied a Comanche, approaching from the east. The long fringes of his leggings almost swept the grama tufts, there was a bird picture on his rawhide shield and from the point of the red lance which he raised in distant greeting three scalp locks dangled in the wind. Arapahoe reached for his glasses and his heart almost stopped, for the Indian was riding Rawhide.

"Hey! Honey!" he shouted. "Fetch my gun and be quick about it! Here's a danged, murdering Comanche, riding in on Boone's horse; but he's lifted his last scalp, I swow!"

He raised his glasses again as the trappers came running and Honey brought up his gun; but as the Comanche held up his shield, with the picture of the bird on it, Arapahoe ripped out an oath.

"It's Boone!" he whooped, dashing down to the corral and leaping astride a horse; and while Honey waved her hand and the trappers gave a cheer, Arapahoe went galloping across the flat.

"Gosh all hemlock, boys!" he cried, as he rode up on Boone, "you're shore taking chances, with that rigging. About one minute more and I'd bored you, through and through. Comanches ain't popular, around hyer!"

He leaned over and shook hands, and not even by his eyes could he tell that Boone was a white. His long hair, plaited with buckskin, hung in two braids down his breast, his grim countenance was stained brown as mahogany; even his seat on the worn robe that served him for a saddle was that of an Indian —a Comanche.

"I've turned Indian," he said. "Any news from Luz?"

Arapahoe hesitated, then spoke:

"Well—yes and no," he answered. "She's still with Espejo. But he's turned back from the Arkansaw—south."

"South!" exclaimed Boone, slapping his leg in vexation. "If I'd stayed there," he cried, "instead of coming up here, I might have—but what's the use?" And he slumped down in his saddle.

"We bought Alicia back," spoke up Arapahoe eagerly. "Paid five hundred dollars in trade goods, and twenty-five ponies fer *pilon*. That was up below Fort Dodge, a month or so ago; but he wouldn't sell Luz—not fur no money. Old Satanta and the Kiowas tried to crowd Espejo into it, on account of being skeered of the soldiers. The Arapahoe I sent in there offered him five hundred ponies, but he recognized my brand on one horse. Funniest thing in the world how I overlooked that iron, but the minute he seen it, Espejo began to yell and call the Arapahoes dogs. He said they'd been sent there by his enemy, Brown, to try and buy back his wife. But the dangedest thing of all was he thought I was working fur you. I'm

sorry, Boone, but it kinder looked that way."

"What did he say?" demanded Boone; and Arapahoe rubbed his nose apologetically.

"Well, the p'int of it was that you was a danged, sneaking coward. You was afraid to come and fight him, and so you sent out these Injuns, to buy back Luz fur yore wife."

"Damn his heart!" burst out Boone. "I've rode three thousand miles just to git him in front of my guns. You say he went south from Fort Dodge?"

"Yes, and all the men he had was the Kwahari band; the rest of them threw in with Satanta. But I forgot to tell you, Boone—kinder thought you'd like to know. Luz has stood the scoundrel off and they ain't married, after all. He's jest keeping her out of spite."

"My Lord!" breathed Boone, and looked back toward the east, where the trail to the Canadian lay. "Well, give me some more cartridges and a couple of horses," he said. "I can't wait for anything—I'm going!"

He jumped Rawhide into a gallop and whipped back to the fort, and while Boone got the cartridges Arapahoe cut out two fresh ponies and turned Rawhide into the herd. Then, with hardly a word of greeting for Honey and the trappers, he went riding into the east, on the trail of Espejo—and Luz.

"Well, I'll be danged!" grumbled Arapahoe as they watched him lope off. "Not a word about his doings or how many Injuns he's killed. The minute I told him what Espejo had said, he hopped up and swore he was going. And that bird he had painted on the front of his shield—don't you know that was the *correcuervo?* He's turned Injun, I tell ye—more Injun than Espejo—and if he ever come up on him that half-breed Comanche is going to stop a bullet."

"Oh, dear," sighed Honey, "he looked so tired and beaten. But he wouldn't even wait while I heated up some coffee. He just couldn't wait, and something kind of tells me that this time he'll bring poor Luz back."

"Well, I hope you're right," shrugged Arapahoe; "but that Espejo is a snake. If he starts out to hide, all hell couldn't find him—not until he wants to be."

He heaved a great sigh and looked off across the prairie, where Boone's dust had settled out of sight.

And then for months and months he kept his vigil on the gun tower, for his partner did not return. Long trains of emigrant wagons came dragging into the Crossing with tales of desperate battles on the plains; but no one had heard of Espejo and his warriors, nor of Boone who had gone on their trail. They were lost in a vastness that could not be measured—thousands of miles of rolling prairies, deep canyons by lonely rivers, blue mountains that touched the distant sky. They were gone, and a great drama of love and anger and hate was being enacted beneath the rolling sun.

Soldiers came, and Captain Gildersleeve, whom the trappers had named "Shavetail," asked often for news of Luz; but Arapahoe and Honey both gave him short answers, for they blamed him for her loss. Had he ridden back to Haut Cœur, which he had been ordered to protect, instead of leaving it exposed to attack, many men now dead would be riding the hills and Luz would be safe at home. But Espejo had lured him off by his attack on the Mexican wagons, and his return to Fort Hancock to report to Colonel Latimer had been the signal for a general attack.

Now Haut Cœur lay in ruins, its fire-blacked walls untenanted, its broad fields the pasture for thousands of sheep, driven in by the Mexicans from the south. All the feudal retainers who had called Hautcœur *"Patron"* were dead or scattered to the winds, and only the hardy trappers who had built their fort below lived to uphold the white man's power.

But a new school of commanders had been developed in the West, men like Custer and Crook, who cut loose from their supply trains and fought as the Indians fought. In the north the fighting Cheyennes had been beaten and chased, the Apaches had been driven into Mexico; and as winter came on the Plains Indians left the trail to hide themselves

deeper in the wilderness. Lacking the leadership of Espejo, they had met with fresh disasters at the hands of the hard-riding troopers, and the fate of the Cheyennes and Mescalero Apaches had put a new fear into their hearts.

No longer were they safe to pitch their tepees along the streams, protected by the blizzards and storms; the soldiers might burst upon them in the depths of winter, driving them naked to flee through the cold. So the marauding Comanches retired early from the emigrant road, the Canadian and its tributaries were deserted; and the Mexican sheep-herders, scouting about for a winter range, found the grass in the broad bottom lands untouched. Even the buffalo had vanished, and the Mexicans were sorely tempted, for a drought had left their mountain valleys bare; but not until the soldiers came back to Haut Cœur did they dare to venture forth.

Fall had come and the dead leaves had been swept into windrows. A brooding silence hovered over the land. And then, far to the south, the sound of bugles rose and the gray-horse troop came in sight. In the lead rode Captain Gildersleeve, with his trumpeter and the guidon. The troopers in column of fours marched behind, and in the rear followed the supply train with its load of equipment, dragging along as in days of yore. It was in protest against the wagons and the long delays they caused that Boone Helms, despite the orders of the sergeant, had practically deserted from the service. He had ridden off at a gallop, and when the squadron arrived he and the trappers were halfway to the Crossing. But Boone was gone now and his defiance was forgotten, though the sergeant had reported his loss.

But now to the sound of bugles the column of twos approached, every man stiffly erect, while the file closers, ever alert, kept the line like a company on parade. Arapahoe Brown, from his lookout on the roof, grumbled mutinously as he saw them pass by; but as they swung off up the valley through The Gateway of the Sun, he shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"What the devil they coming now for?" he cackled, as he watched them. "Must think Espejo will ride through again, some fine night, like he did a year ago."

But to the camp of Mexican sheep-herders, who still lingered with their flocks, the coming of the soldiers was a godsend, and the next morning the *patron* started his sheep down through the pass, for at last the Canadian was safe. They drifted down slowly, keeping close to the Cimarron for shelter in case of a storm, and hardly had they passed when Arapahoe raised a shout and pointed far out on the plain.

"There he comes!" he whooped. "It's Boone, boys, shore enough. But there's something the matter, by the way he sets his hawse. Reckon I'll jog along out and investigate."

He saddled up his horse and rode soberly forth. for Boone's shoulders were drooping and every line of his body spoke of weariness and a great despair. He came back alone, and the red lance with its scalps had been cast away with the shield. He had failed; but Arapahoe spurred out blithely to meet him, waving his hat as he gave the long yell.

"By grab, boy!" he cried. "Shore thought you was gone this time." And reaching out his arm he took Boone into a bearlike clinch as they rode along, horse by horse. But Boone responded apathetically, shaking his head at the eager questions, and Arapahoe regarded him intently.

"You sick, Boone?" he demanded. "Ain't hurt, air ye, some place? Honey and me have shore been worried, thinking maybe you was killed, or tangled up somehow with Espejo."

"The damned devil!" burst out Boone. "I can't find a trace of him. He's gone, and Luz is gone—I'm a miserable failure. I wish to heaven, Arapahoe, I was dead."

"Aw, sho, sho!" soothed Arapahoe. "You certainly have rode the country. Cain't nobody say you haven't done yore best, but the rascal has hid out on you, again."

"Yes, again!" cursed Boone. "And I claimed to be a tracker!"

"Best trailer I ever see," spoke up

Arapahoe loyally. "Never knowed you to fail—up to now."

"That scoundrel has hid until his own people can't find him," went on Boone, gritting his teeth with rage. "He's gone, and the whole Kwahari band has gone with him. Seems like the earth has just swallowed him up."

"We'll find him," predicted Arapahoe. "I got a bunch of Delaware scouts all set to start out in the spring. We'll comb the whole country, plumb over to eastern Texas and south to tho Rio Grande. Got lots of money, boy, that we took in this summer; and every danged dollar will go for a reward to the man that brings Luz in alive."

"Well, I'm beat," sighed Boone, "and I might as well admit it. I've searched the whole country, but now I'm going to quit. We'll never see Luz again."

"Aw, yes we will, too," protested Arapahoe, half-heartedly; and, still trying to comfort him, he led Boone back to the fort, where Honey took him in and made much of him. The old trappers gathered about to hear the tale of his exploits; but he sat brooding by the fire, hardly conscious of their presence, until at last they went away. An early storm whirled in on them, covering the mountains and plains with snow, and while the soldiers at Haut Cœur roofed in the houses for winter quarters, Arapahoe made all tight at the fort.

ANOTHER summer had passed; the autumn leaves were turning brown, and the chipmunks and prairie dogs were plugging up their holes as they prepared for their long winter sleep. But as a warm wind sprung up the snow melted overnight, and on the wings of it a Mexican came running from the south, waving his arms and shouting: *"Indios!"*

"What Indians?" demanded Arapahoe, rushing anxiously out to meet him; but Boone had beaten him to the herder.

"Comanches!" cried the Mexican. "There are thousands and thousands of them! I have run for twenty miles, since my burro refused to go!"

"You're loco!" scoffed Boone, waving the Mexican away. "I just came back from those plains and——"

"But yes!" protested the Mexican. "In the bottom lands of the Canadian! With these eyes I saw them when I crept up to the bluff and looked down to make sure all was well. And from the tent of the chief I saw a white woman captive, going down to the river for water!"

"He's crazy, boys," said Boone. "He's been hearing about Luz Hautcœur until——"

"Ah—*si, si!*" exclaimed the sheepherder. "It was like her—very small. But since the Americans will not believe me, I will go on to Captain Como-se-llamo—the captain who lives at the *casa.*"

"Wait!" commanded Arapahoe, laying a hand on him as he started away. "What's the matter with you, Ramon? You been smoking *maraluana?* Where are these Indians? Are they close?"

"Only forty miles away!" shouted the Mexican, in a panic. "I had gone ahead of my sheep to see if all was well when I saw their white tepees, hundreds and hundreds, along the bank—and this woman, very small, walks out!"

"Crazy as hell!" admitted Arapahoe, nodding sagely at Boone; and the Mexican burst out cursing.

"No!" he yelled in English. "Me no crazy; *you* crazy! But thees captain, thees Como-se-llamo, he weel pay me, I know!" And he ran on wildly up the road.

"That's the Mexican," observer Arapahoe, "who's been herding sheep hyer all summer. Reckon they could've found Comanches, as close in as this? Mebbe Espejo is coming back fur more."

"Not with all those tepees," Boone responded gloomily. "It's a winter camp—it couldn't be Espejo's. But say," he cried suddenly, looking after the Mexican, "I believe I'll go up there, anyhow!"

A sudden ray of hope, almost against his will, had found its way to his heart; and galloping up the road he swung the Mexican up behind him and spurred on to the gates of Haut Cœur.

To be concluded in the next issue of THE POPULAR, *September 24th.*

To the Readers of *The Popular*

WITH the next issue of THE POPULAR the price will be fifteen cents instead of twenty-five. And, at the same time, the magazine, instead of coming out twice a month, will come out once a week.

We have been hoping to do this for a long time. The fifteen-cent price has always appealed to us. THE POPULAR started as a very small, modest, ten-cent publication. That was back in the early years of the present century when a dime bought about as much as a quarter does now. Afterward, paying the biggest prices for current fiction and making the magazine bigger to hold the good stories we had collected, it was necessary to raise the price to twenty-five cents.

We hated to do it. Many people, during the war, did things they hated to do. We held up the high standard of the magazine, however. If you have been reading the magazine for a number of years, you know that without our telling you. With the next number, THE POPULAR will be a better magazine than ever in its history.

A fiction magazine derives its personality from the personalities of those who write for it. Now let us see what authors are to be present in the next issue. There is Bertrand W. Sinclair. He has been writing for this magazine for a long time. There is H. H. Knibbs, not so long a contributor, but a writer of some of the best Western stories ever published. There is B. M. Bower, who knows the West and writes about it with the touch of the outdoor romantic. There are Dane Coolidge and Robert Welles Ritchie, who present their dramas of the West in brilliant colors. There is Francis Lynde, with his glamour of the life on a railroad, and Hemmingway—we would like to tell you his real name, but we cannot—with his close-to-the-skin, and down-to-the-minute, story of a prize fight.

Also, there is Fred MacIsaac, with the first of his great series of Hollywood stories, and last, but by no means least, W. B. M. Ferguson, with his really great football story, "The Dollar God."

This is just the beginning of a lot of great numbers. It will be out on the news stands every Thursday. Fifteen cents. A weekly, not a semimonthly.

Every Thursday ***Fifteen Cents***

The Popular Stories

The Champion Looks Ahead

By William Hemmingway

Author of "New Fists for Old," Etc.

An authority on boxers and boxing—whose real name must remain unwritten—here presents the result of an extended and intimate personal interview with Gene Tunney. The World's Champion tells what he thinks of the game and of his fellow fighters, in such a way as to throw many interesting lights on the coming bout.

WHAT most attracts you to Gene Tunney is his modesty. Not that there is anything of the shrinking violet in his make-up, but in spite of his proud perch on top of the world as the best fighting man of his day, he still wears the same old size of hat and does not think he knows it all. He is a moderate user of the capital I; can take it or let it alone, as they say, but as a rule he lets it alone unless you ask him a direct question about himself. Talking with him the other day, I happened to mention that one of the greatest business leaders in the country had stopped our game of golf to ask me: "Now, what about Gene Tunney?"

Instantly a wave of red spread over Tunney's forehead, face and neck. Up to that moment we had been talking of this and that, of the prospects of the fight game as the biggest money maker among all kinds of public entertainment, et cetera, but as Tunney heard those words he seemed as embarrassed as a shy boy suddenly called out of class to recite before a crowd. Lindbergh himself could not have been more surprised.

"What!" he exclaimed. "Do you mean to tell me that that man ever heard of me? He has? And he asked you that question? Well, that's the highest compliment I ever had."

Familiar as I have been with nearly all the champions from the immortal John L. down to this day, this was the first instance I ever saw of such modesty. This young man seems to have the ability to stand outside of himself and coolly measure himself in comparison with the rest of the fellows who fascinate the public with their fists, neither puffing up nor crying down any one in the lot, himself included, simply calculating all the chances in sight. Of course, what I wanted most to know was his feeling about the outcome of his battle this month, the first time he will ever defend the championship of the world. Yet it was not possible to walk right in and ask him, "Who'll win and why?" just like that. No, indeed. The ring has its code of etiquette as rigid as that of the court of Spain, or even of Japan. Yet he knew that I wanted to know this thing, which every reader of this page equally wants to know; so he threw light on the problem, obligingly though necessarily a little obliquely.

"The newspapers have been very kind to me," he said earnestly. "Of course, some think I'm not much of a fighter; but they all have treated me kindly. Mr. McGeehan, you may say, has been tender in his treatment. It's hard to see why he doesn't give me a rap once in a while for luck. He wrote the other day a sentence that expressed a lot. It was

this: 'Sharkey is a fighter by instinct; Tunney is a fighter by intelligence.'"

This was prime stuff. I could guess without his saying so that he was quietly depending on the unusual intelligence he has brought into the ring to keep him at the head of the column for some time to come; yet there wasn't even a suspicion of anything like boasting in his words or in his manner.

He likes Dempsey; has never forgotten the clasp of the hand the former champion gave him as he came out of the ring one night after a small victory, nor his words: "You fought a nice fight. You'll do well, and I wish you luck." Yet he could not forget that no beaten champion of the world has ever come back after defeat, even though Jim Corbett built himself up into wonderful condition, came within an eyelash of doing the impossible, and for twenty-two rounds put it all over the gigantic and clever Champion Jim Jeffries.

Jeff said to this writer after the battle: "Eighty-seven times I tried to land that left hook on Jim's chin before I got him."

"It would be pleasant," said Tunney slowly, as if he were turning over the idea in his mind, "it would be pleasant to give Jack another try for the championship. He must have been in pretty good condition to give and take all he did at Philadelphia. Still, it might be that he had never before met a boxer who could shift around, protect himself —and hit him, too. Yet, after all the talk about that battle, it would be a satisfaction to meet him again. He is a good man, and he seems to be in good condition now."

The conversation drifted every which way. Tunney agreed that the boxing game has come up in the world, and that now it deserves its place in the first rank in the show business.

"In the old days," he said, "boxing was surrounded by some pretty tough elements, which gave it a bad name; but you read the histories of the great fighters, and you'll admit that they were true men, brave men of great endurance and persistence and of fine principles. Mr. Muldoon has told me about John L. Sullivan. What a man! He must have been the greatest of them all. Honest as the sunlight. People to-day don't know about his amazing speed. At his best he was fast as a little man, and besides, he had strength you would not believe possible in a man of only one hundred and eighty pounds. When he leaped at a man and hit him, it was as if a torpedo crashed against his ribs or jaw.

"And heart! Do you know that even in the battle at New Orleans, where he lost the title, he was always making the pace, always tearing in, never took one back step? What a man! And Corbett. There was courage in its highest form—to go up with a smile against the destroyer who made good men shake just by his contempt and his killing glare. That took moral courage. Any healthy man can take a knock-out blow and come back quickly to full strength. There's no more pain in it than in having a tooth out with laughing gas. But to face the man who has knocked men cold by hundreds; to face that man and laugh at him—and mean it—and then go in and fight him, intelligently, carefully, calmly as an engineer solving a problem—there's courage in its highest form.

"Yet in spite of the high qualities of those two men and many others, the sport of boxing was under a cloud almost to this day. I have read and heard of such leaders as Charles A. Dana and Roscoe Conkling at the ringside when Sullivan met Mitchell at Madison Square Garden; yes, there were clergymen there, too, and many others of high character and high standing in the community. But they were the small minority who really knew the game.

"The people at large still had the old-fashioned picture of two ferocious brutes intent on destroying each other—though every intelligent observer knows that the struggle is a contest in which each boxer seeks to outpoint the other and so win the honors. Of course, if the winner knocks his man out he makes his victory secure; but otherwise he wins on his superior skill and speed and endurance, like a sprinter or jumper or distance runner—and without half the hardships of a football player.

"Do you know what brought up our people to the plane of the really intelligent minority? The World War. That opened their eyes. Under the selective draft, every youth fit to fight was put in training, and one of the first things he had to learn was to box; for boxing teaches the elements of bayonet work. Naturally, the boys began to put on boxing matches at their camp entertainments, and there hundreds of thousands of fathers and mothers for the first time saw boxers in action.

"They saw what a fine school it was for fair play and keeping control of the temper, and for careful, sober living, also that the movements of the best boxers are as full of skill and grace as those of the best dancers. Why, boxing is far more beautiful than dancing!

"The fathers and mothers saw, too, that no other entertainment drew the crowd like boxing. The most noted singers or other artists would face pretty good-sized crowds—but boxing matches even among lads who had never seen a glove until a short time before, packed them in so that lots of fellows had to perch on the rafters. With their minds informed by seeing the game in action, rather than by hearing prejudiced attacks on the sport, the American people began after the war to go to boxing matches as they never went before. We fellows in the game to-day came in at a fortunate time.

"There is room for improvement among some of the promoters, though most of them are fine men. Mr. Rickard has genius for bringing out men the public want to see. The Athletic Commission of this State has directed and controlled the sport so as to keep it improving. And Mr. Muldoon—where will you find any one to compare with him, not only in experience and wisdom about sports, but in knowledge of human nature? I revere that man. You remember the ancient Greeks had a word 'aristocracy,' meaning 'government by the best.' Well, in that true sense of the word, William Muldoon is an aristocrat."

Tunney would not criticize Sir Hall Caine, who startled the world recently by denouncing boxing as savage and degrading brutality after Micky Walker had knocked out the British middleweight champion, Tommy Milligan. Incidentally, it need not surprise us if Sir Hall Caine wakes up to the true merits of the game, if he shall ever happen to examine it and find out just what boxing is all about.

An equally eminent man of letters, Monsieur Maurice Maeterlinck, shocked by hearing of knock-outs and before he knew what he was talking about, declared: "Boxing is a vulgar sport, carried on by means of brutal gestures." This was a real fancy epigram, even if it was all wet. But when he became interested in that gallant Frenchman, Georges Carpentier, champion of Europe, and boxed with him a while, he changed to a most eloquent advocate of the pastime. He had, of course, superior facilities for learning to box, for he was younger than Sir Hall.

George Bernard Shaw, who might admit that he is almost as eminent a writer as either, has publicly instructed Sir Hall that he is all wrong on the facts, and writes: "The knock-out, far from being painful, is the most perfect known anæsthetic and leaves none of the unpleasant after results of chloroform." Quite true, But how does he know? He carries a more variegated and complicated hairy handicap than the illustrious Manxman, and no one who has ever seen him can imagine him prancing around the ring with gloves, tongue, chin, mane and whiskers all wagging at the same time. Still, he who boasts that he can write better plays than Shakespeare seems to admit that he knows more about boxing than Corbett.

What a treat it would be to mankind if Tex Rickard should pull off a six-round go between the smart Mr. Shaw and his fellow journalist, Bill Rocap of Philadelphia, ex-featherweight amateur champion of America! It would overflow Madison Square Garden. Bill would win in a punch—unless they allowed George B. to talk, in which case Bill wouldn't have a Chinaman's chance. But men would come from New Zealand and farther to see George B. prattling and practicing his theories in the ring.

But to return to practical consideration of what may well prove the most amazing fist duel of all time—how does Tunney feel about this next fight, about his prospects in the game, and what will he make of his life after the few feverish years which any man can expect to stay champion? As all the world knows, Tunney is a studious, decent, clean-living young fellow. For more years than one likes to remember I have preached in print that it isn't the way a man trains, but the way he lives between battles that makes or breaks him in the ring. And that is the absolute truth.

The old maxim, "The bigger they are the harder they fall," might well be changed to, "The harder they train the harder they fall," if a fighter doesn't live right all the time. John L. was a sad proof of that truth, and so were many other able men. Right-living champions have not been plentiful enough to make people familiar with the effect on ring career of a righteous and sober life; yet there have been enough of them to prove the principle. Tunney is not the first one.

Jem Mace, the English gypsy who was champion of the world for years, knocking out giants although he was only a middleweight, came to New York and boxed a wonderful exhibition when he was long past sixty years old. He was nimble as a kid, could hit like a bullet, and his dark eyes sparkled above cheeks pink as a boy's. When Mr. Kelly of the *World* staff asked him how on earth he got that way, old Jem replied, in words that ought to be placarded in all training quarters.

"It's moderation does it, moderation in all things—moderation in working, moderation in playing, moderation in eating, moderation in drinking, moderation even in fighting!"

Bob Fitzsimmons is another example. He lived the life of an honest country blacksmith. As he left the ring at Carson City with the championship which he had just won from Corbett, did he call for champagne, et cetera? Not so that you could notice it. He climbed into his old one-horse buggy, tucked the robe around his wife, clucked to the nag and remarked: "Now let's go 'ome and have Sam cook us a bloody good dinner—with plenty of h'eggs." When I overtook him he was quaffing a great beaker of—of what? Coffee! And Fitz fought some of his best battles around fifty years; some of them past that.

And there was wonderful Mike Donovan, forty-six years old and twelve years out of the ring from which he had retired undefeated middleweight champion of the world, when he came back and in a six-round go smothered the famous first Jack Dempsey—the "Nonpareil," they called him. I was at the ringside to pray that my friend Mike might not be knocked cold—and was with him in the dressing room when Pat Sheedy said: "Mike, old-timer, I've seen most of your battles, and to-night you fought the best of your life." And the Nonpareil came in with great tears rolling down his battered cheeks and begged for a return match. He knew old Mike was his master. No; it is not time that destroys fighters; it is bad living.

The Jack Dempsey of to-day will realize some time that the cakes of Hollywood are not good to fight on.

Tunney has taken such good care of himself that when he began to train for the defense of his championship, nine months after winning it, he had put on only six pounds of flesh. After the victory he made a few visits at the homes of wealthy friends down in fashionable Long Island, but promptly hastened to the woods to get the soft life out of his system. He knows you can't be a Spartan on terrapin and truffles.

The champion kept up a moderate amount of daily exercise while he was touring the country for months in vaudeville, not overdoing it with the foolish idea of keeping on edge as some have done, while at the same time avoiding late or luxurious dinners, or anything else that would rob him of early sleep. And when, last May, he saw how briskly Josef Paul Cukoschay, known to fame as Jack Sharkey, knocked out poor Jim Maloney, the pride and hope of Boston, he promptly took to the North Woods to begin a long and careful course of preparation for the battle of September.

When questioned about the possibility of finding himself short of combat practice because he has not fought any one since beating Dempsey and will go into the ring after a full year of peace, Tunney said he believed that will not hurt him.

"Under the ancient London rules," he said, "a champion had to fight twice a year if challenged, or give up his title. In those times that was no hardship. But work, play, sport—everything—has speeded up a lot since those days, especially in the last few years. Can you imagine any one offering a champion of to-day the little, old-fashioned purse of five thousand dollars? On the theory that he is entitled to a fair share of what he draws in gate money, he is entitled to and he gets from five hundred thousand dollars up. Two long periods of training and two combats for a sum of that size within one year would take too much out of any man, no matter how strong he might be and how little he might feel the nerve strain at the time. It is the aftermath which tells the tale.

"I was thoroughly fagged out for weeks after the "Battle of the Sesquicentennial," as they call it. The ten rounds Dempsey and I fought did not cause that so much as the long, tiresome, monotonous grind of training before the battle; the excitement of working before crowds of spectators every day and of reading the comments of the critics; but, above all, the nerve strain of going into that vast arena packed with more than one hundred and twenty thousand men and women, all keyed up to that pitch of nerve tension which only a championship battle can produce. I'll venture to say that, with all your experience, you can't eat dinner before going to report a championship battle."

"True," I replied. "Before the battle nothing but a sandwich; but afterward—oh, boy!"

"Then think of the two men in there, who know that every move they make—and a lot more they don't make—will be criticized by the hundreds of thousands who look on, by the millions who listen to the story on the radio and by the tens of millions who will read it in the papers! And, besides having those millions of minds focused on them, they know that their future, involving gigantic amounts of money, is at stake. A blow carelessly placed may crack your fist; a slip on a wet spot in a corner, where seconds sponging their man may have spilled a few drops of water, may turn your ankle—and away flies fame, fortune, your whole future! Oh, no; twice a year is once too often for a big fight. Once a year is enough."

"Have you trained long for this next big battle?" I inquired.

"Every day," Tunney replied. "It would be strictly true to say that I have been training for it from the moment I left the ring at Philadelphia; making sure to get enough sleep every night, taking a moderate amount of exercise every day—nothing heavy. Whenever I'm kept up late—and that's seldom—I sleep longer next morning to make up. I took a fishing trip back in May, which was really a beginning of the program that will presently wind up in the ring. Since then I have been doing regular walking and running on the road, far from cities and crowds, besides a little boxing, increasing the amount of work and the degree of speed week by week. I watch speed and timing particularly.

"We'll all work considerably harder when we settle down into the strenuous program a few weeks before the day of the game. By the way, no visitors are allowed but the newspaper men and others who come on business. Training is one thing; giving public exhibitions is altogether something else, and has nothing to do with it. As a matter of fact, if you try to mix the two, you get yourself into trouble and spoil the whole business.

"Say you are writing an article. You try a sentence or a paragraph one way, then change it to another—perhaps a dozen changes before it satisfies you. Suppose you had to compose your stuff in a big room, writing it all on a blackboard, before a crowd who would laugh in the wrong place, or misinterpret what you put down—and call out comments as you went along. What kind of an article would you produce? A boxer in

training is composing the stuff he is going to show the public on the night of the battle, and he will do it better if he is not disturbed."

Perhaps Tunney has profited by the examples of the stunts performed by others in training. Dempsey's workouts were in the presence of a crowd, whose free and easy criticisms often irritated him, so that he cut out the show one day and put it back the next, and Sharkey worked in New York City daily before hundreds of spectators.

Some wise psychologist might estimate just how much benefit Sharkey derived from the snickers of the crowd when his new chum, Leo Gates, a Mohawk Indian, ten pounds lighter than he, knocked him sitting half dazed on the floor with a straight left to the chin. Sharkey had worked fast with several other partners and was well warmed up, while Gates was just beginning. The challenger grinned as if it were a joke; but when he arose he tore after Gates without any display of humor but with fire and fury—and did not hurt him. Poor training.

Once an editor instructed me to be sure to bring back "Kid" McCoy's battle plans for his fight with Dan Creedon. Oh, yes; the astute Kid, who never disappointed editors, cooked up a fine mess of "plans," which duly appeared—in print, not in the ring. Of course, no fighter will tell his battle plans in advance. Yet it is possible to declare here just what Tunney plans to do in his next battle. He means to use his head.

"There is only one thing to do," he said. "Study the antagonist; know everything possible about him, his style, his strong points and his weaknesses—and use everything I know to help me win the contest.

"I've had a pretty hard row to hoe before winning the championship. I regard it as a distinguished title; it is worth more money than any other piece of property I may hope ever to acquire, and all my friends may depend that I shall not omit anything in my power to defend it and keep it. The man who takes it away —some day—will leave me on the floor when he takes it."

Curious thing to hear a champion calmly discuss the possibility of parting with his title; but it sounded perfectly in keeping with the style and character of this man to canvass it in this detached, impersonal way. He is not yet out of his twenties; he has the clear, sparkling eyes of youth, a rosiness and freshness of skin that argue him still a boy—and yet he goes over the situation with the poise of a middle-aged philosopher. Mr. McGeehan is right: Tunney *is* a fighter by intelligence.

"Well—er—when the day comes——" I began rather awkwardly. "I mean, you know, the day when you no longer—of course, it is bound to come to every one who holds the title—he either loses it or retires. Then what?"

"Why, then," said Tunney, "I'll be able to go far away and work on things I have planned—no; I guess you might say dreamed. But then I'll be just myself, a mere nobody in whom the public will have no interest, about whom they'll have no curiosity. Whew!" He whistled and smiled a happy smile to think of the time when he'll be free, be his own man, free to go where he likes, do what he likes, and not have to account to anybody for his actions.

"Then you feel it, do you?" I asked. "Feel the pressure of the crowd?"

"Of course I do," he answered. "It would be ungrateful to find fault with it, because there is a lot of friendliness mixed up with their curiosity; and yet, when you have it morning, noon and night, in hotels, trains, stations, streets, everywhere you may go, it does get on your nerves. Do you know the two words that tire you most in all the world? You get tired of hearing people say: 'That's him!' "

When his day of freedom comes, Tunney's nearest friends think he may take to writing. From boyhood he has been an industrious and discriminating reader —mostly of history, biography and philosophy, with an interesting novel now and then. He appreciates style as well as substance. It need not be surprising if the swift right hand that has punched its way to fame and fortune should turn to pushing the pen. Not without precedent. Dan Dawson, a noted Philadel-

phian of a generation ago who held his own against first-class men, was an author of sonnets and other poems that commanded admiration, though by vocation he was an iron and steel man. Tom Shevlin, Yale football king, was a splendid heavyweight boxer and a great lumberman. Perhaps Tunney's few years' experience in the New York Central freight office will prove useful to him in a business career. Certainly he will never be an idler.

My guess, though, would be toward the writing. Tunney seems so keen on that side. I happened to praise Bulwer Lytton's, "The Last of the Barons," with its vivid picture of the England of that day and of the struggle of the great Earl of Warwick with his faithless king. This unusual pugilist at once seemed much more interested than when we were talking of the ring. He leaned forward, all attention.

"I've read Bulwer Lytton's, 'Last Days of Pompeii,'" he said, "but not this story. What was the period? I must get it."

But, in view of his present excellent condition and his intelligent way of living, training and fighting, it may be long before he will turn to literature or to business. A trivial accident might—might—deprive him of the championship; but, barring accident, he ought to outplan, outthink and outfight any challenger now in sight.

NATIONAL DEFENSE BY STATUTE

ONE of the best-known civilian aviators in this country, in a private conversation with Chairman Butler of the Naval Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives, was urging upon the congressman the advisability of largely increased appropriations for aviation in the navy. Mr. Butler, who pointed out that the last appropriations for this purpose had been generous, did not seem particularly impressed.

"This reminds me," said the aviator, with a grin, "of what happened that time when George Washington was attending a session of the Congress during the debate on the establishment of the Federal army. A member offered a resolution limiting the army to three thousand men, whereupon Washington asked a member sitting near him why he didn't propose an amendment stipulating that no enemy should ever invade this country with more than two thousand soldiers!"

THEN AS NOW

IN almost all men worthy of the name there is, and always has been, a powerful, deep-rooted desire to lift themselves out of the great sea of anonymity, and impress the uniqueness and force of their personalities upon their fellows. Many students have held that this was not altogether true of the ancient Egyptian sculptors and artists, their works not bearing any apparent marks of identification. But this view has been seriously challenged by Edith Williams Ware of the University of Chicago, in a recent issue of the American Journal of Semitic Languages. According to Miss Ware, the Egyptian artists were just as anxious for fame as are we moderns, but were deterred from plainly signing their pieces through fear of the small master-artist class, who were jealous of their inferiors, and were in a position to dictate to them. Nevertheless, those lesser lights very naturally wanted so badly to identify their things that they frequently resorted to ingenious hidden and disguised markings. Thus, sagely remarks the paragrapher, does man seek to make of himself a god.

The Dynamite Drift

By Fitzhugh Green

Author of "Ed Grogan's Escape," "Buried Alive," Etc.

A couple of sailors, out in a launch, mistake a box of dynamite for a box of canned grub, and try to smash it open—and the fleet holds its breath!

Ed Grogan and "Little Mitt," his pal, had been on many a wild adventure together. But their narrowest escape from death came one quiet fog-bound morning, when all danger seemed utterly remote.

THE stage wasn't set for tragedy at all. Squadron One of the U. S. battle fleet lay quietly at anchor in Seattle Harbor. Massive gray hulks of the armored ships nestled almost invisibly in the morning fog, like lead ships laid away in cotton wool. Fog bells clanged recurrently down the column. Shrill whistles of launches, feeling their way through a soupy atmosphere, added to the muffled din. Near the harbor entrance there rose at intervals a long, low moan—the voice of the big electric siren that guided traffic in and out.

Just abeam of the flagship, also invisible in the murk, lay the navy "beefboat" *Cuyama*. On her deck aft, skulking behind one of her thick ventilating cowls, lurked two men in the uniform of ordinary seamen, U. S. navy. It was easy to tell from their sharp gestures and low but raspy tones that both were in a state of acute vexation, and about to commit some overt act of violence or despair.

One of the men was a huge and hulking fellow. He wore his white work hat tilted far back on his stiff, black hair. He stood with legs braced wide and elbows out, as if ready to hit and hit hard when the moment of action came. The other man was short and slight. His pale, freckled face contrasted pathetically

with the thick, florid jaws of his bull-necked companion.

The big man, Ed Grogan, suddenly wiped his mouth with the back of his hairy hand, and whispered hoarsely:

"All right, Mitt, stay here and be damned to you! I'm going back for breakfast."

Mitten, the little fellow, glanced nervously over his shoulder.

"But, Ed," he half whimpered, "Callahan said he'd send the boat back for us. And 'Cookie' will save chow. I know he will."

"Shucks! I'm hungry now," growled the other.

Which was very true of both. For since "turn-to" at four thirty a. m., that morning, the hour when their working party had left the U. S. S. *Texas,* Grogan and Mitten had been aboard the *Cuyama,* hoisting stores out of her hold and rustling them into the duty launch alongside. It was heavy labor in raw, cold air.

"Let's take that whaleboat."

Grogan pointed to the quarter boom, where a small craft lay moored. She held a load of cases like those the two had been handling.

"We might——" faltered Mitten. "Kelly, the engineer, smashed a finger, cranking her a few minutes ago. He and the coxswain are grubbing here now."

"All right, matey, we'll go."

To head off further protests, Grogan seized his friend's arm in a grip that made the little fellow wince. Three minutes later the motor whaleboat's two-cylinder engine popped into action, her painter slipped from the pendant ring, and she disappeared into the fog toward the *Texas,* with Mitten at the throttle while Ed Grogan steered.

It wasn't a safe move, by any means. Both knew that Boatswain O'Callahan, king of the *Texas* main deck, would likely have a tantrum when they arrived with another man's boat. But it meant a hot breakfast to two starving men. And both secretly hoped that turning up with a good load of cases aboard the whaleboat would appease the boatswain's anger.

Ed Grogan and little Mitten thought these cases contained canned beans, such as all the other cases that morning had contained.

It was a matter of terrible fact that the cases did not contain beans, but *dynamite* —a confidential shipment of high explosives for experimental work the *Texas* was due soon to carry out with her torpedoes.

Ed Grogan sat comfortably astride one of the cases of "beans" and lit his pipe. Not taking the trouble to extinguish the match, he tossed it forward among the cargo.

At that instant the motor sputtered and died.

"Damn!" snapped little Mitten.

"Rats!" growled Grogan.

The fog was so thick that neither battleship nor launch, land nor sky, were visible. The whaleboat, with its cargo of dynamite and two hungry mariners, drifted helplessly in a small, circular pond of black water, entirely walled in by impenetrable fog. Yet the clattering of bells and shrieking of whistles went on incessantly about them.

"What say we break open one of these boxes of beans and have a mug-up right here and now?" suggested Mitten.

"You said sumpin', sailor."

Simultaneously, both men began to search the boat for wrench or hammer with which to smash one of the wooden cases. Little did either suspect how close Doom was.

But that is the way with life.

At this moment there entered the captain's cabin of the *Cuyama* the gunnery officer of the *Texas,* Commander Weeks, a brilliant young explosive expert who had been chosen for the torpedo test work at hand. He was tall, and the stripes on his sleeves were very shiny. His face shone with brisk intelligence.

"Good morning, captain. I've come for the shipment of ammonite."

Captain Burnsides, cheerily mountainous, waved his visitor to a seat.

"Happiest moment of my life!" he chuckled ponderously. "I tell you, Weeks, I haven't had a good night's rest since we left Frisco. Those twenty cases of dynamite——"

"Ammonite, sir," corrected Weeks briskly.

"Well, ammonite, if you will. Those twenty cases of it up there on deck have made me nervous as a cat. I had two marine sentries on 'em all the way up. I was so danged afraid some numskull would drop his squilgee on one, or stumble over it in the dark and blow us all to eternity, that I know I've lost twenty pounds!"

The commander laughed.

"Of course, it isn't quite that sensitive."

"I'd like to know why not. Mare Island sent word that it was the most dangerous shipment of high explosives that had ever been taken out there!"

"Was it marked?"

"That's just the trouble. They didn't want the news of the test to get out. Each case has a red band painted around it to show it is dangerous. But the cases themselves are unfortunately just the size and shape of those in which our canned stores are carried."

Weeks rubbed his chin reflectively.

"Awfully glad you told me, captain. Now I understand why the correspondence from Washington directed that the stuff be kept under guard at all times."

"Right. And I don't want you to make any mistake about its being sensitive. Billings at the ammunition depot had four men carry each case from the magazine to the lighter, though its weight was under forty pounds. He didn't dare risk having one dropped. I haven't allowed a man to smoke on deck since the moment it came over the side."

Weeks rose and took his cap from the table. His hand shook slightly as he did so. He turned to the captain.

"Where is it now, sir?" he asked.

"Ready for you, thank Heaven. Your whaleboat was here at seven. We loaded it down the gangway while the water was good and flat. She is probably on her way over now."

"But the fog, sir?"

Captain Burnsides puffed for a moment from the exertion of hoisting himself out of his chair. Then he laid a plump hand on the young officer's shoulder.

"Don't worry about that, my boy. I'm going to have one of our best coxswains lead the way. Besides, you know the *Texas* is only a few hundred yards astern of us."

As Weeks laid his hand on the door to leave, it suddenly swung in, nearly knocking him over. Without waiting to be announced, the *Cuyama's* marine officer burst in.

"The whaleboat's gone, captain!" he cried.

Captain Burnsides' jaw dropped.

"Gone where?"

"Adrift, sir, as far as we know."

Slowly the captain's ruddy face flushed a deeper red than either sunburn or overfeeding could paint it.

"Adrift!" he roared. "But you've got a guard over it!"

"Yes, sir, we have. Had one every minute of the time." The marine no longer stood at military attention. His shoulders slumped, and he clasped his hands in misery.

"Then how could it have gone adrift?" demanded the captain.

"The guard said he was just being relieved for breakfast, sir. For two or three minutes he was engaged in turning over his orders to the other man. And then——"

"Wreugh-h-h!" growled the furious skipper through his nose, and rushed out the door.

The marine officer gave the commander a despairing look.

"Is it as serious as he makes it out to be?" he asked.

Weeks shrugged, and then answered gravely:

"Afraid it is, old man. If that boat drifts down among the fleet, almost anything is likely to happen. It has nearly a ton of the highest explosive ever devised aboard it. A hatful would crack a sixteen-inch gun, if used right. A bucketful would destroy this ship. You see, we planned to take one of the old cruisers out, and explode torpedoes and depth charges containing this stuff several hundred yards away from her, to see if it would sink her."

"But the boatload will drift out of the harbor, won't it?"

"It might. But Heaven help the poor wretch of a fisherman who tries to open one of those cases."

The other dropped into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

It was a blessing that neither the irate captain nor the anguished marine lieutenant could see the whaleboat and her deadly cargo at that moment. Ed Grogan held one of the cases braced against a thwart. Little Mitten, his thin face screwed up into a knot, held a screw driver in one hand and the heavy, steel engine crank in the other. The former he pressed up against the top of the case. The latter he had swung up over his shoulder, preparatory to driving a blow home that would rip the cover off.

"Aw, bust it in," commented Grogan. "What's the sense of all this refinement."

Mitten paused. His lips were blue with cold, and he shivered slightly in the penetrating wind that had begun to pick up.

"Because if we bust it in, Ed, we can't put it back on. They won't notice it if we only take out a couple of cans."

Again he balanced the heavy crank backward. Squinting an eye for aim, he made one or two preparatory movements.

"Shake it up, Mitt," said Grogan, lit tle realizing he was demanding a cataclysm.

Mitten's arm descended. An involuntary grunt escaped him as he swung. He wasn't strong. The crank was heavy. He became slightly unbalanced as it curved swiftly downward toward the case. By a hair it missed the head of the screw driver. His forearm shot out toward Grogan. The big man, a fighter in his time, swerved back quicker than the eye could follow. The crank left Mitten's hand, described a neat curve above the mist-infested waters, and landed with a splash almost out of sight.

Little Mitt had his alibi ready, even before the splash.

"Gee, Ed, I had some oil on my hands. Really I did."

Grogan glowered over his shipmate.

"*Stew*-pid," he gritted. Little Mitt cringed.

For a long minute, the disconsolate pair sat. Mitten licked his lips, and three times appeared about to speak. But Grogan was the first to talk.

"What you did means no breakfast and no engine," he said slowly and with murderous accent. "We'll drift right out into the Sound now. It's ebb tide. You saw the way the *Cuyama* was lying, didn't you?"

"Yes," admitted Mitten meekly.

Slowly Grogan gathered himself into a crouch and then stood up. His movements were as deliberate as those of a sloth. He was never a rapid mover. Now he was terrible in his slowness. Little Mitten watched him, fascinated.

The big man picked his way forward over the cases. In the bow of the whaleboat was an upright post, a four-by-four timber that passed through the deck and was mortised into the keelson. He stood above this for a moment, studying it.

"What yuh going to do?" queried Mitten.

Grogan answered with action. He turned and stooped to the piled cases behind him. He chose one near his feet. He lifted it as a child might lift a toy. In his thick arms the forty-pound package of high explosive was feather light.

"What yuh going to do?" said Mitten again plaintively.

Grogan rolled the case from his arms to his hands. He raised it high above his head.

"Oh, no!" cried Mitten. "You'll bust it to smithereens!"

But there was no stopping the big man. He was going to have his beans, at any cost. He might lose a few cans overboard by smashing the case against the painter post, but at least he'd have food. And every ounce of his two hundred and ten pounds, every inch of his six feet two, was crying out for nourishment.

Back on the *Cuyama* at this frightful moment there was being enacted a scene of noisy turmoil. Officially, there is never supposed to be turmoil aboard a vessel in the United States navy. With such mathematical smoothness is every emergency and crisis planned and drilled for every month in the year, that, were the sea to open up and engulf the fleet itself, surely the personnel would be at their stations with every nerve and muscle strained.

Around Captain Burnsides on the quarter-deck was collected a little group of

seamen, orderlies and officers. Every moment or so there broke from his group an orderly at a run.

"Has that signal gone to the flagship?" demanded the skipper loudly.

"Yes, sir."

"Motor boats under way toward the harbor entrance?"

"Yes, sir."

As always in times of stress, he noisily growled through his nose: *"Wreugh-h!"* He spied the navigator striding aft from the direction of the bridge. "Mr. Dillon, are you sure the tide has just begun to ebb?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Yes, sir," echoed a nervous young watch officer, who thought he had been addressed. The captain glowered at him.

The navigator went on hastily:

"I checked it up from the tables, sir." He glanced at his wrist watch. "If the whaleboat slipped her moorings——"

"She couldn't have slipped her moorings!" broke in the captain angrily.

"Well, sir, I mean if she left us about seven o'clock, she should be near the entrance of the harbor by this time."

"Right in the path of incoming traffic! Two passenger ships due from Vancouver at nine. A ton of high explosives!" Captain Burnsides' face grew purple.

An orderly shouldered his way through the awed group, with a dispatch sheet fluttering from his fingers. Captain Burnsides seized the bit of paper, and read it vociferously:

"FROM SQUADRON COMMANDER:

"Consider situation critical. Boatload of high explosives menaces all shipping. Have notified shore wireless. All battleships this force will supply boats. Organize thorough search immediately."

As the skipper finished, his listeners became conscious that the din of shrill whistles from navy power boats about the *Cuyama* had grown almost deafening. She was surrounded by the squadron's contributions to the crisis.

"Tie 'em up astern, sir?" inquired the officer of the watch.

"No!" bellowed Captain Burnsides. "Send them down toward the Sound. Don't lose an instant. Hundreds of lives hang on the chance of our finding that whaleboat!"

The group about him melted away, as if glad for a chance to act. The suspense was already beginning to tell on every nerve. The seaman who went forward to strike the fog bell paused and listened for a moment before he swung the clapper. The surgeon, bandaging a mashed finger in the sick bay, cocked an ear toward the porthole while he worked. The skipper, even in the midst of his vociferous orders, bent his head and listened.

All were awaiting the frightful blast which would mean that the missing whaleboat and its cargo of deadly explosives had struck, with ghastly effect, the prow of some innocent vessel feeling her way toward port.

But their concern was as nothing compared to what their feelings would have been, had they seen powerful Ed Grogan balancing there in the bow of the whaleboat, with a forty-pound case of ammonite poised above his head, about to hurl it downward upon the thick post before him.

Curiously enough, Ed Grogan was listening, too.

"That a ship, Mitt?" he asked, nodding ahead.

"Sounds like it, Ed."

Grogan lowered the case into his arms.

Through the dank fog came the regular beat of a steamer's propeller. Gradually, the sound died away in the distance. Grogan waited, still standing braced in the bows. Little Mitten fidgeted aft. He lit a cigarette, and tossed the hot match among the cases of explosives. The match smoked and expired, not a quarter of an inch from the raw ammonite. Finally his shredded nerves could stand the suspense no longer.

"Aw, smash it, Ed!" he entreated. "Go on and do it."

Grogan glanced out over the water. By this time there should have been a stern wash from the ship that just passed. It would upset his equilibrium when it came. That's why he had waited. But in the fog-restricted circle of his vision he saw only flat water.

Once more he raised the box of explosives. Nervous little Mitten braced him-

self for the destruction of what he thought was one good case of navy pork and beans. It was a sweet blessing that he had no inkling of the truth.

There was a gleam of lust in Grogan's eye as the case came down. Indeed, he was so famished that, at the sight of a beefsteak, he would surely have growled like a savage. Under his blue overshirt, the cords of his powerful muscles stood out in thick ridges. Every fiber in his shoulders, back and trunk went to the down swing that would burst the box he held.

But he did not reckon on the rapidity with which the passing steamer's wake would slide in, when it finally arrived. Only Mitten saw the neat, black waves rolling under the fog wall.

Before Mitten could cry out, the case in Grogan's hands was halfway toward its goal, the painter post. Then the waves struck. The whaleboat gave a violent lurch. With an oath Grogan let go the case in mid-air, and clutched for the nearest rail. He fell sprawling backward into the boat.

Missing the stem by a hair, the case splashed heavily into the sea.

"Dropped something, Ed," observed Mitten. A strange relief warmed the little fellow's flesh. Could some tiny voice have whispered the terrible actuality of their narrow escape?

Grogan sat up.

"How's that?" he asked.

Mitten chuckled.

"I said you——" Suddenly, he perceived the black scowl that dented his friend's forehead. "I said you might have hurt yourself, Ed," he finished lamely.

With almost a snarl, Grogan rose to his knees. He scrambled to his feet.

"I'll have some beans!" he announced vengefully, and seized hold of the nearest case.

At the *Cuyama* the fog was at this moment beginning to lift. Nearly half the squadron of battleships was visible. The group about Captain Burnsides, who was by now bordering on apoplexy, moved with him to the rail. Hope flickered in the drawn faces beside him. If the weather cleared, the whaleboat could be spotted by glass from the bridge in a few minutes. It would then be a question of but a few minutes more to dispatch a fast launch to her and clear the harbor of its fearful menace.

Then the air was shaken by a startling explosion!

"Too late!" gasped the skipper. His flushed face paled several shades. The disaster meant court-martial.

The navigator, palpably unnerved, stepped forward and said:

"But it wasn't far, sir. That explosion was right at hand."

A murmur of assent greeted this observation.

"Can't tell distance in a fog," snapped Captain Burnsides.

To the profound astonishment of all, there came another explosion. If anything, this was louder than the first. It was incredible. Surely, the boatload of high explosive, once ignited or detonated, would have gone up in one frightful blast. That it should discharge its power in two successive stages was quite outside the habits of any form of dynamite.

"Orderly!" burst the skipper. "Send the signal officer here."

"Aye, aye, sir." The man darted off.

Speechlessly, the group glanced about. Each officer and man wore a silly expression of wonderment. There wasn't anything to say. Indeed, the skipper's act of sending for the signal officer seemed, in such a crisis, to smack almost of genius.

Came a third explosion!

"Ah-h-h!" gasped the group together.

There rose from the navigator a burst of uncontrollable raucous laughter.

"We're all crazy, sir!" he cried.

"What!" demanded Captain Burnsides, nearly as loudly as the explosion.

"It's the big flagship coming, sir. Those explosions are only our saluting. We're hypnotized by this other business."

"Wreugh-h-h!" snorted the captain, and walked away, while the saluting continued through seventeen crashing blasts from the saluting cannon abeam.

By the time the noisy ceremony had ceased, the fog had completely lifted. A score of telescopes and binoculars were immediately leveled on the outer reaches of Seattle Harbor. The missing whale-

boat was not in sight. Clear down into Puget Sound the air was clear, but it did not disclose the whereabouts of the drifting dynamite.

The reason for this was logical enough. The whaleboat was, at that moment, just around a little point of land near the southern promontory of the harbor, which hid her from the fleet of searching launches dashing frantically to and fro.

Just as Grogan had declared with dangerous vehemence that he was going to have some beans at any cost, and had seized up the nearest case to smash it, the whaleboat ran aground on a rocky shore. Also, the fog showed signs of lifting.

"Hey, Ed!" yelled Mitten, from the cockpit. "Lookit them rocks. They'll do fine to bust it open with."

Little waves rolling in upon the beach jerked the boat unsteadily. Grogan glanced toward the beach where some granite splinters suggested real tools.

"Huh," he agreed. "Guess you're right, Mitt. Fetch me one."

Little Mitten hopped out into the water, soaking his feet and adding to his chill. But he pulled the boat up farther aground, and in a moment was climbing aboard with a long, sharp sliver of flinty stone. He also brought a round boulder to use for a hammer.

The pair were just getting set for a final attack upon the case of dynamite, when there came to their ears the distant rumble of a cannon.

"Huh?" observed Grogan, cocking his head.

Little Mitten grinned crookedly.

"They think we're drowned, Ed. And they're firing to bring our bodies to the surface. Ever hear about that being done?"

Grogan didn't answer. He thought he had made out the lean body of a ship's launch, just over the point. That might mean a search. Also the launch might have hot "java" aboard.

"Say, Mitt, let's have a look for a minute."

They hopped ashore and scrambled up the small rocky bluff above them. They made out the flagship, firing alternate guns from her saluting battery. But they did not notice the fast destroyer coming in from down the Sound behind their backs.

The destroyer's wash created real waves, several feet high. She passed in deep water not two hundred yards from where the seamen stood. When the waves reached the beach a few minutes later, they lifted the unmanned whaleboat high above sea level, and slammed her back again and again upon the pointed rocks.

The outcome was inevitable. With a thundering roar the whaleboat's cargo blew up. So terrible was the explosion that it hurled both Mitten and Grogan to the ground. A shower of rock and wooden splinters fell about them.

"Ow!" cried Grogan, when a stone nearly the size of his head crashed upon one ankle.

Mitten struggled to his feet, white and panic-stricken. Grogan gave vent to a loud groan as he essayed to rise, and fell back. His left ankle hung limp when he raised that leg.

A launch hove into sight around the point. Then another and another. Mitten ran to the edge of the bluff. He choked back a cry at what he saw. The whaleboat had disappeared. A gaping, water-filled crater marred the beach where the craft had lain.

Men from the launches were wading ashore. Mitten ran down to meet them. Fear was still on them. He stuttered when he tried to talk. He led the way to his crippled friend.

"What is it, Mitt?" asked Grogan.

"Them beans, Ed. They blowed up!"

"Huh! Just what I told Cookie last week they'd do some day."

"But Ed, they wasn't beans. *They was dynamite!*"

Grogan's eyes widened incredulously for a moment, then closed tight. His lips moved in prayer.

By Boyden Sparkes

Finders, Weepers

By the author of "The Obituary Lottery," Etc.

A small-town business man comes East for a long-anticipated vacation, and tries to step the pace of some highflyers in a resort hotel.

IT was the first vacation Herman Coulter had taken in thirty-five years, barring a few week-end trips to Benton Harbor, Michigan, and one New York trip which he excused to himself on the ground that it was really a business trip because of the trade convention being held there that same week. But this was a real vacation in a certain seaside city in the East that is a synonym for the extravagant pleasures of the rich.

For two days Mr. Coulter had sat about the magnificent lobby of the Royal Trianon, glaring at passing bell boys for fear they might not realize he was a registered guest. He had smoked more cigars than were good for him; he had read newspapers until his eyes were tired; he had tried swimming in the surf, only to discover that salt water irritated the sensitive membranes of his nasal passages; and at last he was prepared to confess frankly to any one who might inquire that he was bored with leisure. Mr. Coulter, in his years of industry, had forgotten how to play. Consequently, when a well-dressed man, who had settled into the comfortable chair next to him, requested a match, Herman Coulter hastened to extend his newfangled cigar lighter.

"It's a warm day," suggested the stranger.

"Gosh! You said it!" agreed Mr. Coulter fervently, as he noted details of the other man's costume—the smart hat, a suit of some rough homespun material that Coulter figured must have cost real money, a silken cravat against fine linen, low shoes that seemed to belong to the

atmosphere that filled the corridors of the Royal Trianon.

"I don't take many vacations," volunteered the stranger, "but when I do I surely hate to waste my time. Some time, when I really can afford it, I'm going to hire a sailing yacht and take a long cruise. This sort of thing isn't enough of a change."

By that time Mr. Coulter's survey of his companion's costume had taken account of an emblem of a fraternal order that was set inconspicuously into the lapel of his coat. The emblem's counterpart was displayed in the lapel of the hardware dealer's coat. It was a close tie. Silently, Coulter extended his hand toward the other man, and asked a question. After a significant handclasp, the other man responded to the question.

Coulter and the other man—he introduced himself with an engraved card that bore in script the name William Boyce—had dinner together that night and then went to a cabaret.

The next morning they met by appointment and went for a walk along the beach. It was when they returned to the lobby of the Royal Trianon, and approached the chairs where they had sat the day before, that Coulter had his stroke of luck. Another man, a pompous figure, had risen at their approach and hurried toward the elevators. Coulter, sinking into the deep leather chair which this man had abandoned, discovered that he was sitting on some bulky object. He sent an exploring hand under him and brought forth a thick wallet.

"Where did you get that?" sharply demanded Boyce.

"Found it right here in this chair," explained Coulter. "I better turn it in to the manager, I guess."

"Don't be a sucker," advised Boyce harshly. "See what you've found first. Maybe the owner's name is inside. Time enough to deal with the manager after you know what you are surrendering to him. Besides, you ought to protect yourself."

Coulter was fairly aching with desire to look in that seal-leather wallet, anyway, but he had been in doubt as to the propriety of such an action. He had never found a pocketbook before, at least not in another man's presence. He opened it by withdrawing a leather strap from a platinum buckle. Then he gasped.

A thick bundle of crisp, yellow bills was tucked in the first compartment of the leather case. Twenties, two fifties and three one-hundred-dollar bills.

For a man such as Coulter who made it a rule never to carry more than fifty dollars in cash on his person at one time, the bundle of money seemed like riches. Coulter was far from being a poor man. The credit-rating agencies for some years have had his concern listed as good for sixty thousand dollars. He owned his home, a couple of second mortgages and other securities that entitled him to consideration in his town when prosperous citizens were under discussion. Nevertheless, eight hundred and twenty dollars in a wallet—and a count showed there was that much money in sight—seemed to him to be a certain indication that he had found something belonging to a very rich man.

"What's in that other compartment?" asked Boyce, whose manner indicated he was not greatly impressed by eight hundred and twenty dollars.

"Some kind of a bond," hazarded Coulter, after peeking.

"But isn't there a name somewhere?"

Coulter lifted a flap and saw in gold letters, imprinted on the leather, the name of Durant Livermore King.

"My stars!" exclaimed Boyce. "You have found something. Durant Livermore King, the big Wall Street manipulator. He can play the stock market as if it was a pipe organ. He can make it sing and dance. My stars! You are in luck."

Coulter rose uncertainly to his feet.

"I suppose I'd better turn it over to the manager now," he said.

"Say, brother," scoffed Boyce, "I'm a comparatively poor man. That is, I'm not a millionaire. But I'll write my name on a blank check for you if you'll let me return that wallet to Durant Livermore King."

"Why?"

"Why? Man alive, he can make a for-

tune for you as easy as look at you. It would be worth money just to meet him and get acquainted. I'll bet you anything you want the people at this hotel don't know he's stopping here. That'll give you an idea of how he's hounded by people trying to get tips on the market. Go on, return that wallet yourself and meet a really big man. Come on, I'll go with you."

Together they approached the desk. Boyce made the inquiries.

"Is there a Mr. King staying here?"

The information clerk surveyed him carefully a moment. Then he said:

"Yes, but he left word that he was not to be disturbed."

"That's all right. He'll be glad enough to be disturbed this time. What's his room number?"

"Six two eight and six two nine."

A moment later Coulter heard Boyce bully Mr. King, heard him refuse point-blank to discuss the purpose of their visit over the telephone and then say: "All right, we'll be right up."

Mr. King was recognized by Coulter immediately as the pompous man he had seen arising from the chair in the lobby.

"Come in, gentlemen," said the impressive-appearing man. It was a command and not an invitation.

Boyce then took charge of the conversation.

"Have you lost anything, Mr. King?" he asked.

"Not a thing," said King coldly, and then as an afterthought plunged his hand into his breast pocket. The word he spoke then is sometimes uttered as a curse; again it is a prayer. That was the way he used it. Weakly he sank into a chair. "My wallet!" he gasped.

Then Herman Coulter produced the bulky leather article with its precious contents, and King rudely seized it. Then he plucked out the bills and dropped them carelessly to the floor as he rooted in the back among other compartments. Finding what he sought, he suddenly turned toward a bureau, hauled forth a bottle of whisky and poured himself half a tumbler of the fluid. It was rich, red liquor, as fragrant as the stuff Coulter's grandmother used to burn on puddings. But King did not drink; dramatically he lowered the glass as it touched his lips, and then placed it on a table.

"Too much depending on cool nerves. Can't have it." Suddenly then he seized Coulter's hands and began to thank him. "An honest man," he said, "is the noblest work of Nature. If I had lost that purse with the papers it contains, I'd have been close to ruin. You gentlemen have placed me under obligations eternally. Yes, sir, eternally."

From that moment Herman Coulter really began to enjoy his vacation. Durant Livermore King proved to be one of those rare individuals of whom it is said that they are perfect hosts. When a bell boy brought ice, it was King who flipped him a half dollar and a kindly word. When a bottle was opened, it was King who invariably opened a window and with solemn gesture tossed the cork away—an action that never ceased to be comical for Herman Coulter during the forty-eight hours of association, in which their acquaintanceship developed to a stage where they called each other by their first names. King knew how to order a meal, too, and would allow no one to reach for the check but him.

"Money?" he snorted, with contempt. "It's the easiest thing in this world to get. Friendship, now, there is something hard to find. A man you can trust, Herman, old fellow, is worth——"

Herman felt that he would like an occasion to arise that would permit him to demonstrate the truth of this philosophy of the Wall Street operator. It was on the second day of the friendship that he was permitted to overhear Durant Livermore King talking earnestly into one of the telephones in King's suite.

King apologized for neglecting Herman.

"A long-distance line to New York, old man. Excuse me a few minutes. Have to keep this wire open until the market closes. There's a pool working in D. B. & L. I'm handling it. I can rely on your discretion to say nothing."

"I wish you'd let me in on one of these deals," Herman suggested in a timid voice, when King turned away from the telephone. Herman had spent hours try-

ing to devise a graceful way of making that suggestion. Boyce had urged him to take the step.

"I'd certainly put it up to him if he was half as strong for me as he is for you," Boyce had said. "Why, he was telling me last night that you were the salt of the earth. That's just what he said. 'Boyce,' he said, 'Herman's the salt of the earth.'"

Herman felt a tickling sensation behind his eyes. He felt as men do in a theater when bugles play and the flag and womanhood and little children are defended by the hero. Herman wanted to be heroic, and also he wanted to be rich enough to flip half dollars at bell boys. Only Herman decided that when he was rich the bell hops would have to say "thank you" for quarter tips. He determined never to be rash with his money.

He was suffering from a pang of anxiety now, though, because Durant Livermore King's lips had tightened when he heard Herman express a wish to get in on a deal.

"I'll tell you, Herman, on any other proposition but this one. But I'm under strict obligations this time. Still and all—how much had you thought of playing with just now?"

Herman had in mind a sum he had carefully worked out. It was ten thousand dollars. He could raise that without touching his business. He started to say ten thousand, when King resumed speaking.

"I don't see how I could let you in for more than twenty-five thousand dollars, and I don't suppose you'd get much kick out of such a small bit."

For a moment Herman suffered the agony of embarrassment that comes to a man who enters an exclusive club in search of a public telephone, under the impression that it is a hotel. He determined not to let Durant Livermore King know he was such a small-town person.

"All right," he said, in a bold tone, "count me in for twenty-five thousand. Take me a couple of days to get it here. That won't be too long?"

"Three days won't matter. But no longer than that, Herman," cautioned King. "And I suppose I ought to let your friend Boyce in for a bit, too, though I'll have to cut down my own share. But not a word to any one. Not a word! The other crowd would pay highly for information about this pool."

The day Coulter heard his twenty-five thousand dollars was awaiting him at the bank, his acquaintance Boyce was on hand early. Boyce said he, too, was going into the pool.

"But I could only raise twenty-two thousand," said Boyce sadly.

Then the telephone rang in Coulter's room.

"If you are not alone," said a voice, "be careful how you reply to me, Mr. Coulter. I want to see you, preferably in the office of the manager of this hotel. The manager will indorse me if you ask him. Is that agreeable to you?"

"All right," agreed Coulter, completely puzzled. "I'll be right down." Then he told Boyce to wait for him in the lobby. At the manager's office he was taken by that official into an inner room, where he was greeted by a slender man, dressed as men do when they have other things than clothes to be concerned about.

"You have wired your home-town bank for a large sum of money?" asked this stranger.

"I don't see what business that is of yours," retorted Coulter angrily.

"Well, I'll explain," said the stranger. "My name is Fergus, H. B. Fergus, and I am a post-office inspector. Here are my credentials." With that he flipped open a small, leather case that contained a card signed by the postmaster general of the United States.

"Go on, please," suggested Herman Coulter, and waited with a consciousness of impending bad news. He had the feeling of one who is being shaken into wakefulness from a pleasant dream.

"I want to tell you something about this gang you have been associating with for the last few days," said the inspector. "They're a pack of swindlers. Confidence men. Now suppose you tell me all about it so's we can plan a way to get the evidence to convict them."

A memory of the injunctions laid upon him by King recurred to Coulter. He had been warned that the other side would

make efforts to find out details of the impending raid on the stock market. Besides, Coulter was far from being ready to accept the shabby little man before him as a responsible officer of the government. He began to stroke his chin nervously, as he hunted for words that would give him time to make up his mind. Above all things, Coulter hated to be taken for a sucker.

The door of the manager's office opened perhaps a few inches as Coulter began to speak.

"That there card isn't enough to prove to me that you are a postal inspector," he said finally, with a note of challenge in his voice.

Some one rapped on the partially opened door, and William Boyce's carefully trimmed head was inserted.

"I say old fellow," he broke in, "I'll wait upstairs in D. L.'s suite. Don't forget our luncheon engagement."

"All right," Coulter mumbled; and the door closed.

"I know that fellow," boasted Fergus. "He's the poke dropper for the gang."

Coulter stared with a hostile gaze at his interrogator.

"Say," he demanded, feeling proud of his own shrewdness, "if you are a postal inspector, maybe you'll be kind enough to explain to me what the government cares about swindlers? This might be a case for a policeman, but what's it got to do with the mails? Answer me that, will you?"

"Sure." Fergus grinned sourly. "They have been using the mails to defraud."

"Not with me," cheerfully retorted Coulter. His spirits were beginning to rise; again he was sensing some of the elation that had been his earlier in the day. King's coup must be a tremendous thing if the opponents could try such methods to get information about his plans.

"Take a little thought about this matter," advised the inspector.

"Take off your false whiskers," said Coulter smartly. "I know you. You're a private detective, but if you aren't careful you are going to get into serious trouble."

The hotel manager, who had been silently biting the brush of stiff whiskers on his upper lip, put in a word then.

"Of course, Mr. Coulter, I can't take sides in this matter, but if you wish to ascertain the identity of this inspector, I'm sure the postmaster is in a position to satisfy you."

"It's all right with me," agreed the inspector.

"Perhaps you'd prefer to call the postmaster yourself." The hotel manager extended the telephone and Coulter accepted it.

"I'll look up the number," Coulter said sneeringly.

"Suit yourself." The inspector's tone was bland. The blandness was irritating to Coulter. He feared to confront King if that great speculator should, in some uncanny fashion, learn of this faint disloyalty from one whom King had called a friend. He gave the number to the operator. He might as well be sure, and, besides, on second thought, he decided he could amuse King by telling how he had pretended to be taken in by these Wall Street crooks.

After some delay a voice responded to Coulter's impatient: "Hello, hello, hello!"

"This is the postmaster speaking. What is it?"

Coulter explained that he wished to learn if there was a post-office inspector named Fergus in the city. The voice countered with a demand as to the identity of the person wishing to get the information. What he said was: "Who wants to know?"

"I do—Herman Coulter of the Royal Trianon Hotel. A man here tells me he is a post-office inspector. I want to know if he is."

The voice asked to be permitted to speak to the inspector, and silently Herman Coulter shoved the telephone toward the shabby one.

"This is Inspector Fergus."

Coulter would have given much to have heard the complete conversation, but he could hear only the voice of the man standing beside him, and at intervals a burring, metallic distortion of sound from the receiver.

"I told him he was in the hands of a

gang of confidence men," continued Fergus; "but he thinks I'm a wrong guy. There isn't any too much time. If this crowd gets frightened they'll clear out in a hurry."

Coulter was controlled by a desire to make up his mind for himself, but he still felt a strong sympathy for his friends upstairs. It simply did not seem possible that King was an unauthentic person, and as for Boyce, obviously he was just a darned good scout. Coulter was wistfully looking forward to the time when he could stalk into the Packersville Midday Club for luncheon with a distinguished man of affairs at his side. The man of affairs, of course, was Boyce, or it might even be King himself.

"Here. You talk to him." Fergus had shoved the telephone into his hands.

"This is the postmaster speaking, Mr. Coulter." Herman drooped at the tone. "I want to assure you that Inspector Fergus is not misrepresenting himself or his authority. He is a post-office inspector, and his principal task is the rounding up of swindlers. You can trust him."

"All right," Herman replied feebly. "I'll do whatever he says. Sorry I had to bother you." As he slapped the receiver back on the hook, some of the stiffening seemed to slip out of his knee joint, so that he collapsed into one of the leather chairs of the manager's office. "I still don't see what this has got to do with the mails."

"It's this way," explained the inspector, as if to a child: "this crowd encouraged you to have your home-town banker transfer money to a local bank. They had to use the mails for that purpose. That is, their fraudulent actions caused another man to use the mails to defraud you. It's technical; it's thin; but we've got convictions before and we can again. Now this is what I want you to do." Then Inspector Fergus outlined a course of conduct for Coulter. He was to keep his appointment with his acquaintances, go to the bank and draw out his money, return to the hotel and surrender it to them.

"Don't be frightened," said the inspector. "I'll have some policemen of the local force here ready to grab them. If we can catch them with your money actually in their possession, I can send 'em to Atlanta."

Coulter demurred at risking his money in such fashion. Finally he was induced to go to the bank and draw out his money.

"You got our notice?" said the cashier pleasantly, when this possessor of twenty-five thousand dollars came to his desk.

"This morning," said Herman. "Give me twenty-five thousand dollars in big bills, please."

"Surely," agreed the cashier. "And may I suggest that we'd like to have you open an account?"

"I'll be back," mumbled Coulter. He was beginning to feel guilty about his money, and he was still dreading the ridicule of one whom he could not bring himself to believe was an impostor, and not Durant L. King.

When he entered one of the elevators of the Royal Trianon Hotel and said, "Sixth," in response to the look of inquiry from the mulatto operator, he had a momentary glimpse of Inspector Fergus, lurking behind a palm whose fronds drew sustenance from an aristocratic green porcelain vessel.

At the sixth floor Coulter was still trying to construct a plausible story, to account to King for his failure to obey strictly his instructions about talking with others about this deal. His feet dragged uncertainly along the thick carpet pile of the corridor until he stood outside the King suite.

He rapped twice. It was an agreed signal. There was no response, and so Coulter rapped again, and louder.

A maid, one of many in the Royal Trianon, shuffled along the corridor with an armful of towels.

"Nobody home," she informed him. "I saw all those gentlemen go down the elevator."

Instead of replying, Coulter began to hammer on the door with his fists. There was no thought in his mind of vengeance on swindlers. He felt as if he had been deserted by comrades. The wild thought occurred to him that King had discovered his treachery. He was beginning to doubt the authenticity of Inspector Fer-

gus, when that personage turned the angle of the corridor and approached rapidly. Fergus' footsteps were dogged by the manager.

These two ignored Coulter. Fergus shouldered past him, and the manager's hauteur was something that could be felt. Nevertheless, the manager unbent sufficiently to insert a key in the door of the suite. As he threw the door wide, Fergus stalked in, and then the manager. Uncertainly, Coulter followed.

The suite was untenanted. An empty whisky bottle stood on a dresser, beside the telephone. There were a few torn scraps of paper in a wastebasket; there were soiled towels on the bathroom floor; the closets and drawers had been emptied.

"I was afraid of it," complained Fergus. "That poke dropper, who looked in the office while we were trying to save your dough for you, must have got wise."

"The clerk," said the manager, "has informed me that they tossed him fifty dollars as they were going through the lobby; told him to settle their bill and keep the change."

"I just can't believe it!" exclaimed Coulter. "Why, time and again I've been in here and heard Mr. King talking over long distance to New York right there at that telephone. It's got me beat."

"What telephone?" asked Fergus.

"That one." Coulter indicated the instrument on the dresser.

"Yah," jeered Fergus, "that's a hot long-distance phone! See where the green wire goes? Into the bathroom. Now come in here, and I'll show you something else."

What he showed was a small magneto box with a handle on it, of the type which used to be on all telephones when it was necessary to turn a crank in order to signal the operator. Fergus cranked it, and in the other room the decoy telephone began to ring.

"There's your long-distance call, mister," said Fergus scornfully. "Now then, would you like to see a picture of your friend King? Look here." From his breast pocket he drew a photograph, two photographs, in fact, a full face and a profile. Beneath each print were numbers.

"It's King!" gasped Coulter. "The darn rat! If ever I see him—still, I don't see how—— "

Fergus began to laugh at the same time that he began to loop up the length of silken-covered wires that linked the magneto box with the telephone.

"You suckers always give me a pain. But, mister, you give me the worst pain I ever had. Go on back to Packersville!" As he spoke Fergus drew back one thin leg, as if he were tempted to kick Herman Coulter.

In spite of an effort to stand his ground and glare defiance, Herman winced. As he crossed the threshold, though, he turned and spoke:

"Well, who was he, then?"

"Up in Sing Sing they call him 'Gargoyle Eddie's Borden."

"Just the same," insisted Herman, "you got to admit there's a lot of money to be made in Wall Street."

ANY one who is challenged on the subject has got to admit there is a lot of money to be made in Wall Street. This is true partially because of the abundant supply of Herman Coulters who bring their money there for shrewder traders to take, through processes that seem simple only until an attempt is made to understand them.

It took Herman Coulter nearly six months to discover that much of the money made in Wall Street is the money other men have lost. He made the discovery by losing nearly all of his. Herman guessed rightly in his early market transactions, and then, emboldened, he had guessed wrongly about four times.

A month or so after his adventure with Gargoyle Eddie Borden, he had arrived in New York with sixty-eight thousand dollars, the compact result of pulling up stakes in his old home town. Packerville friends had treated Herman with very little consideration. When they read the published version of his Eastern resort vacation experiences in the Packerville *Herald*, they had a good laugh. They enjoyed a heartier laugh when Herman recited *his* version, which he had come to believe. Herman said he had not been taken in by the confidence men,

at all. As a matter of fact, he told them, he had merely undertaken to help the government detectives try to catch a gang of swindlers.

The laughter had its part in causing Herman Coulter to sell his share in his hardware business, to sell his house, resign from the country club, and set out for a town where there are really big men to meet and myriads of opportunities to make real money. The most accessible places for encountering the expensively clad males of pompous bearing, who were in Herman's mind "big men," are hotel lobbies. The men in the customers' rooms of the brokerage houses in which he had spent his money were a rather seedy lot, taken as a whole. Herman realized that. But the men he saw in the corridors of certain hotels seemed to live the sort of life to which he felt that he aspired. So, Herman fell into the habit of spending a part of each day strutting in the lobbies and corridors of the big hotels. He knew the writing rooms of all the important hotels. He knew the bootblacks and the news-stand girls, but he was almost without acquaintance among the waiters. Herman ate his meals at the boarding house in Seventy-fifth Street, where he had a room, and a few acquaintances.

When he was not loitering in hotel corridors, Herman was usually standing in front of the windows of hardware stores. A pile of hatchets with red handles in the display case of such an enterprise moved Herman as other men might be moved by hearing a familiar strain of music. Mounds of black wrenches with gray jaws, garden rakes stacked as rifles in a bivouac it pained him sweetly to behold. Still, he knew he did not want to return to Packersville.

At dinner at the boarding house he sat next to a moderately young widow with a little girl of ten. The little girl would climb on Herman's lap sometimes. The first time she had done so he detected tears in the widow's eyes. When the child had been sent along to bed, the widow offered him a sort of apology.

"Kitty misses her father, Mr. Coulter."

Herman learned that the widow's slender fingers pounded the keys of a typewriter all day in the office of a vice president of Schlacker & Co.

"That's the hardware concern," he had said knowingly.

When the widow acknowledged this, he had boasted that he was a hardware man himself.

Once Herman had gone in a taxicab on a trip that gave him some of the flavor of adventure. An advertisement in one of the trade papers had captured his interest. A small hardware store was offered for sale in Astoria, Long Island. "On account," the notice had stated, "of owner's ill health." Herman had spent several days investigating the possibilities of trade in that region, and was persuaded that with proper management the small store could be expanded into a first-class business. There was a growing human migration into that part of New York that was greater in its proportions than any gold rush of recent times. For that information Herman did not rely on the word of the old man who wanted to sell. He had rather a low opinion of the man's business ability, anyway. The fellow did not even carry a stock, he had found out, of paints.

"Paints is for paint stores," the proprietor had ruled, dogmatically.

"But people come to a hardware store when they are doing repair jobs," argued Herman.

"Meat is for meat stores and paint is for paint stores."

Nobody could fool Herman about the hardware business, though. He told the widow about his investigations in Astoria.

"I wonder," she had said, "how the schools are over there. Kitty hates these crowded schools on Manhattan. The children are so—well, you know what I mean, Mr. Coulter."

"Sure," agreed Herman. "It's terrible. And that fellow didn't even have any electric fans in stock, either."

For days after that Herman tried to forget hardware stores. He still had a notion that he might achieve riches quickly, and he kept this idea alive by sitting in the free armchairs of the most expensive hotels. He was occupying a favorite chair in the Hotel Rinzuli during

one of those days, when he saw a familiar countenance in the procession streaming along the corridor. It was the double-chinned face of the man he had once been led to believe was Durant Livermore King, the rascal he knew to be Gargoyle Eddie Borden. He saw him pass along the corridor in the company of another man. The other man was Boyce.

His first impulse was to cry an alarm, to get a policeman, anything to punish the rascals. A moment of reflection was enough to stay him from such a course. He stood up and watched the pair, saw them approach the desk, receive room keys and go to the elevators. Then he went out of the hotel, got aboard a street car and rode to his boarding house.

"How are you making out with that hardware deal?" The widow's tone would have suggested to any one who listened that she knew that Herman was engineering a merger of the entire industry.

"So-so," temporized Herman.

"The next time you go over there, I wish you'd inquire about schools for me."

"Oh, sure," said Herman, embarrassed. "I already have. The school near that store, for instance, is a new one.. I got a date with that old man to-morrow."

"Really? I must get my child away from this atmosphere."

The next day he went again to the Hotel Rinzuli in the hope of getting another glimpse of the swindlers. He had a half-formed idea that he might get in touch with Inspector Fergus and aid that official to get evidence against the pair. He saw the pseudo Durant Livermore King, but Boyce was nowhere in sight. Fearing King would see and recognize him, Herman hid himself behind his newspaper. He tried to think of some brilliant scheme for trapping the crooks, but his brain was not especially fertile in that field. Nevertheless, he trembled with agitation when he saw Boyce step from an elevator and pass King as if they were strangers.

Reluctantly, Herman started for Astoria. He found the hardware store proprietor in a difficult mood.

"I don't know whether I ought to sell, or not."

"I thought your mind was made up."

"I unmade it. If I sell now it'll have to be for cash."

"How much cash?"

"Three thousand dollars."

"But last week you only wanted fifteen hundred cash."

"That was last week."

"I could give you twenty-three hundred cash."

"I'll need three thousand cash where I'm going. Else I might as well stay here. I don't care much——"

"Give me a week's option?"

"For what?"

"For fifty dollars."

"Sure, if the fifty is cash. That way, I'll hold off for you for a week."

That night Herman telegraphed to Packersville for his postage-stamp collection. It was delivered to him two days later, and he disposed of it to a dealer in Nassau Street for one hundred and fifty dollars, which was three hundred dollars less than he had expected. When he had paid his board for another month in advance, his resources totaled two thousand three hundred and sixty dollars.

The rear lounge of the Hotel Rinzuli had become a sort of office for Herman. At least, he spent many of his daylight hours there. At his favorite post in the lounge he could see every one who approached the desk for a key. Twice he had been rewarded by seeing Gargoyle Eddie move pompously up to the marble counter and request his key. Once he had seen him talking out of the corner of his mouth to Boyce. But the two were careful about being seen together. It was due to sheer persistence that Herman finally saw Boyce enter into conversation with a middle-aged man, seated in a wide chair placed against one of the onyx columns in the lobby.

"That's him," breathed Herman, tasting triumph for the first time in many months. "That's their new sucker." He knew that he was twitching with nervousness and struggled to control himself.

He sat still as the swindler and his new victim approached the cigar and magazine stand, close to Herman's seat, but out of his view. He could hear them talking now.

"Two seats down front for 'Royal Revue.' "

"Matinée?"

"Sure," he heard Boyce retort; "we can find better things to do at night, eh, Mr. Fitkin?"

"Maybe," Herman heard the stranger say; "but I like shows pretty well. Don't see many in Naperville."

Then he heard Boyce excuse himself for a few moments, on the plea that he wanted to telephone. Herman surmised that the sharper wanted to warn Gargoyle Eddie that he had made a contact. Acting on that theory, Herman hustled out of the hotel. It was nearly two and he wanted to be back at his listening post before five o'clock. He ate a frugal luncheon in a steamy Greek restaurant, and spent the afternoon hanging around the counters of a department store.

It was nearly five when Herman entered the side door of the Rinzuli and walked briskly into the dimly illumined lounge. A single couple who were being served there with tea looked at him resentfully as he sank into his chair. Immediately, Herman began to glow inside with anticipation. Gargoyle Eddie Borden was seated in the chair placed against the onyx pillar, and his horn spectacles, his studious, avid manner of reading the stock reports of his newspaper, testified that he was playing his part earnestly. Either he had become a Durant Livermore King, or a Morgan partner, or maybe Elbert Gary. But Herman was watching closely enough to see that Gargoyle Eddie was not so engrossed in his acting that he was neglecting the flamboyant entrance of the Hotel Rinzuli. The fat confidence man was fumbling in the chair behind him. Then Herman saw him rise slowly and move ponderously toward the elevators. Herman stepped forward. Approaching the chair where Gargoyle Eddie had been seated were Boyce and the new victim Fitkin. Mr. Fitkin's arm was held in a seemingly friendly grip by Boyce who was talking earnestly, but, nevertheless, managing adroitly to steer his companion toward the chair.

When Boyce and the new sucker were still half a dozen paces from the chair, Herman stepped in front of it. A glance told him there was a dark object lying on its deeply cushioned leather surface. Immediately, Herman began to fan his pockets and cry aloud with agitation.

"My pocketbook!" he shouted. "I've been robbed. My pocket's been picked." With every word he slapped a different part of his anatomy as if in a frenzied search of his person. Four bell boys, a clerk and the house detective started forward.

"What's all this about?" demanded the house detective. There were wrinkles of fat at the back of his neck and wrinkles of authority in his frown.

"My pocketbook's gone," repeated Herman, stealing a sly glance at Boyce. That well-dressed gentleman was gazing at him with a pallid countenance from which his eyes protruded groggily. Herman gave him a bitterly cold smile of recognition. It was more than a smile. It was a warning.

"What's this here?" demanded the house detective, and reaching down into the chair behind Herman picked up a wallet. "Right where you was sitting. We don't have pickpockets around this hotel, mister. Put it inside your shirt this time and you won't lose it. Or get a money belt."

"Sure," exclaimed Herman as he seized the wallet. "I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Again he cast a withering glance at Boyce. "I was just about to telephone my friend Inspector Fergus." A small crowd had collected.

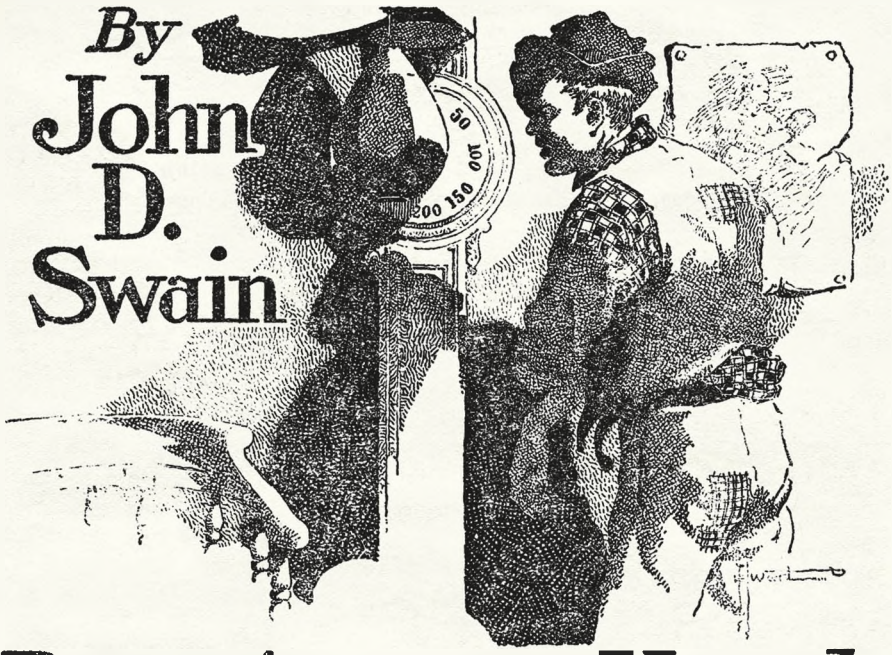
"Here," said Herman. Rapidly he flipped open the wallet. Yellow bills fluttered under his thumb. He selected one of the small ones, a fifty, and pressed it into the hands of the house detective. "Again I thank you!" exclaimed Herman vehemently, and strode across the lobby. A taxi was at the curb with open door. Herman stepped in.

"Drive me," he ordered the chauffeur, "to Astoria, Long Island. I'll tell you the address when we get there."

"But, boss, that's way out——"

"I understand perfectly," soothed Herman, "but you are to bring me back also. I'm coming back right away. The next address is West Seventy-fifth Street."

By John D. Swain



Dangerous Hands

By the author of "The Jawbone of an Ass," Etc.

No matter what he touched, somehow he managed to destroy it. His hands were so massive, so clumsy, so much in the way—and they had always got him in dutch. In the end, though, he was glad he had those hands.

FOR more than an hour a tall, bony man, wearing a neat but threadbare blue serge suit, had been furtively watching the free-lunch counter in O'Meara's Saloon. He was hungrier than he ever had been in his life; and it seemed to him that he had never been really free from the pangs of undernourishment. Now, having not so much as a quarter to pay for one of O'Meara's schooners of near beer unlawfully needled with ether, he was technically ineligible to help himself to the cheese, flabby pickles, crackers and scraps of bologna which were displayed at one end of the bar for paying guests.

At length a diversion took place. There stood, at the far end of the narrow room, a new punching machine which O'Meara had set up a day or so before. It consisted of two upright metal rods in which ran a weight, checked by a powerful steel spring. A padded leather cushion invited the athletically disposed customers to test their hitting power; and a graduated scale, registering from three hundred to twelve hundred pounds, enabled them to make of it a contest of sorts.

A newcomer, a longshoreman, had just belted the pad for eight hundred pounds, and looked about the room with a pleased and defiant air. His voiceless challenge was taken up by a squat little gangster, with a body round as a barrel. Squaring off and drawing a deep breath, he gave of his best in the way of a right slam; but the weight only popped up to a trifle over six hundred. Others among the loungers gathered about; challenges were passed, small bets laid. Most of the

customers, some of them with their drinks in one hand, assembled at the end where the machine stood.

O'Meara himself, pleased to have his expensive new toy appreciated, and realizing that it would result in drinks for the losers to buy, also ambled fatly that way; and the attention of one of his bartenders was attracted to the fun. The other one was serving a policeman just going off duty.

The moment seemed propitious to the tall stranger; he began to sidle, crabwise, toward the remains of the free lunch. Already one great, gnarled hand was sliding along the top of the bar, when the bartender saw him. He fixed him with a cold and uncharitable stare, his inch and a half of brow furrowing into an ugly question mark.

With a sigh Peter Gorton turned away. There went his last chance of supper! But instead of going outside and resuming his tramp of the streets, occasionally pausing to leave his nose print on some window inside of which an expert was turning griddle cakes, or examining in detail the incredible wealth of the delicatessen shops, with their trays of white, scrubbed pigs' feet, smoked salmon, herring salad, long, nubbly Italian or smooth liverwurst sausages, bowls of sauerkraut, jars of dill pickles and stuffed green peppers—instead of subjecting himself to further torture of this sort, Peter crept dispiritedly to that end of the bar where stood O'Meara's new punching machine.

There had come a little pause in the efforts of the men to beat the machine. Only one fellow, and he the policeman, had bettered the longshoreman's record. The officer had swung a mighty Irish fist against the leather pad, and the weight had shot up to nine hundred and fifty pounds. Nobody seemed anxious to go after this mark. Nobody, so O'Meara declared, had ever equaled it; he had the salesman's word that not yet had any man been able to make the weight pass the one-thousand figure. O'Meara may have been lying. He was Irish, and so was the policeman. It would be natural for him to hand him a little blarney; but no one present cared to test his own hitting powers further.

It was just as the little group was dissolving that Peter Gorton arrived. He was a notable figure in the place. Almost without competition in the matter of forehead, which was wide and intelligent. Also, his quiet, gray eyes, set wide apart, hinted at a high degree of intelligence back of them, and of many strange and informative scenes upon which they had gazed. His chin was firm, beneath a mouth whose half smile was sadder than tears; and in little details like clean finger nails and collar, boots well dusted if not recently shined, and cheeks clean shaven, as well as in his threadbare, carefully brushed suit, he hinted at the type known as a "decayed gentleman."

Either term would have offended Peter deeply. He knew that he wasn't a gentleman, and he didn't want to be one; still less, was he decayed. He was merely exceedingly hungry, and discouraged. It was without any premeditation, almost absent-mindedly, in fact, his mind on a slab of bologna he could see from the tail of one eye, that he stepped up to the punching machine, drew back his right arm, half pivoted, and, from a distance of not more than a foot, let fly at the leather pad.

What happened was amazing. He had not seemed to put any real spirit into the smash; he had, in fact, acted indifferently. But the weight leaped spasmodically upward with a shrill clatter, sped past white-painted mark after mark, kept on with no apparent loss of energy as it sizzled by the final number of all, which was twelve hundred. Emerging from the top, and jumping from its rods, the weight flew outward, dented the low ceiling, rebounded to the floor, and came to rest upon O'Meara's right foot—the one with the broken arch.

Low, coarse words poured from O'Meara's lips, mingled with yelps of pain. He longed to beat the thin stranger to a pulp, but even in his rage, a certain prudence withheld his hand. The reputation of his new toy was ruined; his story that never yet had any man been able to score one thousand, was also spoiled. Probably the machine was spoiled, too; it didn't look to him as if it could ever be put together again. The

upright rods had sprung apart, the steel spring lopped over to one side like an overgrown stalk of asparagus. He turned to the policeman, demanded that "this panhandling bum" be arrested on the spot.

The officer soothed him. He whispered in his ear. It would need a lot of explaining to the judge, a pinch like this. For one thing, why was he, Officer No. 651, in O'Meara's place at all? It would mean publicity of the sort the place didn't need at all, at all! And it was not quite clear to him on just what charge he could book the stranger, anyhow; he had merely tried his fist on the new contraption, like they all had.

During the argument, Peter Gorton had stood silently by, a hopeful gleam in his eyes. Men, arrested and locked up, were fed. And, for a plate of beans and a mug of coffee, he'd pretty near agree to be locked up in Murderer's Row. For a boiled dinner, with all the fixings, he'd gladly go to the chair and take the high voltage!

It became evident to him that luck was still against him. He wasn't going to be arrested. But neither was he going to receive any favors whatsoever in this place. Nobody even offered to buy him a drink, on the strength of his prodigious swat. This, probably, because he was so very unpopular with the boss. Reluctantly, Peter turned away, and went out into the street.

While he had been inside, night had rapidly fallen. Now the streets were alight, as were the windows of such stores as had not been closed for the day. These, in the section of the city in which Peter found himself, these stores that were still doing business, were mostly secondhand clothing shops, pawnbrokers, ice-cream-and-soda parlors, hot-dog stands, shooting galleries, painless-dentist offices.

A new idea had come into Peter's head. He would get himself arrested, and thus obtain a free supper! This should, judging by what he had so often seen, be easy enough. Men were always getting arrested for trivial infractions. For talking back to a cop, for blocking the sidewalk, for annoying a pretty girl, for shooting craps up some dim alley, for staggering. Almost anything would get a man pinched, and usually the victim protested loud and long. It should be a simple affair for an intelligent man, anxious to get himself taken up to the hoosegow. But, to make it absolutely sure, Peter decided to commit something more than a mere misdemeanor. Perhaps he could get himself held for trial, and thus become a city boarder for at least a week or two, not to mention a good stiff sentence, with three squares a day!

A half brick, lying just off the pavement, caught his eye. A half brick is always inspirational to one bent on committing a felony. So many things may be done with it! With no definite purpose, Peter picked it up, thrust it loosely into a side pocket, and strolled on. A moment later he passed a patrolman—the relief who had just taken the place of Officer No. 651, back in O'Meara's place. And a few yards beyond the policeman, Peter was brought to a halt by the gaudy window of a pawnbroker. Everything was there—a shiny sextant, a pair of buffalo horns, a framed water color, trays of glittering rings and pins saxophones and clarinets, craftsmen's tools, tarnished table silver, watches, revolvers, cut-glass decanters, pocket flasks, a first-aid outfit, a surveyor's steel tape.

He looked behind him. The patrolman was still in sight, and within sound. He took out his portion of brick, stepped back to the edge of the pavement, and heaved it through the plate-glass window with a satisfying crash. He took note with relief that the officer had heard it, too; he was coming on the run. So was somebody else. From within the store the proprietor, a fat, bloodshot man, with popping eyes, appeared at the door, wildly waving his hands.

"*Policemans!*" he shrilled. "Inside he iss, down cellar!"

Of Peter, he took no notice whatever; and when the officer seized Peter roughly by an arm, asked him what was the big idea, the fat little pawnbroker rushed out in anguish, tried frantically to pry him away.

"Quick, you catch him easy!" he cried, panting. "He's down there, I tell you. He can't get oudt!"

The officer looked scowlingly up.

"Who you talking about, Sam?" he barked. "I got the guy that heaved that rock. I seen him myself. Lay off of me, will you?"

"Sure, this man heaved the brick," Sam agreed. "He's a smart feller, I give him right! Inside was I being stuck up by a bandit; and soon as my window goes, the stick-up runs. The glass, I should worry. It's insured."

It dawned on the policeman that the plot was not so simple as he had supposed. Blowing a shrill blast on his whistle, and dropping Peter's arm, he dashed inside the shop, to reappear presently with a weazened, sleek little rat, handcuffed to one of the officer's wrists —the left one. He waited by the door for the effect of his whistle, and menacingly waved back a gathering crowd. He turned to Peter.

"You're a quick thinker, feller! If Sam had a heart inside his chest instead of a artichoke, he'd slip you something for saving him from being cleaned. But he won't, so you might as well run along."

"But I threw that brick to get myself pinched!" Peter wailed.

The officer paid him the tribute of a laugh.

"That's a good line, too!" he admitted; and just then another patrolman arrived, who promptly rang in for the wagon.

Meanwhile, Sam, his pride touched perhaps, waddled to where Peter stood limply. He reached out a dirty hand and inserted in Peter's necktie a gaudy-red stickpin, worth all of fifteen cents when new.

"Nobody can say Sam Levine ever forgets a favor," he wheezed, giving the cravat a loving pat. "Efery time you see this lofely jewel, think of me and of your brave act!"

Peter did not even think to express his gratitude. Instead, he turned to the officer.

"Ain't I needed as a witness?" he asked.

"Naw. I seen it all, and Sam is all the witness I need. This hophead is mugged down at headquarters, anyhow. He's out on parole now. This'll send him up the river for a long stretch."

Well, that was that. Peter had no heart to stay and see the thing out. Without waiting for the arrival of the wagon, he pushed his way through the crowd and went on up the street. It wasn't so easy to get arrested, when one wanted to be!

It is axiomatic that, when a man gets hungry enough, he will eat, in spite of everything. Men even get hungry enough to eat one another, and have done so, and been acquitted by their peers of anything worse than bad taste. There comes a point at which death or a square meal are the only alternatives. Such a point Peter had reached.

Wandering on and on, growing hungrier and fainter, he passed at length from the more seamy side of his city, and came to that region sometimes designated the Tenderloin. Peter knew of this nickname; the word roused agonizing thoughts. Also, he was now in the section where are some of the best grills and chop houses and oyster bars in town. At one of these he determined to eat; and what better choice than one of the oldest of all, whose low, almost shabby wide doorway he was at this moment passing? As a man in a burning house dives into a life net, so Peter Gorton dived through the entrance to Barney's Chop House.

Barney is patronized by actors of the more prosperous sort, by authors, musicians, theatrical managers, celebrities of various kinds, sports. Evening clothes are not necessary here; some of the best patrons are careless, almost seedy, in their array. As Peter entered, the place was well filled. A captain of waiters, a Swiss, politely escorted him to a table for four, at which a single gentleman was dining. With a murmured apology for the necessity, he seated Peter, snapped his fingers for a waiter, and spread before the guest one of those enormous menus, the mere reading of which is a liberal education in geography, linguistics and folklore.

There is one dish for which Barney has stood supreme for three generations, though his price has in this time risen from seventy-five cents—including a seidel of beer—to two dollars and a quar-

ter, with plain water. This eye and stomach-filling masterpiece is the mixed grill. A single Southdown mutton chop weighing a pound and a quarter, the kidney appertaining thereto, two little sausages chuckling in their hot fat, two long strips of Wiltshire bacon, a stuffed tomato and three grilled mushrooms, and a vast baked potato, born in Idaho.

It was this which Peter ordered, together with a cup of hot coffee, to be fetched while the mixed grill was on the charcoal, and enough rye bread and unsalted butter to sustain life meanwhile. Not until he had placed his order did he glance at his table companion, whose restless, bright eyes were fixed upon him with mild interest.

The man, Peter observed, was perhaps fifty, quite bald. Although not large in body, he possessed many jowls. His face was white and damp; he seemed to perspire freely, though the evening was cool and electric fans were in operation all over the restaurant. He kept mopping his noble brow with an expensive, initialed handkerchief, the while he dallied with a modest fruit salad. This individual bowed slightly, spoke to Peter.

"You been here before. I see you know the best bet for a hungry man!"

Peter Gorton shrugged indifferently.

"What's the difference? It all costs the same," he said.

The other looked surprised.

"Not by a jugful, it don't! You can get here a swell ham-and-egg sandwich for twenty-five cents, or a big stuffed lobster with sherry sauce, for about five bucks."

"I meant," Peter patiently explained, wondering why he talked so freely to a stranger, and deciding that it was because he had passed the point of caring what happened, "I meant that it would all cost *me* the same. For I'm not paying anything, see?"

"Yeah? Friend of the management, what?"

"Anything but," Peter denied, and went on to explain his predicament. He was utterly frank about it all; related his vain efforts to annex a portion of O'Meara's free lunch, his failure to get himself arrested for heaving half a brick through a shop window, and his final decision to eat one square meal, come what might.

"You see, if you go into a place and eat a big feed, and then tell 'em honest you haven't a nickel on you, why they've just got to have you pinched! And, with a hearty chow inside, you don't mind that; it is just what you wanted, anyhow. A lot better than my first idea, of just getting myself locked up for the sake of the stuff they throw at you in the city jail. And, once having made up your mind, the only sensible thing is to eat all you like of what you like. Your sentence won't be any heavier than if you just trimmed 'em out of a oyster stew!"

The stranger had ceased to eat his fruit salad. He leaned back in his chair, his eyes faintly popping.

"You giving me this straight? You're clean, and when the waiter brings the check you ain't got a bean to pay it? Am I right?"

Peter nodded.

"More than that; I ain't got a thin dime to tip him with." Then, noticing an alarming expression on the other's face, he added reassuringly: "But don't worry, mister! I won't spring this till long after you've settled your check, and gone. I'm aiming to take plenty of time over this feed! It may be the last swell one I get this year."

The waiter returned at this instant with the coffee; and the strange man ordered him to bring him one, too. "Black," he added.

"Listen," he went on, leaning across the table on his elbows. "You got me int'rested. You look healthy, and you are young. Also, your pan shows you got brains inside it. What's the trouble? It oughta be easy for you to get a job that would anyhow fill your tummy?"

Peter drank deep of the fragrant coffee, and set down his cup.

"There's no man living ever lost so many jobs as me." He spread his two hands on the table. "Lamp them well, mister! There's the most destructive

hands ever made. Whatever they touch, they break. Been that way since I was a child. The lickings I've took! Out in the woodshed, when I got too big to lay across my mother's knee. Out in the street, and in the woods, and down on the docks, when I passed the woodshed stage. I been a lumberman up in the deep woods—nothing I like better! Man, but they eat, down East! Beans baked all day long in a pit dug into the ground, and heated by red-hot stones. All the bread and coffee you want, plenty corned beef, pickles, jam, puddings, pies! But they threw me out of seven camps, inside two seasons. Why? I broke more ax helves than all the rest of the crew put together. Not to mention the blades of crosscut saws; and them things cost money, not to say time!"

"Then what'd you do?" the other man asked with interest.

"All sorts of things. And wherever I went, I left a trail of breakage done by them two hands. Both of 'em lefts, my good old mother used to say, after I'd wrecked another one of her cups and saucers. I was a roof shingler one spell; fell off twice, broke the ladder both times, and never done more than scratch me. You see, I'm naturally tough. Born in Gloucester, I was, where they put the new-born babies into brine to harden 'em. Course, I been to sea, like all Gloucester men have. But in my case I didn't aim to go. I was shanghaied."

"Honest?"

Peter nodded.

"From Frisco. Woke up on a barkentine, way out beyond sight o' land. Well, I knew more or less about ships, being born where I was. Learned to row a dory before I could walk, almost. Had my own catboat as a boy. But destructive! Mister, I near drove that skipper off his nut. They made me take my trick at the wheel, and I lurched and busted the binnacle. They set me to a job of paintin', and I spilled a hull pailful just as the Old Man was paradin' by, and his best suit was sp'iled. Then they sent me to the galley, and I got sugar into the salt horse, and salt into the coffee. And when I fetched the first mate a bottle of rum, I slipped and smashed it, and they never saved so much as a drop of it. Nothin' left but an aggravatin' smell that lasted the rest of the v'yage. To make a long story end, they put me ashore on a South Sea island, as anxious to get rid of me as they'd been to shanghai me."

"How'd you manage to get home?" asked his new friend.

"Lord knows! I near starved, only for there being so much fruit and shellfish to be had free. Finally I got adopted into a native tribe. Was made a sort of butler to their king; had a lot of natives to boss, and all I wanted to eat. Well, sir, they give me charge of the king's own barge. Beautifully carved, she was, and rowed by twelve of the finest, muscularest brown men you ever see. Now this boat, 'cording to the native style, was an outrigger. Mighty near impossible to upset 'em; they'll ride out anything short of a typhoon. Don't ask me how I done it; but, mister, I capsized her! I dunno how, no more than you do. She went down with all hands but me. King and everybody else gone! I swum around a while, and was picked up by a pearler. After I'd tinkered with their only diving suit and put it out of commission, so's they had to put back to Sarawang to have an expert mend it, I was left there. And I shipped as stoker on a tramp, bound for Havana, through the Canal. I wrecked a seven-thousand-dollar boiler, and the whole trip was one series of fights for life. I swum ashore at the first sight of land, worked up through Central America and Mexico, always breakin' things, most of 'em valuable, till I got to Oklahoma. I was plumb wore out; couldn't walk a step farther. So I got me a job in the oil fields. I earned seventeen dollars before I broke a drill or two that set 'em back a full month, at an estimated loss of ten thousand dollars a day; but I hopped a freight while they was trying to figure up the total. In time, I landed here. And inside two hours, I break O'Meara's punching machine, and a plate-glass window, and now I aim to break old man Barney's heart!"

The waiter set before Peter his enormous plate, with its savory mixed grill,

and he waited only to order a fresh cup of coffee before he sank his white teeth into the mutton chop.

"You never got yourself married, I take it?" the man across the table asked, as he lighted a cigar.

"Nope. But even at home breakin', my record holds good. I was a janitor, once. A swell job in a big apartment house, with lots of tips, and some graft. And what does the manager's wife do but get a crush on me! Look at my pan, and tell me I'm a liar. I don't blame you! But that's what happened. She was only half-witted, anyhow, and homely as a sculpin. Her old man was jealous if anybody even looked at her, not understandin' it was prob'ly in mere pity. Anyhow, he and me got into an argument, and he got a divorce. Named me, for breakin' up his home; but I was miles away when the case was called. Never set eyes on either of 'em again, nor wanted to. Only shows you I can't go near nothing without breaking it!"

"You must pack quite a wallop," the stranger mused. "You say you wrecked O'Meara's machine. I know those things; it takes a real he-man to ring more'n seven hundred on 'em! And you look like you could look after yourself, in a scrap."

"I ought to be able to *take* it, anyhow," Peter allowed. "For three years I averaged a lickin' a day, till I got so they had no effect on me at all. Then I begun to do a little fightin' myself. Never was much good, only at hittin'. Whatever I hit square, flopped."

"Never tried any professional fights?"

Peter lifted his mutton bone, and raked the remaining meat from it with strong, white teeth. He licked his lips, shook his head.

"Nearest I ever come to that was in a training camp. They took me on with a lot of other huskies to act as punchin' bags for Joe Jackson, the heavy. He wore 'em out faster'n his manager could dig 'em up. Somebody got hold of me, and when I found how good the eats at camp was, I didn't care whether they paid me any real money or not. All went well; I didn't mind being cuffed around. I was used to that in every quarter of the world and its seven seas! But one day the manager says to me: 'Peter, you gotta give Joe more of a workout. All you do is let him sock you, and come back for more. You hit out at him, hard as you can. He needs the practice. It'll give him a chanst to counter.'

"Well, course I wanted to hold my job, so I hadn't been trying to hit the guy. I thought all I got to do was to take it. But when he told me that, why I just hit him, hard as ever I could. Right in the mouth, it was. And that'd been all right, too; but this fella—you may remember him—he was stuck on his gold teeth. He had a whole suspension bridge of 'em right in front. Golly! how they did shine when he talked, which was most all the time. Well, I reckon I must 'a' ruined close to a thousand dollars' worth of gold and ivory with that one swat. Man, they chased me for miles across the fields, but they never caught up with me! And I never collected my pay. But I got a nice set of boxing gloves I was wearing. I hadn't had time to take them off. That ended my experience as a professional."

Peter finished the last crumb of sausage on his plate, rolled the skin of his baked potato into a ball and swallowed it like a capsule. He turned to the admiring waiter.

"Fetch me some pie," he ordered. "Mince pie. I want it hot, with toasted cheese. Not a piece of pie—a *half* a pie! And another cup o' coffee."

"Look here," said the bald-headed man, leaning across the table, after the waiter had gone again. "You ain't plumb set on going to stir, are you? What I mean: it's eats you want, more'n the rest?"

Peter nodded absent-mindedly. He was beginning to feel drowsy after stowing away such a grand feed into an empty hold.

"Would you fight for grub, *real* grub, I mean? And plenty of it?"

"Mister," declared Peter, "there's been times when I'd 'a' murdered my good old grandmother for a hunk of apple pie."

"Don't mind taking a lacing?"

"Why would I? I've took plenty in my time."

His listener handed over a soiled card, reading:

Israel Lipwitz. 200 A. Broadway.
Sports Promoter.

"That's me. Ever hear of Joe Lumm, known as the 'Assassin?'"

"Sure. He's the light-heavy champ. I seen him work."

"Then you know he's good. Also, he's a fox. Always side-steppin' the top-notchers, and lookin' for set-ups. I don't blame him; it's money we're all out for! Well, to-morrow night he's booked to meet a *unknown,* in the Haymarket Arena. And I'm the guy that dug up the unknown for him. Two hours ago he laid down on me; got himself a statement signed by some phony medico that he's down with acute appendicitis or hair lip or something! Fact is, he's got cold feet. He knows he was in for a swell licking, and he couldn't take it. That leaves me high and dry, with a forfeit up. He was to get five hundred smackers, me the same, for a ten-round go, and it was all framed that he was to lay down in the fourth. Now I got to dig me up somebody to take his place!"

"That ought to be easy, with five hundred in sight," commented Peter.

"Not so easy as you think! Everybody knows the Assassin deserves his moniker. He mashes every set-up he meets to a pulp. That's what makes him so popular a champ. The fans don't go to see a fight, but to see murder done. He don't know how to pull his punches at all, that bird."

Peter's half pie arrived, with melted cheese running across its crust. He forked up a steaming mouthful. Through it he asked:

"What's it to me?"

"Well," said Mr. Lipwitz, "I ain't got much time left. It come to me you might be willing to step into the ring with him to-morrow night and take your lacing, for five hundred in real money."

"Why not? I've took lacings for nothing, many's the time! For five hundred I could eat steady for weeks."

"How much you weigh? 'Bout hundred and seventy?"

"One sixty-five, besides what I eat here to-night."

"Good condition, huh?"

"I am, now I've had a real feed."

Lipwitz sighed.

"I don't suppose you know nothing about boxing, but it wouldn't make no difference if you did. So long as you just stick along two or three rounds and bleed liberal, the gang'll be satisfied. So here's my proposition: when the waiter brings your check, I'll pay it with my own. Then I'll take you over to 'Spike' Ryan's gym to stay to-night, and till the fight comes off. To-morrow morning you go with me to the board to be weighed in, and you gotta be examined by the official doctor. How's it strike you?"

"Fine," agreed Peter. "I'm all set for a good sleep right now. Much obliged to you, Mister Lipwitz."

Lipwitz waved a fat hand.

"That's me, always. Big hearted. Too much so for my own good! But I see you was a likely young feller, a mite down on your luck, and figured to help you, and at the same time pull me out of a hole. So when you finished, say the word, and we'll go over to Spike's place."

Lipwitz settled the checks, and they turned back in the direction from which Peter had come an hour before. A short walk brought them to a shabby brick structure beside whose door was a tarnished brass sign reading:

Ryan's School of Physical Culture.

Without ceremony Lipwitz pushed ahead, and they entered a dingy office containing three chairs, a desk, cuspidor, and two fly-specked enlargements of former heavyweight champions. It also contained Spike Ryan, who was reading a tabloid and smoking a cigarette, in violation of all the rules of physical culture.

"'Lo Spike!" Lipwitz cried. "I got a bird willing to go on with the Assassin to-morrow night. Put him up and keep an eye on him, will ya? He wants to pound his ear now."

Spike cast a bloodshot eye at the complacent Peter Gorton.

"Huh! Who is he?" he grunted.

"Comes from Gloucester way. Mixed-

ale scrapper. Willing to take it, for the eats there is in it. He's been down on his luck."

"He ain't been so far down on it as he will be to-morrow night," prophesied Spike.

"That's right! Scare him out of it, so's he'll lay down on me like that other bimbo done," bitterly complained Mr. Lipwitz.

Spike made no reply to this, but heaved himself reluctantly out of his chair. He shook Peter's hand limply, then rubbed his own with a frown.

"That ain't a hand you got, friend," he grumbled. "It's a steel trap!"

He cast his eyes appraisingly over Peter's thin frame.

"Why, you ain't nothing but bone," he said.

"That's right, even to my head," the Gloucester lad agreed.

With little more in the way of preliminaries, Peter was led through a great drafty room in which stood various apparatus—two punching bags swaying in the dim light, a pile of boxing gloves tossed onto a dirty canvas mat. Through a small door at the farther end, they passed into a dirty little room containing shower baths, and beyond this a narrow apartment with half a dozen folding camp beds, adorned with soiled blankets.

Within twenty minutes Peter was sleeping in one of them, but not until he had managed to break a chair beyond all mending. And the following morning, after a solid ten hours of sleep, he borrowed a shaving mug and a razor, and broke the former and put a nick in the blade of the latter. After which he inquired anxiously about breakfast.

Both Spike Ryan and Lipwitz knew that in the short time between now and the fight, it was useless to attempt to show their man anything about the fine points of the game. Best to let him crawl into the ring, take his beating, and crawl out again—if able. That would comply with the contract, and insure Lipwitz his money, out of which he would pay Peter, and settle with Spike not only for a night's lodging but also for acting as Peter's second during the battle, or rather the slaughter.

Lipwitz arrived in time to take Peter out to eat, and he noted with relief that no nervousness was to be seen in his protégé, no signs of quitting cold. All that interested him was how much there was going to be for breakfast, and how soon it could be had.

After a hard battle with griddle cakes, coffee, eggs and bacon, Lipwitz and he walked about the streets, purchasing a few trifles Peter needed, such as a fresh collar and a pair of socks, and a toothbrush. Lipwitz advanced enough to get him a cheap hand bag, which he stocked with a shaving outfit, brush and comb, and other essentials to the well-dressed gentleman. At ten o'clock they proceeded to the room where the contestants for the coming evening were to be officially weighed in.

Peter expressed little curiosity, and no reverence whatever. He hardly looked at the gentlemen who represented the State Boxing Commission. He submitted without interest in the result to the proddings and soundings of the official medical examiner, who at length pronounced him ripe for slaughter, and not likely to die under anything less strenuous than an assault with a broad ax. Strangest of all, he seemed disinterested when the champ, having been presented, fixed him with mean little eyes, and thrust out his horseshoe jaw at him. Joe Lumm was a magnificent animal; his muscles were placed just where most needed, along the back and the forearms and the thighs. When he hit he did it with every ounce he carried. And he loved to maul and deface and maim! He was a killer by instinct, as surely as is the man-eating tiger or the rogue elephant.

In Peter, he was puzzled to find one who wasn't even interested enough to look him over. It wasn't pretense, either; that was what puzzled the Assassin. Peter was merely bored; wanted to get into his clothes, and have the thing over with. Both men had weighed about the same, Lumm carrying five pounds the better, though Peter's hearty breakfast, as well as the dinner the night before, had made him somewhat overweight. The officials declared that the peace of the State was not endangered by the coming battle, and

issued their formal sanction. The men began putting on their clothes.

"Who is that guy?" Lumm whispered to Spike Ryan.

"Some water-front bum Izzy picked up. His own set-up run out on him, and he was crazy at the idea of losing a whole grand! So he just digs up the first healthy-looking lad he meets. This one panhandles him for a feed—that's how they come to meet."

Lumm nodded, relieved. To do him justice, he was not afraid of any man in the world, once in the ring with him; but he was always wary of being double crossed, of having some ringer sprung on him. It was a relief to know that this was merely another piece of flesh to be pounded into insensibility for the delight of his followers. He turned away, and put Peter Gorton out of his mind. This would be even easier than the first man picked out for him. For that one had, at least, the advantage of some few fights in the ring, even though he had not made any showing therein. It would be this bird's first flight; he'd be scared stiff!

There probably never had been any main bout pulled off at the old Haymarket, where so little worrying was done by anybody concerned. Lipwitz wasn't worrying; he had fulfilled his part in supplying another victim. Spike Ryan didn't worry; he was being paid his usual fee for acting as second, and it didn't look as if his job would be either long or arduous. He was supplied with the usual pail, fan, lemon and vial of ammonia. Lipwitz had objected to the useless expense of the latter, as a waste of money.

"Wot's the use of wasting good ammonia? Dynamite won't bring that bimbo round, once the Assassin measures him for a right to the button," he grumbled. But Spike felt it to be unprofessional to leave out any of the standard equipment, even though little of it might be needed. He had had his own troubles: Peter had put up a bitter argument in favor of a hearty dinner just before leaving for the arena. Only on the promise that he should go as far as he liked directly the affair was over, did he grumblingly accept the balanced ration Spike fed him.

None of the assembled fans were doing any worrying. They were present to see their idol in action. Fierce, merciless fighting, slaughter, a final knock-out—that was what they were there to see! And the Assassin himself regarded the bout as all in the line of his profession, a thing to be got over with as soon as possible. Finally Peter, waiting down in his little dressing room during the preliminaries and the semifinal, was amusing himself by thinking up what he was going to order for dinner as soon as the show was over. The only thing that ever caused him to worry was the whereabouts of his next feed. And he had visualized this down as far as pie à la mode when Spike roused him, and told him it was time to be climbing into the ring.

The Assassin was already seated in his corner. He did not even bother to assert his right to make his opponent wait for him—he was not worth it! Just for the sake of the fans, who represented his meal ticket, he would let the unknown string along for a couple of rounds, meanwhile cutting him up as much as possible without actually putting him away; and then, in the third, or anyhow the fourth, the old sleep medicine, and another boost for his publicity! He was to get ten thousand for this appearance—nothing at all, in comparison with the purses hung up for big bouts. But, if you got enough of the little ten-grand ones, they all figured up to a tidy sum in the run of the year.

He glowered ferociously, as Peter clambered awkwardly into the ring and receive a few scattered cheers, the tribute of the subject of the forthcoming inquest. But Peter scarcely glanced at him; his curious eyes had caught sight of a new contraption a little to one side of the ring, beside which stood a fine-looking gentleman in a Tuxedo suit.

"Wot's that?" he asked Spike.

"That's the radio sender. Captain Burns broadcasts all the box fights from here, round by round."

Peter blinked.

"Ya mean, maybe down home in Gloucester, there's folks listenin' in?"

"Sure, they is!"

"And when I hit Lumm, he'll tell 'em about it?"

"He'll tell the world about it," Spike assented. "And if ya paste him hard enough. your folks'll hear the blow itself!"

"Gee!" Peter reverently breathed. "Ain't that great!"

Captain Burns, who had been listening smilingly, turned to his instrument and began speaking, in a loud, clear, distinct voice:

" 'The Gloucester Fisherman' has just taken his corner! He wishes to send a message to his friends back home. Tell them to listen hard, and they'll hear him sock the Assassin in a couple of minutes."

"They'll hear worse'n that," growled Joe Lumm to his seconds. "They'll think another mackerel fleet has been sunk!"

Izzy Lipwitz thrust his neck through the ropes. He was in a happy mood. It meant nothing at all to him that his man was presently to be beaten into a pulp, finally to be dropped senseless upon the felt-covered canvas.

"How ya feelin', kid?" he inquired.

"Hungry," Peter promptly complained. "This little runt gimme toast and tea and two eggs to eat, and nothin' more."

Lipwitz chuckled.

"You can go the limit, when it's all over," he promised.

"I aim to," Peter grimly replied.

The formalities of the ringside proceeded. The two men were introduced by the announcer, from amplifiers set on each of the four sides of the ring.

"In this corner, Joe Lumm, the Assassin, light-heavyweight champe-e-n of the worrld! And in this corner, the Gloucester Fisherman, Peter Gorton!"

The men rose and bowed, met at the center of the ring and touched hands. The white-flanneled referee instructed them. The gist of his warnings was that there must be no biting, butting or hitting below the belt. Photographers followed, and flash lights were taken. After which the men's hands were taped.

To this process Peter took exception. He preferred his own overgrown joints and tholelike digits.

"Cramps my style, all that rag wound round 'em," he complained to Spike. But the latter faithfully went about his task, watched by the Assassin's manager. Arms were slipped out of bathrobe sleeves, gloves laced on. Automatically, Spike worked the horsehair back from Peter's great knuckles, realizing at the same time how useless all this stuff was. He might carry horseshoes in them, and it would do him no good.

The bell clanged. Peter hardly realized what it meant. He had to be pushed forward by his second, toward where the Assassin was already halfway across the ring, murder in his slitted eyes. A momentary silence fell; doubtless just such a silence heralded that instant in the old Druid days, when the priest raised aloft his sacrificial knife ere plunging it into the quivering, lashed victim, beneath the mistletoe oak.

It was sheer instinct that made the Assassin pause, just before they collided, and indulge in a swift feint or two. He was by nature a killer and wasted little time on mere boxing or fiddling about, or fancy footwork or anything of the sort. His theory was based on beating the other man to the punch, outswatting him, smashing him down with a whirlwind of solid blows, never giving ground. As it was, his feints meant nothing to Peter, on whom everything in the way of science was wasted. Finding himself within striking distance, he lashed out with all his might; and, the Assassin skillfully moving his head aside a bare two inches, Peter's sock landed on one shoulder.

Even so, it taught Joe Lumm that here was one unknown who packed a real wallop. It seemed to him that his entire arm from the shoulder down was paralyzed; there was no feeling in it, and it hung useless by his side. Only for a matter of seconds, however. And meanwhile his other arm had been busy. A hard-packed glove closed Peter's left eye completely; a repeat sank deep into his tough midriff, causing him to grunt. The two bodies came together, and Peter wrapped long arms about his foe, dizzy from the slam he had taken aboveboard and amidships. The referee pried them apart.

That momentary silence had been shattered by a terrific uproar in which Captain Burns' voice could be heard by nobody in the arena. The Assassin was at his foul work again. And now, Joe Lumm having recovered the use of his other arm, it found Peter's mouth, and cut his lips against his own strong teeth. More pain; more howls, catcalls, whistles, stamping of feet, cries and prayers that death be dealt swiftly to the Gloucester Fisherman. The bell sounded, and Peter clawed his way back to his corner, where Spike went skillfully to work on his battered face. Even this early in the fray, the ammonia was called into use.

The second round was a repetition of the first, but worse. From corner to corner of the ring the Assassin drove Peter, who didn't willingly give ground, but who was helpless to stand fast against the bludgeoning of heavy fists that seemed to hit him everywhere above the waist, and at once. The injured eye took more punishment; only by luck did Peter keep the other one open. His cheek bone was slashed wide open; his nose, it seemed to him, was flattened like a buckwheat cake. And all the time, he was trying his best. He made no effort to guard himself, to parry, or even to counter, but lashed out heartily at the elusive yet steadily advancing figure before him. Just once, before the bell sounded, he got in a wallop that only caught the Assassin on the forehead, but that sent Lumm back what seemed like three feet. It made him seasick; he sought to fall into a clinch, but the bell sounded then.

Despite the battering he was receiving, Peter was not winded. He couldn't breathe through his nose because it had been smashed so flat, but his breath came regularly and without distress. Nor did he seem at all worried. He fretfully remarked to Spike, who was beginning to feel for his charge a real respect for his ability to take it:

"I told you I couldn't fight on toast and two eggs! I needed a boiled dinner to strengthen me. If I get licked, it'll be your fault."

"If he got licked!" Spike, busy massaging and kneading, wondered what in merry Hades this bird thought he was getting, anyhow. If not a licking, then what? It couldn't last more than another round, he decided; but he was certainly one tough nut. If he, Spike, could only have had him in his stable for a year, to teach him a few elemental points, he might have surprised a lot of them.

The bell announced the beginning of the third—the round that the Assassin had, in his mind, picked upon as the last. And since the going was beginning to tire him from his own efforts, and since his man undoubtedly packed a wicked wallop which might, through some grotesque mischance, land in the right spot, he determined to end the affair here and now.

That round will never be forgotten by those who were there to see it. Peter took everything a man ever took in three minutes. He was a frightful-looking object, but his stamina did not seem to be particularly affected. A glancing blow had partly closed his one good eye, from which the tears were gushing. He was practically blind. But he continued to face Joe Lumm, and to whale away at him. Worked utterly out of position, bewildered, he had turned his back on the Assassin, unable to see him; and, dimly noting through his watery eye, something looming up which he conceived to be his tormentor, he leaned into it with his right, putting his very shoe laces into the blow. It was the heavily padded and anchored corner post of the ring which he hit, and it was shorn off as a tree smitten by a down Easter's ax. Over it went, carrying with it ropes and rigging, and jerking loose one of the other posts.

Frantically, the referee held the Assassin away, and called for time out. Fast as the arena carpenters worked, a full five minutes was needed to repair, in some degree, the wreck. This enabled Peter to recover the use of his eye, which ceased to weep. The rest didn't do Joe Lumm much good, because it gave him time to imagine what might have happened if it had been himself, instead of a stout, four-inch maple post, that had received the impact of Peter's right fist. During the rest of the resumed round the Assassin contented himself with sparring, leading short, snappy lefts to Pe-

ter's nose and eyes and lips, making him look even worse, but otherwise not doing him any special harm. Of the two, he was more winded than Peter, and was indeed glad when the bell sounded and he could take counsel with his experienced handlers.

Back in his corner, Peter complained to the pop-eyed Spike, who was by now convinced that he was handling a freak, a monstrosity.

"I skinned my knuckles on that durned post," Peter said. "I'm gonna put some iodine on 'em before I go to bed tonight."

To which the usually wise-cracking Spike had nothing to respond. He was good on the up-take, as a rule, but he was speechless now. He had never handled a man who was worse battered than Peter; but the fighting fool didn't even seem to know he was taking anything but the usual stuff! He didn't possibly see how Peter could go another round—but he was done guessing. And at his side, Israel Lipwitz was silent for another reason. Already, he was visualizing a new champion. He planned to take Peter away from the ring for a whole year, have him properly trained and carried along with a few third raters until he got ring wise. And then!

The harsh bell announced the beginning of the fourth.

That branch of the higher mathematics, the theory of probabilities, enters into the fight game as deeply as anywhere. If a man launches a succession of wallops, any one of which will, if it lands, lift the recipient off his feet and perhaps over the ropes, no matter how awkwardly these blows may be delivered, or how skillfully parried, if the contest lasts long enough, and the men also last, soon or late one of them must connect at the right spot.

Few of the onlookers, even among the sports reporters, gave an identical account of this fourth round. It was the meeting of two whirling dervishes, armed to kill, and full of some murderous dope that rendered them immune to punishment for the time being—or so it seemed. That most of the Assassin's blows got home, and that few of Peter's did, was about all that could be relied on. But one of Peter's did get home, about the middle of the frame; it caught Joe Lumm as he was coming in, and it catapulted him clear out of the ring, and into the lap of the *Transit* reporter. The Assassin landed upon the reporter's little portable, folding typewriter, which would henceforth unfold no more. Lumm was hoisted back into the ring, groggy, but able to stand. He was clever enough to hang on until his head cleared, and good enough, when pried apart, to snap Peter's head back with an uppercut.

Thereafter, the Gloucester man seemed to run wild, if indeed he had at any instant been sane before. He leaped upon his foe, both arms swinging from his hips. Blows were exchanged, the like of which few championship bouts see more than one or two of in any one evening. By now, both of Peter's eyes were closed tight; his only chance was in keeping at all times on top of his man, where he could feel him. And the Assassin, who had not trained very hard for this trifling affair, was too tired to keep away.

The end came just before the bell; it seemed as if both of Peter's fists landed simultaneously, one on the mark, the other on the jaw; and the champion fell forward, only to be lifted from his feet by a sweeping uppercut, that sent him to the canvas, which his shoulders seemed fairly to bounce back from.

Amid a bedlam of shrieks and imprecations, the referee leaped in to warn Peter to stand back. His warnings were in vain; it was only because the Gloucester man was stone blind and hence unable to find his man, that he did not commit a foul then and there. The instant the referee shouted the fatal, "Ten!" he turned to the groping Peter, to raise his arm high in token of victory; and the latter, supposing that it was Joe Lumm who had at last come back within reach, promptly knocked the referee so cold that it was not until half an hour later that he knew what had happened to him.

There was a big policeman standing close to the ring, ready for any emergency, and when he beheld the referee thus assaulted, he climbed into the ring with amazing agility for a man weighing

two hundred and thirty pounds, and reached out to take Peter into his mighty embrace. Whereupon Peter, to whom all men looked alike, simply because he couldn't see at all, sank his right into that part of the officer immediately above his official belt. There came a sound as of an ice pick probing the largest size of balloon tire—and the majesty of the law was felled. Then seconds and handlers, managers, timekeeper and the immaculate Captain Burns, closed in on Peter, wrapped him hand and foot in living flesh, and bore him in a squirming heap to the canvas. The evening's entertainment was over!

Some time later, Lipwitz was hysterically trying to make his find understand that he had knocked out the world's champion, in the fourth round, and that untold wealth lay in reach of himself—and of Lipwitz. Peter Gorton expressed a stolid satisfaction, but seemed not greatly concerned.

"When do I eat?" he asked fretfully.

"Eat?" bawled Lipwitz. "Why, boy, ya own this li'l' old town to-night! Ya can go anywheres, do anything! Roof gardens, night clubs, swell hotels——"

"Aw, what's the use of all that!" Peter grumbled. "I can't see nothing, anyhow! I can't even see this kale you handed me. It might be phony, for all I know. Ya promised me when I got through, I could have anything I want to eat. Can't we dig up some quiet place where the grub is good? I can eat all right, in the dark."

Which was exactly what Peter Gorton did do. With the swelling reduced just sufficiently from his eyes so that he could avoid blundering into tables and chairs, and so that the maddened crowds that lined the streets loomed beside him as a dark and very noisy cloud, like thunderheads off Cape Ann, he rode with Lipwitz and Spike Ryan to the chop house of Mr. Barney. And, once seated, while the orchestra played the national anthem, he pushed aside the menu the waiter handed him, and sat back luxuriously, saying:

"I can't read that! But I know what I want. Gimme two of them mixed grills, and a big pot of coffee, and have a whole mince pie warming up in the oven. I'll give the rest of the order later."

AMERICA was so much more influential at the Washington arms-limitation conference than at Geneva because at Washington she was willing to sink so many of her ships while at Geneva she wanted to sink so many of Great Britain's.

THE GREATNESS OF LINDBERGH

WHEN Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh returned to Washington from France to receive the congratulations of President Coolidge, he was also given a great reception by the National Press Club, whose members, accustomed though they were to hobnobbing with the great and prominent of the world, were captivated by the flier's charm and modesty.

"But what I want to know," one of the journalists said to a colleague the day after Lindbergh left for New York, "is what effect he had on the president."

"He made a great hit with Coolidge," replied the colleague, who had been fortunate enough to have half an hour's private conversation with the airman the day before. "Coolidge was particularly interested in his contacts with royalty in Belgium and England; and the flier, in telling him about what the kings and queens said and what questions they asked, got a big laugh out of him. Which," added the colleague dryly, "was Lindbergh's second record-breaking feat."

By Theodore Seixas Solomons

A Good Old Scout

By the author of "Two Stirs Forward—Three Back," Etc.

It was a question of sentiment—which had the more genuine, the old-timer or the more modern prospector. When a rich haul of gold was at stake, which man would cast aside his finer feelings and become a heartless grabber?

"IT'S a land a-flowin' with milk and money," quoted old "Nock" Whipple, in a high and hopeful voice, "jest as the Good Book says. Only the conditions is different. You got ter stew down the berries to git the honey—and it's some puckery. Fer the milk—why, jest catch a caribou or a cow moose.

He turned his gaunt frame on his elbow to laugh, his gray-bearded head and hollow neck emerging from the dingy blankets of his bed on the bough-strewn floor of the tent. His merriment ended in a fit of coughing.

"Get back under there, old scout!" admonished McAdams severely, striding to him and giving the blankets a jerk into place. "And shut up. You talk too much!" He shoved a stick or two of wood into the battered sheet-iron stove—a fortunate pick-up of the afternoon before, relic of a winter camp of earlier prospecting days.

"Don't be so harsh to him, Aleck," said a third man reprovingly. He was sitting in the corner, hunched over a diary or memorandum book of some sort, in which he was industriously writing.

"Aw, I know how to handle the old guy," returned McAdams good-naturedly, as he slipped through the tent flap, bent on cutting stove wood for the night.

The prospect without was a dreary one. The pleasant, springlike summer of the Far North had ended weeks before, and the fall, brief precursor of the

long and hard, white time, had already painted the few deciduous shrubs into danger signals, giving to the dun landscape of the arctic highland that little warmth of color the year knew.

Rock and moss filled the near vistas of the landscape, its stream valleys of low relief and intricate contours marked by pencilings of fringing willows, with a hint, southward, of spruce forests where hazy patches of the hue of faded indigo revealed the lower reaches of the Porcupine, most northern tributary of the mighty Yukon.

The three had been out all summer on a prospecting trip through that far, unmapped region of Alaska—Enoch Whipple, pioneer Montanan, pioneer Alaskan, leading on the last of his once stout legs; Aleck McAdams, for some years his friend and occasional companion; and Mr. Alfred Lawrence Turner, a thirty-year-old mining engineer, rather down on his luck. It was a scoured watershed country—eroding to a new "base level," as Turner put it, with little of the older gravels left. But old Nock Whipple had told them as much, though, in different language. What hadn't been washed away, old pals had said, was sometimes gold bearing. A "pockety" country, hard to get to, and the pockets too rare to tempt any but bold men desperate for a grubstake.

Outside of the tent lay two pack saddles, canvas bags, a few prospecting tools. On the bare slope of the stream valley, two old mules, that had been sleek enough some months before, but were now skin-covered skeletons, browsed philosophically on frost-dried herbage.

McAdams browsed for dead willow sticks in drift litter under the banks of the creek. From the tent, hastily pitched the afternoon before, when Enoch Whipple's legs had succumbed to the weakness of fever, came the droning sound of the old scout's voice, high, almost senile, as he "knocked" the country to which he had gone, years before, yet too late in life for a chance to win—and probably lose again—another fortune in the West and Northwest. McAdams, between his cracking of sticks, listened with a quizzical smile, to the old man's ravings.

"Yes, she's a land o' gold, all right, Alfred. Klondike, Forty-mile, Nome, Fairbanks, Iditarod. Fortunes made. Millions of 'em. Well, anyhow, a dozen or two. Natcherly, a few of us didn't get nothin'—leastways a million or two of us didn't. The hull country was covered with gold, the papers said, when the old Klondike strike was boomin'—covered with gold like a old carpet with dust, they told us.

"I 'member a feller camped near us at Split-up Island at the mouth of the Stewart. He was playin' a lone hand. Had a big awk'erd skiff loaded with s'plies—funniest junk you ever see. Hunnerd and five different articles o' grub, he told us. One I 'member was *manioca*—somethin' like that. Kinder cousin to tapioca, he says. Build yer up. Great stuff. He was a big, six-foot counterjumper from Kansas City or some'eres. Growed a beard to look like a sure-enough Western man. An' every day while we was all splittin' up, this guy—they called him Willie—would set up a little lookin'-glass against a tree and comb out his whiskers and slick up his long, wavy, brown hair.

"One mornin' he 'pears on the river bank with a pack sack on his shoulders, loaded down with bacon an' *manioca* and sich. He was startin' to locate his claim. Where was he goin', with the Klondike a hunnerd miles off yet? 'Why,' says he, 'I'm a-goin' up some creek anywheres,' says he, 'before we gets too close to Dawson where the crowd must 'a' staked everything. I'm a-goin' ter locate me a reg'lar claim. I'll take out enough for to git me home and show the folks the gold, and then I'm a bringin' in some of 'em—mother, mebbe, too—and we'll work her out, and back to old Kansas City,' he says, just like that!"

Old Whipple turned on his elbow for another laugh—and a coughing spell.

"Keep under your blankets, Whipple," admonished Turner, merely pausing a moment in his note-making. "And don't laugh like that, my good man. Bad for you and nerve-racking to me."

"Just like that," repeated old Whipple, when he got his breath. "As easy as fallin' off a lawg. Whole country was covered with gold. All you had to do

was find a piece of it without stakes on—and that was easy, in spite o' fifty thousand stampeders. What did *they* amount to in a hunnerd and fifty thousand million acres o' wilderness, hey? Say, this Willie was one of the guys that used to sing, 'The Klondike Vale Tonight.' Must 'a' heered it on a boat comin' up to Skag-a-way. Had a string thing like a banjo or somethin'. Fine voice Willie had, too. An' he'd bawl her out in the evenin' from his skiff moored to the bank. When the rag chewers was through sawin' their stoves in two, and gittin' ready to sleep to git new strength for quarrelin' afresh in the mornin', Willie would sing it mournful—fer he sure believed the words:

"In fur-away Alaska, whare the Yukon River flows,
An' the mighty boulders stand 'mid wealth and might,
In a land o' wealth untold, in a grave that's decked with g-o-l-d,
He's sleepin' *i-n* th' Klondike Vale tonight!"

Flushed, his faded, blue eyes shining in the deep sockets, old Whipple's laughter sounded again, like mirthless echoes in an empty cavern.

"'In a grave that's decked with gold!' Never be *my* luck, live or dead!"

"Shut up, Nock!" McAdams appeared with an armful of slender, twisted sticks. "Get yourself all het up, ye old fool!"

"No use abusing the old fellow," remarked Turner. He had put the diary aside and was perusing a small pocket volume of something. "Delirium, I suppose," he added in a lower voice. "Let him die in peace!"

"Aw," McAdams muttered; "he's all right. Tuckered out, tha's all." In a louder voice: "Lay still, old scout, will yer? They ain't much grub left, and durn little game away up here. How we gonna get yer down to the Yukon 'less you rest up so we kin start again in a day or two? Cut out the gab!"

"Gosh; but you're a rough devil, McAdams!" exclaimed Turner petulantly. "Let him die in peace, can't you?"

"He'll hear yer you durn fool!"

Turner scowled. Comrades though they were, and in a desperate plight, he disliked the unwonted familiarity of the uncouth man more than he objected to the slur.

"He won't. He's only hearing his own maudlin talk. Man, you've got no heart, no sentiment!"

"Sentiment? What's that?"

Turner shrugged.

"What you—haven't got. Let him alone. Don't nag him. It's just a question of hours."

"I'm tryin' to buck him up, tha's all. Got to get him outer here purty soon. Reckon we kin stick him on one mule by bunching what's left of the outfit an' crowdin' it on the other one."

"Impossible," decided Turner, frowning. "We'll simply do what we can for him till he—passes. Please speak to him kindly." He turned again to his handy volume of the classics.

McAdams seized a small-caliber rifle and went after ptarmigan, a sparse few of which they had seen the day before in the bushlike willows of the divide. Their plight for food was desperate. A bird or two would make soup for the old man.

But Enoch Whipple was nearly beyond all help from food when the middle-aged, "unsentimental" McAdams returned belatedly, the early dark of the northern fall upon them. A couple of birds—already turning white to meet the coming winter—were slung over the barrel of his gun. Old Whipple was raving.

"Don't none o' you guys think this old Injun tracker was slow in gittin' to the strikes up here?" he shouted to the solemn-faced engineer. "I was gen'rally before the first stakin's was done. And, gentlemen, I allus pulled a blank. Nome? Say, in Nome, the gold was all around me, first on the beach and then out on old Dexter—a fraction, that was, All around me, boys—an' mine, both of 'em, didn't have a color!"

He seemed to doze for a while; but when McAdams roused him to take the ptarmigan broth, he glared crazily into the battered tin bowl and wagged his head refusingly.

"Looks yaller," he muttered. "B'iled-up gold, I reckon. Not fer me. I git mine in a pan or a sluice box. That ain't

nothin' but tundra water. Yaller. All over Alaska. Some folks think it's gold—dissolved out by the grass roots. Gold at the grass roots! That's it. That's what they promised us when we come North. 'Land o' wealth untold—grave that's decked with gold——' "

It was impossible to quiet him. Turner's dignified gentleness, when old Whipple's ravings disturbed his reading, was as unavailing as McAdams' rough admonishings, which turned, finally, into severity. "Shut up and go to sleep, you!" It was the only way he knew of impressing the wandering mind of the old frontiersman, but it was inexpressibly shocking to Alfred Turner, of finer mold. He glared at McAdams balefully. McAdams only laughed.

"Always been knockin' the country, sence I've known him," he remarked to the engineer, as they sprawled on their blankets, a single fluttering candle between them. "Baptized Enoch, he was; and you kin figger what a grand chance that name gave the boys up here to nickname him. They jest left off the 'e,' that's all. Oh, well, everybody knocks things and places when the luck is all agin' 'em. But old Whipple's always had it wuss than anybody I ever seen up here. Hey there!" he bawled, when the sick man began singing again. "I'll tie you down, you old rascal, if you don't lay quiet!"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Mac," protested Turner hotly. "It doesn't do any good. Let him die happy!"

"*Does* do good," insisted McAdams. "Slinks down, more or less, whenever I holler at him. You got a easy way of killin' him off. Why ain't he got a chance? Fever's passin', mebbe. He's a tough old bird. Keep him quiet, *I* say!"

But neither Turner's melancholy advice to the passing one nor the gruff-voiced commands of McAdams availed to stay the torrent of delirium. Only death stilled the weakly raucous voice. And his last words came in a kind of gasping chant, in high, thin falsetto:

"In a grave that's decked with g-o-l-d,
He's sleeping *i-n* the Klondike Vale to-night!"

Turner made considerable ado over laying out old Whipple in seemly guise, fussing about in the tent; while Alack McAdams took upon himself the grilling task of digging a grave in the hard and rocky soil. The late night was a poor time, and the man was tired. But the two had agreed that an early get-away from that inhospitable barren land was imperative, and McAdams groped about for a nook that offered soil enough for a proper grave, deep beyond the fierce pawings of slinking creatures of the wild. In an angle of the creek bed, yet higher than the marks of the spring freshets, he found such a place, and with a light pick and short-handled shovel, McAdams went doggedly to work.

When he reëntered the tent, admitting thereto a first faint light of dawn, he found his remaining companion smoothing off a flatted slab of wood.

"For an epitaph for the poor old fellow," explained Turner, fumbling in his coat for his fountain pen.

"I know," nodded McAdams, mopping his face with a grimy bandanna handkerchief. "In a grave that's decked with gold, he's sleepin' in the Klondike Vale to-night! Fine!"

Turner gave a grunt of disgust.

"Doggerel. The word 'wealth,' if you quote the whole verse, is repeated twice. I suppose in the correct version it isn't, but it's rotten poetry to stick up on a grave, even in the wilderness."

McAdams looked wistfully at the slab.

"Still," he urged, "it was the old man's fav'rite joke—knockin' the gold up here. And that ridic'lous 'grave that's decked with gold—he allus split his sides laughin' at that. Old man was some joker in his time, too. I been with him off and on a number of years."

"Death and graves are solemn matters, McAdams," replied Turner pettishly. "As I've had occasion to remark before. Mac, you've simply got no sentiment. The man was your friend. We'll give him what decent burial we can, and mark his last resting place with something a little more fitting in the way of verse than that maudlin dance-hall stuff!"

"What'll it be?" asked McAdams, abashed.

"I had thought of an epitaph, or a verse, rather, from the tomb of the immortal bard, Shakespeare. It's a bit highbrow, perhaps, for poor old Whipple. It may protect the mound, though. Even you old sour doughs are sometimes superstitious."

McAdams leaned down, his hard hands resting on his clay-slippery overalls, and watched Turner as he printed slowly, beneath the name and date, the words:

> Good friend, for Jesus' sake, forbear
> To dig the dust inclosed here;
> Blest be the man that spares these stones,
> And cursed be he that moves my bones.

"It aint' the kind o' langwage old Nock Whipple savvied," commented McAdams soberly. "But I get the idee."

He extinguished the candle with his heavy palm—thriftily.

"Now give me a hand, here——"

By the time McAdams had shoveled back all the gravel and smoothed the oval surface, Turner had ornately rounded the wooden slab and pointed its end. A few strokes with the back of the shovel and the little monument was driven to its place at the head of the grave underneath the high bank. Alfred Lawrence Turner murmured a brief prayer and dropped a silent tear.

It was barely light when they made up the packs, and McAdams brought in the shivering mules and saddled them. Then four companions trudged, single file, down the meandering stream bed, where five had come.

Turner clapped his hand to the breast pocket of his coat.

"Wait, Mac! I must have left my fountain pen where the tent was. I'll go back after it."

"Take you half an hour," demurred McAdams, squinting at the rising sun. "We got some job getting outer this part of the world—on half rations."

"Got to have the pen, you know!" Turner walked briskly away.

The little black tube was nowhere to be found among the tramped boughs that marked the site of the tent. Suddenly Turner remembered that he had used the pen last in making a decorative box around the epitaph. At the grave he found the pen—and also something else. The risen sun drew glintings from the fresh-turned gravel. He was amazed. He dug about with his fingers. A little nugget; a larger one; specks of fine gold and coarse. He ran down the creek and found an impatient McAdams feeding choice bits of bunch brass to the gaunt mules.

"Most wonderful thing! Where we camped last night——"

"Well, by heck! what d'ye know about that?" exclaimed McAdams, when the mining engineer had told him. The "pardner" of unlucky Enoch Whipple forgot about half rations, for the time being, and turned the mules back. In ten minutes the two prospectors were sizing up the vicinity of the last resting place of the old Montana scout.

The result was amazing—and disappointing. McAdams, in the dark, had come upon the only deposit of gravel. It was a pothole shielded by the angular, overhanging rim rock of the creek channel from the denuding forces of erosion that elsewhere had swept the highlands clean of all its old deposits. It had been known as a "pockety" country, as old Whipple had told them. Hereabouts there was one pocket. All that was mortal of Enoch Whipple rested there. The mining engineer and the old sour dough returned to the gold-flecked grave.

Alfred Lawrence Turner's mouth twitched. He lit one of the last of his cigarettes.

"We won't find as easy a place for a —new grave," he remarked thoughtfully. "But we'll not need a new one. After we've washed the gravel—cleaned out this pothole completely—why, we can reinter the body and cover it with the tailings. Make it look just as it did——"

McAdams gasped.

"What d'yer mean? Dig him up again? You're joking!"

Turner laughed uncomfortably.

"Of course, if it had been lighter, we'd have seen that this was pay dirt. And naturally we'd have washed it out. Just because it was too dark to see——"

"But we *buried* him!" exclaimed Aleck McAdams. "This ain't no placer dump.

This is a grave. Grave of my old pal. What the devil are we? Body snatchers? Ghouls?"

"I'd hardly thought it of *you!*" Turner replied, reddening. "About as unsentimental a devil as I ever saw."

"Yeah, you told me I ain't got no sentiment. What have *you* got?"

Turner frowned and bit his lip.

"There's a difference between sentiment and sentimentality. The former—sentiment—is a mighty good thing to use on living people. I didn't roar at him and jerk the covers over his shoulders as if he was a horse. But he's dead now—clay. It's the most puerile sentimentality to talk about the sacredness of a mere grave."

"Oh, it is hey? Well, I admit I don't know the difference between the sentiment and the 'tality' you stick on it. But I do know I was riz decent, and I know what the homefolks think about graves and graveyards. Why, man, look what you wrote yourself!"

With a stubby finger Aleck McAdams pointed closely to the verse of the epitaph. Painfully squinting, he read out the words:

"'Blest be the man that spares these stones, and cursed be he that moves my bones.' Hey, you don't want to be cussed, do yer? Cussed for life fer a grave-snatching ghoul? Your own pal, at that? Poor old Nock!"

Alfred Turner's eyes were averted. He smoked the last half of his cigarette in three long puffs and tossed the stub away with a determined gesture. He was as big, as quick and as strong as McAdams, and younger by fifteen years. However, he would try his wit first. He scooped a handful of the rich pay dirt.

"Do you realize, McAdams, what we have here? Not a dozen buckets of gravel, probably. A couple of hundred pans at the most, and perhaps as much more that you didn't disturb in digging the hole."

"Hole, is it? Just a hole! Sentimental, you are, fer a fact!"

"Just wait a minute. You're a placer miner. You know what gravel goes to the pan when you can *see* the gold in it—pick out nuggets with your fingers! There's five, six, seven thousand dollars in this pothole, this pocket, just as sure as the world. *I* need the money—need it bad, if you don't. You're broke, ain't you?"

"What's that got to do with it?" demanded McAdams.

Turner studied him. Was it affectation? No, the fellow looked frankly bewildered at the question. Was it cupidity? Did he intend later to return and take it all?

"It's all right, this sentimentality—for that's what it is—mere mawkish sentimentality. If you can afford it! Why we'd be just plain fools if we went off without it!"

McAdams had recourse to the grimy bandanna. He mopped his brow.

"Any man can work," he answered doggedly. "He don't have ter rob graves. I ain't superstitious, Turner. But it's durn funny old Whipple dies with them words on his lips: 'In a grave that's decked with gold.' An' here he is in a grave full of it. If there's anything in sperits, maybe the old man's hovering around and laughin' to beat the dickens. Struck it at last—when it can't do him no good!"

"It's an excellent joke, no doubt," returned the engineer unsmilingly. "But the real joke would be on us if we left thousands of dollars—after all the hardships we've gone through this summer. Left it for the next couple of prospectors to wash up and put it in their buckskin pokes. No, sir!"

McAdams scowlingly flipped his thumb at the epitaph.

"Didn't you write that there po'try to skeer the next man off from tamperin' with the grave? Maybe the next guy, even if he ain't got the decency of a pig to let a grave alone, will be scairt out by the curse."

"Oh, of course," returned the engineer, ironically. "Prospectors are that way. Men that have got the nerve to take their lives in their hands in a wilderness like this—they're going to be scared off by a verse they can't even understand. With gold glittering under their hands. Why not advertise it? Write the other verse under it—tell 'em it's a grave that's

decked with gold, for fear it's a cloudy day when they pass by and they don't catch a gleam in the dirt. Sure, let *them* have it!"

"You're gittin' sarcastic, now, ain't you? Well, you kin, if you like." McAdams folded his arms. His jaw was set. "This man Whipple didn't amount to much in this country, so fur as success goes, though he always stood fer law and order. But old-timers that knew him tells me he's been *some* punkins back in the States in early days. One of the best Injun fighters in the West, and known and trusted by the gov'ment men that come after Custer. If he was back in Montana, now, the old-timers'd plant him proper and give him a headstone with what he done cut on it, 'stead of a moldy old poem from this feller Shakespeare. Just because he cashes in away up here a thousand miles from nowheres is no reason why we oughter treat him like a dead animal. No, siree! Not by a darn sight."

"Do as you damn please!" barked Turner, enraged. "Help me, or I'll take it all!"

He stripped off his coat and walked to the pack mule that bore the short-handled shovel, thrust under the lashing. When he turned he looked into the muzzle of a revolver.

"You'll take it all!" echoed Aleck McAdams. "Every one of the five chambers if you tech this grave. You won't listen ta reason. You'll listen to *this*, if it talks!"

Turner went white.

"Partners, heh! This is the way you treat a partner because he don't agree with you!"

"Yeh, this is the way I treat pardners. I got more respeck fur a dead pardner than I have fur some live ones I could mention. You kin cut off the slack of that lash rope there and tie your own hands. I'll make a better job of it when you're through."

Aleck McAdams seemed to have had some experience in manhandling. He pocketed the revolver and tied his living partner securely and set him on a rock near by, ignoring Turner's threats and protestations. He got out the pick and pried loose many flat slabs of shale rock on the other side of the creek. These he carried to the grave and set them neatly upon the dirt mound, edge to edge, so that none of the gravel of the pothole remained in evidence to excite the cupidity of a passing prospector—a remote chance in that far land, yet one to be guarded against.

With his jackknife McAdams scraped away the verse and wrote instead, underneath the name and date:

A GOOD OLD SCOUT

He replaced the pick and shovel in the pack. Then he tethered the mining engineer to one of the mules by a ten-foot rope, and tied the red bandanna over Turner's eyes so that he could see only the ground.

"What's this unnecessary insult for?" inquired the man who vainly sought to illustrate the distinction between sentiment and sentimentality.

"You're too durn handy with that there notebook of yours," replied McAdams. "It's a twisty country, yet with the help of sketchin's I reckon you could sneak back here some day an' rob the grave. I aim to put the kibosh on that!"

THE report that Mr. Coolidge says absolutely nothing at his "State breakfasts," at which he entertains prominent politicians, is not surprising. That's just about what everybody says at breakfast.

"DEMOCRATS," remarked a wit of the National Press Club of Washington, in a recent discussion of the political situation, "are politicians whose position is the same as Republicans' on government policies but not on government pay rolls."

The Spanish Man

By **Henry Herbert Knibbs**

A TALLISH man and dark, with ribands to his clothes,
And eye with burnin' glint and spark, and fine, commandin' nose.

And oft he spent his cash in Hurley's boozin' ken,
The where, with pistol in his sash he talked with sailormen;

Or, twiddlin' with a cane, he'd strut and take the air—
No highborn lady half so vain to make a body stare.

Folks said behind his back such things no lad should hear,
But talked on quite another tack, his shadow fallin' near.

Now on a time there came a lass to Barrowlea,
Called "Florizel"—a pretty name, nor other name had she.

And oft my mother said while windin' from the skein,
That some fine day the lass would wed the glowerin' man of Spain.

It seems my mother knew, for on a stormy night,
A travelin' papist wed the two by cross and candlelight.

Their painted cottage stood a piece from Barrow hill,
Where winds the road through Gower wood, an eerie spot and still.

And there we lads would hide before the sun went down,
And watch him with his gypsy bride come walkin' up from town.

Then soft we'd up and run with noses pointed home,
And ghosts of pirates dead and done, red-reekin' through the gloam.

Long since! But I recall how "Peddler Joe" would come,
And show his trinkets, rings and all with penny-itchin' thumb.

Wee mirrors, thimbles, thread, bright needles, skeins of floss,
And on a bit of velvet red a little golden cross.

With that Joe would not part for anything, said he,
And one who wore it next his heart would never drown at sea.

One evenin' long he staid, though all our change was spent;
'Twas passin' late to look for trade, but down the road he went.

And well I call to mind the mornin' Joe was found,
Stiff dead in Gower wood, behind a ridge of ferny ground.

All empty was his pack of gawds and ribbon bands,
A dirk upstandin' in his back and dead leaves in his hands.

And all our folk were there, a still and scowlin' clan,
With answerin' nod and meanin' stare—except The Spanish Man.

Safe by the fire that night I heard my father plead,
With Heaven to slay the Amorite who did the awful deed.

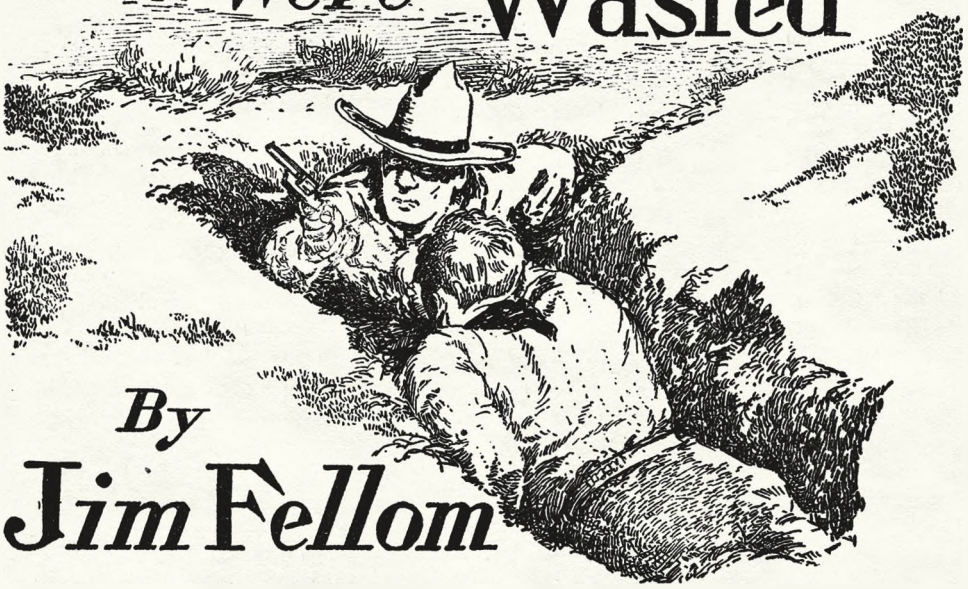
And then it came to pass, while walkin' by the sea,
My father found the gypsy lass afar from Barrowlea.

Her eyes with horror wide, her body stark and cold,
And glimmerin' on her breast he spied a little cross of gold.

And on that very day, the law upon his track,
The Man of Spain he sailed away and nevermore came back.

And still in Barrowlea folk argue to and fro,
The whether it was he or she who did for Peddler Joe.

But Several Bullets Were Wasted



By Jim Fellom

Author of "Putting the Skids Under Skuds," "Transplanting a Vi'let," Etc.

Well, Yates did get to Frisco, but first he got half-drowned, shot at, and married. What's more, he enjoyed most of it.

WELL, you can figure it out for yourself. There I'd been working steady at the Touchstone Mine, and I'm sitting pretty with a year's wages in hundred-dollar bills sewed up nice and snug inside the sweatband of a brand-new twenty-dollar sombrero. I'd put in a long spell of work—something I never have been any too fond of—and I certainly meant to get all that was coming to me in the way of fun in spending that there money I'd earned by the sweat of my manly brow.

I climb up onto the auto stage to take me to Salubrious City, from whence I'm intending to loaf à la Pullman all the way to Frisco for a big time in that grand old burg—and that cussed stage busts its front axle twelve miles from the station, in a beautiful, dismal canyon where there ain't a living human being outside of myself and the driver, except this tall, hatrack sort of female who's been eying me suspiciously ever since I got on. It sure was a piece of hard luck. Looked like my trip to the pride of California was getting off to a pretty bad start. Well, I thinks to myself, there ain't no use sitting here beefing about it. There ain't but one thing to do.

And when I remarked offhand to the driver that if he'd stake me to one of his canteens I'd hike on into Salubrious in time to catch my train, why this skinny, agate-eyed woman calls me to one side and breathes hoarsely in my ear:

"Don't leave me alone with this low-brow," jerking her thumb at the driver, who's got too much grief to pay us

any attention. "I can't explain now, but I'm terribly nervous. I don't trust anybody. And you've got such a *good* face!"

I took a deep breath and looked at her. And I couldn't have returned the compliment if I was to have been shot the next minute. Honest, I'd never seen such a map on a woman before! She had a nose like an eagle's bill, jet-black, shoe-button eyes set close together, lips thin as razor blades, and a chin with a long vamp. I judged she was forty-five plus; and her iron-gray hair was bobbed, and she wore a plain black dress and an old-fashioned hat with a lot of sick-looking violets plastered on it.

Her eyes were pinned on mine, cold as glittering ice.

"You have such a *good* face," she repeats, and, somehow, it sounded to me as if a tigress was purring.

I was beginning to feel like the wreck of the *Hesperus*.

"But, lady, it's a twelve-mile hike," says I politely. "It's half past one now, and my train steams into Salubrious at five thirty. I'll have to walk some. I'm afraid you couldn't hold out. If it wasn't for that, why——"

"You'll be surprised," she breaks in. "And thank you so much for letting me go with you. I'll only carry my hand bag. Oh, how relieved you've made me feel! Supposing we get started?"

Well, sir, I could have groaned aloud. She'd wished herself on me and I didn't have backbone enough to turn her down. And, mind you, all the time I'm more than suspicious of her. She was on the stage when I got on at the Touchstone Mine. I'd sat in the same seat with her for better than an hour, and we hadn't said a word to each other, but every once in a while when I'd look her way I'd find her little, bright eyes glued on me. Believe me, I was mighty glad I'd hidden my year's wages in my hat. Kind of a clever idea, I figured, considering the country was actually crawling with bandits.

Anyhow, I talked the driver out of a canteen, promised I'd send him help soon as I got to town, and down the road the lady and I ramble.

It is a fine, sunny, desert day—better than a hundred in the shade; regular ice-cream weather. And you have to be a pretty good man to hold a three-mile-an-hour clip for four hours in that kind of temperature, like I intended doing. Yet, here was this feminine person hitting it up like she was going to a picnic—picking up her feet and laying them down again every time I did, slinging along shoulder to shoulder with me!

For half a mile or so neither of us spoke, but just kept stepping it off like a couple of soldiers. Of course, there's such a thing as being sociable, and I kind of figured it was up to me to say something. So, after a little, I remark rather pleasantly:

"Ain't this the lonesomest canyon you ever seen? It's got a fierce reputation, too. More men have been killed here to the square mile and more stages held up than anywhere in the West—that is, in the early days, you understand. They call it Dead Man's Gorge."

She gives me a quick, funny look.

"How interesting! But I'm all prepared, as you can see."

She's on my off side, and as she says this, up comes her right hand holding a man-size six-shooter. She must have slipped it out of her big hand bag when I wasn't looking.

It sort of flabbergasted me for a minute; it was so unexpected. But I manage to grin.

"You're bandit proof, all right enough. Of course, you can shoot?"

"I hope to tell you! I've shot holes through better hats than the one you're wearing," she replies with a slow wink.

I didn't say so, but I was pretty positive she hadn't. Not with a year's wages tucked inside of them—say around eight hundred dollars. But that was a mighty peculiar remark for her to make, I thought to myself.

"They wouldn't have to be much to beat this skypiece," I laughs gayly, and follows it up with: "You're all set to fight off bandits, and yet you were scared the driver would rob you—that's what you told me. What's the big idea?"

She didn't answer me right off. We marched along for a couple of minutes in

silence, our footsteps banging through the canyon. Her hard little eyes were fixed ahead, and I was pretty sure she was cooking up a nice story for me to swallow.

"Well, since I must tell you sooner or later," says she at last, "I need a partner, and you've got such a good face that——"

"A partner? What kind of a partner?"

"A red-blooded, fighting man who'll —— What in the world is that?"

From behind us came a roar like a flock of pianos doing a fox trot on roller skates in the town hall.

One look and I knew the worst. Just clearing the top of the range, and sailing through the clear, blue sky as if it had been shot out of a gun, was a little, ragged cloud about the size of a skillet, and you never saw a blacker blot of ink in your life. Little flickers of lightning were playing in and out of it, and every so often the thunder would let go a broadside that'd make your hair curl. Swooping down the slope of the range came that black gob of a cloud, straight over the canyon. A crazy wind started up, blowing in furious gusts, screaming around us like a mob of invisible devils.

"Come on—run!" I holler to the mysterious lady. I grab her by the arm and head for the nearest hill. "A cloud-burst is coming. If it catches us in this canyon we'll drown like a couple of rats."

If you know anything about cloud-bursts, you know an airplane is a horse and wagon alongside of them for real speed. This one, it seemed to me, was considerably peppier than the average. By the time we reach the hill and begin scrambling onto high ground, it's almost over us. Out goes the sun; it gets dark as night; the wind whips and tears at us, pelting us with dirt; the lightning spits and sputters; and the thunder roars and roars.

Then, all of a sudden, something rips that sky water bag wide open—and the fun begins. This ain't a gay little April shower. It's Niagara Falls plus a lot of hell fury and some awful moments. Several hundred thousand gallons of water just simply fall out of that inky cloud in the space of a city block, and in less than six minutes.

"Save me! Save me!" screams my female companion, throwing her arms around me wildly.

"I'm trying to. Let go of my neck!" I bellow. I grab her by the arms, but she's got a death grip on me. I can't pry her loose.

But that cloud-burst does. It sideswipes us, washing us off our feet and down the hill. I bring up against a boulder just off the bed of the gulch, and the torrent pounds me out flat. The lady has vanished with a scream, and so has my brand-new twenty-dollar hat! I ain't got time to think of them just then, though. That shrieking deluge is astraddle of me, as you might say, and I'm fighting for my life.

Lordy, how it pours! I'm suffocating for want of air, slowly drowning on the side of that hill with the water cataracting down the slope onto me. And the gulch is roaring by now, rising higher every moment, great, muddy waves whirling on the crest of that mad flood that nothing could live in.

I knew what would happen to me when it rose to where I lay struggling to get up. I'd be swept away, and that'd be the grand finale for yours truly. So, at last, blinded and half dead, I made a big, desperate try to get back up the hill. I'll never tell you how I did it, except that I bucked that elemental fury head on, crawling by inches like an angleworm till I got to the top.

And just about when I did, the cloud-burst quits. It quits sudden, as if somebody had turned off the faucet. The sun is shining the next minute. The ground begins to steam.

A little while after, I sit up, weak and groggy. I'm soft mud from head to foot. I get back to normal slowly and begin taking inventory. As I've already said, the lady and my hat were swept away. From where I'm sitting I can't see a sign of them. They were carried down the gulch in the flood. The water is falling as sudden as it rose, and the bed of the gulch is starting to show in places.

Getting to my feet, I hike along the hillside looking for that poor woman and

my expensive hat. There were eight hundred hard-earned dollars sewed up in that sombrero. Don't forget that, neighbor! Was I sick? I'll say! No trip to Frisco; no big jamboree; no need of me trying to get to Salubrious City before train time, even. I had just about change enough to buy my way back to the Touchstone Mine, that's all. I felt like the end of the trail. Why, oh, why, had I made a purse out of my hat? I kept cursing to myself! A whole year's wages that I'd put by so carefully, month after month, dreamed of spending on one wild fling of pleasure in stepping out like a regular and hitting the high spots—gone! I'd figured on protecting myself from two-legged robbers and had overlooked this sky bandit.

Anyhow, I hike on, sort of bemoaning my tough luck. Pretty soon, I drop back into the gulch. All that's left of the flood now are pools of water here and there. But the stage road is washed out as if it had never been there at all.

Then I find a hat—hers! I got the funniest feeling, as if I was looking at something dead. That hat was jammed among the boulders in the center of the gulch. I left it there and went on. But after that I kept watching out for her, and for my own hat. I sort of reasoned that, if I'd find a flimsy, little hat like hers, I couldn't help but come across a heavy sombrero such as mine was. Except it became covered over with sand, that is.

Well, sir, I hiked maybe a couple of miles, till I was way down where the gulch opened onto the flat. Here the flood waters had sunk in the wash. But no dead woman or sombrero. Back I went again, searching the sand bars. I found a pond of water, took a bath, washed out my clothes, put them back on to dry, and resumed the hunt. And after combing the gulch this second time, up to the spot I started from, I made up my mind to strike on into Salubrious, notify the sheriff of the lady's death, and return with the posse next morning. You see, I intend to find my year's wages if it's anywhere in that gulch. If it ain't, then it's up to me to discover the man who's wearing a brand-new twenty-dollar sombrero. It would be somewhat mud stained, but I'd recognize it the minute I'd see it.

So off I go again, this time heading for Salubrious.

It's well on toward the end of the afternoon, by now. The sun is about ready to dive behind the range. My clothes have dried, and I sling along at a good clip, keeping a sharp lookout to either side, and thinking to myself that if my lady friend hadn't caught me around the neck like she did, and overbalanced me when the cloud-burst hit us, I'd probably have saved her and my bank roll. I ain't feeling very cheerful, I can tell you that.

I'm almost clear of the hills when I suddenly hear a woman calling. Her voice is low and sort of musical, and even before I see her I'm mystified. I know it ain't my missing lady. Not *that* voice.

"Mister! Just a moment, please, mister!" she calls again.

I glance around for some seconds before I spot her. And for a spell I think I'm dreaming. You never seen such a wonderful creature in your life—twenty fair summers, half like tangled sunshine, skin just tanned to a turn, and eyes—— Man! She's sitting on a rock in a little gulch feeder, and as I stand and stare at her, bewilderedlike, she invites me over with her finger.

Do I go? I hope to tell you I do. Not only am I interested in what such a lovely vision is straying around loose for, in that hell country, but she's got my brand-new twenty-dollar hat! Yes, sir, she's sitting there holding it—and you can't hardly imagine how I felt. I just had to hold onto myself to keep from running up and grabbing her in my arms and kissing her.

"How do you do?" says I, walking up and grinning at her as if I was cuckoo.

Then I noticed for the first time that she was trembling.

"Oh, I'm so glad you—somebody has come!" she half sobs. "I'm in terrible trouble. Two men came to our camp this afternoon. When they found I was alone, they—they took possession, threat-

ened me. Look what they did!"—showing me her wrists, both swollen and black and blue. "I managed to escape. I was going to town after help. But—but I've sprained my ankle running."

She put her face in her hands and started to cry.

I looked at her, then at my hat. I picked it up, and saw that the sweatband was still sewed up.

The girl kept crying in a kind of a hopeless, helpless way. She seemed so small and pitiful, all huddled up on that rock. And her hair was so silky, and the skin just back of her tiny ears so like cream, and her gossamer dress so becoming to her!

Pretty soon, she dried her eyes and glanced up at me—I can't tell you in just what fashion. But she made up my mind for me.

"How far is your camp from here?" I ask her.

"About a mile."

"Well, I'll go up there and see how tough those two gents really are," says I. "I want to thank you for finding my hat, miss. I got caught in a cloudburst and lost it."

"I might have given it to you when you first went down the gulch. I saw you when you came back, too. But I was afraid to call to you. I thought you might be with those men."

"What made you change your mind?"

"Why, I—I watched you." She hesitated. "You're different. You—you've got a good face."

I didn't answer her. Here was another woman telling me how good looking I was. It didn't swell me up any. It was ridiculous. But right then I got to thinking about that poor, unfortunate, homely female whose bonnet I'd found in the rock pile, and who must have been buried in one of the sand bars. I figured it wouldn't be wise to mention it to this lovely girl, who was nervous enough as it was.

Anyway, she gets to her feet at last, and starts off to show me the trail to her camp. But she can't walk on her left foot. I catch hold of her arm, and she looks up at me again in that way which I can't explain—kind of puzzles me, so to speak, because I don't understand much about women. But that don't mean I'm bashful, either.

Before she knows what it's all about, I've got her in my arms, like you'd carry a baby. She fusses some—not much, though.

"You can't hike, and I won't leave you here," says I.

Well, she tells me how to find the trail, and presently I'm on it and traveling fast, following a crooked gully that leads back into the foothills—wild country, this, let me remark. The girl is the tidiest little armful I was ever lucky enough to carry, and I just pranced along with her, feeling it was the biggest moment of my life. And there was her face, maybe a foot away from mine. If I'd had just a mite more sand I'd have kissed her and taken a cuffing.

By now the sun had gone down. The sky to the west was a smear of orange, with a dash of tomato catsup. The air is warm and fragrant with that strange, spicy smell that you find out yonder where you'd swear nothing ever grows. I've often wondered what causes that smell.

Once, I stop and set her gently on a rock, and roll a cigarette. She'd just told me that her camp is not more than two hundred yards off. There isn't a sound. I look my six-shooter over, and begin to figure if my cartridges are dry. If they ain't, and I run into the enemy, I'm out of luck, proper. So I'll have to get the drop on them first, no fooling!

"I'm afraid you'll have to wait here till I run those pests off," says I to her. "I won't be gone any longer than I have to. Don't be nervous."

"But—but suppose they shoot you? Oh, that would be horrible!"

"Yes, it certainly would," I agreed. And then I ask her: "Would you mind telling me your name, so I'll know who I'm representing? It'll help me a lot."

"Jessica—Jessica Blaine."

"Mine is Ked Yates. Now, since we know one another, tell me this: what did these two birds want in your camp?"

She hesitates.

"You can trust me." I grin. "You said I had a good face."

She smiles, sort of embarrassedlike, and blushes.

"Why, my aunt and I are arranging to build a bathhouse, and——"

"A bathhouse?" I echo—and, honest, I think she's goofy. "A bathhouse on this desert?"

"Yes. There's a medicinal hot spring here. Anyway, the news got around and some men laid claim to the ground. My aunt went to the county seat three days ago—they've brought suit against us. I am sure those two wretches I escaped from are the ones who are trying to dispossess us."

"What sort of a looking lady is your aunt? Maybe I saw her at the county seat." An awful idea gets crosswise in my head, and I make this explanation so as not to arouse her suspicions.

And it was just as I suspected. The description she gave me of her Aunt Tabitha fitted the mysterious female who had disappeared in the cloud-burst like it was made to order.

"I guess I didn't see her," I lied, because I couldn't have told her the truth right then.

But from that mintue on I decided that it was up to me to see that that poor little thing didn't get the worst of it. I recollected that among Aunt Tabitha's last words to me, just before the cloud-burst hit us, was that she wanted a red-blooded fighting man for a partner, and that she had hinted that I about filled the bill. I'm a sentimental cuss. I can't stand to see beauty in distress, for one thing; and then, again, I kind of like an occasional little frolic with guns.

Therefore, I begin to prepare for the big show I'm going to put on somewhere in the neighborhood. I get down on my knees and stick my ear to the ground like the Indians do, and listen. But I can't hear a sound. Then I get the distance and direction of camp from Jessica, and take off my brand-new twenty-dollar hat and give it to her.

"If you hear any shooting, start right out for Salubrious City. I ain't got any relations, so I'm willing you this sombrero. All I ask is that you clean it, inside and out, and keep it as a souvenir —that is, if I don't came back," says I.

"Oh, please don't go! I won't let you risk your life like that. It's not right. I'm going along with you," she cries. She grabs me by the arm and looks at me in that hypnotizing way she's got.

"It's too dangerous. You'd be safe here. Come on, be reasonable, Miss Blaine!"

"I can't be. And, besides, I'm afraid to stay alone. Suppose they found me here? And I couldn't walk to Salubrious. I'm too lame. You wouldn't leave me unprotected, would you?"

Her arguments win me over. I ain't saying how much her eyes helped. I sit down by her side, and glance over the hillsides. Night is just beginning to draw the blinds. The first star starts winking down at us. I remember that the moon comes on shift early. In an hour or so I'll have plenty of light to work by. Anyway, instead of striking out alone up the gulch, I start over the hill in the direction of the camp, taking Jessica with me—yes, sir, carrying her in my arms; I didn't mind it a bit.

And the strangest thing—I forget all about my trip to Frisco and the eight-hundred-dollar whirl I'd been promising myself for the past year. And I didn't even feel hungry, and the only bracer I'd had was what gurgled out of the canteen I'd borrowed off the stage driver. That's what a pretty face will do to a fellow.

We get to the top of the hill, and, Jessica directing me, I let her down and sneak forward for a look on the other side. There lies their camp, just like she'd said—a sleeping tent and, a little ways off, a kitchen fly. The gulch has made a right-angle turn, and a short distance higher up I can see a dark-green patch and a clump of trees. And there's a murmur of running water.

"I can't hear anything, and there's no camp fire—nothing. I've got an idea they jumped out, figuring you'd go to town and bring help," I whisper to Jessica when I come back to her side.

"What had we better do?" she asks me. "Oh, I do wish Aunt Tabitha was here!"

I didn't say anything to that. A picture of the old-fashioned bonnet with its

plaster of sick-looking violets lying back there in the dark, lonely canyon flashes into my mind. It was going to be hard to break the news to this poor little girl. I didn't believe I could do it. Ain't it funny, but at that moment I'm feeling all jazzed up because I was her one and only protector? And I had a sneaking notion that I'd be a hero of some kind before the night is over.

But things start breaking the wrong way for me to cover myself with glory.

The moon hasn't showed yet and it's pretty dark, and, being dead certain that the two tough hombres of the afternoon had beat it sooner than take chances with a posse, I tell Jessica to follow me, and together we begin crawling slowly down the hill toward the camp. I won't risk carrying her in plain view, and she's afraid to stay there alone.

Well, sir, we reach the bottom of the gulch, and everything is serene and peaceful as a church. We cross a short stretch of gravel to a bank, maybe five feet high, and I stick my head up for a survey of the camp, which is pitched on a small clearing no farther than across this room from where we're hiding.

And—wowie! There's a flash of flame from the inside of the sleeping tent, and a bullet almost kisses me good night. I duck out of sight—and a man gives me the laugh.

"Lady, take your sweetie and beat it! We're wasting no more bullets," he calls out.

For a half a second I don't know what to do next. Then my old fighting blood begins bubbling. I take a harder grip on my six-shooter, and I'm all set to give the enemy an interesting evening. I'd waste no bullets, either!

Jessica is in a panic.

"Oh, what shall we do?" she chatters in my ear.

"Keep calm! Keep calm! We'll creep up to the spring. We can't stay here, and I'm not running away. Your white dress is bad medicine. They can see it."

Bent double, so as to keep from sight of the watchful waiters, we pussyfoot upstream under cover of the bank. It's dark yet, you understand—the moon's a good half hour away—and I know that before it gets light I'll have to work fast. I've got it figured out to hide Jessica among the trees at the spring, and then snake my way onto the flat where those two gents are intrenched, find myself a safe place back of some boulders from where I can sweep the tent with my gun and start unwinding until they holler—or can't.

Looking back now, I see where I had no brains. Anybody but me would have suspicioned that, since they'd come to take possession of the hot spring, they would stand guard over it now that they had it. Which was just exactly what they were doing.

So, not suspecting any surprise of that kind, I rush Jessica through the mud and seepage and into the shadows of the cottonwood trees. It's a spooky place. The water is gurgling like somebody laughing, and desert insects are buzzing and droning, the way they do when somebody disturbs them in their sleep. The minute I heard them carrying on like that, I knew we were in for it. Somebody had been moving around through the brush, waking those bugs up. But it was too late then.

Before I could hustle Jessica out of the grove, I get my orders:

"Stick them up, sport, or I'll massacre you!"

He's got a hard voice, and he's talking right into my ear. His gun jabs me just about where my appendix is located. I have to accommodate him, so I put up my hands, and the next instant he's herded Jessica and me out into the open again. And, say, you've never seen a girl pick up so sudden. All she needed was to meet trouble head-on. An outraged queen has nothing on her. And gritty!—she's nothing else but! She didn't say a word to that bird—oh, no!

"Robber! Sneak! Coward! Beast! Bandit!" That's only a few of the pet names she administers to him.

He's a husky guy—makes two of me, almost—and from what I saw of him afterward, is in his middle thirties, tanned as a hazelnut and tricky-eyed like a coyote. They call him "Bull" MacDermott.

He relieves me of my gun, and I no-

tice he slips it in his back pocket. Then the parade starts for the tent, Jessica leading and me second, with the big boy's gat glued to my spinal column. Jessica has quit talking.

"Let me hear another word out of you, girlie, and your little Romeo, here, will get a one-way ticket to hell!" he'd warned her.

It's not more than forty paces to the tent, and MacDermott gives a funny whistle, his pal chirps back to him, and pretty soon here comes the lad who took a shot at me, some minutes before. I never did get a good look at this fellow, because I didn't help bury him. But right then, in the darkness, I saw he was a medium-sized man, stoop shouldered and wore a heavy lumberjack sweater. The two stood off and talked in low tones for a little while.

Jessica moved up close to me.

"They're planning to—to do away with us," she whispers, her voice shaking in spite of herself. "I'm—I'm so sorry I brought you into this terrible thing—that I asked you to help me."

"Why, I'm having the time of my life. I'm a man of few words, but wait till I start," I whisper back to her.

The conspirators finish their powwow. MacDermott comes over and tickles me in the ribs with his gun and orders us into the tent. We ain't got any choice but to obey, so in we go. There's a bed and a couple of camp stools. Jessica and her aunt had fixed it up tolerably comfy. I sit on the bed and Jessica huddles close against me.

I figure to myself that we're going to be asked a lot of questions for one thing, and I'm dead certain they don't intend letting us go. Something tells me they're just waiting for the moon to come up so they can walk us to a lonely spot and shoot and bury us. That way they'd be rid of us.

The fellow in the sweater—Todd is his name—stands just outside, peering about and listening. His partner stands in front of me, holding his gun on me.

"You're in a bad jam, youngster," says he. "It looks like curtains for both of us. But maybe, if you'll tell us the truth, we'll turn you loose. Did you come alone or is there a posse snooping around?"

I thought lightning fast, and chuckled.

"*I'll* say there's a posse. You don't think I'd be cuckoo enough to tackle this proposition without a backing, do you? If you'll take my tip you guys better make your little bow and get going before the shooting becomes general." I said this as careless as if it had been true, and for a moment I thought I had him in the nine hole.

But he came back at me pretty.

"That's about what I thought. So we'll just hold you for bullet bait, in case things get too hot for us. If they shoot, we shoot you. And it'll be up to you to talk to them. Get the idea?"

I could have bust out laughing. That little old lie had gotten by, even though it hadn't scared him like I'd intended it to. There wasn't any more chance of us getting help than there was of me catching the measles, which I'd already had. But I had a hunch that with a little time I could slip it over on these mysterious, bold, bad hombres and make them squeal for mercy.

Anyway, while MacDermott is telling me what they are going to do with us, I sneak my knife out of my pocket, open it, and drop it carefully to the ground. He's holding his gun on me and, though it's kind of dark in the tent, it would have been suicide for me to have tried bringing him down. I had a neater scheme. I was pretty sure he figured on tying us up, and I proposed to get loose and capture the two of them.

Sure enough, pretty soon the big lad orders Todd to fetch him a rope. They bind us hand and foot, leaving Jessica sitting on the bed. But they pile me into a corner of the tent and warn me that if I move they'll prepare me for the undertaker. Then the two of them slip outside, and the night gets so still you'd imagine you could hear a pin drop half a mile away.

Well, sir, I didn't lose any time. The tent was one of the family-size, ten-by-twelve variety, and I was over in the far corner, but I started rolling like a log till I got to where Jessica was sitting.

"P-s-t! Pst!" I signal her cautiously.

"Don't be afraid. I'll have you loose in a jiffy. Tell me if you hear them coming."

My hands are tied behind me, tight. But I squirm around over the ground on my back and presently find Mister Knife, hoist myself on my knees, hold its blade up between my heels and am just going to begin sawing the rope off my hands when Jessica sounds the alarm.

"Quick! They're coming back," she whispers.

I take a couple of desperate slashes at the rope, but can't part it. And now I hear footsteps. I just have time to roll back to the corner when MacDermott pokes his head inside—and I've lost the knife and my hat in the scramble!

"It looks like your posse is sneaking up on us, kid," says he in low, hard tones. "Soon as we find out for sure, it'll be up to you to stop them, as I've told you. And that goes for you, too, girl! They keep off of this ground or both of you die."

He struck a match as he spoke, let it flare just long enough for him to see that we were where he'd left us, and, as he crushed it out in his hand, he spotted my brand-new twenty-dollar sombrero lying at his feet, big as a cart wheel.

"Sort of a fancy lid, pretty boy," he grunts. "More than likely you'll never need it again, so I'll just adopt it."

Man, oh, man! I went hostile as a rattler. Here was my bank roll getting ready to depart again. I worked like mad over the rope holding my wrists. I wasn't sure, but I thought it gave a little—and for the moment I forget all about the posse he'd mentioned.

"That's a dirty trick. You might at least wait till a fellow's dead—even a turkey buzzard does that," I sling at him. All the time I'm trying my dangdest to get my hands loose.

"None of your back talk!" he curses, giving me a kick. "Make another crack like that and I'll——"

He never did finish telling me what he'd do.

A good-sized rock hits the roof of the tent, *plunk*, bounces off, and bangs into a water bucket outside. Talk about your racket! And on top of it all, Jessica screams. I can't see MacDermott, but I hear him crawling for the open on all fours. Then—*whang! whang!*—two shots roar out—Todd shooting, I afterward find out. MacDermott rips out a string of curses and is gone.

During this hullabaloo, I've made the seconds count for hours. They weren't going to put the skids under Jessica and me—not without a battle. Over I roll again to where she's sitting on the bed. I don't stop to hunt for the knife this time. I boost myself up alongside of her and, back to back, I begin wrestling with the rope binding her hands. In a jiffy, she's free. In another, she's set me loose. I should have worked it that way in the first place, but a man will get off to a wrong start sometimes.

Anyway, the moon is just rising. My year's wages are somewhere outside, and me without a gun! I could stand for a cloud-burst relieving me of my wad, but for an ordinary two-legged skunk like MacDermott—never!—if I could get a crack at him.

Well, sir, working faster than a lightning-change artist, I find my knife and rip open the back of the tent. The next minute Jessica and I are out and creeping off across the flat for the hillside, maybe ten good paces away. But we don't get there. I just happen to look up, and I see my sombrero sticking out from behind a big boulder off to one side. It's MacDermott, blocking the way to the spring.

I give Jessica the danger signal and we right angle down the gulch, that cussed moon growing brighter and brighter every instant. Then the celebration gets going good. MacDermott starts shooting. I hear a man holler murder down the gulch. And just when it looked like one of us was going to be tagged, a little gully about a foot and a half deep suddenly crosses our path, and we flatten out in it. The night becomes quiet as the grave again.

"Well, we're better off than we were," I whisper to Jessica.

"This is terrible! Now is our chance to escape. For Heaven's sake, let's take it!" she breathes.

"Soon as I get my hat and gun, I

will," says I. "You stay right here—don't move. I'll be back in five minutes."

I know she don't like my leaving her, but she's a thoroughbred and don't say anything.

Off I go, slipping along like an eel, following the little gully that sort of detours around until, pretty soon, I see it's heading straight for the boulder where I'd seen my sombrero peeking out a few minutes before. And then a funny thing happens. There's a bend in the gully, and who should be rounding it the same time I am but MacDermott, bound on a snooping expedition of his own.

I don't know which of us was the most surprised. Our noses are about a foot apart, and we stare at one another for a couple of seconds like a brace of wild cats. Then, quicker than it takes to tell it, he shoves his gun in my face. But the gully is so narrow it don't allow him arm movement, which is what saved me. I make a dive for his wrist, and nail it. And the fight starts, him trying to shoot me, and me bent on keeping him from it.

He's twice my size, as I've said before, but I'm battling for my life. I'd have tackled him if he'd been as big as a balloon. Over and over we roll. First I'm on top, then him. We hurdle out of the gully, plowing up the real estate and making the night hideous. Then his gun sails away through the air, and, having his hand free, he grabs me by the throat, flattens me out on the ground, and, straddling me, proceeds to calmly choke me to death.

Now, I'm not sure if he'd forgotten he carried my gun in his back pocket. But I know I hadn't. So while he's busy killing me, I reach around and jerk it out and poke it into his ribs. That ought to have changed matters right away—but it didn't.

He grins down at me, murderouslike. He knew all about that gun.

"It won't shoot, kid; I tried it. Your bullets are pickled. Good-by," says he. His fist tightens on my gullet.

I pulled the trigger anyhow, desperate—I can't hold out much longer. But the powder is wet—that's what the cloudburst did. However, with one last effort I bring the gun up, swinging for his head, connect hard, and drop him like a beef in a slaughter pen.

I get to my feet and stand there, teetering. The moon is bright as a gob of quicksilver. I gaze down at MacDermott. I've nicked him bad, it seems—face is all over blood. I happen to look at my hands. They're the same way, and so are my clothes. Both of us are all smeared over, slimy, sticky. My hat is lying in a black pool a few steps away half full of some dark liquid. But it ain't blood.

And while I stand there staring around, my eyes big as pie plates, somebody taps me on the arm, and says with a chuckle:

"Pretty work! Pretty work! His partner is lying in the gulch. He's quit, too."

I whirl around, ready to scrap, and who do you suppose it is? Yes, sir—Aunt Tabitha! That's a fact. She'd gotten out of the cloud-burst half drowned, and managed to reach camp finally, just about the time Jessica and I were prisoners in the tent. She had crept up and tried to shoot those two birds, but her cartridges were wet, too; and, fearing they intended killing us, she'd thrown rocks at the tent, thinking to scare them away.

A little later, when we get Jessica out of the gully where she's hiding, and Aunt Tabitha begins getting supper, she says to me:

"Yates, as a fighting man you make a good partner, but how are you for work?"

"That's my middle name," I grin, winking at Jessica. "But I don't think much of a bathhouse on the desert And there's no need of working if you don't have to. You can ask Mr. MacDermott what he and his partner found here," says I, looking at our prisoner who we're turning over to the sheriff next day.

"So?" she laughs. "I see you're wise."

"You'd be, too, if you'd almost lost a year's wages in this oil land, like I have. See that hat of mine? Well, there's

about eight hundred dollars in bills in it that I'll have to send to the laundry."

Well, sir, I didn't get to Frisco for some months afterward, and when I did Mrs. Yates and her aunt were along. We cleaned up big on our oil land, and there's a wicked little desert town flourishing in the same gulch where I first met Jessica. There's two things I forgot to mention. One is that Aunt Tabitha and Jessica had at first intended opening a medicinal bathing resort, and then, finding the oil oozing out of the ground, they take up some claims. Then, here comes MacDermott and Todd and try to dispossess them.

The other thing I overlooked mentioning is—and this is stranger than fiction, as the saying goes: When MacDermott shot at Jessica and me, as we were making our escape from the tent, one of the bullets hit Todd, who was a little ways beyond us. Aunt Tabitha saw him tumble over and roll down into the gulch. But her and me never wasted a bullet.

A MAN WHO LIVED IN THE OLD WEST

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

REATA and spurs were the tools of Charley Siringo's trade. He began working at his trade in 1867, when he was twelve years old. He was born, and worked in Texas, which is a big State; but it was not big enough to hold him. Ambitious, stubborn and fearless, he became horse wrangler, top hand, and finally foreman of a big outfit. He saved a little money, and operated a small cigar stand for a while. But selling cigars was a trifling business. He had been told by a blind phrenologist that he would make a good newspaper editor, stock raiser, or detective. He applied to a detective agency, and was employed by them, as he says, "as a cowboy detective, to work on Western criminals." His headquarters were in Denver, Colorado. For twenty years he "worked" on Western criminals, his operations, and theirs, taking him from Alaska to Mexico City.

Siringo is sincere in everything he does or says. When he tells a story he curls back his thumb and uses his trigger finger to point the emphasis. Even in his latter years, on his ranch near Santa Fe, it took a pretty good horse to put him afoot.

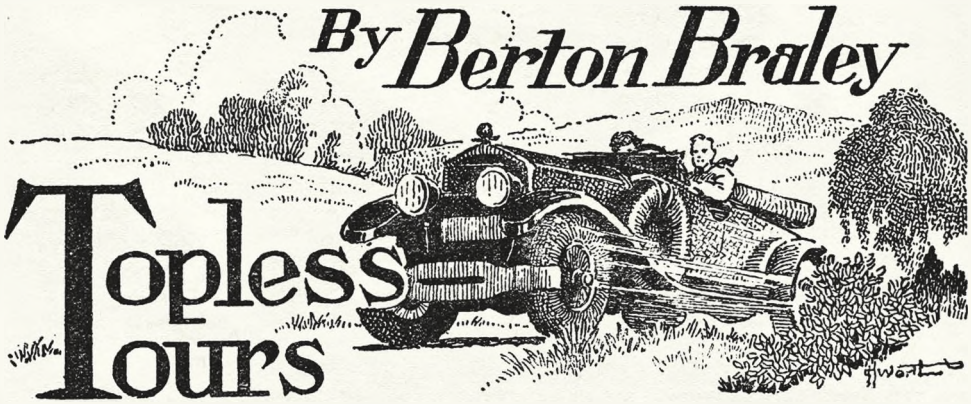
When assigned to the tasks of discovering who was pilfering from railroads, looting box cars, or knocking down fares, Siringo became a hobo. He consorted with mining men, became a miner. When after a murderer, or horse thief or cattle thief. Siringo posed as any one of the three, and convinced the man he was after that he was as desperate a character as the man himself.

That he was not killed is a mystery to one reading his autobiography, "Reata and Spurs." It is not so much of a mystery to those who know him well. He gallops to a conclusion, while others are walking toward it. And he can arrive and double back in time to meet the pedestrians halfway. Aware of the risks he ran, he ignored them as mere incidentals to the main chance. To get into an outlaw camp, when he had been told that he would be shot down on sight, Siringo liquored up, deliberately fell from his horse and crippled himself, and limped into camp, where he was fed and cared for by the murderer he was after. Recklessness might have inspired a man to do a thing like that, but it took the toughest kind of nerve to carry on in the midst of men who gladly would have shot him, had they known who he was. Time and again his identity was suspected and questioned. He always managed to prove that he was some one else.

Stricken with smallpox and left to die, he survived and again went to hunting men. Time and again he crossed the Western deserts alone, trailing some criminal. He mentions one "little" horseback ride of three thousand miles. To-day such a ride would be featured in the Sunday newspapers. His book is not alone a personal narrative, it is a slice of Southwestern history.

Topless Tours

By Berton Braley



LET'S drop the top with a careless flop
And let in the wind and sun,
Let's dare the air and the noonday glare
Wherever the roads may run.
What do we care if our hair is curled
By all of the winds there are,
We'll ride on top of the cock-eyed world,
On the seats of a topless car!

Alas for the class that is housed in glass,
Conservatory-wise;
Who strain in vain through a windowpane
For a glimpse of the arching skies;
Who hide inside from the dust that's swirled,
And miss all the fun by far.
We ride on top of the cock-eyed world,
On the seats of a topless car!

We'll be as free as the hawks, to see
The sweep of the plain and hill.
We plan to tan like the gypsy clan
And savor the gypsy thrill.
We'll view the hue of the dawn empearled
And at night we'll hail a star,
As we ride on top of the cock-eyed world,
On the seats of a topless car!

Bread upon the Waters

By Frederick Niven

Author of "And the World Wags On!" "While the Going Is Good," Etc.

"Blunt" Carley, lumber king, befriended a young fellow who soon betrayed his trust. Years later, when Carley's fortunes were very low, he heard from the same man again.

JOHN CARLEY—they called him "Blunt" Carley—turned slowly round in the swivel chair, in the office of his lumber camp. He gazed out of the window under gloomy brows, with lower lip shot out, chin on chest; he stared blankly at the scene—the bunk houses, the wall-less roof over the humming and shrieking saws, with its steady puffs of steam ascending, and the background of the distant ridge of forested mountains.

"I shall shoot him on sight!" he announced.

The timekeeper eyed him askance, waited a few moments, then said:

"If you sent out phone messages east and west to the police they might——"

"Police be danged!" interrupted Carley. "The law is not coming in on this. After all I did for that fellow! No, sir! I won't even go and hunt for him. It ain't convenient at the moment, and he ain't going to inconvenience me. But I got a hunch I'll meet up with him some day, and then he'll know. It will be coming to him. I'll just put this check he forged in my pocketbook, for a souvenir, to remind me in case I forget. I ain't likely to! No, sir. I'll shoot him on sight when we meet again."

The check for fifteen thousand dollars, with his forged signature, he put into his wallet with heavy, slow motions, and then the chair screamed round again as he rose.

"You should oil that chair!" he snapped, and tramped out of the room.

There had been two other men in the office besides the timekeeper, during all this. They heard also. So the news went round through Camp Carley that the

boss had certainly said that he would shoot Hiddleston on sight, and that no policemen were going to be asked to butt in.

His men admired him. He was like an ox for strength. He was fair and square with them. They hoped he would not shoot Hiddleston, not because they had any sympathy with that young man over the forgery, but because they did not want to see Carley hang. Indeed they discussed whether, even if he did shoot, he would hang. They murmured about it in the bunk house and on its veranda, after work was over.

Thirty years ago—and to some extent, to-day—the West had considerable belief in unwritten law, as apart from the kind on the statute books. Circuit judges have gone apoplectic over certain verdicts of innocence blandly given to them by foremen of juries. Impossible, ridiculous, absurd! Yet they had to accept. But murder, for forging a signature—that would be a ticklish case for the friendliest jury.

However, it wasn't just exactly, or solely, shooting a man for forgery that Blunt Carley announced as his intention. Not exactly. There was more behind. He had set this man on his feet, helped him along—— But perhaps the best way to tell about it is to turn back a bit.

TOM HIDDLESTON had been up against it. A young man, hardly more than a boy, he had come West with the fine idea of getting rich quick and helping the poor family at home. Of course, when one gives a definite reason for doing a thing there is often a second reason, subsidiary perhaps, but there. One of Tom's reasons for coming West, anyhow, had been to help the family in the East. Another one was, perhaps, to get away from the omnipresent carping care of that harassed family life.

He had met with hard times. He had not been able to send home a cent. In fact, he had been glad even to take any merely temporary job that offered. Mining and lumbering were new callings to him. As for the mining—after a boom there had been a slump, and miners were working as muckers so as to be on the spot and slip into the place of any miner who might quit. Then, so far as lumbering went, Tom was not exactly an expert ax man. Cant hook and peavey were not accustomed tools to him. Any lull in lumbering in most parts made bosses hire experienced men whom they knew. Hiddleston had been working on wagon roads. He had been working on the railway extra gangs. Such work was intermittent; and what with working and being laid off he remained, to all intents and purposes, financially stationary.

And then one day he met Carley—or at least had Carley pointed out to him. Hiddleston was then, with a roll of blankets and a battered suit case, sitting on the depot platform of Duhamel Junction, waiting to see the section boss. For somebody had told him that one of the section men was quitting. No fortune in that job—a stop-gap, and no more. But it would tide him over. The freight boss, to whom he had been speaking, came out.

"Say!" he said. "See that big fellow standing there? He might have something better than section-gang work. You go and touch him for a job. He's Carley. They call him Blunt Carley, so don't worry if he roars like a bull at you."

"Who is he? What is he?"

"He's John Carley. Place along here named after him. It's a big lumber camp on the lake edge. He's sure to have some kind of job he can give you. You step up to him and ask, good and resolute."

So Hiddleston stepped up and asked.

The great Carley looked down at him, and then looked along the platform to where lay the blanket roll and the grip. Perhaps the grip was hidden by the blankets and he thought the young man possessed only the roll—a "bindle-stiff."

"Are you a bum?" he said.

That was Blunt Carley all over. However, the freight boss had warned Hiddleston.

"Do I look like it?" he asked.

"You sure do! And Camp Carley ain't a hand-out place for hobos, come to-day, gone to-morrow, after they get a meal."

Hiddleston opened his hands and showed the calloused palms.

"Uh-huh!" said Carley. "Well, you've

been working, I see. But your build don't look like a manual laborer's to me."

"I do it on my nerves, then," replied Hiddleston. "I've even been working for contractors on the roads. And you know how they can work their men."

"You ain't been out in this country long?"

"No."

"Do any lumbering back East?"

"No."

"Clerking?"

"Yes."

"Well, I want a timekeeper. And I want one on the square. But I tell you I got an awful tough bunch. Some of them are liable, if we're working extra hours, to keep track of their overtime, and if your count don't tally with theirs they are liable to come to you and explain the difference with a swift mitt to the jaw."

"I'll take a chance at it."

"And fight them on your nerves, eh? All right. Here's the train. Get in. I'll pay the conductor your fare. Tell him John Carley is paying for you," and he turned away like a great potentate. The newly hired man was not going to sit beside him, that was clear. A queer man for people to be devoted to, perhaps. Yet many were.

ONE day Carley saw his new timekeeper with but one eye in action, and his mouth very much swollen. He laughed.

"Somebody objected to your timekeeping?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"And he licked you?"

"Yes. But he didn't get his count of the time, all the same."

"He didn't!"

"No, sir. He says I'm to add it this week or he'll lick me again."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Well, he's not going to get it. Guess he'll lick me again."

Carley laughed and passed on; but he was around in the office on Saturday. When the slugger told the accountant that there was some extra money coming to him, the accountant said that those were the figures given him by the timekeeper. Then the slugger told the accountant to tell the timekeeper that he could knock the stuffing out of him. Carley came up.

"Say," he began, "the accountant has to pass the buck to the timekeeper——"

"I'll take them both," interrupted the heavyweight.

"How about taking me?" asked Carley. "I'm the boss here, but if any man wants a fight with me he can have it without being fired. That timekeeper is right. I've been looking at his counts."

"You say his count is right?"

"Sure! And now, how about a little set-to? I guess I'm nearer your weight than the timekeeper."

"Well, of course if you say——"

Carley flicked the man lightly on the cheek. That settled it. They stepped outside and Carley, that great hulk of a man, slipped about on the toes of his heavy shoes as agile as a ballet dancer, and feinted, and parried, and smashed.

"Don't be scared to hit your boss, man!" he bellowed. "Hit hard—if you can! You won't get fired for that."

He had taken on, actually, the best fisticuff expert of Camp Carley. The men clustered round and looked on. Things like that made them like Carley. His was a name in talk from the coast to the mountains, thirty years ago, in the days of his strength. They beat each other up, these two. And they continued. They continued till the complainant said, spitting out another tooth:

"Well, Blunt, I guess we'll let that difference in time go as she lies."

"All right," coughed Carley, and extended a hand that was raw and swollen.

Carley later elevated his timekeeper to be accountant, and sparred with him, and taught him how to run an office into which sometimes came men who did not seem able to discuss a little difference in bookkeeping but had to fight it. Carley was square with his men. He had no desire for his timekeepers to chisel them for his sake. And if they chiseled them for their own sake, they would not last a day. But he rather liked to have a camp that had a name for being a bit tough, so he usually had argumentative

men around, who argued that way, with the fists.

Hiddleston began to send money back East, but the folks there seemed to have bad luck. They were always getting into the hole. His father was rather a helpless sort of man. He got into fresh financial difficulties instead of out of old ones, and the son's odd help was but a drop in the bucket. And Hiddleston's mother wrote heartbroken letters. There are people who can get their voice into the written word. She was like that, and her son was sensitive. She wrote about debts and mortgages. "I just don't know what we're going to do." That was one of the sentences in a letter she wrote. And it haunted him. He could hear her voice. Indeed he could see her face, it seemed, her troubled eyes.

He had to go down to Seattle to see some men about a deal that the boss wanted to put through. Carley had come to trust him that much. Besides, though Blunt was shrewd, he wasn't educated as he might have been, and he believed, humbly, that Hiddleston wold make a better front with these people in Seattle. He thought a lot of the younger man, of what he had helped the lad to make of himself since that day on which, at Duhamel Junction, Hiddleston, peaked and troubled-looking, had asked for a job.

Just as Hiddleston was leaving he got his mail. There was a letter from home. He slipped it into his pocket and read it on the train. And he did not come back. What came back, through the bank, was that check for fifteen thousand dollars, with Carley's signature forged.

NO, sir," Carley said, along in his foremen's bunk house, telling them himself what they had already heard gossip of, "there's going to be no law in this. I'll run across him some day, and pound him"—that was his next consideration —"I'll pound him to a finish."

That might be better than shooting Hiddleston on sight, they thought. There could be proof deduced, perhaps, that it was a provoked fight.

"The old man's making a big mistake, all the same," one said. "He ought to have the fellow found, and arrested, and sent to jail. All this stuff about pounding the pith out of a man, or shooting him on sight! We've got to cut this out. You can't go around bunging bullets any more at people who get your goat."

"You don't know the old man. He's sure sore. Don't you see? He'd taken a fancy to that young fellow. He liked his sand. He never forgot the way he took his licking from Mike Maloney over that overtime, and yet wouldn't pay it, because it wasn't rightly due. I tell you, Blunt Carley is a heap more than blunt. He's a big-hearted man. This here is personal. He's hurt about it; that's what he is."

The conversation, at that, flagged. It was somehow embarrassing to hear of Blunt Carley's spirit, and spiritual hurts.

Men came and went. The camp was like a cup into which they poured, and from which they brimmed. But still, despite the old restlessness of those days, several stayed through the years. These remembered. These worried when Blunt, at any time, went "out," which means as far as the coast. They scanned the papers from the coast, when he was gone, for another of these mysteries of the big cities, thinking that perhaps Hiddleston was no farther away than there, and that Carley had run across him. If they saw such a heading as: "Man found killed on Tenth Street," they frowned on the column, and read anxiously. But the years passed and they came to think, when they remembered the Hiddleston incident, that Blunt Carley had forgotten it. He never spoke of it.

If Carley had been an educated man he could have risen to great heights. He was shrewd. He had imagination. But there was a simplicity about him that could be taken advantage of. The average savage, even, if you treat him square, will treat you square. But there is a type who thinks, if you treat him square, that you are his meat. Thus, when the new railway was going through to Port Westerly, one of these men came to Carley, who was growing elderly, and gave him a tip "as one of our old-timers who deserve to get such chances." He told

him that, on inside information, he knew that Port Westerly was going to be the new railroad terminus. There was a comfortable—nay, an affluent, old age for the hard-working Carley. He put all his eggs in one basket. He bought half the hillside at "Port Westerly." Yes, it really should go in quotation marks, for it was only a port till the land back of it was sold, and the railway crossed the narrows and went on to Pacific City. Then it was nothing at all and Carley had a hillside to look at where would never be a port, or houses, or anything but chipmunks and squirrels. He had been an easy mark.

That hit him hard. And what with that, and one thing and another, he had to get mortgages on the old mill at Carley. He fell sick, he who had never been ill in his life. The new race, hustling to and fro in low shoes, selling land and phonographs, electric heaters and radio sets, saw him, had him pointed out as "one of the old-timers" who had helped to make the country, and then lost out.

"Hard luck about Blunt Carley. Oh, yes, he's still around. Got it in the neck. Speculating, you know. Poor game for some men. You want to have your wits about you."

You certainly do—with some people. Here was Carley, once upon a time somewhat of a lumber king, trying to get an advance from middlemen in Spokane, so that he could go out in the Kootenay woods and take out poles and posts. It embittered him. He worked back in his mind from one dubious game attempted on him to another, and came always to the Hiddleston one, brought up against it with a final bump. He could do with that fifteen thousand now. He should never have let the fellow go. He should have got the police after him and had him put in the pen. Only, in the old days, one did not bother much about such things. One settled them oneself or, failing to settle, wrote them off as bad debts.

"Say, Blunt, you'd never think who I ran into on the coast," said a lingering member of the old gang to him one day, in the rotunda of the Occidental.

"No."

"You remember that timekeeper you had way back in '97—Hiddleston?"

"Hiddleston? Oh, yes. Sure."

"Well, I met him at the coast."

"Been there all the time?"

"No. He was telling me he went back East a spell, but the call of the West got him. He came back. He's certainly made good."

"He has, eh.

"Yeh. He was asking about you."

"He was. What did you tell him?"

"Oh, I told him you were still around, young looking as ever, still flourishing."

"Uh-huh!"

Carley rose and went over for his mail. The Spokane deal was off, and he went back to sit in the rotunda and feel blue. That mighty frame began to creak, to tell truth. He had twinges. He sat brooding on the days to come when he would not be able to go into the woods and work like a horse. It would be the old men's home for him; and there, he mused, he'd sit twiddling his thumbs and listening to old liars telling about the things they had never done in the early days. Bitter, bitter! He might have felt more so had he known that his informant about Hiddleston had *not* told Hiddleston that his old boss was flourishing. He had told him that Carley had been stung on Port Westerly, that he had mortgaged and then lost the mill, that he was ready to take a small one-horse job getting out poles and posts—yes, that he'd be glad to go tie cutting for the railroad the way things were shaping. Had Carley known that Hiddleston had been told all that bitter truth, he'd have felt even worse. As it was, he was brooding desperately enough.

He went out for the coast that night, with a grip, and in the grip was a six-gun. B'gosh, he'd let them see how one of the old-timers, who had helped to make the country, could act to the man who had begun his downfall, who had turned the first skin game on him and so brought him bad luck.

Somewhere in the Cascades the eastbound and westbound meet. In the baggage cars the men open the side doors and shout to each other. The trains slide past, and the people on the one observation car rear platform wave to the folks

on the other receding one. Carley was in the dining car and saw the eastbound wink by, faces at windows, glimpsed in a blur and gone, the white flick of a pillow some one had kept out to lean on all day in a sleeping coach, the white of tablecloths and gleam of dishes in the other dining car. And in the passing train, that was so much glint and glitter, hazed faces, and silhouette of diners, sat Hiddleston, though Carley did not know that.

In the new, roaring coast city, Carley found the palatial offices of his one-time timekeeper. But, after some days of hanging round scanning the faces of those who whizzed down in the elevator and went their dashing way, he began to wonder if his man was there at all. He went into the office to inquire.

"He's gone to the upper country on business. I don't know when he'll be back. Any message to leave, sir? Would you care to see his secretary?"

"No. His secretary won't do."

The upper country! So that was how, at the coast, they talked of the wide province inland that men such as he, still living, had found wilderness and made into a great productive domain. He would go back. His luck was out. Waiting for Hiddleston he'd go broke, if he stayed many more days. Besides, the great city was having its effect on him. Last time he had been there it had plank sidewalks before two-story houses, where now were broad cement pavements under tall skyscrapers. Where, the time before, he had seen Indians in their long cedar canoes paddle past, now lay liners, their donkey engines coughing while the contents of their holds swung up in air and veered to the wharfs. The truckers hustled him, despite his bulk. In the hotel rotunda some few of the new herd, rushing to and fro, glancing at him, looked back. One of the old breed, they were thinking, those who looked a second time. He felt old and out of it, here. He'd go back where he was known. He'd get some kind of a job to tide him through his last years, he who had given jobs to others. After all, the upper country does remember, and if there were any new roads being built, he'd get a bossing job on one of them, maybe. He'd eke out. He'd pull through.

So he returned to the place that was named for him, where, by the lake side, the mills rhythmically puffed steam—mills in which he had now, in his old age, no share.

"Oh, Mr. Carley," a voice hailed him after he had descended from the train. It was that of the bank manager, a trig, dapper little fellow.

Carley stared at him and thought he knew what it would be. Markhouse would break it to him gently, explaining that "with such as you, of course, Mr. Carley, there's a certain sentiment; we give a little scope; but your account is overdrawn." That's what Blunt Carley expected.

"Could I have a word with you?"

"Sure," and Carley followed to the bank.

"Come right into my room, Mr. Carley."

The tone didn't sound like an overdraft, but Markhouse was not a snob, so it easily might be. He had some sentiment for the land. He knew who made it. He was a youngster of the new age, but he regarded his forerunners with admiration, whether wealthy, or bedeviled financially.

"Take a chair, Mr. Carley."

Mr. Carley took a chair.

"Have a cigar."

Carley had a cigar.

The fact is that the manager had been, as they say nowadays, intrigued. He scented a story. He wanted to find out all about it.

"A few days ago, Mr. Carley, a gentleman came in to say he had been looking for you in town but heard you had gone out. So he came to see me. It seems he had a sum of money for you, and thought the best plan, in your absence, was to pay it direct to your account. He said that many years ago, when he was in financial trouble, you lent him a cool fifteen thousand and——"

"A what?"

"Fifteen thousand."

"Oh!" said Blunt Carley, and wriggled the cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other, frowning.

"Hiddleston is his name. He explained it all to me, that he'd come to see and apologize for letting the years go. But finding you were away he decided to pay it into the bank. You remember it, don't you?"—noticing that Carley looked almost stupid, stunned.

"I remember it."

"I did not think even you, Mr. Carley, one of the jack-easy old brigade, could forget lending a man fifteen thousand dollars."

"Yes, oh, yes. Now you mention it I recall—er—lending him fifteen thousand dollars. Well, what do you know? What—do—you—know?"

"It's a nice little sum to get back," said the manager, who knew well how Blunt Carley's account stood.

"You may say so. A nice little sum for me, these days. But tell me, what did he say besides?"

"Just that he'd like you to know that he'd had some serious domestic trouble at the time or he would never have borrowed it."

"Never have borrowed it," echoed Carley in a level voice, his intonation odd to the bank manager's ears.

"Has it been owing very long, may I ask? He spoke of some years."

"I'd say 'some.' He's owed it about thirty!" yelled Blunt Carley, and then he put his head back and laughed. Here was relief. The deep laughs boomed in the room.

"Thirty years! Why, Mr. Carley, you astonish me. There must be a story behind this."

But he did not get the story. Instead, Carley inquired:

"What's that text about 'Cast thy bread upon the waters——'"

"That's in Ecclesiastes," said Markhouse. "'Cast thy bread upon the waters; for thou shalt find it after many days.'"

But Carley, gazing out of the window with head bent, seemed to be paying no attention to that reply. It was as though he had only made an aside of a grim, or heavy, jocularity. He rose.

"Well," said he, "I'll be getting across to the hotel. Guess I'm getting up in years. I get kind of tired, traveling in the coaches. I feel kind of all in, Mr. Markhouse, after my trip out."

Markhouse rose to his feet and opened the door for his gnarled elder. He looked after him with interest, feeling there was a story behind it all, thinking how many stories of the old days there must be in the minds of such grim, uncommunicative old-timers as Blunt Carley.

"I DON'T cut the hair," said a famous French hair trimmer on a visit to the United States. "I sculpture it." Well, judging by the hair cuts some of the girls choose, their heads are hard enough to stand it.

A PATRIOTIC PROTEST

THE wife of a United States senator, who refuses to be further identified for fear of losing her cook, tells a story illustrating the constant patriotic fervor of the Irish. Her cook, who is a daughter of Erin, was greatly excited over Commander Byrd's flying experience which ended with his forced landing in the English Channel, but she could not understand why, when it was dawn on the coast of France, it was not dawn in the United States.

"But there's a difference in time between this country and Europe," the senator's wife explained. "For instance, your friends in Tipperary are sound asleep in their beds while we are just beginning to enjoy ourselves over here in the early evening."

"Thot's always the way!" Maggie exclaimed indignantly. "Ireland niver got justice yit!"

A Chat With You

ON another page in the magazine you will find the announcement of a change. Henceforth, THE POPULAR will come out once a week, and the price will be fifteen cents instead of twenty-five cents.

We have been planning to do this for a long time. The fifteen-cent price is certainly a better one for most readers. The once-a-week publication will bring us closer to our readers. If a story magazine has the right stuff in it, once a week is none too often.

* * * *

WE started some twenty-three years ago as a monthly, a slim little publication at ten cents. As circulation grew and made it possible we gave more and more, both in quantity and quality of the stories we put through the press. We changed it to twice a month and made it fifteen cents. We know we gave the best bargain in reading that ever appeared on a news stand. How do we know? The results showed it.

* * * *

WE intend to give even more for the money in the future. Fifteen cents to-day will not, ordinarily, buy what it did years ago. Thirty cents in most things would be a nearer equivalent. Now we propose to give you a better magazine than ever. Skip one Thursday and the Thursday after that you will find the new POPULAR waiting on the news stand for you—if you are there soon enough. It might be better if you ordered it in advance. We have featured the word "stories" on the cover. There are magazines like *The Popular Science Monthly*, and *Popular Mechanics* that are not at all devoted to fiction, and we want people to know that this is a magazine of stories.

* * * *

HANGING on to the old with one hand, and reaching for the new with the other, seems to us a sound policy. If you have read this magazine for any number of years you know B. M. Bower and Bertrand Sinclair. Their voices are familiar to you. You know the kind of folks they like and don't like. If you are a new member of THE POPULAR club, we advise you to get acquainted with them as soon as possible. They are worth knowing. You will never regret an hour you spend with either of them. Interest, inspiration, mental and moral stimulus get across always from their sending stations. And there is no static. No dull buzzing, no moments when the clear ring of a telling narrative is interrupted. They are both in the next issue of this magazine. Sinclair has the complete novel, Bower a short story.

* * * *

DID you ever read a good story about a football player? No? You will. It starts in the next issue. It is called "The Dollar God," and is by William Morton Ferguson. Football is quite as dramatic and exciting a thing as boxing, if you understand it. There are champions in football just as there are in the prize ring. To be a champion at anything—even croquet or pinochle—means certain qualities of sturdiness and resolution. To be the champion football player of a continent means a real man. Read the epic of such a man in "The Dollar God," by Ferguson. The best story of sports in ten years.

THERE are other high points hit by old friends in the next issue. Henry Herbert Knibbs is there with another of his heart-warming stories of the sunny Southwest. Dane Coolidge is there with an installment of a great serial. Francis Lynde is there and so is Robert Welles Ritchie.

* * * *

NOW, as for the new, permit us to call your attention to the new series, "The Progress of Peter Pratt," by Fred MacIsaac. The setting is Hollywood. Yes, it is true, Peter works in the movies. But he is not the ordinary type of movie actor, nor are these the ordinary types of movie stories. Peter is the square-shooting, well-ballasted type of young man, sound as a dollar and clean as a hound's tooth, who would have gone far in the marines, or on a ranch. He started as a boxer and drifted into the movies. He carries his own atmosphere with him. You will like him. The next number is out on the stands Thursday, the twenty-second, though dated Saturday, the twenty-fourth. It will cost fifteen cents. It might be well if you ordered a copy now.

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After Every Meal

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By CHARLES HOUSTON

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Continued on opposite page

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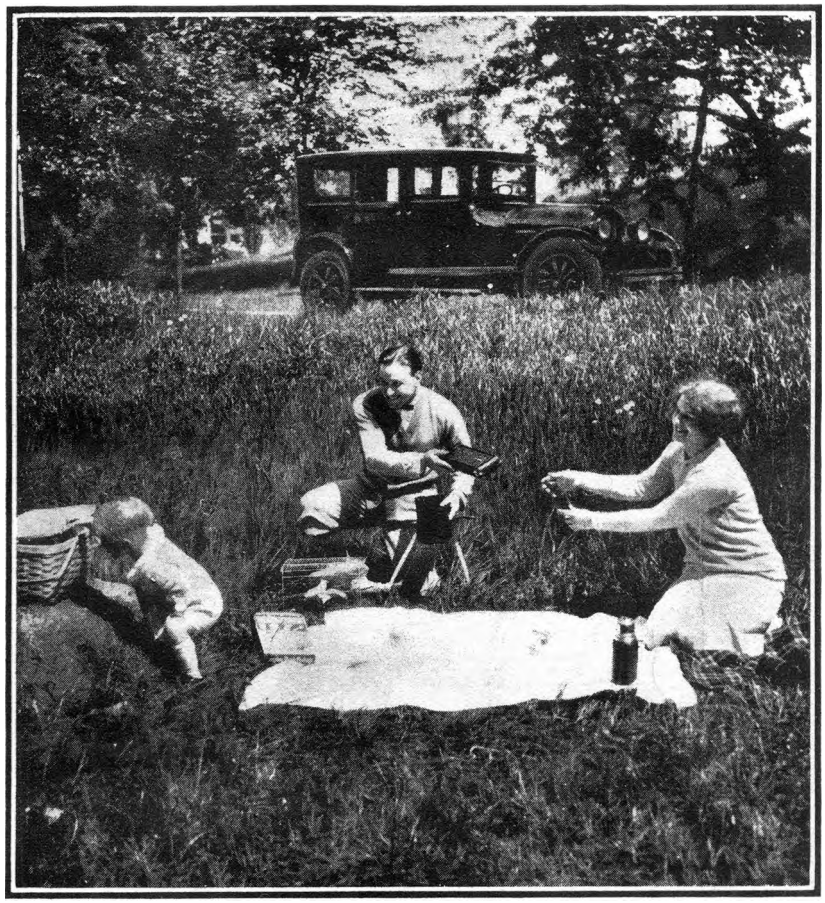

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RULES

1: Each entry must contain a title suggestion in 20 words or less and the name and address of the sender. **2:** Contestants may submit as many answers as they wish. When sending in suggested titles, the reverse side of Black Jack wrappers, or white paper cut the size of a Black Jack wrapper (2¼"x3"), may be used. Use one wrapper or one piece of paper for each title suggested. **3:** All entries for this contest must be sent to "Black Jack Titles", Dept. 11, American Chicle Company, Long Island City, New York, and must be in before midnight, Oct. 25, 1927. Winners to be announced as soon thereafter as possible. **4:** Titles must be sent first class mail, postage prepaid. **5:** Originality of thought, cleverness of idea, and clearness of expression and neatness will count. **6:** The judges will be a committee appointed by the makers of Black Jack and their decisions will be final. If there are ties, each tying contestant will be awarded the prize tied for.

Study the picture. Think of Black Jack's delicious licorice flavor. Then send in your title or titles. Contest closes at midnight, Oct. 25, 1927.