OCT. 1935

# STREET & SMITH'S Complete MAGAZINE



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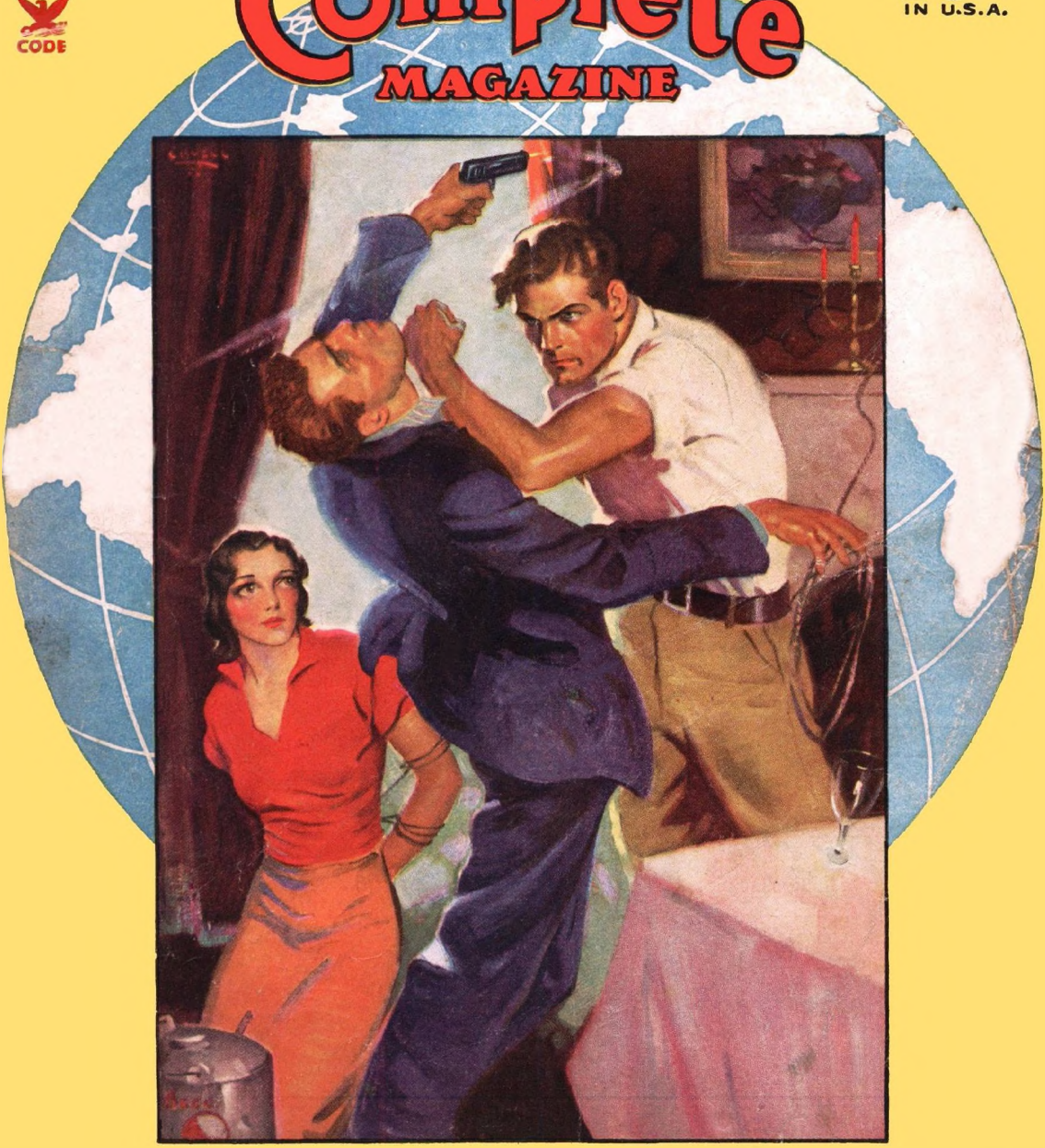

JOHN RANDOLPH PHILLIPS'S NOVEL
*of the hand and heart of* "A SMART YOUNG MAN"

# "That's the PEST I used to be!"

HE was referring to the grotesque picture that the shadow made upon the wall. "I shudder to think what a nuisance I was —how I almost lost you," he added.

"You certainly did," she laughed, "there was a time when I thought I couldn't stand you another minute."

"And if I hadn't taken that very broad hint you gave me, I'd never be sitting here, your husband-to-be."

* * *

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***USE LISTERINE BEFORE SOCIAL ENGAGEMENTS***

*It takes your breath away!*

STREET & SMITH'S
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MAGAZINE

CONTENTS OCTOBER, 1935 Vol. XXXIX, No. 3



## *A Brilliant Novel*



## *Two Gusty Novelettes*



## *Four Dashing Short Stories*



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# Startling Facts for Men!

***Inquire About Our New Improved Invention The "PROSAGER" and How Well It Serves Those Who Are Bothered by Getting Up Nights—And Also How Well It Serves Those with Other Weaknesses and Ailments Caused by a Faulty Prostate Gland.***

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Nervous Debility, Frequent Night Rising, Leg Pains, Lame Back, Lumbago, Lost Vigor, Kidney and Bladder Trouble, Chronic Constipation, Despondency, Restlessness at night are only some of the ailments differing in individuals, that can often be ascribed to lesion of the Prostate Gland.

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## USE "PROSAGER"

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Thousands of men in every community suffer needlessly it is said from ailments, weaknesses and other physical shortcomings without knowing that very frequently they are caused by prostate failure. The Prostate Gland though small is most important, when inflamed, enlarged or otherwise deranged, the result is most generally apparent in other vital organs which are also situated in the pelvis of man. Because the effects of a disordered Prostate Gland is responsible for so many varied ailments, the percentage of men past middle life that are troubled with these ailments is so high that it is impossible to estimate.

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INVENTOR

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Mr. B. A. Williams, Columbus Ohio, writes in regard to the Prosager: "I am thoroughly satisfied with it and wish to say that if I could not get another, I would not take a thousand dollars for the one I have—if you desire at any time you can use my name in any way in any exploiting you might want to do with your product."

Mr. Wm. F Lemon, San Francisco, California, states in his letter: "After using the Prosager I am well again and feel none of the symptoms of Prostate trouble." Mr. Wm. F. Lee, Washington, D. C., writes: "The Prosager is mild; I would not be without it."

Mr. Henry Zitman, Auburn, Indiana, says: "I will say this much for the Prosager, it has saved me from an operation. The Doctor that treated me before I got it says it is a fine thing to use. If there is any one in this territory that wants to know about it, direct them to me." Mr. Judson Trefethan, New Castle, N. H., writes about the Prosager: "I think it is a great invention, my Doctor came to see it and he said it was a good invention."

**Each month we receive scores of unsolicited letters of gratitude and appreciation from users of the Prosager —having thousands of users we no doubt can refer Prostate Sufferers to someone in their own home town who are enthusiastic in their praise of the remarkable benefits received.**

**"You're as young as you feel—And the PROSAGER helps you to feel Young"**

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# IT HAPPENED IN WAIKIKI

A novel

By Donald Barr Chidsey

**STREET & SMITH'S *Complete* MAGAZINE**

# A Smart Young

## CHAPTER I.

### FOOTSTEPS AFTER MIDNIGHT.

YOUNG Mulvey sat in the office of his employer, Otis B. Vail. The blue eyes of young Mulvey roved over it approvingly. Pretty nice. Pretty nice for Mr. Mulvey, too, for was he not, in addition to the job he held, engaged to Millicent, the daughter of the big boss himself?

"George," said Mr. Vail, "you're fired."

So suddenly do dreams explode!

"Did you say—fired?"

"I said fired."

"But, Mr. Vail, I don't understand." Young Mulvey ran a quivering hand through his dark-brown hair. "What's the matter?"

Mr. Mulvey lacked pep, he was too easy-going, and he wasn't hard-boiled; but the young man knew what to do when he saw a pretty girl.

# Man

By John Randolph Phillips

"The matter is you," said Mr. Vail. "I've warned you before. Or rather, I made suggestions that a smart young man would have taken as warnings. George, you just won't do. I could name a hundred faults you've got. But I'll limit it to three: you've got no pep, you're too easy-going, and you aren't hard-boiled enough for modern business. So you're fired. Come back in a year's time and show me something important you've achieved, and Millicent and I will give you another chance."

"You and Millicent! Did you say Millicent?"

"I certainly did. She and I talked it over last night. She, being a sensible girl"—Mr. Vail said this as if no child of his could be anything but sensible—"agrees with me."

"I'd like to see Millicent myself," said young Mulvey.

"That is your privilege," said Mr. Vail, but his manner suggested that Mr. Mulvey might save trouble by not availing himself of it. "By the way, have you got any money?"

"Not a brownie," Mulvey cheerfully replied.

"There you are," said Mr. Vail. "Living your income up as fast as you make it. Well, I'll lend you fifty."

But young Mulvey now recovered that light manner which long ago he had adopted as a defense against a world he did not wholly understand. He gave an airy wave of his hand. He said, in gay tones: "Oh, no, my dear Mr. Vail. Couldn't think of it. We Mulveys have a certain pride, you know."

"You're the damnedest young fool I ever saw," said Mr. Vail.

Young Mulvey journeyed out to see his financée. But it turned out that Mr. Vail had been right. Millicent was now his ex-financée. She was terribly sorry, but daddy had convinced her that George Mulvey needed further tempering in the furnace of life before he would qualify as a suitable mate for Millicent Vail. But in a year's time if he came back and——

Young Mulvey held up his hand. "That's plenty. In other words, if, in a year's time, I return with several millions, a yacht or two, and the crown jewels, it will probably be all right for me to suggest the middle aisle to you. You have such simple wants, you Vails. So long, old girl."

And Mr. Mulvey went away from there; went, of all places, to a poker game. He had not been exactly truthful when he informed his late employer that he had not a brownie. Really, he was quite wealthy, for of his last week's salary sixteen dollars yet remained in the kitty. But Mr. Mulvey needed more. Hence his advent into the poker game.

On the very first hand he drew aces back to back and, in the manner of all good stud devotees, proceeded to make the boys pay to stay in that pot. But the cockeyed son of a gun sitting next him drew to a straight in the belly and filled it. A few minutes later Mulvey saw his two pair beaten by three jacks. Still later Mr. Mulvey rose from the table in groggy fashion, minus his sixteen simoleons.

"Would somebody kindly give a guy a cigarette?" he inquired humbly.

WALKING down the street, young Mulvey decided of a sudden that this city had known him long enough. Well, he'd always wanted a little smack of adventure. He took himself to a secondhand clothing emporium. Of course, he got stung. The proprietor would not have been in business if he had not known how to sting young men in need. For his practically brand-new suit young Mulvey received in exchange a khaki shirt, a pair of khaki trousers, and six dollars in the way of boot. But didn't you have to pay for adventure?

Young Mulvey hopped a freight going south. He crawled into an empty box car just as the celebrated shades of night were falling fast. He woke up at a water tank in the State of Virginia, where an unreasonable brakeman kicked him off into the surrounding countryside in a manner very authoritative.

After waiting a decent interval, young Mulvey glared at the departing freight. He shook his first at it. He inquired sarcastically: "You didn't think I wanted to ride any farther anyway, did you? Don't be

absurd. I wouldn't be caught dead aboard you. Why, you wheezing, smoke-eating, cinder-belching, low-down——."

"Don't you reckon that's enough?" he heard a voice say.

Young Mulvey turned dignified. He hadn't noticed that his exit had been made alongside a highway. But there lay the highway and, parked on it, waiting for the last of the freight cars to pass, stood a coupé. And in the coupé there was, of course, a young female. She wasn't a girl to crash Hollywood on her looks alone, but still, it didn't hurt the eyes to look at her. She had burnt-gold hair, candid gray eyes, and a mouth that looked as if in a pinch it might know what to do with a kiss.

"I stopped you," the young woman explained, "because I thought in another minute you might get violent."

"The Mulveys seldom if ever get out of control."

"Your name's Mulvey, then?"

"George Mulvey, madam. The last of the Mulveys, I may say."

"What were you doing on that freight?"

"Well, I was riding it until a very uncouth fellow came along and put his foot to my—er—rear."

"Where are you going?"

"Crazy, I guess," said young Mulvey.

"Which way do you want to go?"

"South, east, or west. I've just come from the north. There really isn't anything north of here, I can assure you. I wouldn't give it a thought if I were you."

"Well, I happen to be going in a southeast direction for about ten miles. Hop in, if you want to, and I'll take you that far."

Young Mulvey hopped in. They rolled across the tracks and down a winding macadam road. The young lady asked questions. Young Mulvey answered them to the best of his ability, giving her a pretty thorough case history of the reasons for a young man of his attainments to be beating his way on a freight. In his turn he likewise made inquiries. He learned that her name was Gillian Darby, that she lived ten miles farther on at a plantation called Red Mill, that her father was about the most successful lawyer in the State.

"You know," the girl said abruptly, "I've sort of taken a fancy to you. Do you want a job?"

"I want a job, all right," said young Mulvey, straightening his six-foot frame to a commanding position, "but the job probably doesn't want me. My last employer seemed to be under the impression that no job of any decency at all would care to have me."

"Well, this wouldn't be anything hot. I was referring to a job on our farm. We could use another man. You'd get fifty dollars a month with board and room free. It might not be so bad till you could land something really worth while."

"Lady," said young Mulvey, "you hev done got yo'self a hired man."

"I suppose you never saw a farm before in your life. But Jesse Burk—he's the foreman—will teach you. It'll be pretty hard on you at first, for it's tough work, but I guess you'll get used to it."

They came at last to Red Mill and young Mulvey received a few surprises. His conception of the South had been based on romantic literature. He expected a white house with tall columns; he saw a large, substantial-looking brick dwelling oozing reality rather than romance. He expected a couple of Negro servants to come bowing and scraping at their arrival; nobody met them at all. He expected Gillian's fa-

ther to be the goateed colonel of storied fame; but when Gillian led him into the house he was confronted by a brisk and vigorous man in his fifties, a man with sharp gray eyes and a short, bristly mustache.

"This is Mr. Mulvey," said Gilligan. "I found him abusing a freight and thought it would be best to bring him here and give him a job on the farm."

"I wonder what you'll bring in next," said Mr. Darby. "How are you, young man? What do you know about farm work?"

"Not the first thing," Mulvey answered cheerfully.

"I thought so. Well, I don't suppose you'll break us. My daughter has quaint ideas. You aren't the first of them. Report to Mr. Burk and he'll put you through your paces."

"Father," Gillian said, "Mr. Mulvey isn't the ordinary type of hired man. I suggest that, like Jesse, he eat and sleep here at the house."

Darby looked at young Mulvey, looked in the manner of a man washing his hands of the whole affair. He said: "I used to think that I ran this place. I know better now. Mr. Mulvey, the ranch is yours to do with as you like till Gillian's sympathies are aroused by some other unfortunate."

"Thank you kindly, sir," said young Mulvey, in his best servile manner. "I shall endeavor to please, sir."

"Go to the devil," said Mr. Darby. "Gillian, you and this—this gentleman get out of here. I've got a hard case to-morrow."

YOUNG Mulvey was put through his paces. He found Jesse Burk, the manager, to be a tall, well-built chap of thirty, with hard eyes and the jaw of a man not to be estimated lightly. Kiracofe, who, with his wife, lived in a tenant house, was a short, bulky fellow powerfully molded. There were two Negro hands. And Burk said sourly that they didn't really need another man, but that he supposed he'd have to do what Miss Gillian ordered. Young Mulvey had a distinct feeling that Burk had not fallen in love with him at first sight.

In the days that followed he discovered that there is more to farm work than what appears on the surface. But he went at it grimly, in the characteristic determined way of all the Mulveys.

He thinned corn, he hoed corn, he plowed corn. He cut, raked, cocked, and hauled hay. He cleaned up ditch banks and mended fences. He helped harvest wheat. And before he knew it, six weeks had slipped away. Six weeks during which he was so tired at night that he could barely drag himself from the supper table and stumble up the stairs to his room in that wing of the house inhabited by Burk and himself.

This, it would certainly appear, was not adventure. Young Mulvey could have been excused for bidding farewell after the first pay day. But he didn't do that. He stuck around, for it was in the back of his mind that if ever he got over being tired to death there was a chance that he might persuade Gillian that Mrs. George Mulvey would be a very pleasant name for her.

He didn't have much companionship with the men. The colored hands were interested only in their own mysterious conversations. Kiracofe seemed to have a contempt for him as a softie from the city. Burk would go to his room immediately after supper and devote himself to crime stories of the type that dealt with gang fights and kidnap-

ings. Mr. Darby would charge in at nightfall, gobble his supper, and retreat to his office to labor over his next case.

Consequently young Mulvey had only Gillian and Mrs. Kiracofe to commune with. Now communing with Gillian was something to be desired, but she wasn't always at home of an evening. And sometimes Mr. Mulvey would take himself down to Kiracofe's house. Usually Kiracofe would either be gone to bed or to town for a bottle of beer with the boys. Mulvey would pass a few desultory moments with Mrs. Kiracofe; but as that lady's conversation dealt in the main with whether it did or did not look like rain, this was a minimum of fun.

Finally Gillian invited him one night to escort her to a dance. Young Mulvey had wrestled with a grubbing hoe the whole day and he ached from cowlick to heel callus, but he jumped at that opportunity. Jumped? He landed on it in mid-air and promptly throttled it.

He had a good time at the dance, too; met a lot of Gillian's friends and liked them. But best of all was riding home under the stars with Gillian. Mulvey drove. Gillian sat beside him in a blue outfit in which moonbeams were forever getting tangled. Mr. Mulvey ventured the opinion that she possessed the loveliest eyes he personally had ever gazed upon. Gillian said for him to watch where he was driving. Young Mulvey decided that perhaps it would be better if he waited a while before again alluding to her eyes. But it was a mighty enjoyable night.

THE next day he went back to the ditch bank, he and Kiracofe and the two colored men. About ten o'clock Burk came out and transferred the latter two to another field. This left Mulvey and Kiracofe alone. For nearly an hour they worked in silence, then Kiracofe said: "Datin' the boss's gal last night, wasn't you? Pretty slick of her to give you a job just so she could have you handy."

"That," said young Mulvey, "is a low remark." He laid down his hoe. It had been a long time since he was furious, but now he could feel the blood rushing to his face. "I won't ask you to take it back. I'm just going to teach you not to make it again."

Young Mulvey wasn't any slouch. But Kiracofe happened to be an uncommonly powerful man. They fought tooth and nail for about five minutes, then Kiracofe knocked him down. Young Mulvey got up, and went down again. His head rang, lights shimmied before his eyes. When he stumbled to his feet this time, Kiracofe advanced deliberately. In his eyes there was the look of an animal coming to the kill. Young Mulvey could take a licking; but he wasn't going to be outraged. He seized his grubbing hoe, lifted it, and for the first time in his life he was prepared to do real and deadly violence.

"Keep coming, big boy, and I'll part your hair for you!"

Kiracofe, not being a complete fool and not caring to have his scalp as well as his hair parted, desisted. For a moment they eyed each other, then abruptly both went back to work, in the manner of two men who have fought, settled nothing, and yet do not care to press the issue further. It happened to have been the first time in his life that young Mulvey had gotten stirred up enough over anything to do battle about it, and the experience left him with a gratifying sense of exultation.

"What's the matter with your face?" Gillian asked, at supper.

"Got it scratched up in the briers," Mulvey lied gently.

Burk gave him a sharp look, but said nothing. Darby said that the briers along some of those ditch banks were something fierce. Gillian began to tell about the dance last night. Burk broke in to tell of the latest crime serial he had read, in which one gangster had shot his rival right out in the middle of a dance floor.

"Some of those fellows are smart," he declared. "Some of 'em make a mint of money. Must be kind of exciting to be living outside the law that way and making it pay. You got to have brains in that game."

"You should have been a gangster chief, Jess," said Gillian.

"I expect I'd have been a good one." Burk laughed.

After supper, to young Mulvey's surprise, Darby offered him a cigar, and they went to sit upon the veranda. Darby was in an expansive mood. He spoke of the moon and praised it. He said that young Mulvey looked like a new man since coming to Red Mill.

"That fellow Burk, now," he said. "There's a comer. I admire his spirit and determination." Young Mulvey looked politely impressed, though, truth to tell, he had discovered nothing to admire about Mr. Burk. Darby continued: "Deserves credit, that fellow. Came from the bottom of the ladder, but he had the spark. Got an education some way, then put himself through a couple of years of agricultural college. Of course, the law is my business, but I like a profit on the farm, too, and Burk has made money for me since I made him manager."

"He's sure a fiend for those gangster stories," Mulvey said.

"Relaxation, Mr. Mulvey. Every man's got to have it."

Young Mulvey was seriously wishing now that Mr. Darby would take himself off somewhere, anywhere, for over yonder in the swing sat Gillian looking too attractive to be left alone. He resolved to make a try.

"It's strange you aren't working on a case to-night, Mr. Darby."

"By George!" exclaimed that gentleman. "I clean forgot. That Perley business comes up Friday. I'll have to run in and do a little work. Forgot all about it sitting here talking."

"Mulvey," said young Mulvey to himself, as Mr. Darby departed, "you're a smart guy." Then he crossed the veranda and sat down in the swing beside Gillian. He wondered if he could mention her eyes again, and decided against it. But they sure were worth mentioning. He put his arm experimentally behind her on the swing back.

"It's a nice night, George."

"It's a swell night, Gillian."

Then it happened. Somehow that arm went round her, drew her to him, and the first thing he knew, he had kissed her and was doing his level best to repeat. But Gillian pushed him away.

"Stop, George. Stop!"

"Good gosh, I haven't begun yet! Please. Please, Gillian."

No, he couldn't kiss her again. But he—he was in love with her. She doubted that. The moonlight had just gone to his head. He'd better move his arm, too.

"You can doubt it all you like," young Mulvey said, "but I'm ready to spend the rest of my life proving it." Then he caught her and kissed her anyhow, and felt like a couple of kings.

SOME hours later, after repeated declarations that he knew what he was talking about when he said that he loved her, young Mulvey went up to his room. His head was swimming. Did he have a chance? Would Gillian really consider him seriously? Those were disconcerting questions! They were posers. What the Sam Hill did he have to offer a girl? We-ell, nothing but his adoration; but that was a mighty vigorous kind of adoration.

He walked into his room, closed the door, and crossed to the window without turning on the light. He sat down before the window, lit a cigarette, and let the sighing breeze caress his hot face. The moon was going down in the west, a gorgeous golden disk. A little while ago he and Gillian had sat enraptured gazing at that moon, and he remembered suddenly that he and Millicent had never spent any time observing the moon. Millicent! She seemed a million years back in the past. He hadn't loved Millicent. Young puppy, he had just been infatuated with her, with the thought that she was the daughter of the boss. Smart young men always married the boss's daughters. It had seemed to be the thing for him to do.

But, gosh, he was glad old man Otis Vail had fired him. Gillian, now—Gillian wouldn't be a girl to kick a man just because her father said he was no good. Gillian would have to find out for herself.

Far away he heard a screech owl send forth its eerie cry, and remembered the first time he had heard that mournful sound. That was his third night here and he had sprung up in bed sure that somewhere a woman had screamed. The sound had come again. He decided then that a maniac was at large in the neighborhood. Finally, after repeated cries, he had realized that some kind of bird was making the noise. Next day he had mentioned the thing to Kiracofe, and Kiracofe had pityingly told him that all he had heard was a harmless "little ole screech owl."

Once more the owl's cry sounded, closer this time. Well, he might know what it was, but the thing still made him feel creepy. He reached for a cigarette—and stopped suddenly. There had come to his ears another sound, closer—a sound in the hall outside. Young Mulvey rose silently to his feet and stood tense.

He waited patiently. The sound came again, a cautious, stealthy noise as of some one moving on pads. Young Mulvey eased across the room on the feet of a cat. Kneeling by the door, he put his ear to the keyhole. Again the sound came, and this time it was directly opposite the door. He strained his ears for all they were worth, and at last he knew what was going on out there in the hall. Somebody was creeping in his stockinged feet to the stairs.

Young Mulvey heard the first step creak, then everything was quiet again. A long time later he heard the third step from the bottom creak. Young Mulvey waited perhaps a minute; then, opening the door, he stepped out into the hall. He heard nothing. He slipped off his shoes and, carrying them, made cautiously for the stairs.

Somebody was making it a point to be mighty darned quiet about leaving the house. He moved silently down the steps. When he reached the bottom he went out of the house by a side door and shrank into the shadow of a water oak. The moon, being practically down, gave scant light. But young Mulvey had excellent eyes. They picked out a

movement on the far side of the lawn. Young Mulvey, bending low, passed from the shadow of the water oak to that of a maple. His eyes caught the movement again. He saw a figure move cautiously into the driveway that led to the barn. The dying moon cast a final pale shaft, and in it that figure was revealed. Jesse Burk!

## CHAPTER II.

### WHAT A FOOL!

YOUNG Mulvey stood tense. For a moment he was about to laugh at himself and go back to his room. Then he stiffened again. Certainly the manager of Red Mill had no reason to go about legitimate business in so furtive a manner. Young Mulvey, being of an inquisitive nature, then and there decided to investigate.

He followed Jesse Burk. But he didn't creep down the driveway. He paralleled it and he bent low and was careful to take advantage of every bit of shadow. Adventure, young Mulvey felt, was making a belated start in his direction. He was correct.

Burk moved straight on toward the barn, but just before reaching it, he turned abruptly to the left, entering a path that led down to the creek. Young Mulvey kept him in sight with difficulty. One moment the man's figure would be in sight, then it would be swallowed in the gloom of the night. Young Mulvey reached the path, eased down it cautiously, still carrying his shoes in his hand.

He saw Burk go straight toward the creek. But when he himself arrived at the stream, there was neither sight nor sound of the other man. Young Mulvey halted, and stood a long time absolutely still, scarcely breathing. The only sound that came to his ears was the querulous mumbling of the stream. Across that stream lay the Red Mill woodland, thick and dark. Had Burk gone over there? Well, where else? But what possible business, legitimate or otherwise, could he have along the steep, wooded bluff on the far side of the creek?

Young Mulvey was in a quandary, but finally he decided to investigate further. Stepping from stone to stone in the shallow water, he crossed the stream. On the far side the path began again, winding around the foot of the bluff. Young Mulvey moved forward stealthily, pausing every few yards to listen. In this manner he penetrated a good quarter of a mile into the woods. But he neither saw nor heard Burk again.

He came back at last to the creek and, easing into a particularly dense block of shadow, sat down on a log. For hours he waited there and nothing happened. A faint veil of light appeared in the east. Young Mulvey got to his feet, recrossed the stream, and made for the house. Dawn was pale in the sky when he crept up the stairs to his room.

Yielding to a sudden impulse, he stole down the hall to the door of Burk's room and put his ear to the keyhole. For perhaps half a minute he heard nothing, then there reached him the sound of deep and regular breathing. Burk had come back! He had obviously returned by a different route from the one he had taken going out, and young Mulvey had simply wasted his time waiting on the creek bank.

Mulvey went to his room and slept until Burk knocked on his door nearly an hour later. "Don't sleep all day," Burk called. "There's work to do, you know." Young Mulvey

got up and went down to the barn, where he busied himself with the chores.

But all that day he was thinking deeply. Once he thought of informing Gillian of what he had seen last night. But he decided against this. Neither Gillian nor her father, he reasoned, would be inclined toward suspicion of a man who had been with them so long. But he, George Mulvey, had the privilege of entertaining all the suspicion he pleased, and right now that was plenty.

For a week thereafter he made it a point every night to leave his door partly open and to stay awake till after midnight. But Burk indulged himself in no more nocturnal excursions, or if he did young Mulvey did not hear him. Mulvey decided that he had been a fool to attach so much importance to the thing. But even yet that curiosity of his remained far from satisfied.

He went to another dance with Gillian and made love to her. She wasn't exactly responsive, but he knew now that he had a chance with her. Somehow he just knew it. And where there was a chance—well, young Mulvey was the boy to take advantage of it.

SUMMER was now in full, hot swing. They cut the alfalfa and stored it, they trimmed more ditch banks, they mended fence. A man nearly roasted in that weather, but there was something invigorating about that sun beating down on his back. Young Mulvey grew to like it. He felt swell. He took an interest in the farm.

On rainy days they mended harness and oiled machinery. Now and then, of an afternoon when there was nothing particular to do, young Mulvey went fishing in the creek below the abandoned mill from which the place took its name. Not many fish fell to his lot, but it was grand to loll on the bank lazily contemplating his bobbing cork. The well-known Southern languor stole into his bones. He could lie there by the mumbling stream and forget all cares, all worries, in the world. Gillian found him thus one drowsy afternoon and sat down beside him.

"If your Mr. Vail could see you now," she declared, "he would probably say all his worst fears about you were realized."

"I expect he would," young Mulvey muttered sleepily.

"And that Millicent girl. By the way, was she beautiful?"

"She was a knock-out." Mulvey was still drowsy.

"What?"

"I mean she was ugly as a mud fence," Mulvey said hastily.

"I'll bet she wasn't. I'll bet she was a beauty. I wonder what it feels like to be really beautiful."

Young Mulvey sat up and stared at her. "You tell me!"

"Oh, I'm not beautiful and I know it, but I have got good sense."

"My time has been wasted," young Mulvey said sadly. "For weeks now I've been telling how beautiful you were and you bob up with an inane remark like that."

"Are you an authority on the subject?"

"I am in your case." And he gave her a look that brought surging color to her cheeks and made her eyes drop.

"You're getting a bite, silly. Pull him. Pull him!"

Young Mulvey had his opinion of a fish that would choose a time like this, but he obediently yanked the offender from the water, a half-pound silver perch. Gillian was enthusiastic over the catch. Young Mulvey was enthusiastic over her.

The perch was enthusiastic over flopping out of Mulvey's hand back into the water.

"There! You let him get away. You weren't watching what you were doing."

"Any time I watch a fish when I can watch you, you can shoot me."

And now upon this delightful little scene there stalked an intruder. Jesse Burk. He gazed speculatively upon the pair. Gillian was blushing. Young Mulvey wished that Burk was in Hades.

"I hate to disturb you," Burk said. "You-all look like you were having a real good time. But the hogs rooted out of the hog lot, Mulvey, and I expect you'd better get 'em back and fix the hole where they got out."

Then and there young Mulvey heartily consigned all hogs to the land of fire and brimstone. He got moodily to his feet and went after the swine and, it is regrettable to say, he flung a few vicious rocks at Mr. Darby's prize porkers. He was in that kind of humor.

When he had mended the hole in the fence he looked up to see Burk approaching. Burk came up and regarded him in silence for several seconds. Then he spoke.

"I don't know, Mulvey, as it's such a good idea for one of the hired men to be so much in Miss Darby's company. Mr. Darby might not like it."

"Well," said young Mulvey, "I'm going to wait till he shows he doesn't like it." He wanted to push his fist into Burk's face, but decided against it.

"I'm warning you," Burk said, his face an angry red.

"I'm thanking you," young Mulvey sarcastically replied and, turning on his heel, walked away.

It was that night that Burk went out again. Mulvey had left his door on a crack. He woke up at ten minutes to twelve with the distinct sense of having been disturbed. He listened, and heard Burk creeping down the hall.

ONCE more young Mulvey adopted the rôle of detective. Once more Burk disappeared in the woods across the creek. Young Mulvey retreated to a spot from which he could observe the house. He wanted to learn the route by which Burk returned. But this time Burk came back by the same way he had gone. At five minutes to three young Mulvey saw him emerge from the shadows below the barn. To his surprise a second figure followed Burk and it was the man Kiracofe.

For a moment, at the barnyard gate, the two men whispered together. Then they separated, with Burk coming toward the big house and Kiracofe going to his own. Young Mulvey ducked into the shadows, sprinted across the lawn, and whisked up the stairs to his room. Five minutes later he heard Burk's stealthy ascent.

Mulvey did not sleep that night, but lay wide-eyed till dawn brightened the east. Burk and Kiracofe. What were that pair up to? To save his life, he couldn't figure it out. But he knew intuitively that these excursions were not carried out in innocence. He had a feeling, all of a sudden, that Gillian and her father were in danger, that his own neck, even, was scheduled for trouble.

Adventure, young Mulvey decided, had definitely arrived, and now that it was here he wasn't so hot for it. Still, he didn't intend to let up; he was going to keep on shadowing Burk. Sooner or later he

would penetrate to the bottom of this puzzle.

With the coming of daylight he felt better, as is usually the case. It was silly to think that Gillian and her father were on the verge of peril. That had been merely a fantastic thought hatched in the dark of night. Burk and Kiracofe were undoubtedly engaged in some nefarious business, but it couldn't affect the Darbys or George Mulvey. Funny, he reflected, the thoughts a fellow let himself think in the night when his good sense was playing hooky.

He went about his work the next day as usual. He didn't even bother to think much about last night. Burk had sent him with the two Negroes to fell trees for the winter wood. It was young Mulvey's first offense with a crosscut saw and he learned that that particular species of saw was a devil.

Young Mulvey greeted sundown with fervent thanks, and plodded wearily to the house and supper. His back felt as if it had been broken and then set by a gravedigger. After supper he sat on the veranda with Gillian, but it is a matter of record that young Mulvey was not that night a glittering success at conversation. He was so tired that merely to open his mouth required a supreme effort.

"I've been thinking about you," Gillian announced. "How long are you planning to stay here at Red Mill?"

"Trying to get rid of me?" young Mulvey yawned.

"Of course not, silly. I was just thinking. You certainly aren't a man to dawdle around on a fifty-dollar-a-month job all your life. You know——"

"I'm a man"—he yawned again—"excuse me, to dawdle on it when there isn't anything else in sight."

"That's what I was coming to when you interrupted. You know, daddy is pretty influential and he has a lot of friends. He could probably put you in line for a good job."

"You tell him to hop to it," young Mulvey said. "But"—he sighed—"I sure will hate leaving here. It's been swell. First physical work I ever did."

"Go on to bed," Gillian laughed. "You're yawning with every word. But listen, before you go. Daddy's taken something of a liking to you. Have a talk with him to-morrow night. He'll help you."

YOUNG Mulvey went up to his room and fell into the bed. He slept soundly from eight o'clock to twelve. Then he woke up, and thought: "Seems like that guy would let me sleep all night for once." For a moment or so he seriously debated letting Burk attend to his nocturnal affairs without his faithful shadow. But, no, he wouldn't, either. And so he got out of bed and hustled into his clothes.

Burk took the usual route. Mulvey followed him. When Burk crossed the creek, Mulvey wasn't twenty steps to the rear. He, too, crossed over the stream and he crept along the path in a manner that would have aroused the envy of any old-time Indian scout. But once more he lost Burk in the woods across the creek. He came back, slipped off a rock crossing the water, and got his feet wet.

There just didn't seem to be any use to follow that fellow Burk. The guy was altogether too slick at getting out of sight. Young Mulvey headed for the house and, where the path circled the barnyard, he came face to face with Burk and Kiracofe.

Young Mulvey nearly jumped out of his skin. Burk came straight to him.

"What're you doing out at this time of night?"

"Seems like I could put the same question to you," young Mulvey made answer. "Well, if you want to know the truth, I just couldn't sleep and I thought I'd take a walk." Gosh, that was a silly excuse! But it seemed to satisfy Burk.

"Listen," Burk implored. "Don't tell anybody you saw us. It's like this." He winked meaningly. "Kiracofe and I had a little date to-night. If his wife found it out, she'd kill him. Nothing bad, you know. I wouldn't mind so much myself, though I would hate for the folks up at the house to find out about it, but Mrs. Kiracofe would raise particular hell."

Young Mulvey felt like a fool. So all that had been going on was that. Burk and Kiracofe were slipping off to dates in town. Well, that wasn't any business of his. Damn it, the sleep he'd lost playing detective over a thing like that!

"Sure," he said. "I'll never mention it."

"That's the boy," said Kiracofe, and for once he actually looked friendly.

"Going up to the house now?" Burk inquired.

"Think I will," young Mulvey said. "Believe I can sleep now."

"Well, Kiracofe and I have got a plan or two to make. I'll be up soon. Don't make any fuss and wake the folks."

YOUNG Mulvey promised that he wouldn't, and departed for the house. Burk and Kiracofe stood watching him. Burk's lips were tight and there was a dark light in his eyes.

"We've got to get rid of that gentleman," Burk said.

"Why?" Kiracofe demanded. "I hate the devil, but I don't see where he can do us any harm."

"You'll always be a fool," Burk laughed. "Did he take you in with that story about not being able to sleep? He was following me. He told the first lie that popped into his head when I asked him what he was doing out at this time of night. What the devil did he cross the creek for and follow that path? He could have done all the walking he wanted to around the barn for instance. It was damned lucky I stopped off the path to wait for you. I never would have seen him if it hadn't been for that."

"And you think we got to get rid of him?"

"Kiracofe, I don't think. I know."

"I ain't never killed a man," Kiracofe said.

"You're still the fool," Burk answered pleasantly. "We aren't going to kill him. Killings don't go."

"Then what are we going to do? I thought gettin' rid of him shorely meant puttin' him out of the way."

"Getting rid of him means getting him away from this place. I've got a good plan. Listen, can you trust your wife?"

"Sure, I can trust her. I'd like to know who I can trust if I can't trust Lottie. Ain't she in with us on this whole deal?"

"I know that," Burk said patiently. "But this is something special. Listen." And at great length and with much detail he explained the plan he had in mind. When he had finished, Kiracofe applauded, his dull face actually beaming.

"Burk, you're a honey. You've got more brains in a minute than any other man's got all day."

Young Mulvey was in bed and

asleep when Burk returned to the big house. Young Mulvey had put aside such childish thoughts as that Burk and Kiracofe were plotting against the Darbys. He had called himself several choice varieties of fool and had sought his pillow.

He arose the next morning feeling sheepish. A fine figure he'd cut, sneaking around and trying to spy upon the clandestine affairs of Burk and Kiracofe. That was a good way for a guy to get shot.

Young Mulvey did his chores that morning with a light heart. To-day was the day he was going to speak to Mr. Darby about helping him get a job. To-night, right after supper, he'd make his play and, with luck, Mr. Darby would rush to his assistance. Gillian had said he would. If Darby helped him get a good position, he'd soon put that question to Gillian more earnestly than ever before.

Mr. Mulvey was a fiend for work that day. He drew that crosscut saw like a veteran. His back protested, but he told it firmly to lie down and be good. At sundown he started for the big house in high spirits. A bath, then a change of clothes, and a good hot supper. Boy! Then he'd ask Mr. Darby for a word in private with him. After that—well, after that Mr. Mulvey might have something to say to Miss Darby out on that secluded veranda.

As he was passing the barn he saw Mrs. Kiracofe moving toward him from the direction of the big house. She'd evidently been up there and was now returning to her own house. Young Mulvey wondered if she would stop and ask him if he thought it would rain to-morrow.

She didn't stop, but she did something else. Just as she was opposite him, and Mulvey was tipping his hat, he caught sight of her eyes and they looked haunted. Mulvey felt distinctly shocked, and puzzled. The next instant her hand touched his. Then it went away. In his own hand he now discovered a folded sheet of paper. Young Mulvey, again feeling like a fool, moved a few furtive steps away, then unfolded the note, and read it:

Please, Mr. Mulvey, help me. I am in all kinds of trouble. I want your advice. If you fail me, I don't know what I'll do. Please meet me to-night at the oak tree behind our house—*and burn this note.*

## CHAPTER III.

### NO MAN IN THE WAY.

YOUNG Mulvey had to read that note four times before he recovered from his surprise. Mrs. Kiracofe in trouble? What kind of trouble? Maybe she had learned about her husband's philandering. But why call on young Mulvey to help her?

Mulvey went on to the house, had his bath, and changed his clothes. A sudden thought struck him. He'd just show that note to Gillian and see what she thought of it. But when he went downstairs in quest of her he learned that she had gone out to dinner with friends and would not return until late.

Mr. Darby, Burk, and young Mulvey ate supper in silence. Burk was never a talkative one and Mr. Darby to-night seemed vastly preoccupied. Immediately after the meal he went into his office and shut the door emphatically. Young Mulvey decided that he had better wait for a more auspicious time to hold his conference with Darby.

"The old man's a bear for work," Burk commented.

"Sure is," Mulvey agreed. "Is he really very wealthy?"

"He's probably one of the richest men in the State," said Burk.

Mulvey wandered out to the veranda. Burk went upstairs to his magazines. Mulvey took out the note and read it again. Well, since there would be no opportunity to show it to Gillian, he might as well burn the thing now, as Mrs. Kiracofe had suggested. Accordingly he struck a match and applied it to the paper.

The night wore on. Mulvey sat on the dark veranda and consumed cigarettes. There was no moon tonight, but the stars were brilliant in the black curtain of the sky. Mulvey's old friend, the screech owl, tore the night to bits with his eerie wailing.

At last Mulvey, extinguishing his cigarette, left the veranda. He took a circuitous route toward Kiracofe's house, going past the barn and swinging in a wide circle across the meadow back of the barn. He entered the woods at a point some two hundred yards beyond Kiracofe's. Here, standing in the edge of the brush, he observed the house. A light burned in the kitchen. Young Mulvey could see Mrs. Kiracofe moving back and forth.

The next time he halted he was directly behind the house. The kitchen light still burned. He saw Mrs. Kiracofe hang up a dish towel and, with a little gesture of fatigue, brush a strand of hair out of her eyes. It was that little gesture which got to Mulvey's heart. He felt a sudden pity for that woman. Slaving away for a man of Kiracofe's stripe. Damn it, he'd help her if there was any way under the sun for him to do it.

He sat down under the oak tree and waited. The screech owl seemed to have followed him, for now its cry sounded in the woods just back of him. Young Mulvey shivered in spite of himself. Darned nuisance, that fellow with the mournful voice.

The light in the kitchen went out. Mulvey thought he heard a door creak, then everything became still. He slipped to his feet and stood close to the bole of the tree. For some reason or other young Mulvey was shaking; oh, not much, but still enough to betray his nervousness. Hang it, this sort of thing wasn't in his line. Fellows got shot at this kind of business sometimes, even chaps just as innocent as he was. He wished that woman would come on now and get it over with. There were any number of places he would prefer to be at this moment.

Then he saw her. Not ten feet away she was stealing silently toward him. Her face looked tense and white. Mulvey stepped slightly away from the tree. Mrs. Kiracofe saw him, stopped stock-still; then, seeming to gather herself together, fairly sprang at him.

"You did come!" she gasped. "Oh, I was so afraid you wouldn't. I've been in such misery. I thought he never would leave the house." She was panting and her eyes were wide. Young Mulvey, feeling something of a fool, put his hand on her arm.

"Control yourself, Mrs. Kiracofe. To be absolutely frank, I'm a good bit puzzled that you should call on me, but if there's any way I can help you, I'll do it. What is your trouble?"

"Wait till I catch my breath," the woman said. She leaned against the tree, her bosom rising and falling. Young Mulvey was distinctly ill at ease. That was like a woman, he reflected, to prolong the thing. She was dramatizing herself and the situation. At that moment George Mulvey felt not the scantiest desire

to be a member of the supporting cast of any drama.

"What is the trouble?" he asked, a bit impatiently.

Suddenly she turned her white face toward him. Her eyes were big and wide. They seemed to look through and through young Mulvey. Mrs. Kiracofe put her hands on Mr. Mulvey's shoulders and drew closer to him.

"Oh, Mr. Mulvey, you were sweet to come!"

THEN Mulvey saw Kiracofe. He felt as if cold steel had touched him, as if a long, icy blade had whipped through his vitals. In that moment young Mulvey's usually reliable knees knocked together and his teeth danced.

"I think," declared young Mulvey, and both what he said and the way he said it were ludicrous, "I think—that we are—about to be inter-interrupted."

"You're happy right you are," Kiracofe said. He came forward as if shot out of a gun. His huge hand seized his wife and flung her aside. "What's the meanin' of this?" he thundered. He raised his hand and started toward young Mulvey, who had deemed it discreet to back away a few paces. But Mrs. Kiracofe caught her husband's arm.

"Please, Irv. Oh, please, please! Mr. Mulvey and I didn't mean any harm. I just wanted to talk with him."

It seemed to young Mulvey that it was now or never for him to advance some argument in his own behalf. "Your wife's right, Kiracofe. We meant absolutely no harm. Mrs. Kiracofe just wanted to talk to me."

"Talk to you! What did she have to talk to you about?"

"I'd like to know that myself," young Mulvey said.

"Well, you'll soon know what I'm goin' to talk to you about. I'm goin' to kill you."

The fellow looked as if he meant it. Young Mulvey got ready to sell his life as preciously as possible. And how he longed for that grubbing hoe with which he had once defied Kiracofe. But again Mrs. Kiracofe sprang to the rescue.

"Please, Irv. Please not when you're mad like this. Wait! Wait till in the morning."

"Sure," young Mulvey said fervently. "Wait till in the morning. Wait longer than that."

Mrs. Kiracofe was tugging at her husband's arm. Suddenly Kiracofe seemed to get a grip on himself. He allowed his wife to pull him back. Some of the rage left his eyes. "All right," he said finally, "I'll wait. But in the mornin'——"

"In the morning," said young Mulvey, "you'll be ready to listen to an explanation." And then young Mulvey went away from there.

Well, here was more adventure. Had this thing happened to George Mulvey? He wiped the streaming sweat off his forehead. "That would have been a pretty end for you, big boy," he muttered, "if that guy really had given you a ticket to kingdom come. Hereafter, son, if ladies want your help they'll have to confer with you in the daytime and in public!"

He was not now very frightened, because he believed that Mrs. Kiracofe could talk manslaughter out of her husband's mind. But still, he'd feel a lot better if by sundown tomorrow he was alive and doing well.

NEXT morning Burk sent young Mulvey on an errand to the adjoining farm. When Mulvey was out of sight, Burk turned to his employer. "I'd

like a few words with you, Mr. Darby, before you go to town."

"Can't you wait till to-night? I'm in a hurry."

"This is important, sir. It's about that young Mulvey."

"What about him?" Gillian demanded instantly.

"Miss Gillian, you won't want to hear this. It's not nice."

"I don't care what it is. I want to hear it. I can stand it."

"All right, then," said Burk. "Mulvey has been having an affair with Mrs. Kiracofe."

"The devil he has!" Darby cried.

"I don't believe it!" There was fury in Gillian's eyes and her cheeks flamed. "I don't believe it!"

"Kiracofe caught them last night," Burk said gently. He went on then to describe the whole business. "Kiracofe was crazy mad last night, but he's cooler this morning. Came to me and told me the whole thing from beginning to end. I reasoned with him. He says now that he won't make trouble if Mulvey leaves Red Mill."

"Well, he'll certainly leave!" Darby shouted. "Damned young sneak! I feel like taking a stick and breaking his neck!"

The color had seeped out of Gillian's face as she listened to Burk, in that cool, matter-of-fact voice of his, piling up the evidence against young Mulvey. In spite of her cry that she would not believe it, she knew now that the thing was true in all its ugliness. For a moment she was physically sick with revulsion. Then she regained control of herself and on steady feet walked out of the room.

"Bring Mulvey to me soon as he gets back," Darby directed his manager. "I won't go to town till I've settled with him."

So Burk brought young Mulvey to Darby. The latter spoke swiftly and to the point. He didn't want a man of Mulvey's stripe at Red Mill. In other words young Mulvey had a damn sight better get off the place while he was all in one piece.

"But I'm innocent!" Mulvey yelled. "Mrs. Kiracofe gave me a note saying she was in trouble and wanted my advice. Asked me to meet her last night. That's all there is to it."

"It seems, though, that Kiracofe found her in your arms."

"That's a dirty lie. She did put her hands on my shoulders. I didn't touch her except to put my hand on her arm one time and try to make her get control of herself. I tell you, she gave me a note."

"Well, let's see the note," Darby snapped.

"I—I—why, I burned it. She asked me to in the note."

"Oh, yes," Darby said sarcastically. "Very convenient to have burned the note. Get out! Get out!"

"Look here!" young Mulvey shouted. "Listen to me. I see the whole confounded thing now. It was a frame-up, variation of the old-time badger game. Woman lures a man to a certain spot. Has it fixed

## DO YOU KNOW—

1. What is the only natural liquid independent of life processes which exists in a free state and considerable quantity at the earth's usual temperature?
2. In the Glacial Period of the earth, how far south the arctic ice cap extended?
3. What New Zealand tree is a natural development of a small American plant?
4. If seals are found in any bodies of water save the oceans?
5. What is the origin of the expressions: "feeding" a fire; keeping a fire "alive"?
6. What national sport of to-day had its origin in a primitive religious belief?

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all the time for her husband to surprise them."

"Don't be idiotic," Darby said.

"Hell, no wonder she could talk him out of killing me last night. It was all part of the game. So Kiracofe won't make trouble if I leave Red Mill. You're damn tootin' he won't! That's what he wanted all along. Look at it reasonably. Kiracofe is the type of man who kills another man if he catches him with his wife. He's just that type. Thunderation, nobody in the world could have talked him out of killing me if it hadn't been a frame-up. I was dumb as all outdoors not to see that last night. Burk and Kiracofe framed it. They want me away from here."

"And why do they want you away from Red Mill?"

"Because they're afraid of me."

"Afraid of *you?*"

"Absolutely. They're afraid of what I'll find out about them. Mr. Darby, there've been some funny things going on around here. Burk and Kiracofe are——"

"I really believe you're insane," Darby said. "I have the utmost confidence in both Mr. Burk and Mr. Kiracofe. I ordered you off the place a few minutes ago. I repeat that order."

"All right, sir!" Mulvey snapped, having reached the limit of his patience. "I put you down long ago as being too stubborn to see anything you didn't want to. I'll get out. But you listen to me. There's something rotten around here. Ask Burk where he goes and what he does those nights he slips out after midnight! Ask him!"

"I haven't the slightest interest in what Mr. Burk does before or after midnight so long as he runs Red Mill to suit me. Get out!"

YOUNG Mulvey ran up the stairs on thundering feet. He got his few duds together. Going into the other wing of the house, he knocked on Gillian's door. But she wouldn't open it for him, told him not to dare come in.

"But, Gillian, you don't believe it, do you!"

"What else is there for me to believe?"

"But I swear I'm innocent. The whole thing was framed."

"Don't be ridiculous."

"Gillian, please give me a chance. Let me come in and explain. Gillian." No answer. "Gillian!"

"Will you please leave this house instantly?"

Perhaps young Mulvey muffed a chance there. Perhaps if he had defied her and gone in anyway and talked face to face with her he might have convinced her of his innocence. Certainly she would have wanted to believe him. But young Mulvey didn't do that. Young Mulvey stamped down the stairs and slammed the door behind him.

He set his face toward the barn. He was going down there and have it out with Burk and Kiracofe. But he stopped suddenly. If he

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7. When the "safety" pin was first invented?
8. In what country and when man first fought on horseback?
9. Where basketball originated?
10. What was the earliest form of writing?
11. Why ancient Egyptians took such great care to make the faces of their images accurate portraits of the persons represented?
12. Where the "Irish" potato was domesticated; that is, where it was transformed from a plant growing wild into its present-day form?
13. What ancient peoples lived in "state socialism"?
14. Whether the beads, skins, feathers, etc., worn by primitive man were purely ornamental or utilitarian?

Answers on page 140

let them know how much he suspected them, it might ruin everything. Burk and Kiracofe, he felt convinced, had lied to him about their nocturnal expeditions. Something rotten was on foot. No, there was a better way than to go and face that pair.

So young Mulvey took the road to town, walking with long, angry strides. He reached the town, which happened to be the county seat, shortly before noon, and had lunch in a greasy restaurant. That afternoon he rented a cheap room and moved in with his few belongings. The remainder of that day he spent looking for a job. But vacant jobs were nonexistent. Young Mulvey returned to his room. Well, he had enough saved from his salary of the last two months to enable him to get along all right for a week or two. He intended to stay here till in some way he solved the mystery of Red Mill. In fact, he had plans for that very night. Gillian might have kicked him out, but he wasn't going to quit as long as he had that persistent, insidious feeling that she was in danger.

And out at Red Mill Jesse Burk looked at Kiracofe. A triumphant smile came to life upon his lips. He winked and then laughed outright, the laugh of a man vastly pleased with himself.

"Well, it worked," he said.

"You bet it worked," Kiracofe agreed.

"You and Mrs. Kiracofe," Burk said, "staged the thing perfectly. Well, you said you could trust her."

"Lottie was good," Kiracofe said, with a reminiscent smile. "Why, the way she played her part, I almost believed the thing myself. That Mulvey was scared to death. Boy! He turned right white. I come mighty near laughin' in his face."

"I knew we could count on Darby," Burk said. "He's got all the confidence in the world in me. I just talked right slow and sad and he and the girl ate it up, though at first she said she didn't believe it."

They fell silent now, gazing into the distance. Satisfaction showed in Kiracofe's dull face. More than satisfaction, elation was revealed in Burk's. He had the sensation of a man with power in his grip.

"You know, Kiracofe," he said musingly, "I've had a hard life. My folks weren't any good. I made up my mind I'd get somewhere. I put myself through school. I picked out certain things I wanted from this life. Said to myself, 'I'll get those things or die trying. I'll let no man stand in my way.'"

Kiracofe shivered. "You're hard, all right, Burk. Sometimes I get scared thinkin' what might happen to me if—if—well, if things come to a pass between me and you. You'd kill a man awful quick if you had to, Burk."

"Yes," said Burk, "if a man had to be killed. But what's the matter with you. You never have failed me, have you?"

"No, I ain't. But, Burk, you're goin' to play square in this thing, ain't you?"

"Certainly I'm going to play square, aren't you?"

Kiracofe gulped. "Shore. I ain't losin' my nerve or nothin', but I do wish we'd do it and get it over with."

"Get yourself together," Burk said patiently. "You're jumpy. We can't just bust right into the thing. We've got to pick our time. You leave all that to me. Didn't I get rid of that nosey Mulvey for us? Just leave it all to me."

## CHAPTER IV.

### YOUNG MULVEY YAWNS.

ON the bluff across the creek from the Red Mill house the woods were vault-dark. Young Mulvey crouched behind a laurel bush on the lip of the bluff. Absently his fingers plucked tufts of the moss that grew in vast profusion all along here. All around him sounded rustlings of the night: a rabbit darting in terror past him, a fox skulking across the face of the bluff, a night bird startled from its perch.

Yonder lay Red Mill, dark and silent. He could just discern the bulk of the house by the few stars showing in the sky. Over there Gillian lay asleep. Over there, too, was Burk. Was he asleep? Or was he already skulking down the stairs on his way to the bluff?

Young Mulvey hoped the latter. For young Mulvey was determined to discover Burk's secret. He intended to do it if he had to hide here every night for a month. From this vantage point he could gaze down upon the path as it wound around the base of the bluff. He could see where Burk went when he crossed the creek to this side.

The night wore on. The woods were still alive with a myriad rustlings. Down below, the creek gurgled and chattered and mumbled.

Then, all of a sudden, the woods were getting light. Well, his men hadn't showed up to-night. Young Mulvey arose and picked his way carefully through the woods, emerging on the highway at a spot halfway between Red Mill and town. The sun was a pale red face in the brightening east when he let himself into his room. He undressed and, after drawing the shades to keep out the light, tumbled into bed.

The next night he went back to the bluff, but again nothing happened. He merely sat there in the deep shadow, waiting. He wondered now if he had flushed his birds and scattered them too soon. Perhaps their suspicions had been aroused sufficiently to cause them to abandon their scheme, whatever it was. But he wasn't going to take a chance on that.

For a week he did not miss his vigil a single night. Once Red Mill was ablaze with lights and dance music came drifting over the bottom land to him. This wasn't a happy night for young Mulvey; he couldn't keep from thinking of Gillian over yonder dancing in some other man's arms. Young Mulvey felt pretty bitter. He saw a couple of shadows close together on the lawn. In the condition he was by now, it never occurred to him that those two figures were anything but Gillian and some man. Young Mulvey picked a sapling viciously.

Twice in town during that week he saw Gillian driving down the street, but she looked past him as if, at the most, he was nothing more than a telephone pole. Her father he saw nearly every day, either going to his office or leaving it. Mr. Darby was just as oblivious of Mr. Mulvey's existence as his daughter.

Young Mulvey did a lot of brooding. Sometimes he called himself harsh names. The way he saw it now, he had been the biggest fool in captivity to let Burk and Kiracofe frame him with that woman.

HE would sit for hours gloomily contemplating the future, wondering how he ever could retrieve his lost ground with Gillian. He'd had some crazy no-

tion that Burk and Kiracofe plotted danger to her and her father and he had visualized himself as the bright, courageous young man who rescued them. In such cases as that the sullied hero was welcomed back with open arms. The proper procedure would call for an amorous fade-out with himself and Gillian last on the stage. But now it seemed there wasn't going to be any opportunity to display his courage and ingenuity, for evidently Burk and Kiracofe had given up their business and all was serene at Red Mill. Young Mulvey decided that he had been born under an unlucky star.

Desperate, he penned a frantic letter to his lady, protesting his innocence again, pleading that she give him a chance to explain. She returned the letter to him unopened. He hadn't put any return address on the envelope, so how the devil had she known the letter was from him? Well, at any rate she remembered his handwriting well enough to recognize it when she saw it again. Young Mulvey took that letter and viciously tore it into tiny strips.

But in spite of his despair he continued his nightly treks to the bluff. He began to feel that by now all the little woodland animals considered him a blood brother. He was just as much a part of the night life of the forest as they were.

The days and nights dragged on. Young Mulvey thought the thing out, as far as he was able, a thousand and one times. He knew, as well as he knew anything in the world, that Burk and Kiracofe had been up to deviltry, knew that they had wanted him away from Red Mill so strongly that they had framed him. Why, then, the sudden cessation of their night visits to the woods across the creek? Had they completed whatever it was they had been engaged upon? Or, as he truly suspected, had he scared them away from it?

Young Mulvey shook his head in painful bewilderment. Burk was a foxy one; of course, it was he who had thought up the scheme of framing Mulvey with Kiracofe's wife. The chances were, he decided, that Burk was biding his time, letting things slide until he considered it safe to resume operations.

In the daytime Mulvey knocked around town. He made guarded inquiries about Red Mill and its people; learned that the folks in town thought a great deal of Gillian and her father, also of Burk. Nobody, however, seemed to know much about Kiracofe, which was reasonable, Mulvey, reflected, as he had observed that while at Red Mill Kiracofe seldom had gone to town. But it was, after all, just superficial things that Mulvey learned. In reality he didn't know any more now than he had known that morning when Gillian and Mr. Darby made it so plain that he was an undesirable person.

"As a detective," he told himself ruefully, "you're something less than than a howling success, son."

It was good, he reflected, that he had at least a makeshift sense of humor. Otherwise he would go crazy. But this time it was more than difficult to start the motor on that sense of humor. When old man Vail and Millicent had given him the exit cue, the old humor box had responded gallantly. He'd felt sorry for them and laughed at himself. But now—well, Gillian wasn't Millicent, and that other time he hadn't felt a definite sense of impending peril.

There came a night when young Mulvey, his supper disposed of at the greasy restaurant, wandered downtown, drank a glass of beer, and

strolled into a pool room at eight o'clock. Two hours now till he would start for the bluff, for he usually left town at ten o'clock, thereby giving himself time to reach his destination before midnight.

Young Mulvey shot a few games of pool with the proprietor. But since this was expensive, inasmuch as the proprietor could beat him, he soon hung up his cue and sat on the bench to watch the other players. It was dull sitting there, but he had nothing else to do, no other way in which to kill time.

People went in and out. Young Mulvey sat on his bench and brooded. A cue ball jumped one of the tables and whacked him sternly on the shin. Mulvey had been so deeply preoccupied he'd hadn't noticed its hurtling approach. Everybody in the pool hall laughed, with the exception of young Mulvey. Young Mulvey didn't see anything so funny in a guy getting soundly cracked with a cue ball. He glared his disapproval of such a low mirth, but the boys continued to laugh. So young Mulvey moved down the bench out of the danger zone.

Outside a car went by very fast, and somebody said: "Sheriff's in a hurry to-night. Wonder where he's going?"

Young Mulvey didn't give a darn where the sheriff was going. He looked at his watch. Five minutes to nine. One hour and five minutes yet to wait. He yawned, bought a bottle of beer, and drank it without relish. Darned stuff tasted flat. Everything was flat.

There now seemed to be some kind of excitement out on the street. Probably, Mulvey decided, another fight. This was the confoundest town for street fights it had ever been his misfortune to live in. Now here came a fool rushing into the pool room, his eyes wide and staring. Young Mulvey yawned again. Then young Mulvey nearly jumped out of his skin, for the fool had yelled:

"Old man Darby's disappeared! That's where the sheriff was going!"

## CHAPTER V.

### ALIBIS.

THE night was pleasant at Red Mill. A faint curved splinter of moon rode youthfully in the sky, and while it did not diffuse much light, there it was in the sky for you to gaze upon to your heart's content. Gillian, her father, and Jesse Burk sat at supper. Gillian happened not to be thinking of George Mulvey to-night and was therefore her former delightful self. Burk talked more than usual. Mr. Darby, having won a most important case to-day, found himself in excellent humor.

After the meal he lit his customary cigar and strolled out onto the lawn. Gillian and Burk remained behind. Burk said: "Tell you what, if you haven't got anything else to do, I'll play you a game of double solitaire."

"Swell," said Gillian. "It's been months since we had a game."

They went into the library, found table and cards, and settled to their game. Outside Mr. Darby strolled about the lawn. He'd taken to doing this a lot after supper of late. Sort of rested a man. And, as he had once remarked to that sneaking puppy of a Mulvey, every man needed relaxation. A slow, gentle stroll and a good cigar. Where was the man who asked for more. *Puff, puff—pu-u-uh,* he went on the cigar, *puff, puff—pu-u-uh.*

Darned good case to-day, Mr. Darby thought. He'd certainly torn

the opposition to bits and, added to that, there had been his celebrated way with juries. *Puff, puff. Puff, puff—pu-u-uh.* No, sir, it hadn't taken that jury twenty minutes to bring in a verdict of acquittal for his client. Nice fee in that case, too. Oh, a nice fee.

He was opposite the rosebush at the far corner of the side lawn now. He took a long drag on the cigar. Then something came out of the dark behind the rosebush and crashed against his skull. Mr. Darby fell without a sound. A figure moved out of the shadow, bent over Mr. Darby and examined him, then, hoisting him across a powerful shoulder, headed swiftly for the driveway.

The double-solitaire game turned out to be close and exciting. Finally, however, Gillian won. She glanced at her watch. "Why, it's after eight o'clock. Where's daddy?"

"Probably roaming around the lawn. Want to play another game?"

"I'll go call him first." She went out to the veranda. She called. No answer came. She walked down the steps still calling. No answer. She circled the house and there was still no reply. A sudden panic seized her and she shouted for Burk.

"I can't find him!" she cried, when Burk joined her.

"That's nothing," Burk laughed. "He just took a longer walk than usual."

"He never goes off the lawn at night. Jesse, go and get Mandy and her husband and we'll look for him."

Mandy, the cook, and her husband responded gallantly, but nowhere could a trace of Mr. Darby be found till Mandy's husband discovered his cigar.

"Only half smoked," Gillian said tensely, "and you know he never throws one away until it's smoked down to the last half inch. Jesse, something's happened to him. I'm going to call the sheriff."

"I'll do it," Burk said, and sprang across the lawn.

The sheriff came and saw, but did not conquèr. He scoured the grounds to no avail. Then, sweating profusely, he asked a lot of useless questions. He was a well-meaning fellow, but it was politics that had put him in office, and in a disappearance case politics are singularly ineffective.

It happened to be while the sheriff was plying his questions that young Mulvey catapulted upon the scene. He was red in the face and panting from his exertions. He went straight to Gillian.

"I came to help in any way I could," he said, and he gave her a look that cut off the protest she was about to make.

YOUNG Mulvey asked questions, too, but they were sensible and to the point. Where had she been? Oh, in the library? Where had Burk been? Oh, so he was in the library, too? They'd been together all evening, eh, playing cards? Well, let's take another look.

Mulvey seized the sheriff's flashlight. Gillian showed him where the cigar had been found. Young Mulvey got down on hands and knees and not one inch of that ground was left unscrutinized. At last he got to his feet, a peculiar look on his face.

"I think I've got it."

"Got what?" the sheriff demanded truculently.

"The way what happened to him did happen. Look here. See that? know what it is? Yeah, you're right, it's a dash of blood. Now look

here." He led them behind the rose-bush. He flashed his light, brought it to a focus on a certain spot. "Two footprints," said young Mulvey. "Pretty deep. Somebody stood there for quite some time. Somebody who was waiting for Mr. Darby to come along. When he did come, that person hit him with something, which explains the blood."

"But where is he?" Gillian cried.

"None of us can answer that yet," young Mulvey told her gently. "Obviously, whoever assaulted him also carried him away."

Gillian looked at him suddenly in a new light. It was as if she abruptly trusted him more than either of the other two, and certainly he had already showed more initiative. She said: "What—what would you suggest doing?"

"I think," young Mulvey said, as politely as possible, but firmly, too, "that you should phone to Richmond for detectives."

"What's that for?" the sheriff demanded.

"With all due respect to you," young Mulvey told him softly, "I think we would do well to get hold of men who are—well, a little more familiar with this kind of thing." He stood up straight and he looked the sheriff squarely in the eye.

"I thought I was in charge here," the officer grumbled.

"A natural mistake you made," young Mulvey answered pleasantly, then turned to the girl. "How about it? Shall I telephone to Richmond for detectives?"

"I—I wish you would," Gillian said.

"I'll do it," Burk put in.

"Oh, no," said young Mulvey. "I don't mind." And he dashed across the lawn and into the house. He made the telephone call and secured satisfaction, then he sat down in a hall chair to rest a brief moment. Having run practically every step of the way from town, he was pretty thoroughly exhausted. But his senses were abnormally keen tonight. A written confession would have made him no surer than he now was that at last Burk and Kiracofe had struck. But what was the game? Why slug Darby and drag him off somewhere? Was there a grudge buried somewhere back in the past? Hardly that, or Darby would not have professed such confidence in both men. Then, what?

Young Mulvey went back to the lawn. The sheriff, looking like a fat old setting hen and clucking in a manner very similar to one, was poking around with his flashlight. Burk was standing a little to one side. Gillian had taken up a position behind the sheriff. Mulvey went to her side. In her eyes tears trembled, but she held them back gallantly. Young Mulvey had never in all his life pitied a person more or at the same time felt such admiration. He wanted to put out his hand and touch her comfortingly, but he didn't.

ALL at once Mulvey became conscious of a new figure on the scene. Kiracofe. He demanded what was the matter. In terse, sharp words Burk told him. Mulvey kept his eyes screwed to Kiracofe and he knew that the surprise Kiracofe exhibited was not genuine. Kiracofe looked at Mulvey now and his eyes dilated. Hate looked out of those eyes. Mulvey coolly stared back at him. Mulvey wasn't scared this time, for in his hip pocket there reposed an efficient automatic.

"Thank you—thank you for phoning to Richmond," Gillian said.

Mulvey bowed silently. This

wasn't a time for superfluous words. He shifted about, watching that old setting hen of a sheriff. Mulvey felt a little sorry for the fellow, puttering away and getting nowhere. He walked up to him.

"Don't you think we'd better leave everything as it is until the men from Richmond get here? Then we can all work together."

"Maybe we had," the sheriff admitted. "Say, who the devil are you, anyway? Where'd you come from?"

"My name's Mulvey. I come from north of here, but don't hold that against me."

"Kind of a fresh guy, ain't you?"

"Not at all," said young Mulvey. "Have a cigarette?"

Burk came up to them now. Kiracofe had gone off toward the house. Young Mulvey went back to Gillian, who still stood where he had left her. The tears were yet in her eyes, but her face looked more composed. She was gallant, that girl, Mulvey thought. No wonder he'd fallen head over heels in love with her.

"What do you really think has happened to him?"

"I can't say. If you'll let me speak plainly, I think—— Oh, well, we've been over that before. Somebody hid behind the rosebush. Slugged him. But what I can't understand is why he was taken away from here. I want to have a frank talk with you before the night's over. In the meantime don't you think you'd better go up to the house and lie down till the Richmond people get here. I'll look after everything. How about that?"

"Oh, I couldn't rest. I couldn't! I'm going to wait up with the rest of you."

"Then come over to this bench." Gently but urgently young Mulvey applied pressure to her arm, and at last Gillian went with him. He seated her on a bench under a water oak, but remained standing himself, gazing at Burk and the sheriff who were steadily conversing by the fatal rosebush.

"Won't you sit down, too Mr. Mulvey?"

That formal "Mr. Mulvey" went through him like a knife. He winced. But when he said, "Thank you, I will," he had conquered his emotion and his face wore a mask. He sat down half the length of the bench from her, sat very erect, his eyes still on Burk and the sheriff. That Burk, he was a cool one. But just wait till the Richmond men arrived. George Mulvey would have some information to pour into their ears then.

"Do you think it could have been some one with a grudge against father because of some law case?"

"No, I don't think that. I don't think that at all."

"It's obvious from your tone that you do think something. What is it, please?"

"Let's wait a while," said young Mulvey. "There's something else I want to talk to you about. That business with Kiracofe's wife. I tell you again that I was innocent."

She met his eyes steadily. "I—I know you were now. I think I believed you all the time down in my heart. It was just that it was—oh, such a shock to—— Well, you see, don't you?"

"Yes," young Mulvey said gently, "but it would have helped if you had believed me from the first."

"You are foolish, though, to think that—that you were framed, George. That's impossible, absurd."

"We'll pass that over for the time being," said young Mulvey. He still watched the sheriff and Burk. Now Kiracofe came back and joined the two at the rosebush. Young Mul-

vey could hear the man's guttural voice mouthing questions. Some of them Burk answered impatiently, others he replied to at length. The sheriff wandered about like a man in a dream. Never in all his years in office had a thing like this confronted him. He wished now that he had sent his deputy, but that wouldn't have helped much, for the deputy would promptly have called for him in such a case as this.

MULVEY gave Gillian a cigarette, lit one himself. The thin fragment of moon became lost in the top of a poplar. Gillian shivered. Mulvey promptly took off his coat and gave it to her, but first he transferred the automatic to the hip pocket of his trousers.

"I saw that," the girl said.

"Saw what?" young Mulvey asked innocently.

"That gun. What have you got that for?"

"Oh, it always pays to be prepared."

Gillian said nothing in reply. Mulvey drew deeply on his cigarette. Burk, Kiracofe, and the sheriff went to sit on another bench beyond the rosebush, the sheriff mopping his brow with a huge handkerchief. Mulvey could see Burk gesturing. He wished that he was close enough to hear what the man was saying.

"I wish," said Gillian, "that you'd tell me what it is you've got in the back of your mind."

"First," said young Mulvey, "I want to ask you some questions. Tell me all you know of what happened between supper and the time you found your father had disappeared." Gillian told him, omitting no detail. Then young Mulvey said: "Does it strike you as being peculiar that to-night, of all nights, Burk didn't go to his room and read those everlasting crime stories, but suggested a game of solitaire?"

"What do you mean? Oh, George, you aren't normal where Jesse is concerned. Are you insinuating that——"

"I'm saying isn't it queer that he happened to pick to-night to play cards instead of read?"

"It may be a coincidence, but it's a lucky one for him."

"I wonder," said young Mulvey.

"Well, he can prove by me—— Oh, it's too silly for words to think that he had to prove anything. But he can prove by me that he was with me at the time daddy disappeared."

"That's exactly what he can," Mulvey said cheerfully. "Very clever. Burk has learned from his reading how to establish an alibi."

"George! I won't have you making these insinuations about Jesse!"

Young Mulvey looked at her sternly. "This is a time, Gillian, when you've got to trust me. I think I can get to the bottom of this case. I'm waiting for the Richmond people. Frankly, I think Burk and Kiracofe did it."

"But I told you——"

"Yes, you told me that Burk was with you. But where was Kiracofe? Of course, he'll have his wife to say that he was with her and he'll have an alibi, too. I think that Burk & Co. specialize in perfect alibis."

"George," she said tensely, "it's idiotic for me even to listen to you on that subject. But here. Why in the world would Jesse and Mr. Kiracofe have reason to do harm to daddy?"

"There is such a thing," Mulvey said gently, "as kidnaping."

She gasped and her face went chalk white. "George! You—you really mean—— Oh, do you think that's what happened?"

"I'm not sure," Mulvey said frankly. "But listen." And swiftly yet with careful attention to detail he told her of the night trips Burk and Kiracofe had made. "If that isn't suspicious, what is? And then there was the matter of the Kiracofe woman and me. Say what you please, but I know I was framed and by nobody other than those three. There you are."

GILLIAN regarded him steadily. "You sound so plausible. But I know it isn't true. Things like that don't happen. Jesse loved and respected my father. Kiracofe, I know, is surly and vulgar, but he isn't a man to do——"

"He's a man to be led and persuaded by a fellow like Burk," young Mulvey interrupted. "Kiracofe is the ideal private in the ranks, a fellow to do faithfully just what he's told, to supply the brawn while the other fellow furnishes the brains."

"You really are sincere, aren't you?" the girl said.

"Never more so in my life. Listen." He edged closer, laid his hand upon her arm. "You must do this: Don't give me away. I don't ask you to believe me, but I do ask you not to do anything that will expose my suspicions. If I'm wrong, time will show it; if I'm right—time will show that, too."

"I'll not expose you," Gillian said. "I am certain you are wrong, but it's only fair to give you your chance."

"That's it," said young Mulvey, and removed his hand from her arm. His eyes went roving. Down yonder the sheriff had risen and was moving heavily toward them. Burk and Kiracofe remained on the bench. The sheriff lumbered up, sat down on the opposite side of Gillian from young Mulvey.

"I don't know what to do, Miss Darby. Swear I don't. Somebody hit him from behind that bush. Mulvey showed that. But I don't know where to go from there. I can't find no other signs to save my life. You sure you didn't know of any trouble he might 'a' had? I mean, maybe some trouble about a case in court. Or anything far as that goes."

"I know of absolutely nothing," Gillian said, and once more young Mulvey marveled at her composure. That wonderful voice of hers came clear as a bell. He regarded her with redoubled admiration. How many girls could bear up under a thing like this? Ninety-nine out of a hundred would crack, which, of course, under the circumstances, would be no discredit to them. But that gave Gillian all the more credit for controlling herself so excellently.

The sheriff went on asking more questions, mechanical queries. Young Mulvey watched Burk and Kiracofe sitting on their bench. He would have given a lot to know what they were saying.

As a matter of fact, Kiracofe had just said: "We got to get rid of that Mulvey again. Hell, he seems to stand all right with that girl again."

"How would you suggest getting rid of him?" Burk inquired.

"Why, that's easy. I'll just make a kick to Miss Gillian, tell her I won't stand for him bein' on the place again after the trouble I had with him and my wife."

"Kiracofe," Burk said pityingly, "don't do or say a thing unless you ask me about it first. So you'd go to her and make a kick! Doesn't it strike you that you'd be playing right into that fellow's hands? That

would really throw suspicion on us if you did that at a time like this. No, don't do a thing. Just sit tight and keep a still tongue in your head. I've planned this thing from beginning to end. We can't lose if we handle our cards right."

"I guess that's so," Kiracofe said. "Only"—he shivered—"he gives me the creeps, that Mulvey. Burk, he's a sharp devil, he's smart as a steel trap."

"He's no smarter than I am," Burk said scornfully. "In fact, he's not half as smart. Let him play along."

"You're the boss," said Kiracofe. "What you say goes, but be awful careful, Burk. I think a hell of a lot of this old neck of mine. I wouldn't want a rope around it."

"You'll have one around it," Burk snapped, "if you don't watch your step! I told you before to leave everything to me. Can't you understand that?" He rose abruptly to his feet. "Listen. I'm going over where they are. Come along. Tell Miss Gillian that if she wants you to do anything you're ready, go anywhere for her, or anything else she wants done. And act sad and solemn, man!"

KIRACOFE played his part very well. He inquired sympathetically and humbly if there were anything at all that he might do for Gillian. She thanked him and said there was nothing. Whereupon Kiracofe said he was going down to tell his wife what had happened. If Miss Gillian wanted him for anything, just send for him, that was all. Then he moved slowly, heavily, away.

Looking after him, Burk said: "Kiracofe's pretty badly broken up. He isn't a fellow to show his feelings much, but he thought a lot of Mr. Darby. He gets queer ideas, though. Just now he wanted to get up a bunch of men and scour this whole section. I had to explain to him that that might spoil everything for the detectives when they got here."

"Absolutely right," young Mulvey said. "You want men on this job who've had experience with such things. By the way, it shouldn't be so long before they get here—the detectives, I mean."

Burk nodded. Gillian and the sheriff were talking in low tones. Young Mulvey lit a cigarette and watched Burk out of the corner of his eye. Yes, that Burk was a cool one. He, too, lit a cigarette and Mulvey noted that his hands trembled not the least bit. You had to be careful with a man of Burk's caliber. You made one false step with a chap like that and did not live to regret it.

"What's your opinion of this thing?" Mulvey asked. Burk looked at him sharply, and young Mulvey hastily added: "Look here. I know we had some unpleasantness when Mr. Darby fired me, but that's over with now, specially at a time like this when everybody ought to forget what's gone and pull together."

"I'm glad to see you look at it that way," Burk said. "You asked for my opinion. Well, to tell the truth, Mulvey, I don't know what to say. I never knew of Mr. Darby having any enemies. Oh, I know he had some—every man has—but I mean enemies that would want to kill him."

"You think he's been killed, then?"

"What else?"

"Why'd they take his body away, then? Whyn't they leave it just where he was slugged?"

"They wanted to hide it, I guess," Burk said. "That's the only reason

I can think of. Now, suppose you give me your opinion."

"I'm just as much in the dark as you are," Mulvey said. "I've just been wondering if maybe somebody didn't have a grudge against him on account of some case in court. There've been things like that happened, you know."

"Sure," said Burk. "And it could have happened in Mr. Darby's case." He sat down on the end of the bench, and there was suddenly a great doubt in his mind. Maybe after all he'd been wrong about this fellow Mulvey. Maybe the fellow wasn't suspicious of him at all. Guardedly he watched young Mulvey, and young Mulvey, though he appeared to be oblivious of this scrutiny, nevertheless was aware of every bit of it. He just sat there as if there were nothing more important in the world than his cigarette, but he knew what time it was always.

"Hello," said Burk, "who's that?"

"Probably the detectives," Mulvey answered, watching the car careen up the driveway. In this assumption he was correct. Two men, introducing themselves as Messrs. Stout and Carter, got out of the machine. Carter seemed to be in charge. Young Mulvey acquainted him with the situation. Carter then promptly called all persons present to him, including the servants.

"He might want Kiracofe and his wife," Mulvey said to Burk.

"I want everybody," Carter said. "Absolutely everybody."

Whereupon Gillian sent Mandy's husband after Mr. and Mrs. Kiracofe. When they had arrived, Carter began his examination. He seemed satisfied with everybody's explanation. Mandy and her man had been in the kitchen. Gillian and Burk, of course, had been playing cards. Mrs. Kiracofe said that she and her husband had been on the point of going to bed when they heard the commotion up at the big house. Kiracofe corroborated this.

Carter and Stout then began their examination of the grounds. Mulvey showed them the rosebush, the footprints behind it, the blood smear on the grass. He wanted to get them off to himself for a word in private, but Burk hung so close this was impossible. The two officers were thorough in their examination. It was plain that they believed in going over every inch of the ground. In their wake the county sheriff padded along like a befuddled but faithful old hound. Mulvey withdrew to one side. Gillian came to stand beside him. Her breathing was fast and irregular. Every bit of color seemed to have left her cheeks. Impulsively Mulvey took her hand in his.

"I'm so afraid," she murmured.

Mulvey squeezed her hand. Ahead of them the two detectives had paused to converse in low tones with the sheriff. Burk walked up and took a place on the other side of Gillian. Burk lit a cigarette and the discarded match fell hissing in the grass.

Kiracofe and his wife stood off to themselves. Mulvey could hear the woman's thin voice and the man's guttural one, but he couldn't, to save his life, catch the words. Presently Burk walked over to join them. He, however, Mulvey noticed, took no part in their conversation. Mr. and Mrs. Kiracofe continued talking; Burk simply stood beside them in silence.

The Richmond officers, with the sheriff still faithfully in their wake, were now down at the far edge of the side lawn. Their flashlights, like probing eyes, went everywhere. Mulvey said to Gillian that it

seemed that those men knew their jobs. And then, as if in confirmation of this statement, Carter, rising from a stooped position, called to them.

"Come down here, you people. I've got something to show you."

## CHAPTER VI.

### YOUNG MULVEY'S PLAN.

MULVEY led Gillian forward, his hand upon her arm. Burk appeared on the other side. Behind them crowded Mr. and Mrs. Kiracofe. Everybody walked as if they trod on eggs. Carter was standing between his lieutenant, Stout, and the county sheriff. He held up his hand dramatically. Mulvey and Gillian stopped just in front of him.

"Here's something important," Carter said, and exhibited a small, flat, rectangular object. Mulvey saw instantly that it was a memorandum book. While Stout held a flashlight, Carter turned to the back cover of the notebook. On the inside back cover of the book was stamped the name of the maker:

Amos Work & Sons
Washington, D. C.

Carter slowly flipped the pages; only two had anything written on them, and these, even, were unintelligible to all present, since they appeared to be merely records of petty financial matters. Carter slapped shut the notebook, dropped it into his pocket.

"We know where they came from," he announced positively. "Washington. Notebook proves that. It's probably that gang which has been operating through Virginia, and Maryland, and the District."

"Sure," said Stout. "Tough gang, that bunch."

"Let me see that book," Mulvey asked. Carter handed it over. Mulvey minutely examined the two pages of writing. Whoever had made those notations wrote in a stiff backhand. Mulvey gave the book back to Carter. There was a queer smile on Mulvey's lips.

"Way I see it," Carter said, "they had a car parked out somewhere round the entrance. They came up here, waited for Mr. Darby, slugged him when he came along, then carried him out to the car."

"Sounds logical," Burk said. "Probably been around here at least a week, getting the lay of the land and spying on Mr. Darby's movements."

"Sure," Carter agreed. "Those gangs lay their plans well in advance. They know what they're doing when they do move." He turned abruptly to Stout. "You and the sheriff better high-ball it to town, Stout. Get busy on a phone. Have all roads watched, specially those to Washington. Notify the Washington police. And bring me back a pack of smokes. Get busy, now."

Stout and the sheriff departed in haste. While the others watched, Carter poked around a little longer, then halted. "There isn't much to do now," he declared. "Suppose we go up to the house. I'd like a drink of water."

They walked slowly to the house, Gillian and the detective in the lead, Mulvey and Burk following closely. Mr. and Mrs. Kiracofe, after obtaining the detective's permission, started home. When Carter set his foot on the top step of the veranda he jerked himself to a sudden halt. The next moment he sprang forward and tore something white from its resting place between the cross piece

and the wire of the screen door. Slowly Carter unfolded the sheet of paper, read it, then handed it to Gillian. Looking over the girl's shoulder, young Mulvey read the note. It was addressed to Gillian. and it read:

Your father is safe for the time being. Leave fifty thousand dollars in bills not any larger than twenties at the foot of the pine tree at the edge of Muller's cow pasture by twelve o'clock to-morrow night. If you don't do this, it will be just too bad for your father.

GILLIAN did not say a word. But she slumped and young Mulvey put his arm around her.

"I thought it was kidnaping all along," Burk said, and Carter nodded.

Young Mulvey, closely examining the ransom note, saw that it was written in the same stiff backhand used in the memorandum book. Yes, the same man had written both.

Beside him the girl was trembling violently. A choking sob escaped her, betraying that at last her calm was breaking. Mulvey gently guided her into the house, to the library where he induced her to lie down. Then he called Mandy and asked for whisky. The Negress brought a decanter and a glass. Young Mulvey got Gillian to take a couple of swallows.

"This is the time to buck up," he told her gently. "Mandy, you stay here till I come back."

After procuring a glass of water for Carter, young Mulvey went back to the veranda. Burk and Carter stood together by the steps. Both turned at Mulvey's approach and Carter drank thirstily from the glass. Setting it aside, he spoke to Mulvey.

"I was just telling Mr. Burk what a nervy bunch that was to hang the ransom note right on the front door. Those boys are in a hurry. Usually a gang waits several days, but these guys want to get it over with. What is Miss Darby going to do?"

"I didn't ask her," Mulvey replied. "It seemed to me she was a little too upset for that right this minute."

"Well," said Carter, "my idea would be this: Get a posse together and comb this whole section. Burk tells me the Muller farm adjoins this one. Well, then, the kidnapers can't be far."

"I don't know about that," Burk said. "They might leave one man in the neighborhood to collect the ransom while the others carried Mr. Darby on to Washington or wherever their headquarters are."

"Of course, that's true," the detective admitted. "But just the same, I'd get that posse together and scour this whole section."

"I don't think Miss Darby would agree to that," Burk said. "Put yourself in her place. She's more interested in getting her father back than she is in catching the kidnapers. I imagine she is going to call off the police and do what that note says."

"I didn't have any idea that Darby was rich enough to pay a fifty-thousand-dollar ransom," Carter said.

"Oh, yes," said Burk. "Fifty thousand won't break him."

"And you think Miss Darby will insist on paying the ransom?"

"That's my opinion," Burk replied. "What do you think, Mulvey?"

"I agree with you," young Mulvey said, but he was thinking deeply, going over the whole thing, taking mental notes at breathless speed.

"Do you think," Carter asked, "that we could talk to her now?"

"I believe so," said young Mulvey, and led them into the library. Gil-

lian sat up at their arrival. The whisky had restored a little color to her face. She managed a wan smile. "Mr. Carter wants to talk to you," Mulvey said, "if you feel like it."

"It's this way, Miss Darby," said Carter. "I think we can round up this bunch. Get a force of men and comb——"

"No," Gillian broke in. "No! I won't take that chance. I am going to get the money to-morrow and do just what the note——"

"But, Miss Darby——"

"No!" Gillian repeated. "I won't take a chance with my father's life. I know you were going to say that I'd be serving law and order if I held off about the ransom. But there are some things——"

"I think we all understand," young Mulvey interrupted, anxious to spare her as much as possible. "I suggest, gentlemen, that we leave Miss Darby for a while." But young Mulvey didn't leave. He followed Burk and Carter to the door, then turned back, signaling to Mandy to leave the room. He sat down beside Gillian.

"Was there something you wanted to say, George?"

"Yes. You saw both that memorandum book and the ransom note. You noticed of course that they were in the same handwriting. Well, now tell me this; do you know Burk's handwriting when you see it?"

"George, you're still harping on that!"

"You promised," said young Mulvey, "to give me my chance."

"Yes, I promised that. Well, then, neither one of those was in Jesse's hand. He writes a long, sloping hand. It slopes to the right. It isn't a backhand at all. Oh, George, I wish——"

"That's what I expected to hear," young Mulvey interrupted. "Of course, he wouldn't write in his natural hand. The writing in the memorandum book struck me as being unnatural, stiff. I noticed the same thing in the note. Somebody disguised his handwriting."

"But that memorandum book—it was from Washington. It proves that——"

"It merely proves," said young Mulvey, "that Burk is a long-headed gent. He dropped that book there or had Kiracofe do it. Good gosh, I never took any stock in things that were accidentally dropped at the scene of a crime. Burk, if you remember, went to Washington last month on business for your father. That's when he bought that book. So to-night he drops it out there to make everybody think the job was done by a gang from Washington."

"According to you," Gillian said, with a dash of asperity, "all the rest of us are dumb-bells and you're smart."

"Not at all," said young Mulvey. "I would swallow the things just as fast as the rest of you except that I was already suspicious of Burk. That explains it, and I know I'm right. I want you to trust me absolutely in this thing."

"I can't promise—absolutely. But I did promise I would give you your chance. I still hold to that."

YOUNG Mulvey pressed her hand, then rose. Going out to the veranda, he discovered Carter alone. Burk, Carter said, in answer to Mulvey's inquiry, had gone to put Gillian's car in the garage. Mulvey asked still another question, and in reply Carter said that the police would be forced to hold off till the ransom had been paid.

"That's the trouble with this kind of thing," he said. "Our hands are more or less tied. We can't do anything till the ransom's paid. After that we go to work and try to find the criminals."

"I want to talk to you," Mulvey said. "That Washington business is out."

"What do you mean—out?" The detective was bristling.

"I mean that somebody else did the thing."

"What are you talking about?" Scorn throbbed in Carter's voice. "Thing's as plain as the nose on your face. The Washington gang did it. Probably some of the guys that were left when the gang was busted up after the killing last year of that mail-truck driver in Richmond. The old Tri-State gang."

"Rats," said young Mulvey, and there was just as much scorn in his voice as there had been in Carter's. "Let me——"

"The sheriff told me about you," Carter growled. "Listen, young fellow, I been in this game a long time. Reckon it went to your head when you found that blood and them footprints. Listen. We're glad for any tips; but you leave the rest to fellows that know what they're doing. You're liable to gum up the whole works. Go ahead and tell me now what you had in mind, but don't go getting the idea that you know more'n we do."

"Thank you for a pleasant evening," said young Mulvey, and turned on his heel.

"Wait a minute. You might as well tell me."

"As far as I'm concerned," young Mulvey said sweetly, "you can go take a nose dive in the creek."

"Wait a minute."

"Go to hell!" said young Mulvey, and meant it. He walked inside. Encountering Mandy in the back hall, he learned that Gillian had finally consented to go to bed. Young Mulvey climbed the stairs to the room that had once been his and would be again, for to-night at least. He was still fuming with anger at Carter. At first he'd thought that guy knew his business. And then he'd shot off his head about the length of time he'd been in the detecting game. "Jackass," said young Mulvey feelingly.

As young Mulvey slipped out of his clothes he noticed a light smear in the east. Daylight was knocking at the door. Well, he'd lie down and catch maybe an hour's nap. Then he'd be up and about. He crushed out his cigarette and slid into bed.

When young Mulvey awakened, a big red sun was looking through the window, staring him genially in the face. Young Mulvey hopped out of bed, got into his clothes, washed up a bit, and went swiftly downstairs. Mandy served him breakfast. From her he learned that Miss Gillian was awake, but not up yet; that Burk was still sleeping, or pretending to, since he had not come down.

"If anybody wants me," said young Mulvey, "tell 'em I'll be back before dark, anyway. Oh, by the way, what became of those fellows from Richmond, the detectives?"

"They went to town with the sheriff," Mandy said. "One of 'em—one that went to town—him and the sheriff come back and took the other one on to town. They said they was goin' to lay off till after the ransom money done been paid."

"Mandy," said young Mulvey, "what size shoe do you wear?"

"I wears a No. 6."

"Oh, you do? Well, I wear an eight. I expect Mr. Kiracofe wears

the biggest shoe on this place, don't you think?"

"Reckon he does. He wears a ten. A big ten, too."

MULVEY rose leisurely from the breakfast table and walked out to the lawn. At the rosebush he studied the tracks in the soft mulched dirt. He set his own foot alongside them.

"At least two sizes larger than mine," he murmured. "Yes, just about a ten." Young Mulvey smiled, then he walked down the driveway, turned to his left when he reached the road to the barn, and headed for the creek.

Over yonder, somewhere in the bluff, lay the answer; of that he was sure. He slipped across the creek and followed the path for a short distance, then he turned to the right along the foot of the bluff. The underbrush was thick here and moss covered the ground. He gazed up the sharp angle of the bluff face, his eyes searching every foot of the ground. But young Mulvey didn't see anything out of the way. He went to the far end of the bluff and came back halfway up the face of the slope, and still he didn't find anything.

Young Mulvey spent all that morning and a part of the afternoon in laborious exploration of the bluff. Young Mulvey discovered nothing. About the middle of the afternoon he walked up the driveway to the big house, his face red and sweaty, his limbs aching from his toil. He was somewhat harassed, too, young Mulvey was. He had gambled on finding something in the bluff and he'd lost that gamble as badly as he'd ever lost one.

Gillian and Jesse Burk were at a late lunch. Young Mulvey joined them. Gillian had got back her composure. Burk looked cool. Young Mulvey slid into his place with assumed nonchalance.

"Where have you been?" Burk wanted to know.

"Knocking around," said young Mulvey. "I didn't think there was anything I could do around here, so I walked in to town and fooled about a bit."

. "You walked?" said Gillian. "You walked when there were two cars right here in the garage?"

"Well," young Mulvey said, "I thought somebody else might want to use those two." But her concern thrilled him. He looked across the table at Burk, and said casually: "No more notes to-day, were there?"

"No," Burk replied. "Miss Gillian and I have been to town to see Judge May. We've got everything ready."

"You mean you've got the money?"

"Yes," said Gillian. "At least Judge May will have it ready for us this afternoon some time."

"Who's going to take it to the place?" young Mulvey asked.

"Why, any of us," said Gillian. "You and Jesse and I."

Young Mulvey finished his meal in silence: Afterward he strolled out onto the lawn. Burk came out and said he was going alone to town to get the money, since Gillian wanted to rest a while.

"Be careful," said young Mulvey, and Burk, grinning, showed him a revolver.

When Burk had gone, Mulvey went back into the house. Gillian he found in her room. Young Mulvey walked in. "I want to talk to you," he announced. "I want to ask you not to put that money out to-night."

"But why? What on earth——"

"Because," said young Mulvey, "I think, if you'll give me the chance, I can solve this thing."

"George," said Gillian, "I can't take that chance. I'm going to have the money for them. It's the only thing I can do."

Young Mulvey argued. He told her again of all his suspicions. He maintained that, given time, he could solve the thing. The bluff, he declared, was the secret. But, Gillian reminded him, he hadn't found anything there. That was true, Mulvey admitted, but he hadn't finished. He was going back again for one more try.

"I can't take that chance," Gillian repeated, and young Mulvey saw that this was final. He got up and went out, going slowly down the stairs. When he reached the veranda he sat down in a chair and drew hungrily on his cigarette.

THE sun was sinking in the west when Burk returned. He had a large parcel under his arm, a parcel which he put in the safe in Mr. Darby's office. Coming out to the veranda, he sat down across the porch from young Mulvey. Young Mulvey regarded him guardedly. Once more young Mulvey's brain was working at lightning speed.

"Listen," he said to Burk. "I've got a plan. What do you say to my hiding in the pine tree to-night? I could go there just after dark, before you and Gillian bring the money, and then I could see the kidnapers when they came. What do you think of that?"

"I think it's plain craziness!" Burk snapped. "You want to mess up the whole thing, don't you? Maybe the kidnapers will get suspicious, call off the whole thing, and do away with Mr. Darby."

"But they won't know I'm there," Mulvey said significantly.

"I guess that's so," Burk admitted. "Still——"

"I'm going to do it," Mulvey interrupted decisevely. "Don't tell Gillian."

"I think she ought to know."

"Don't tell her!" young Mulvey ordered sharply. But Burk was just as determined. He did tell Gillian, young Mulvey going with him to the girl. Gillian opposed the plan heartily, and it took young Mulvey the better part of an hour to win her consent. There wouldn't be any risk, he said over and over, and he would be able to see the kidnapers, perhaps see them well enough to identify them when and if they were ever captured. He argued at such length that Gillian finally gave reluctant consent.

Just after dark young Mulvey crept out of the woods on the Muller place. Carefully he crossed to the tree and climbed it. Twenty feet above the lowest limb he established himself in a crotch, at a spot where the foliage screened him completely. There was a crooked smile on young Mulvey's face. This stunt to-night would prove whether or not he was right. If Burk was the kidnaper, nobody would come for that money. That, of course, was obvious.

About nine o'clock he saw Gillian and the manager moving across the field. Reaching the tree, they deposited at the foot the package containing the money, then departed in haste. Young Mulvey waited patiently in his tree. The moon came up shyly, a breeze whisked back and forth across the field. Deep in the woods a big owl hooted. From time

to time young Mulvey adjusted himself in his uncomfortably cramped position.

The minutes lagged on. Mulvey took out his watch and, by craning his neck so as to take advantage of the solitary ray of moonlight peeping through the foliage, was able to see the face. Ten o'clock now. He was absolutely certain that as long as he remained at his perch, no kidnaper would appear. But he couldn't afford to leave, for there was the chance that Burke was watching from somewhere near by. In that case he would collect the money as soon as young Mulvey quitted his post.

So Mulvey sat there and enjoyed the exquisite tortures of the cramped. He wanted a cigarette and couldn't light one. He longed for a glass of water. He wished that his right leg wouldn't keep going to sleep. Now and again doubt would assail him. Plans had been laid for to-morrow, but suppose they didn't work. Suppose he had no better luck to-morrow than he had enjoyed to-day.

The moon began to fall in the sky. The lonesome owl left off his hooting. Around him the darkness seemed to draw closer, a great black cape enveloping him in its many folds. Young Mulvey almost dropped off to sleep and came perilously near falling out of the crotch.

AT last the darkness began to thin. Young Mulvey heard the early-rising birds calling in the woods, saw a late-retiring rabbit scuttle from the field to the brush. In the east a faint streak of light appeared. Young Mulvey took himself down out of the pine tree, stood a moment stretching cramped and aching muscles, then, picking up the package of money, went walking slowly and thoughtfully back to Red Mill.

Burk he encountered on the driveway. Noticing the package of money, Burk looked scornfully at him. "So your little stunt didn't work. I could have told you that all along. They watched that place all day, probably with glasses from a distance."

"They couldn't see after dark even with glasses," young Mulvey dryly pointed out. "I can't understand it at all. They wouldn't dare come very close to the tree until the time set for the money to be there. I can't understand it at all," he repeated, with well-feigned perplexity.

"Next time you'd better let things alone," Burk advised him. "Not that I don't realize you meant well, but this thing is serious."

Young Mulvey walked on to the house. He found Gillian waiting for him in the library, and he silently handed the package of money to her. For a long time she regarded him without a word. Then, at last: "So you ruined the whole thing."

Her face was wan.

"On the contrary," said young Mulvey. "I established that your Mr. Burk is the guilty man. I did all that on purpose, planned the whole business."

"But if there were other kidnapers they knew you were there. I mean they watched and saw you go there."

"Burk just pointed that out to me. But you're both wrong. That tree is at least seventy yards out in the field. The moon wasn't up when I slipped out of the woods and went to the tree. Nobody could have seen me. Besides, as I told Burk, they wouldn't venture into that neighbor-

hood until late. No, Gillian, you're wrong. Burk is the man. I knew that all along. I wanted last night to show him up with my stunt, but I wanted just as much to prevent that ransom from being collected, because I am going to find your father to-day."

"You were going to find him yesterday." She did not say this with rancor, but in a wistful, hopeless little voice. Young Mulvey touched her hand to his lips.

'To-day is the day," he promised. "I know what I am going to do. And there's one thing I want you to do. If you get the chance, pretend to Burk that you and I had a fuss about my stunt last night. I'm going to town, ostensibly. The idea is that you made it plain I was a hindrance. Do that and we'll win."

Again Mulvey met Burk on the driveway. "Where are you going?"

"To town!" young Mulvey snapped.

"Without waiting for breakfast?"

"Hell, yes! I'm through out here. You know, yourself, Burk, that I only did what I thought was right last night. But she—she blows me up about it. So I'm through. Good-by." And young Mulvey, moving with the strides of a genuinely angry man, stalked down the driveway, took the road to town, and disappeared around a bend, while Burk stood looking after him with a triumphant smile playing over his sharp-featured face.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE SECRET OF THE BLUFF.

YOUNG Mulvey did not go to town. Young Mulvey had no business whatsoever in town. He walked a mile down the road, then turned to his right, entering the woodland. In half an hour's time he had established himself at the top of an oak tree at the highest point of the bluff. From his coat pocket he took the small pair of field glasses he had borrowed from Gillian. With these he scanned all visible sections of the Red Mill place.

"I'll be a champion tree sitter before this thing is over," he told himself. "But they've got to feed Darby. Oh, yes, they've got to feed him, and I'm betting Kiracofe is the boy who does that."

Through the glasses he sent his eyes roving over Red Mill. Out yonder in the cornfield were the two Negro hands; he could hear them singing. Their voices reached him in a long chant:

"I been roun' de bend and I goin' back again;
Honey, where you been so long?"

Young Mulvey smiled. He loved to hear those darkies sing, would gladly sit for hours listening to them. But to-day there was other and more important business on hand. Young Mulvey swung the glasses in a wide arc. He picked up Burk at the house. The manager was talking with a man whom young Mulvey recognized as Mr. Darby's banker. In the background were two more leading citizens of the community. Gillian came out and joined them. Even at that distance Mulvey could tell that the gentlemen were offering sympathy. He saw Burk gesture emphatically.

"I'll bet," young Mulvey thought, "that he's telling how I gummed up the details last night. Well, old son, you're going to have plenty on your mind before this day and night are over."

Again he swung the glasses, and

this time he found the figure he sought. Kiracofe. The fellow was plowing in what was called the forty-acre field, clearly outlined against the brown stubble. Young Mulvey studied him intently for some time, then turned the glasses once more.

Mrs. Kiracofe he found shelling beans in her yard. From that distance she looked a very busy woman. Mulvey remembered that night behind her house and poked fun at himself. He'd been the top fool of all time to fall for that note of hers. What an idiot he'd been!

He took the glasses from his eyes for a while. Everything would stay put for the time being. He had found the man he sought, had located him surely, and so now there was no immediate need to keep on spying. Relaxing upon the limb on which he sat, he hearkened to the husky, chanting voices of the Negroes.

After a time he took up the glasses again. Kiracofe still plowed in the stubble land. Mrs. Kiracofe had disappeared, but smoke pouring from the kitchen chimney attested to the fact that she was busying herself with preparation of the noon meal. Young Mulvey turned the glasses on the big house. The guests were just at that moment climbing into their automobile. Mulvey saw Gillian and Burk bidding them goodby. Gillian then disappeared into the house, with Burk going to the barn.

TIME wore on and it was noon. Young Mulvey had eyes now for no one but Kiracofe. He saw Kiracofe unhitch his team at the end of the furrow nearest the barn. The Negroes came by and Kiracofe turned the horses over to them to be watered and fed. Kiracofe himself went to his house. He disappeared inside. Young Mulvey waited tensely in the oak tree. After five minutes Kiracofe reappeared, carrying a small object that looked at that distance very much like a shoe box.

Kiracofe took to the bottom that ran through the middle of the stubble field. Following this ditch, which led ultimately to the creek, he was protected from observation from the big house. But young Mulvey, like a guard in a tower, could follow every movement the man made. Kiracofe came at last to the creek and turned down it. Young Mulvey began his descent. Reaching the ground, he ran swiftly back through the brush until he arrived finally at the path. Here he hid himself in a convenient clump of laurel.

He waited there perhaps ten minutes and was then rewarded by sight of Kiracofe moving cautiously up the path. When Kiracofe was within thirty feet of young Mulvey he halted, peered all around him, and turned sharply to his right. Mulvey slid out of his hiding place. His automatic was in his hand. For a moment he considered surprising Kiracofe and commanding him to reveal where Darby was hidden. But that move might run into a snag. Suppose Kiracofe, calling his bluff, protested innocence, refused to lead him anywhere. In those circumstances Kiracofe would be the winner, because Mulvey wouldn't dare shoot him down. No, that idea was out.

Mulvey slid sinuously through the brush. Once a stick snapped under his tread and his heart sprang into his mouth, but Kiracofe hadn't heard it. Forty feet ahead Kiracofe moved on slowly. And then it happened.

One moment Kiracofe walked in plain sight, the next he stepped behind a black gum and did not reappear. Young Mulvey looked and looked. By all rights Kiracofe should be in sight again, beyond the black gum. But he wasn't.

Young Mulvey didn't know what to do. Even if he couldn't see the fellow, the bluff at the point of Kiracofe's disappearance was entirely too steep for him to climb it without Mulvey's hearing him. And he certainly hadn't gone on beyond the black gum. Nor had he turned back toward the creek.

"Vanishing act," young Mulvey muttered, and waited, not knowing what else to do.

After twenty minutes he heard a movement and saw Kiracofe come from behind the black gum. Young Mulvey shrank behind a stump enveloped in honeysuckle vines. Kiracofe passed within ten feet of him. Mulvey watched the man until he had disappeared on his way out of the woods, then young Mulvey went forward hastily.

But that section of the bluff lying beyond the black gum looked just like any other section of it. Mulvey leaned against the tree and scratched his head. Where he stood, the ground sloped gently; just above him the bluff began to rise sharply. Young Mulvey scanned that rise with eyes that promised to miss nothing. But if they missed nothing, they found absolutely nothing, either.

Young Mulvey felt like a man entangled in some intricate mathematical problem. He knew that the answer was right here under his thumb and yet he couldn't put his thumb down on it. He sweated a little and cussed a little and called himself several choice varieties of ignoramus for not being smart enough to pounce right down on the solution like a hawk on a baby chicken.

But standing there reviling himself, no matter how accurate a reviler he was, wouldn't get him anywhere. Young Mulvey began to cruise about. If he had had a little hammer with which to tap the face of every rock he could easily have passed for a geologist out on a professional spree. But young Mulvey didn't have a hammer. He had only a .38 automatic, which for some reason he kept firmly gripped in his right hand.

YOUNG Mulvey crawled up the bluff a way, then he crawled back. He sat on his haunches and did some more high-powered scanning. Some kind of fool bird, the name of which he didn't know and didn't care to know, lit on a near-by bough and proceeded to scold him very thoroughly in bird language. Young Mulvey reached peevishly for a pebble to chuck at the offender—and then young Mulvey halted as if he'd been a cannon jammed in his back.

Young Mulvey's eyes got big. Here, as everywhere else along the bluff, moss grew thick and rank. Mulvey was now staring at a section of moss, say, four feet by three, which was not exactly the rich green of the rest. No, it was a faint yellow as if it were dying. Mulvey sprang five feet up the bluff. He took hold of that yellow moss. It moved in his hand and, lifting it aside, young Mulvey found himself gazing into a very neat little artificial cave.

The moss he held in his hand was really a curtain. It had been uprooted, then the various clumps had

been ingeniously sewed together by means of strips of green cloth. The result was nothing if not clever. The only flaw was that it had begun to turn yellow after being uprooted.

Young Mulvey took out his flashlight and sent a beam darting into the interior. He saw now that the cave was not a natural one, but had been dug. It ran back into the bluff for a distance of about seven feet. In the extreme rear lay Mr. Darby bundled up efficiently with window cord and adhesive tape. His ankles were bound with the window cord, so were his wrists. Adhesive tape had been pasted over his eyes and across his mouth, so that he could neither see nor speak.

"In the best modern manner," young Mulvey commented, staring at the tape. "Oh, our Mr. Burk didn't miss a single method of the boys he read about in his crime stories."

Young Mulvey squeezed into the low, narrow cave. Taking out his knife, he made short shrift of the window cord. "The Muller brush man, partner," he said cheerily, as he slashed away. "Now hold still and I'll remove your blindfold." He removed the tape from Darby's eyes. Darby blinked furiously. Mulvey eased off the tape on his mouth. Gently, he drew Mr. Darby to a sitting position.

"How in the name of Heaven did you find me?" Darby demanded.

"Oh, I get around and about," young Mulvey replied.

"Where am I?"

"It will probably surprise you to death," said young Mulvey, "but you're hardly more than a quarter of a mile from your own house of Red Mill."

"What! What did you say?"

"I was just telling you that you weren't out of calling distance of your own fireside. Mr. Darby, you're in the bluff across the creek from the barn."

"The hell you say. How—what happened? I only remember that I——"

"You were kidnaped, Mr. Darby, and your two most trusted employees did it. I refer to Mr. Burk and Mr. Kiracofe, the two gentlemen whose word you took in preference to mine, if you recall that." In spite of his concern for Gillian's father, young Mulvey was enjoying this moment to the hilt; he sort of liked rubbing it into Mr. Darby.

"I don't believe it!" Darby snapped, as he massaged his cramped limbs.

"You're still stubborn," Mulvey commented. "O. K. If you and I wait here till Kiracofe brings you your supper, I'll soon prove it is so. Tell me what happened."

"I was down on the lawn by the rosebush," Darby said. "All of a sudden I heard a movement. Something landed on my head and everything went black. I have a dim recollection of jolting along as if I was being carried on somebody's back—guess I was beginning to come to, then. But I was here right where you found me when I really came to, tied up just as you found me.

"After a long time, I guess it must have been the next morning, I heard somebody come in. He wouldn't say a word so I could hear his voice. Didn't take the tape off my eyes. Just took it off my mouth. Didn't untie my hands, either. Fed me himself, then taped my mouth again. Didn't come back till what I guess was last night. Came twice to-day. What time is it now?"

"Three fifteen," Mulvey gasped.

"Good gosh, I spent nearly three hours cruising about before I found that moss curtain."

"You can't convince me that Burk's at the bottom of this," Darby declared.

"No, I guess not. You've got stubbornness like Job had patience, but it's plain as the nose on your face to me. I used to see Burk go out after midnight. I tried to spy on him, but I always lost him in the woods on this side of the creek. I know now what he and Kiracofe did on those nights. They dug this cave."

"How," Darby broke in, "did they dispose of the dirt?"

"Evidently carried it down to the creek and dumped it in. Well, to go on with the story, they got suspicious of me and conceived the clever idea of framing me with Mrs. Kiracofe. That disposed of me. They had everything in readiness then. All they had to do was wait for the right time. You know what happened then.

"Kiracofe undoubtedly lugged you over here. This cave was the swellest stunt in the whole business. They naturally couldn't take you very far from Red Mill. Neither could they hide you in any outbuildings like a tobacco barn or an empty tenant house, because in all likelihood such places would be thoroughly searched. But they had to hide you somewhere. Hence the cave."

"But Burk and Kiracofe, how were they going to get away with it—I mean afterward?"

SIMPLE as falling off a log. They collected the ransom, then they carried you off through the woods, and laid you down, say, four or five miles from here. Untied your hands and left you to get loose yourself from the ankle cord and the tape. They beat it before you had a chance to see them. Can't you understand? They really weren't taking any risk. They hadn't let you see them, they hadn't let you hear their voices. You'd have nothing by which to identify anybody. Those two lovely gentlemen would go on working for you as before for maybe as much as a year, then they'd find reasons for leaving. Oh, they had it sweetly planned."

"I—I had the greatest faith in Jesse."

"Sure, you did. He's a competent man. But he's also an ambitious man, one of those guys that want money and position and are ready to pay for them. Mr. Burk read entirely too many crime stories. He got all hopped up over making big money and making it fast and easy. And I'll give him this, he sure worked his head. Nothing wrong with that boy's think box."

"What do you plan next?" Darby asked.

"The safest and surest way," said young Mulvey, "is for us to stay put just as we are till Kiracofe comes back with your supper. We'll nab him then. After that we'll get Burk."

"But why not go on to the house now? Gillian—I want to get to her, let her know I'm all right," Darby argued.

"Of course, you do," Mulvey agreed gently. "But she'll have to wait. I don't care to tackle both those boys at once. One at a time suits me. First Kiracofe, then Burk, finally Mrs. Kiracofe."

They sat at the mouth of the cave till the long shadows began to skulk through the woods. Then Mulvey drew the moss curtain into place and

both of them retired to the back of the cave. "Mustn't talk now," Mulvey whispered, and so they sat in darkness and silence, waiting. Darby fidgeted, but young Mulvey, despite the tenseness of his muscles and his eagerness to get the thing over with, waited patiently.

But time went by so slowly. Darby still fidgeted. Young Mulvey slid forward till he was less than a foot from the cave mouth. He had the automatic in his hand and every now and then he swung his arm about so as to keep it as loose as possible.

PERHAPS twenty minutes later young Mulvey heard a bush rustle. He slid to his knees. His right arm, clutching the gun, came back over his shoulder. Another bush rustled, then he distinctly heard a step. "If only he doesn't hear my heart thumping," thought young Mulvey, "everything will be all right." He moved his left foot a few inches forward in order to balance himself perfectly. Another step sounded, then he actually heard the labored breathing of a man toiling up the bluff.

The man stopped just beyond the curtain, inhaled relievedly. Then he drew the curtain aside and, stooping low, prepared to enter the cave. This was a sweet moment for young Mulvey. That arm went back just a trifle farther, then swished forward. The barrel of the automatic thudded against Kiracofe's skull and he fell heavily and inertly on his face.

Young Mulvey leaped over him, grabbed the man by the legs, and hauled him out of the cave. Mr. Darby sprang out just behind him. Mulvey rolled Kiracofe over on his back. The felled man was not unconscious, but he was certainly in a daze. Weakly, he sat up, his glazed eyes roving stupefiedly.

"Get yourself together," Mulvey said to him, significantly displaying the automatic. "We're going places."

"How—how did you find this place?" Kiracofe asked dumbly.

Mulvey answered with a scornful laugh. "You had a bad partner, Kiracofe. We got straight after him and he crawfished on you. Conscience got to hurting Burk because he let you lead him into this thing and he confessed the whole business."

"It's a lie!" Kiracofe yelled. "It was him led me into it."

"Thank you," Mulvey said cheerily, and then to Darby: "I guess that satisfies you, doesn't it?"

"Yes, that satisfies me," Darby said.

"I guess," young Mulvey went on, "you'd better get some of that window cord and tie Kiracofe's hands behind him. Leave a piece of it about two feet long hanging loose so I can have a check rein on him." When this had been accomplished, Mulvey said: "Get up," and Kiracofe stumbled leadenly and disconsolately to his feet.

Then, in single file, Kiracofe leading, Mulvey next, Darby last, they descended the bluff, and turned right toward the path. They walked in silence until they reached the creek, then Mulvey bethought him of something else. From his pocket he took the tape that had been used on Darby and deftly taped Kiracofe's mouth.

"Just so as to keep him from yelling out and giving the alarm to Burk," he explained.

Kiracofe's face turned a fiery red and he shook his head violently.

"He's trying to tell us," Mulvey said, "that he wouldn't warn Burk after the way Burk squealed on him. Sorry, Kiracofe, old boy, to have fooled you, but Burk didn't welsh. I just wanted Mr. Darby to know that he was the head man in this affair. Anyway, if he had confessed, we'd have him in custody and there wouldn't be any point in your warning him. See? You're slow with your brain to-night."

They crossed the creek, made their way silently toward the big house. There were lights in the kitchen, hall, and dining room. Burk and Gillian no doubt were at supper. Mulvey led the way cautiously to the lawn and then across it. Leaving Darby and the prisoner by one of the water oaks, he stole up to the dining-room window. Yes, Gillian and Burk were at supper. Burk ate solidly, but Gillian merely stared at her plate, her eyes red, her face haggard. Mulvey went back to the others, his face hard with determination.

"You two ease up to the veranda and wait there," he commanded. "I'm going in and tell Gillian and cover Burk."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### AMATEUR HERO.

YOUNG Mulvey, walking with the feet of a cat, crossed the veranda and entered the hall. It took him but a moment to glide into the dining room. Gillian looked up with a little cry. Burk swung around in his chair.

Mulvey said: "Gillian, your father is safe—and, Burk, you're a gone goose.

He pointed the gun straight at Burk's breast and there was a look on his face that seemed saying he would actually enjoy pulling the trigger. Over his shoulder he called to the veranda, and a moment later, propelling Kiracofe before him, Mr. Darby entered the room and was enveloped in Gillian's arms.

After that Mr. Darby said things to his late manager. In spite of the presence of his daughter, he used some double-edged profanity in stating his opinion of Burk. Young Mulvey enjoyed the thing to the hilt.

"What are you going to do?" Burk asked, and Mulvey had to marvel at the man for keeping his voice fairly steady at such a time.

"Do!" Darby shouted. "Do! What the hell do you think? I'm going to get the sheriff out here as fast as he can come and I'm going to turn you and your pals over to him. What did you think I'd do—give you a vote of thanks?"

"I didn't know," Burk said. "Seems to me we might"—he paused, his hands toying idly with the carving fork in front of him—"seems to me we might talk this thing over. You know——" Then he acted, springing to his feet and grasping Mr. Darby by the collar. Mulvey couldn't shoot for fear of hitting Darby. Burk swung his former employer directly between himself and Mulvey. In his hand now gleamed not the fork, but the carving knife.

"Drop that gun, Mulvey, or I'll drive this knife through his heart. I mean it."

Mulvey knew he meant it, all right, but he hesitated. There was a faint chance that he could shoot over Mr. Darby's shoulder and get Burk. But that chance was too great. And across the room Gillian said: "He does meant it. Do what he says, George." Mulvey dropped the gun.

"Kick it over here," Burk commanded. Reluctantly Mulvey put his foot to the gun and shoved it across the floor. Burk picked it up, releasing his hold on Mr. Darby.

"Now all of you back up against the wall. Quick now!"

Young Mulvey, Gillian, and her father obeyed, and stood side by side against the wall. With the carving knife Burk slashed the window cord binding Kiracofe's wrists. Young Mulvey caught the look of admiration that Kiracofe flashed his chief. Well, you had to admire the guy, for a fact.

"What are you going to do?" Darby asked hoarsely.

"Plenty," said Burk. "Hell, you didn't think a two-bit like that Mulvey could get ahead of me, did you? Kiracofe," he said, turning to his lieutenant, "go in the kitchen and get Mandy."

A few seconds later Kiracofe reappeared with the terrified cook. "Where's your husband?" Burk demanded.

"He—he gone to town."

"When'll he be back?"

"He don't never get back till after twelve o'clock when he goes to town."

"All right, you take a stand over there by Mr. Darby. Kiracofe, go up to my room and get that coil of rope you'll find in my closet. Make it snappy." Kiracofe returned in less than five minutes with the rope. "Now go in the kitchen. You'll find a five-gallon can of kerosene in there. Bring it here." Kiracofe was back in no time with the oil, setting it upon the floor by the table, his hard face an evil mask.

"Take this gun," Burk commanded him, "and guard them till I get back. He went out of the dining room and they could hear his rapid tread down the hall, heard him enter Darby's office. When he returned to the dining room, young Mulvey saw that he carried the package of ransom money.

"What are you going to do?" Darby demanded again.

"It's you that's asking that question now, isn't it?" Burk laughed. "I might as well tell you. Things are going to turn out all right after all." He tapped the package. "This is what we were after. We've got it, though I'd hoped to get it without the trouble we'll have to go to now. Kiracofe, use about three gallons of that oil on the floor and furniture in the room. Save the rest for outside."

IT began to dawn upon young Mulvey then what was going to happen. For a moment the shock of it left him so dizzy he reeled crazily against the wall. A thing like that! Could it be possible?

"You can't do that!" he shouted. "You can't!"

"You and your detective work have made it necessary. All right now, Kiracofe, get that rope."

Darby and Gillian understood now, too. Gillian started forward, but Burk waved her back with the gun.

"You can't do it!" Darby yelled. "Listen! I'll give you everything I've got in the world. We'll let you go free, never breathe a word to the police."

"I'm too wise a bird to trust that. Tie up Mandy first, Kiracofe," he ordered.

When Kiracofe reached the old colored woman, she kicked him ferociously. Kiracofe knocked her down, gagged her with his handkerchief, and bound her wrists and

ankles. Then he moved along to Darby.

"Don't touch me!" Darby shouted.

"Go ahead and touch him, Kiracofe—he won't bite."

"At least you'll—you'll spare the girl."

"I'll spare nobody," Burk said. "We're going to leave you tied here. Then we'll set fire to the house. Before any of the neighbors can get here, it'll be so far gone that nobody will be able to get close enough to see if there's anybody inside. I'm taking no chances. Kiracofe and his wife will be gone to a neighbor's. I'll be in town on business. Perfect alibis. No way in the world to connect us with the fire. And we'll have our fifty thousand." Burk grinned sardonically.

Darby was bound and gagged by now. Kiracofe approached Gillian. Young Mulvey's blood boiled. He tensed himself.

"Careful now," said Burk, and shoved the gun in his face.

Gillian submitted dazedly. Kiracofe then picked her up and laid her on her back on the floor, as he had done with the others. He turned now to young Mulvey, his eyes glittering in anticipation. In that moment young Mulvey felt as if he could already hear the flames crackling. First a darting tongue of fire, then a broad shaft, finally a wall of flame and—oblivion.

"Put out your hands," Kiracofe said.

"Tie 'em good," Burk ordered. "Make the knot tight as hell." He stood directly behind Kiracofe, looking over the man's shoulder, his eyes glinting.

"Put out your hands," Kiracofe repeated.

Young Mulvey put them out, but not in the expected manner. They flew forward like flashing pistons, landing against Kiracofe's chest with terrific force. Mulvey put all he had into that effort, and Kiracofe, falling heavily backward, crashed into Burk. Burk, too, toppled, but he worked his trigger finger. Young Mulvey heard the report, saw the stabbing flame, and smelt the smoke. But he was unhurt, and he dived forward onto Burk.

He seized Burk's hand, lifted it, crashed it against the floor as Burk pulled the trigger a second time and a third one. Mulvey had held the hand away from him, so the bullets went wild; and as the hand met the floor, he heard the crunch of bones and saw the automatic fly out of broken fingers.

Young Mulvey then undoubtedly broke the world's record for the three-foot dash. He dived that distance to the gun, whirled, and covered Burk. Kiracofe, he discovered, was lying unconscious, with blood already smearing his shirt. Mulvey understood then why Burk's first shot had not got him. It had got Kiracofe instead.

"We'll take no chances this time," Mulvey said to Burk. "You lie right where you are. If you move, I'll shoot you as sure as there are little apples." Then, using his left hand, but keeping his eyes glued to Burk, he undid Darby's wrists. In a short while Darby freed himself, then unbound the others.

"You're a man, young Mulvey," Darby said.

Gillian didn't say a word, but she gave young Mulvey a look that he would not have traded for a million dollars in gold.

"Get to the phone," he told Mr. Darby, "and call the sheriff. Tell him to bring a doctor, too. Kiracofe's badly hit. You lie still there,

Burk, because as a matter of cold fact I'm sort of wishing you would try to get up."

The sheriff and two deputies came in haste, bringing with them a doctor, who said that Kiracofe would pull through in spite of his wound. Kiracofe was loaded onto an impromptu stretcher and carried to the car, still unconscious. Next went Burk, handcuffed. Then the sheriff and one deputy went after Kiracofe's wife.

At last young Mulvey felt free to put down his weapon. The war was over now. But first he'd better remove the empty cartridges. So he slid out the clip—and then young Mulvey fainted.

WHEN Mulvey came to he found his head pillowed on Gillian's lap, a fact that made him realize that even faintings have their advantages. He could hear Gillian's low, musical voice explaining to her father: "The strain was just too much for him. Poor boy." Young Mulvey grinned to himself. "The reaction from the strain just toppled him over," Gillian added. Young Mulvey opened his eyes wide and looked up at her.

"It wasn't that," he said. "I broke something about the trigger of that gun when I slammed Burk's hand down on the floor. Didn't know it till I opened the thing to take out the empties. There I was facing a devil like Burk with a gun that wouldn't work. No wonder I fainted."

Gillian patted his forehead with her cool, lovely hand.

"I think I'll faint again," young Mulvey whispered to her.

But Gillian urged him to his feet, led him across the room to her father, where all three seated themselves. First, then, Mr. Darby had to tell his daughter all about his imprisonment. Then young Mulvey had to explain his part, outlining all the moves of Burk and Kiracofe that he had figured out.

Mr. Darby seemed to think that young Mr. Mulvey had been pretty confounded smart; in fact, he said as much. He also maintained that all along he had been a little doubtful about that business with Mrs. Kiracofe. Yes, sir, it hadn't rung true to him in spite of the attitude he had taken. Come right down to it, he hadn't believed it at all.

"Well," young Mulvey said dryly, "you certainly put up a good imitation of a man believing it."

"Oh, come now, don't be too rough on me. I hope—I sincerely hope there are no hard feelings between any of us."

"No, no hard feelings," said young Mulvey.

"You're entitled to that fifty thousand," Mr. Darby stated emphatically. "Absolutely entitled to it. I——"

"Not a bit of it," young Mulvey said firmly. Then he laughed. "I'm not a commercial hero, Mr. Darby. I'm strictly an amateur."

"But look here. What are you talking about? Of course I am going to reward you. Do anything you say. You name it. There's bound to be something you want, something I could give you. Go ahead, what is it?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, there is. You could——" And then, for the first time in his life, young Mulvey found himself acutely at a loss. He said, "Uh," and he said, "Er," and he said, "Ah," but it just wasn't any use. The confounded words simply refused to say themselves.

"Daddy," Gillian said, "he's try-

ing to say there is one thing you've got that he wants."

"Well, why doesn't he say what it is? What's he stammering for?"

"He's trying to say it's me that he wants."

"Well, I'll—— Why, it never occurred—— I never thought of that. I'll be damned. Well, what about it? You want him, too? Speak up, don't hang your head."

"Well," said Gillian, "I expect I could use him."

"It's settled then," said Mr. Darby. He shook hands with young Mulvey. "Congratulations. Well, well, well. I must be getting old. Don't notice things like I used to. Now look here. You seemed to sort of like the work you did here. I'm getting along in years. Don't take the interest in the farm I once did. You and Gillian can have Red Mill as a wedding gift. Now here, don't go stammering and stuttering again. Thank me sometime when you haven't got a hot potato in your mouth. Anyway, I'm the one to be saying thanks."

Mr. Darby then rose to his feet. Upon the young couple he bestowed a smile in the best paternal fashion. He tried to be very casual about bidding them good night and going off to bed, but a blind man could have told you that he realized three was a crowd and intended to remedy such a dreadful state of affairs. Gillian and young Mulvey, of course, voiced polite little lies, urging him to stay. But Mr. Darby waved them aside with the same hand he used in pounding desks and tables in courtrooms.

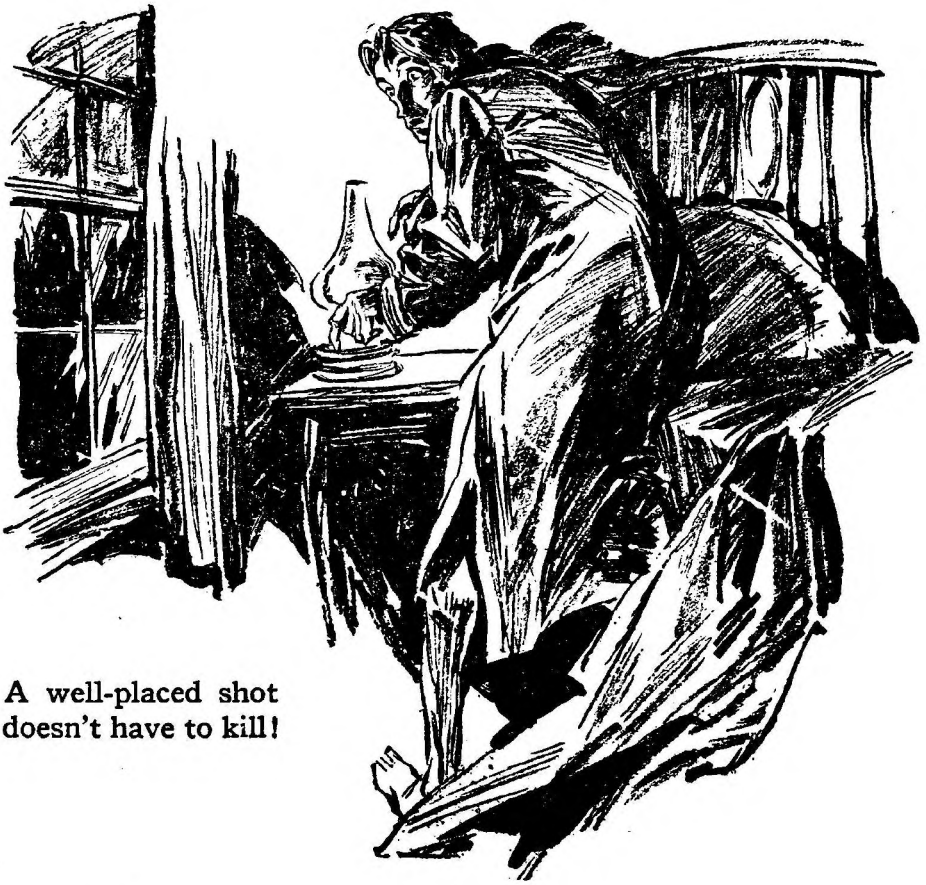
"You know," said young Mulvey, when he and Gillian had established themselves in the swing on the veranda, "I think I'll invite Mr. Vail down for a few days in the hunting season."

"Mr. Vail?"

"Yeah, that guy I used to work for."

"Not a bit of it," said the future Mrs. Mulvey. "If he accepted, that daughter of his would probably come tagging along, and I'm not going to have that hussy on the place!"

"O. K.," said young Mulvey drowsily. He leaned back. Gosh, it was good to rest once more! Hadn't known what a strain he'd been going through. Gillian—Gillian—— And then young Mulvey went sound asleep there in the swing on the veranda.



A well-placed shot doesn't have to kill!

# Horse Medicine

## By Homer King Gordon

THAT one of his daughters would fail to accept marriage as the end of her romantic ambitions had never occurred to "Doc" Porter. Mary, Edna, Sarah, and Myrtle had all married and immediately settled down to the business of being wives and mothers. Nora, his youngest, had been married to Clay Turner for nearly three years; now she was showing signs of being anything but serious about making marriage her career.

At the moment she was in the back parlor practicing a duet with the singer who was helping conduct a

revival meeting at the church. Her high soprano defied the barrier of distance and the wooden walls of Doc's outside office, where he had gone to try to figure things out.

Nora was young and high-strung. He knew that. But she was married to a good man. Clay was ungainly, shy, and doomed to be more or less unsuccessful through life. He worked hard, he was in love with his wife, and if she would let him he would make her a good husband.

A smoky coal-oil bracket lamp threw a yellow half light on Doc's brooding face as he bent over his desk against a background that would have been fantastic and weird even in bright sunlight. In his small office Doc had stored the things he had acquired during some twenty-five years of practice as a country horse doctor. Scraps of harness, blankets, cans of medicine, instruments, bottles, books—some of which he had not used in years—hung from the walls, filled two old cases, and were flung in confusion about the room.

The smell of the office could not have been catalogued. It was the mingled scent of carbolic acid, salve, turpentine, harness polish, liniment, sulphur and other medicines that Doc had scattered about the shelves and his medicine grips.

Low-hung clouds had brought on early darkness. In the kitchen his wife was getting supper, clinking pans across the big wood range, while Nora shrilled over the dismal drone of the parlor organ which the singer was playing.

Doc was reluctant to think for a moment that Nora was seriously in love with the singer. There had been other infatuations, although none of them had reached the proportions this one had reached, until the men who loafed in the store up at the crossroads were sniggering significantly and the women of the community were whispering behind their aprons.

Neither would Doc believe that Nora had a wild streak in her blood. It was simply that she had never accepted her husband. It was hard to blame Clay. He had done everything he had known how to do. Nor could Doc condemn Nora because Clay had not done the one thing which would have gentled her, whatever that might be.

He was blaming himself because so far he had been unable to help them find themselves. He knew what to do to help a sick heifer or a high-strung mare. But it was the first time in his life that he had been faced with the problem of helping one of his daughters become reconciled to life with a man whom he instinctively knew to be the right man for her—the man she had married.

DOC had a stubborn, heavy jaw, a high forehead, and high cheek bones. In the yellow light his stubble of sandy beard smoothed the lines about his mouth. His faded corduroys, gray flannel shirt, and open vest made him look older than he was in years. Squat and powerful, he had the strength to keep going through long miles and hours in all kinds of weather and over all kinds of roads, and to arrive at his calls full of the vitality that brought cheer and hope to the poor farmers he served. Doc did not lose a case even when the stronger odds of an incurable disease defeated him. With the dead carcass of some animal he had not been able to save he left some-

thing of his own courage which made the loss of smaller consequence. And he did not mean to be defeated now. He heard his wife come out of the kitchen and onto the back porch.

"Pa, supper's ready."

She was using her company voice, high and unnatural. Doc did not answer. Ma had been calling him to his meals for a great many years now and he had never answered her. It would have surprised her as much as she would be surprised to see him come to the house immediately. Doc had discovered early in life that it did not pay to have a woman satisfied in everything she wanted. That was one of the things wrong with Clay and Nora. Clay tried to satisfy every whim. So Nora had to invent new wants, because nature never intended a woman to be completely satisfied.

Absently Doc's big, red-knuckled hands rummaged about his desk. His credit ledger was there, a gray-backed, dusty book, filled with scrawled entries. A lot of calls he had made had never been entered in his ledger, nor had they been paid for. Many of the entries he had made he had never expected to collect. But ma liked to see the charges entered. It made her feel superior to some of her women neighbors who had better things.

Farther back behind some books which were not quite so dusty, Doc fished out a bottle of old whisky. He had always taken a drink when he felt he needed one, in spite of ma's white ribbon. Now he took a full one.

Presently he blew out the bracket lamp and went up to the back porch. Ma heard him coming and tiptoed out of the kitchen to meet him at the porch steps. She was a small woman with a withered face and fluttery hands.

"Pa, Brother Hopkins is here. Why don't you shave and put on a clean shirt? You've got plenty of time."

She sniffed suspiciously as Doc brushed past her and went over to the stand where a tin pan, soap, and towels were waiting.

"If I've got plenty of time, I want to go down to the store before I eat," Doc declared.

There was a kettle of hot water on the stand. He began pouring some of it into the tin basin.

"Don't use it all," ma whispered, "and, pa, use this towel; the other is for Brother Hopkins."

Doc deliberately poured a stiff solution of carbolic acid into the water in his pan. It was just another silent protest against the entertainment of Brother Hopkins. Ma did not remonstrate, even when he picked up the wrong towel. Nor did Nora when she came out on the porch. They were afraid he would start something, he realized grimly.

Nora had Doc's firm body and stubborn face. Although small and feminine, she radiated energy and restless motion.

"Ma," she whispered, "Elmer's getting nervous. He's afraid we'll be late. Isn't supper ready?"

"I was trying to get pa to clean up," her mother explained vaguely, "but I guess it's ready to set on the table, if Brother Hopkins wants to go——"

Nora went back into the house. In a moment she returned with another clean towel. Their guest came with her, standing back against the wall as she arranged a clean pan for him.

"Nice night," he commented to Doc.

Doc wet his thin, sandy hair and combed it before the mirror hung on the porch post. There was frost in the ground, although the air was warm with the promise of spring.

"It might rain," he grunted.

Brother Hopkins was tall and emancipated. He might have been thirty or thirty-five years old. Against his corn-colored hair, parted in the middle and plastered down with perfumed hair oil, his face was flabby and pallid. His long-fingered hands were soft and white, with a boneless appearance.

Doc left him on the porch alone and went into the sitting room to wait, while Nora and her mother put supper on the table.

THE meal was not a social success. Doc ate slowly and in comparative silence, keeping his attention on the food he was eating. Brother Hopkins made fluttery attempts to be witty, but it was evident he was scared. Once during the meal, when they had both left the table and were out in the kitchen, Doc heard Nora and her mother whispering. He had an idea they were trying to get up enough nerve to suggest that the singer come back from church and stay overnight. Along toward the end of the meal Doc had an opportunity to settle that notion. The telephone bell rang. Ma answered and called Doc to the instrument.

The summons was from Mary Galt, who lived with her father half a mile down the road near the store, and who operated the local telephone exchange.

"Milt Hopper called in from the Ferguson's to tell you his cow was down sick, and wants to know if you can come over to-night and see what's wrong with her," Mary said. "He's on the other line, waiting to see what you say."

"Tell him I'll be over later," Doc growled.

Hopper lived ten miles across the prairie on the scrub farm of the entire county. There was very little chance that he could ever pay for Doc's services.

"Who was it?" Ma asked, when Doc came back to the table.

"Milt Hopper. His cow's sick."

"And you're going over there to-night," Ma sniffed indignantly. "And he's so ornery and poor he don't even feed or buy clothes for his wife and children. You know you won't ever get a cent out of him—and he owes you plenty now."

"He'd have a harder time feedin' his kids if his one cow died," Doc observed.

"I'd hoped—we'd hoped—Miss Nora and I—that you and Mrs. Porter could come to the meeting to-night," the singer said.

"Mrs. Nora," Doc reminded him.

"Of course." The singer's laugh trailed off and he flushed.

"Ma is goin'," Doc stated evenly. "I don't want Nora drivin' home by herself. You're stayin' over at the Greenwortses', ain't you?"

Nora and her mother exchanged quick glances, but both remained silent. After a pause, during which Brother Hopkins cast discreet glances toward the two women, he nodded.

"Why, yes."

"Won't they be at church?"

"Why, yes. I suppose they will."

"Then you can go home with them, and Nora can come on back here with ma," Doc declared.

He pushed back from the table.

"I'll hitch up for you," he told Nora.

She glanced at their guest, but he made no offer to help Doc.

"Brother Hopkins can help you clean up the table," Doc suggested, as he started for the barn.

That had not been a tactful remark, Doc realized. Nora's cheeks grew red and determined. She accepted it as a challenge. Brother Hopkins had passed over the remark with a sickly grin. He was obviously afraid. Doc pondered over this as he hitched Clay's sorrel mare to the buggy.

The sorrel had not been worked enough. When ma and Nora and the singer came out of the house, the mare was pawing at the ground and dancing with eagerness to get going. Standing at her head, Doc cramped the buggy wheels. The singer awkwardly helped Nora and her mother into the seat.

"You a good driver?" Doc asked.

"Why—er——"

"Because if you ain't, you'd better let Nora drive. This mare's mighty skittish to-night."

"Go ahead and drive!" Nora snapped. "A child could drive this mare."

Brother Hopkins climbed nervously over the wheel and took a firm grip on the reins. As they went past Doc, he could see the singer's expression. He was scared and he was not hiding his fright very well. Aside from a quick trot, the mare went off gently enough.

DOC was thoughtful, as he went slowly back to the barn to hitch his team of buckskin ponies to the old buggy that he drove. Unless he was a poor judge of human nature, Brother Hopkins was not the kind of a man to face trouble by standing his ground and fighting.

Doc took his time. It was an hour or more before he had the ponies harnessed, and his kit in the buggy. As he climbed in and eased himself into the sagging seat, his hand dropped down to the side of the seat and ran along the edge until his fingers felt the cold barrel of the .44 he carried there.

He always took the gun along with him. There had been two occasions when he had used it to shoot himself clear of attempted holdups. And it had carried the last remedy for many a crippled animal that had to be destroyed.

Doc had to pass the crossroads store on his way to Hopper's. Five or six men were loafing on boxes around the iron stove in its bed of tobacco-stained sand.

They stopped talking abruptly when Doc entered. He nodded at the storekeeper, who was figuring up account books back at the desk, and stopped at the stove to spread his hands.

Dick Silker fondled his pipe and looked slyly at the others.

"Say, Doc"—Dick had a high, squeaky voice—"I thought Clay sung bass."

Doc looked at him, waiting.

"When I passed your house a little while ago I heard Nora singin' in the parlor with some man, but if it was Clay, durned if his voice ain't changed."

Doc did not hurry. There was a moment of strained silence.

"Clay's voice ain't changed to soprano, like yours did," Doc remarked. "You ain't got no cause to worry about competition."

The laugh was at Dick, and he resented it.

"I reckon I'm not worryin' half as much as Clay is, at that!" he snapped.

"I reckon there ain't much chance that you'll ever have enough to worry about," Doc agreed.

"Well, what I get, I'll keep," Dick declared.

Doc ignored him, and walked back to the desk.

"Want to use your phone, Charley," he explained.

Going behind the desk, he cranked the instrument until Mary Galt answered.

"Say, Mary," he said, loud enough to be heard all over the store by the listening loafers. "Bring up Clay and ask him if he won't saddle up and ride over to Milt Hopper's to meet me there. Tell him Milt's got a cow down, and I may need some help."

Clay was on the other line and there was no way to make a direct connection from the store. The operator had to repeat their conversation.

"And, Mary," Doc continued, "tell him to bring his .44 along. I left mine at home. Had it out cleanin' it and forgot to put it back in the buggy. Tell him that cow of Milt's might have brain fever, and may have to be shot."

Conversation around the stove had ceased. In a few minutes the operator reported back.

"He says he'll saddle up and ride right over and that he'll bring his revolver," she told Doc.

"Tell him there's no hurry," Doc said. "It'll take me about an hour to get over there."

Doc went back to the stove. He had acted on an impulse that had been slowly taking form since the moment he had seen the singer's white face as he drove away from the house.

To reach Milt Hopper's, Clay would have to ride by the Greenwortses', where the singer had been staying. Doc was a little vague about some of his plans, but he had an idea. There might be nothing come of it.

Clay's revolver was an exact duplicate of the one he carried. Doc had given him the gun and knew that there was no way of telling them apart.

"That'll be too bad—if Milt's cow has to be shot," the storekeeper said sadly. "With them kids of his."

"Fix up a box of groceries, Charley," Doc said. "Put in some coffee, beans, flour, and sugar—two or three dollars' worth of stuff—and charge it to me."

'No wonder you're a poor man, Doc," the storekeeper declared. "I reckon if there was less preaching and more——"

"Singin'," Dick Silker interrupted.

There was no laugh. While the old storekeeper made up a box of groceries, Dick attempted to brave out the hostile silence, but it was too much for him. Whistling defiantly between his teeth, he sauntered out.

"Dick's kinda sensitive about his voice. I reckon I shouldn't 'a' said what I did," Doc sighed.

"You should 'a' kicked his hip pocket up between his ears," the storekeeper growled.

He carried the box of groceries out to Doc's buggy.

"Tell Milt if he gets hard pressed, maybe I can carry him for a little more—till he gets a chance to get a crop in," he offered.

"That'll mean a lot to him, Charley. I reckon if I stay poor, I'll have good company."

THE road to Hopper's ran along the river through several miles of cut-over timber. The farmhouses along the road were set back on high ground. It was a

lonely road to travel, even in the daytime, but Doc had chosen it for a purpose.

At a spot on it where he was nearly a mile from the nearest house, he took his gun from the side of the seat and fired it twice at a telephone pole. His ponies, after a few nervous jumps, settled back down to their steady trot, as he put the gun away again.

Twenty minutes later he drove into Hopper's barnyard. The gate was open, hanging on one hinge. A light burned in the kitchen of the old house. The barn was even more dilapidated than the house. The roof sagged. Boards hung loose, and the doors had long since fallen from the hinges.

Milt Hopper, a shambling, lanky man in a faded shirt and patched overalls, came out of kitchen with a lantern when Doc drove up. Hopper's face was a mass of black, unshaven bristles.

"I was beginnin' to get afraid you —you couldn't make it," he greeted Doc. "I'm shore glad you could."

"I went by the store and got the kids some presents," Doc declared. "Here, take this box in the house."

Hopper came over to the buggy, raised his lantern to look at the box of groceries, and then, without saying a word, took the box in his arms and carried it off toward the kitchen. He left the lantern on the ground beside the buggy wheel, but there had been enough light for Doc to see his face. Words would have been unnecessary.

"Say," he shouted after Hopper, "tell Maggie to fix up a pot of hot coffee! We'll be needin' a few cups of it before long."

After blanketing his ponies, Doc took his medicine grips and the lantern and went over to the barn. Cold air swept through the open doors and the gaping holes in the siding. Two horses nosed hungrily in the stalls on one side. They stamped eagerly in the muck when Doc appeared with the lantern. He set it down, and gave them each a pitchfork of hay from the meager pile in the barn runway.

On the other side he found the sick cow, lying in a quagmire of manure. Doc crawled over the feed box and inspected her casually, finding just what he had expected he would find: insufficient food and the wet, cold stall had sent the starved animal into rheumatic exhaustion. She had gotten down, and did not have strength enough to fight off pain and get up on her feet.

While Doc was in the stall, Clay Turner rode up to the barn, tied his horse at the door, and came into the runway. Doc heard him arrive, and climbed back up in the feed box.

"Glad you came over. I've sure got a job for you," he greeted Clay. "Bring your gun?"

"Yes." Clay handed Doc the gun, and leaned over the stall to look at the sick cow. "Is she that bad?"

Clay was thirty. He was tall and loose-jointed. He was neither handsome nor romantic in appearance, but he was clean and serious, handicapped more by his own shy, retiring nature than by his physical appearance.

"No," Doc said shortly. "Give me the gun before Milt sees it. I don't want him and Maggie scared."

He put the gun into his pocket, as Hopper came into the barn.

"I told Clay to ride over here and meet me," Doc explained. "Figgered we might need some help."

"I'll do the same for you any day, Clay," Hopper said gratefully. "Is she bad sick, Doc?"

"I think we can pull her through with the right kind of treatment," Doc said grimly. "But unless she gets it, she's a dead cow."

"Anything I can do to help?" Hopper offered humbly. "You know how things stand, Doc."

"There's plenty to be done," Doc told him. "You and Clay get a couple of pitchforks and get this next stall cleaned out. Dig down till you hit dry dirt if you have to dig three feet. You got any dry straw around?"

"We can pull some out of the stack," Hopper said.

"Well, that stall has to be bedded with a lot of it. I want sacks nailed over the cracks in the sidin' and I want the door nailed up so there won't be such a draft through here. You two might as well get busy. While you're doing that, I'll fix up a hot drench."

CLAY took off his coat and crawled over into the stall Doc had indicated. Hopper joined him, and they began pitching the wet manure out of the open stall window. Doc watched them for a few minutes, then began preparing a drench. Leaving them the lantern, he went over to the house and pounded on the kitchen door. Mrs. Hopper, a faded, tired woman, opened the door. Doc did not give her a chance to speak.

"I can't come in, Maggie, my feet are covered with manure. Heat me a kettle of water and bring it over to the barn, boilin' hot. There's no hurry, just take your time."

As he went back to the barn, Doc stopped at his buggy. Taking Clay's gun out of his pocket, he pushed it under the seat and put his own gun where Clay's had been.

There was only one difference between the two guns. Clay's had not been fired. It was loaded with six unfired cartridges. Doc made sure of that by breaking the gun before he put it under the seat. His own gun had been fired and contained only four unfired cartridges..

Before going back into the barn, Doc stopped beside Clay's horse long enough to put his gun into one of Clay's saddlebags. Hopper and Clay were still cleaning manure out of the stall when Doc got a bottle of liniment and began rubbing it into the swollen joints of the sick cow.

He had just finished doing that when Mrs. Hopper ran over from the house with a kettle of steaming water. She would have stayed, but Doc took one look at the ragged shawl she had thrown over her thin dress, and ordered her back to the kitchen.

"You get that coffee good and hot," he ordered roughly.

The two men helped him pour a bottle of hot medicine down the cow's throat, and then went back to their work. In about an hour the clean stall was ready, and by all lifting and pulling, they managed to get the sick animal up and into it, where it stood with legs braced and head down.

Doc left orders for the animal to be curried and wrapped with a blanket.

"You go on up to the house, Doc," Hopper insisted, "me and Clay can finish up here—unless you want to go, too, Clay."

"Not till we get this place nailed up," Clay declared.

He was outside nailing on boards over some of the largest cracks in the siding, when Doc sidled up to him.

"I put your gun in your saddlebag," Doc whispered "Don't tell Milt anything."

"Sure not," Clay promised. He hesitated. "Is Nora——"

"She and ma went to church. They took that singer with them. He's going home with Greenworts, and Nora and ma are drivin' back home together. Nora will stay with us to-night, I reckon."

Clay swung viciously at a nail, as Doc avoided any further conversation by plodding off toward the kitchen. He cleaned his shoes off as well as he could, and went inside to wash.

Mrs. Hopper had brushed her hair and made a pathetic attempt to tidy up. Her eyes were red, and she winked back tears as Doc put an arm roughly about her shoulders.

"None of that, Maggie. How's that coffee coming along? Where's the kids?"

He wandered through the open door into the room off the big combined kitchen and dining room. A folding bed was let down against one wall. On the other side of the small wood stove a pallet had been made on the floor. Under the old quilts that covered it were three small children, huddled together, but watching Doc with bright, wide-awake eyes.

"Your pa says one of you has a stomachache," Doc declared, with professional solemnness. "He said I'd better drench the sick one. Which one is it?"

Excited giggles answered him. Two of the children were girls with braided pigtails. The other and youngest was a boy. Doc got down on his knees and reached an exploring finger under the quilts.

There were enough squeals and screams and giggles accompanying Doc's exploring finger to bring a tired smile to Mrs. Hopper's face as she watched from the doorway. They finally tired Doc, and he demanded his coffee.

Clay and Hopper came in while Mrs. Hopper was pouring Doc's cup. They drank some of the hot coffee, too. Clay was tired, Doc could see. The tenseness had left him. In the heat of the kitchen his eyelids began dropping involuntarily.

"You go on home, Clay," Doc ordered. "I'll stay around a while and see how that medicine acts."

The hour was after eleven, and Doc knew that church was out. He had been watching the time, so that Clay would not meet any of the people who had been to church and were returning home.

"Guess I will, at that," Clay said. "You can tell Nora if there's anything ma wants her to do in the morning, she needn't hurry home."

Hopper left the house with Clay. When he returned, Doc took him over to the barn for another look at the sick cow. There had been no change in the animal's position, but she appeared to be breathing easier. Doc nodded his approval of the way Clay and Hopper had stopped up the chinks in the old barn.

"Do some more work on it to-morrow, and keep her stall cleaned out," he advised. "I'm leavin' you a bottle of liniment an' this medicine. Feed her on hot bran mash with a couple tablespoons of medicine in each feed."

"I don't know about the—the bran mash, Doc," Hopper faltered.

"Charley said he could manage to carry you along over at the store till you got a crop," Doc told him. "That goes for beans and bacon for them kids, too. Don't take any chances on losin' one of them."

"Doc——" Hopper swallowed over the words, and blew his nose vigorously in an old blue handkerchief.

"Call me if your cow don't get better," Doc cut him off. "I got to get back before ma accuses me of bein' out on a spree."

He stamped out of the barn and over to his buggy. Hopper helped him unblanket his ponies and stow the blankets away in the buggy. Mrs. Hopper was standing in the doorway waving as he drove off.

DOC took the road toward the river, but once away from the Hopper place he turned off at the first crossroads, and came back, following the road Clay had taken; the road which led past the Greenworts farm, where Brother Hopkins was staying.

It was a narrow, rutted country road, and deserted. The Greenwortses' house was about a quarter of a mile from a crossroads. Doc turned off at this crossroads, and drove into a patch of timber pasture a few hundred yards from the barn.

Tying his ponies to a tree, so that they were out of sight of the road, he took the revolver from the side of the buggy seat, and made his way slowly through the patch of timber toward the Greenwortses' house.

The timber pasture came up to within a few hundred feet of the house. It was a tin-roofed, two-story house, standing in an unfenced yard. Greenworts kept no dogs. Doc was glad of that—not that a barking dog would have stopped him.

There were no lights showing in the house. Greenworts was not the kind of a man who would tolerate the waste of coal oil. Doc knew where Brother Hopkins would be sleeping. The spare bedroom was on the ground floor, next to the patch of timber. Greenworts and his family slept upstairs.

Standing behind an evergreen tree not fifty feet from the house, Doc raised his revolver and, taking aim at the upper part of the window of the room in which Brother Hopkins was sleeping, he fired twice, as fast as he could work the trigger.

At the crash of window glass, Doc turned and, keeping behind the evergreen, ran toward the timber. After reaching the screen of timber, he paused long enough to look back and see a light in one of the upstairs windows. He was too far away to hear any commotion in the Greenwortses' house.

Puffing from the unaccustomed exertion, Doc reached his buggy, untied his team and drove rapidly toward home. Before he got there he reloaded his gun, swabbed out the barrel with the tip of his buggy whip, and then put the gun back where it was always carried under the seat.

NORA and his wife were at home and asleep when Doc arrived. He went to bed without waking them, chuckling a little when he heard the party-line telephone ringing furiously downstairs. There was a call he had to make in the morning and, although it was not an emergency, to avoid talking to either Nora or her mother, Doc got up early, ate a cold breakfast and drove off without seeing them.

At noon he drove into Clay Turner's barnyard. Nora was at home. She ran out of the kitchen to meet him. She showed no traces of tears, but Doc should see that she was pretty badly frightened.

"I suppose by this time you know what Clay did last night," she declared. "Every one else does."

"I heard some one took a couple

shots at that brayin' jackass over at Greenworts's," Doc admitted, "but I didn't figure it was Clay."

"Well, it was."

"How do you know?"

"Every one knows he had his gun when he rode over to Hopper's last night after you called him. They heard you tell him to bring it."

"Did Clay tell you he took a shot at the singer?" Doc asked mildly.

"I haven't asked him, but I found his gun in his saddlebag, and there was two empty cartridges in it!" Nora exclaimed. "There's two bullet holes in the Greenwortses' window."

"Any one see Clay do the shooting?"

"No, I guess not."

"Did he hit the singer?"

"No—but broken window glass did."

"Is the singer accusin' Clay?"

"I don't know. He's left." Nora hesitated. "He had a—a call to sing somewhere else."

Doc hid a grin behind his hand.

"Does any one else know about them two fired cartridges in Clay's gun?"

"Of course, they don't," Nora said indignantly. "I took them out and threw them in the cistern. And I cleaned the gun, too, and reloaded it."

Doc was deliberate. Climbing back into his buggy, he winked at Nora.

"I'd say the whole thing looks to me like a pretty good endin' to a mighty bad beginnin'" he confided. "If I was in your place, I'd forget everythin', but just this: Any man that ever lived can be pushed too far. You're lucky no blood was shed and that Clay's fine enough not to be blamin' you any."

He drove away before Nora could answer him, completely satisfied that she would never underestimate Clay again. Protest as Clay might later, no one, and least of all Nora, would ever believe that Clay had not been guilty of taking a couple of well-justified pot shots at the sleeping singer.

Doc slumped down in his buggy seat and dozed as his ponies trotted toward the home barn. He was tired. It was a tiring business—this using horse medicine on his own children, even if it was what they needed.

# Capers

By Roland Krebs

BREATHES there a man with soul so dead, who never to himself hath said, "Gosh, I'd like to have a harem"?

Well, don't do anything, brother, until you get all the facts. Here are a few.

Having a harem is not just a matter of taking life easy and having a lot of elegant dames crazy about you. It takes a shrewd operator to run one, and the expense runs high.

Here's your first complication. The head man around a harem never has been the sultan, as popularly supposed. The head man was the sultan's mother. I doubt if American womanhood, great as it may be, has yet produced a mother who would care to have twenty-seven or thirty-nine daughters-in-law capable of doing nothing, but looking gorgeous, playing stringed instruments, and playing her son for a chump.

Then, you would have to have a *kyahya khatum,* or female superintendent, as assistant head man. A journeyman *kyahya khatum* usually rates about forty dollars a week and keep. Next comes the *hasnadar ousta,* or treasurer of the harem. Her job is to tell the sultan, just when he thinks he's in the pink of condition, that the overhead has got him in the red.

*On the groceries for a harem you would take an awful beating. Ask any Turk, and he'll tell you that these harem gals have appetites that would shame an equal number of section hands. What's more, they want their nutriment dished up in style. Each dish had its own servant to serve it.*

The harem gals always beefed about being cooped up, so the sultan always had to have a flock of carriages and horses to take them out for a ride. Every time the family went out, the sultan felt that it was he who was being taken for a buggy ride.

The funny part about it was that, strictly speaking, the harem gals were rated slaves. More strictly speaking, the sultan himself was the slave. In fact, it was all so complex that most sultans used to thank their stars when they could sneak away for a while and go fishing. What burned the sultans up was that folks from other countries looked down their noses and said the sultans didn't treat the weaker sex right. Which led one potentate to sigh, "Really, that's insultin' a sultan."

*My advice to any young man is to give up all notions about a harem. Rather get married and start paying*

# and Catcalls

*off on a home. I've tried it and I know. Tried getting married and paying off on a home, I mean. I'm still trying to pay off.*

Astronomers report that in the daytime the moon is so hot that human beings, if put there, would be cooked to a cinder in a split second —and that at night it gets so cold that a human would be frozen stiff before he could blink. We suppose the Man in the Moon boasts of sleeping under a double layer of coals at night.

Richard Heber, early nineteenth-century collector, was a pushover for book agents. He always bought three copies of each volume. One was for display, one was to be read, and one was for borrowers. He owned one hundred and fifty thousand volumes. There was one boy who, when told to give his wife a book for Christmas, could say, "She's got a book," and mean it.

*At the slightest noise, the hedgehog contracts certain muscles that roll him into a ball and thrust out quills like those of a porcupine. He does this numberless times all day long. His life seems to be all balled up.*

The real name of the Third Century Roman Emperor, Heliogabalus, was Varius Avitus. Why in the Heliogabalus any guy would want to be known as Heliogabalus when he had another name only Heliogabalus can say.

A hippopotamus, unless it is wounded or is defending its young, is a very mild and inoffensive animal for a greater part of its life, despite its ferocious and ugly appearance. However, when a male hippopotamus reaches the old grandfather stage, he becomes very sour and quarrelsome, attacking anything and everybody that comes his way. The reason, supposedly, is that he is soured by the thought that he spent his whole life being a hippopotamus.

The Emperor Charlemagne, who centuries ago conquered Europe, got mad at a Frankish nobleman named Huon, because Huon killed the wrong man. He agreed to give Huon a reprieve if Huon would visit the Emir of Babylon, bring back a handful of the emir's beard and four of his back teeth, kill the best of his knights and kiss the emir's daughter, Esclarmonde, three times. If this is the same Esclarmonde whose picture I once saw in a book, Huon probably kissed the emir and killed himself.

# Hidden Water

## By Henry Herbert Knibbs

Billy Bent, desert rat—and his big romance.

### CHAPTER I.

### "I BELONG TO NOWHERE."

BILLY BENT of Organ Mountain was having trouble with the rotten quartz in the roof of his mine. Following the sixth cave-in he took to his tent; not, to sulk, but to forget his troubles in romance. Mining was a necessary evil. Billy Bent's real interest in life was books. When he was immersed in a book the tent could have burned down round his ears and he hardly would have noticed it. The broad, calloused thumb that so often turned pages now lay alongside a poem about a Roman keeping a bridge against a group of importunate citizens who were trying to crash the gate. What a hand that bridge tender would have made around a homicidal mine!

Reluctantly he thrust the volume on the shelf, ate a hasty noon meal and, picking up his pipe, stood looking down upon distant black butte, purple shadow, harsh red cliff, and silver white sand of the distant Bad Lands. Bad Lands on one side of the range, and tolerably good folk on the other. Ord Valley with its alfalfa fields, small cattlemen, two towns, and one railway station looked like a paradise—from a distance. There was no question as to what the Bad Lands looked like. And what a hiding place for a man in trouble! Believing that Providence approved of looking after the victims of indiscretion as well as others, Billy Bent, with fifty not too sinful years behind him, stood as a widely known champion of the under dog. It was said that he had fed more hungry outlaws and frustrated more lynching parties than any other man in New Mexico. His mind on the heavy work that lay ahead of him, he sought a match.

"By the nine gods of Ilium!" he exclaimed. "I'd give my kingdom for a man. I've got a horse."

The old mine was getting altogether too temperamental for one man to handle. Help was scarce. Moreover, the mine had a bad reputation. There were stalwart souls in Ord Valley who would no more have thought of going into that tunnel than of taking a mid-week bath.

He had left his tobacco pouch on the table. When he again came out of the tent he stopped short and took his pipe from his mouth. Was it Ilium, beans, or too much coffee? In the downpour of noon sun stood a tall stranger. The high-heeled boots and the legs were as they should be, but there was no horse

in sight. The stranger needed a shave, he looked hungry, and he asked for work, any kind of work. Billy Bent at once recognized an under dog—tall and broad of shoulder, with a straight gaze, but obviously under.

The stranger gestured. "I notice that your tunnel has caved in."

"She's got the habit!" snorted Billy. "Just look at the stack of timber I've hauled down for mine props, and then look at that tunnel."

The hungry stranger made no inquiry about the chuck box, but took up a hole in his belt. "Where's your ax?"

Billy gave him coffee and beans first. The rest of the afternoon he watched the new man cut mine props with a gusto that made the chips soar like birds. But immediately

after supper the stranger asked for his pay, saying he would be glad to take it out in grub. Concealing his disappointment, Billy Bent filled a gunny sack with provisions. Surmising that this under dog was afoot and hiding out somewhere, he topped the load with a tin cup and his second-best skillet. The stranger struck into the piñons back of the flat. Billy felt mournful. What a hand with an ax! And how he could make a wheelbarrow giggle! Billy sighed. Such a man would not come again.

"Hey, up there!" The stranger had stopped. He flung up his arm. "If it's all right with you I'll be back to-morrow morning."

THOSE few who have attempted to explore the Bad Lands have no good to tell of it. Raw red cliffs enclose a wide basin studded with somber buttes; a desolate and forbidding land where no grass grows. not even a weed. There is no entrance save the narrow, cliff-shadowed gateway facing the south, no visible water, not even a poison spring. Indian legend has it, however, that there is another entrance, that there is water there, that the many great caves were once inhabited, at which time the Bad Lands were known as "Hidden Water." Billy Bent had a secret feeling that legend, as so often happened, was right.

When the stranger appeared at Billy Bent's mine next morning he was riding a sorrel cow pony. This fact Billy Bent blandly ignored. With his usual calmness the champion of under dogs also noted that the new man had left saddle and bridle in the meadow near the horse. In case of necessity there was a quick get-away. Fair enough. Every man for himself: that was the code. As a champion of under dogs Billy Bent, however, went the code one better. About ten that morning, returning from a survey of Ord Valley, he told the new man that he was fired. The stranger made no comment, simply nodded and picked up his coat. Far below a horseman was making his way into the foothills.

Presently the distant rider turned, left the mountain road and headed back down the valley. The champion of under dogs grinned. "You're hired again, John," he drawled.

A queer expression crept into the stranger's eyes. "Down around Montrose I'm called Walt."

"All right, Walt. In case you're fired again, and decide to leave in a hurry, you might forget that sorrel you rode up here. My Smoky horse is a brunette."

While there was no apparent change in their daily relations, a friendship grew between them, inspired by the respect each had for the other's ability to go ahead and do things. Never once did Billy Bent hint at Walt's status as a citizen, or his own sympathy for the under dog. Nevertheless, being a tireless reader of his weekly paper as well as of romance. he was aware that Lance Deering, the Hartwell foreman, had recently been killed in a gun fight by one Walter Malloch of Montrose, and that, probably becoming aware he would not get justice in a Hartwell-controlled court, Walter Malloch had made his escape, followed by a hastily gathered posse. Just why the men had quarreled the paper did not state. The champion of under dogs had a verse, however, which he liked to hum.

Once I loved a lady,
And put her in a song.
I belong to nowhere.
Where do you belong?

Now Walter Malloch had been talking with Bessie Hartwell just before the shooting. For a man who was a fugitive from the law Malloch was a cheerful soul, though he seldom spoke. Billy Bent talked enough for both of them, gaily commenting upon books, stopes, drifts, mineralogy, cyanide, and matrimony.

THEY were a week shoring up the tunnel to where the last cave-in had occurred. During that week Billy Bent learned a good deal about the underlying integrity of his helper. He ignored the external history. As in the Bad Lands, the most forbidding prospect may conceal a spring. The legend of Hidden Water had not grown up of itself, but had sprung from an ancient people closer to the heart of things.

When he had relocated the vein, Billy Bent put in a shot of dynamite. As the dust settled he took a candle and went into the tunnel. "It's all right," he called.

Malloch, returning for a wheelbarrow load of rock, heard a muffled slither and crash. He shouted. There was no answer. As the horror of it crept over him the sweat was cold on his back. The tunnel had caved in again. This time the cheerful and sprightly Billy Bent was inside, under that mass of fallen rock. Malloch's mind leaped to an involuntary conclusion. Sooner or later Billy Bent would be missed. His body would be found. Certain folk would be apt to hint that Malloch had killed him. The Hartwell brothers would be only too quick to encourage the idea. A wise man, at least a wise fugitive, would take what provisions there were and leave the country. And then, as a man strips off his coat to plunge in and rescue a drowning person, Malloch impatiently cast aside all thought of himself. Whether Billy Bent was alive or not there was but one thing to do.

Taking pick and shovel, he entered the tunnel. His lungs filled with acrid dust as he heaved chunk after chunk of the fallen rock behind him. The muscles of his back cracked as he tried to move a huge slab. The stout handle of the pick broke. Seizing a drill he pried the slab loose. With it came a shower of flakes from the tunnel roof. Any minute the tunnel might cave in again. It was a fool's job, digging for a dead man. And hopeless, like trying to buck the Hartwells. Yet if he were under that mass of rock, Billy Bent would be toiling to get him out. Thirsty, he walked over to the water jug near the edge of the flat. Down in Ord Valley a long black dot was moving slowly toward the town. Other black dots—two of them—were moving into the foothills below. A wagon going south. Two horsemen coming up the mine road. The Hartwells? Sheriff Leadbetter's deputies? Malloch could almost believe he heard the spirit of Billy Bent telling him nothing more could be done for him, warning him to go. But instead of going for his horse, he went back into the tunnel.

By the time that he had uncovered the limp body, which had been shielded from the bulk of the cave-in by a dislodged mine timber, he was sure that Billy Bent was dead. Though aware that the two horsemen were due at any moment, he carried him to the tent.

Hurriedly gathering a sack of provisions, he was startled by a mumbling behind him. Billy Bent's eyes were open.

"Take it easy," said Malloch.

Quietly he took up Bent's rifle. Through the succeeding silence came the restless shuffle of horses, the creak of a saddle. "The ole fool," said one of the invisible riders, "is probably gopherin' in that hole in the wall. Come on, Tom."

The riders moved on; two cowhands returning to Budlong's ranch.

Malloch brushed the sweat from his forehead.

Billy Bent gestured weakly. "Is this—these United States?"

## CHAPTER II.

### "ONCE I LOVED A LADY."

BILLY BENT had no broken bones, or, so far as Malloch could determine, any serious injury. But he wouldn't be able to take care of himself for several days. Wholly ignoring the risk of discovery, Malloch stayed at the mine day and night for a week. Neither of them more than casually referred to the rescue, yet Billy could not help but feel that Malloch might have left after the cave-in, instead of staying and digging him out of that smother of rock and darkness. The Saturday following the accident Billy was able to sit outside in the sun. Malloch, who had carefully hidden his apprehension about unwelcome visitors, said he thought he would go over home for a couple of days.

"All right, Walt." Perhaps a little hint that he understood more than he had thus far said about what Malloch meant by "home" and about his status with the law, would be in order. "Give the family my regards. You might tell the aforesaid family that I'm going down to Ord on Tuesday. Need grub. Want a newspaper. The *Sentinel* is running a sort of disconnected serial about my old friend Sheriff Virge Leadbetter. Seems Virge lost something over by the Montrose courthouse——"

Malloch glanced up. "Lost what?"

"Well, now! I forgot to remember. I always do in such cases." Billy smiled. "I remember what Sheriff Leadbetter said to me though, when he was in Ord last week. 'Although I am on pleasure, Bent, I have a feudal mind.' I didn't ask him why."

Alive with understanding, Malloch's eyes held Billy Bent's. Malloch took up the reins of the sorrel. Billy Bent rose, and almost bashfully thrust out his hand. Their grips tightened. Walter Malloch was a fugitive. Only a few days ago a posse had been on his trail, yet blow high, blow low, Billy Bent was his friend.

Malloch rode with the unhurried pace of a reputable man for once on the wrong side of the law. One takes it as a matter of course that one day one is herding cattle in his own undisturbed territory, and the next day hiding out in the Bad Lands like any common outlaw. And all this was because of a pair of steadfast gray eyes and the enmity of two young hotheads. Malloch wondered what had become of the posse, more important still, of the Hartwells themselves.

As a matter of fact, the two Hartwell boys, cursing the posse for turning back when the fugitive's trail was lost in a smother of cattle tracks round Ladle Springs, were just now riding up the wide sandy valley of the Jornada below Budlong's ranch, their immediate destination the ranch house of their cousins, the Budlongs. They intended to take up the search for Malloch personally, and finish the

work given up by the posse of which they had been the leading members. Sullenly handsome, tall fellows, they were glad now that the posse had turned back. It gave them a free hand. If Malloch were killed resisting arrest, Montrose County could hardly hold it against two deputized peace officers. This time there would be no escape.

"Queer," said Rand Hartwell, the elder brother, "that Bess took such an all-fired sudden notion to visit Aunt Hattie Budlong. What do you think about it?"

"Plenty," replied Bert Hartwell. "Malloch sure didn't get any farther north than the Bad Lands, yet. And Bess knows that he headed that way. All I got to say is, watch Bess."

He was a lonely figure riding down the mountain, that same Walt. Billy Bent chewed hard on the stem of his pipe. Dog-gone it all, why did a decent man have to get into trouble when there were plenty of the other kind looking for it? He peered down the dark road.

"Once I loved a lady,

And put her in a song——"

It was possible that Malloch loved a lady, too. Folks said that Bess Hartwell was a mighty fine girl. Malloch had stood talking with her that day when Lance Deering, the Hartwell foreman, had come up drunk and told him to get out of town. When Malloch came out of Humphrey's store, where he had escorted the girl, Deering had fired at him. Here was the vulnerable feature of our politics. A plain case of self-defense, yet Billy Bent knew that the Hartwell boys, who ruled the courts and named the sheriff before election, would never let up until they got Malloch. And to those familiar with their high-handed methods, it was only too evident that Deering's quarrel had not been altogether a personal matter. The champion of under dogs grumbled to himself.

THE following Tuesday Billy Bent rode down to Ord and purchased his supplies. During the long ride back to the mine he regaled himself by reading the local paper. There was nothing new about Malloch, although Billy thought it significant that Miss Bess Hartwell of Montrose was visiting her cousin Myra Budlong. Budlong's ranch was only about six miles from the Bad Lands. Billy's mumbled comment ceased as he came upon a young woman standing beside a horse that bore the Budlong brand. The young woman was tall, with dark brown hair and candid gray eyes. She wore a divided skirt of corduroy. A quirt dangled from her gloved hand. If Billy hadn't been a confirmed bachelor he would have had to admit that he liked her low, even voice, as she said:

"You're Mr. Bent, aren't you? I'm Bessie Hartwell, Myra Budlong's cousin."

Hartwell stock she was, a straight, slender figure. She sat a horse well. Billy Bent remembered old Jason Hartwell, but never had happened to meet his daughter or the two brothers. As he glanced at the girl he thought of Malloch, of Deering, and oddly enough, of the Garden of Eden. Come to think of it there had been a Lilith, too. But if this Lilith thought she was going to get anything out of him about the new hired man, she had come to the wrong post office.

When they reached the crest of the range, the girl stood looking at the distant Bad Lands, gorgeously somber in the late-afternoon sun.

"It looks like a city," she said slowly. "A forbidden city."

Billy began unpacking supplies. "It is, to most folks. Poked into that forbidden city once myself, but I didn't locate any claims."

Bess Hartwell laughed. "I haven't found what I'm looking for, yet. Though I even looked in your mine. It seems to have caved in."

"Yes, the old tunnel caved in again after all the work we put in."

"I didn't know you had a partner."

"You mustn't mind my grammar, Miss Hartwell. Sometimes I talk editorially. Makes me feel bigger."

The girl was gazing at the fresh imprint of a high-heeled boot in front of the tent. "Is that editorial, too?"

Billy Bent smiled. He wore broad, hobnailed shoes. Casually he placed a box of canned tomatoes over the boot track.

An exceedingly unaffected and straightforward young person, this Bess Hartwell. "Mr. Bent, is Walter Malloch hiding in the Bad Lands?" she asked.

"My goodness, lady! Where did you get that idea?"

"Walter Malloch and I," she said hesitantly, "are engaged."

Billy Bent didn't actually distrust women, but he could never forget that as females they were subject to inexplicable interpretations of honor. Women and complications went hand in hand. Mr. Kipling had said something about a man traveling the fastest when he traveled alone. Billy agreed; especially when there was a Hartwell sheriff in the middle distance. Had he been in Malloch's boots he would have dreaded the thought of a woman in the case. He wasn't in Malloch's boots, but he felt peculiarly responsible for keeping those boots out of sight.

While not a poor hand at poker, Billy Bent could never successfully bluff a woman. And those gray eyes were imploring. "Personally, I'm a bachelor. But if you were to ride up here to-morrow morning, alone, you——"

The girl said nothing, but her eyes thanked him as she bade him good night.

When Billy Bent went into the tent to get supper, he wondered if he had been wise. Adam had been doing famously in the Garden before he lost that memorable rib. Quite incidentally, Billy took his six-shooter from beneath the pillow, examined it, and put it back.

## CHAPTER III.

### "SIGNED, SEALED AND DELIVERED."

THERE was no mistaking the two sweat-marked animals Bess Hartwell saw in the Budlong corral when she got back: Rand's Comanche and Bert's Domino. Slowly she walked up to the ranch house, her heart filled with foreboding. Her brothers would never have made the tedious, two days' journey from Montrose simply to visit the Budlongs. That Bert and Rand had come could mean only one thing: they were looking for Walter Malloch. And to-morrow morning she was to meet him at Bent's mine.

About midnight Billy Bent was awakened from a sound sleep by some one calling his name. He put on his overalls, tucked his six-shooter in the waistband and stepped out. Bess Hartwell was sitting a pony that breathed hard.

"Mr. Bent, my brothers are at

Budlong's. They've been with the posse that trailed Walter Malloch. I daren't risk coming up here tomorrow morning, myself. Bert and Rand will be watching me."

Billy Bent heard and understood, but his immediate attention was focused on the brush across the flat.

"So please tell Walter I came tonight," Bess went on. "The rest of the posse turned back at Ladle Springs, but my brothers won't give up. If you can, get him to leave the country."

"He doesn't rein any too easy, but I'll do what I can."

"If you knew what it means——"

"Maybe I do."

What Billy Bent did not understand was the alien shadow in the brush across the starlit flat. He asked the shadow what it wanted. A swift wind brushed his cheek, a darting flame answered him. The echo of the shot was obliterated as he fired. The next second he had flattened himself behind the frame of a windlass, and Bess Hartwell's horse had bolted down the mountain.

Billy Bent grew cold lying there with nothing on but his shirt and overalls. Yet he argued cheerfully that he might have been a whole lot colder. He didn't know why some one had tried to murder him, but he did know that Eve had arrived with the usual complications. It was always thus. And yet men will insist upon exercising the rights of Adam. With due respect for the possibilities, Billy Bent made cautious circuit, arriving at the opposite side of the flat to find that the rounded bulk looming in the starlight was a horse. It was dead.

The girl rode a foam-breasted pony back onto the mine flat. Billy Bent struck a match and held it close to the ground. "It's Rand's Comanche." There was a catch in the girl's voice. "Rand tried to kill you. He must have thought you were Walter Malloch."

"Silly idea, Miss Bess—killing. Now I'd a whole lot rather have a good game of poker with your brothers. But no, they would have it that there must be trouble." It was no fault of hers, or of Malloch's, or his own. It was just the eternal cussedness of things. A champion of under dogs must expect to get bitten sooner or later.

He was working in the tunnel next morning thinking of himself as an innocent bystander thrust suddenly between two opposing forces, when the sound of hoofbeats drew him out to the mine flat. The two tall fellows who were bending over the dead Comanche bore a family resemblance to Bess Hartwell. Fine-looking men, thought Billy, and also harder than the hubs of hell. He wondered which way the hubs would turn. And his gun was in the tent.

If Billy Bent was surprised, so were the Hartwells. They had hardly expected to meet a white-headed, affable person with a twinkle in his eye. Billy Bent's twinkle, however, covered a multitude of possibilities: one of these was the arrival of Malloch.

"Looking for something?" he said pleasantly.

"You know damn well we are!" Rand Hartwell straightened up.

"Hoity-toity! as the old lady said when she fell in the creek. Now I always do my damn-welling before breakfast. Nothing personal, you understand. Let's begin at the beginning. Good morning, and how did you sleep last night? I notice you're riding a Budlong horse this morning."

PLAINLY the Hartwells considered Billy Bent merely a harmless old desert rat. "We're looking for Walter Malloch," said Bert Hartwell. "We've good reason to believe he's hanging out around here."

"Hanging? Then why disturb him?"

Bert Hartwell stepped off his horse. "You old hyena——"

"Hyenas," said Billy gently, "are not indigenous to North America. Didn't your teacher tell you?" Billy Bent's gaze mirrored the distant figure of a man back of the Hartwells—a man on foot in the brush, wearing a familiar hat. Billy raised his voice. "I don't want trouble with you boys. I like boys, and I don't like trouble. Maybe it would help matters if you would speak gently to these silver hairs."

Rand Hartwell snorted. "I want my saddle."

"Your saddle is in my tent. But you haven't apologized."

Bert Hartwell swung round and started toward the tent. Billy intercepted him. "Easy, young man! You can't jump my preserves all hot like that. No indeedy!"

Billy wished that he hadn't left his gun in the tent. Taller by a foot, heavier by thirty pounds and younger by as many years, Bert Hartwell towered above him. When he told Billy to get out of the way, and Billy didn't, Hartwell swung and all but knocked him down. Billy Bent jumped back at him, swarmed up him like a squirrel mounting a tree. And Billy punched as he mounted. As Rand Hartwell started toward them, a rifle cracked in the brush. The combatants sprang apart. Rand Hartwell stepped behind his horse, his rifle across the saddle, as he watched the hillside. Bert Hartwell stood staring at a little round hole in the "Bent's Mine" signboard just above his head. It had a new and pronounced period.

Mumbling through swollen lips, the champion of under dogs dived into the tent and out again. "Exhibit A." He threw the saddle on the ground. "And this little contraption, with a trigger attached is Exhibit B. Remove yourselves in a decent and orderly manner, and don't swear as you leave the courtroom. Otherwise"—Exhibit B was leveled at Hartwell's stomach—"I shall be obliged to pull the said trigger."

It was no victory for the high-handed Hartwells. Yet they made their retreat more like a threat than a defeat. When, some fifteen minutes later, Malloch appeared, Billy Bent was removing a loose tooth. He seemed in an exceptionally genial humor. The tooth, he declared, was a monument to a misguided peacemaker, cheap at the price, since nobody had been killed. "Nevertheless, I'm going to dock your wages for one tooth and two holes in my tent."

"Two?"

"Two. Hole No. 1, due to a case of mistaken identity last night. I was standing just about here, talking to a young lady—I call her Eve."

"Has Bess Hartwell been here?"

"And her tall brother. That's his horse, over yonder." Feeling a spell of eloquence coming on, Billy Bent suggested that they retire to the tunnel. He was tired of interruptions.

AFTER Billy Bent had given him Bess Hartwell's message, Malloch stood for a long time looking out onto the flat. "I suppose," he said finally, "it would be

best if I did leave the country. But I can't do that."

"You've got a horse, and a couple of friends. And there's an old-timer up in Montana who would listen to a voice crying in the wilderness. My voice. Introducing a gentleman with a past. You've punched cows, and he's got a lot of 'em."

"That's right kind, but——"

"See here, Walt. You think you're standing plumb in the middle of things with the world revolving round you. It isn't. Fact is, you're revolving round the world—off your feet, up in the air, and not even trying to catch hold of a star to steady yourself. Do you think it's fair to that star for you to stay here and take chances?"

Malloch's only answer was to shake his head stubbornly. Billy Bent, who at Malloch's age would have made the same reply, smiled to himself. Here was an under dog that wouldn't run even when he got the chance. He would stay, probably fight, and get chewed up by the pack. And what could a well-intentioned person do about it? Nothing, but hold fast to the main chance, keep his wits oiled and loaded, and his eyes clear. A commendable program, but just a mite bookish for ordinary use, and lacking detail. Details, in such cases, had to be met and handled as they came. "Walt," Billy said, "I've got a snug little sack tucked away in the bank. Banks aren't safe. If——"

"Thanks. It isn't that."

"No!" exploded Billy. "It's your dog-gone, all-fired, high-falutin' idea that you can outride, outshoot, outwit, and outlive the gang that is dogging you. You're up against the hardest proposition a man can face, which is to keep his hands off the relatives of the girl he is going to marry. For two pins I'd fire you so far you wouldn't get back in time to play grandfather to the kids you ought to have raised. Incidentally, and at the present moment, have you got any money on you?"

"Thanks again. Yes. Five or six dollars."

"Hand it over, and don't ask questions." Billy solemnly counted the money and tucked it in his pocket. "You've now bought a half interest in this mine. According to law you're liable for any injuries to any of the hands working her. That means you. If you go and get bumped off while in our employ, I'll sue you for damages."

"Sounds as if we were partners."

"Signed, sealed, and delivered." Billy was curious. Now what would his new partner do? What Malloch did was to fetch his own horse from the brush, drag the dead Comanche to an abandoned shaft and dump him in. Tying his mount back of the tent, he took up pick and shovel and set to clearing out the tunnel.

## CHAPTER IV.

### "WE USUALLY MAKE IT."

NEITHER of the partners entertained any illusions about the Hartwells. Malloch's father and theirs had quarreled about the water rights of a certain spring in the Tecolote foothills. Both had been killed. The younger generation might have let the feud die out, had Walter Malloch not become engaged to Bess Hartwell. A Hartwell married to a Malloch! This was too much for the hot-headed Rand and Bert. Yet because of Malloch's standing in the community they dared not attack him openly. When, however, their plans miscarried, and their foreman was

shot trying to carry out their orders, they proclaimed their intention of getting Malloch themselves. Hence Billy Bent and Malloch worked with both the tools of industry and of warfare within easy reach.

During the days that followed, Bess Hartwell made it a point to keep Malloch informed of all that was going on. Bert and Rand had returned to Montrose to look after their interests. She was going to stay at Uncle Tom Budlong's and look after hers—which meant Malloch. She was not going back to Montrose until he had been cleared. Reasoning with her brothers had proved useless. They would not listen to her.

Still a bachelor at heart, Billy Bent was beginning to see Bess Hartwell in a way that was an experience to him. She was steadfast. She was affectionate, but she didn't use her femininity as a lever to pry a man off his balance. Even with Malloch she seemed more like a companion than a sweetheart. Billy Bent's knowledge of sweethearts, however, was limited. Yet he had to admit that no woman he had known, unless it were Tom Budlong's wife, had ever been so unobtrusively solicitous about her man's comfort. Bess never asked if Walt Malloch needed socks or shirts or underwear. She seemed to know what was needed, and ordered it from the valley store, the package invariably containing a cake of hand soap and a bar for washing clothing. Tom Budlong's wife was like that, always looking out for Tom's comfort and welfare. She was also Bess Hartwell's aunt. Maybe that comforting quality ran in the family. As the uniting link between the Hartwell-Malloch clans the quality would be valuable.

Billy Bent began to wish that things would clear up. With the news that Judge Thornton, the Hartwell appointee who was to have tried Malloch, had been found dead in bed, Billy felt that progress had been made. Indeed the politically careful Ord *Sentinel* intimated that the death of the Hartwell's most valuable henchman was the beginning of the end.

Malloch thought the *Sentinel* too optimistic. "They'll be back," Malloch told Billy. "For Bess's sake I'll do all I can to keep out of their way. But I don't intend to run."

OFTEN, on his long rides from Ord to the mine, Billy Bent wondered how the feud would end. He was no longer a spectator, secretly championing a stray under dog. Walter Malloch was his business partner, his companion, one of the family. To his surprise he found that he, Billy Bent, to whom uncertainty had hitherto been an invigorating challenge, was becoming tired of living on the edge of a crater. At any moment it might boil over and Walter Malloch be consumed.

His uneasiness reached a climax when word came to him that Rand and Bert Hartwell had suddenly left Montrose. No one seemed to know why, or where they had gone. Billy Bent, however, had a very definite opinion. His dislike for pulling any strings save those which tightened up his own resolutions had hitherto kept him from using his political friends. Stirred by an intuition that he could not ignore, the champion of under dogs sat down one night when alone and wrote to an old friend with whom he had punched cattle in the San Andreas country years ago. This friend now occupied

the governor's chair. In his letter Billy asked no favor, he simply stated a case with the details of which the governor was already pretty well familiar.

For several days thereafter Billy Bent was on pins and needles. No news came of the Hartwells, nor any word from the governor. Billy Bent found himself lying awake nights. One day, when he had about given up hope, he was handed a letter from the governor, which was characteristically brief and to the point.

I have issued a pardon for Walter Malloch of Montrose, which will be forwarded in due course. As for the two young gentlemen you mention, I shall investigate.

Yours obediently,

While resting the horses at the foot of the Organ Mountain grade, Billy read it again. "Huh! 'Yours obediently!' He is, like dynamite! He's the slickest little political boss that ever misused a branding iron. My, my! How I could enlighten his constituents.'

Wouldn't Bess be tickled to hear about the pardon? It would really mean a whole lot more to her than it would to Walt. Women liked the approval of society, especially where their men were concerned. Walt would now have a chance to get organized, and go ahead and live without having to hold a gun in one hand and his pony's reins in the other. Billy Bent never had liked the idea of a pack chasing one lone animal, even a coyote.

"We're bearing the good news from Ghent to Aix," Billy chuckled to his pack mare. Now, most probably the young folks would get married. Billy toyed with a vision: two strong healthy young folks establishing a home—neighborly, solid folk who would keep their books straight, raise sturdy children, lend a hand to the under dog, and live out their years, a credit to themselves and to the country.

As he reached the mine flat he let out a long halloo, eager to share the big day with his partner. He would not unload all at once, but twirl the pan slow and easy, till the coarse gold began to show.

Malloch wasn't in the tunnel, nor in the tent.

WHEN Billy led his horses up to the meadow, he saw that Malloch's horse was gone. He wondered if his partner had had to leave in a hurry or had decided to spend the night in his old retreat in the Bad Lands. It wasn't like him to go without leaving a note. Billy found no note in the tent. A book lay on the floor, face down. On the stove stood a pan of beans burned black. His partner didn't throw books on the floor or let beans burn. With a start Billy thought of the tunnel. But when he took a candle and investigated he found everything was all right. Billy stored his provisions, got supper and settled down to read a while before he turned in, trying to ignore his apprehension. But somehow things didn't feel right. Even his friendly and familiar books failed to hold him.

Just before daylight he was awakened by a shrill nicker. He got up and stepped out. In the chill half light stood Malloch's sorrel, the reins dragging and the saddle half off. Billy caught him, reset the saddle and looked him over. The pony was unmarked, but exceedingly nervous.

Back-tracking the sorrel down the mountainside, Billy picked up an

empty bullet shell. Farther along he found Malloch's hat. Clear to the secret crevasse in the northern rim of the Bad Lands, the trail was plain. Here the tracks stopped.

Unfamiliar with the dark, winding passage, save for what Malloch had told him, Billy Bent led the pony through the crevasse to the basin, and mounted. Deliberately the sorrel plodded toward a big cave some sixty yards west. Entering the cave the horse kept on until reaching what seemed to be the end wall, it stopped. On foot, Billy Bent felt his way along the wall, came upon a narrow opening, and recalling Malloch's description—"a sort of alleyway that doubles back on itself so often that the light doesn't show through to the cave"—he finally found himself in another and much smaller basin, ringed with cliffs. A clear deep pool shimmered in the early light. Malloch lay beside the pool as though alseep.

"Hello, Walt," said Billy. "How are you making it?"

Malloch's face was white, and beaded with sweat. Billy shook him gently, roused him. Malloch's bandanna, soggy red, was stuffed between his shirt and chest.

Billy Bent made no comment, even when he saw how seriously his partner was wounded. With his belt and a strip of his own shirt he fashioned a makeshift bandage. He hoped it would hold until he could get Malloch over to Budlong's. The cold water seemed to revive Malloch. He asked Billy to help him sit up.

His back against the cliff, his hands pressed hard against the ground, Malloch tried to clear his mind of the recurring cloud and sound that oppressed him. He was not surprised that his partner was there. It seemed the most natural thing in the world. Only the inanimate things that met his gaze seemed unnatural, the high cliffs that swayed slightly, the pool, which seemed to move like running water.

"Think we can make it to Budlong's?" asked Billy.

"We usually make it, don't we?" In spite of his wound Malloch tried to grin. He knew that when Billy Bent ceased talking he was either asleep or mad clear through.

When Billy tried to help him to his feet Malloch collapsed. Billy Bent glared like an irate teacher questioning a small boy. "I take it you didn't shoot yourself."

"Rand and Bert, about noon, yesterday——"

Billy laid him beside the pool and put his rolled jumper under Malloch's head. The lengthening shadow of the cliff would afford shade the rest of the day. By his calmly deliberate manner Billy Bent might have been getting ready to go to a party.

## CHAPTER V.

### BILLY BENT'S ROMANCE.

THE trip to Budlong's and back would take him a good four hours. Would it be Walt who was there when he got back, or just a still shell lying beside Hidden Water, and the shadow of wide black wings on the sand? Billy Bent filled his pipe and lighted it, trying to cover his feelings with a hard philosophy. Next to doing all that he could to insure his partner's recovery, there was something which meant more to him than anything else. And that was to get within rifle shot of the Hartwells.

Picking up his canteen and rifle, he started through the zigzag passage from the spring to the cave.

Midway he stopped. He had heard the unmistakable click of shod hoofs on rock. Some one was entering the cave from the front. The sound of creaking leather, the deep breathing of horses, and the thud of boot heels in the soft dust told him that whoever it was had dismounted. Quietly he put down the canteen. A voice reverberated in the rock-walled hollow. "How many shells you got left, Bert?"

"Three, damn it!"

The click of a rifle lever followed. "Here, take a couple. I've got eight. But I haven't got a pistol cartridge left."

"Neither have I."

A feeling of grim satisfaction swept over Walter Malloch's partner. The Hartwells! Too old a hand to rush things, Billy Bent held himself to a measured deliberation of purpose.

"I smell smoke," said Bert Hartwell. "Tobacco."

"You're crazy. Anything in that canteen? I'm dead for a drink."

Billy Bent had forgotten about his pipe. Well, it would be the last time the Hartwells would smell that kind of smoke. Malloch was out of it. It was Billy Bent's feud, now. He heard the gurgle of water as one of them drank.

Rand Hartwell had his head tilted back drinking from the canteen. Bert's arm was raised to take it. "We've got to get some more water."

"Fine chance!" said Rand Hartwell, "the way they've got us holed up."

"I guess we picked a good hideout at that," said his brother.

Barely glancing at the two rifles leaning against the cave wall, Billy Bent stepped out. "Yes, you picked a good one."

In spite of their nerve the Hartwells experienced a jolt. A few seconds ago the rear of the cave had been empty.

"You've just about done for Malloch," said Billy slowly. "I'm here to play out his hand."

Coolly Rand Hartwell lowered the canteen and faced Billy with a sort of scornful arrogance.

Billy waited for them to go for their guns, fiercely hoping that they would.

"If Leadbetter and his warriors weren't right tight after us," said Rand Hartwell, "you wouldn't be so hot to take a hand in this."

Leadbetter? There was no breeze stirring, yet far down the basin Billy's quick eye caught a movement. Near the south entrance rose a faint cloud of dust. It took more than one rider to stir up that cloud. The champion of under dogs began to see a light hitherto obscured. The Hartwells were on the run.

"Looking for a little glory, eh?" said Bert Hartwell.

Billy Bent ignored the taunt. Once deputized members of the posse that had hunted Malloch, they were now fugitives themselves, and they had taken refuge in the same cave that had sheltered him. It must have been Billy's letter to the governor which had produced this ironic change of circumstance. Whether or not Rand Hartwell surmised it, it was in his eye to rush Billy Bent.

"I wouldn't," said Billy. "Even if you made it, I'd get that brother of yours first."

"I'll make a deal with you, Bent. Turn Bert loose and I'll take what's coming.'

"Bert, hell!" said the younger Hartwell. "Turn Rand loose and I'll

talk to the posse. And to you, too, Bent."

High-handed sons of Belial, these Hartwells! They had earned what was coming to them, and they knew it. Yet they faced him, not only unfearful, but autocratic. Nerve? Yes, and plenty of it. Rand Hartwell shrugged and, turning his back, stood looking at the dust cloud down the basin.

Suddenly, in spite of that little blue hole in Malloch's chest, the champion of under dogs knew that he could not shoot down these two who accepted the approach of the pack with such indifference. The community, Billy told himself, was justified in turning against them. But he, Billy Bent—— His eye glittered. He spoke with a certain ferocity. "You boys are wanted. In just about half an hour the men that want you will be here."

Rand Hartwell nodded. "And you haven't got the nerve to do the job."

"Shut up, you irreverent son of perdition." He wondered if a younger Billy Bent had been as hard and reckless as these two young hellions. "Sixty yards east is a crevasse. It's your only way out. Nobody knows it. Lead your horses down the rock slide, and git!"

"We aren't asking any favors of you," said Bert Hartwell, hotly. But there was a light in Billy Bent's eye which told them that he had come to the end of his rope.

When they had disappeared within the shadowy crevasse the champion of under dogs hastened back to Malloch. To the wounded man Billy's voice sounded like the crackling of a brush fire. "I just met up with Rand and Bert Hartwell."

Malloch's dull eyes gleamed with understanding.

"I was all fixed to square your account," said Billy. "But Heaven help me for a blithering old fool. I turned them loose."

A faint smile touched Malloch's lips. He nodded.

THE smoke curled lazily up from Billy Bent's pipe as he thumbed the pages of his old thesaurus. He had never been wholly satisfied with the current definition of "romance"; a stout word, a whimsical word, a word that could set you to dreaming. Billy knew that he should be getting his midday meal. But that could wait. He was deeply absorbed in a forest of words, jumping from one to another like a flying squirrel, when he heard some one coming up the west road—probably one of Budlong's hands. He would be glad of news. He wanted to know how Walt was getting along. But the voice that hailed the camp was young and fresh and somehow made Billy tingle. He stepped out of the tent, book in hand, his glasses halfway down his nose. "The high command acknowledges the lady and the horses. But who is the tall stranger accompanying you, ma'am?"

"Pardon me," laughed the girl. "Mr. Bent, this is Mr. Malloch."

"So it is." Billy pretended to adjust his glasses. "But he's wearing clothes, and a necktie. Legal holiday or something?"

Bess nodded mysteriously.

"Goodness! And I'm all out of firecrackers. But I can rustle some hot biscuits and honey, and there's a watermelon cooling in the tunnel. Rapidly he thumbed the pages of the thesaurus. "Now I thought Uncle Roget had something to say about it. But I've noticed"—Billy glared profoundly over his spectacles—"that

books can take you only so far. You've got to go the rest of the way by yourself."

"Goodness, Billy Bent, what are you driving at?"

"Romance, fair lady. Been driving at it all my life. Exploration, war, love, adventure, cow-punching, mining—and then, as Mr. Kipling says, 'Romance brought up the nine-fifteen.' It's in the air. It's in everybody! It's in everything that's worth while: self-sacrifice, hard work, bacon and beans, under dogs. Shucks! Let's get dinner.'

The afternoon was memorable. Their enthusiasm kindled him. It seemed that through them he was living something he had heretofore missed in life. He was sure he couldn't have raised a finer pair of youngsters himself. This, he realized, was his big romance.

The afternoon sun touched the ridge of the western range. The somber Bad Lands were tinted with creeping fire. The fields and houses of Ord Valley were slowly sinking into the dusk. Only a white thread of winding road showed clearly. Malloch led the horses down from the meadow.

Bess Hartwell shook hands with Billy, bade him good-by. "Billy Bent, I could hug you!"

The breeze ruffling his white hair, Billy watched them go. His heart warmed toward them. They were the kind of folks that made this Western country a lovable country, which like most things lovable, needed spanking once in a while. Trouble was the country was a little inclined to hesitate about spanking herself. She had been all ready to take the Hartwell boys over her knee. But they, somehow, had managed to get away.

The riders stopped, turned their horses. "Hey, up there!" called Malloch. "If it's all right with you I'll be back to-morrow morning."

So this was the surprise they had been keeping for him? Walt was coming back. Probably to stay at the mine until Bess returned from Montrose for the wedding. Billy cupped his hand to his ear, tried to appear exceedingly dense. "Coming back?" he shouted. "What for?"

"To work." Malloch glanced at the girl and they laughed.

Billy Bent waved his arm, and turning, trotted back to the tent. Work. That was the idea. It was time to get supper.


## CHAPTER I.

### PLENTY OF MAN.

THIS particular morning at roll call Rod Ives had no idea he would be surprised. Nothing about Captain Townsend's face suggested it. The captain usually looked as sour as he now did, when he said:

"Ives, you're relieved from duty. Report to the commissioner."

"Yes, sir," Rod said woodenly, as befitted a first-grade patrolman to his captain. Inwardly he wondered what the devil he had done now.

Holding his position in the middle of the front row, Rod wondered uncomfortably if that gunman he had beaten into a pulp three days before had had political pull.

Or perhaps the Frapelli brothers, whose pool room Rod had wrecked, had carried out their threat to get his badge. Let's see, that had been five nights ago, when the mob at

# No Ghosts

BY

T. T. FLYNN

Two hands are better than two guns—with a man behind them.

the Frapelli joint had tried to stop an arrest. Not too far back for trouble.

Roll call broke up. Captain Townsend left the room and the barrage of consolation rolled in. Officer MacHale patted Rod on the back solemnly. "Too bad, my boy. You were a good copper while you lasted."

Officer King said reflectively: "Let's see, the last guy I knew who went up before the commissioner was Dan Taylor. He drew five months' suspension that trip."

Rod hunched his muscular shoulders and looked down at his big hands, which always seemed to be in the way, good for nothing but pounding the face of some underworld rat, who would probably get sprung by a shyster lawyer in the

ordinary course of events. Now, for want of anything better to say, he beamed at the lot of them.

"Wisecrack while you can, boys. Haven't you heard?"

"We'll hear by to-night," Officer Gilligan replied sadly. "We'll go home thinking 'Ives was a good boy, but he didn't have enough imagination. He couldn't tell a voter from a punching bag, so the commissioner counted him out.' And, by the way, what is it we haven't heard?"

Captain Townsend was out of earshot. Rod regarded them benignly. "It's a secret," he confided. "You'll know by to-night." On that he made what he hoped was a dignified exit.

However, his entrance into the commissioner's front office an hour and ten minutes later struck Rod as being clumsy and packed with guilt. His shoes clumped, drawing derisive glances; his hands felt larger than ever; the room seemed abruptly smaller when he crowded through the doorway.

It never occurred to Rod that his double-breasted blue serge molded over lean hips and wide shoulders; that when he grinned sheepishly he hardly looked his twenty-eight years; or that the blond hair, threatening to curl but not quite making it, could make women's fingers itch: or that his solidness, the slow deliberate movements of his powerful hands, the direct glance from his blue eyes, the good-natured crinkle at the eye corners could make men feel at ease around him.

Two unlucky devils in uniforms were there before him, several plain-clothes men, three women, an important-looking man in a cutaway, and some small fry who probably had letters from precinct leaders. This, evidently, was the commissioner's busy morning. A clerk popped in, saw him, and asked: "What's your name?"

"Ives, Seventeenth Precinct," Rod answered glumly.

The clerk turned to a desk and consulted a paper. "R. Ives?" he questioned expectantly, and every one in the room gave attention to what was happening.

"That's right," Rod agreed. He wished some one would assign the clerk to an outlying precinct, where he'd lose some of his officiousness.

"Step this way. The commissioner will see you now."

Which, Rod thought as he clumped in ahead of every one else, could probably mean no less than the trial board.

EVERY one knew about the commissioner, who had come up from the ranks and was as hard-boiled as the Centre Street pavement. Some liked him, some didn't; you felt either one way or the other. But Rod was merely curious, as he looked into the commissioner's spare face.

Surprisingly, he found no disapproval. The commissioner was leaning back in his chair, staring noncommittally. "So you're Ives?" the commissioner said.

"Yes, sir. Seventeenth——"

The commissioner gestured impatiently. "I know all that. I understand you're pretty loose with your fists, Ives."

Here it was, and Rod answered with resignation. "If there's been any complaints, maybe I can——"

"Never mind that," the commissioner cut him off, still with that appraising manner. "I understand you never use a club or a gun."

"Never needed it yet, sir."

"Tough guy, are you?"

The commissioner spoke as if they were standing together in the squad

room, and Rod felt better. He grinned, blinked down at his hands, answered mildly:

"Never figured I was tough, sir. I hate trouble. Sometimes things get stirred up a little and I calm it down quick as possible."

"What would you do if a heist guy pulled a gun on you across the street, Ives?"

"I guess I'd try to drop him with a bullet first, sir."

"You'd shoot then?"

"Sure. But if I could get my hands on him——"

The commissioner chuckled. He wasn't such a bad fellow after all. "I believe you'd have him then, Ives. You're big enough. I understand from Townsend you've done it often enough."

Rod grinned uncertainly.

The commissioner leaned forward and shot a question across his desk.

"What would you do, Ives, if a ghost jumped at you?"

THE question was a trick one, of course. Any answer might be wrong. Rod told the truth.

"Kind of hard to say, sir. No ghost ever jumped out at me."

"But if one did?"

"I guess I'd try to get my hands on him and see what a good ghost felt like."

"You wouldn't shoot first and think about it afterward?"

"If I can just get my hands on anything, I feel better about it," Rod explained. He knew it sounded awkward, even if logical to him. It was kind of hard to make the commissioner, or any one else for that matter, understand how comfortable it was to get a good grip on a man. If the other man wasn't a fighter, a good hold was generally enough; but if he was a fighter, you had him in close then, where you could think about it while you handled him.

But the commissioner did seem to understand. He nodded.

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Ives. It makes you just the man I want. I've a job for you if you care to take it. Nothing official, but if you handle it smoothly it won't do you any harm in the department. Captain Townsend understands, and I'll not forget it. He seemed to think you were just the man."

Rod grinned uncertainly. "If you think so, sir, I'll be tickled to do it."

"Understand me, Ives, you don't have to. There may be, in fact there probably is, danger in this. You may even be killed."

Rod stretched out his big hands.

"I guess I'll get killed sometime, anyway," Rod answered contentedly. "Long time ago I stopped worrying about that. If I can just get my hands on anybody who's got ideas along that line, maybe I'll have something to say about it."

"You never worry, Ives?"

"Well, no. I tackle it as it comes along, sir. Seems to work."

The commissioner exhaled a breath suspiciously like a faint sigh.

"A very good idea, too, Ives. Some of us would do better by trying that. You'll either get nowhere or go a long way on it. Now then, here's your resignation, ready to sign. You can be off the force a year, if necessary, and be reinstated. Your salary will be paid by the man I'm sending you to, double what you draw on the force."

"Gosh, commissioner——"

"You'll earn it. Sign here, and go to the office of J. D. Ames, at 71 Wall Street. He'll tell you what to do."

"Ain't—isn't that Ames, the

banker, sir?" Rod asked, as he signed his resignation.

"It is," said the commissioner. "He's expecting you. Good luck, Ives."

ROD found himself walking out past the curious faces in the other room, and descending to the street in somewhat of a fog as to what was happening. But double pay and the commissioner's blessing seemed to take care of everything. In no time at all Rod clumped into a much larger and better furnished office behind a svelte, businesslike young woman.

"This, Mr. Ames," said the young woman, looking up past Rod's thick shoulders in a queer way women seemed to do when near him, "is Mr. Ives, whom you were expecting."

"Eh? What's that? Oh, Ives—— Great saints in heaven! Is all *this* the man? That will do, Miss Marsden."

Miss Marsden tore her eyes away and departed with an expression close to dreaminess.

The slender, erect little man, who had put down a letter and bounced to his feet, now walked around the big desk and scrutinized his caller.

"There's enough of you," he said, as one might judge a good show horse. "A lady's man, eh? I'll bet."

Rod felt his ears getting red. "No, sir. Don't have anything to do with 'em. They make me nervous."

"Hrumph! No wonder, if they all put on that dying-calf look Miss Marsden just displayed. Didn't think she was capable of it; always seemed to be of sterner stuff. Now then, do you understand what you are to do?"

"Take orders from you, sir."

"Exactly. I could have hired a detective; but they always do the wrong thing. I spoke to my friend, Commissioner Seabrooke, and he assures me you're the man I want. By the way, have you a gun?"

"Not off duty, sir."

Ames waved a hand carelessly. "I'll take care of that. Wait in the outer office."

Ames was pursing his thin lips nervously as he turned away. His face was pink, smooth; his hair a white, silky shock; he was well past sixty. But nervous energy boiled in the man like bubbles in a rare old champagne. Age had improved and ripened old J. D. Ames.

Despite all his energy, Ames looked worried. The pinkish skin below his eyes was circled darkly, as if he had not slept much lately or had been under great strain.

For the next three quarters of an hour Rod sat in the outer office watching people come and go, and wishing uncomfortably that the stunning Miss Marsden wouldn't look his way so often. Then a buzzer sounded softly. Miss Marsden popped into the inner office, stayed some minutes, then appeared in a lightweight coat and a stunning little hat perched smartly over one eye.

"Come with me, Mr. Ives," she requested.

Miss Marsden said nothing, as the elevator dropped them to the street level and they walked outside. She hailed a passing taxi, gave the driver an East Forty-second Street address.

Several minutes later Rod looked over and met a dreamy look. He felt his ears getting red, so looked out at the midwinter sunshine on the sidewalk. "Nice weather, isn't it?" he said vaguely.

"I've often wondered what a po-

liceman thinks about," Miss Marsden murmured.

"Some people say they never think."

Miss Marsden laughed. Rod looked at her. "Where do we happen to be going?"

"Gothic City."

"I mean—what do I do?"

"Nothing," said Miss Marsden. And that was all. When the taxi stopped before one of the big apartment buildings in Gothic City, Miss Marsden said, "Wait for me," and ran inside. She returned quickly with a traveling case. "Now then," she said, while the driver waited, "where do you live, Mr. Ives?"

"Eighteenth Street, off Seventh Avenue."

Miss Marsden told the driver to go there. When the cab stopped before the brick house which Rod indicated, Miss Marsden said:

"You're to bring one bag filled with clothes. Please don't ask questions. I can't answer them."

IN the face of that attitude there was nothing to do but pack. Rod did so hurriedly, tossed an overcoat over one arm, and went out to the cab.

"South Street, down beyond Fulton Market," Miss Marsden said, to the driver.

They rode down to the lower tip of the island, where the cliffs and canyons of the financial district lay on the right and the East River piers lined the water front on the left. Following Miss Marsden's order, the driver turned out on an open concrete pier.

At the head of the left slip two speed boats and a rakish cabin cruiser were moored. Farther along, steep steps led down to a float. Moored at the end of the float, steadied by ropes held by two men on each side of the slip, was a large multicolored amphibian plane.

Miss Marsden paid the driver and dismissed him.

A nattily uniformed young man came running up the steps. The triple motors of the big amphibian were idling slowly. "Do we fly in that?" Rod asked uncertainly.

Miss Marsden gave him an amused look. "I'm afraid we do." And, as the young man sprang on the pier and stepped to them, she addressed him with the ease of familiarity.

"Will you put these bags aboard, Tom? This is Mr. Ives, who is going along. Mr. Sears."

Natty was the only word for the blue uniform Mr. Sears wore. Below the jaunty white yachting cap the face of Mr. Sears was distinctly handsome. His greeting was pleasant, his glance curious, until Rod absently squeezed his hand; then Mr. Sears winced.

"Everything is ready," Sears said to Miss Marsden, as he picked up the bags. "I didn't know we were to have you along this trip. Where do we go?"

"Don't you know, Tom?"

"Haven't the slightest. The plane was ordered here, that's all we know. A reporter has spotted it already and has been pestering for information. You passed him back there when you came in."

Rod hadn't noticed the young man loitering at the shore end of the pier. Looking now, he saw only a turned-up overcoat collar and a back which displayed no interest in them.

"Wouldn't you just know a reporter would smell this out? J. D. will have a fit. I wonder if that man can't be run away." Miss Marsden looked expectantly at Rod.

"He'd be a handful," Rod said, smiling. "Nobody has any luck run-

ning a reporter away. Might as well take 'em and make the best of it."

Sears eyed Rod with a slight air of distaste. It seemed to say, "I have to be polite, but what the devil are you doing with a knock-out like Miss Marsden, when I could do the job so much better?"

Rod felt a similar distaste as he looked toward the unsuspecting reporter. A bunched fist might suggest healthier spots for the man to be. Before there was any chance of putting that into effect, however, a big limousine drove swiftly onto the pier and stopped beside them. A chauffeur leaped out, opened the rear door, and the slight figure of J. D. Ames hopped out and assisted a young lady to alight.

Miss Marsden spoke to Rod, sharply. "Stop that reporter! Don't let him get to Mr. Ames!"

## CHAPTER II.

### SUSPICION OF DANGER.

THE reporter was a slender young man wearing a Chesterfield overcoat and dark hat with a turned-down brim. He tried to dodge past as Rod loomed up before him. A big hand caught his shoulder and flipped him round. "Beat it!" Rod ordered calmly.

"Let go, you big lug!" was the snarled retort. "I've got business with Ames!"

"Newspaper man, hey? Where's your press card?"

"None of your damn business!"

Rod held his catch at arm's length and contemplated it.

"If you got in a newspaper office you'd yell for a guide," he decided. "You look like a chiseler and a shyster to me. Scram!"

"I've got to get this for my paper. What's it worth to give me the dope on where Abby Ames is going?" A thin hand plunged inside the overcoat and brought out a bill fold.

Rod shook him until his teeth rattled. "Do you beat it?" he drawled.

"I'll have you run in for this!"

"You asked for it," Rod sighed. His open-handed slap should have been audible to J. D. Ames, who was hurrying down the steps to the float.

The stranger's head pivoted halfway around from the impact. His knees went loose—and Rod let him drop and hurried down to the float.

The inside of the big hull was fully as luxurious as J. D. Ames's own office. Miss Marsden and the young lady were seated. J. D. Ames was striding back and forth in the aisle. His pink face was red with emotion, his shock of silky white hair was fairly bristling as he snorted:

"Of all the confounded luck! I go to all this trouble to get out unseen and then stumble over a newspaperman at the last moment! This will be public property before we're out of sight!"

"If that was a newspaperman," Rod said, "then I'm a Sunday-school teacher."

Ames stopped short. "What's that? Not a newspaperman?"

"No, sir. He looked like a gyp to me. I've seen plenty like him. He wouldn't know what to do with a job."

"Gyp? You mean a criminal, Ives?"

"If he hasn't got a record, he ought to have, sir. Just to be on the safe side I slapped him down. He won't see anything for a few minutes."

"You mean you knocked him unconscious, Ives?"

"Maybe he laid down and closed his eyes to fool me. I didn't wait to see after I slapped him down."

"Slapped him down, eh? Well, well, you're taking hold in good shape, Ives." Ames smiled contentedly.

At that moment the three motors burst into a full-throated roar. The amphibian had floated to the head of the slip and now began to slap and pound over the swells as it gathered speed.

Climbing fast, the plane swung northward. Manhattan dropped behind in smoky haze. The checkerboard surface of Long Island passed beneath and the big plane droned out over the open sea.

Sears, who was the copilot, came back and bent deferentially over Ames, who spoke rapidly to him.

Rod studied the profile of Abby Ames. He knew all about her. Who didn't? Hardly a week that Miss Abby Ames's picture or name was not in the newspapers. America's richest heiress, publicity had it.

She was nineteen, Rod recalled. Held in trust for her were two major fortunes, and when J. D. Ames was gathered to his fathers Abby would inherit his money, also. There she sat, slender, rather pale, quiet. Her clothes were simple, her manner unassuming. A darned pretty girl, Rod thought. You wouldn't think she had fifty bucks a week. Miss Marsden looked much more the grand heiress.

Sears returned to the control cabin. Land was out of sight now. A few minutes later the plane banked gradually and drove south.

"Now what?"—Rod wondered; and he continued to wonder as the plane raced into the south hour after hour.

The afternoon waned, the sun slipped lower; midwinter gave way to spring and spring to summer. Just before sunset Rod became aware they were skirting the Florida coast.

Over the trip hovered an air of mysterious suspense. The other pilot came back twice and talked to Ames. He was black-haired, long-faced, quick and easy in his movements. Occasionally Abby Ames said a few words to her grandfather or Miss Marsden. Late in the afternoon Sears brought out boxes of sandwiches.

After nightfall they passed over the slow, circling beam of a lighthouse. Then a city—which for this far south must be Miami—appeared on the horizon ahead, and was quickly dropped behind.

At eight thirty by Rod's watch, the motors were cut off and the plane began to glide down in a wide spiral. Rod made out dim lights below. Then the amphibian scudded over low swells, until suddenly there was no water and the racing engines drew them onto a sandy beach and cut out.

THROUGH the port Rod saw lighted house windows and a brightly illuminated porch some distance away. Sears hurried past him to the cabin door; outside a man in white duck trousers and coat ducked under the wing ahead of a giant Negro.

Ames stood up, clapping a shapeless black hat on his head. In ears slightly deafened by the motor noise Rod heard him say: "We're here in good shape, at least."

It seemed to Rod the remark was almost a sigh of relief. He wondered why.

Abby Ames was getting out, followed by Miss Marsden. Rod joined them, as the man in white spoke jerkily to Abby Ames.

"We wasn't lookin' for you folks, Miss Ames."

A lean hand nervously rubbed a stubbled chin. The man was upset,

disturbed. His eyes rolled from them to the plane windows, through which J. D. Ames was visible.

Abby Ames smiled. "It's a surprise visit, Hanley. How is everything on Ghost Island?"

Hanley hesitated. He was a tall, rawboned man. Under sandy eyebrows his glance was shifting nervously. And his delayed answer appeared reluctant.

"I reckon we're so-so. Same's always. You know how it goes here. Uh—I sure wish I'd got word you was comin'. We'd been more ready."

Abby Ames laughed. "We'll take what we find, Hanley. Do you still have mysteries on the island?"

Hanley gave her a startled look. "Uh—mysteries?"

"Ghosts, Hanley. Do you remember the night I thought I saw a ghost and ran screaming to Mrs. Hanley?"

The smile of agreement on Hanley's long, thin face looked weak. Before he could answer, Ames emerged, speaking briskly.

"Good evening, Hanley. The place is ready as usual, I suppose?"

Hanley bobbed his head. "Yes, sir, Mr. Ames. I always keep everything ready. But—but I wasn't lookin' for you to drop in this way."

Ames waved that aside.

"Evidently not," he remarked dryly. "You'd have shaved and put on clean clothes at least. Do that at once. You know I don't like sloppiness. We'll go to the house now."

Hanley turned to the giant Negro, whose black face glistened with perspiration.

"You, Grit. Take a load of suitcases to the house an' git Septimus to help you with the rest."

Manley led the way with a flashlight. In the dark, moonless night the lighted house proved a surprise. From high in the air the faint lights below had not promised much. From the beach the place had looked somewhat larger; but when they reached the house it loomed large and massive before them.

Built of dark rock, two stories high, with wings extending out on each side, it was far larger and more substantial than one would have expected in this out-of-the-way place.

The front porch glowed with electric light. Somewhere behind the house the rapid exhaust of a small gasoline motor explained the source of the light power.

Hanley opened the front door and walked in hastily ahead of them, which was the wrong thing to do, Rod saw. J. D. Ames frowned and spoke about it sharply as he followed his granddaughter in.

"Have you forgotten your manners, Hanley?"

Hanley had stepped to a doorway at the right and was looking into a large living room. He turned, rubbing his jaw nervously, blinking.

"No, sir, I reckon I haven't, sir. I—I was lookin' for the old woman —uh—for Mrs. Hanley."

"That's right. Where is she? This is the first time within memory she's failed to meet us at the door. Where is she, Hanley?"

Hanley grinned weakly as he stood aside for them to enter the living room.

"I reckon she's around. Most likely upstairs givin' a last lick to your rooms."

"Call her down here," said Ames.

ROD sniffed the air in the living room. He couldn't see the tobacco smoke, but there had been quite a bit of it in the room recently. Cigarette smoke. Several white dabs of ash were visible on the rug.

The odor strongly suggested Egyptian tobacco. Somehow it didn't quite fit in with Hanley's personality. A copper ash tray was on a table in the center of the room. Empty now, it had been used recently.

Looking about, Rod saw the cigarette ends in a shallow fireplace opposite the table. One of them was still giving off a faint curl of smoke. He sauntered over to the fireplace. Queer. The cigarette ends were of two kinds—plain and cork-tipped.

The almost invisible curl of smoke was coming from one of the cork-tipped ends. Another, with a plain-tipped end, caught his eye. He picked it up, then tossed it back. Queer again. The end was still damp. The coal had been mashed out. But this plain-tipped cigarette had been snuffed out at about the same time the cork-tipped one, a brand of Egyptian tobacco, had been discarded.

Abby Ames had moved silently to his side. She looked into the fireplace, and then up at him, smiling slightly. Her remark was meant for his ears alone.

"I see you have sharp eyes, Mr. Ives."

Rod grinned at her.

"I'm always curious, Miss Ames."

"'Scuse me, please, folks."

Hanley had come up behind them. Now, taking a small hearth broom from beside the fireplace, he swept the cigarette ends and ashes to the back of the fireplace.

"Kind of messy," he said.

Abby Ames said: "I didn't know you smoked cigarettes, Hanley. It always used to be a pipe, didn't it? And Egyptian cigarettes, too."

"I took it up since you was here last, Miss Abby."

"I see you smoke two brands."

"I like to change around."

Her smile had a trace of mischief in it. "Let me have one of your Egyptian cigarettes, Hanley. I had no idea I'd find anything like that here."

There was no doubt that Hanley was embarrassed and nervous. He swallowed before he answered.

"I smoked the last one jus' before you folks come. I'm real sorry, Miss Abby. I am."

The same mischief was in her smile. "I believe you're pulling my leg, Hanley. Where is the empty box?"

Hanley swallowed again. His eyes wandered past her to the hall doorway.

"I reckon the missus threw it out," he said hastily. And he raised his voice and moved away from the fireplace. "Emma, you threw that empty box out that had them Egyptian cigarettes in it, didn't you?"

She had come into the doorway as he spoke. She answered with a trace of asperity:

"Threw what box out? Oh, yes, I put it in the kitchen trash."

And she went on hurriedly to greet J. D. Ames. "Howdy do, Mr. Ames. Howdy, Miss Abby. It's certainly nice to have you folks here in the house again. I'm real sorry I wasn't down here when you came. Soon as I saw it was you, I ran upstairs to fix your rooms."

She was smiling, but it seemed to Rod the smile came with more of an effort than it had to Hanley.

She was a massive creature, with a big full face, almost masculine in line. Graying hair was drawn back into a tight, severe knot, and her features had a dour cast, as if she seldom smiled.

Ames said to her: "We're all rather hungry. Can you get us some food, Mrs. Hanley?"

"Yes, sir. I'll fix it in a hurry," she told him quickly. "I reckon Hanley can show you to your rooms. Tell him anything you want done while I'm busy in the kitchen, Mr. Ames."

She moved out of the room with solid, heavy steps.

Thoughtfully Rod watched her go; then eyed Hanley, who had joined Ames at the end of the room and was getting orders. Abby Ames had remained at his side. She chuckled now and spoke softly, again only for his ears.

"Are you usually so thoughtful?"

Smiling, she was waiting for his answer. He gave it under his breath, with a question of his own.

"There's nothing to be thoughtful about, is there?"

She sobered. Her reply brought them closer together, for there was anxiety in it, and a suspicion of danger, and confidence and trust in him.

"I don't know." She added: "And don't say anything to grandfather. He has enough worry now."

## CHAPTER III.

### STRANGERS?

THE big house was well furnished, but not richly. The rooms were large, the ceilings high. If there were any other house servants besides the Hanleys, Rod did not see them.

Formality was cast aside, except for the fact that the two plane pilots were quartered in a different wing. Rod was given a room across the hall from Abby Ames.

They all gathered at the same table, under the beamed ceiling of a big dining room. Ames presided at the head, like a pink-cheeked patriarch. But he spoke little, being absorbed in his own thoughts. Without stimulus from him, conversation lagged.

Mrs. Hanley served the meal with the assistance of her husband, who had shaved and changed into clean whites. The food was surprisingly good.

After the meal Ames spoke bluntly to the plane pilots.

"Bennett, you and Sears secure the plane for the night, then I'll not need you any more. Miss Marsden, bring the brief cases to the library. I have some dictation for you. Ives, come along to the library with me."

The library was upstairs, at the end of the hall running past Rod's room. It was a quiet place.

Ames closed the door and began to speak briskly, watching Rod's face. "You don't know why you're here, Ives?"

"No, sir."

"Good! I hope no one else does, either. We're here for a visit; a week, two weeks, perhaps longer. My nerves are bad. I need the rest. But that isn't all."

Ames had started to pace restlessly back and forth, hands behind him, shoulders hunched slightly forward. "You've heard about my granddaughter? Read about her?"

"Plenty."

"A great many people have. My own health didn't bring me down here. My granddaughter's welfare did. I'm a wealthy man. Abby is a rich girl—and will be richer. She is too well known, I am sorry to say. Threats have been made against her life and her safety. Kidnaping threats. Warnings of injury. Demands for money."

Rod nodded. "That's easy to understand, sir. Any one with that much money is a target for cranks."

"It's worse than that!" Ames snapped, running fingers through his silky white hair. "We're used

to a certain amount of that. You can't escape cranks once you're in the public eye. This is different. Crime seems to have changed. I have friends who have been victimized by kidnapers and who have never dared make public the fact. Abby has been in increasing danger lately."

This was familiar ground. Rod scowled from his own feeling about the subject. "I've heard things along that line which would make you open your eyes, sir."

"I have no doubt of it," Ames agreed grimly. "But my eyes are wide enough as it is. Abby has been well guarded—too well. She's been little better than a prisoner for the last year.

"It's getting on her nerves. Mine, too. She has rebelled against it. I have owned this island for many years, but of late we haven't visited it. I doubt if the general public ever associates us with it any more. We've come down here to rest and relax a little."

Ames pursed his lips, stood still, eying Rod.

"I could have brought guards; any number of them," he said abruptly. "And we would have had the same old routine and undoubtedly a leakage as to where we were. So I brought you, Ives. Alone. When we left New York I gave out a statement that we were flying up into the north woods for some winter sport.

"No one," said Ames emphatically, "knew where our real destination was; not even Miss Marsden, my own private secretary, or the crew of my plane. We were out of sight of land, flying north, before I gave orders to turn south. We kept fairly out to sea, and passed over Miami after dark. The Hanleys did not know we were coming. As far as I know, no living soul can have any suspicion that we are here on Ghost Island."

Rod opened and closed his big right fist. "Queer name for an island, sir."

NOT at all. The place has an old reputation of harboring ghosts. Superstition, of course. Lights have been reported at the other end of the island—will-o'-the-wisps, some form of phosphorescent glow or pure imagination, I should imagine. However, I asked Commissioner Seabrooke to get me one of his steadiest and coolest men. One who wouldn't be stampeded by ghost stories or imagination. One I could depend on at any time of the day or night."

Ames cleared his throat, said curtly:

"He sent you. You're my granddaughter's sole bodyguard, Ives. I've brought along a German Luger automatic, with a shoulder holster and spare clips of cartridges. But I want no wild blundering with a gun—no shooting at ghosts or shadows after dark."

Rod nodded. He was at ease, now that he knew what he was to do. "Are you going to keep that plane here?" he questioned slowly.

Ames eyed him sharply. "Why?"

"You're sure now no one knows where you are. If it leaves, you won't be sure."

"Precisely. It will stay. I'll confess, Ives, I'm somewhat worried about the man whom you—er—slapped down on the dock. Were you certain he wasn't a newspaperman?"

"I've seen plenty of newspapermen, sir. He wasn't one. He even tried to pass out money to find out where Miss Ames was going."

"I don't like it."

"Nor do I. If I'd known all this

back in New York, I'd have slapped the truth out of him. If he was waiting at the plane before you got there, it means some one was keeping a close watch. That means plenty of money and organization. When you get that, you've got brains," Rod said. He dropped a troubled look to his clenched fist.

"I'm not afraid," he said slowly. "But I'm not too easy about being here on the island without any chance to get help."

Stubbornly, Ames said: "No one can possibly know where we are." His insistence of that was almost as if he were trying to convince himself of the fact.

Rod shrugged. "Maybe you're right, sir."

"And," Ames went on, "if there is any trouble, we can fly out of here in a few minutes. The plane will be kept ready night and day."

"How do you keep in touch with the mainland?"

"Hanley has a good, fast boat. He makes weekly trips to Miami. If necessary the plane can fly there."

"And perhaps be spotted and mentioned in the local papers, and be wired all over the country," Rod pointed out carefully.

"There will be no trouble," Ames insisted.

"I hope not," Rod said. "I'll take that gun, sir. Do you want me to watch to-night?"

"I see no use in it to-night. We all need sleep after the trip down here."

The study door opened. Miss Marsden entered with two brief cases. Ames spoke to her.

"Take Ives to my room and give him a gun and cartridges you will find in the Gladstone bag, Miss Marsden."

The room was halfway along the hall, on the right. Rod stood in the doorway and watched Miss Marsden open the bag. An expression of distaste was on her face as she lifted out the Luger.

"Do you think there will be any trouble?" she asked, as she gave the weapon and holster to him. When he cocked the pistol experimentally, Miss Marsden shivered. "Please be careful!" she begged. "I'm afraid of guns!"

"They're safe enough if one isn't a fool," Rod said absently. "I guess there won't be any trouble. I wouldn't let it worry me if I were you."

He heard a chuckle behind him. Abby Ames was standing in the doorway, smiling.

"So you don't expect any trouble, Mr. Ives?"

Rod grinned back at her. "Do you?" he asked.

"I'm leaving it all to you," she told him. "I'm going to sleep soundly to-night. It will be like a vacation from prison."

She was one grand little lady, Rod thought again. It must be hard to live day and night in expectation of harm or violence. But he had a job to do, and he asked:

"What about the ghosts?"

She laughed at the memory. "I was nine when I followed my dog along the beach one evening. Then a light moved out of the palms and started toward me. I ran screaming back to the house. Hanley went to look and found nothing. I probably imagined it."

"Does Hanley understand what I'm here for?"

"I heard grandfather tell him."

Rod told them both good night, and went across the hall to his room. There he prowled back and forth for some minutes, moving silently for all his bulk. He was thinking. No matter what approach he took to

the job, he came back each time to those two cigarettes in the fireplace.

Hanley had lied about them.

It was a safe bet, Rod decided, the man who had been smoking the cork-tipped Egyptian cigarette had carried the box away with him.

That made one man who was not supposed to be about the place; one man who had been in that living room when the plane swept down to land; one man whose presence the Hanleys had not divulged for some reason.

And a man who would be smoking cork-tipped cigarettes probably belonged to the big cities. What was the answer to that?

Furthermore, if Hanley was still a pipe smoker, there must have been a second stranger here in the house when the plane arrived.

Abby Ames had keen eyes and a fast mind. She knew all that. She was disturbed about it, so much so that she did not want her grandfather to know. Rod smiled to himself as he thought of her. A grand girl. And she was leaving everything up to him.

HE dropped the automatic into his coat pocket, and went downstairs. The front porch was still lighted. He walked to the beach and found Bennett and Sears working on the plane.

They had put out anchor ropes and were lashing canvas coverings over the motors, using a ladder they must have gotten at the house.

Rod watched for a minute and then suggested: "If you had to get in the air quick, those canvas covers'd be in the way, wouldn't they?"

Sears looked down and answered curtly. "I understand you're here to guard Miss Ames. We'll handle the plane."

"Sorry," Rod apologized. "I'm not trying to start an argument. But Ames told me this plane would be ready to fly any minute. It won't be with the motors covered."

Sears muttered irritably to himself and did not reply. Bennett spoke lightly.

"I'm covering the motors as a precaution. I'll speak to Mr. Ames about it, and uncover them if he thinks best. Tom's a bit miffed because he's not in there talking to Miss Marsden. She's kept him dizzy for months now."

Rod left them and walked on along the beach. In the loose sand his steps were noiseless The surf kept up a restless monotone. Beyond the flat sea horizon at his left a full moon was rising.

Behind him from the house stole the restless throbbing of the generator. It was like a comforting pulse.

With no idea how big the island was, Rod kept on. It was useless to question the Hanleys about the strangers who had been in the house. They would only lie. But the island could not be big. If strangers were on it, some trace of their presence would be evident.

The dark line of palm trees along the beach became clearer as the moon rose. Gradually the beach began to curve to the right. The plane, the house, and the faint pulsing motor exhaust vanished. If it had not been for those cigarette ends the island's peace would have been absolute. No wonder Ames felt secure here.

Rod stopped abruptly. Some hundred and fifty yards away a match had flared under the palms.

Queerly enough, Rod thought first of the commissioner's query as to what he would do if he saw a ghost. And now, as he had said then, he plunged forward toward the spot,

flexing his big hands. Ghosts did not strike matches; but men who smoked Egyptian cigarettes did.

## CHAPTER IV.

### FOUR TALKS AT MIDNIGHT.

THE match had flared under the palms, where the shadows were still thick. When Rod got to the spot he found nothing.

A palm leaning out over the beach at that point made him certain he was at the spot where he had seen the light. Behind the palms lay a dense thicket of scrub trees and bushes. He tested the wall of growth. It was almost impenetrable. No man could have run back in it without his crashing progress being audible.

He swore under his breath, prowled about for a few minutes, then went on warily. The beach continued to curve. It broke off abruptly into a small cove.

The place was as deserted as the rest of this end of the island. The same line of palms and tangled undergrowth ran back of the narrow beach line. Beyond the cove, which was several hundred yards wide at the north, the beach curved sharply back toward the house. This leeward side of the island lacked the harsh murmur of surf.

Rod looked behind every now and then. Half a mile beyond the cove a quick glance over his shoulder caught a dark shadow vanishing furtively under the palms. He turned back instantly, keeping to the edge of the water, veering in suddenly when he came abreast of the spot.

At first it appeared to be another mysterious disappearance. Then he made out a dark, poised form half-concealed in the thicket edge. He jumped toward it.

The figure fled noisily back into the dense undergrowth. Following through the tangle, Rod grabbed the man. A fist glanced off his head.

Rod laughed. His hands had something now. A cheek bone jarred under his big fist. His other fist sank to the wrist in a muscular stomach. The man, gasped with pain.

"Boss, boss, don' kill me!"

"I thought so! Stand still, you!" The man obeyed. "What were you following me for?"

"Befo' Judas, boss, I was jes' tryin' to keep outa yo' way!"

"How did you get here from the other side of the island?"

"Scuse me, suh, I wasn't over on dat side."

"Don't lie to me! You struck a match over there, and then got out of the way when I started looking for you!"

"No, suh! Please, suh, I ain't been offn dis side of de island tonight. I jus' takin' me some air here on de beach—an' I seed you walkin' by. I figured you was maybe Mistah Hanley wid some moah work, so I jes' keep quiet an' come erlong behind fo' company. Dat's de truth, suh."

"Does Hanley visit the south end of the island much?"

"Maybe er little, suh. He de boss man. I jes' lives back of de big house with my ole woman an' kids. Septimus, dat's me. Septimus Daley."

Rod released the man. He remembered Hanley speaking the name. "How many more of you live on the island?" he asked.

"Three families of ussen, suh. We does de sweat work an' keeps watch on de big house when Mistah Hanley an' de missus go away in de boat."

"Where do they go? Miami?"

"I don' erzactly know, suh. Sometimes Mistah Hanley go erlone for three-foah days."

"Come along," Rod said.

Septimus was big and black. His shirt was torn. He looked silent, subdued, uneasy. But his denial of being on the other side of the island seemed truthful enough.

"Any place a man could stay down at the south end of the island?" Rod questioned.

"'Deed, suh, I don' know," Septimus muttered uneasily. "De boss man tell us to stay erway from there."

ONCE more the beach curved gently ahead of them. The rapid exhaust of the generator engine was again audible. Septimus jumped as a flashlight beam bathed them in light. Behind it Hanley's voice spoke sharply.

"What are you two doing out here on the beach?"

"I jes' takin' de moonlight an' run into dis gemman," Septimus replied hastily.

"Get on home, Septimus!"

Septimus departed quickly. Hanley put out the light and waited a moment. "There's nothin' at the other end of the island," he said slowly. "You're wastin' your time foolin' around there. Come on back to the house and I'll show you around, if you've got to look."

Rod went with him in noncommittal silence. In the moonlight, he found that the whole northern tip of the island had been cleared of all growth but palms. Grass had been planted and carefully tended.

"The blacks live over there," Hanley said, pointing. "Three families of them, an' all lazy as all get-out. Tries a man to fool with 'em."

He led the way on beyond the house.

Rod saw that the beach at this end of the island curved in also, forming another, smaller cove, shielded by a narrow spit from the open ocean. A small spidery landing stage ran out into the water; at its shore end a white boathouse squatted on the beach. Against the landing stage a speedy cabin cruiser was moored.

"Nice boat. Go out in it much?"

"Not much. Got plenty to keep me busy on the island here," Hanley said.

"If I had a boat like that, I'd be out fishing all the time."

"Don't like to fish. There's a skiff in the boathouse for the blacks to fish from. They catch all we can use. The old woman and I run up to Miami now and then for a day. That's all the going we do."

Hanley was lying again. Rod said nothing.

"This is all," Hanley said, after a pause. "Want to go to the house now?"

"I'll stay out a little longer. Good night."

Hanley looked at him for a moment, drawled a slow, "Good night," and walked toward the house.

When the back door of the house closed behind Hanley, Rod completed the circuit of the island by strolling on around the beach to the big amphibian plane. Deserted now, motors covered, it rested there on the sand.

The porch lights were still on. He entered the house without knocking. But as he moved silently to the wide staircase, the full-bosomed Mrs. Hanley appeared in the doorway at his left with a soft rustle of skirts. Her full face looked more dour than ever. Her voice had the same manlike rasp.

"You in for the night?" It bordered on a challenge.

"I seem to be in," Rod told her, smiling.

"Then I'll lock up. We ain't used to staying up all hours this way."

Flat-footed, solid, she moved to the door, took a key from her full gray skirt and locked the door with an emphatic twist. Rod waited, smiling as she turned back.

"I'm apt to be in and out any time of the night, Mrs. Hanley. You'd better give me a key."

"What do you want to traipse in and out for, young man?"

"No telling. Like your husband, I might go out for a walk."

"He went out looking for you."

"Did he?" Rod asked innocently.

She stared at him. Her next remark was bluntly challenging.

"What do you mean by that?"

Rod beamed at her. "Do I mean anything? Shall we go up and see Mr. Ames about the key?"

She thrust the key at him.

"Good night, Mrs. Hanley. Don't lose any sleep worrying about what I do."

"Good night," she said ungraciously.

She was standing in the hall, staring up after him, when he passed the stair landing and went on up to the wing where he was quartered. Bennett and Sears were presumably in their rooms in the other wing.

THE library door was shut, but the murmur of Ames's voice came out. He was dictating to Miss Marsden with seemingly inexhaustible energy.

Rod had hardly closed his door when a light knock swung him back to it. Abby Ames was outside in a rather ravishing negligee.

"I was reading when I heard you come in," she said, smiling. "I'm horribly curious." She tilted her head and looked judicious. "From the stickers and rubbish clinging to your suit, I'd deduce, sir, you have been prowling. Have you discovered anything?"

Rod chuckled. "As the old woman said about the reports of her gossiping, 'Maybe I have, and maybe I haven't, but I'm keeping my eyes open.'"

"I'll never get to sleep without hearing about it," Abby announced, coming into the room. "Don't blush. It's quite all right in this day and age." She sat on the edge of the bed. "Now, tell me," she commanded. "I don't want grandfather to hear anything that will worry him."

"I walked around the island," Rod said. "I think there's something peculiar going on around here, but I can't get a line on what it is." He told her all that had happened.

Abby listened intently. She was not nervous or afraid, but she was greatly interested. At the end she nodded thoughtfully.

"It is queer, isn't it? I don't know what to make of Hanley. They've been on this place for ever so many years. They've always been satisfactory. Year in and year out they're here alone, and grandfather lets them run things about as they please. I'd think you were imagining things if I hadn't seen those cigarettes myself—and heard Hanley's lame explanation."

"I don't like it," Rod confessed.

"Neither do I. But what are we going to do about it?" Once more she was making it a matter between the two of them.

Rod spoke his mind bluntly. "I think your grandfather should know. He hired me, and he has the final word in anything. He'll not like it if he finds out I'm hiding things from him."

"Pouf. Leave him to me. He's a

darling behind all his snappishness. So Hanley has been leaving the island for days at a time? He's not supposed to do that unless he gets permission and leaves a reliable man in his place."

Abby pursed her lips thoughtfully. "I wonder if it would do any good for me to have him up here and question him? I can be severe —and he knows if I say the word he'll be discharged."

"I wouldn't try it. If he wants to lie, he'll lie. We'll have no way of knowing if he is telling the truth. It's fairly evident all this can't have anything to do with your visit here. They had no idea you were coming."

"That's true," she admitted. "But still, I don't like mystery and lying and not being sure what is happening around our own property." She asked doubtfully: "Do you suppose Hanley just had visitors and was entertaining them here in the house as if he owned the place? They could have come in a boat and slipped off as we were landing."

"Then who was the man who lighted a match down there on the beach? I made the circuit of the island and didn't find a boat."

"I haven't the vaguest idea," she admitted. "And I'm not going to lose any sleep over it. Hanley has a shotgun and a revolver if we need them."

"I'll keep watch outside to-night."

"Please don't. Get your sleep. To-morrow, when you can see better, we'll investigate the south end of the island. Good night."

She slipped off the bed, gave him a final smile and returned to her room. Rod was smiling to himself again as he made ready for bed. Abby Ames was growing on him. He was getting some of the positive urge to protect her that imbued old J. D. Ames so strongly.

That night Rod slept with his door open, so the slightest alarm from her room across the hall would reach him. But no alarm came. Morning sunlight made the previous night's happenings seem not so formidable after all. Abby Ames was singing in her room. J. D. Ames was cheerful when he appeared downstairs in the dining room.

"God bless my soul," the old man chortled as he drew out his chair. "I don't know when I've been so hungry. Where is Bennett?"

The thumping of running feet sounded on the front porch just then. Bennett burst into the room, panting and red with anger.

## CHAPTER V.

### MAN TO MAN.

"SOMEBODY'S been at the plane motors!" Bennett said furiously. "The ignition wires have been stripped off and the spark plugs taken!"

Ames's voice rose to a high pitch. "It's not possible to fly the plane, Bennett?"

"No, sir."

Ames started from his chair. He stood a moment, staring. His face paled. He looked older as his glance went to his granddaughter. But he was not fuddled. He snapped the order that was in Rod's mind.

"Hanley, get the boat ready to start to Miami at once! Hurry!"

Abby Ames went to her grandfather and put a hand on his arm. "Don't let it worry you," she said. He patted her hand. But her eyes at that moment went to Rod, questioning, doubtful.

Silently Rod left the dining room and went upstairs to don the shoulder holster and automatic. He had left them in the top drawer of his bureau. The shoulder holster was

there, but the Luger and extra clip of cartridges were gone.

Rod located Mrs. Hanley in the kitchen. Two colored women in aprons were there, also. They stared curiously as he went to Mrs. Hanley. He was brutally frank with her.

"You were up in my room a little while ago, weren't you, Mrs. Hanley?"

She stood firmly, with her back to the wood stove.

"Who said I was in your room?"

"Never mind about that. You were, weren't you?"

She shrugged. Her deep manlike voice was warning.

"Don't come bothering me with such nonsense! Bring the person here who saw me in your room, mister, and I'll talk to you about it. I've got enough trouble on my hands now, running this kitchen and house for all of you."

Rod glared at her. She acted like a man and he had a good idea she should be handled like a man.

"Where is your husband?"

"He said he was going down to the boathouse," she answered.

Rod left the house by the back door. He was almost to the landing stage, when Hanley emerged from the cruiser's cabin and came ashore.

"The plugs are gone from this motor, too!" Hanley cried. He went into the boathouse and came out looking dazed, uncertain. "The rowboat's gone! What's happenin' around here?" But the exclamation lacked the fire of conviction. Hanley acted like a man who was trying to put over false indignation.

Rod caught his arm. "What happened to the gun in my room?"

Hanley batted his washed-out blue eyes. "What gun, mister?"

"Damn you!" said Rod. "You know what gun. Where is it?"

Hanley answered sullenly. "I don't know what you're talking about. Leggo my arm! You're hurtin' it!"

"I'll take that shotgun and revolver you keep on the place," Rod said. "And don't tell me I can't have them or we'll go straight to Ames and have it out!"

Hanley shrugged with a surly manner.

"I traded them guns off years ago. Ain't a gun on the island as far as I know."

Short of mussing the man up, there was no way to make him talk. Rod released Hanley's arm, said curtly: "Come along to the house."

THE company was all gathered in the dining room. Ames, despite his self-control, was pale and bleak. The stark fact that they were marooned on the island visibly piled years on him. Abby Ames was on his mind. Abby, herself, was cool and outwardly unconcerned. Miss Marsden was cool, also, although she could not hide a certain nervousness.

Hanley was silent, sullen. His wife was laboring under some strange emotion. Anger more than anything else, it seemed to Rod as he watched her. But she said nothing. Hanley said nothing. Rod said thoughtfully:

"This morning, early, I thought I heard an airplane not far off, going south."

"We're somewhere near the Miami-Havana air line," Bennett declared hopefully.

"Isn't there some way we can signal a plane and get a lift for Mr. Ames and Miss Ames?"

"A good idea!" Ames snapped. "I want contact with shore!"

They built a signal fire on the beach near the big amphibian, piling brush, dead palm leaves, sticks of wood, old paper, and rags. Bennett set a small can of gasoline and another of lubricating oil near it.

"The gas will give us a quick blaze and the oil will make heavy smoke," he said.

Then the wait began. Anxious hours dragged. Just before noon the high, distant drone of an airplane motor drifted over the island from the west. Sears spotted the plane first, a mere dot against the cloud-flecked, blue sky.

Bennett threw gasoline on the fire pile, tossed a match, and as the flames roared up he scattered the thick oil on the blaze. A pillar of greasy smoke swirled toward the sky.

The distant plane droned on into the north and disappeared.

They piled more stuff, waited again. Early in the afternoon a plane came south, over in the west also. Again dark smoke went swirling toward the sky, and again the second plane went on. Still later in the afternoon a third plane went north without displaying any knowledge of their distress signal.

No boats appeared. The afternoon waned. Uneasiness and a growing fear stalked into the open, the fear of helplessness against the unknown, of being forced to wait on this lonely island for what might come.

Twice during the day Rod suggested searching the island. Ames forbade it. "I want you near Abby," Ames said emphatically. Reluctantly, Rod yielded. He, too, was feeling the growing tension, was chafing against the delay. As yet he had not mentioned his missing gun. The knowledge wouldn't help Ames or Abby.

The afternoon was well gone when once more a motor droned in the sky. They sighted the plane coming out of the north. Bennett lighted his fourth signal fire.

A blind man could almost have seen the smoke; yet the plane flew past, just offshore. Bennett danced on the sand, waving his arms.

"What kind of fools are in that?" he yelled. "Haven't they got eyes?"

Then the plane—an amphibian—banked, swung back over the beach, low enough to show faces peering down at them. But the motor continued to roar and it went on into the south.

The sun set. Another night dropped swiftly. Dinner was a gloomy meal. At the end Ames spoke his mind.

"I am as much in the dark about this as any of you. If we all had guns, I should feel much better. But since Ives is the only armed one, I want every one to stay indoors tonight. We will adjourn to the living room and spend the evening together."

He still did not know about the missing gun.

As they all moved toward the living room, Abby Ames touched Rod's arm and drew him aside.

"Something is on your mind," she accused. "I've been watching you all day—and you've been more worried than you tried to show. Back there, when grandfather spoke about your gun, you started to say something and choked it off."

"Did I?" he drawled.

Her dark eyes were searching his face. "You have the gun, haven't you?" she asked slowly.

He saw it was no use to lie to her. For that matter he didn't want to. She held her head too high, and was too straightforward and honest. So he told her the truth.

Her eyes darkened. "The Hanleys must have gotten it! They were the only ones who would have done such a thing! Let's go and have it out with them!"

"It wouldn't do any good," he pointed out.

"I don't like being defenseless."

She was very small, very indignant, very likable. Rod smiled down at her, and felt in that moment that he could do almost anything to help her. He did the thing that carried the most reassurance to him. He flexed his huge hands.

"We're not exactly helpless," he said.

She understood at once. Her eyes were shining as she smiled up at him.

"Of course we're not helpless. I don't see how I could have said that, with you here. And please, I'm not worrying. I'm merely furious with the Hanleys. I'm leaving everything to you."

Darned if she didn't put out her hand. Man to man. It was warm and firm as his big fist completely engulfed it. You could tackle anything with such a girl trusting you.

IN the living room a radio brought music and voices out of the air. In a way it was subtle mockery, bringing the mainland, safety and assistance tantalizingly close.

The Hanleys were working in the kitchen. Miss Marsden proposed a card game. Presently Rod drifted into the front hall, let himself out and relocked the door.

The moon was not yet up. Behind the house the throbbing gas engine pulsated again on the black night. Once more the sound was oddly comforting, as Rod moved noiselessly over the damp grass to the back of the house.

Two of the kitchen windows were up. Low voices were speaking inside the kitchen. Hanley and his wife were talking furtively. Hanley finally raised his voice a little.

"All right. I'll do it," he said sullenly.

"You bet you'll do it, Jim Hanley! You're to blame for all this, an' you'd better straighten it out quick, you greedy fool. Here, take this gun. And be careful with it! You shouldn't have let those other guns get away from you!"

Rod moved away as Hanley descended the back steps and struck off across the grass toward the landing stage. Hanley went aboard the cruiser, came ashore in a few minutes, and Rod met him in the darkness, snapping:

"Come here, Hanley!"

Hanley dodged off along the beach, running hard. Rod followed—and stumbled over a chunk of driftwood. When he started on, Hanley's steps had vanished. The man had seemed to be heading to the amphibian. Rod cut across the grass toward it.

Hanley was not at the plane.

Swearing softly, Rod went on along the beach toward the south end of the island. He ran at a jog trot, and judged that he was more than halfway to the south tip of the island—the exhaust of the light motor had died away behind him—when he heard a faint shot in the south. Then another, and another; then a volley of sharp reports.

## CHAPTER VI.

### "RUN, DAMN YOU!"

ROD sprinted toward the sounds, but soon had to slow down for breath. He was walking noiselessly in the black shadows under the palms, when

some one came running toward him with the hard, flat-footed tread of exhaustion, breathing in hoarse, gulping sobs.

Rod stopped, waited. The man ran full into him, recoiled, stammered a startled oath, yanked an arm back and struck.

A knife slithered through the sleeve of Rod's left arm. It scored deep in the flesh and went out across his shoulder.

"So that's it!" Rod grunted.

He struck out furiously. His fist smashed into a face, driving it back. The stranger landed heavily on the sand some feet away. He was limp when Rod bent over him. Striking a match, Rod cupped it over the body.

The man was a stranger—a rather startling stranger to find here on the island, too. He was short and slender, dressed in well-tailored gray. His shirt was clean, his cravat new, and he looked as if he might have just strolled down from Fifth Avenue.

Blood oozed from his nose and lips, and a broken tooth was visible.

"Served you damned well right!" Rod said angrily.

Rod's left arm was gashed deeply above the elbow. Warm wet blood was soaking into the shirt sleeve. Searching, he found the knife in the sand. It was a large clasp knife with a spring blade. A deadly enough weapon.

Putting the knife in his coat pocket, he yanked the man up, draped him over a shoulder and started on once more.

He reached the south cove without hearing any more shots. So dark was the moonless night that he carried his limp burden to the head of the cove without seeing anything. Then, suddenly, a faint groan some yards ahead stopped him.

The groan came again.

Some one was lying on the beach in pain. His own burden was stirring slightly. Rod dropped the man and moved forward. His foot struck another body right in front of him. It did not stir.

Bending, Rod felt inert, lifeless flesh, still warm. His finger tips touched closed eyes, found no pulse, got in blood just over the heart. And—just then a flashlight some distance ahead blazed at him.

The whole scene was etched clearly, vividly.

At Rod's feet was a pale, staring corpse, tall and well dressed, with a white silk handkerchief dangling halfway out of the coat breast pocket. Just beyond was a wounded man, huddled on his side. At the left a large black motor boat was grounded on the beach. Beyond the motor boat rested a silver-colored amphibian.

The man who held the flashlight stood in front of the plane. As Rod jumped forward, an order was shouted from behind the light.

"Stick 'em up! Stand still there!"

Rod kept going. A shot crashed out. Missed. His quick swerve toward the water probably saved him, for a second shot followed. A third shot lashed at him as he gained the shelter of the boat hull.

Water cascaded about him as he floundered in. The bottom dropped steeply. He reached the stern with water almost to his shoulders. Behind him on the beach the man with the light and the gun was running to the boat.

Rod gulped a chest full of air and ducked under the surface. Swimming easily, he made his way under the slimy boat bottom.

Rod swam in to shore on the opposite side of the boat, and braced his feet firmly on the bottom. He exploded out of the water to the beach in a shower of spray.

THE light swung to meet him from the other side of the boat. Catching the bow with his right hand, Rod swung around it and charged at the man. He had forgotten all about the knife in his belt. He must have been a fearsome and unexpected sight. The light wavered as the man jumped back, shooting as he went.

Rod struck a chest, hit a shoulder, knocking it around. The gun went off again and the bullet missed him this time. His right fist crashed in solidly to the side of a head.

Rod felt the head give, the neck beneath it stretch and snap under the fury of that terrible blow. That finished it. Men who were hit like that didn't come back for more. Rod caught up the flashlight from the sand and turned the beam down. It showed him a dapper, huddled figure, the head lopped over grotesquely.

The man's neck had been broken. He was dead. Something about him struck Rod as vaguely familiar. A moment later he placed the fellow. This was the man who had pretended to be a reporter back there in New York, while trying to find where Abby Ames was going.

In some way he had found out where she had gone—and now he was dead.

He couldn't have been here the previous night when they arrived.

Standing over the body, dripping water, Rod swept the beach with the light, just in time to see a scuttling figure plunging toward the tangled undergrowth behind the beach.

The light showed the man darting into the tangle of growth and vanishing from sight. When Rod hurled himself through the interlacing branches at the same spot, with his muscles set to tear a passage, but he found no barrier after the first two feet. He was on a narrow, cleared path which wound through the tangle toward the interior of the island.

The man scuttled ahead of him with the speed of blind fear. Rod gained on him. The man looked over his shoulder and ran harder. Rod was almost within arm's reach when they both entered a clearing barely large enough to hold a small frame house.

The man squealed as Rod's big hand slapped to his neck and jerked him to a stop.

"Don't do it, mister! I've had enough! I'll go with y-you!"

Shaking him, Rod panted: "Try to stick a knife in me, back there on the beach, will you? I ought to cut you up with it! What's this all about?"

"Don't! I didn't know who you were! I'll come along! Here, put the cuffs on!"

He expected arrest. Rod held him off and shone the light in his face. "What's in that building?" he asked.

"Nothing, but our bags."

Rod dragged him over to the door and kicked it open. The flashlight revealed one big room furnished with half a dozen canvas cots, some blankets, and several chairs. Suitcases, two of them open, were scattered on the floor.

Rod swore and shook the fellow again. It was all pretty vague yet, but he knew one thing for certain. "Hanley's in on this, isn't he?"

"Yeah. The double-crossing rat! Three hundred apiece, he's been getting for years! Take it or leave it—and him having the only spot like

this along this part of the coast! He'll get knocked off for this!"

"Will he?"

"He can't double-cross us to the coast guard this way, just because his boss drops in! He looked yellow to me when I first seen him! He knew the boat was due to-night to get us on over to Cuba! He could have kept his mouth shut for a day longer!"

"Talk fast!" Rod growled, shaking him. "Who owns the boat?"

"I dunno. Hanley has it come here. Some friends of his make the run to Cuba."

"Why Cuba?"

"It's easier to get to South America from there. No cops watching the boats."

"All of you on the lam, eh? You run down here, and Hanley hides you out on the island, and ships you to Cuba where you can make a getaway?"

"Why ask me? You guys know, or you wouldn't be here."

"Who does the plane belong to?"

"It belongs to you guys, doesn't it? It's a coast guard plane, ain't it?"

"Is it?"

The prisoner was abruptly and sullenly doubtful. "Are you kidding me? We didn't hear it come in. It was there on the beach when we heard the boat coming in and went down to meet it. Then all hell busted loose. Somebody at the plane cut loose with a gun. I lammed along the beach—and I guess I met you."

"I guess you did," Rod agreed grimly.

THE picture was clear enough now. Hanley, in charge of the island, had turned it into a hideaway for crooks trying to get out of the country without meeting detectives at the steamer gangways. No wonder Hanley had been nervous when Ames dropped in.

But the big amphibian plane back there on the beach had nothing to do with the coast guard. It was the same one which had circled over the island late in the afternoon and then vanished into the south. It must have brought the man who had watched Abby Ames leave New York. And the others. Where were they?

The answer to that hit Rod hard. The others must have gone to the other end of the island—to Abby Ames!

"Who lighted that match on the beach last night—and then vanished when I came up?"

"Say, was that you? It was me. There's a path from this house to the beach over there. It stops a couple of feet back in the bushes. I jumped back in it when I heard you coming. You must have come with old man Ames."

"Correct," said Rod. "And who got the plugs and wires out of Ames's plane and boat?"

"Ouch! You're hurtin' my neck! We got 'em, so if Ames got wise he couldn't get word off the island until we left."

"Where are they?"

"Outside. I'll show you."

From the bushes at the edge of the clearing the man drew an old flour sack, heavy with wiring and plugs.

"Walk ahead of me and carry this sack," Rod ordered grimly. "What's your name?"

"Call me Parker. It's as good as any," the man muttered.

Parker led the way back along the path. The beach was still deserted. When they stepped out Rod found that the wounded man had died.

No guns were there on the beach,

save the one which had been used to fire at him. It was an automatic, with one cartridge left. Three extra clips were in a coat pocket of the dapper young man with the broken neck.

"Leave the sack here and come on the boat with me."

Mutely, Parker obeyed, stood there while Rod found some oily bags by the motor and set them afire. He carried several more bags away and set the plane cabin afire.

With Parker carrying the sack again, they started north along the beach. They had not gone a hundred yards when more groans off to the right stopped them. The light showed another man lying there at the foot of a palm tree. He was a heavy-set, bearded man who looked up at them dully. One leg was wet with blood. A furrow in the sand showed where he had dragged himself when he could no longer walk.

Parker gulped: "That's Crosset! They got him, too!"

The man stirred, muttered: "Ge' me on the boat before they come back."

"He'll have to wait," Rod said shortly. "Come on."

Rod's arm was still oozing blood. His side hurt with every breath he drew. It was not bleeding badly. Prodding with his fingers brought flashes of pain which indicated one rib at least was fractured. All that would have to wait, too.

Behind them, as they hurried along the beach, a faint glow began to show against the night, as the flames took hold of plane and boat.

The rising moon began to cast light across the sky. Ahead of them, the pulsing of the gas engine became audible. Then, abruptly, it stopped, like a stout heart which had ceased to beat.

A moment later the sharp report of a gun lashed through the night from the direction of the house. And no guns were in the house, no protection.

"Run, damn you!" Rod snarled at his prisoner.

## CHAPTER VII.

### SLAPPING THEM DOWN.

MORE shots sounded, as Rod and Parker ran. The shots were spaced casually, almost leisurely. They suggested murder with calm deliberation. Behind, at the south end of the island, a red glare was now visible.

Ahead, over the palm tops, which hid all view of the house, came stealing a soft pink glow, which deepened to red, crowding back the silver wash of the rising moon.

The red glow was sinister, threatening. It increased, rose higher, until over the palm tops it was visible in naked swirls of distant flame.

Parker was stumbling, staggering and lagging back as he fought for breath and tried to keep on with the heavy sack. Rod snatched the sack from him.

"You're no good in this!" he told the man. "Get back in the bushes out of sight and stay there!"

The occasional shots were still snapping, as Rod ran on alone. The brush ended and he got the picture all at once.

The big wooden back porch of the house was a mass of flames. The kitchen, the back rooms, the south and north wings downstairs were all burning. The fire leaped and curled above the roof, feeding on the dry shingles. Downstairs windows glowed with the fire inside.

A burning trail seemed to have been carried through the whole lower part of the house, leaving an inferno behind. It was growing

swiftly, spreading, rising to consume the upper rooms.

The wide lawn was uneasy with red light and shadow. The palms on the lawn stood like numb, helpless spectators. At the right, midway to the Negro cabins, a figure bent over something on the ground.

Swerving there, Rod heard sobs. The figure stood up defiantly and faced him. It was Mrs. Hanley. And at her feet Hanley lay inertly. In that curious, manlike voice, swearing like a man, she choked:

"They hit him on the head! I can't do nothing for him! If I had a gun, I'd kill every damn one! I'd kill them, I would!"

"Where is Ames and his daughter?" Rod threw at her.

"They all ran upstairs in the north wing when those devils kicked the back door in and drove me outa my own kitchen! I found Hanley near the back steps where they'd left him! The damn cowards!"

"You mean they're all up there in the north wing? Ames and Miss Abby?"

"Yes."

"They'll be burned alive!"

"That's how come the house was fired!" she said. "The folks wouldn't come out. I heard those devils yelling for Miss Abby to come out before she was smoked out. They been standing around the house shootin' at the windows and waitin' for her."

The shots had stopped now. From where he stood, Rod could see moving figures at the north wing. Three—no, four. He saw a woman, then another woman, herded back from the house by two men.

Rod left the Hanleys there and ran past the small cabins. No telling where the Negroes were. Hiding back in the brush, probably. When he had the burning mass of the house between himself and the north wing, he dropped the sack and dashed for the front corner of the house.

The worst of the fire was at the back. The front windows were still dark. A narrow belt of comparative shadow lay along the house front. Through that shadow Rod raced to the corner of the north wing. He stopped there, setting himself as he looked into the brighter glare over the lawn, just beyond the end of the wing.

The scene was laid out like a picture—a blood-red picture of terror.

ABBY AMES, Miss Marsden, and old J. D. Ames, were standing back on the grass, guarded by two men with drawn automatics. Dangling sinuously from a library window was a clumsy rope of twisted sheets. Down those sheets Bennett was sliding to two armed men who waited for him.

A fifth man, gun out also, stood a double arm's length in front of Rod. He had evidently been posted there to watch the front of the house, and had given it up when the trapped occupants chose capture to certain death in the flames.

The five men were well dressed. They would be. Their kind always was when possible. The red glow showed well-barbered, sleek, arrogant faces, backed with callousness, coarseness, and latent cruelty.

Rod had hated men like that since he had first met them as an officer. He had harried them, fought them, smashed them when he could.

Now five of them stood there in the midst of violence and murder. They had caught Abby Ames. Heaven alone knew what they'd do next.

Even as Rod looked, old J. D. Ames, his shock of white hair high

and defiant, protested to the man nearest him. A backhanded blow across the face sent him reeling back. Abby Ames ran to him, and was roughly shoved back.

Bennett's feet touched the ground. His arms were pinioned. Through blinding anger Rod saw the fifth man, just in front of him, swing around as if suddenly conscious of danger.

He saw Rod. His shout of warning was drowned by a bellow of anger as Rod jumped at him. A great fist drove into his face and lifted him off his feet. The shot he fired went wild. His broken face was spouting blood as Rod grabbed him off the ground and hurled him at the two men who were swinging around from Bennett. The limp body knocked the nearest man back against the other, bringing cursing, struggling confusion to them. Rod struck into it—a roaring avalanche of fury.

Rod had the knife and gun—and forgot them. Fists were enough. One contorted face turned to him. He drove a wild looping blow into it, which shocked his own arm clear to the shoulder.

The face went down.

A gun blasted in front of him and missed, as Bennett knocked the arm aside.

Rod caught the arm as it swung back, and then twisted. He heard the bone snap, the muscles tear, the man yell in agony. Turning, with the arm still in his grip, Rod saw the two men who had been guarding Abby Ames dodging in, afraid to shoot until they got close.

He yanked the agonized owner of the broken arm off the ground and charged behind that shield.

Panic hit the first man. He dodged, shouting wildly. Rod felt the bullets hitting his squirming shield, heard the victim cry out shrilly, then go silent and limp as Rod threw him at the gun muzzle, and followed.

Swearing wildly, the man staggered back, and Rod caught his wrist, yanked him close, and drove a big fist into the man's middle. Retching, gasping, the target fell to the ground.

As Rod turned, a gun blasted shots in quick succession. The fifth man was shooting blindly as he struggled with Bennett, who was hanging grimly to the hand which held the gun.

Bennett was still keeping that gun pointing to the ground as Rod caught its owner around the neck. Short seconds later Rod held up a gasping, unconscious figure. Bennett, holding the automatic, was panting oaths. Sears was sliding gingerly down the rope of sheets to the ground—and a hand was shaking Rod's elbow from behind.

IN shot-deafened ears, Rod heard old J. D. Ames calling above the dull, sullen roar of the fire: "Don't kill him! He's helpless!"

"Helpless?" Rod panted. "Let's see if he can talk!" He stood the man upright and shook him until he was breathing and coherent once more. "How many more of you are there?"

His prisoner was thick through the chest, strong, with a bulging jaw and a sneering look despite his dishevelled helplessness. "No more of us!" he gasped.

Rod hit him on the bulging jaw. "You're right, only you don't know it. I got the fellow you left back at your plane. He's the one who tried to find out where Miss Ames was flying to, when she left New York. How'd you rats get the dope about this island?"

The man spoke sullenly.

"We had a watch on Ames's private plane. When it left New York, Miss Ames and the old man didn't wear heavy coats. We knew he owned this island, so we ditched the dope about them going north and flew down here."

"All set to shoot up the island and get Miss Ames?"

Still sullen, the man answered hastily as Rod lifted a fist.

"We figured it wouldn't be any shooting. But when we slipped in after dark an' the guards opened up on us, we got sore an' bulled our way here to the house. We got a fellow on the beach who wouldn't admit there were any more guards, but we knew better, so we penned 'em all inside, fired the house and waited."

Ames raised his voice. "Guards? What is he talking about?"

Rod grinned at the old man. "He's referring to a little business of Hanley's. I'll tell you about it later. I've got the wires and plugs for your plane. You'd better fly a load of wounded men to Miami and send the law back. I'll stay here and make sure there's no more trouble."

Ames nodded. "We'll do that, Ives. Get the guns these men have dropped—and patrol the place until we can get back with help."

"I don't need the guns, sir. Take them along."

J. D. Ames snorted and ran fingers through his shock of white hair. His pink face was flushed and alive. Despite the excitement he had dropped years.

"Who suggested you needed the guns?" he replied tartly. "I'm thinking of the other men. The guns aren't half as dangerous as you are when you—er—start slapping men down. I don't want you involved in a manslaughter charge, or some such idiotic matter. I—uh—need you safe and whole to keep an eye on my granddaughter. Abby, do you hear that?"

Abby Ames smiled, a trifle weakly, but she smiled.

"If you hadn't said it, I would have," she told her grandfather—and Rod. "Provided he wants to risk things like this."

Rod grinned at her, man to man. He didn't have to say anything. She knew. Man to man. If this was a sample of what the commissioner had sent him into, he liked it.

A wise doll—and a big-hearted citizen.

# A Ticket For Hollywood

## By Herbert J. Salomon

I GET off the El at Fiftieth Street and walk on up Sixth Avenue. I'm on my way home. Never mind where I've been, but I'm on my way home and it's late as hell. It's February. There's snow on the ground and it's cold.

My collar's turned up and my hands are deep in my overcoat pockets. I'm kind of bucking the wind, sideways, and I look up Fifty-second Street toward Fifth. I see a dame, by herself, in the light of the street lamp. The street is dead except for this dame.

I put on the brakes and take another look. The dame is walking, or trying to, toward Sixth—toward me. She's skidding. Drunk, I say to myself. Just another doll who's got herself tanked up and heaved out into the cold, cold world.

I don't much crave the company of ginny dames, and it's no business of mine anyhow. I'm set to get moving along, when this dame flops down right in the snow. So, what the hell, I've got to go and lend a hand.

But she's up under her own power by the time I get alongside. She isn't stewed, I can see that right away. But she's in pretty bad shape—shaking and shivering. She's got on a flimsy wrap, a sort of silver cloth, and no hat.

"Well, sister?" I say.

She's scared. She's in some kind of jam, I figure, and she's scared to talk.

"I'm no cop," I say to her. "Don't you worry about me." And I ask how about getting her a cab, or seeing her home, or what.

"Not home," she says. "I can't go home. I live up the block. I want to get away from here."

She starts walking toward Sixth, and I take her arm. The sidewalk's mighty slippery.

"Where do you want to go?" I ask her.

She says she don't know where she wants to go; only she can't go home, that's sure.

We turn the corner and go up Sixth. The wind's blowing something fierce. We're only a couple of blocks from my place, so I tell the dame she'd better come along home with me and I'll give her a drink and fix her a cup of coffee. "You'll be all right," I say to her.

Well, she don't put up any argument. It's too cold to talk out there on the street, or to worry about anything except getting indoors.

So we go on up. My place is in one of those brownstone walk-ups, right off Sixth. Nothing to brag about, but it's warm.

I get some coffee started right away, and pour a couple of stiff shots of whisky.

When I come back to the room with the drinks, I find the dame flat on the sofa. She's still got her wrap on. Her right arm's hanging down, nearly touching the floor. And I see she's got a handkerchief tied around her hand. The handkerchief's dripping with blood.

"Here," I say. "Down this drink."

But she don't answer. She's out; dead to the world.

Now, I'm no doctor, but I know enough to get busy fixing a tourniquet on her arm just above the wrist. I lift up her head and try to pour some of the whisky in her mouth.

She coughs and chokes a little. Then she opens her eyes and tries to sit up.

"Easy now," I say to her. "Take another sip of this."

Her fluffy red hair's mussed every which way, and she's mighty pale under her make-up. She looks around the room a minute, like she's kind of scared. Then she takes the glass and finishes the drink. "Thanks," she says, and she makes a stab at smiling.

"Listen," I say. "I guess I'd better call a doctor or maybe an ambulance."

"No, please," she says, and her eyes go scared again. "Don't call anybody. Don't."

I start to argue. What the hell, I don't want to take any chances. After all——

"Listen," she says. "You look like a good feller, a good sport. Don't call anybody. Please."

"Why not?" I ask.

"Well," she says. "I just croaked a guy up in my room. He had it coming to him."

WHAT am I supposed to do? I'm no cop. I'm no mobman, either. And no lawyer. Just a plain citizen trying to get along. And now what am I to do with Kitty? Her name's Kitty, she tells me—Kitty Brennan—and she's a night-club hostess.

Well, first of all, I fix up her hand as good as I can. She's got a bad cut—from broken glass, she says. She don't let out a squawk when I pour on the iodine. Then, when the hand's all bound up, she takes off her wrap and shows me the scratches and the black-and-blue marks on her arms. She's got on a low-cut dress, sort of black satin, and her arms are nice and white except for those marks, which look worse probably than they are. Anyhow, I get the idea that if she croaked a guy, maybe he did have it coming to him.

Now I want to say right here that this little redhead isn't knocking me for a loop or anything like that. Not that she's hard to look at. Far from it. She's got a nifty pair of kind of blue-green eyes, and she can't be a day over twenty-one. But she looks like she knows what it's all about and then some, and I just don't fall for those wise dolls any more.

She's had her coffee and she's comfortable on the sofa, with her shoes off and a blanket over her. She feels so good now she wants a cigarette.

"You're a good guy, Jack," she says. Jack, that's me.

"Forget it," I say. "What I'm trying to figure out is if it won't be better for you to go to the police yourself and tell them your story—accident or self-defense, or whatever you want to call it."

"Sure, but——"

"Let me finish," I say. "If they find him up in your room, and you missing—why, it'll look worse. It'll look like murder."

"I know. But it ain't the killing I'm so worried about now, Jack, believe it or not. It's this."

With her good hand she brings out her bag from under the blanket. She opens it and pulls out a long string of pearls. And each and every one of those pearls is as big as an olive. "Some fun, eh, kid?" says Kitty, and her eyes sure light up when she looks at that necklace.

I don't know a thing about jewelry, but you don't have to be an expert to see that those pearls must be worth real dough—real important dough. Maybe a hundred thousand dollars. Maybe more. I don't know. "Where did you get it?" I ask her.

"I'll give it to you straight," she says.

FOR one thing, she says, that spot where she's hostess is nothing but a Grade B clip joint over on Forty-eighth Street. Do I know what a clip joint is?

I've heard tell, I say, that it's a somewhat unrefined place that's cheap and easy to get into and expensive and hard to get out of. Also, I've heard it called the drunks' last round-up.

She laughs. She's heard a lot worse than that, she says. But she don't want me to get the idea that the place is so awful tough. The cab drivers are only supposed to bring in drunks who look like they've got money—smooth drunks. And those birds have sense enough, most of them, to pay up and not fight. Anyhow, she says, they don't have to pay such a terrible lot: maybe twenty, maybe fifty bucks a round—it all depends—for a couple

of rounds of drinks with the hostesses. And the customer often pays up because he wants to show the hostess what a hot sport he is, and that if she sticks to him she'll be wearing diamonds or get a Park Avenue apartment, maybe. They talk big at two and three a. m., those birds, but they never get to first base. The hostesses are only there to tell them the champagne is very refreshing, and to say, "Oh yes," every once in a while. And when the customer gets the check, the romance is all over.

I get it all right. "But how about the necklace?" I say.

She's getting to that, she says, right now. There's a hackman, name of Oscar Katz, has been bringing in customers pretty regular. The cab driver gets a commission, see? Ten per cent of the check. He sits in the back room and waits till the customer pays. Then the driver gets his, see? And this Oscar Katz—well, she says, he's been handing her a hot line every time he gets a chance to talk to her, telling her he's positively crazy about her. He's got a wife and two kids up in the Bronx, but his wife don't understand him, and so forth. He's a short, husky gorilla, really like a gorilla with that short neck of his. She can't see him at all, and she always keeps telling him he's got a nerve talking to her that way, and to lay off, kindly. But he just takes all that with a smile and tells her some day he's coming in with a wad of real dough, and then he's going to take her far, far away—to Havana or Paris or Monte Carlo. And she always tells him, no thanks, big boy, not her. And he just says, you wait.

Well, to-night he breezes in about one thirty, without a customer. Excited and important he acts. He sits down at the little table in the back room, orders a drink, and tells her to have a drink with him. Champagne or anything she wants. The sky's the limit.

Business is dead. Oscar's money's as good as anybody else's, so she sits down at his table. And pretty soon he takes this here string of pearls out of his pocket, holds it up, and asks her how does she like it?

"Nice-looking beads," she says.

"Beads, my foot," he says. "It's the McCoy. I picked it up from the floor of my cab. And who do you think dropped it? Who do you think I just drove from the Ninety-nine Club to the Carlton? Who do you think?"

How the hell can she guess?

"Well," he says. "It's Gloria Tremaine."

"No kiddin'? The movie star?" she says.

"Yep," he says. "Gloria Tremaine, in person."

So then Kitty gets real interested. "Gosh!" she says. "Then they must be worth a million dollars. Let's have a good look at them." She wants to see what it feels like to touch them, to hold them.

Oscar hands them over. His brown plush eyes are greasy with ideas. "Me and you are going places, baby," he says.

JUST goes to show," I say, "what can happen to a guy when he falls for a dame. He digs up a necklace like that, then he gets bumped off. Poor Oscar!"

"Ho hum," says Kitty.

"Meaning just what?" I ask.

"Meaning," she says, "that I'm making a bad guess. Oscar's all right. All he gets is some drops in his drink. When he's out, they carry him downstairs and put him in the back seat of his cab. And then one of the boys drives the cab

around to a quiet side street, turns off the motor, and leaves Oscar there to sleep it off." He must be there yet, she thinks, but he'll be all right.

I'm glad to hear that. I can't help feeling sorry for poor Oscar. But what's he going to do when he snaps out of it?

She don't worry about him, she says. She's never going back to that joint again, anyhow. There's that other guy. And she goes on to tell me all about the dirty so-and-so who runs the joint. A yellow runt who calls himself "Rudy" because somebody once told him he looks like Valentino, and he's never got over it. A rat, she says—a real rat.

I tell her not to get herself steamed up. He's a rat. So what?

Well, she says, she's sitting there with the pearls, and she wants to beat it. But Rudy don't want to let her go. He's wise to the pearls, see?

I get his angle. He fixes it so Oscar gets the gate, don't he? He does his part, don't he? So he wants his cut.

"Sure," says Kitty. "But the angle you don't get is that the dirty whoozis owes me plenty as it is."

"He owes you money?"

"It's this way," she says. "My boy friend and Rudy are partners last year. Another place. The joint's raided, see, and my boy friend gets the rap. He's up the river now, with another six months to go. That's why I've got to hold down this hostess job, understand?"

"I understand. Rudy still wants his cut on the pearls," I say.

"Cut is all right. But if that chiseler gets his fingers on the necklace, he'll pay me off in chicken feed," she says. And then, she says, when she wants to scram, he tries to hold her a minute, but he don't dare get rough on account of he's scared of her boy friend.

So she gets away. She hops a cab. And when she gets home, she says, she's sitting there looking the pearls over, trying to figure out what the next move is, when the doorbell starts ringing. "I don't answer," she says. "I put out the light and keep quiet. But that bell keeps on ringing, and then I hear somebody knocking at the door. Then I hear him—Rudy. He says, "Let me in, Kitty, for a minute. I've got something to tell you." I tell him to scram, but he keeps on knocking, and he says, "Let me in. It's very important." I can't have him make all that noise in the hall. It's a decent, respectable house. And maybe he has something to tell me, about Oscar coming back, maybe. I don't know. So I open the door."

Rudy comes in. And she can see right away that he's got a jolt of coke in him. To get himself nerved up, she says, the yellow rat. His eyes are shining, and he starts in on a big line of how he only wants to help her and a lot of tripe about friendship, and so on and so forth. He says he's scared she'll get in a jam if she goes to turn the pearls into cash. They're hot, he tells her, and he knows the right party downtown, who'll pay her the top price.

"Thanks, Rudy," she says. "I'll handle this myself."

"You don't trust me?" he asks, like his feelings are hurt something terrible. Then he dishes out some more of that old friendship stuff.

She'll think it over, she tells him. And now she says to him she wants to go beddy-by. "In other words," she says, "amscray!"

"You don't trust me?" he says again. His face is twitching. He stands there a minute, looking at her. Then he makes a quick pass at her and tries to snatch the bag she's holding.

So what can she do? She fights him off. And when he comes back for more, she picks up a bottle off the table and lets him have it. Crowns him good on the side of the head. "He goes down like a brick," she says. "And the bottle's busted. That's how I get my hand cut, see, Jack?"

WHAT does she want me to say? It don't look like the chair, I can tell her that much. But the picture's bad, and a hell of a lot worse if those pearls really are good.

"They are good," she says. "Look." She puts part of the necklace—just about the middle part where the pearls are biggest—right in her mouth, and she bites down hard with her back teeth. Nothing happens. "See? It's the way to tell. When they're phony," she says, "you can crack them with your teeth."

"Well," I say, "that makes it grand larceny, all right."

"But Oscar found them, didn't he?" she asks, like she's arguing with herself. "He found them," she says again.

I tell her it's just as bad as downright stealing if she don't try to give them back. I don't go and preach to her. I just tell her the law.

She's holding up the necklace to the light. "Do you see that clasp?" she says. "Twelve sparklers and a big emerald in the middle. That clasp must run into big dough all by itself. I wish I could keep it. It's wonderful, ain't it, Jack? Wonderful."

I can see she's tired. Her face looks small and thin, like a scared kid's. I've got an idea she's beginning to see daylight, so I don't say a thing. I don't have to.

She sits up and looks me square in the face. "I don't want the damn pearls!" she says, talking fast and excited. "I'm no crook, Jack. I'm no crook. I must 'a' been crazy. Here ——" She hands me the necklace, nearly throws it at me. She's crying now. That black stuff around her eyes is beginning to run. "Help me get it back to where it belongs," she says. "Will you, Jack?"

Will I? I'll be mighty glad, I say. And if that hairy ape Oscar's story's on the level, all we've got to do is call the Carlton and ask for Gloria Tremaine.

"O. K.," says Kitty. "But maybe it's too late to call? Maybe she's sleeping?"

But Gloria's not sleeping. I get that royal suite of hers on the phone right away, and there's a high-hat voice on the wire, kind of foreign—sounds like a head waiter.

Yes indeed, it says, Miss Tremaine has lost her necklace. She would be pleased, enchanted, to get it back immediately and at once, or words to that effect. No questions will be asked. No indiscreet questions whatever. Just the pearls——

"All right," I say. "We'll be over pretty soon." And I tell the voice to kick out all dicks—private and otherwise—also all reporters, if any. We don't want any publicity.

WELL," says Kitty, "that's that." She throws off the blanket and gets up. She's going to get a big kick out of it, she says, meeting such a glamorous movie star.

Yeah, I say to her. But there's something we got to attend to first. Something that ain't so glamorous and don't look like it's going to be much fun. We got to go over to her room first, I tell her, and have a look and see what we can do for Rudy.

"Don't worry too much," I say. "Maybe you only knocked him cold."

"But I hit him right on the head with the bottle," she says. "I hit him good and hard, I tell you."

"Listen, sister," I say. "There's somebody being crowned with a bottle every minute. If it was as dangerous as all that, if it was fatal every time, they'd be making bottles out of paper by now. Get me?"

She don't laugh at that crack. She don't even smile. She's worried plenty. But she sees I'm right, she says. As long as it happened in her room, she knows she can't run away from it. She's ready to go now.

"Wait a minute," I say. "See how you look in this sweater of mine. Remember, it's kind of chilly out."

It's a heavy, white turtle-neck sweater. She pulls it on over her head, and looks at herself in the mirror. She can't help laughing.

"Let's go," I say.

Then she tells me she wants me to hang on to her bag for her, on account of her right hand's out of commission. "Put it in your pocket, Jack," she says. "I think the pearls'll be safer with you."

So then we go downstairs, and lucky enough there's a cab cruising on Sixth. We get in the cab.

Kitty's awful jumpy again. "It's going to be terrible, Jack," she says, "going back in that room."

I'll go in, I tell her. She can wait out in the hall, or downstairs in the cab. And I tell her I know a smart lawyer, a good friend of mine. "I'll call him," I say to her. "He'll know what to do. Stop your worrying now."

Well, we get to the house.

"I guess I'll go up with you," Kitty says, "and I'll wait out in the hall." She points up at the house. The windows are all dark except two on the third floor. "Those lights," she says. "That's my room. I left the lights on when I ran out."

I tell the driver to wait, and we go on up.

Kitty grabs my arm. "I'm scared," she whispers.

I don't say anything. The house is quiet. I've got an idea maybe there's a cop around, called in by the neighbors after the rough-house. Maybe there's a cop there now, guarding the body. We're up on the third landing now. There's a door half open. I don't stop to ask her if she left the door that way. "You wait out here," I say.

I go into the room. I don't know what I expect to find, but there's nothing. Nobody's in the room. The lights are all on, and I can't see a thing wrong, except for a lot of broken glass on the floor.

I go out in the hall and tell Kitty the good news. Rudy must be alive and kicking, mostly kicking I guess. He must have just picked himself up off the floor and called it a night. "Do you want to go in there," I ask her, "and get anything?"

"No," she says. She wants to get away from here as fast as she can. She's scared some of that mob's hanging around, maybe, laying for her.

So we're on our way. Then Kitty starts worrying, all of a sudden, about Oscar. She's worried if he can be froze to death by this time, sleeping it off in the back seat of his cab.

"Not a chance," I tell her. "Some cop must have picked him up long ago, if he didn't wake up first."

"Poor Oscar," she says. "After all, he only wanted to be nice to me."

"Sure. And mighty nice to himself, too." I say. "Forget it." Then I give her her bag. It'll be her job, I tell her, to hand over that necklace.

THE bird who talks like a head waiter opens the door on the twenty-second floor—Suites A and B. He looks like a head waiter, too, but he introduces himself as Prince Something.

"You have been delayed, no?" he asks.

Yes, I tell him. There was a little matter we had to attend to. But here we are.

"Splendid," he says. "And we have obeyed your wishes to the letter. You shall see only madame and myself. Will you come this way, please?" He talks stiff, like a butler in the movies.

He takes us into a room that smells like there's a funeral going on. Flowers all over the place. And, half sitting, half lying on the sofa in front of a big open fire, there's Gloria Tremaine, herself, in person. She's got on kind of black velvet lounging pajamas. Her platinum hair's shining like a brand-new dime.

I see where she's got a little dog on her lap, one of those little Mexican hairless pooches. He looks up at us with bugging eyes, but there's not a squeak out of him.

"Nice little pup," I say, to break the ice. "What do you call him?"

"She's a lady dog," says Gloria. "And her name is Carmen. Do you like it?"

Kitty laughs, kind of dumb if you ask me, but it's all right. Kitty and I, we sit down on a couple of big chairs around the fireplace. It's real friendly and cozy, except for the prince.

"You must be frozen, you poor things," Gloria says. "Maximilian," she calls, without turning her head. "How about ordering some hot coffee?"

The prince comes out of the background. "My dear," he says, "at this hour it is impossible. You understand, sir," he says to me. "But we do have sherry and port, a very passable champagne, absinthe, vodka, and of whiskies the greatest variety." Sounds just like a waiter, I can't help thinking.

"Make mine bourbon," I say. "Straight."

"Same here," Kitty sings out.

"Me, too," says Gloria. To tell you the truth, she looks like she's had a couple already. She says to us: "My husband is so very unpractical, at times. Not always so very bright, if you know what I mean?"

We all laugh. Then, when we're just about through laughing, the prince comes in with the glasses and a big bottle of old bourbon. He puts them down, very careful, on the low table in front of us.

"Help yourselves," says Gloria. "Drink hearty. And pour me one, Maximilian, will you?"

He looks over at her, like he thinks she'd better go easy.

"Come on," she says. "Fill it up."

So he fills up her glass. But he don't take any himself.

"Cheerio!" says Gloria.

The whisky's great. I pour myself another.

Then the prince starts talking turkey. "You have the necklace, sir?" he asks. "In your possession?"

Yes, I tell him. We have a necklace. But how do we know it's the right one? "Supposing you describe it," I say. "Just to make sure."

"Of course," Gloria says. And describe it she does, down to the twelve diamonds surrounding the emerald in the clasp.

"It's your necklace," says Kitty. She brings out the pearls.

Gloria just takes one look at the necklace, and then she makes her little speech of thanks. "I want you to know," she says, "how very grate-

ful I am to you. Just think," she says, "I only bought it last week, and neglected to take out insurance. How dreadfully careless of me." And so forth. She tells us she's so happy to see there are still such nice people in the world, so honest and thoughtful as we two. No fancy words.

She goes on. "I know," she says, "that I'm not supposed to ask any questions. But," she says, "I see Miss Brennan's hand has been hurt. Is it all right for me to ask if that injury has anything to do with the necklace, one way or another?"

Kitty looks over at me, like she don't know what to say, like she wants me to do the talking.

"Well, Miss Tremaine," I say, "as a matter of fact, Miss Brennan's got that cut on her hand in the line of duty, so to speak. You see, she got hurt fighting off a guy who wanted to take the pearls away from her."

"Why, that's terrible!" Gloria says. She jumps up and puts her arms around Kitty. "You poor kid," she says. "You poor, brave kid." And she kisses her. Then Gloria runs over to her desk. "Where's my check book, Maximilian? Where'd you put my check book?"

THE prince don't seem to be in much of a hurry just now. He's sitting in a big chair, smoking a cigarette. "Your check book, my dear," he says, "is in the second drawer to the left. Where it is always."

She's got it—and her fountain pen, too. She's writing out a check. She hands it to Kitty. "Here," she says to her. "I want you to take this, dear."

Kitty takes the check. "Five grand!" she says. "Look, Jack!"

"Five thousand dollars!" The prince comes to life, jumps up. "This is nonsense, Gloria. Positive nonsense, I tell you."

"Don't pay any attention to him," Gloria says to Kitty. "It isn't too much at all. I only hope that you and your boy friend"—looking at me—"that you two will be very happy."

When she hears that, Kitty starts in laughing and crying all at once. She must be awful tired, I figure, because she goes kind of hysterical and breaks down and starts telling Gloria the real low-down: how I pick her up on Fifty-second Street, and how I took her home, and everything.

I gave Kitty the sign to keep her trap shut, but she goes right on spilling the whole story. "You can thank Jack for it," she says, "that you've got your necklace back. He talked me into going straight," she says, and she lets herself fall down on the sofa and she cries something awful.

"Poor kid," Gloria says. She sits down next to Kitty and takes her hand and strokes it. And all the time she's holding Kitty's hand, Gloria's looking at me, giving me the once over, like she hasn't seen me before.

After a while she says to me: "Would you mind telling me who are you? I mean, what do you do?"

I'm in the fighting game, I say.

Am I very busy these days, she asks.

"No," I say. "To tell you the truth, it's been kind of slow."

"Well, then, how would you like to go out to Hollywood?" she asks me.

Hollywood? I tell her to stop kidding me.

"No, I'm not kidding," she says. "I've been reading a script," she says, "and there's a part in that play—a young fighter. It's an easy part,

only a few lines. I might be able to get you that job. Would you like to try it?"

"Would I? Any kind of a job would look awful good to me right now," I say. "Outside of the champ class, there's nothing much but headaches and chicken feed."

"I understand perfectly," Gloria says, and then she gets up. "You write down your name and address and all that, and I'll see what I can do. In any case," she says, "you'll hear from me."

I tell her that sounds great. I thank her. And I can see the interview's over.

Kitty's fixing up her eyes after all that crying. Then she gets up.

We start edging toward the door.

But Gloria stops us. "Just a minute," she says to Kitty. "It's so cold out, you'll freeze in that thin silver cloth wrap, dear. And you can't go around in that funny sweater. Wait, just a minute." She runs into the next room, and comes back with a long fur coat over her arm. "I want you to take this, dear," she says to Kitty. "Put it right on now. Does it fit? Swell. You'll be nice and warm."

Kitty starts to argue. She don't want to take it, she says. Miss Tremaine'll need it.

"Need it?" Gloria laughs. "I've got five of them. What do I need five fur coats for, anyway?"

Out in the hall, when we're waiting for the elevator, Kitty says to me, "It's mink," she says, "real mink. What a wonderful coat."

WELL, I see Kitty off on the early train for Findlay, Ohio.

She's got a married sister living out there, and that's where she's going to stay till her boy friend gets out of stir. Then, she says, she wants to get married and settle down out there in Ohio—buy a gas station, or something. She's through with the rackets, she says.

She's going to cash that check out there, open a bank account, and she wants to send me half of the money. It's coming to me, she says.

I talk her out of it. I tell her she'll be needing all that dough to get herself fixed up nice and comfortable out there. "Anyhow," I say, "I'm getting a job in the movies—maybe."

Then she tells me she can't help feeling kind of bad about Oscar. After all, she says, he found the necklace.

"Forget it," I say. "If Oscar gets hold of any of that dough, he'll just throw it away in some hot spot, or he'll feed it to the ponies. His wife and kids won't get to see a nickel of it. Hang on to your money," I say. "You've had a break for once in your life. Cash in on it."

We're at the gate now. The train's leaving in a couple of minutes.

"You've been wonderful to me, Jack," Kitty says. "Just like a brother, and us perfect strangers. Aren't you going to kiss me goodby?"

So, what the hell, I kiss her goodby. She looks awful tired, the poor kid.

"I'll send you a post card," she says, as she turns around to wave good-by for the last time.

So then I go home and hit the hay. I'm asleep before you can say "quintuplet."

And about five thirty in the afternoon, the phone wakes me up. It's the prince. He wants me to come over to the hotel right away. Important business, he says.

And it looks now like yours truly's going out to Hollywood.

# This is my Story

By Cleo Lucas

This could have been you.

I PROBABLY never would have written this had it not been for my friend, Lafe Hurst, urging me to do it. Ever since I told him the truth about my life he has been wanting me to write it up and send it to some magazine editor. He said it was better than any story he had ever read. I was reluctant to do it. Of course, until recently my story had no ending. Now it has. Something happened the other night that ended it and made it a story, final and complete. I hesitated, too, because I have no literary talent, but Lafe said he would help me out on that end of it. I found out afterward that he doesn't know any more about writing than I do, but between the two of us we got the thing together in a readable form, even though it isn't grammatically correct.

Lafe and I both thought it would be better to start at the beginning than to start in the middle and then connect things up, because we were afraid we would get confused. We both knew that if we once got stopped we would throw the thing away and never finish it.

I was at D—— when the U. S. went into the War. At the end of my second year I was crazy about school. I had worked hard during my freshman year and had earned the position of end on the D—— football team. I said I was crazy about school, but I think I was more crazy about football. I weighed about one hundred and eighty and my muscles were firm and solid. The fellows at the fraternity house used to call me the "Greek God" to kid me a little, but in a way I knew they meant it.

All the sports writers said that I had a great career ahead of me in football, and I really think I did have. Any ideas I had, when I en-

tered college about what I wanted to take up as a profession, all faded when I got interested in football. I felt that I wanted to be connected with athletics all of my life.

At Christmas time of my sophomore year I met Sunny Humes. I didn't put quotation marks around Sunny, because it was really her name and it fit her perfectly. She had soft, golden-colored hair that hung in loose curls close to her face and down on the nape of her neck, and her eyes were as blue as the heavens after rain. When she looked at you, you had a feeling, too, of rain, gentle and refreshing, because her eyes sparkled like dew. I thought about her eyes lots of times when I was in France, when there was nothing but red blood falling from the heavens, and it saved me. It reminded me that somewhere there was a sky that was blue, and clear, and clean.

I met her, as I said, at Christmas time. I had gone home with a fraternity brother of mine to spend the holidays with him. He lived up in the northern part of Maine. Sunny was his sister and she had come home for the holidays, too. Meeting her has been the most wonderful and yet the most tragic thing in my life. After I saw her I couldn't look at anything else. Her skin was so smooth and white, and her mouth was perfect. She was the most beautiful girl I have ever seen.

I didn't do anything I had planned to do that Christmas. Skating and skiing were marvelous around that town, but I didn't go once. I just stayed with her all the time she would give me. When I couldn't be with her I just stayed in my room and thought about her.

I guess I have thought at least a million times about the night that she told me she loved me. Maybe I can't tell it exactly right now, because when I was in the hospital so long in France, sometimes my memory left me and I would lie there in bed and strain to reconstruct the few short meetings that I had with Sunny. I wanted to remember this night so badly that I may have filled in a gap here and there with my imagination. But this is as nearly as I remember it.

We went for a ride in her car. We drove out about ten miles through the white, flat countryside. There was a lot of snow on the ground and the moon shining down on it made it seem whiter than ever. I drove the car. Sunny sat close to me under a big plaid blanket because it was awfully cold. I wasn't cold. I knew it was winter and plenty cold outside, but I was warm and comfortable. I didn't even have on a topcoat. I tried to remember that when I was standing knee-deep in cold mud in the trenches and my hands were so numb that I couldn't feel the rifle—it helped sometimes to make me feel warmer. That sounds funny, but it's the truth.

WE reached a funny, little bridge finally, and I stopped the car and took out a cigarette. My hands were trembling so that I couldn't get a match out of my pocket. I threw the cigarette away and took Sunny in my arms. I guess I very nearly crushed her I squeezed her so hard. She laid her head against my shoulder, and when I leaned down to kiss her she lifted up her face to me and I felt warm tears on her cheek.

When I stopped kissing her, she said, "I love you, darling. I'm so happy."

I said, "You shouldn't cry if you're happy."

She laughed, then said that people cried when they were happy the same as they did when they were sad. I was so happy myself that I couldn't say much. Every time I started to say anything it sounded flat and meaningless. I would try to say it another way and it ended up by both of us laughing and with me holding her tight against me and kissing her over and over. I know that she could feel my heart pounding against her breast. I couldn't control the darned thing, but I didn't care.

The two weeks were over in a flash and we both went back to school again. I heard from her every day and I wrote her as often as I could. It was hard for me to write letters, and she understood that. She knew I loved her even though I didn't write as often as she did.

I never saw another girl after that. When the football season was over the fellows dated a lot, but I never went along. They tried to make me go with them one night when they said they were going to stag it. When I went out to get in the car they had a girl waiting for me there. I didn't even wait for an introduction. I just turned and walked back to the house without a word. I don't know what the girl thought. She must have thought I didn't like her looks, when, as a matter of fact, I didn't even see her face. They never tried to date me up after that.

Then the War came on the scene. About a month before school was out in the spring, they selected a bunch of us and sent us to a training camp in Massachusetts. Sunny was awfully worried, but I kept telling her that the War would be over long before I would have to go to France. I really thought it would be over, too, but it wasn't. We only stayed in camp about three months when we got orders to sail. I don't know what I thought about things then. When you have something ahead of you to do you are carried along with it, and don't spend much time thinking. Then, too, with Sunny writing such tearful letters I suppose I kept myself bucked up for her sake.

We were in New York three days and Sunny came on to be with me there. We were married. Those were the three most glorious days of my life. We promised each other that we would forget I had to go to France. We made believe that we were starting our lives together right there in that hotel room and that things would never be any different. We pretended that it was an apartment, and we worked up such an illusion that I sometimes think of that place as having four or five rooms instead of just one. I even remember furniture in it that I know wasn't there.

Sunny didn't cry, when I got on the boat. Her chin quivered a little, but she was doing her best to be brave. I didn't look back, once I had started away, because I knew she would cry the second my back was turned. I didn't want her to know I knew. Besides, my own eyes were wet.

WHEN I figure back it seems that everything happens fast to me, or it did when I was young, anyway. I was only in France two weeks when I was ordered up to the front line. Then I was in that infernal hell only two weeks, when the captain came into the dugout and told us that some of us would have to get through the barbed wire and break up a machine gun nest that was becoming a bit annoying. He didn't ask for volunteers. He just named a few who

were to go and my name was among them. I guess he thought my shoulders were pretty broad, that I could stop more bullets than could some of the other fellows.

I felt pretty brave and heroic when I started out. False patriotism, I guess. I was inspired by the captain's speech, maybe—I don't know. Anyway, I didn't think about danger until I had climbed over the last trench and stood out there under the colored sky. There was quiet for a few seconds or maybe it was minutes. You lose all count of time on the battlefield. Then, suddenly it seemed as if some one had torn a sheet right across the heavens and let everything that was behind it fall out at once. The first roar was so deafening that I don't know whether or not there were any succeeding noises. I couldn't see a thing except a swirling cloud of red and gold that was like a colored fog. I know I kept wondering how I could find a machine-gun nest through those eddying clouds of smoke.

I stood there trembling all over for a minute, then the earth seemed to rise up beneath me and push me into the air. I remember one thought went through my head. I thought, "This is death. My soul is leaving my body." You see, I felt detached when my feet left the ground. I didn't feel like I was myself any longer.

When I regained consciousness I was back in the hospital at A—— and I had donated one leg. Later they amputated my right hand in due respect to the German gunner who was smarter than I. Of course, I didn't find out about the donations as soon as I awakened. My head was bandaged for a long time; they told me I had an infected jaw. So I didn't discover the little donations I had made for my country until some months later—not until after I had been in the operating room so often that I told them they had just better leave me in there in order to save wear and tear on the wagon.

THIS is the way I found out about my infected jaw. I had been asking the nurse for a mirror ever since they had taken the bandages off my face, but she always had some excuse for not giving me one. Then one day they brought in a fellow and put him in the bed next to me. He had a pocket mirror and I asked him to let me have it. He tossed it over onto my bed; I picked it up and looked at myself.

I thought for a second that I must be mad. I thought maybe that I *was* some one else, *that the real me had died*. There wasn't a feature on my face that was my own. My hair was snow white. I rubbed my one hand across my cheek to see if I could feel it, and I couldn't feel a thing. My right cheek was paralyzed. I tried to smile, but only one side of my mouth would respond. The result was a kind of twisted half smile that was a little frightening. My nose was startling, too. I had been a little proud of my nose. It was well shaped and straight, even though I had once injured it in football. Now I had a short flat affair that was painful to the eye.

Just then the nurse came up and grabbed the mirror. She was awfully upset because I had seen myself. She said, "Where did you get this? You weren't supposed to have it."

"It's all right," I said. "I had to know sometime."

She said that the doctors weren't completely through, and that it would be better later. But the doc-

tors were through and they didn't do anything else later. The nurse never mentioned it to me again all the long time I was in the hospital.

I can't tell you how I felt after that. I kept trying to make myself realize that I was a physical wreck. Sometimes in the night I would dream that I was all right again. I would get out of bed and start to walk, then awaken on the floor with a terrible pain in my leg. I would have to ring for the nurse to help me back in bed, and I would lie in a cold sweat for hours, trembling with the cold, yet with my clothes wringing wet.

I kept telling myself, "You're all through, boy. You can never play football again. This is that wonderful body that the fellows used to kid about it being like a Greek god." It was terrible. Of course, I knew that I would never go back to Sunny. That was out of the question. Even if I had to kill myself I would never let her see me this way. I used to wonder how it was all going to come out. Most of the fellows in that hospital were wrecks like myself. I used to pray for a bomb to hit us and blow us up. It would have been a blessing.

One day they moved a bunch of us to another hospital. On the way, one of the fellows, who was next to me, got worse and died. Nobody saw him die except myself. Right then I saw my way out. I reached over and tore off his identification tag and substituted my own. I knew they would never be able to check up. As far as the rest of the world was concerned I was now officially dead.

I wanted to write a letter to Sunny. Something about how much I loved her and that I was dying now, but that I would always love her. I made several attempts, but each one sounded worse than the one preceding it, so I finally tore them all up and tried not to think of her again.

They sent me home as soon as I was able to use crutches. On the boat I met Lafe. He had been gassed and they were sending him home, too. We stuck together on the trip, and, before we got to New York, Lafe told me that his father was a wealthy manufacturer in Chicago, and that he would make room for me in his office. I went to Chicago with Lafe, and I've been here ever since. I changed my name, of course, and told Lafe I was an orphan. He never knew the truth about me until a couple of months ago.

I went along for ten years working in Mr. Hurst's office. Little by little I succeeded in adjusting myself to the strange, new person I was. I wanted to forget the other me. It was pretty difficult, but I drank a lot and chased around and tried in every way to change my inner self. I thought of Sunny as being happily married to some nice fellow. I wanted her to be happy. I hoped that she was.

TWO months ago the American Legion had a convention in Chicago. Lafe and I both got pretty well tanked up and went over to headquarters. I was walking around, hoping I would see some of my old outfit, when suddenly I saw Sunny. She had on a uniform and she was standing talking to some other women in uniform. Without thinking, I limped over to her. I thought for a second she recognized me, because there was a little startled look in her eyes, but I realized later that it was just a look of pity.

I didn't know what to say to her when I got up to her. I realized that I had to play a part, so I asked

her what she was doing that night, if maybe she wouldn't like to see the town. She said no, that she already had an engagement for the evening.

She was the same beautiful Sunny. She hadn't changed at all, except to grow more beautiful. I wanted to put my arms around her and hold her close to me as I have never wanted anything in my life, but all I could do was to stand there and tremble and look at her. She started to turn away, but I spoke to her again. I tried again to make a date with her, but she smiled a little and said, "No," and that anyway, she was married. I choked a little. I wanted her to be married, of course, but I couldn't stand it when I heard her say it.

I said, "You're married?"

I knew my hand was shaking, so I jammed it into my pocket.

"He was killed in France," she said quietly.

I said, "You mean, then, that you're married to some one else?"

She smiled a little.

"No," she said. "You wouldn't understand. I can't explain it, either. It's just that—well, I never saw him dead. It seems as though he's still living. He is, too, in a way—he's living on in his son."

I thought my heart would leap right out of my chest. I was afraid I couldn't control myself.

"His son," I said; even my voice was going back on me. "He had a son?"

She nodded. I stood there for a second looking at her and wanting to tell her. Maybe I was going to tell her. I don't know, but then I pulled my arm out of my pocket, the arm that has no hand on it. She shook her head a little and her eyes softened with pity. I didn't say a word. I knew it wouldn't be right. She would pity me all of her life. Maybe she wouldn't even love me. She was in love with the other man, the man I was before I went to war.

She was embarrassed, I guess because she had talked to me so personally. She turned and walked away without another word. I watched her disappear into the crowd of jostling people, and I knew I had to get out of there in a hurry. I didn't try to find Lafe. I just edged my way out into the street as fast as I could get there. I walked all the rest of that day, then at night I went to my apartment. Lafe came over and wanted to know why I had ditched him there at the convention hall. I told him, then, all about everything.

He got excited and said he was going right out and find Sunny—that we had to tell her. I wouldn't let him do it. I brought out a quart of good liquor, some I had been saving for a celebration, and we both got drunk. I stayed drunk for about a week, then I pulled myself together again and went back to work.

I feel better now. Knowing that Sunny is still my wife and that I have a son has made my life worthwhile again. Every pay day I send a cashier's check to a town in Maine. I'd like to see my son. Maybe some day I'll make a trip to D—— I know she'll send him there—and watch a football game. I don't go out at all any more. I just come home after work and read or work on some drawings I've been interested in lately. Lafe still thinks I ought to get in touch with Sunny, but I think it's better this way.

I don't drink any more either, but I promised Lafe that if we sold this story I would buy some champagne and celebrate with him once more.

Dave Hawley takes—and puts on the

# Pressure

By C. S. Montanye


THE Tuesday edition of the Fairmont *Blade* was on the press. Two thousand copies. Dave Hawley covered his typewriter. Two thousand. Not bad for a town the size of Fairmont.

He tapped his pipe on a heel, washed his hands at a sink in the corner and was drying them on the roller towel, when Jeff Abbott, the owner and publisher of the newspaper, came in.

Abbott was a shrewd little man. He had almost radical ideas, a contempt for wealth, and the fearlessness which a newspaper publisher needs. His failing was drink. He'd go along for months, sober as a judge. Then a single shot of whisky would start him on a spree that might last a fortnight. In his own way Abbott was a misplaced genius.

"Been out to Sun Lake, Dave?"

Hawley nodded.

"I've got a story for the Sunday edition with some photographs. I'm to pick up the pictures to-morrow."

"See Flynn in action?"

"I watched him box four exhibition rounds with his sparring partner. Pretty tough crowd out there."

"Camps where prize fighters

train," Abbott said, "are not supposed to be social drawing-rooms. And Sun Lake's reputation has always been unsavory. In the old prohibition days Gaffney's place was a glorified speakeasy and hangout for all the roughnecks in the neighborhood. This Flynn isn't one of our best citizens either. I understand he has a prison record."

Dave Hawley winced inwardly. Prison record. He thought of his father at the Eastview Penitentiary, serving six years for embezzlement. Then he thought of himself. The stigma of his father's sentence had made him a social outcast. People shunned him because his father had taken eleven thousand dollars of the Fairmont Coal & Fuel Co.'s money.

"Flynn looks good," he told Abbott. "I wouldn't be surprised if he won."

"I wouldn't bet a nickel on it." Abbott shrugged. "It's probably fixed. Flynn's noted for his shady deals. Let's see the story."

Hawley took some manuscript from the desk.

Abbott folded the typewritten papers and shoved them in his pocket. He looked at Hawley. Dave was tall, well-built, good-looking.

"Hear anything from the bombshell you exploded in the paper last week?"

Hawley shook his head.

"Nothing—yet. I'm keeping my fingers crossed. Old man Craig isn't the kind to back down on threats."

"What's become of his lady-crazy son?" Abbott asked.

"Rodney ducked out of Fairmont the morning after the affair at the country club. That's like him. Rod never could take it."

Abbott laughed.

"We tried hard enough to finish him here in this town. I think I'll run a question box at the foot of the first page. Slap a big title on it: 'What's Become of Rodney Craig?' Hear anything about the girl he was engaged to? Lucile Varrick, wasn't it? I wonder how she took our headlines."

"Probably with a grain of salt. After all," Hawley pointed out, "the Craigs are rich and powerful. Money covers a multitude of indiscretions."

"You've been listening to me." Abbott grinned. He looked at his watch. "Guess I'll go home. This hot weather gets under my skin. Sticking around?"

"I've got to check over the 'Classified Wants.'"

ABBOTT nodded. He turned toward the door. Phil, the *Blade's* combination apprentice, office boy, and telephone operator, came in, a smudge of printer's ink on his freckled face.

"Mr. Lockwood's outside to see you," he announced, with a jaunty air.

"Tell him to come in." Abbott turned to Dave Hawley. "Wonder what he wants. Ten to one he's going to reword his full-page advertisement."

The man who entered through the door that Phil held open was angular, lantern-jawed. Lester Lockwood, owner of the Fairmont Dry Goods Co., was a middle-aged native.

Abbott waved him into a chair.

"Sit down, Lockwood. Something wrong? If you're thinking of changing your advertisement there isn't a chance in the world. We're on the press."

Lockwood stared at Abbott.

"I want to cancel the advertisement."

Hawley saw Abbott's fleeting smile. It was ironic, cold.

"Isn't it rather a late date for that?"

The man in the chair cleared his throat.

"I haven't any choice in the matter. I'll tell you how it is. About an hour ago Henry Craig called me up. I have a note at the bank that's due on the fifteenth of the month. Henry asked me if I was giving the *Blade* any advertising."

Lockwood paused. Abbott rested against the edge of Hawley's desk. His thin, sensitive face darkened.

"And when you told him you had a full page in the Tuesday issue Craig said that if you didn't cancel it your note wouldn't be renewed?"

Lockwood sat up straighter.

"Why, yes, that's just what he said! How——"

"Did I guess it? It wasn't hard. You see," Abbott explained, "Craig has it in for our paper."

"You mean——"

"I mean," Abbott continued, "that ever since Rodney took a pot shot at the man who went to the country club to horsewhip Rodney for jilting his daughter, Henry Craig has been waiting a chance to get even. Dave spread it all over the front page of the *Blade*. This looks like the first gun in his campaign."

"But Rodney didn't kill anybody," Lockwood put in.

"Thanks to Dave's timely interference. However, the Craigs are social leaders. It hurt them to have their son shown up for what he is. It's one thing to jilt a girl, but to be horsewhipped for it by her father didn't exactly add to his glamour."

Lockwood rubbed his chin on the back of his hand.

"Well," he said defensively, "Maybe you did lay it on too heavy. Lots of young fellars to-day get into scrapes with girls. Can't help it, what with the times as they are and the way we're living. I didn't come here to talk about the right or wrong of it. I want my advertisement canceled."

"You're thirty minutes too late," Abbott told him.

For a long space Lockwood thought it over.

"I don't know what I'm going to do," he said uncertainly. "Henry meant business. There's nowhere I can go and get that note money except——"

Abbott picked up the telephone. He dialed a number, waited, and when the connection was made, asked for Craig at the bank.

"This is Abbott of the Fairmont *Blade*," he began. "Lester Lockwood stopped in to have his advertisement withdrawn from the Tuesday paper. Unfortunately it's on the press. Mr. Lockwood said you've threatened him. Is that true?"

Craig's voice was vibrant over the wire.

"Is Lockwood there now?"

"That has nothing to do with what I asked you."

"Put Lockwood on. I want to talk to him."

The dry goods dealer guessed what Craig had asked.

"Let me talk to him." When the telephone was pushed in his hand Lockwood moistened his lips. "Henry? This is Les. I came down to the newspaper to do what you suggested, but I found out——"

"You fool!" Craig interrupted. "What do you mean by discussing a personal business matter with a man like Jeff Abbott? I don't care what you say or do now. I'm calling your note on the fifteenth!"

He hung up with a venomous click. Lockwood's face reddened when he put down the telephone. He looked at Abbott.

"Did you hear that? He says he doesn't care what I do. He's calling the note. That puts me in a fine fix. What are *you* going to do about it, Mr. Abbott?"

"What do you mean? You gave me the ad, paid for it, and I'm running it." Abbott's eyes narrowed. "Suppose we use what Craig told you. That ought to make good reading—Craig in the rôle of dictator."

Lockwood's thin hand fastened over the publisher's arm.

"Don't do that!" he begged nervously. "Don't make it any worse. I —I'll think it over. I'll go and see Henry to-night. He owns stock in the store. Maybe he'll be reasonable when he cools down."

"All right, I'll lay off," Abbott said. "Let me know what Craig says."

When Lockwood left, Abbott walked over to the press-room door. He glanced in briefly, shut the door, and picked up his hat.

"See you later, Dave."

HAWLEY pushed aside the typewriter and sat down at his desk. So Henry Craig had struck the first blow—a blow aimed at him through Abbott. Abbott, through loyalty, would never yield. And in the end Abbott's defiance would bring disaster.

Hawley's mouth tightened. He couldn't let that happen. Jeff Abbott had befriended him. He had given him a job when no one else in Fairmont would.

After a minute he put a piece of paper in the typewriter. He tapped the keys briskly. He rolled out the paper on which he had written:

Dear Mr. Abbott:

I hereby tender my resignation to go into effect at once.

David Hawley.

He left the note on Abbott's desk and left the office.

The sun was well down behind the hills in the west. Hawley walked down Trader Street. The main thoroughfare was almost deserted at this hour just before dinner. Fairmont washed its hands and combed its hair in preparation for the evening meal. Hawley continued on as far as the linoleum plant.

He had a date with Betty Deland. Betty was working late. The girl was a stenographer and the cause of the episode at the country club the previous week. Young and pretty, she was the one whom Rodney Craig had jilted before he had asked Lucile Varrick to marry him. It had been Betty's father who had gone to the club to punish Craig.

His thoughts changed. Poor kid. She was as much of an outcast in her way as he was in his. Fairmont looked at her with censuring eyes. They both had a battle to fight—and win. The odds were against them. A jailbird's son and a girl who had been cast aside by the son of the town's first citien.

He didn't care particularly. He was used to sneers and slurs. But how would Betty take it?

He smoked a cigarette near the employees' entrance. He thought about the job he had given up. Tomorrow he'd run out to Sun Lake and pick up the photographs Flynn's manager had promised to supply. Then his association with the *Blade* would end. He wondered if he could get a job on a newspaper in one of the big cities. He hated the idea of leaving Fairmont. He knew what they'd say. He had shown the white feather.

BETTY was a brunette, rather small and attractive. Hawley could imagine Rod Craig falling for her. He always had an eye for a good-looking girl.

Betty's smile was bright and friendly.

"Keep you waiting long?"

"It's a pleasure to wait for you," he said gallantly. "You look all in."

"It wasn't exactly a picnic to-day. Mae Wilder, the girl at the next desk, was sick. I had to do her work." She drew a deep breath. "The air is good. It's so stuffy in there. I haven't gotten used to the smell of linoleum yet."

She fell into step beside him. Hawley linked his arm with hers.

"Do we have to go back to the boarding house? It's going to be a swell evening. How about a ride somewhere? I had the puddle jumper greased this morning. It's pleading to go."

She nodded.

"Sounds good to me. Anything for a breath of fresh air." She looked up at him. "Just give me a chance to change my clothes and powder my nose, and I'll be with you."

They both roomed at Mrs. Maddigan's boarding house on Forest Street. Betty had taken lodgings there under the name of Allen, when she had come to Fairmont. Hawley remembered the night he had asked her to the country-club dance. It seemed a long time ago now. A lot had happened. He had enjoyed her company that night. It was the first time he had ever stepped out with a "nice" girl. Previously his girl friends had been the dime-a-dance ladies of the road houses along the main highway.

She was waiting on the vine-grown front porch. She stood there while Hawley went around the corner to the garage for his secondhand car. The machine was a roadster. He put the top down so they could see the sunset, backed out and went around to get her.

"Any particular place you'd like to go? Just mention it and you'll get plenty of service."

"Where would you suggest?"

Hawley looked at her. The breeze over the windshield had loosened a tendril of her dark hair. It blew across her face. Somehow it gave her a sort of fascination. She had always been so spick and span.

"I tell you what we'll do," Hawley said slowly. "How about Sun Lake? I've got to pick up some photographs of Flynn, the boxer who's training there. It'll take only a few minutes. We can stop at Drigo's Pavilion at the Cove and get some sandwiches and beer. It's pretty out there and it ought to be cool."

Betty pushed herself farther back against the worn leather upholstery.

"It's funny you mentioned Flynn."

"Why?"

"Tom Shaw—he's one of the file clerks at the plant—went out there the other day. He said he saw a familiar automobile parked on the road back of the training camp. A large, bright yellow coupé with one of those glass horse heads on the radiator cap."

Hawley twisted around quickly.

"That's Rod's car!"

She nodded.

"Tom didn't see him around. Does it mean that Rod's come back? Is he staying out there? There couldn't be any mistake about the car, unless he's sold it. I'm sure he hasn't. He used to tell me that it was the only one of its kind in this part of the country. He got a big kick out of that."

HAWLEY'S eyes narrowed. Rodney Craig's car at Flynn's training camp. That was unusual. Prize fighters were beneath the dignity of the

Craig family. Rod had never displayed any interest in public sporting events other than polo and tennis.

"I'll check on that," he said. Quite casually he added: "I've quit the *Blade*."

He sensed rather than saw Betty's start of surprise.

"You left the paper?"

"Resigned this afternoon."

"But why, Dave?"

"I wasn't doing Abbott any good. It's one thing to have old man Craig put the pressure on me, something else when he hits Abbott because he wouldn't fire me."

"What do you mean by pressure?"

Hawley explained what had happened that afternoon. He told her about Les Lockwood and the telephone conversation in the newspaper office.

"When the advertisers begin to get cold feet it's time something was done about it. That's one part of Craig's campaign—to intimidate any one who uses the *Blade*. He's in a position to do it, too. All he has to do is look over his prospect, find a weak financial spot and clamp down on it. No newspaper can succeed without advertising. After Lockwood it would probably be Shep Conklin. They're our two biggest accounts. I couldn't hang around and poison the paper."

"What are you going to do?"

There was an anxious note in her voice that did not escape him.

"I haven't decided. I'd like to hit for one of the big cities and a berth on a real sheet. Somehow I've got the crazy idea I'm destined to be a newspaperman in spite of myself."

Her hand fastened over his arm.

"But that's running away, Dave! That's showing them you're licked. Remember what you told me one night? You said you were going to fight it out with me—that you weren't afraid!"

"I'm not afraid! It isn't that. Abbott's the only one in Fairmont who would give me a job. I can't stick around and starve!"

Her slender fingers trembled.

"That's true, but there ought to be something you could do to keep the one you had. Why don't you talk it over with Mr. Abbott?"

"I did. You know his ideas. He'd keep me on to spite them if it meant losing his last dime. I quit to save him from his own folly. Can't you see I'm right?"

She dropped her hand from his arm. She seemed to shrink back into the corner of her seat. Under her breath, she said:

"Yes, I suppose you are. It isn't just yourself, is it?" She raised her glance. "But what am I going to do without you?"

"You'll get along all right," he answered gruffly.

"Will I? You're the only one who's given me courage. It hasn't been so bad with you to lean on."

"It isn't doing you any good—going around with me. I've been selfish about it. I've liked doing it."

"I've liked it," she said in a low voice.

He stared ahead through the rosy light that lay along the road. The sun was down. Sun Lake was only a few miles farther on. Already the hills surrounding it loomed up in the distance.

"Maybe Abbott can suggest something for me. He knows the ropes. I've got a little money saved—enough to last for a while."

She kept silent. For the first time Hawley realized exactly what it would mean to leave Fairmont. He had been born there. He had known happy hours, and black, nerve-racking despair. He remembered the

night they came for his father—his stunned, beaten anguish. He was only a boy, a boy crying bitter tears in the darkness of his room. But he had grown up that night. Out of his mental suffering had come something. He didn't know then what it was. It had given him strength enough to go on, to bear up under a blow that had numbed and bewildered him.

"We turn left," Hawley said. "I wouldn't bring you up here to Drigo's if it were a Saturday or Sunday night. Pretty tough crowd over week-ends. It ought to be all right to-night."

"I've heard about it," Betty told him.

THEY parked in front of a low, rambling log structure. Drigo's Pavilion was directly on the lake. Joe Drigo, the proprietor, was an Italian who had found operating a dance hall where gambling was encouraged profitable. He rented boats for fishing parties as a side line. He kept the place open all year. In the winter the Fairmont younger crowd came out to skate.

Hawley and Betty went out to the veranda which overhung the water. It was like being on the deck of a boat. There were about six other people eating there. Four men were at one table. They wore sweaters and light-colored trousers. Hawley recognized one of them as being connected with Flynn's training camp. A man and a woman, evidently tourists, were at another table.

Hawley selected a table at the far end of the porch. He ordered sandwiches and beer. They looked out over the lake. Shadows were lengthening. Birds called through the dusk.

"It's so peaceful," Betty murmured. "Don't you love it?"

"I used to come out here with my dad, fishing. Drigo wasn't in business then. We had a rowboat on the other side of the Cave. When we finished we used to hide it in the underbrush."

"Do you often go to see him?"

"You mean, my father? I haven't been to Eastview in two months. It's depressing. It takes me days to get over it."

"I can understand. Why don't you go out and see him this Sunday? Take me with you."

He gave her a blank stare.

"Take *you* to a penitentiary?"

"It might help a little—having some one with you. I'd like to go, Dave."

"I don't know where I'll be Sunday," he told her. "You wouldn't want to meet him anyway. He's not the dad I used to know. He's turned cynical, bitter, and hard. I appreciate your offer, but let's," he added quickly, "drop the subject. It's not so pleasant."

The man and woman finished and left. The four down the porch ordered more beer. Hawley noticed the men kept looking in their direction. He supposed that was on account of Betty.

"I can't believe you are really going away," Betty said, out of the silence between them.

"Neither can I."

"You're going to let me hear from you?"

Hawley leaned forward.

"Do you want to?"

"You know that."

"Yes," he said slowly, "I guess I do. We've been pretty good pals, Betty. Something more than two fair-weather friends. We've known tough going. I think it's helped us to understand each other."

ABOUT half an hour later, Hawley knew they'd have to start back. He wanted to see Scanlon at Flynn's camp and get the promised photographs. Training camps usually had set hours. The quartet had left the table down the porch. The waiter handed Hawley his check.

Mrs. Drigo made change. Hawley went back and put a tip on the table. There was a screen door leading from the porch to a path that went around to the back of the building where he had parked the roadster. A single electric light gave some illumination.

Before he reached it Hawley heard voices. Some man was talking to Betty. He said:

"Come on, sister, don't be so high hat. We've got a car, too. How about a little joy ride over to Woodville?"

Betty's answer was cool and quiet.

"Thanks very much, I have an escort."

"That egg you were eating with? Give him the slip. He's no bargain."

"Would that be nice?" she chided.

Hawley quickened his steps. When he rounded the building he saw the man who had gone out to telephone standing in front of Betty. Two of the others were in an open touring car. It was large. It had been expensive in its day. The fourth member of the party was buying cigarettes inside.

"All set, Betty?" Hawley asked.

"Yes, all ready."

Hawley paid no attention to the man standing a pace away from them. He took her arm in his. Before he had moved ten steps forward the man caught the girl's other arm.

"Wait a minute, Betty. What I said before should be——"

At that instant it seemed to Dave Hawley as if the thing had been prearranged. The men in the car, waiting. The one who came out of Drigo's, putting the cigarettes he had bought in his pocket. And the man who faced them, his hand on Betty's wrist.

Hawley's right fist curved up and out. The blow sent the man reeling backward. He heard his snarled oath. In the faint light he had the impression of the two in the car climbing out hastily. He had hardly time to give Betty a push and say:

"Get inside—*quick!*"

The one who had bought the cigarette lunged at him. Hawley sidestepped and swung his left. It was a powerful jolt. It brought the man up short and gave Hawley chance to meet the two who came piling up.

"He's got a wallop!" the first man cautioned. "Watch him!"

Hawley tried to pick out a spot where they couldn't corner him. Again his intuition seemed to tell him it wasn't any casual encounter. While they had been sitting on the porch, looking him over, they had doped out the mechanics of their plot and selected the stage for it.

But why? It couldn't be a stickup. He didn't look prosperous enough to warrant that. Betty? Perhaps, but not likely. They weren't drunk enough to risk the serious charges the law would prefer. Then what?

He had no time to ponder the questions. He was in it and had to make the best of it. Fortunately, he was big and strong.

The first man was coming at him again. He wore a brown sweater that distinguished him from the others and had a hard, expressionless face.

Hawley set himself for the attack. Instead of striking at him as a boxer might, the four made a concerted rush. Their effort to gang him

didn't catch Hawley off guard. He evaded the blows as they came and used his fists in return. He understood the advantage of keeping a clear head. So long as he could stand them off and hold his own he'd be all right.

He wondered where Betty was. She had disappeared in the log building. Was she telephoning for help? It wouldn't do much good. The nearest State police booth was on the main highway, a mile beyond the road that led to Sun Lake. By the time troopers came he'd probably be well beaten. And he knew Drigo's policy when it came to brawls. The Italian never interfered or let his help mix in.

Again they rushed him. Hawley tripped as he ducked aside. He went to his knees. The next instant they were on him. Blows thudded off his body. Struggling to throw them off he lurched to his feet. His big right fist cracked into one face. He grabbed the man and hurled him at the others. Now if he could only get Betty and make a dash for the car!

The man in the brown sweater slid up to him. He knew something about fighting. Hawley could tell that by the way he held his guard and wove in. He warded off a hook, an uppercut, got clear of the others and closed in on his opponent.

The light was better where they engaged. Hawley looked into the masklike face and glittering eyes of the man who circled him warily. The other stepped closer. He led with a left, hooked with a right. Hawley saw his chance. His shoulder partially blocked the jab. The uppercut shook him. He clinched and hung on. Then he pushed the man away, feinted and sent a right to the peak of the jaw. The blow had all of Hawley's strength behind it.

The man dropped as if he had been shot!

Dave whirled around to meet the others. The three had scrambled into the touring car. The self-starter whined as the lights went on. Had they gotten Betty? Why were they leaving so hurriedly? Dimly, through Hawley's confusion, he saw the girl in the doorway. Almost at the same moment a light coming along the lake road lanced the dark. The distant chug of a motor cycle broke out.

*"Betty!"*

"Here!" She hurried out to him. "I telephoned. Mrs. Drigo wouldn't listen to me, wouldn't do anything! Oh, Dave, are you hurt?"

He laughed through swelling lips.

"Not much. You ought to see the other guy. And that reminds me. Let's take a look at him."

He hauled the wearer of the brown sweater to his feet and propped him up against the log wall near the door. The touring car had gone. The motor cycle wheeled into the parking space. A uniformed figure alighted, kicked the stand into position and hurried across.

"What's going on here?"

Hawley turned.

"Just a little argument, officer. I got the one who started it. I'd like to find out what it's all about. Mind if I take him inside and pump him?"

ABOUT nine o'clock the following morning Mrs. Maddigan knocked on Hawley's door.

"Telephone, Dave." The woman peered at him anxiously when he opened the door. "You ain't sick? It's after nine and you ain't had breakfast yet."

"I'll take the telephone call first."

Hawley smiled. "No, I'm all right, Mrs. Maddigan."

"What have you done to your mouth? It's all puffed up."

"Is it? Why, you're right. I'll tell you all about it sometime. First, the phone——"

Jeff Abbott's voice came over the wire.

"What are you trying to do, act funny? I mean, typing comedy notes and leaving them on my desk. You get down here and make it snappy. Your resignation's not accepted."

Hawley drew a breath.

"Listen, skipper. I have some important news for you. Meet me in a half hour in front of the bank."

"What——"

"In thirty minutes," Hawley said, and hung up the receiver.

Abbott was waiting when he reached the brick edifice that housed the Fairmont Bank & Trust Co.

"I don't get this, Dave. What are we doing here?" He gave Hawley a searching stare. "And what happened to your mouth?"

"That's part of our reason for being here. I think we'll put on a little pressure ourselves. You'll understand in a minute or two. Come on, let's go in. We're calling on Henry Craig."

"Fat chance he'll see us," Abbott said.

"Watch." Hawley took out a letter and handed it to the office boy in the rear of the bank. "Give this to Mr. Craig."

The boy came back from an inner office after a minute or two.

"Mr. Craig will see you. This way, sir."

The man who sat before a polished mahogany desk was florid, stout, and pompous. Hawley's letter was open before him. He looked from one to the other. To the office boy, he said:

"Shut the door, Robert." He moved around in his swivel chair. "What do you want, Hawley? This letter sounds like a lot of nonsense. You——"

Hawley's tone was quiet when he answered:

"Not exactly nonsense, Mr. Craig. I'd like to tell you a story. I'll make it short and to the point. Last night at Drigo's Pavilion on Sun Lake I was attacked by four men."

"I'm not interested," Craig said crisply.

"I think you will be when you hear the particulars. My chief attacker was an ex-pugilist named Barney Whalen. Later, when the affair was over, a State trooper helped me make him talk."

Craig looked bored.

"You came here to tell me that?"

"It seems," Hawley continued, "your son Rodney learned that I was to go back to Flynn's training camp to pick up some pictures for the *Blade*. Rod got the bright idea of squaring matters with me. Briefly he engaged the services of Whalen. I was to be beaten up and——"

Henry Craig's hand struck the desk.

"I don't believe it!"

"I'm sorry you don't. I have Whalen's confession and the State trooper as a witness. I came here this morning to give you a break. I'll drop the matter on one consideration. Either you take the pressure off Lester Lockwood and agree to renew his note and let him advertise when and where he pleases or——"

A wave of color deepened in Craig's jowled face.

"Oh—*what?*"

"I'll go down and have a warrant issued for Rod's arrest!"

For a minute the man at the desk hesitated. Finally he picked up his telephone.

"Miss Curtis, get me the Fairmont Dry Goods Co. I want to speak to Mr. Lockwood. If he isn't there you can leave a message. Tell whoever answers that I said if Mr. Lockwood will stop at the bank this afternoon we'll renew his note as usual and——"

Outside on Trader Street, Abbott spoke for the first time:

"Pressure, eh? Walking back to the office with me, Dave?"

Hawley tried to grin.

"Sure, after I make another call."

"In person?"

Dave Hawley shook his head.

"On the telephone—to the linoleum plant. Betty's waiting to hear what happened this morning. I want her to know," he said softly, "I'm staying in town a while longer!"

## ANSWERS TO "DO YOU KNOW—"

Questions on pages 26, 27

1. Water is the only natural liquid independent of life processes which exists in a free state in any quantity. Gasoline, the oils, the alcohols, etc., are all the products of natural life processes.
2. In North America the arctic ice sheets pushed as far south as the junction of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers; in Europe the ice invaded the plains of France.
3. The little plant, St. John's wort, which grows about a foot in height was transplanted from North America to New Zealand about eighty years ago. There it now grows as a tree often forty feet high.
4. Seals are found in several landlocked bodies of water. They are found in the Caspian and Aral Seas, and in Lake Baikal in Eastern Siberia. This is due to these bodies of water once having been arms of the oceans to which they are now adjacent.
5. Early man looked upon fire as something mysterious and uncanny, as a living being with an insatiable appetite. Hence, the primitive man "fed" the fire.
6. The bull fight, now the national sport of Spain and her daughter countries, had its origin in religious rites of the primitive tribes inhabiting the Iberian Peninsula. These ceremonies were to insure plentiful harvests.
7. The safety pin was invented during the Bronze Age. Fibulæ, *"fasteners,"* were of bronze, and worked on the same principle as the modern safety pin.
8. Fights between men on horseback first occurred in southeastern Russia about 1000 B. C.
9. In the Mayan culture a game similar to basket ball was played as part of a religious ceremonial.
10. The earliest form of writing was the pictograph—actual pictures of concrete objects, such as men, animals, or plants. Symbolic representation came next: a star, for example, might represent a god; three wavy lines stood for water, etc.
11. The ancient Egyptians believed that the spirit of the dead needed a body to live in, so they took particular care to make the face of the stone image an accurate portrait, so that the spirit might recognize it.
12. The Irish potato was domesticated in ancient Peru, in the days of the Incas. The sweet potato was domesticated in the valley of the Amazon River by primitive tribes.
13. The Inca Empire was organized "state socialism." The common people had every act from birth to death regulated for them by the state. There was no private property. The state guarded them against foreign invasion, protected them against injustice, looked after them in sickness and health. Entire communities were moved to work on state projects. In old age, when no longer able to work, they were looked after by the state.
14. In primitive times all objects worn were supposed to possess a mystic and magical property. The skins of animals were supposed to give the wearer the properties of that particular beast. Odd-shaped stones, etc., by their very oddness, were supposed to possess some occult value.

# YOUR HANDWRITING TELLS

## Conducted by Shirley Spencer

If you are just starting out to find your first job; or if you are dissatisfied with your present occupation and are thinking of making a change; or if the character of your friends—as revealed in their handwriting—interests you; or if, as an employer, you realize the advantage of placing your employees, in factory or office, in positions for which they are best suited—send a specimen of the handwriting of the person concerned to Handwriting Expert, Street & Smith's Complete Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., and inclose a stamped, addressed envelope. All samples submitted will be analyzed by Shirley Spencer, and her expert opinion will be given, free of charge.

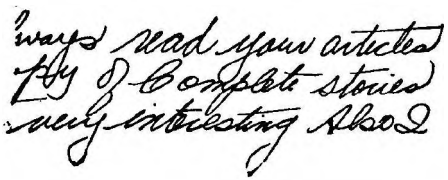
The coupon, which you will find at the end of this department, must accompany each handwriting specimen which you wish to have read. If possible, write with black ink.

Your communications will be held in strict confidence. Only with your permission will individual cases be discussed in the department, either with or without illustrations. It is understood that under no circumstances will the identity of the person concerned be revealed.

Miss Spencer will not assume any responsibility for the specimens of handwriting, though every precaution will be taken to insure their return.

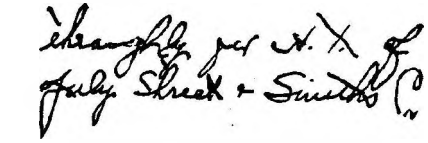
J. J. H., Halifax: I wish to emphasize a point about your handwriting, for it represents a type which I receive constantly. The writing is uneven, variable, and not at all "pretty"; but it has an individuality which is worth more than legible penmanship. There is nothing routine about such script, and so I am not surprised when the writer tells me he doesn't like to settle down to any particular thing—as you have told me. Those who write this type of script are always restless and inconstant in their interests. They like to move from place to place, try different jobs, and lose interest when they have investigated each one.

In your writing you have the combination of science and action. I think you have chosen wisely when you chose engineering. Those wavy *t*-bars, light and inconsistent in length, reflect your "lazy" streak. It is not laziness, but lack of concentration and will power to apply yourself. If you find something which interests you tremendously, you won't have any difficulty in sticking to it. When you get school over with and can do the interesting work in your field, you won't feel so aimless.



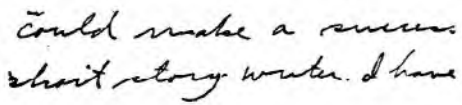
Miss L. M. R., Maryland: All those combative-looking *t*-bars, which are made like daggers, indicate the reason you are asking me

"Is there anything worth while left in life for me?" You are a highly critical person, faultfinding, argumentative, and exacting. You expect too much from life and don't give enough, and you are too critical of people.



That's being very frank, but you wanted the truth. You have a great deal of pride and vanity and so don't take criticism kindly. Your angular writing shows keen intelligence and ability. Just try to control your temper and be more tolerant.

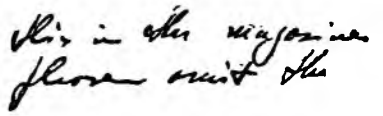
F. W. W., Washington: Writing is not something one can toss off in one's spare time, in spite of all the advertisements to the contrary. I don't think a correspondence course in journalism would solve your problem at all. To be an author one must devote one's whole time to it —a lifetime. That doesn't mean that one might not get an occasional story or article printed, but that is not being a writer in the professional sense. There are so many in this country who succeed in selling one story and all their lives struggle along hoping for success which never seems to come.



You say you have had but one term of high school. Of course that lack can be remedied, but not with one correspondence course. I suggest that you train yourself for a trade in the sciences, since your writing reveals a bent for science, especially electrical engineering.

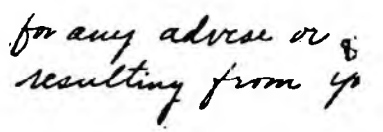
You have a quick, keen mind, but your will power is variable.

Miss I. V. K., New York City: Your writing reflects a very alert, active mind. You are emotional, impatient, impulsive, enthusiastic, and ardent. You are shrewd and clever, persistent and determined



You sign yourself as a nurse, but you have talent enough to have made a brilliant doctor.

P. L. C., Michigan: You have executive ability. Your writing shows training and culture. Ability for detail and good judgment are shown. You have excellent taste and a well-blended, well-rounded character and personality.



You should specialize, as you have been doing, no doubt, for you are capable of attaining a position of responsibility and trust.

A stamped, self-addressed envelope must be sent with each sample. Canadians may send coin or loose stamp with return envelope. Other foreign readers please send International Postal Coupon.

Handwriting Coupon for Street & Smith's Complete Magazine.
This coupon must accompany each specimen of handwriting which you wish read.
Name.....
Address.....

# THREE MINUTES WITH YOU

## THE DRIVE OF THIS MAGAZINE.

THE editor of this magazine always speaks his piece without fear or favor. Since he is moved by no other motive than the desire to catch your fancy, he can speak frankly and fearlessly. Few, if any, magazine editors in the popular fiction field can afford a like degree of honesty. For the most part they undertake to sell you hokum under the name of fast-action fiction, and to increase their sales by cheap devices.

The editor of Complete not only believes this magazine gives its readers a superior story, but he is moved by a sincere desire to improve their taste and stimulate their minds. In the editor's opinion, the public taste has been debased by every device possible, and the last thing a publication of the day does is to engage the minds of its readers. Entertainment and stimulation are supposed to be contradictory notions. A paper or a book that makes you think is to be avoided as something immoral or an unbearable burden.

COMPLETE does not flatter bad taste or soothe a dull mind; therefore, it will always be a magazine for discriminating readers. To discriminate—to

pick and choose—means to have taste. To reject the moranic stories of crime for crime's sake or action for action's sake is the first step in the gradual climb to mental competency and good taste. Just as there have always been more fools than wise men in the world, so there will always be a larger number of bad magazines than good. If you are not discriminating, you can close your eyes and grab any one of the many hundreds on the stands. They are all alike and you need not give yourself a headache wondering which is the best. There is no best.

What is the purport of all these words? "What is he driving at?" Just this: If you find Complete dull or uninteresting—too highbrow or too quiet—do not conclude too readily the fault is in the magazine. You might look for bad taste in another quarter. A juvenile mind cannot appreciate adult fiction. Complete is a magazine for grown-up people. Certainly neither the editor nor the writers of this magazine want to educate or moralize you. Complete's program is something much more modest and much more enticing. It wants to entertain you—to divert your mind. The editor, however, contends that entertainment is not synonymous with slapstick farce or juvenile melodrama.

WHEN we maintain that action is not enough for a story, we are thinking of so many contemporary stories. All of them have action, but no life. This magazine tries to give you stories which are a projection of life itself, the life of to-day in the phases which seem to us the most dramatic, significant, and interesting. We want character in fiction and we want adventure and love, because it is only in moments of stress and action that a man can really show what is in him. Another thing we demand in our stories is ingenuity and ideas.

It is not hard to find new writers, but it is increasingly hard to find a good story of action and incident. A good story asks of a man the rarest gifts of mind and intuition. It is one of the hardest tasks to which one may set himself. All the great literature and all the good stories have been written by men who were not trying to show off or to put on airs; they were men, in fact, careless of the claims of literature as such, but they cared intensely for the story and the people in it. Next to certain natural gifts, the necessary equipment for a writer is that he shall know well one or more phases of life at first hand. His task is to project the vision of the life he knows on the reader's consciousness. His story will have action, but action is only the beginning.

THE good writer is neither wholly realistic nor wholly romantic. It is easy to fake people impossibly good or impossibly bad. It is easy to prove that life is dull and that there is no real heroism, but a great deal of scoundrelism in every man. But after it is done, is it worth while? Is there not a feeling that if life were no better than this, people would have given up living long ago? Is it not better to remember with Rostand that there is always one nightingale left in the forest, and always one hope left in the heart of man. Between dull realism and idle romance there is a great human middle ground, in which a man sees things plainly as they are, but retains the aspirations and the hope that have carried the race so far upward.

# New INVENTION SAVES GAS!

**3 TO 7 MILES MORE PER GALLON**

**MOTORIST SAVES $180.00 a YEAR**

Saves up to Thirty Per Cent On Gas. Provides Faster Pick-Up---More Power--- Greater Mileage and Smoother Running.

GET FREE INFORMATION

### CHRYSLER
Have tried the Vacu-matic and it sure is fine. Better pick-up with a 30% gas saving.—John C. Martin, Pa.

### PLYMOUTH
I am amazed at Vacu-matic performance. It's giving me 5 more miles per gallon. Walter Zielinski, Ill.

### V-8 FORD
I installed both Vacu-matics and they work excellent. On my own V8 Ford I notice wonderful performance in pickup, ger-away and gas saving. — Burt Burnett, Mich.

### BUICK
Everything you claim about Vacu matic is true. I now get 20 miles to the gallon. Before I was only averaging 15½ miles.— C. Constantine, Fla.

### FRANKLIN
With Vacu-matic I have increased my mileage from 10.1 to 14.2 miles per gallon. I figure I save over $75.00 a year in gasoline. R. K. Radtke. Wis.

### SAVES $180 A YEAR
On my Plymouth 6 I obtained an average of 22 miles per gallon, an increase of 7 miles. This means a saving of $15 a month or $180 a year F S. Peck, Calif.

### CHEVROLET
Please send me a Vacu-matic for a Model A. The mileage on my 1933 Chevrolet jumped from 18 to 22 miles per gal. with Vacu-matic. — Paul P Haas, Mass.

### ALL WELL PLEASED
Enclosed find order for 12 more. Everyone I have sold is giving from 4 to 6 more miles per gallon. I have 3 more orders for V8 Ford. Every body is well pleased.—J O. Carll, Texas.

### MODEL A FORD
Have been using the Vacu-matic for a month. I used to get 20 to 22 miles per gal. Now I get 30 to 33 miles. It is amazing the difference it makes.—James W Barr, Canada.

### NASH
On my Advanced 6 Nash gained 17½% in mileage. The car will idle down to 3 miles an hour and then take gas without a complaint. — J. Showalter, Mo

### DODGE
Just completed 2310 miles on 92 gallons in my 1933 Dodge 6. This figures 25 miles while before I averaged only 20 miles per gal. on trips. — Al Fruzyna, Calif

### OLDSMOBILE
I am well pleased with Vacu-matic on our Oldsmobile. A test proved it to give 18 miles per gal. Before we considered 13 good. — Arthur Williams, N Y

**Above are just a few of the many unsolicited letters received from Vacu-matic users.**

# VACU-MATIC

PATENT PENDING

*the Carburetor Control that "BREATHES"*

AT LAST! Automotive engineers have smashed down the barriers to perfected combustion! The new VACU-MATIC solves the secret of greater power! With almost magical action, this amazing invention instantly puts new life and pep in any motor. It adds mileage to every gallon of gasoline . . . produces split-second pick-up, sensitive accelerator response, greater speed and smoother running

## New- *Automatic* - Nothing Like It!

The self-starter—four wheel brakes—knee action—streamlining . . . and now VACU-MATIC! The greatest motor improvement of recent years! With it, engineers have achieved a practical means of balancing air and gasoline automatically for all speeds. Vacu-matic is ***entirely different!*** It is AUTOMATIC and allows the motor to "breathe" at the correct time, opening and closing automatically as required. No idling troubles—no carburetor adjustments necessary. Just put it on and forget it! Sharply cuts fuel wastes, saves dollars in gas costs, reduces carbon and gives your engine new pep, greater power and longer life.

## Fits All Cars

VACU-MATIC is constructed of six parts, assembled and welded into one unit, correctly adjusted and ***sealed at the factory***. Nothing to regulate. Any motorist can attach VACU-MATIC in ten minutes. Once in, its only reminder is the surge of instant power and speed it gives to the motor and the savings it affords your pocketbook.

### *Agents and Salesmen*

If you are interested in earning unusual profits, check coupon. Exclusive territories are now being granted.

**The VACU-MATIC Co., Wauwatosa, Wis.**

## Guaranteed Gas Savings

The VACU-MATIC proves itself on every car. It is guaranteed to give worth-while gas savings, quicker pick-up, and more power or it costs you nothing. "On a test I gained an average of 4 miles on a gallon," writes Alex Wertz. "Vacu-matic is the best I have ever tried." Clarence Rutzin—"I have tried the Vacu-matic on several tests and find that I get between 5 and 6 miles per gallon increase, have more mileage, have greater pickup."

## Free Details

Learn about this remarkable device that so greatly affects the entire performance of your motor. Learn why your car is costing you extra money to operate without VACU-MATIC. See why your VACU-MATIC equipped car will leap away from traffic without sputter or hesitation. Discover a new driving thrill and enjoy the savings. Get the facts! Write today!

**FREE OFFER COUPON**

THE VACU-MATIC COMPANY
7617-109 W. State St., Wauwatosa, Wis.

Gentlemen: Please send me full particulars concerning the Vacu-matic and details of your Free Offer. This of course does not obligate me in any way.

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

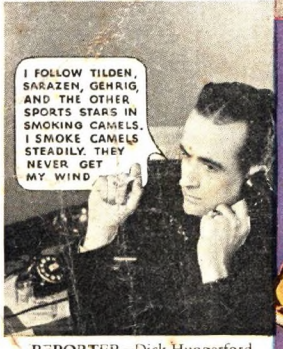
☐ Check here if interested in selling proposition.

# "They don't get your Wind" ATHLETES SAY

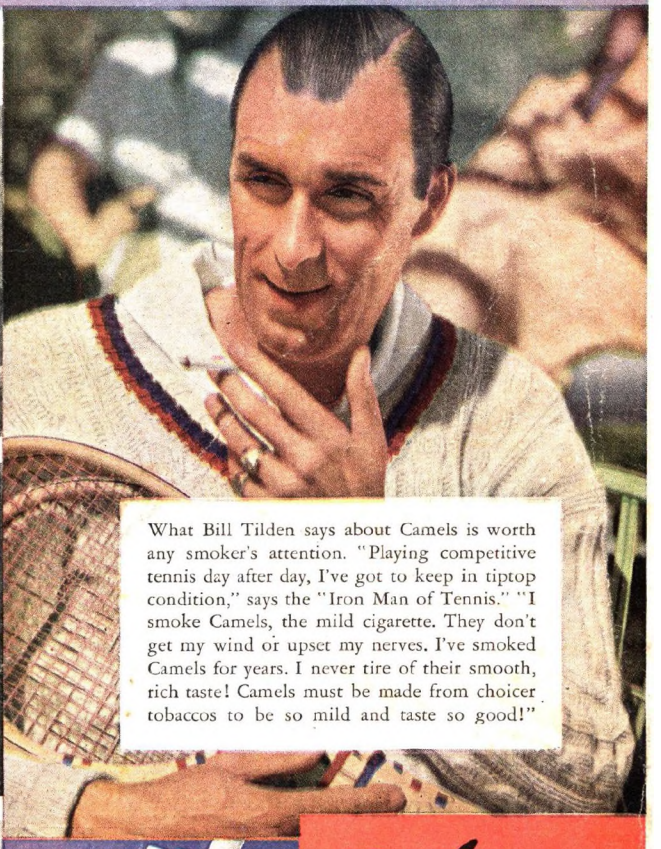
YOU'LL LIKE THEIR MILDNESS TOO!


ACCOUNTANT—C. A. Petersen


WRITER—Eileen Tighe




REPORTER—Dick Hungerford



What Bill Tilden says about Camels is worth any smoker's attention. "Playing competitive tennis day after day, I've got to keep in tiptop condition," says the "Iron Man of Tennis." "I smoke Camels, the mild cigarette. They don't get my wind or upset my nerves. I've smoked Camels for years. I never tire of their smooth, rich taste! Camels must be made from choicer tobaccos to be so mild and taste so good!"


## Costlier Tobaccos!

● Camels are made from finer, MORE EXPENSIVE TOBACCOS —Turkish and Domestic— than any other popular brand.

(*Signed*) R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company
Winston-Salem, N. C.