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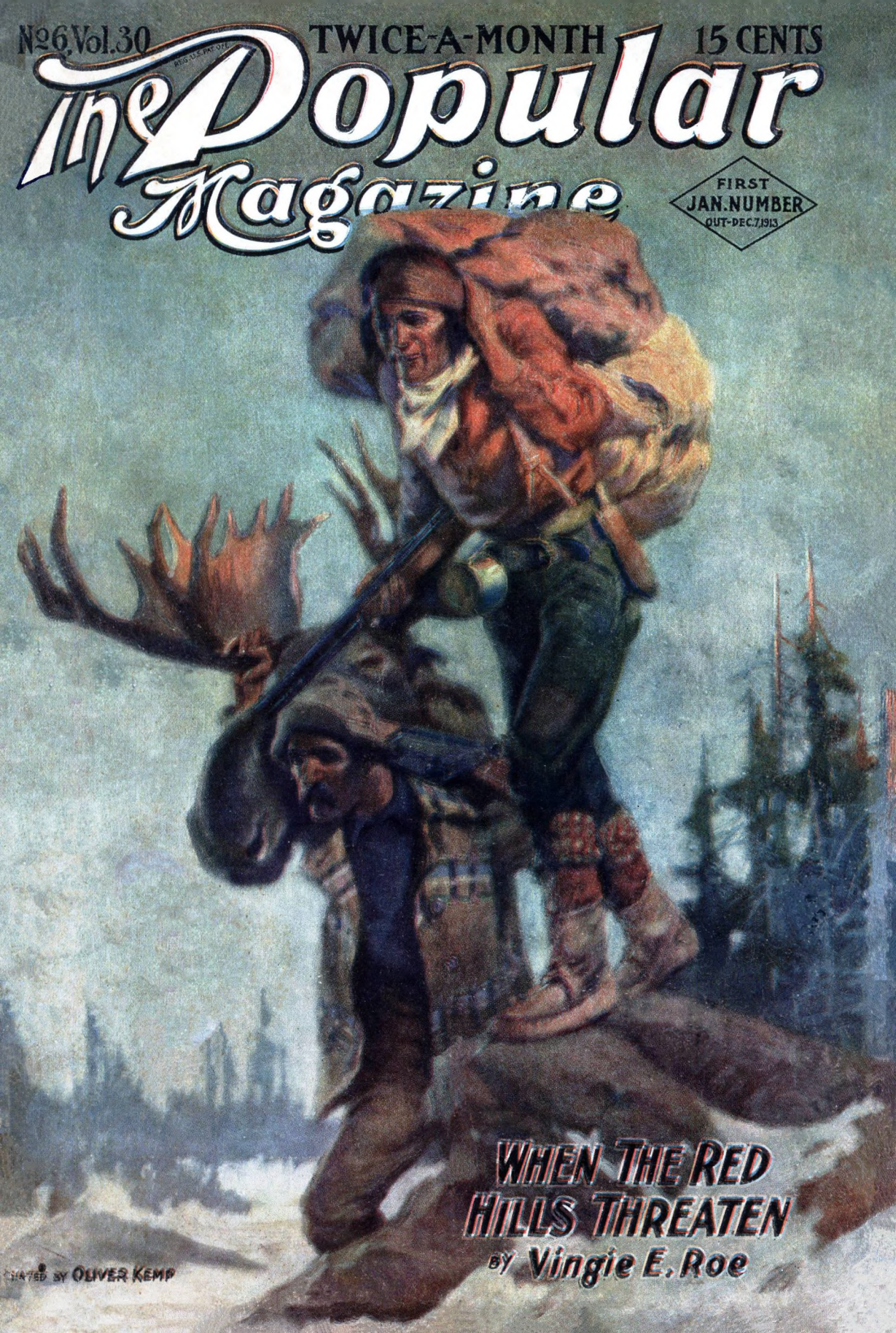

WHEN THE RED HILLS THREATEN

BY Vingie E. Roe

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THE JACK OF HEARTS

By GEORGE PATTULLO

A Big, Breezy Tale of the Cattle Country

VOLUME XXX — NUMBER 6

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

CONTENTS

JANUARY 1, 1914

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They are men of wealth and fashion.
And they are smoking—
The comfortable, economical pipe and—
The hand-made cigarette they roll themselves.
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THE AMERICAN TOBACCO COMPANY

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XXX. JANUARY 1, 1914. No. 6.

Undercurrents

By Henry C. Rowlands

Author of "The Apple of Discord," "Footprints," Etc.

There must be a special crown for the hard-working fellow whose relatives live solely by his industry without stirring a finger to help. Sometimes the man breaks away, but more often he says, "What's the use?" and settles down to treadmill existence. In Doctor Rowland's story the man cuts loose and starts on a new career full of hope. But at the very moment of his setting out Fate leads him along a side path where romance and adventure lurk. Here the profoundest depths of his nature are stirred —undercurrents that are to govern his whole voyage through life. A great story, rather less fanciful than some of the other Rowland novels, but in our judgment one of the best things he has done.

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

BREAKING AWAY.

FIRST, a word about my father. He was genial but selfish, and, though strong as an ox, he placidly refused to contribute to the support of his family. In addition to supporting him, I had to support an invalid sister and an aimless, irresponsible brother, who worked at long intervals, but invariably lost each position through what father was pleased to describe as "constitutional inertia."

How I was able to provide for this helpless family would take too long in the telling. Enough to say that, thanks to a powerful physique and a natural talent for mechanics, I did accomplish it, and managed to educate myself as a mechanical and hydraulic engineer besides. My father was very proud of me, and liked to hold forth to his friends on the abilities of his son, which he was pleased to consider as an inheritance from himself. It was a singular fact that nobody ever seemed to expect of father any effort beyond his edifying conversation. He came of a race of scholars, and was himself a polished, scholarly man, finely educated, well read, and he had spent fifteen years of his life in the United States consular service. The death of his political godfather retired him with the next change of administration, and he returned home at the age of fifty to renew his acquaintance with his motherless children for whose provision he had made arrangements with a relative. He had managed to save three or four thousand dollars, probably through the impossibility of

spending it where he had last been stationed on the Persian Gulf, and with this he rented a small cottage where for a year we lived happily enough.

His money gone, father made one or two sporadic efforts to write for different journals and periodicals. Then, finding that by strict economy the family could live upon my earnings—for I had shown a precocious talent for mechanics, and, being huge for my age, had at fifteen the sole charge of a pumping station—he relapsed into a life of graceful ease, piecing out our scant income by the occasional sale of some special article. My sister had not yet been obliged to go to the sanitarium, and was able to assist with the housework. She broke down several years later and at about the same time my inefficient Brother Charles married a penniless young woman and proceeded to acquire a family. Driven to the wall, they came to live with us, bringing with them the wife's father, an amiable dotard, who pottered about our little garden.

At this time I was twenty-five and practically the sole support of the entire family. I had even managed to save a little, as through friends of my father I had secured a good position from the city council which did not prevent a considerable amount of private work. But this small fund soon faded and disappeared.

I cannot say that I had ever felt inclined to rebel at the burden which for sixteen years I had been obliged to carry. This drudging for others had got to be a second nature. Work was never lacking, and I was sufficiently well paid for it to make both ends meet and maintain the household with decency and a few minor comforts. Our city was a prosperous and growing one, and it is even possible that if I had possessed any marked business ability I might in time have been able to undertake in addition to present responsibilities the support of a wife and children of my own. But our family came of professional and scientific forbears; doctors, clergymen, men of letters, and there was no record of any financial ability. Even then I might have got ahead if only I could have had a little capital at my command.

In the matter of a trolley line on which I did most of the work and afterward a big land reclamation work, had I been able to take stock instead of money for my compensation I might have found myself in easy circumstances not many years later. But money was the pressing need. All went in rent and food and clothing, and when at thirty years of age I paused to take stock of my position, it was practically no better than it had been ten years before. I had been unable to save a cent, which was the more discouraging as the opportunities for the investment of a little capital were being brought constantly to my attention, and I felt that with even five thousand dollars I might yet win clear.

About this time the city was completing the construction of a big building, one floor of which was to be equipped as a public library and reading room. For this a librarian would be required, also a superintendent for the building itself. As I stood well with the party then in office, I quietly set about securing these two positions for my father and Charles, which in consideration of certain political services rendered, as well as a friendly feeling, I had no great difficulty in doing. Both positions were sufficiently well paid, and it seemed to me that if I had had the opportunity of choosing occupations for these two members of my family, I could not have imagined anything more suited to their tastes and abilities. Father was, as I have said, a scholarly man, fond of books and the discussion of books. Charles was possessed of no mean executive ability, and, as I had often discovered, enjoyed directing the work of others. These two positions would have made them both quite independent of me and enabled me to get the start for which I had worked so hard in vain.

Will you believe it when I say that both declined these positions which I had used all of my diplomacy to secure? Father protested mildly that he was too old to take up any active occupation, and that he feared the confinement in-

doors would prove injurious to his health. Charles objected on the ground that the management of a modern office building—for some of the upper stories were to be devoted to city and private office suites—was a position which required a considerable technical knowledge which he did not possess, and that also he feared that he lacked the qualities necessary for the enforcement of discipline over those beneath him. He was at this time engaged in a futile effort to invent a nonpuncturable automobile tire. Both seemed rather hurt at my effort to get them steady and remunerative work.

But it was here that the worm turned.

"Very well," I answered quietly, "in that case, you will all have to get along as best you can for the next two years without my support. I am going away."

They stared at me, father in dismay and plucking at his beard in a senile fashion which his years and physical strength did not warrant; Charles with a sort of disbelieving resentment.

"Douglas, my boy," father exclaimed, "you can't be serious!"

"I am, though, dad," I answered. "I've been doing some pretty hard thinking, and I've come to the conclusion that this thing can't go on. I am thirty years old and no farther ahead than I was ten years ago. With our present expenses, it is impossible for me to put anything aside, and I must have a little capital or make up my mind to stick to the treadmill for the rest of my life."

"Ah, Douglas," said father, in a hollow voice, "you will not be burdened with the support of your old dad for very much longer."

"What good is it going to do you to go away, Douglas?" asked Charles. "You've got a good thing here with the city—and, I must say, I think it's pretty tough to double cross me just when I need some help in promoting my tire."

"Then you'll have to get it somewhere outside," I answered. "As for my object in going away, I got a letter from Professor Denton the other day, telling me of an American concern that wants a good hydraulic engineer to build a plant for placer mining in the Mazaruni gold fields. They've had three down there in the last four months, and they have all died of fever."

"Good Lord!" father exclaimed. "You don't mean to say that you contemplate risking your life in such a pesthole as that?"

"The pay is ten thousand dollars a year, and all found," I answered. "In two years, if I live, I'll be able to come back with a bit of capital. Then, if some more of these good things come along such as I've had to let go by for the last ten years, I'll be in a position to profit by them, as most of my friends have done."

"But how are we to get along without you, Douglas?" father asked; "and how about Miriam?"

"I have enough in hand to pay up Miriam's expenses at the sanitarium for the next year," I answered. "After that, you and Charles will have to look after her until I get back."

"But how are we——"

"There are these two positions I've worked and sweated and pulled wires for the last three months to get you," I answered. "Take them or leave them. I've done my part for sixteen years, dad. Now it's up to you and Charles to help me out for a couple of years, at least. I've never kicked before, because there never seemed to be any work that either of you would care to tackle. But these two jobs are unusually good ones. The hours are easy, the work light, and both are well paid. Positions like them are usually given as a sort of reward for past services to people who have worked for the party."

Father shook his head. "That alone would be enough to deter me, Douglas," he said. "You know we have never agreed in our political opinions."

I turned to my brother. "How about you, Charles?" I asked.

"Oh, I might try it," he answered doubtfully; "but I don't believe that I could give satisfaction. Inventing things is more my line."

"All right," I answered, rising, "then you can get to work and invent some

way of taking care of the family until I get back."

And I went out to send a telegram to the Mazaruni Gold Mining & Development Co.

CHAPTER II.

A MILLION AT STAKE.

The thirty-six hours of train travel to New York gave me the first uninterrupted opportunity for thought which I had had for many a day. I cannot say that I enjoyed it. My leave-taking had been something in the nature of that of a shipmaster who abandons his dismasted vessel and the folk aboard her for whose safety he is responsible, putting off in the only boat to seek succor on some vague and distant shore.

This was the feeling with which my family had subtly managed to inspire me, and their manner of doing so had proven to me that there existed in their hearts not one slightest atom of gratitude or appreciation for my efforts of many past years; no more, in fact, than might be found in the heart of a spoiled child for the sacrifices of loving parents. The reason was plain enough: They had grown accustomed for so long a time to my efforts in their behalf that their imaginations were unable to picture anything different. They took it for granted that I should continue to provide for them as I had always done, and anything different on my part seemed to them monstrous, cruel, and undeserved.

Casting backward in my mind I could see that I had made a great mistake. I had pauperized these people who were the nearest and dearest to me. And it seemed to me that I had gained nothing for myself in doing it. In many ways, I was as ignorant as a Georgia "cracker"; in some, more so. I had never been five hundred miles from my birthplace. I had never seen the ocean. Pleasures of almost every sort were totally unknown to me, except by hearsay. There had never been any woman in my life. I had scarcely ever tasted liquor. I had never smoked.

Life for me had been nothing more than the steady grind of work, and there had been the urgent need at home for every penny earned. I had become a working machine, as grim and dogged and persistent as a steam drill. My immediate circle of acquaintances respected but did not love me. Many people considered me mean to the point of stinginess. I had joined no lodge or club or fraternity, nor did I ever enter a church. I had avoided everything of a social character which entailed the avoidable necessity of spending a cent.

My only personal expenditures had been for food and clothes. I made it a point to eat well and to dress well, for these things I considered in the light of profitable investments. My professional work finished, I went home and dug in the garden, silent but not morose. I was too healthy ever to be morose.

In the evenings I had often sat and listened to my father's descriptions of his travels and experiences, though without any great amount of interest, as these things had always seemed so far removed from the conditions of my own life. I liked also to shoot and fish, but usually went alone, these outings seeming justifiable as they freshened my mind and were usually attended with success in the matter of our larder.

In fact, I had been from boyhood rather a silent, solitary person, and my family were secretly afraid of me. There had been at times certain girls and women who had tried to "draw me out," but these invariably grew discouraged after a certain period of vain effort. I had often wondered why, because I liked the society of women and was never unresponsive. Perhaps it was because I never accepted invitations, nor offered any.

My chief enjoyment, I think, had been in books, these for the most part histories, or the biographies of successful men. I was also a great reader of newspapers. Looking back, I can see that between the ages of twenty and thirty my one absorbing aim and ambition was to improve my condition, mentally and financially, and by *my* financial

condition I mean principally that of the people dependent on me.

It was in a thoroughly bitter frame of mind that I arrived in New York. In fact, I had been in a bitter mood from the time that I had decided to go to British Guiana and build their plant for the American syndicate, and this emotion had been fomented even more by my leave-taking with my family. But if they had been taught to depend upon me, so had it also become a part of my nature to be depended upon. After all, as I thought it over, I was evidently destined for one of the workers in the hive, though the parallel ceased before the stinging of the drones.

On reaching New York, I went immediately to the offices of the Mazaruni company, where I was received by the secretary, a crisp, straightforward Englishman, who was thoroughly informed from personal knowledge of the conditions which existed at my proposed field of labor. He made no attempt to conceal from me the drawbacks of work in the gold fields.

"A white man might be able to stick on there by exercising the greatest precautions," he told me; "but so far it has cost the lives of three of our chief engineers, while two others bolted down the river and got away alive, though in pretty rotten shape."

"A sort of malaria?" I asked.

"Yes, and other beastly things. The soil appears soaked full of miasmatic poisons, and the minute it's disturbed they get in their work. The labor consists of negroes, supposedly immune, and East Indian coolies, and 'red' Indians, as they call the aborigines down there. They all get bowled over, more or less. On the other hand, I spent six weeks there myself, and never had a touch of anything, but I was jolly careful about the night air, and keeping dry, and my drinking water and mosquito nets and all that sort of thing. None of our men had your physique, Mr. Walcott, and I fancy their habits weren't of the best. A man's tempted to drink in that stew pan, and if he does it's all up with him. I never touched anything but tea while I was there, and that may have had something to do with it. You see, I'm not holding anything back. My conscience wouldn't let me send a man down there without giving him due warning. What are your reasons for wanting to tackle it, if you don't mind my asking?"

Finding him so friendly and honestly disposed, I told him precisely how I was situated. He glanced at me curiously once or twice, and the expression of his face was more of a compliment than anything he could have said.

"I see," said he briefly, when I had finished. "Well, then, go ahead and tackle it, if you like. And if you care to have a six months' advance, I think that it can be managed. We know all about you, Mr. Walcott. Professor Denton told us of how you went down through that cañon prospecting for the feeder tunnel; also, how you got your men out of that cave-in, standing there chucking clay into the blow-outs with the pressure jumping from one atmosphere to four every other minute. You're the man for us, if you care to take it on."

So the matter was arranged, and I spent the afternoon with him and a couple of engineers going over the plans and specifications for the plant. This was the fifteenth of May, and my steamer was to sail at ten o'clock the morning of the seventeenth. Mr. Stuart, the secretary, was obliged to leave for Chicago the next morning, so he wished me good-by and good luck, and before I left handed me a check for five thousand dollars, my first six months' advance. This I was very glad to have, as it was my intention to send it to a friend at home, a bank president, with instructions to hold it in reserve and to draw upon it only in the case of my people falling into actual want.

It was in a pretty depressed frame of mind that I went back to my hotel, although I was at the same time conscious of a sort of apathy which dulled other emotions. I felt immeasurably tired, discouraged, and strangely indifferent. The fact that I was consigned for the next two years to a fever-ridden jungle where no white man had been able to

survive the climate for more than a few brief months said nothing to me. To tell the truth, I did not greatly care whether I should survive it myself or not. I was tired.

The accumulated fatigue of many years of grinding work with no play seemed suddenly to heap itself on my shoulders with a crushing weight. There was no reason to suppose that I would be able to support the climate of the Mazaruni any better than had my predecessors who, although lacking perhaps in my physique, had been men, so Mr. Stuart told me, more or less seasoned to the tropics. But I did not care. If I went under, then my family would have to do as other people without resources have been compelled to do, and if I were able to see the job through, it meant a start in life and a brighter prospect for us all.

Mr. Stuart had intimated that if I succeeded the company would undoubtedly see fit to pay me a premium in their stock, over and above my pay, and he assured me that once the hydraulic system was in operation this stock might speedily attain a value impossible to estimate, as the formation was unquestionably one of the richest in the world. It was at least a consolation to feel that I should be working for an honest and liberal concern.

I slept like a log that night, and, having all of the following day at my disposal, I rose early and, after a good breakfast, went out to look about the city. It was a gorgeous morning, bright and mild, and the car which I boarded at random brought me presently to Central Park. Wishing to see a little of the city's playground, I got down, and, following the first path which I struck, I strolled past some little lakes and came out on a broad driveway, where I dropped on a bench in the sun to glance at the morning paper.

There were few people in the park at that hour. An occasional motor car sped past, and now and then a couple on horseback cantered along the equestrian path on the other side of the driveway, or it might be some portly gentleman with his hat crammed down to his ears pounding by on a hard trot for the sake of his liver.

There was already the odor of spring in the air, and presently a big gray squirrel approached my bench in graceful bounds, pausing occasionally to sit up and survey me questioningly. I laid down my paper, and watched him, wondering at the same time how I should spend my day. I had absolutely nothing to do, as Mr. Stuart had told me that I could buy such few things as I might happen to need much better in Georgetown than in New York, and for about a quarter of the price.

I was just about to stroll on when I saw approaching slowly and close to the curb a long touring car, in which were a gentleman and lady and a chauffeur. The chauffeur had turned in his seat, and appeared to be talking excitedly to the man in the tonneau, who was of middle age, with a pale, saturnine face and a black mustache and Vandyke beard shot with gray. Even at the distance of a hundred yards or more I could see that there was some violent dispute between him and the chauffeur, for he was gesturing angrily with his gloved hand, while the pallor of his face looked as if it might be due to anger and excitement. The woman, who was veiled, sat very straight and rigid, her hands clasped tightly in front of her.

As it approached the place where I sat, the car moved slower and slower, the driver steering with one hand and throwing occasional, swift glances ahead, then turning again to resume his discussion with the man behind him at whom he kept thrusting his flattened hand, palm downward, and as though to drive in his remarks. His face was crimson, his pointed under jaw thrust out, and his smooth-shaven mouth set in a sort of snarl.

Almost abreast of me he snapped about in his seat, reached for his speed lever, then switched off the current and leaped down to the curb. I thought for a moment that he was going to strike the older man, and I raised a little on my bench. At the same moment his

words reached me distinctly, now that the hum of the motor had ceased.

"Say," said he, "I got enough o' you —see? I got your number, all right, all right. Say, if you wasn't such a slab-sided old skate, d'ye know what I'd do for you? I'd hand you one on the smeller, that's what! Now you can take your car and go to ——, that's what you c'n do!" And, turning on his heel, he strode off toward the city in the direction from which the car had come, and passed me muttering curses.

The two in the car sat perfectly still for a moment, the man gnawing at the edge of his mustache, and the girl's hands moving nervously. The man rose to his feet and looked around, his eyes resting for a moment on me. He drew out his watch, glanced at it, and gave an impatient exclamation. What had happened seemed plain enough; he had quarreled with his chauffeur, and the latter, with the independence of his class, had stopped the car and gone off in a rage, leaving his employer to get out of the difficulty as best he might.

An Eastern man in my position would probably have sat still and minded his own business, but I came of a section where it was the custom to offer assistance to anybody in trouble without waiting to be asked. I understood motors, and was accustomed to drive the big machine which belonged to the engineers' department of my city. So without hesitating longer, I got up and walked to where the car was standing.

"I beg your pardon," said I; "perhaps I can be of some service to you."

The man gave me a quick, keen look. His face was not a pleasant one, the nose being long and sharp and the eyes cold, light in color, and rather watery. His mouth, too, looked thin-lipped and cruel under its thin fringe of gray mustache. It was a shrewd, intelligent face, and its general lines suggested the unscrupulous money getter; the forecloser of mortgages, and general commercial vulture.

He did not answer immediately, and, a little embarrassed, I glanced at the woman. Her light veil was doubled, with the sun striking full upon it, and all that I could see of her features was a pair of intense blue eyes which seemed to burn through the veil. Yet for some reason I felt sure that she was young and very pretty. The general shape of her head and face seemed to indicate it.

"Our chauffeur has left us in the lurch," said the man, in a harsh, whining voice.

"That's the way it looked to me," I answered. "If you are in any hurry I'll drive you to the nearest garage, and you can get somebody to take you where you want to go."

His face struggled for a pleasanter expression, which I liked less than his former one, as it gave him a look which reminded me of a treacherous collie which smirks a little before it snaps.

"You are very kind," said he. "That would be a great service—a very great service. You must know, sir, that I am a surgeon and on my way to perform an important operation on a patient who lives some way out in the suburbs. Most unfortunately, I lost my temper with my chauffeur for his slovenly manner of driving. The fellow resented what I said to him, with this result."

"If that's the case," I answered, for what he told me put quite a different face on the matter, "you might as well let me take you to where your patient lives."

He shot me a quick, almost suspicious look. It seemed to me, too, that the woman moved uneasily.

"Would it not be an inconvenience?" he asked.

"Not in the least," I answered. "I am merely a transient in New York, and sailing to-morrow morning for South America, where I have some engineering work to do. I have nothing on my hands for to-day."

His face appeared to lighten. "In that case," said he, "I shall not hesitate to avail myself of your very kind offer."

I nodded, and, switching on the current, started the motor. The car was of a type familiar to me, and a moment later we were gliding swiftly toward the upper end of the park, the surgeon leaning forward occasionally to indicate the route.

Not being familiar with the locality, I would be unable to describe the course we took, but before long the city gave way to rather pretty suburbs thickly settled, with new and attractive villas, and I caught an occasional glimpse of what I correctly judged to be the beginning of Long Island Sound. The car was high-powered, smooth-running, and I drove as fast as was prudent; and before long the country grew more open and the towns farther apart. The surgeon, leaning forward, told me that we had not much farther to go. A little later we turned sharply to the right and took a road which appeared to lead toward the Sound.

The last town was perhaps a mile and a half behind us when all at once the motor began to miss. For a brief moment or two it fired erratically, then stopped. I turned to the side of the road and braked gently, then looked back.

"What's the matter?" asked the surgeon sharply.

"Sounds like a lack of gasoline," I answered, and got down to investigate. Sure enough, the tank was empty.

Under the circumstances, I could scarcely blame the man for being angry, but the look of his white, vindictive face as he got out of the car was nothing short of murderous. It was one of those pale, quiet rages which are all the more ominous for their stillness. For a moment he stood gnawing at his straggling mustache with his yellow teeth, then glanced at his watch.

"I am nearly an hour late, now," said he. "The place is only about a mile farther on. I shall walk. Might I trouble you still more by asking you to try to get some gasoline and follow me as soon as possible? My instruments and dressings are in that box on the back of the car."

"Certainly," I answered, "but it may take a little time, as the town is some distance back. However, somebody is apt to pass with a rig of some sort, and, if so, I'll ask them to take on your things if you will give me the address. They could scarcely refuse in a case like this."

He nodded. "That is a good idea. Perhaps I may get a lift, myself. The patient is a Mr. Millsboro, and his residence is the first big place straight down this road on the end of the point." He turned to the woman. "You had better wait and come with the car," said he, and with another word of thanks to me he slipped out of his fur-lined coat, threw it into the tonneau, and started off briskly down the road.

The woman had not spoken a word, and as I looked up at her she raised her veil and drew it back over the brim of her hat. I saw that I had been right in thinking that she was pretty, though this is scarcely the word to describe the pale, intense face that was turned to me. Neither could it have been called beautiful, according to any of the usual standards of feminine charm. It was an unusual face, and might have belonged to a very handsome, high-spirited boy, with widely spaced eyes of so dark a blue that for the moment they looked black, a short, well-shaped nose, and a mouth of singular firmness. I had never seen a woman's face which appealed to me more, but my first glance showed me that the girl—for she could not have been more than twenty-three—was in a state of downright terror. There was no mistaking the strained, almost wild, look about her eyes, and when she tried to speak her lips trembled so that she had difficulty in forming her words.

"What's the matter?" I exclaimed, and stepped to the door of the car.

"Has he gone?" she whispered, and her voice was dry and shaking.

"Yes," I answered. "What is it?"

She drew in her breath deeply, then let it out with a sort of shudder.

"He—he mustn't perform that operation!" Her voice was almost a whisper.

"Why not?" I asked.

She twisted about and glanced over her shoulder. The surgeon had disappeared around a bend. She turned to me again.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"My name is Walcott," I answered,

"and I am a hydraulic engineer. What are you so frightened about?"

She seemed to hesitate, and at the same moment there came the jingle of a bell and I looked around to see a young fellow in working clothes coming around the bend on a bicycle. I stepped out into the road and raised my hand. He drew up and slipped down from his wheel.

"Do you want to earn a dollar?" I asked.

"Don't mind," he answered. "What's the trouble?"

"We've run out of gasoline. Can you ride on to the town and get me a couple of gallons?"

"Sure."

I gave him the money, and he mounted and went on. Then I turned to the girl. She appeared to have pulled herself together and was staring at me intently.

"Well," said I, "if I can be of any service to you——"

"You can," she answered, "if only you will."

"I'll do anything in reason," I answered, a little shortly, having always had a dislike of theatrical business.

"Then," said she, leaning forward, "as soon as that boy comes back with the gasoline I want you to turn the car around and take me back to the city as fast as you can."

I stared at her for a moment, then shook my head.

"Not unless you tell me why," I answered. "How about this patient?"

"Doctor Feldsburg must not operate," she said. "Listen. I have good reason to suppose that he does not intend that Mr. Millsboro shall recover from the operation." And she leaned back, breathing rapidly.

"You are making a mighty serious charge," said I slowly.

"Don't you suppose that I know it?" Her voice was almost shrill. It was plain enough that her nerves were stretched to the point of snapping. "Won't you take my word for it?" she cried.

"I have no doubt that you believe what you say," I answered; "but it's a pretty serious thing to ask me to run off with the man's car and all of his surgical gear. What if the patient were to die?"

"He is less apt to die if he is not operated on," she retorted. "Mr. Millsboro is a man of seventy, and he has been in the condition that he is now for two weeks. Oh"—she threw out her hands with a sort of desperation—"I wonder if I ought to tell you?"

"Do as you think best," I answered, and added, after a moment's pause: "But you will have to tell me a good deal more than you already have if you want me to do what you ask."

She looked at me fixedly, and as I watched her closely I could see that she was not thinking of what I had just said; was scarcely thinking at all, for that matter, but seemed to be concentrating all of her will on the effort to contain herself; to check an all but uncontrollable breakdown. Her mouth, which for all of its firmness had an indescribable sweetness of expression, quivered, and as she stared tensely, looking at but evidently scarcely seeing me, her eyes suddenly filled.

There was something terribly pathetic in this silent struggle, and it seemed to inspire me with a sense of protectiveness such as I had never felt before. Whatever the situation, it was plain enough that the girl was suffering, bravely and silently and hopelessly, too. Moreover, I judged that she had been for some time under a nervous strain, for there were dark rings under her eyes, and her features seemed to tell of many days and nights passed with little food or rest.

"You had better tell me, I think," said I gently. "A good many people have brought their troubles to me at different times, and I do not know of anybody who ever regretted it."

The effect of my words was startling. Her tears gushed over. She caught her breath in a little strangled sob, then recovered herself with an effort, and a tinge of color crept into her cheeks.

"You'll think me a hysterical fool," said she, "but I've been so awfully worried and with nobody that I could ask

for help. I don't know anybody here. I'm a trained nurse, and this is my first private case. I'm going to tell you everything—if I may. You're strong, and you're good. Anybody could see that you are good. Perhaps you were sent to help me."

"Perhaps," I answered. "My mission in life seems to have been to help people."

"So has mine. I've had an awful time. You see, my people are terribly poor, and I've always had to take care of them—since I was a little girl. We live out West. I've been only three weeks here in the East. I came in answer to an advertisement of Doctor Feldsburg. He is a terrible man—and his son is even worse. If I'd known what they were, I should never have come——"

"But about this operation business," I interrupted gently, for the girl was almost incoherent as she rambled on.

"Yes. Doctor Feldsburg has this poor old man absolutely in his power; under his influence. His son hypnotizes him, I think. Now, this is what happened: Mr. Millsboro is worth I don't know how many millions, and is an old bachelor with no immediate family. A week ago he decided to make a will, and Doctor Feldsburg came out here with a lawyer. The will was made, and immediately afterward Doctor Feldsburg and the lawyer, who seemed to be a decent sort of man, came out of the room and sent for me. You can imagine my surprise when they both began to congratulate me, and told me that Mr. Millsboro, having no direct heirs, had left me *a million dollars!*"

"Good Lord!" I exclaimed.

"Yes. They told me that he had done this from appreciation of my care of him and his high regard for my character and a lot of the same sort. Of course, I was dumfounded, for, while he had always been very kind, he had never seemed to show any especial interest in me."

She paused to stare at me questioningly.

"Go on," I said; "what then?"

"I couldn't believe it. But they showed me the will, and I had heard and read of such cases, so naturally I was tremendously excited. I went in to thank Mr. Millsboro for what he had done, but he seemed dazed and unable to understand what I was talking about. When I told this to Doctor Feldsburg, he shrugged his shoulders and said that the old gentleman was very weak, and that the fatigue of making the will had been too much for his strength. He told me to go in and give him an injection of strychnine, which I did. He also told me, after the lawyer had left, not to say anything more about the will, as he did not want the patient to be reminded of his low condition."

"I think that I begin to understand," said I. "What then?"

"What do you think that you understand?" she asked quickly.

"I'll tell you later. Go ahead."

"Well, two days later, Doctor Feldsburg with his son and another doctor whose name is Ratznoff came out at about half past two. At three I was to give Mr. Millsboro his medicine, and just as I was pouring it out the three of them came into the room. I did not know that they were in the house. Doctor Feldsburg, seeing me with the glass in my hand, took it from me and held it to the light.

"'What is that?' he asked, in a sharp voice. "I told him that it was the medicine he had ordered. He gave me a peculiar look which I didn't understand; then tasted the medicine and poured it back into the bottle.

"'I don't think that is precisely what I ordered,' said he, and looked at me again.

"His manner was so queer that I got embarrassed, and very likely showed it. The other two doctors seemed a little puzzled, too.

"Doctor Feldsburg gave me another odd look, and said: 'We will discontinue all medication for the present, Miss Stanley,' and then all three of them examined the patient and went out.

"Of course, I was confused, and did not know what to think. A little later a maid came in and said that Doctor

Feldsburg wished to see me. All three of them were in the library, and there was something in their expressions that frightened me."

"You poor child!" said I, and dropped my hand for a second on the back of hers. I was pretty well able to guess at what was coming. Her face lightened at my touch, and for the first time I realized that the girl was actually lovely.

"You can imagine my feelings," she went on, "when Doctor Feldsburg told me that as I seemed to be getting rather overtired and nervous he had decided to relieve me from the case and that he had telephoned for another nurse, who would be out in a couple of hours. He added—and it seemed to me with a sort of sneer—that as I was now a prospective heiress there was really no necessity for my continuing to wear myself out.

"By this time I was too upset and bewildered to say anything, so I went back with him in his car to New York, where he left me at a nurses' home. He told me to say nothing about the case, but to come to his office the following day at five, as he wanted to talk with me."

"Shall I tell you what he said the next day?" I asked.

Her blue eyes opened wide.

"What do you mean?"

"I'll tell you directly," I answered. "Here comes our man with the gasoline."

CHAPTER III.

THE EASIEST WAY.

When I had filled the tank and sent off the workman, glad to have earned a dollar so easily—for he had not had to go all the way back to the town after the gasoline—I said to Miss Stanley:

"The case is plain enough. These scoundrelly Feldsburgs have rigged up what crooks call a 'plant.' They induced the old gentleman to make a will in your favor, then doctored the medicine which you were to give him, probably dosing it with some poison which, while not strong enough to have killed him immediately, might have done for him if continued for several days. Then Feldsburg brings in an outside physician, who no doubt had nothing to do with the plot, and in his presence takes the medicine out of your hand as you were about to administer it. He tells this doctor about the will, and asks him to have the medicine analyzed. This is done, and the result of the analysis incriminates you. Now, he does not intend that Mr. Millsboro shall recover, and when he dies and you come in for the money he means to blackmail you, probably to the tune of half the inheritance; maybe more."

"You are a good detective, Mr. Walcott," said the girl unsteadily. Her eyes had never left my face as I talked.

"One doesn't need to be much of a detective to see through the devilish business," I answered. "Now, tell me the rest of it."

She moistened her lips with the tip of her tongue. A good deal of the fright had gone out of her face, and her square little chin was set in a way that I was glad to see, for it told me that in spite of her horror at the position in which she found herself there was plenty of fight in her as well as fear. As I realized what she must have suffered, I felt like sitting down beside her and soothing her as one might a plucky, frightened child. Poor girl! There had been nobody to whom she dared turn.

"You see," I said, to give her a little more time, "these two devils naturally have not dared to use their influence on the old man for their own direct advantage, inasmuch as they had charge of the case. They needed a cat's-paw."

She nodded. "When I went to see Doctor Feldsburg the next day," said she, "I was shown into his consulting room, where he and his son, Doctor Lorenz Feldsburg, were sitting. Doctor Lorenz is even more awful than his father. He is a tall, broad-shouldered man, with a very white skin and a black beard and mustache. His eyes always sent shudders through me, they are so big and brilliant and always moving from place to place until he speaks to

you. Then they fix and glow. He is like a black panther, and he walks about with no more noise than a cat. As soon as I came in Doctor Feldsburg shut the door, then offered me a chair.

"His manner was very quiet; gentle, almost. He began by telling me that he had learned something of my circumstances and knew that the temptation to a woman in my position must have been a tremendous one. He told me that the analysis of the draft which he and Doctor Ratznoff had found me in the act of giving to Mr. Millsboro showed the presence of phosphorus, which, if taken through a period of several days, would have caused death from a fatty degeneration of different internal organs. He asked me where I had got the idea of administering phosphorus."

I must have moved restlessly, for she paused and looked at me with a white, strained face.

"What did you say?" I asked.

"I scarcely know. Every time I tried to speak I caught Doctor Lorenz's eyes fixed on me, and there was something in his look which seemed to make me dumb. Of course, I tried to say that I had not touched the medicine. But I was so confused and bewildered—for I had never thought of such a terrible position—that if I had been in a courtroom I am sure that everybody would have been sure that I was guilty. I might have been able to talk to Doctor Feldsburg if Doctor Lorenz had not been there. But he upset me. There was an expression in his face that I didn't understand—or, at least, I didn't want to understand it. I had had a horror of him from the first time that I had seen him. He came out every day to see Mr. Millsboro, and from the very beginning he had a way of looking at me and—and—trying to touch me—either with his hand or his shoulder or his elbow, that made my blood run cold. He reminded me of the vampire in Stevenson's story, 'Olalla,' I think it was. When he smiled at me, it made me feel faint."

She stared at me for an instant, and I noticed that her lovely face—for it was undeniably lovely—had gone white again.

"I think I know the breed," said I reassuringly, though this was absolutely untrue. I had never known such a person as she described Doctor Lorenz to be, and if I had met with such a character in my scant readings I would have tossed the book aside and turned to something more sound and sane. "What happened next?"

She passed her hand across her forehead. "It's hard to tell. The whole thing seemed so frightfully unreal—like a nightmare. I remember hearing Doctor Feldsburg say in that soft, whining voice which he uses to his patients that I really need not have listened to temptation, as Mr. Millsboro could not live at the most more than a few weeks longer. He said that there was an adhesion of the intestines, and that the only chance of prolonging his life was by an operation, though he had grave doubts of his being able to survive one. Nevertheless, he had about made up his mind to operate. He finished by telling me that I need have no fear about the result of my act, as he did not intend to take any action in the matter for two reasons: The first, because he felt very sorry for me, and the second, for a personal reason which his son would explain to me. Then he excused himself and went out, leaving me alone with Doctor Lorenz——"

Her voice faded, and I could feel myself getting tense and rigid.

"And I suppose that this hyena of a Lorenz proceeded to make love to you?" I growled.

"You seem to know everything, Mr. Walcott. That is just what he did. He came and leaned over my chair and purred like a big black cat. I can't remember all that he said. I doubt if I heard it—but I remember his telling me that he had fallen in love with me at first sight and that some deeper consciousness had told him that I was his perfect affinity, and I don't know what besides. But I did pull myself together enough to ask him if he really believed that I had tried to poison Mr. Millsboro. He answered very quickly that

he did not. He said that his father's prescription contained some sort of a phosphate, and that perhaps, owing to some of the other ingredients, the stuff might have undergone a chemical change and liberated free phosphorus. I asked him if he had told his father that, and he said that he had, but that Doctor Feldsburg insisted that such a thing was chemically impossible, and absolutely refused to believe that I had not tried to poison Mr. Millsboro, for fear that he might get well and make another will.

"It was all terribly confusing—and—and before I realized it, he was kissing my hands and trying to persuade me to marry him secretly that very day. I felt sick and faint, and he offered me something in a tumbler, but I had sense enough to refuse it and managed to get out of the place. I think that I ran most of the way back to the nurses' home. I was nearly out of my head.

"That same night Doctor Feldsburg called there to see me. I had managed to get myself together a little by that time, so I went down to see him. His manner was quite different to what it had been in the afternoon. He told me that I was demoralizing his son, and that he had neither the time nor the patience to put up with my 'cheap intrigues,' as he expressed it. But I was getting angry myself by this time, and when he saw that I was in danger of losing my temper he quieted down.

"In the end he told me that he was assured in his own mind that I had tried to poison Mr. Millsboro, and that he had evidence enough to send me to prison, but that he was willing to spare me for the sake of his son, who had told him that if he took any action against me it would mean a permanent break between them.

"Doctor Feldsburg said that I might take my choice between marrying Lorenz and being tried for attempted murder. Then, almost in the same breath, he told me that he had decided to operate on Mr. Millsboro for an advancing intestinal obstruction, and that he was willing to reinstate me on the case provided I would consent to marry Lorenz. He made no bones about telling me that while his confidence in my moral character was naturally very much impaired, he had no choice in the matter, as his son absolutely insisted that I should be morally supported by his father. Of course, I hated the idea of working under Doctor Feldsburg, but it struck me that he would scarcely dare make any charges against me after taking me back on the case—and I *was* pretty badly scared, though I tried not to show it. So I lied."

"You agreed to marry Lorenz?" I asked.

"Yes. All this happened the day before yesterday. But last night I got thinking it over, and I began to understand. Doctor Feldsburg thinks that I am absolutely in his power; or, at least, that I think I am. If Mr. Millsboro dies, I shall inherit a million dollars. According to Doctor Feldsburg's plan, Mr. Millsboro shall not survive the operation, I shall marry Lorenz, and there will be a million dollars to divide in the Feldsburg family. Now do you understand why I want you to take me back to the city?"

"Yes," I answered slowly; "but I can't quite see how that is going to get you out of the woods."

"Then what *can* I do, Mr. Walcott?"

"It's a difficult situation," I answered. "You might go straight to the district attorney and tell him the whole story. It seems plain enough that you are the victim of a conspiracy."

"But if I were to do that," she objected, "the Feldsburgs would certainly charge me with the attempt to poison Mr. Millsboro. Doctor Ratznoff would be called as a witness and testify that he was present when Doctor Feldsburg took the medicine away from me as I was in the act of giving it to the patient, and that he himself analyzed the stuff, or had it analyzed. Then the lawyer would testify that he had drawn up the will in my favor, and that I had been made acquainted with the fact. How could I prove that Doctor Feldsburg himself put a poisonous dose of phosphorus in the bottle? These three men are physicians in good standing, so far

as I have been able to discover, while it would be easy to prove that I was terribly in need of money. My people are nearly destitute, Mr. Walcott."

I pondered the situation for a moment. The poor girl was certainly in the toils.

"I do not believe," said I finally, "that Feldsburg would take any action against you if he could be convinced that come what might of it you would never marry his son. He would scarcely dare to blackmail you directly. You don't want this money, under the circumstances, do you?"

Her blue eyes flashed. "After what has happened, I would sooner die than touch a penny of it!" she cried. "The worst of the business is that even if I were to be tried and not found guilty I would be ruined professionally. Nobody would ever employ a nurse who had been indicted for attempted poisoning." She clasped her hands and stared at me hopelessly.

"If Doctor Feldsburg were certain in his own mind that there was no chance of you ever marrying his son," said I, "he would not get you indicted. In the first place, such a case would hurt him professionally, as well as it would you; in the second, he would have nothing to gain by it but his revenge on you for not doing what he wished, and he would not care to pay as dearly as that for revenge—especially as he knows that you are acting purely in self-defense. Besides, it would be to his interest to keep Mr. Millsboro alive as long as possible. The old gentleman is no doubt a very profitable patient." I thought deeply for a moment. "See here, Miss Stanley," I said, "do you mind if I ask you a very personal question?"

She shook her head. "Ask me anything you like. It is only too kind of you to be willing to help me at all. And you *do* believe in me, don't you, Mr. Walcott?"

"Of course I do. What I want to ask is this: Is there any man whom you would be willing to marry immediately? Any man whom you could marry immediately?"

If I had asked her whether she would mind walking down and jumping into the Sound, she could not have looked for the instant more surprised. Her blue eyes opened very wide, and so did her pretty mouth. But her wits were quick, and she caught at once what was passing in my mind. She shook her head with a pathetic little smile.

"No," she answered; "there is nobody. I have always had to work too hard to think of a husband, Mr. Walcott. Besides, there are not many men nowadays who would care to burden themselves with a girl who has to support a feeble old father and an invalid mother and her younger brothers and sisters. We shall have to think of something else, I'm afraid."

"That's a pity," I answered, "because, you see, if you could only marry at once it would spike Feldsburg's guns. I thought that perhaps there might be somebody. Besides, you need a protector, and I have got to sail for South America to-morrow morning, and it's rather doubtful if I ever come back."

"Why?" she asked, and looked rather startled.

I told her briefly of the conditions which I had to face on the Mazaruni, and how the men who had tried to stick it out had died of fever. "Our lives have been somewhat similar, Miss Stanley," I concluded. "My people have been dependent on me since my boyhood. I am taking this new job because it seems to offer the only chance of getting ahead. I did not much mind until now that I have heard your story. If it could possibly be managed, I'd stop over a steamer to try to help you through the trouble. But I've promised to go at once, and I've got in my pocket a check for five thousand dollars, a six months' advance on my pay. I can't go back on my agreement."

"Of course you can't!" she cried, and there was a warm light in her eyes which for some reason set my heart to pounding like a full-powered circulating pump. "You've helped me tremendously, Mr. Walcott. There's no use in my trying to tell you how much, because I've never been very good at saying things. I want you to give me your

address so that I can write and tell you how the whole horrid business turns out. I think that I'll manage somehow. You've given me courage. Let us go on now to Mr. Millsboro's, and I'll just tell Doctor Feldsburg that I've been thinking it over and that I have decided not to take a cent of Mr. Millsboro's money and that I shan't marry Doctor Lorenz, and that they can go ahead and do their—their——"

"Damnedst," I suggested.

"Yes," she answered, and actually smiled. "But we can't stay here any longer. Doctor Feldsburg will commence to wonder what's happened us and come to look for us in Mr. Millsboro's car." She stared at me for an instant with her curious, intent look. "I wish, though, that you weren't going to that awful place. You are so big and strong that it's terrible to think of your getting full of fever. Isn't there anything else?"

"Afraid not," I answered, and stepped forward to start the motor. "There are worse things than fever," I said, looking at her over the top of the hood. "I was pretty sorry for myself, last night, but I'm not thinking much about it, just now. Your own fix is so much worse."

I gave the crank a twist, and the motor started with the soft, purring whir which is always a delight to the machinist. And then, as I stepped back to cut down the gas, an odd thing happened. At least, it was odd for me, because it was what people call an inspiration. I never took much stock in inspirations. I had known of engineers who had them sometimes, and business men, and promoters. De Lesseps was one of these inspired persons—and his inspiration cost the lives of hundreds of laborers and engineers on the Isthmus, and the fortunes of thousands of thrifty families in France. My father was sometimes inspired to write poems or political articles which were usually published—without pay—in a local agricultural periodical.

My own personal feeling toward inspirations had always been about as sympathetic as that of a watchdog for a tramp, and I had always been ready and prepared to back my compasses and logarithms and tables of stresses against any inspiration that was ever shot from the blue. I had seen bridges built on inspiration as the nucleus for a log jam on the bed of a creek and dams constructed from the same source—although in the particular case I have in mind it was the cement which was inspired—melting like an ice jam in the spring.

No, I never was much of a believer in inspirations, nor shall be so long as they can be bought over almost any bar for seventy-five cents a quart. But the one that I had at this particular moment was not bought over a bar—or, if so, it was the bar at the mouth of the Essequibo River, which I had heard about but never seen.

I cut down the gasoline, and stood for a moment looking at Miss Stanley.

"I've got an idea," I said.

She looked back at me expectantly.

"Well?"

"Why not marry *me?*" I asked. "That would fix Feldsburg, all right."

"What!"

"Just that," I answered, and hurried on to explain. "If you are willing to accept the protection of my name until you get out of this fix we can turn right around, go straight to the town hall of this last place, and be married in twenty minutes. Then you can take the train back to the city, and I will take the car to Mr. Millsboro's and have a few minutes' conversation with Doctor Feldsburg. Or you can come with me, if you wish. I think that I can manage to persuade him that the less trouble he tries to make for my wife the better it will be for him. I shall also give him to understand that we believe him to have influenced Mr. Millsboro's will for his own ultimate profit, and that you are going to file an assignment of the proposed inheritance to his nearest heirs. Afterward, you can do that and send Feldsburg a copy of the act. I shall then say good-by to you, and if the climate of the Mazaruni does not annul your marriage, you can quickly have it done by any court."

"Are you crazy, Mr. Walcott?"

"What is there crazy about the plan?" I asked. "I am simply offering you the use of my name to help you out of your trouble as I might offer to lend you anything else. What difference can it make to me? I'm off for a two years' exile in a fever hole with no great certainty about coming back. Nothing would be easier than for you to get the marriage annulled. You have only to claim that through personal reasons I left you immediately after the civil ceremony and never contributed a cent to your support."

"But it would not be right to you," she protested, her eyes fastened on my face with a look which it would have puzzled me to understand, if I had taken the trouble to try.

"My goodness!" I answered, almost impatiently, "what earthly difference can it make to me—beyond the satisfaction I should have in feeling that I had been of service to an innocent girl in trouble? I'm merely an obscure member of the many millions of working masses. Besides, my whole function in life is to help others. I discovered that fact long ago."

"I think that you are right," said she softly, and her eyes filled.

"Well, then, what do you say? It seems to me that there is really nothing else for you to do."

She did not seem able to answer. I started the motor, slipped in behind the wheel, and started to turn the car. Her hand dropped on my shoulder.

"Mr. Walcott—stop—I can't——"

"Why can't you?" I asked, and backed the car to the edge of the ditch.

"It's too much. I mustn't let you." Her voice was trembling. "Why should you sacrifice yourself for a stranger?"

"I'm not sacrificing myself," I answered, and reached for the speed lever, "and, besides, I don't feel as if you were a stranger. If you happened to be drowning in that creek down there it would be fitting and proper for me to jump in after you, wouldn't it, even though I'm not a very good swimmer? Well, the fix that you're in now is even worse—and I'm going to try to get you out of it in what seems to be the best and easiest way. I think that you'd better leave it to me, Miss Stanley." And I went into the speed ahead.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CASE AGAINST JEAN.

There was something almost ominous about the ease with which we were made man and wife in the eyes of the law of the State of New York. But there was another quality about the business, too, and one upon which I had not counted. This was the amazing rush of tenderness which came over me as we went silently down the steps of the courthouse, and at their foot the girl paused to stare with swimming eyes at the gold circlet which I had bought at a little jeweler's across the street.

I thought that I could guess what was passing in her mind. It was a sad wedding for a girl, this being hurried off by an utter stranger to a justice of the peace and for the sake of protecting her from the machinations of a pair of unscrupulous scoundrels who had got her entangled in their coils. I dropped my hand on her arm, and she looked up at me in a startled, questioning way.

"Don't be downhearted, Jean," I said gently, and at my use of her Christian name her eyelids fluttered; "some day you'll have a happier marriage than this."

She shook her head without answering, and I thought that she drew a little closer to me. Her eyes dropped again to the ring on her finger, and rested there as though fascinated. Mine followed them. There was a curious attraction in that little golden emblem. It held my gaze, and as she slowly drew her glove over the small, pretty hand I gave an involuntary sigh.

"I shall never say those words again," said Jean, without looking up, "and I do not mean to have the marriage annulled," she added, in so low a tone that I barely caught the words, "unless you want me to."

Without regard for any who might

have been watching us, I took her two hands and turned her so that she stood facing me. She was a tall girl, and as I now noticed for the first time, superbly made, with a light, strong figure which seemed incapable of any movement not filled with supple grace.

"Listen to me, Jean," I said quietly, and loosed her hands again. "The step which we have just taken was made entirely for your protection and the result of my own suggestion, and does not entail the slightest obligation on your part to give me so much as another thought. Once out of the woods, you are to think of yourself as just as free as you ever were. This is merely a civil contract to shield you for the time being. It's a bit solemn, of course, to stand before a dignitary and pledge yourself as you have done, but the act was forced upon you not only for your own sake but that of your family, and this poor old man whose very life may depend on it. You must consider the whole affair from that point of view."

Jean did not answer, and we walked down to the car in silence. I helped her in, then asked:

"Shall I take you to the station?"

"No," she answered. "I want to go with you."

"Very well," I answered. "Perhaps that would be better."

I started the motor, and we went swiftly back over the road to the Millsboro estate. The whole momentous performance had taken little over an hour as I learned to my intense surprise on glancing at the clock beside the oil feeds. It seemed almost ridiculous that so much could have happened in so short a time. It occurred to me that I had lived less in thirty years than in the last thirty minutes. And as the big gates of the Millsboro estate reared themselves in front of us, I reflected that the next half hour might bring a good deal of concentrated life also.

As I drew up under the porte-cochère, Doctor Feldsburg, with a manservant at his elbow, came out of the front door. He looked at me with his collie-dog smirk.

"I was beginning to wonder what had happened you," said he.

"If you have a few minutes to spare," I answered, "I should like to explain the cause of our delay. I think it might interest you."

His vulpine look flitted from my face to Jean's.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "Did you meet with any further accident?"

"No," said I, "it was pure design."

His eyes narrowed slightly, and he showed himself completely at a loss. I got out of the car and offered my hand to Jean. She gave me a quick glance, then turned her back to us.

"I'm afraid that I don't quite understand," said the doctor. "What has happened?"

"A lot," I answered. "It may take some minutes for the telling."

He must have been struck by the harshness of my tone, for I was a poor actor and found it impossible to conceal my antipathy for the man. His foxy face grew sharper in expression.

"Come in," said he. "I can spare you a few minutes. My son has not yet arrived."

I moved aside to make room for the butler and a manservant who had unstrapped the box of surgical supplies and were carrying it up the steps. It appeared to be heavy, for the butler grunted a little. I noticed the man as he passed, and was struck by the peculiar pallor of his face, which was like that of the belly of a dead fish.

"Take that to the upper bathroom," said Doctor Feldsburg, and motioned to Jean and myself to enter.

The house, as I had already observed, was an old one, and might have been one of the early aristocratic residences of that section, dating back almost to colonial days. It was square and spacious, with a mansard roof and tower. There was a wide central corridor, and the rooms which opened off it were spacious and high-ceilinged. The main stairway at the farther end of the hall was steep and narrower than one finds in modern houses of the same size, and

the furniture was old, heavy, and ugly in design.

"Come in here, if you please," said Doctor Feldsburg, and led the way to the entrance of a formal-looking reception room. On the threshold he paused. "You had better go up and lay out our things," said he, looking at Jean. "I expect Doctor Lorenz at any moment. He had to stop to see a patient in the Bronx. We shall begin as soon as he arrives."

"I think that Miss Stanley had better be present at our interview," I remarked.

He raised his bristling eyebrows, but before he could answer there came the swish of a skirt on the stairs, and a woman in the dress of a trained nurse hurried down the hall.

"Will you come upstairs for a moment, Doctor Feldsburg?" she asked, in a quick, nervous voice. "Mr. Millsboro insists upon seeing you."

Doctor Feldsburg frowned and jerked his head impatiently toward the reception room.

"Wait in there, please," said he curtly, and followed the nurse, who had already hurried off. We entered the room, and Jean looked at me with a frightened face.

"Don't you think he's like a wolf?" she asked.

"More of a coyote, I should say," I answered.

"What are you going to tell him?" she asked.

"You'll hear in a few minutes," said I.

She moved her shoulders restlessly. I saw that she was dreading the talk ahead, and so I said encouragingly:

"Don't be uneasy, Jean. Remember that I'm running this business now."

"Don't you think it might be better not to say anything about our being married until we hear what he says when he learns that I have decided to act on your advice and decline to inherit Mr. Millsboro's money?" she asked.

"No, I don't," I answered. "The sooner he learns that you can't marry his scoundrel of a son the better."

"He can learn that later, if it becomes necessary," she answered nervously. "You see, I don't want to have you dragged into the horrid business if it can possibly be avoided. Please do as I ask."

"All right," I answered rather shortly, for the darkened, gloomy place and the delay were getting on my nerves, also. "Just leave it to me for the moment. I'll say what seems best."

We waited in a tense, expectant silence. Jean was sitting on the edge of a big, straight-backed chair against the wall, and suddenly there came from behind her a rattling and scuffling in the wall and the sound of a bit of plaster rolling down. She sprang up with a little choking gasp.

"A rat," said I.

"Yes. This house is overrun by them. Charles, the butler, says that it is the fault of the construction. These old houses were built of brick and sheathed over with wood and plaster, leaving a space between. There was a rat in my room one night, and it frightened me nearly to death. I loathe the beasts. I told Charles to set some traps, but he said that traps were no good, as he had tried them. So I got some rat poison and——"

There was the sound of a footstep outside the door, and Doctor Feldsburg appeared. He looked from one to the other of us with an impatience which he made no great effort to conceal.

"Well, Mr.——"

"Walcott," I supplied.

"Well, Mr. Walcott, I am at your service. Please be as brief as possible. We have a good deal to do."

"All I have to say is this," I answered. "While we were delayed on the road Miss Stanley saw fit to take me into her confidence, and told me that you had accused her of trying to poison her patient after he had made a will leaving her the bulk of his estate. She told me all of the circumstances, including the offer of marriage made her by your son. As a result, I have advised her to get out of the case immediately and to lose no time in making an assignment of this legacy to Mr. Millsboro's

nearest heirs. She has decided to act on my advice."

Doctor Feldsburg did not move a muscle, except to look slowly from Jean to me. His expression wore a look of contemptuous irony.

"Indeed!" said he sneeringly. "Well?"

"That's all," I answered. "I now propose to take Miss Stanley back to New York, where she will call on Mr. Millsboro's lawyer, if you will kindly give her his address, and have the assignment executed and put on file. If her action is questioned, she will say that she is taking the step because she does not believe that considering the mental condition of the testator she would be morally justified in becoming chief beneficiary."

Doctor Feldsburg shrugged impatiently. "Very well," said he snappishly. "Miss Stanley is quite at liberty to act as she thinks would be best for her own interests. I wish, however, to give her this warning: I have conclusive proof that she was prevented by me from administering a toxic dose of phosphorus to my patient. Whether she had already done this or not previously, I cannot yet be sure, although the condition of the patient now appears to indicate it. Mr. Millsboro is at this moment in a very critical condition, and if in the case of his death the autopsy shows indications of phosphorus poisoning, I shall have Miss Stanley indicted for murder in the first degree."

He snapped out these last words like the bark of a fox. There was something singularly venomous in the click of his teeth under the thin, gray mustache which bristled straight out from the sides of his narrow muzzle at the corners of the long, low-bridged nose. Standing in front of the cold, empty hearth with my feet apart, I looked down at him as he sagged back in the recess of his big, brocaded armchair, and I understood the sensations of a hound in the face of a cornered coyote. Only this coyote was far from cornered.

"Just hold on a minute, Doctor Feldsburg," said I. "You seem inclined to bank a little too much on a young girl's timidity and inexperience. You may find that Miss Stanley is not quite so friendless as you thought."

"What do you mean?" he snarled.

"Your son, Doctor Lorenz Feldsburg, has some reputation as a psychologist, hasn't he?" I demanded.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"A lot," I answered. "He has been attending Mr. Millsboro. The old man makes a will, leaving the bulk of his fortune to a nurse whom he has scarcely noticed, in his weakened condition. A day or two later you claim to find the nurse in the act of administering poison. You relieve her from duty on the case, and after the dose which you took from her hand has been analyzed you accuse her of attempted poisoning, but offer to do nothing in the matter if she will consent to marry your son. You even go so far as to reinstate her and bring her out here to assist at an operation."

Feldsburg gave Jean a vindictive glare.

"Little fool!" he muttered.

"Fool yourself," I retorted, "and a criminal fool, or I'm a lot mistaken. You'd look nice in court, wouldn't you?"

He bristled like a rabid animal, and made a motion as though to rise, then seemed to get his temper in hand, though with an obvious effort. I thought, too, that I saw a sudden gleam of fear in his shifty eyes, though whether this came from my own threatening attitude—for I was angry enough to have taken him by his hairy throat and shaken him—or whether it was from my words, I could not tell. In any case, I did not believe that there was any courage at all in the man. He impressed me as a sly, cunning animal, intelligent enough and dangerous to any weak creature.

"My advice to you," I growled, "is to leave Miss Stanley alone."

He sprang from his chair and stepped in front of me, shaking his finger in my face.

"And my advice to you, young man," said he, "is to get out of here as quick as you can." And he glanced through the open window, for the day was mild

and the butler had seen fit to air the musty old place. "If my son were to arrive, I should not answer for the consequences. Do you realize the insinuations that you are making against two prominent practitioners of the highest standing?"

"I do," I answered, "and if I leave this house without your agreement not to persecute this poor girl any further it will be to go with her straight to the district attorney."

This appeared to sober him. He stood for a moment, frowning to himself, then said:

"It is beneath my dignity to offer you any explanations. But since you appear to insist on meddling in what is none of your affair, I am willing to stretch a point for the sake of avoiding scandal. Miss Stanley has apparently withheld from you a highly important bit of evidence. Might I ask you to step to that desk in the corner and as soon as you hear me speak at the telephone in the next room, hold the receiver of this one to your ear?"

"What's all this?" I demanded.

"Kindly do as I ask. I wish you to overhear a conversation which I expect to have. It may convince you that your sympathies are misdirected."

I glanced at Jean questioningly, but her face was as blank as my own. Walking to the telephone, I seated myself on the edge of a chair and waited. Feldsburg stepped out of the room. A moment later I heard his voice, coming from some distance. I picked up the receiver, and held it to my ear, when his words became audible as he gave a number. There was a short pause, then: "Hello!"

"Hello!" answered Feldsburg's voice. "Is this the Central Drug Store?"

"Yes."

"This is Mr. Millsboro's."

"Yes."

"I want to know if you have any rat poison. The house is overrun with rats."

"Yes, we've got two kinds—one minute, please." The druggist must have turned his head a little, for I heard him say: "Jim, didn't you sell some——" and the rest was a mumble. Then, a moment later: "Hello!"

"Hello!"

"I think you've got some out there. The trained nurse from Mr. Millsboro's bought it here a couple of days ago."

"Is that so? It doesn't seem to have done any good. What is in the stuff?"

"Oh, it's a preparation of phosphorus. You've got to give it a little time; but it's the best. The rats die out of the house, you see. When the stuff begins to work, they hunt water, and that finishes 'em. The other preparations are apt to kill 'em in the walls, and then you've got a job for the plasterers."

"I see. Thank you."

"Good-by."

There was a little click. I laid down the receiver and sat for a moment staring at the wall. Then I looked at Jean.

"What is it all about?" she asked.

"Why didn't you tell me about the rat poison?" I asked.

"Rat poison!"

"Hush," I whispered; "here comes Feldsburg."

He entered the room with his quick, nervous step.

"You had no difficulty in hearing?" he asked.

"No," I answered.

"Then I will ask you to come with me for a few minutes. Miss Stanley can wait for us here."

I glanced at Jean, who was staring at us with a puzzled, frightened face, then turned to follow Feldsburg. He led the way to a small room in the rear of the house—a sort of alcove which might at one time have been used as a conservatory, for it was closed in with glass and had a southern exposure which commanded a view of the approach to the house. Doctor Feldsburg motioned me to a chair and touched a bell. As he did so I saw what appeared to be a railroad station taxi enter the gate and roll up the drive to the front door.

"There is my son now," said the doctor, and at the same moment the butler appeared. I noticed again the peculiar livid pallor of the man's face.

"Ask Doctor Lorenz to wait for me

a few minutes," said Feldsburg. "Say that I am engaged."

"Very good, sir," said the man, and withdrew, closing the door behind him.

Doctor Feldsburg turned to me.

"Of course," said he quietly, "you must understand the significance of what you just heard at the telephone."

"I understand that Miss Stanley bought some rat poison at the druggist's," I answered; "but I fail to see that the circumstance proves anything against her."

"The evidence of that," he answered, "lies in the fact that when she gave the stuff to Charles, the butler, the package had been opened and some of the poison taken out. Charles brought it to me to ask if he had better use it. This was the morning after I had taken the medicine from Miss Stanley as she was about to administer it to the patient. Don't you find that rather convincing?"

"No," I answered. "What does Miss Stanley say about it?"

"I have not yet told her."

"Why not?"

"Because, while I am willing to let her know that I suspect her, I am not yet ready to tell her that I have proof of her guilt. I do not care to acquaint her with the fact that the case against her is complete unless it becomes absolutely necessary."

"What do you mean by 'absolutely necessary'?" I asked.

"I mean her refusal to marry my son and to inherit this money."

"Good Lord," I said, "what sort of a man are you, anyhow? You believe the girl to be an attempted murderess, and yet you want her to marry your son! Don't you see that what you propose would make you an accessory after the fact? And, besides, here's this butler—and now you're telling *me*, though nothing could ever make me believe the girl guilty."

"The butler knows nothing about it," said Feldsburg. "He has no idea of my suspicions. All he knows is that Miss Stanley gave him some rat poison and told him to use it according to the directions. As a matter of fact, the stuff would probably not prove fatal to the average adult unless administered in enormous doses or in small quantities for a period of several days. As Miss Stanley bought it that same morning she could not have given at most more than two doses. My attention was attracted by the turbidity of the fluid which she had in the medicine glass, and, on smelling it, I immediately detected the peculiar, garliclike odor suggestive of free phosphorus. Even my colleague, Doctor Ratznoff, has no idea of my suspicions of Miss Stanley, if they may be called suspicions in the light of such damning evidence. Doctor Ratznoff suggested some slovenliness on the part of the local druggist; a wrong bottle, or something of the sort. As for yourself——"

"As for myself," I answered, "I still believe the girl to be innocent."

He frowned. "That is not reason," he answered. "Mere obstinacy, in the face of the proof which I have offered you."

"What does your son think?" I asked.

"He absolutely refused to believe her guilty until he learned about the rat paste. That shook but did not convince him. As a matter of fact, my son has formed a violent attachment for this young woman, and insists upon marrying her. She appeared to infatuate him from the very start. I could not help but notice it, myself, but to tell the truth I was not displeased, as I had been for some time worrying about his possible entanglement in an even more undesirable quarter. Also, I did not believe that it would come to anything serious. It is very possible that he may have suggested to Mr. Millsboro that, as he has no immediate heirs and does not believe in charities, it would be a worthy thing to leave his property to the young nurse who had taken such conscientious care of him and for whom it had been for years a struggle to support her family. I do not know. I have not asked Lorenz. But if he did such a thing I am convinced that he did it entirely for Miss Stanley's sake. Lorenz has no sense of the value of money where he himself is concerned. He is quite different in that respect from his father."

And Doctor Feldsburg looked at me with his bleak, thin-lipped smile.

I studied him thoughtfully for a brief moment. He did not appear to notice my scrutiny, but sat twitching at the tip of his beard, his eyes on the bookshelves opposite, evidently occupied with his own ideas. For some reason he seemed far less obnoxious than he had at first; less vulpine; more human, and possessed of human sentiments and emotions. There was no mistaking the kindling of his eyes when he spoke of his son. It was indubitable that this Lorenz was his pride and delight; his great objective in life. Our reflections must have fallen into the same mental groove, for he glanced up at me quickly and said, as if in answer to my unspoken thought:

"Yes, I have very great ambitions for my son. He has it in him to reach a very high place. But he is impulsive, and his two great dangers are women and his disregard of money. If he were to marry Miss Stanley, and she were to inherit this Millsboro legacy, his future would be assured." He gave me a sharp look. "You raise your eyebrows, Mr. Walcott. Let me tell you that in spite of her momentary moral lapse, I believe this young person to be of the highest and most virtuous character. I have been in practice too long and observed too many complexities of motive and action to allow my estimate of an individuality to be influenced by a single act, wrong to the point of criminality though it may be. Such an act, if traced through an honest though mistaken ethical course, might show itself to have been evolved from the highest, rather than the lowest, of impulses.

"An honest man who loathes the very thought of theft, yet who steals bread for his starving children because he cannot get it in any other way, is for me more of a hero than a criminal. He is sacrificing his deeper principles, his self-pride and honesty, for his paternal love. But filial love sometimes takes no odds from paternal, and for all we know Miss Stanley may have been moved by some such course of reason as this:

" 'Here is a very old man, an invalid for months, who, the doctor says, cannot live but a few weeks longer. His death may even be a painful one. In a flash of appreciation for my care of him he has left me the bulk of his fortune—enough to lift those whom I love from poverty to affluence; perhaps to restore my mother to health and many years of happiness, where otherwise she will surely not long survive. But the mind of this old man is vacillating, and for all I know he might make another will next week, forgetting me entirely.' "

Doctor Feldsburg leaned forward and fixed me with his small, sharp eyes.

"This weighs on her mind, and she passes a restless night. The rats, of which this old house is full, add to her nervous condition. She feels that she cannot stand another night in the place, certainly with the rats scampering about within half an inch of her face; but she dares not leave. There is the fortune and the danger of resentment on the part of her benefactor when in a moment of clearer intelligence he finds that she has deserted him. No, she must stay on; so she walks to the town and buys a box of phosphorus paste. Mind you, all of this time she is thinking only of getting rid of the rats. But, alone in her room, the red label 'Poison' catches and holds her eye. It fascinates her. She smells the stuff, and its garlic odor reveals the active principle—or perhaps the druggist may have told her that the toxic ingredient is phosphorus and explained its action. Nurses are given a course in toxicology, and it may have been that she remembered the action of phosphorus, so peculiarly adapted to such a case as this. In China, you know, they fatten Chow dogs, then kill them with a poisonous dose of phosphorus. The animal dies slowly and painlessly of degeneration of the internal organs, and muscles as well. He softens up, as it were, and becomes more edible, from the Chinese point of view. By the time that he has succumbed, the poison itself has been eliminated from the system."

I gave a shudder of disgust. Doctor Feldsburg glanced at me and spread out his hands.

"That, at least, is my idea," he said

quietly. "I believe that her act was the result of a sublime moral self-sacrifice for the sake of those she loved."

"And yet you would have her indicted for attempted murder if she should refuse to act as you wish," I said.

He nodded. "Although able to condone such an act as hers from an ethical point of view," said he, "it is not one that should go unpunished. It is simply that if I am to be an accessory to a crime, I do not intend to be one gratuitously. You see, I am perfectly frank with you. I believe the girl to be guilty, but I am willing to act against my own sense of my duty to society and the State for the sake of my son's happiness and welfare. There we have the business in a nutshell."

He rose briskly, as if suddenly realizing that he had been neglecting the passage of valuable time.

"So my advice to you, Mr. Walcott," said he, rubbing together the palms of his hands, "is precisely the same as it was in the other room. You had better drop out of the case, leaving those—us whom it intimately concerns—to settle it as best we may."

"I think," said I, "that I can reasonably claim to be included among those whom it intimately concerns."

"Indeed!" he snapped. "And on what grounds, pray?"

"On these," I answered, and reached for my inner pocket, where I had placed the marriage certificate. I drew it out and handed it to Feldsburg. "Miss Stanley and I were married less than an hour ago. She is now my wife, and out of your reach, however she may stand in regard to the law. But I'm not afraid of that. Your faked-up case is as full of holes as a colander. What's to prove that not Miss Stanley but the butler opened that rat poison? And would a trained nurse be fool enough to load up a dose of medicine with some stuff that makes it turbid and smells like garlic and then administer it when she expected the doctor in at any moment? And would she be such a stricken idiot as to save out some of the stuff for a criminal purpose and give the rest to the butler? What's to prove that you didn't bribe the butler to poison the medicine, so that you might get Miss Stanley and the million dollars between your claws?"

Feldsburg stepped back, white and shaken, yet furious.

"There's this to prove it," he hissed. "The butler brought me the poison this morning after I confiscated the poisoned drug."

"Shucks," said I contemptuously, "that proves nothing. Miss Stanley told me herself that she had asked the butler to set some traps, and that he told her traps were of no use, so she bought the poison when she went to the town. No doubt she told the butler that she would buy it." I turned on him so fiercely that he shrank back behind his chair. "You think you've got a case against that poor girl, do you, you infernal scoundrel? Well, then, all I've got to say is that you'd better look out or I may beat you to it. There's never been a straighter case of conspiracy—or one that could be easier to prove. I'll soon cook your hash, you miserable old hyena——"

I laid my hand on the knob of the door, and as I did so felt it move. The door opened inward, and as I stepped back and drew it toward me I found myself face to face with a tall man, broad-shouldered, and with a black Vandyke beard and mustache. He stood on the threshold as if to block the way, and as I glanced at his face I saw that it was flushed from anger or excitement. His dark eyes moved quickly from Doctor Feldsburg to myself.

"Excuse me," said I curtly, and made a motion to pass.

"Mr. Walcott?" he asked, in a deep bass voice.

"Yes," I answered; "let me pass, please."

"Here is a note which Miss Stanley asked me to give you," said he.

"Where is Miss Stanley?" I demanded.

"She has gone back to the city. Perhaps the note may explain matters."

His voice was easy and unembarrassed, and as I glanced suspiciously at his face I was surprised to see an ex-

pression of friendly sympathy about his eyes. Puzzled and angry, I ripped open the note and read:

DEAR MR. WALCOTT: As the result of a few words with Doctor Lorenz I feel convinced that I have been unjust to him. He assures me that he has never had the slightest suspicion of me, and promises to try to help me in every way. If you have not already told Doctor F. of our crazy act, please say nothing about it. I shall take steps to have it annulled as soon as possible. I do not wish you to be involved any further in this wretched affair if it can possibly be helped. I am now going back to town, leaving Doctor Lorenz to arrange matters. Have told him everything. Good-by, and God bless you for your great kindness! JEAN.

CHAPTER V.

JEAN'S DISAPPEARANCE.

"You say that Miss Stanley has gone back to the city?" I asked of Doctor Lorenz.

"Yes," he answered.

"When did she go?"

"About fifteen minutes ago. I sent her to the station in the car which brought me here."

I turned with a gesture of disgust to Doctor Feldsburg.

"Your son may be a good doctor," said I contemptuously, "but he is certainly an awfully poor liar. I happened to see that car go out while we were talking, and there was nobody in it but the driver."

I expected an outburst of rage from Lorenz as the result of this speech. So did his father, I think, for he shrank back with a frightened look. I was watching both warily, for it seemed to me that I had to deal with a pair of unmitigated scoundrels, who might not stop at anything. But to my intense surprise the face of the younger man, instead of showing anger, was lit by an expression of eagerness, almost of relief.

"You are sure?" he cried, in his vibrant bass, and I saw at once that I had made a serious mistake. Apparently he believed that Jean had gone and was only too anxious to be assured that she had not. I inwardly cursed my loose tongue.

"Possibly I am mistaken," I answered rather clumsily. "I may have spoken hastily. But I was under the impression that there was nobody in the back of the car."

The quick flash of his eyes showed me that he was not deceived.

"Excuse me," said he, and turned to leave, but his father spoke up sharply and in a querulous, shaking voice:

"Wait a minute, Lorenz. Mr. Walcott, here, tells me that it is his intention to drag all of this wretched business into the courts. He knows all of the facts of the case, and this morning, with a chivalrous though mistaken idea of protecting Miss Stanley, persuaded her to make a civil marriage with him before a justice of the peace."

Here, again, I was destined for a surprise, for Lorenz merely gave me a quick, curious glance, then nodded.

"So Mr. Walcott has told you about that," said he quietly. "I had hoped that he might not mention it. I have just had the whole story from Miss Stanley, and I must confess that I think Mr. Walcott acted in a very generous if somewhat quixotic manner. I understand, also, that Mr. Walcott expects to sail to-morrow for South America, but I hope to be able to convince him before we part that Miss Stanley—or Mrs. Walcott, *pro tempore*"—he smiled slightly—"is in no danger of any ill treatment at our hands, but that on the contrary I intend to do my utmost to protect her."

"By marrying her yourself?" I sneered.

A quick flush appeared on his face. It was a handsome face, well-shaped, fine-featured, and of high intelligence, and quite without the craftiness of expression shown by his father's.

"I want to marry her," he answered, "but only with her consent. Of course, it would be a simple matter to get this marriage of yours dissolved, to which I presume you would have no objection, as I understand that your object was purely impersonal and for her protection. But she shall be subjected to no coercion."

"That is not your father's idea," I retorted.

He shrugged. "Father and I are not in agreement on the subject," said he. "Personally, I do not for a moment believe that Miss Stanley—pardon me if I use the name by which I think of her—had any criminal design on her patient."

"Then who do you think dosed the medicine with phosphorus?" I demanded.

He smiled again, with a flash of his strong, white teeth.

"A rat," he answered.

"What?" I cried, and Feldsburg echoed the exclamation.

Doctor Lorenz nodded. "A rat," he repeated. "This house swarms with rats. It was as the result of her fright at finding a rat in her room that Miss Stanley bought the phosphorus paste. She put some of the stuff in her closet, where a rat found and devoured it; then, being tormented by thirst as the poison began to act, it set out to look for water. Miss Stanley had poured some spring water into a low, wide-necked pitcher on the medicine stand. The rat must have drunk from this pitcher, perhaps while its muzzle was covered with the poison. Mr. Millsboro's medicine is diluted with water, and Miss Stanley used that in the pitcher, which is one of these small, squat vessels of the sort used on a *table de nuit*, at the side of a bed.

"Going from the light into the darkness of the sick room, she did not notice the turbid condition of the water. But the presence of the phosphorus clouded the medicine, and this caught my father's eye, which is uncommonly observant of details." He threw out his hands. "There, you have my explanation of the circumstance, and the proof of it is that just after I said good-by to Miss Stanley, about fifteen minutes ago, the nurse called me upstairs to show me a poisoned rat which she had that moment discovered in the bathroom. The animal smells strongly of phosphorus. It is outside here in a box, if you would care to examine it. It was this which suggested the solution of the problem."

"Good Lord," I exclaimed, "Miss Stanley must know about this, at once!"

"Since you say that she did not go off in the taxi, she must be somewhere about the place," said Lorenz. "No doubt, at the last moment, she decided to wait and have a word with you before leaving."

Doctor Feldsburg had sunk wearily into his chair. His face was gray and pinched, and he looked old and shaken. He stretched out his hand to touch the bell.

"We will send Charles to search the premises," said he. "I shall not operate to-day, Lorenz. This affair has unstrung my nerves. But could a rat carry poison enough on its muzzle——"

"Of course, it could!" his son interrupted sharply. "And the stuff probably floated on the top of the water, so that the bulk of it went into the glass. There is no other explanation possible. One has only to look at Miss Stanley to know that she could never be guilty of such a devilish act!"

"You're right, there!" I growled.

Doctor Feldsburg pushed the bell again, and we heard it sound faintly in the distance.

"Now where is that confounded Charles?" growled Feldsburg.

Lorenz turned on his heel. "I'm going to look for her, myself," said he.

Doctor Feldsburg rose wearily. "I feel rather badly," said he. "I think that I shall go back to town." He looked grimly at me. "There doesn't seem to be much for us to say to each other, Mr. Walcott. Suppose we call it quits. This has been an odd jumble, and one that I am by no means anxious to repeat. Lorenz is no doubt right. I told you that he was no fool." His sharp, foxy face softened a little in expression as he glanced at his son. "A black head is often better than a gray one in matters of this sort. We grow suspicious of everybody as we increase in age, especially in my profession. Where is that fool of a butler?" And he put his finger on the bell and held it there.

"I'm going to look for Miss Stanley,

father," Lorenz repeated. "How are you going back?"

"I'll have Mr. Millsboro's man take me in—unless you care to?" And he glanced at me. "Mr. Walcott's the best driver I've ridden behind, if he is a bit reckless in other ways," said he, with his bleak smile.

"Thank you," said I, "but I should like to see Miss Stanley, first. As your son suggests, she may be waiting about in the hope of a word with me. I'm sorry for the way I talked to you, Doctor Feldsburg, but, as you say, I think we'd better call it quits. After all, my suspicions were no worse than yours."

He nodded moodily, then his face relaxed into certain lines which might have developed into those of humor on the features of a man of kindlier soul.

"Yes, yes—let's hope that it may teach us both not to trust too much to circumstantial evidence. Give my compliments to your wife"—he grinned—"if you find her, and tell her that I'll apologize later. Take a look at the patient before you leave, Lorenz, and tell Miss Lawrence that we've decided to postpone the operation. Blast it all!" he cried, in a sudden gust of irritation. "Isn't there a servant left in this rat-ridden old shack?" And he jabbed viciously at the bell.

Lorenz, who had been standing impatiently in the doorway, turned on his heel and strode off, saying that he would try to scare up somebody. I wished Feldsburg good day and followed him. At the front door he paused and glanced at me over his shoulder.

"Suppose you take a look around the grounds while I hunt through the house," said he. "And, I say, would you mind passing by the garage and telling the chauffeur that Doctor Feldsburg wants him to take him into town in his own car? I'm afraid you were mistaken, though, about her being in the taxi." He gave me a keen look. "You're quite sure?"

"As a matter of fact, I'm positive," I answered. "I was looking out of the window when it passed, and was able to see right into it when it made the loop in the drive."

"Odd," he muttered. "I said good-by to her here in the hall, gave her the money to pay the driver, and told her I'd call on her at the nurses' home late this afternoon. She must be somewhere about. Come back here after you've looked around, and we'll have them get us a bite before going into the city. There are some things we've got to talk about."

"All right," I answered, and went down the steps.

I walked first to the garage, where I found the chauffeur and gave him his orders, telling him that he had better fill the tank before starting. The grounds of the estate were large and laid out in the semiformal, old-fashioned way, copied, as I have since learned, from the French school of landscape gardening, with little winding paths which led through dense masses of shrubbery, once closely trimmed, but now straggling and unkempt.

There were quaint old fountains fallen into disuse and grimy statues in bronze and iron and moldly marble, the whole place surrounded by a high wall which would cost a small fortune to build in these days.

Beyond the stables and garage a stretch of weedy lawn led down to the shore of a little bay jutting in from the Sound, and there was a boathouse which appeared to have been freshly painted, and a little way out a launch, sadly in need of the attentions bestowed upon the boathouse, was moored to a buoy.

I did not trouble to go down there, knowing that if Jean had been waiting about to see me she would not have chosen such an out-of-the-way spot. As a matter of fact, I was quite sure that she must be in the house, and I suspected that Lorenz had asked me to search the grounds merely to get rid of me while he told her of his discovery.

To tell the truth, I was bound to admit that Lorenz impressed me as an unusually attractive man, and I wondered at Jean's having given me such a different impression of him. Although at first sight I had naturally been prejudiced against a person who had been

described to me as a big, black, snaky hypnotist—of course, I pictured a sort of Svengali—and had already jumped to the conclusion that he must be a blackguard of the first water, I could find nothing to bear out this idea.

Physically, he was one of the handsomest men that I had ever seen, and that in a virile, wholesome way. Magnetic, he certainly was, so far as my crude appreciation of this quality was able to appreciate, but while his look and manner had a sort of compelling force, this did not impress me disagreeably. His speech and manner indicated a breeding and culture which might have made me feel like a raw clodhopper in comparison, if I had been of the sort to take my measure from that of other men. Yet here was Jean, who seemed to have an actual horror of him, confiding herself blindly to the care of a plodding plow horse like myself at the end of a forced acquaintance of about twenty minutes!

Before I had fairly started to puzzle over this another idea struck me which put it out of my head. This was that by all the rules of sense and logic I should have been tremendously glad that the affair had worked itself out so well for Jean. Or, rather—for I was of course rejoiced that Doctor Lorenz's analytic mind had cleared the girl of all suspicion—I should have been happy enough on her account to feel that I could now leave her with my mind at rest.

And yet I was not happy. On the contrary, I was conscious of a deep, soul-pervading sadness, which increased as I beat aimlessly about through the unkempt shrubbery. If the prospect of my exile had seemed gloomy the day before, it now became almost intolerable, and I thought of going aboard the steamer the following morning as bitterly as any deported prisoner in the time of the Georges might have contemplated being driven aboard one of those floating infernos whose sails were marked with the black arrow.

It was not on the girl's account; it was on my own. So far as Jean was concerned, I felt no particular anxiety. I believed that Lorenz was honestly in love with her and would not subject her to any persecution. He was, as I felt assured, a gentleman, and a man of undoubted talent and ability in his profession. Very possibly, he might succeed in overcoming Jean's aversion for him and make her a loving and devoted husband. At any rate, it would take a certain length of time to have her civil marriage with me annulled, and this period would give her the opportunity to weigh the proposition from all of its points of view.

As for Doctor Feldsburg, he had been the victim of the same injustice which he had meted out to Jean, and I cannot say that I was inclined to regret the way in which I had talked to him. Reputable practitioner he might be so far as his general standing in the profession was concerned; but any man who would try to blackmail into marrying his son an unfortunate woman whom he believed guilty of the attempted crime of which he had accused Jean, must be, perforce, of a moral type approaching the criminal himself.

Moreover, I did not believe that his proposed operation on Mr. Millsboro had been decided upon for the best interests of the patient.

Doctor Feldsburg was, in my opinion, a conscienceless, rapacious old vulture, with the besetting sin of avarice. I would not go so far as to accuse him of any direct design on Mr. Millsboro's life, but I do believe that the surgeon's motive was one of personal gain. Whether his patient lived or died, Feldsburg stood to profit by a fee which he would make commensurate to the sick man's estate.

The possibility of Jean's inheriting the Millsboro millions and being coerced into marrying Lorenz was a rich side issue, the temptation to profit by which had been too strong for the surgeon's avaricious nature. No doubt he had told the truth when he had said that he could find it in his heart to forgive Jean her moral lapse. Such a heart as Feldsburg's could forgive anything associated with great pecuniary increment. So far as I could see, his only redeeming feature was his affec-

tion for his son, and even this took a warped form.

At any rate, Jean was clear of the pair, and need have nothing more to do with either, if she chose. It was very probable that after the ordeal through which she had passed it would be her earnest prayer never again to set eyes on either Lorenz or his jackal of a father. She might return to her own part of the country, there to take up her profession, and where she would before long be almost sure to meet some good man who would win her heart and ask nothing better than to lift from her soft shoulders the burden of care and trouble which they had borne so bravely.

But even this reflection brought me no comfort. The more I thought of Jean, the darker my mood became. I felt feverish and depressed, and conscious of such a hungry yearning as I had never felt. If I had ever been given to self-analysis, I would have thought that this came from my anxiety about her immediate future, and probably have got no further than that. I would have lacked the imagination to solve the problem of why I should be so disturbed over the fate of a girl whom I had seen for the first time a few short hours ago.

But her low-pitched, tremulous voice still vibrated in my ears, and I was haunted by the frightened, intent expression which I had seen in her eyes; that and the touch of her hand as it had rested in mine.

It seemed to me that within a few brief moments I had awakened from some sort of long, plodding lethargy, and had lived in the light for the first time, after years of blind boring in the mud. I had felt the rush of emotions in which I would never have believed. I wanted to feel them again; I wanted to see and touch and hear her and to experience once more that curious exaltation which had come over me on realizing that I was her sole protector.

As all of these vague cravings began to take a more concrete form, I stopped suddenly in the middle of the weedy path in front of a tattered little arbor of woven vines.

"Good Lord," I said aloud, "am I falling in love with her?"

I in love? And with a woman whom I had known for about three hours? The idea was preposterous—insane! And yet, once it entered my head, I clung to it like a drowning man to a reed. A sudden, scorching exultation swept over me. For the moment I was unable to think at all. I could only feel. And then, as I realized suddenly that I was actually married to this woman whom I so insanely desired, there came over me a sensation such as I had once felt on being dropped over the edge of a precipice in an ore bucket, when the man at the hoist had let the cable run off the reel for the first two hundred feet.

My knees felt weak, and I sank down on a rustic bench and took my head between my hands.

I was roused by the sound of Doctor Feldsburg's car, which passed not far from where I sat, though hidden from sight by the delicate spring foliage. It tore me back to the Real from the first flash of the Ideal which had ever dazzled my grubbing eyes.

I scrambled to my feet and stood for a moment staring at the tower of the old house, which rose clear of the tangled shrubbery. Lorenz, I reflected, was no doubt with Jean at this moment, telling her of his discovery and pleading his cause with the full force of his compelling personality. I wondered what she would say to him; how long she would be able to resist his masterful nature. After all, he had acted as honorably as a man could, refused to believe anything unworthy of her in spite of his father's mesh of damning evidence, and established her innocence by his own clear-headedness. I had no doubt that he honestly loved her and wanted her for his wife. After all, I reflected, she might do far worse than to marry Lorenz. She might, for instance, have shared the serfdom of some dull slave like myself.

There seemed no use in beating about longer through the grounds, so I struck out across the lawn for the house, noticing as I did so that the air had be-

come very hot and oppressive for the time of year, while the pellucid blue of the sky had grown lusterless and opaque. Not a breath of air stirred the new-born leaves, and the western heavens were darkening to a somber, leaden hue. I judged that there would be a thunderstorm before night. There was, in fact, a nervous tension in the air already. Distant noises sounded flat and with no resonance, and the birds had stopped singing.

A curious depression pervaded the place, and this was heightened by the dreary look of the big, drab house with its dingy, olive-colored paint and shuttered windows, the lawns which needed mowing, and the paths and roadways with the weeds struggling to poke up between the pebbles.

Halfway across the front lawn I saw Doctor Lorenz come out of the front door and hurry to meet me. His fine face was flushed as if from excitement and irritation, and I noticed as he drew near that there was an anxious look about his eyes.

"You've seen nothing of her?" he called, as we came within speaking distance.

"No," I answered. "But I supposed, of course, that you must have found her in the house."

"She's not," he answered, and gave me a keen look. "I don't understand it. You are positive that she did not go off in that station car?" His dark eyes fixed on mine with a sort of appeal. "Look here, Mr. Walcott, you're not keeping anything back from me, are you?"

"Certainly not," I answered shortly. "Why should I? If Miss Stanley was in that taxi, she must have slipped down behind the side. There was nobody on the seat."

He struck his hands together and frowned. "It's devilish odd," he said. "Where could she have got to? Do you mind telling me what she said in her note?"

I drew the piece of paper from my pocket and handed it to him. He glanced through it, and the lines in his forehead deepened.

"That makes it all the more mysterious," he said. "That confounded butler, Charles, has disappeared, too. Besides Mr. Millsboro and the nurse, there's nobody in the house but the cook and a maid. They tell me that the valet de chambre went off on some errand on his bicycle, but Charles ought to be about. You haven't seen anything of him down by the garage?"

"There was nobody there but the chauffeur," I answered.

He knit his brows. "There's something here not as it should be," said he, more as though speaking to himself than to me. "I seem to feel it in the air. The worst of it is I have just had a telephone from my case in the Bronx asking me to get there as soon as possible as the patient has had a sinking spell. I've telephoned to the station for a taxi. It ought to be here at any moment, and if it's the same one we'll find out for sure about Miss Stanley. I say, since fate seems to have dragged you into this curious business, would it be too much if I were to ask you to wait here for a couple of hours and let me know if anything turns up?"

"Why?"

"Well"—he seemed to hesitate a little, and the color came into his lean cheeks —"I've got an idea—that is, it's occurred to me that perhaps Miss Stanley may be somewhere about watching for a chance to speak to you alone. To tell the truth, she hasn't the confidence in my—my feeling toward her that I wish she had. My father's attitude in this wretched affair has frightened her and made her suspicious of us both. I can't very well explain——" He bit his lip.

"I think that I understand," said I. "Very well, I'll stay here for a while, if you like. But I must say I don't see much use in it. However, I've nothing to do, so I might as well be here as anywhere else. But Miss Stanley is not the sort of girl to be hiding about the place waiting for you to go. If she wanted to see me alone I think she'd be mighty apt to walk up and say so."

He stared at me for a moment, then nodded. "I fancy you're right," said he. "All the same, it's deuced queer. I

don't know if you ever have—premonitions." He looked at me doubtfully and with a certain diffidence.

"No," I answered, "I don't."

"Well, then, *I* do—and sometimes they are pretty positive. I've got a presentiment right at this minute that there is something wrong here—of what sort I couldn't for the life of me say. I'd give a lot if I didn't have to leave—but I must get down to see my patient. It's a surgical case, and I fear internal hemorrhage. I've told the cook to get you some lunch, and if that brute of a butler doesn't show up the maid will serve you."

We were silent for a moment, Lorenz tugging at his closely trimmed mustache.

"It's a pity to see a fine estate like this going all to pot," I observed, to change the subject.

He nodded moodily. "The old gentleman lost interest in everything after the death of his son," said he. "Besides, he's a bit of a miser—and a recluse. The butler has run things for a number of years. No doubt he charges in a lot of work about the place that is never done and puts the money in his pockets. Even before his illness, Mr. Millsboro would never have noticed the difference. His son was a lunatic; violent at times. He never left the place, I believe, and sometimes he had to be confined for days at a time. That was a good many years ago, before Mr. Millsboro became a patient of my father's. Well"—he turned at the sound of a motor, and we saw a taxi coming through the big, iron gates—"here's my car. Let's go and speak to the driver."

As we turned to walk back to the porte-cochère, Doctor Lorenz glanced at me over his shoulder.

"The people in the house think that you are a surgeon, come out to assist at the operation," said he. "It doesn't matter, though. Let 'em think it. That explains your waiting here for an hour or two."

The driver of the taxi proved to be another man than the one who had brought Doctor Lorenz. He knew nothing of any passenger being taken to the station. Doctor Lorenz paused before getting into the car and gave me his card.

"You've acted like a trump, Mr. Walcott," said he. "I wish that you would drop into my office late this afternoon. Or couldn't you call for me at about seven and we'll dine at my club? There are a number of things which I should like to say to you."

"Thank you," I answered, "I should like to very much."

"Good!" said he, and with a nod to me told the driver to go ahead.

When he had gone, I stood for a moment thinking deeply. The mystery of Jean's disappearance must have some reasonable explanation, I was sure, but no solution at which I was able to arrive seemed adequate. It was possible that the unwarranted absence of the butler might have some bearing upon it, and I determined to question him closely on his return. Thinking of the butler, my mind reverted to the peculiar livid pallor of his skin, unusual in a person of his apparently powerful physique—for he was a strongly knit, big-framed man of not more than forty, I should say, though his thick, coarse hair was quite gray.

It struck me that I had somewhere observed that same, utterly toneless complexion which suggested the bleaching of otherwise healthy and wholesome skin, for its bloodlessness was quite different to that of ill health or insufficient blood. In the former condition the skin itself looks fragile, either transparent or pinched, while with anæmia the mucous membranes of lips and eyes are bleached. But this was something different—and then suddenly I remembered.

It was in our State prison, which as a boy I had once visited with an acquaintance, the son of a warden, that I had been so impressed by the peculiar, pallid faces of certain incorrigibles deprived for long periods of direct sunlight; of scarcely any light at all, for our penitentiary was at that time a fearful place. It was the "prison pallor," unlike anything else, which had bleached the complexion of Charles, the butler.

I would have been willing to swear that the man was an ex-convict, and one who had served a long term.

There was something also in his face, now that I came to think of it, which reminded me of the expression in some of the convict faces which I had observed. This was a peculiar tonelessness, an expression, which if one may put it in this way, came of the lack of expression; a flaccid condition of the facial muscles which, seldom called into play by the varying emotions which are a part of the daily routine in the life of the free man, lose their normal nervous tension, just as the muscles of the calves might atrophy in the case of a paralytic. The gray monotone of prison life finds no need for the facial interpretations of aught but apathy, and so the lines of character fade into those of a changeless mask. Charles had this masklike face—the prison face.

It was a startling discovery, and I was pondering it when a rather slovenly maidservant came to tell me that my luncheon was ready. She showed me into a big, manorial dining room handsomely furnished and paneled in Flemish oak, black with age. Over the center of the table hung a huge, old-fashioned chandelier, and on either side of the great fireplace set back in niches were two complete suits of medieval armor, and on the walls shields, with maces, swords, and battle-axes.

I had never seen such a room, though I had been able to picture the like from my readings, and I looked about with a certain lugubrious interest at the big porcelain platters which decorated the somber walls, and the darkened squares of canvas which appeared to have at one time represented rich profusions of fruit and flowers and peacocks and other tropical birds, but were now black and all but indistinguishable from age.

The gathering gloom without made the place sepulchral, and I was relieved, on approaching the table, to see that there were places laid for two.

"Is the nurse coming down for luncheon?" I asked the maid.

"Oh, no, sir," she answered. "She has her meals served upstairs. Doctor Lorenz ordered another place set for the other nurse he said might be here for lunch."

I nodded, and she proceeded to serve me, remarking that she was sorry she could not offer me anything to drink, as the butler, who had the keys of the wine cellar, had not returned. I ate what she served me, which was no doubt good enough, though I have not the slightest recollection of what it consisted. At any rate, I did not linger over the meal, and as soon as I had finished got up and walked out into the hall. As I did so there came a step on the stair, and I looked around to see the nurse who had come to ask Doctor Feldsburg to see Mr. Millsboro.

"Would you mind coming upstairs a minute, doctor?" said she.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"It's Mr. Millsboro's medicine. I scarcely know whether to have him take it or not. It has such a queer, garlicky smell."

"All right," I answered, and followed her upstairs. She led the way to a room which evidently adjoined that of the patient, for I heard him stir in bed as I entered. The nurse handed me a bottle and a glass.

"It never smelled like that before," said she.

I raised the bottle to my nose.

"It smells like wet matches," said the nurse.

"Yes," I answered, setting down the bottle. "There is certainly something wrong with it. Don't give it to him under any circumstances. The stuff has evidently decomposed, or something of the sort. Don't give him any medicine at all until you see Doctor Feldsburg or his son. And don't say anything about it. There must have been some mistake about the prescription."

"That is what I thought," she answered, setting down the bottle; then added:

"Do you know how soon the new nurse will be here?"

"No," I answered. "I didn't know that there was to be a new nurse."

She glanced at me quickly. She was

a nice-looking woman of perhaps thirty-four or thirty-five.

"But I thought that you were waiting to give her the instructions," said she.

"No," I answered; "I am waiting to give the butler some."

She seemed to hesitate for a moment, as though doubtful of the wisdom of expressing what was uppermost in her mind. Then——

"Oh, dear," said she, "I wish the new nurse would come! I hoped that I wouldn't have to spend another night in this horrid place."

"What's the matter?" I asked. "The rats?"

"Yes, the rats—and—other things."

"Such as——"

"Well, that awful butler. He gives me the creeps. He goes prowling about in his felt-soled shoes, and it seems to me that every time I turn a corner or open a door—and I don't think I was ever in a house that had so many doors and corners—I come on him. I found him in my room this forenoon. That was a little too much.

"'What are you doing in here?' I asked.

"He turned that death-mask face of his on me like an owl. 'Beg pardon, miss,' said he, 'I'm trying to find where that noise in the water pipes comes from.'

"'What noise?' I asked. 'I don't hear any noise.'

"He told me that it came and went, and sounded like muffled hammering. Sometimes, he said, you'd swear it was a person groaning or shouting into a barrel. He said that it had been going on off and on for some time and that if I heard it not to be alarmed. I hadn't heard it up to then, because there were so many other weird noises in this old barn, maybe; but I've heard it—listen!"

She touched my arm. We listened intently. For a moment or two I heard nothing. Then from the wall, as it seemed, there came a vague, muffled vibration. It lasted but a moment or two, then ceased, and we heard a rat scuffling across the ceiling. The nurse shivered.

"Did you hear it?" she asked.

"Yes," I answered slowly, "I heard it."

CHAPTER VI.

THE VALET'S PART IN THE GAME.

There came a querulous cry from the sick room, and the nurse left me to go to her patient. I stepped out into the hall and stood for a moment, listening. The sound was not repeated. I went to the end of the hall at the rear of the house, mounted the stairs to the top story, and listened again, but with no result.

The fresh discovery of phosphorus in the medicine, backed by my conviction that the brother had at some time served a term in prison, had given rise to all sorts of fresh suspicions. It might be that Charles himself was the poisoner and that he was trying to do away with his master either for reasons of his own or at the instigation of Lorenz, of whom my doubts had suddenly returned.

It even occurred to me that possibly Jean had caught Charles in the act of dosing the medicine, and that he might have locked her up in some room or closet while he made his escape. This last idea I dismissed immediately, however, as he could scarcely have used violence in that hushed and silent house without being heard by the nurse.

Nevertheless, Jean's disappearance was very perplexing, and, coupled with that of the butler, dangerously suggestive. I decided to hang about the place for the rest of the afternoon, and then, if Charles did not return by five o'clock, to call up the local authorities and have the premises thoroughly searched. But for Jean's own sake I did not care to take any such extreme measures if they were possibly to be avoided. As for the noise to which the nurse had called my attention, I decided that it was actually made by the water. It had precisely the muffled, metallic sound caused by a "water hammer."

As I came downstairs again, I was met by the nurse, who told me that the valet also had taken himself off, although it was understood that he was to relieve her bedside duties between the

hours of two and four, when she should be free to rest or take the air.

She seemed very nervous and tired, and said that if she did not hear from Doctor Lorenz by half past four she proposed to call him up and insist that an extra nurse be assigned to the case if she were to remain.

She was very ill at ease in the gloomy old house, and said that she could not see why they did not remove Mr. Millsboro to the local hospital, which was a new and very excellent institution. She had already suggested this to Doctor Feldsburg, and, although he had appeared to consider the idea favorably, he had as yet done nothing about it.

Feeling rather sorry for the woman, and as I wanted to remain in the house until something turned up or I heard from Doctor Lorenz, I told her that I would relieve her for a couple of hours, or until the valet returned. She thanked me, and as the old gentleman had sunk into a heavy sleep I established myself in an alcove of the hall outside the room and tried to amuse myself with some magazines.

The time dragged past slowly. The rats scuffled about in walls and ceiling, and once or twice I heard the water again, but gave this noise little heed, as it seemed now to come from the floor under my feet. A little after four the nurse returned from her walk. She seemed more nervous even than before, and said that we were going to have a terrific storm, as the sky was inky. This I had already observed.

She said, also, that it was a shame to leave a bedridden old man alone with a single nurse in a house run as loosely as Mr. Millsboro's, where the servants went off when they pleased and where they pleased, and that she was going to call up Doctor Lorenz at five and give him a bit of her mind.

I told her that she was quite right, and that I would fully indorse anything she might care to say as to the slovenliness of the household machinery.

While she had been gone, I had come to another plan, which was on the return of the chauffeur to have him take me in Mr. Millsboro's car to the police station, where I proposed to acquaint the proper authority in person with my uneasiness in regard to Jean's peculiar disappearance and my suspicions of Charles' past criminal record.

I decided to say nothing about the poison episode, but merely to request that a thorough investigation of the premises, and the interrogation of Charles, in case he should have returned, be made immediately.

Not wishing to cause the nurse any further uneasiness, I told her that I could not wait about much longer, and that as soon as the chauffeur got back I would have to leave.

Mr. Millsboro roused presently, and she went in to perform some service. She was in the sick room when I heard the "water hammer" again, this time louder than I had yet observed it, and coming as it seemed from the ceiling overhead. I ascended the upper stairs again, but just as before the noise ceased by the time I had reached the upper story, and I was about to go down when, happening to glance through a window at the head of the stairs, I saw a young man in black clothes and riding a bicycle make the loop of the drive which described a half circle on its approach to the house.

Guessing that this must be the valet, I went down to the reception room and touched the bell. After a considerable delay, the maid who had served my lunch appeared, wiping her hands on an apron which was none too clean.

"Is the valet in the house?" I asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Tell him to come here," said I.

She gave me a rather pert stare as if to ask by what right I took it on myself to give orders.

"I think he's busy," said she.

"You tell him that I want to see him," said I sharply, "and at once!"

She flopped out without answering. A few minutes passed, when there appeared in the doorway a narrow-faced, slope-shouldered young fellow of about twenty-four. His hands were dirty, and his face blotched and perspiring. Also, he was in need of a shave.

"You want me, sir?" he asked half defiantly.

"Yes," I answered. "Where is the butler?"

I could tell from his expression that he was on the point of giving me an impudent answer. He hesitated, then, after a glance at my face, seemed to think better of it. Still, he managed to say, though without very much assurance:

"What do you want of the butler, sir?"

"Look here," said I sharply, "you answer my questions, and never mind about your own. Understand? Where is the butler?"

"I—I don't know, sir."

"Very well," said I, rising; "if you won't answer me, perhaps you may answer——"

I stopped short and turned sharply to listen. For at that moment there came as it seemed to me from the wall about three feet away the dull, pounding vibration to which the nurse had called my attention. So faintly audible it was that if I had not had the matter in my mind I should never have noticed it.

As a matter of fact I had decided upstairs that the noise was produced by what is known to engineers as a "water hammer," and is caused by the sudden closing of a faucet when a volume of water is passing through pipes of faulty construction where a sharp angle permits of the falling of a vertical column of water in a manner to break the continuity of the flow, thus producing a vacuum into which the interrupted current from above trickles with a pounding concussion.

The sound to which I had listened upstairs was precisely that of a water hammer. But the noise to which I now listened was not. A water hammer might give a series of thumps, either regular or irregular, depending on the flow. But it could scarcely be expected to thump with an irregularity which was regular. The muffled shocks to which I now listened came in what might be described in music as "syncopated time." *Tum—tum—tum-tum-tum. Tum—tum—tum-tum-tum—* it went for perhaps half a dozen beats, then ceased.

The valet was standing close to the wall, and must have heard it also. As I looked around at him I saw that his sweating face had whitened.

"What is that noise?" I asked.

"I—it must be the—the water, sir," he stammered, and added: "We hear it quite often, sir."

"Oh, do you?" I answered quietly, and took a step toward him. He recoiled like a snake and spun about to make a dash for it. But his foot slipped on the polished floor, and the next instant my grip was on his shoulder. He tried to slip out of his coat, but my fingers sank under his frail bone and muscle in a way that brought a squall out of him. I jerked him into the room and kicked the door shut.

"What's this?" I growled, and gave him a shake that rattled his bare teeth. "Keep still, you shrimp, or I'll tear your head off!"

His face turned livid, and I tossed him into a big, brocaded chair. Then it struck me that he might be armed, and I leaned over him, gripping both of his puny wrists in one hand, while I rummaged through his pockets with the other. He lay limp as a dead cat until my hand passed over the inner pocket of his coat, when he made a sudden movement. Then he shrank away as if I had touched a sore spot.

"What have you got there?" I asked, and at the same time felt a crackling such as might come from a mass of papers.

"Nothing," he mumbled; "let go my wrists, can't you?"

"You keep still, if you know what's good for you," I answered, and, reaching in his pocket, I drew out a mass of loose sheets of writing paper. A glance at them showed that they were covered with loose, scrawling signatures. All were the same. *John T. Millsboro—John T. Millsboro—John T. Millsboro* —over about a dozen sheets of paper in ragged, disjointed letters.

"Aha," said I; "so you are one of these autograph cranks, are you?"

He wet his lips and peered up at me

like a beaten cur that wants to bite, but doesn't dare. He was frightened, too; badly frightened, but beginning to pull his shaken wits together.

"So you sign the checks for the firm," said I, "and Charles looks after the dope department. Well, son, take it from me that if that last slug of rat poison does its work, it won't be long before you sit in a nice armchair like the one you've got now, and short circuit a big jolt of trolley-car juice. Do you get me?"

His pallid lips moved a little, but he seemed unable to speak. He wet them with his tongue, and managed to say:

"I ought to ha' known who you were. Say, what if I was to put you on to the whole plant?" He looked up at me eagerly out of his ratty eyes.

"It ain't necessary," I answered. "I'm already on. I'll tell you what you can do, though, and do it quick, or you may not last long enough to take your electric Pullman. Where have you got Miss Stanley?"

He hesitated.

"Cough it up, you crab," said I, and gave his wrist a wrench. "Sputter it out—and quick." And his joints creaked at elbow and shoulder.

"Hold on!" he whined. "She's in the bughouse!"

"The what?"

"The batroom—where the old man kept his son that was balmy. Hold on, mister!"

I shifted my grip, and, taking him by the collar, jerked him to his feet.

"Show me where it is," I growled.

"It's locked," he whined. "Charles has got the key."

"Then we'll get one of our own, son," said I, and marched him into the dining room, where I wrenched from the wall one of the heavy battle-axes which was furnished at the end with a heavy spike.

"Now, then," said I, "show me the way."

We went quietly up the stairs to the top of the house, for I did not want to alarm the nurse, fearing that if she knew the sort of game which was being played around her she might rush off, leaving the poor old invalid uncared for.

The first thing was to liberate Jean, after which I could quietly telephone for the police, give the valet in charge, and possibly secure the butler. There was still a lot which needed clearing up, but for the moment my thought was entirely for Jean.

The principal features of the case seemed plain enough. Charles, evidently acting as steward of the Millsboro estate, had no doubt been systematically robbing his employer for a number of years, and was in the habit of cashing checks signed by Mr. Millsboro.

With the old gentleman on his deathbed, Charles had decided on a final coup. He had either pressed the valet into his service, or else imported him expressly for the work in hand when between them they had no doubt cashed quantities of forged checks of different denominations. Then, fearing that the master might yet survive to audit his accounts, or, perhaps, because of suspicion aroused in other quarters, Charles had decided to put the old man out of the way. Possibly he might have learned of the behest of Miss Stanley, when he had seized upon the opportunity offered by her purchase of the rat poison to accomplish his ends in a manner which, if discovered, might throw the suspicion elsewhere.

All of this had flashed through my mind on discovering the practice signatures in the pocket of the valet. But my brain, usually rather deliberate in its action, had been prepared for just such a revelation by the nurse's having called my attention to the medicine, and her remark about having found Charles prowling about her room. In fact, the mental process had begun, really, when I had found an explanation for the butler's peculiar pallor. Even as dull a person as myself could scarcely have failed to follow the course of deduction. But I had not actually associated Jean's puzzling disappearance with Charles, except in the vaguest way, until I heard the syncopated tapping transmitted by the wall.

At the top of the upper stairs the valet twisted about in my grip and asked:

"Say, what if I put you wise to the whole mob? There's a lot about this business that you ain't on to. If you could round up the whole bunch you'd be a made man. You could afford to give a poor, little slob like me a chance to make his get-away. All I've done was to put the old geezer's monaker on a check once in a while. Say, how about it?"

Evidently enough the valet took me for a detective. But his reference to the "mob" and the "bunch" indicated that there were others besides the butler and himself mixed up in the crime. It flashed through my head that, perhaps, after all, the Feldsburgs might be involved, the two servants playing the parts of jackals for their bigger game.

I paused and stared into the valet's mean, little face. There was no doubt but that he was badly frightened, and ready to tell all that he knew to save his skin. It was very probable, I thought, that he might really be no more than the tool of a tool; working for Charles just as Charles was working for the Feldsburgs. The little brute did not look as though he had either the courage or the intelligence for any crime more daring than forgery, which might have been easy for him as the result of a natural aptitude.

"Come in here," said I, and opened a door at the head of the stairs, for I did not want our voices to carry down to the nurse. The door opened into what appeared to be a storeroom containing trunks, boxes, and some pieces of dilapidated furniture. I closed the door behind me and stood with my back against it.

"Now, see here," said I, "you make a clean breast of this whole business, and as soon as I have the gang rounded up you'll get your chance to beat it. Savvy?"

He stared at me doubtfully.

"How do I know that?" he asked.

"You'll have to take your chance, I reckon. But it's that or the chair. The old man got that last dose of Charles; the one last night, I mean, and he's pretty bad. If he cashes in it's the zigzags for yours."

The sweat broke out on the valet's bloodless face, and he sank down on a box, wiping his forehead with his handkerchief.

"I been a lollop," said he. "I never counted on this poison racket. Charles never put me next to that until last night—him. The graft he put up to me was only a few fake checks, me to write 'em and he to cash 'em, then beat it——"

"Can all that," I interrupted, "and get down to this stuff about the mob. Who else is in it?"

"There's two yeggs coming here tonight. They blow the safe and get the hardware and the sparklers. Then they start a blaze, and the bunch of us fade. See?"

"Burn the house, you mean?"

He nodded.

"With the old man—and Miss Stanley——"

"Say," he whispered eagerly, "that's Charles. D'ye know who he is?"

"Yes," I answered, and added, with a quick effort at invention: "He's 'the Prince.'"

"I never heard that one. 'Swell Bill' is the name he used to work under. Honest to God, though, I wouldn't ha' stood for this crematin' business. I'd ha' let the girl out—honest I would."

"How about the cook and the maid?" I asked.

"Oh, they ain't in it. Charles told the shoffer he could take 'em to a show to-night in the car. Say, how did you get your tip?"

"Doctor Feldsburg got leary of the dope and brought me out," said I, watching him narrowly.

"I thought that must be it. Do I get my chance?"

"I guess so," I answered. "How soon is Charles coming back?"

"He ought to get here about six."

"Went in to cash a check, hey?"

"Yes—and to see that his two yeggs were on the job."

"Why did he lock up Miss Stanley?" I asked. "And how did he manage it?"

"He got a hunch that she was wise to him about the rat poison, so just as she was getting into the taxi he went out and told her that he'd like a few words with her. She followed him back into the house, and he asked her to step up to his room, where they could talk without being interrupted. She hung back for a minute, but he whispered that it was something about Doctor Lorenz that he thought she ought to know. So she went up with him, and right here he clapped his hand over her mouth and crammed her into the 'batroom,' as we call it. Then he slipped out by the side door and went along by the beach until he got outside the grounds. I met him on the road as I was going to the town, where I'd been to draw out a little I had in the bank. He told me what he'd done, and gave me the key to the batroom, and said that, if she got noisy, to open the outside door and tell her that she'd better keep quiet if she knew what was good for her."

"Then you've got the key?" I asked.

"Yes. You don't need that meat ax."

"All right," said I. "I guess you've earned your chance to do a Marathon. Come along, now, and we'll let her out."

He wriggled uneasily.

"How about me?" he asked.

"The best thing for you," said I, "is to turn State's evidence. I'll testify that you wouldn't stand for this devilish business, and handed it out to me of your own accord. That'll clear you, all right."

"Charles would fix me, if——"

"You needn't worry about Charles," said I. "Charles will be full of quicklime in a few months. As for these yeggs, they'll be where there's no danger of the dogs biting them for about as many years as you've been alive. Come along."

I opened the door and motioned him to go ahead. There seemed no longer any fear of his trying to escape. In fact, after what he had told me, and I did not for a moment doubt the truth of it all, so precisely did it fit the circumstances of the case, I appeared to have become the one bulwark of defense not only between him and the law, but between him and Charles.

I had in my pocket not only the papers on which were the practice forgeries, but I had confiscated his wallet at the same time. He knew that Mr. Millsboro was a dying man, and the valet had intelligence enough to realize that even should he manage to give me the slip it would not be long before the grip of the law closed on his snipe neck, when he would be dragged into the dock, to be convicted as accessory to murder in the first degree. As matters stood, I was his best chance, and he could not help but know it.

As he went out into the hall, he glanced at the battle-ax, which I still carried in my hand.

"You don't need that," said he.

"I like the feel of it," I answered. "Where's that room?"

Not far from the top of the stairs, and nearly in the middle of the house, the hall divided, when two narrow corridors turned at right angles to right and left. Apparently, the top-story plan of the house had been altered for the construction of a chamber in the very center of the house, which was windowless and completely isolated. This evidently had been built as a place of confinement for Mr. Millsboro's insane son during his periods of violence, and I guessed that the walls and floor must be of double thickness to prevent the ravings and stormings of this unfortunate becoming audible to the other inmates of the house.

Halfway down the corridor, the valet stopped in front of a kind of disguised door, which was papered like the rest of the wall, and which, on being unlocked, proved to be of heavy boiler iron. Between this and an inner door was a space of, perhaps, three feet, with a step leading up to a higher level.

"Excuse me, sir," said the valet, and I might have been struck by the sudden return to his servile tone if I had not been so impatient. It was not necessary to unlock the inner door with the key, for it was furnished with a spring latch. Reaching past me, the valet un-

locked it, and stood aside. "Mind the step, sir," said he.

I caught at the rim of the door and pulled it toward me, for it opened outward from the room, like the other. As I did so, I saw Jean, standing beside a big chair, one hand resting on its back, and the other pressed against her bosom, her eyes wide and filled with terror.

"Don't be frightened. It's I—Walcott——"

That was as far as I got, for at the same moment something struck me behind the ear, and a solid weight drove against the small of my back. I pitched forward, caught my foot on the top of the step, and plunged forward on hands and knees. The battle-ax went clattering across the floor. Jean shrieked, and, as I scrambled to my feet, I heard the door slam to with a metallic clang, and the click of its spring latch.

CHAPTER VII.

TRAPPED.

Even to-day, when I think of that moment, I can feel the hot blood coming up into my face and scorching my ears. Great, hulking idiot that I was, to be caught napping in such a brainless way, and tilted into the room like some stupid, clumsy clod by a shrimp of a man scarcely more than half my size and weight.

As I clambered up and flung myself at the door, I heard the click of the latch, and knew that I was trapped. A moment later I heard a muffled jar, which told me that the valet had shut the outer door also.

Jean had shrieked, and when I turned she was clinging to the chair. I stood for an instant staring at her.

"Here's a nice mess," I said. "That little devil fooled me."

"What's happened?"

"Oh, we are up against a bad crowd," I answered vaguely, wondering how much I had better tell her. Here we were, caged in a prison which seemed to offer no chance of immediate escape, and in a house which was doomed to destruction before many hours passed. I knew that there was no mercy to be expected from Charles or the valet. Jean and I were the only persons alive who had any suspicion, or, even more, any proof of their crime. With the house in ashes, and the only witnesses who could testify against them roasted alive and buried in the ruins, the criminals would have plenty of time to put oceans between themselves and the place before any suspicion of foul play might leak out. Indeed, for that matter, it might never leak out. There was nothing to prevent Charles from remaining to explain the conflagration, even to the finding of our charred corpses in any way which his ingenuity might suggest.

Charles would be able to say anything he chose, and there would be nobody to disprove his claims. Even if he thought himself under suspicion of attempting to poison his master, he could lay the crime on Jean, and who could disprove any statement which he might see fit to make?

As I realized all of this, my heart turned cold, and the sweat broke out on my face. I looked around. The room was of average size, windowless, of course, but furnished with light and air by a shaft of nearly the same dimensions which rose directly to the roof of the house, where it was covered by a skylight of frosted glass. On the level of the ceiling of the room itself were wires which ran across the bottom of the shaft to carry horizontal curtains of baize.

Jean's frightened voice interrupted my inspection.

"Tell me, please," she cried, "what does it all mean?"

"It means that I'm a fool," I answered bitterly. "It was Charles who put the phosphorus in Mr. Millsboro's medicine. He thought that you had found him out. I heard your hammering and made the valet bring me up here after Charles had left. He shoved me into the room and shut the door, as you saw. The valet is a forger. He and Charles have been working together, cashing checks."

"How did you find this out?" Jean asked.

I was about to answer, when there came a noise from over our heads. We looked up and saw silhouetted on the skylight a dark, sprawling figure. Out it swarmed to the middle, supported by the iron frame which held the heavy, opaque glass. In the middle it stopped, when there came a splintering crash, and some fragments of broken glass rattled down into the room. I caught Jean by the arm and drew her aside, for we were standing almost in the middle of the room, and in danger of being cut by the falling pieces. More glass fell, to leave a jagged opening a foot or more across, and in this there appeared the face of the valet. For a moment he stared down at us, then——

"Hello, there!" he called.

"So it's you, is it?" I answered. "Think you've turned the trick, don't you!"

"Looks that way to me," he retorted. "Now, listen; you two keep quiet in there, d'ye hear? If there's any racket I'll come up and plug you both!"

He shoved his arm through the ragged hole and waved an automatic pistol. "You see that?" said he. "Well, then, you'd better keep mighty quiet down there, or you'll hear it, too. We ain't takin' any chances on this job."

"Look here," said I, "you better go slow, son. I'm not the only one that's wise to this game. If I'm not heard from by six o'clock, you and Charles won't get far."

"Ah, go on," he answered, "you can't con me."

"There's no con about it," said I. "We've got enough on the blotter right now to fix Charles, and if you're fool enough to think that he won't try to save his skin by putting the job onto you, then there's no use trying to teach you anything about crime. You're too thick to learn. You may both try to beat it, but you won't get far. You're foolish, son; that's your trouble. I gave you a chance to save your hide a few minutes ago. Now come down and open up these doors, and the same proposition holds good. I'll overlook that jab behind the ear. It was worth it just to learn what a gink a man like you can be. Take your only chance before it gets stale. That's my advice to you. Savvy?"

He seemed to hesitate for a moment, and I hoped that the bluff had worked. It may have been that I believed what he said about Charles being under suspicion and the house under observation, for he said sullenly:

"Charles can't prove nothin' against me. Now you keep quiet, and maybe I'll let you out before we touch her off —see?"

The skylight was square, the heavy glass held by light T-iron frames about three feet apart, and set into a heavier iron ridgepole. It was on this that the valet lay, nearly in the center, as the height of the shaft from the room's ceiling was enough to make it impossible for him to command the entire room from any other point. He had knocked the hole with his heel, or the butt of his automatic pistol, between the two middle transverse T-irons close to the ridgepole, and it was through this gap that he had been talking, his body sprawled out on the ridgepole itself, as the transverses were too light and too widely spaced to permit of their taking the strain of a weight even as light as his.

He was not in the slightest danger of breaking through, so long as he avoided placing any great stress on the glass itself. Even that might have supported him had he borne down upon it gradually. But now, as he started to back away, one knee must have placed undue pressure on the glass. Or else, it was that the slight sagging of the whole frame caused the glass to bear unevenly on its lateral support. Whatever the cause, there was a sudden splintering crash, and the next instant all but a few jagged fragments of an entire section came smashing down into the room.

Standing, as we were, clear of the shaft, we were in no danger of being cut by the falling pieces. Nor, for that matter, was the valet in any danger of falling himself. But the sudden giving away of his insecure support startled

him so that he grabbed with both hands at the iron ridgepole, one knee projecting over the opening. In doing this he was forced to loose his grip on the pistol, which fell with the shower of glass, striking the floor almost at my feet. In a second I had whipped it up, and covered his dark body, silhouetted against the sky. His face was hanging over the opening, staring down at us.

"Don't shoot—don't—don't, mister!" he cried stranglingly. "I'll let you out —I will—honest to——"

"Throw down that key!" I roared—"and quick!"

"I ain't got the key——" His voice was a bleat of terror.

"Throw it down!"

"I ain't got it. I left it in the door. Don't—aw, don't!"

"Throw it down!" I roared again.

"I can't," he wailed. "It's in the door—the outside door——"

"You throw down that key!" I shouted. "Chuck it down before I count three, or I'll drill you. One—two——"

His body heaved, and brought down another shower of glass. In that second it flashed through me that he was telling the truth. I had noticed on entering the room that it was the outer door only which he had unlocked. The inner one had the spring latch which he had drawn by a button underneath the lock. But, key or no key, the man could not be allowed to escape. That spidery thing crawling against the darkening sky stood between us and a chance for our lives. The valet realized this. He knew that he was doomed, and, as he stared down at me, his eyes bulged in mortal terror. His mouth opened wide, and his face writhed as though to anticipate the death shriek as the bullet tore through his vitals.

"Ah—don't," he wailed.

"Three!" I cried, and fired at the middle of the black, squirming body. It bounded on the frames, and there was an avalanche of glass. I fired again, then a third time. The writhing shape flung forward, fell upon the open space, where it hung for a moment across a transverse just as a shot squirrel hangs across a twig, then slipped off limply, and fell with a crash, landing in the heap of splintered glass.

I stepped forward and leaned over him. The body jerked a few times convulsively, then relaxed. But almost before the spasmodic contractions had ceased, almost before the mistaken soul had wrenched itself away from the shuddering clay, I was plunging my hands into one pocket after the other, searching for the key. But I did not find it. I knew all the time that there was no chance of finding it. If he had had it, he would have thrown it down.

Jean had shrunk back against the wall, her hands pressed tightly against the sides of her face.

"What have you done?" she cried. "Oh, *what* have you done?"

"I've killed a snake," I answered, raising on one knee. "We've got a chance for our lives now."

"Our lives?"

"Yes," I answered, and rose to my feet. "Listen, Jean; I didn't tell you all. This butler, Charles, is a convict; a burglar, murderer—anything you like. He poisoned Mr. Millsboro, and he means to burn the house to-night after rifling the safe. The servants are to be sent out. No doubt he intends to murder the old man and the nurse. Part of his plan is to burn you here in this room. He thought that you suspected him of poisoning the medicine. The valet told me all this. I tore a confession out of him. He thought I was a detective, and agreed to turn State's evidence. But when, like a fool, I gave him a chance to play this trick on me, he took it. Perhaps he didn't trust me. I had to kill him. It was our only chance. Now we've got to get out!"

Jean stared from me to the huddled, bleeding thing on the floor. There was a heavy rumble overhead, and a gust of wind struck down through the smashed skylight, and it grew suddenly dark. Looking up, I saw that the sky had turned from leaden gray to indigo. There was a heavier detonation, and a blast of cold air.

"Jean," I cried, "do you understand?"

"Yes." She let her arms drop to her sides. "What shall we do?"

"We've got to get out."

"But how? Where is Charles?"

"He went to the city to cash the last of their forged checks. He may get back at any moment. Come, Jean, pull yourself together. You must help me. Charles doesn't know that I am in here with you. We must do something, and do it quick."

I picked up the battle-ax and looked around. There came another thunder clap, followed by a fresh shower of broken glass. I sprang to the door and tried to drive the spike on the end of the ax between the lock of the door and the edge of the casing. Both were of iron, and fitted closely. A quick examination showed that it would be the work of hours to force even the inner door, when there was still the outer one. Moreover, this could not be accomplished without a good deal of noise, and if Charles had returned he might hear the racket, go up on the roof, and slaughter us through the skylight.

There came another gust of wind, and a fine spray of rain beat down upon us. The thunder was becoming almost continuous, and the house shook under the heavy reverberations. The darkness deepened, and the vivid flashes of lightning played in quick succession.

Glancing at my watch, I saw that it was ten minutes to six. Charles had very possibly arrived, and the terrible thought occurred to me that he might take advantage of the storm to fire the house, not waiting for his confederates. Who could ever say that it had not been struck by lightning and sprung into a blaze? Crafty criminal that he was, it seemed as though he would be quick to profit by such an opportunity to cover his crime.

I looked at Jean, silent, but resolute, and a shudder went through me. I thought also of the helpless nurse and the pitiful old man. Their lives seemed worth little more than our own. But the two women servants were still in the basement, no doubt, and it was probable that Charles would want to send them away before putting his plan into execution. There were also the valuables in the safe, of which, no doubt, he would want to get his share.

There came a blinding flash, accompanied by a terrific clap of thunder, and another shower of glass crashed down. Jean seized me by the arm.

"Can't we get out by the skylight?" she asked.

I looked overhead, then around the room. There were two moldy, upholstered chairs, a heavy chest of drawers, and the bedstead. The skylight was at least twenty feet above the floor, and I could not see how any scaffolding which would enable us to reach it was to be constructed from these articles of furniture. But, as I quickly studied the problem, an idea flashed into my head. With the point of the ax I ripped up the dingy carpet and examined the floor planking underneath. It was laid with long strips of yellow pine, four inches wide. I drove the point of the ax behind the butt of one of these, and pried it up.

"Here's stuff for a ladder," I said. "Come, we'll manage it."

Jean caught the idea at once. I gave her one of the slats of the bed, and showed her how to use it as a lever to hold the section of floor planking while I got a fresh "bite" with the ax. The first strip removed, the others were easy to raise. Working rapidly, but quietly, we managed in the course of about half an hour to remove eight of these planks, the nails in most cases pulling out of the light floor beams which supported them. This false flooring was raised about a foot from the original one of the upper story, and had evidently been constructed for the sake of deadening noise, for there was a layer of sand beneath.

Next came the difficult task of working out the nails, then securing the strips one over the other, as singly they would not have been strong enough to take a person's weight. I lapped them so that the butts of the upper planks came at the middle of the under, pounding in the nails on the back of one of the upholstered chairs, for the bed had no mattress.

It was painful work and difficult, especially that of first freeing the nails before I could use them. With a hammer and a saw the whole job would have taken, perhaps, an hour, but with the clumsy battle-ax it was infuriating. The nails bent and slipped under its flat side, and, to make matters worse, the faint light soon faded, though the storm had passed over, and we were obliged to work in total darkness, and by the sense of touch alone. Not being a smoker, I had no matches, and was, therefore, unable to see my watch, but when the side supports of what was to be our ladder were finished, I removed the crystal, and Jean, touching the hands with her fingers, said that it was, as she thought, half past eight.

Throughout the whole of this fearful task the girl had not so much as whimpered. Not a single word of complaint escaped her. On the contrary, though she knew as well as I the vital necessity of haste, her few remarks were made in a low, steady voice, and her words filled with cheer and encouragement. The sweat was pouring from me in streams as I worked, and my body felt as though filled with ice and fire.

As it crossed my mind that even at that moment Charles might be piling up combustibles down there beneath us, and drenching them in gasoline, my mouth and throat grew hot and dry, and my breath came in whistling gasps. We both suffered from thirst, Jean more than myself, and she must have been faint also from lack of food, but not a word of wretchedness escaped her.

Once, when our hands touched in groping for a nail, I caught hers for a moment, and pressed it in mine, and the answering pressure sent a flame through me. With a gasp that was almost a sob I drew her to me, and for an instant held her closely in my arms. Her cool, fragrant face sought my dripping one, and there, in the gloom, I found her lips.

"Jean—darling," I whispered incoherently, "I love you—I adore you."

"And I love you, Douglas," she murmured brokenly, and her arms slipped up and about my neck, where they tightened with an almost strangling force, then loosened.

"Promise me," I said, "that if we get out of this you will belong to me—always."

"I always have belonged to you, I think," she whispered, "and I always shall. You are mine—my husband. In life or death you are mine. And Douglas——"

"Yes, sweetheart?"

"Even if—if the worst comes to the worst, we do not have to suffer. You have the pistol——"

I crushed her face to mine. "You shall not suffer," I said chokingly. "After all, there are worse things than death."

"Death is nothing," she answered, and we turned to our work again.

There came then the problem of how to attach the crosspieces to our uprights, but that I had already considered. Our scant nails were scarcely enough to give security to the uprights themselves. I groped my way to the bed, took out the slats, and, scoring them in the middle with my pocket-knife, broke them in two across my knee. My plan was to notch the uprights in places, then lash the "rungs" with the cords which drew the curtains.

To get these latter I placed the two uprights against the sides of the shaft and started to swarm up. They buckled under my weight, but held. I reached the cords, and cut them away, then slid down again.

It was the work of half an hour to secure the rungs. The cord gave out, so I tore strips from the tough upholstery of the chairs, knotted them together, and used them as lashings. I had barely finished doing this when Jean's voice said tensely in my ear:

"Hurry, Douglas—*I smell smoke!*"

CHAPTER VIII.

THROUGH THE FIRE.

Jean was right. The air was faintly scented with the odor of some burning substance, which seemed to come from

the hole which we had torn in the floor. The darkness of the room was no longer impenetrable, for the sky had cleared, and the stars twinkled brightly through the open gap in the skylight. I groped my way to the chest of drawers, which stood in a corner, and dragged it against the side of the wall almost under the shaft. Then, raising our rickety ladder, I rested the upper end against the side of the shaft, and planted the foot on the top of the chest of drawers, bracing it against the wall.

This gave it a dangerous lateral pitch, but I hoped that it would bear my weight. There was no doubt of its taking Jean's, but it was necessary for me to mount first, as the top rung was a good five feet from the skylight, and rested beneath a point where the glass was still intact. I was obliged to smash this, then swarm up onto the roof by gripping the ridgepole of the skylight, when I could easily reach down and swing Jean up beside me.

The frail ladder buckled ominously as I tested it by reaching up and swinging from the highest rung which I could reach, for if there was any doubt of its giving way I meant to send Jean up, first, and let her try to scramble to the roof as best she might, though I doubted that she could manage it. But though the rickety affair sagged and bent, it held, reënforced as it was by the lashings which I had bound about it to hold the rungs.

"Put your weight against the chest," I said to Jean. "Duck your head. I've got to smash the glass."

"All right," she answered.

I started to climb up, holding my breath as a man will in the effort to make himself lighter. In one hand I had the battle-ax, and I grudged the thing its extra weight. Halfway up I thought for a moment that the whole affair was going, and my heart came into my throat.

But it held, and once at the top, with a part of the strain against the wall of the shaft, there was no more danger of its giving way. Shielding my head with one arm, I punched at the glass with the ax. The stuff crashed down, falling clear of Jean, who was well to the side. I shoved the ax up onto the roof, then gripped the ridgepole, and swung myself feet first through the open gap, then squirmed about and looked down.

"Come ahead," I called softly, and was about to tell her how to go about it when there came what sounded like the muffled report of a pistol.

Close on it followed two other similar sounds, then silence, except for the rush of the cold, westerly wind, which buffeted about the chimneys, and set the ancient weathercock on the tower to jangling discordantly.

"I'm coming," Jean called back, and I could hear the top of the ladder grating the plaster as she started to climb. I was lying out across the iron ridgepole, my arms dangling on either side of it, staring down into the black void which swam in utter oblivion.

"Take it easily," I cautioned her, for the rungs were wide apart, and I was afraid that if her weight came too much on one side, she might capsize the loosely knit affair. "Keep in the middle and——"

"It's slipping!" she called back. "It's falling——"

I could hear the top of the ladder grating against the plastered wall of the shaft. Then came a shriek from Jean, and with it a crash. I knew from the sound that the ladder had fallen.

"Jean!" I called wildly. "Jean——"

Her voice rose despairingly from the murk.

"Oh, Douglas—it's fallen! The bureau slid away!"

"Are you hurt?" I cried.

"No—but how can I raise the ladder?"

"Wait," I called down to her. "The key is probably in the door. I'll slip down and let you out. Don't be frightened, dear."

"Douglas—the smoke is getting stronger."

"Never mind. I'll get you out. Wait a minute, Jean," I called, and scrambled back and onto my feet.

The roof, like all of its kind, was nearly flat, pitched only enough to per-

mit the water to run off onto the broad eaves below the mansard. There was no scuttle, the access to the roof being through a window of the square tower. But the chimney behind me was provided with a lightning rod which led down over the eaves beside a window. I slipped to the edge and lowered myself by the wire cable to the eaves.

The window was unfastened, so I raised it and crept through. Evidently it was one of the servant's rooms, as it had the smell of recent occupation. I groped my way to the door, opened it, and was nearly blinded by the glare of light from an electric lamp in the corridor. This shone against the wall opposite, and I saw that I had come out on the door leading to the room where Jean was still a prisoner. But *the key was not in the door.*

The corridor was filled with smoke; a heavy, oily smoke which hung in the dead air like the fumes in a garage. I stood for a moment, listening. There was no sound of crackling flames; no sound of anything except the gusty wind as it billowed against the sides of the house. I snatched the automatic pistol from my pocket, and ran to the head of the stairs, where an electric light was burning brightly. Looking down I could see wreaths of the turbid smoke, but not a sound was to be heard.

There seemed nothing to indicate actually that the house was on fire. Rather, it seemed as if it might have been ablaze in some part, but that the flames had been quenched. I slipped down the stairs and ran the length of the hall to the nurse's room, which adjoined Mr. Millsboro's. Both were vacant. The old man's bed was vacant, the covers flung back over the foot. Both rooms were lighted. The whole house seemed lighted, and in this front part the smoke was less.

But I did not stop to ponder over these riddles. My thought was only of Jean, alone and frantic in her prison. I rushed back to the stairs and dashed down, the pistol held in front of me. On the ground floor the smoke was thicker; almost suffocating in fact, but less so because of its volume than owing to its sooty character, and there was no sign of live fire.

As I slipped down the stairs, swiftly but silently, it crossed my mind that Charles might have murdered Mr. Millsboro and the nurse, flung their bodies into a room filled with inflammables, touched his match and gone off, closing the door behind him, when the fire had smothered from lack of air or was still smoldering.

The broad, lower hall was opaque with the greasy smoke, through which the incandescent lights flared luridly. I paused for an instant at the foot of the stairs, and tried to peer under it, but could not see half the length of the house. Neither was there anything to be heard. There was no roaring nor crackling of flames, no sound of any human presence. Charles and his pals had apparently achieved their foul work and gone, taking it as a matter of course that the old barracks of a house, a double wooden shell incasing brick walls, would go off like a tar barrel.

But whether the house was on fire or not, there was no time to be lost in releasing Jean. The quickest way of doing this seemed to be to run down to the boathouse, where I would no doubt find a coil of rope, then rush back to the roof, and haul her up through the skylight, or, at any rate, raise the ladder into position. I stumbled down the hall half smothered by the heavy fumes, and was nearly to the front door when, from a room to the left, there came a deep, shuddering groan.

I stopped short, gripping the pistol.

"Who's there?" I called.

"Help—help, for the love o' God!" cried a strangling voice. "It's Charles—the butler. Help!"

The voice came from the dining room. I entered. A single electric lamp on the mantel struggled against the murk, and by its dim light I saw the butler. He was lying on his side against a closed door, and as I sprang forward and leaned over him, my foot slipped in the pool of blood which surrounded him. I noticed, too, that here was the source of the smoke, which was

pouring black and viscid through the cracks of the door.

"Help!" he groaned, and his eyes glared up at me from his colorless face. "Get me out—quick!"

"You dog," I snarled, "where's that key? The key to the room where you put Miss Stanley?"

"Here," he groaned, and laid his hand on his side pocket.

I reached down, secured the key, then asked:

"Where is the old man—and the nurse?"

"Get me out of here—I'm choking."

"You can choke for all me," I answered. "Where are they? Speak quick."

"He was taken to the hospital an hour ago. The nurse—wouldn't stop here. Doctor Feldsburg telephoned—oh——"

His head pitched forward, and I thought for the moment that he was dead. I reached down and hauled him clear of the flat band of dark smoke which flowed heavy as molasses under the crack of the door. His eyes opened.

"I fixed 'em," he muttered incoherently.

"Who?"

"Yellow Pete—and Jimmy the Rat—blast 'em!"

"Where are they?" I demanded.

"*Ugh*—wha's that?" His eyelids flickered, then opened wide. "I swore I'd fix 'em—long ago."

"Where are they?" I repeated, and pushed his limp body with my foot.

His head jerked convulsively. "In there. Water——"

But I did not wait to hear more. The smoke was thickening. I rushed out of the room, down the hall, and up the stairs to the top of the house. Here the air was cleaner, for the fumes were too heavy to rise to any great extent. I ran to the door of the "batroom," my heart nearly bursting as I slipped in the key. The bolt shot, and the breath burst from me in a gasp of relief. "Jean!" I cried, as I fumbled for the latch of the inner door. "Here I am, Jean!"

The door swung open. There was a low, quavering cry, and a dark figure lurched toward me.

"Jean!" I cried again, and caught her in my arms, and dragged her into the corridor, where for a moment I held her as she hung limp and nerveless. She did not faint, and as I clasped her close, kissing her cold, damp face, and murmuring soothing words of comfort, she stirred slightly and looked up at me.

"Come, dear," I said. "We must get out. Can you walk?"

"Yes. Have they gone, Douglas?"

"There is no danger," I answered, and led her down the corridor.

We were almost at the head of the stairs when there came from below a heavy, muffled explosion. The house seemed to rock and sway, and from all sides there came the splintering crash of broken window glass. A pulse of air so violent that it flung us back against the wall, burst upon us from below. The window at the end of the corridor from which, earlier in the day, I had watched the entrance of the valet on his bicycle, flew out, sash and all, while a burning blast heavy with swirling fumes swept up and scorched our faces.

I guessed at what had happened. Charles, perhaps to wipe out some old score of his early criminal career, had enticed his two confederates into the small room off the dining room, which he had filled with combustibles drenched in kerosene. Perhaps, as they were touching matches to the pile, he had shot them both, then tried to slip out and lock the door behind him. But they had been too quick for him, and he had fallen outside the door, drilled through and through by their bullets. These had been the reports which I had heard while on the roof. With the door closed, the fire had smoldered until the gathering heat had splintered the windowpanes, when, the air rushing in, the gas formed had ignited explosively. Charles' last moment could not have been a pleasant one.

Even for us there was no time to lose. The place was plunged in darkness, for the lights had been extinguished by the

force of the explosion. After that first blast of withering heat we were able to make the descent of the upper staircase, and we staggered down, shielding our faces with our arms.

"The back stairs!" I gasped. "Where are they?"

"Here—behind us," answered Jean.

Coughing and choking, we found the door and plunged through it, closing it behind us. Here the air was fresh and pure, for the pantry, into which the back stairs descended, was shut off from the front of the house. This was lighted by an incandescent lamp which hung from a wire, and on the table under it were the remains of a supper with which Charles had apparently regaled his victims.

I picked up the half of a cold chicken and the piece of a loaf, wrapped them in a napkin, and shoved them in one side pocket, and put a bottle of beer in the other, for the sight of the food reminded me that Jean had eaten nothing since early in the morning. Then down we hurried through the kitchen. The basement door was unlocked, and we went out into the pure, sweet air.

I looked back at the house. We had come out on the side of the public road, and as yet no flames were visible, for the fire was on the side of the inlet.

Jean gripped my arms.

"Douglas—oh, Douglas!" she wailed. "Mr. Millsboro—and the nurse!"

"They are not in the house," I answered. "There is no living person in the house."

"How do you know?"

"I looked. Besides, Charles told me."

"Charles!"

"Yes. He is dead now. He told me before he died. Come, Jean. Nobody knows that we are here. Nobody needs to know."

She did not answer, and we hurried down the drive and out of the gate. Jean, dazed, shaken, and half fainting from the ordeal through which she had passed, clung to my arm and staggered along blindly.

We started down the road, which presently forked when we turned off, away from the main thoroughfare. There was a grove of trees to the left, and when we had gone, perhaps, a hundred yards, I turned off directly into this, Jean tottering blindly at my side. The place was clear of underbrush, and we climbed to the top of a rocky little ridge. Looking through the trees, I saw a brilliant glare from the direction of the Millsboro estate.

"We'll rest a bit, here," I said, and sat down on a flat rock, drawing Jean to my side.

For several moments neither of us spoke. The flare in the sky brightened, and we heard distant shouts and cries. Then, from the town came the rapid tolling of a fire bell. One—two—three! One—two! it rang. Motor horns sounded from here and there, and a car sped past on the road beneath us, trumpeting violently as it charged along. Jean's body swayed against me, and I held her closer, her head resting on my shoulder, and her hair against my cheek.

For a while we rested so in silence, listening to the rapidly growing tumult as the neighborhood aroused and hurried to the scene of catastrophe. The humming northwest wind was from our direction, though we were sheltered by an overhanging ledge, and presently we could see great firebrands whirled blazing toward the zenith, and swept off in the rush of the strong, upper air.

People ran chattering along the road beneath us, and we heard the clamoring, blaring arrival of the local fire force. There was something weird and dreamlike about all of this tumult from which we felt ourselves so curiously detached. It all seemed so futile, and silly, and inconsequential, after the terrific hours through which we had passed. Those people scurrying along from all sides like night moths rushing to a flame were tremendously excited, as one could tell from their panting shouts and exclamations:

"Millsboro place—old, historic landmark—wonder if they got the old man out——"

All such fragments shouted by the hurrying crowd of villa dwellers in the

locality rippled up to us like waves splashing against a basaltic rampart heaved up by a convulsive torment of the infant world. We sat there like a god and goddess watching, unmoved, the petty agitations of earthlings.

Motor car after motor car hummed or clattered past, according to its kind. Some of them appeared to be filled with young people who laughed and chattered as if going to a spectacular show in which fireworks played an important part. The damp wood spewed out lovers who had been roused from their trysting among the sweet spring smells of the night. We could hear them chattering, and stumbling, and giggling as they scrambled down to the road. One couple passed close, saw us sitting there, and laughed.

"See the bloomin' fire?" called to us a fresh voice with an English accent. Some sprightly groom, no doubt, who had been studying astronomy with a maidservant, for a tittering voice with a throaty Swedish accent observed: "Dey ban got no use for house on fires —like us." And off they went, slipping, and sliding, and squealing down the bank to join the growing throng, for all about the Millsboro estate, though at some little distance, were many small villas and cottages of suburban people who lived in the country, and had their business in New York.

As I sat listening abstractedly to all of this curious chirp and twitter, I discovered that Jean had fallen fast asleep. Her head had slipped from my shoulder to my chest; my arms were round her, my hands clasped, and her breathing was as slow and peaceful as that of a sleeping child.

What waves of tenderness passed through me, then, no one may ever know. I was glad, in that hour, that I had always been a grub; glad that there had been no drain to that reservoir which holds a man's fund of love for the one woman. She was my only heart's desire; my little girl, my sweetheart, my brave companion—and she was to be my wife! The tears swam into my eyes as I bent my head to kiss her soft hair.

The kiss awakened her. Jean, in her perfect health, had that rare faculty of crowding hours of rest into a few brief minutes of profound relaxation. She awoke with a little twittering like that of the birds all about us, which were being disturbed by the growing glare of the conflagration. I was glad, because I did not think that she ought to sleep in those damp woods. She came back to full consciousness like any of us workers who have things to do that have to be done at certain times, without reference to soft comforts.

"I went to sleep," she said.

"Yes," I answered, "and now you must eat something, because we've got to go. It must be nearly midnight."

I reached in my pocket and drew out the food which I had snatched up as we went through the pantry. With the leather punch in my knife I unfastened the crimped top of the bottle of beer.

"Eat and drink," I said, "because tomorrow morning I've got to go to the Mazaruni."

"I'm going with you," said Jean.

"We can talk about that later," I answered, and my heart was like lead. "Eat, now, and then we'll go."

"Where?" she asked.

"Back to the city. Drink this." I handed her the bottle. "You're thirsty, aren't you?"

"Yes—but I'd rather have some water."

"Take this, and then we'll go and get some water," I said.

She ate and drank while I described how I had found Charles, and what he had told me.

"I think it was true," I said. "The nurse was frightened and nervous. She probably telephoned to Doctor Feldsburg or his son, and they had the patient moved to the hospital. Lorenz felt that there was something wrong. He asked me if I believed in presentiments. I didn't, then—but I do now. I think that a china dog might have felt the atmosphere of crime hanging over that house. But then, I wasn't a china dog."

"What did you say to Doctor Feldsburg?" Jean asked.

I looked at her in surprise, then

realized suddenly that I had told her nothing about that interview, and of how Lorenz had cleared her of all suspicion in the mind of his father by the theory of the poisoned rat. So I now proceeded to acquaint her with all of the facts, and of how I had come to discover the true situation through the confession which I had extorted from the wretched valet. Jean listened in silence and wonder, and before my narrative had proceeded far her hand slipped into mine, and remained there until I had finished.

"Lorenz and I were terribly puzzled about your disappearance," I said. "He was called away to see his patient in the Bronx. No doubt the feeling which he had about there being some ugly mystery around the house grew so strong that he decided to have Mr. Millsboro removed to the hospital that very afternoon. Besides, the nurse was very nervous, and remained only under protest. It may be, also, that she had her suspicions about the phosphorus in the medicine, and suspected Charles. In that case it is possible that she called up Lorenz and intimated something of the sort, when he would have moved the old gentleman immediately. There was no sign of disorder in the room, and the bedding had been turned neatly back. There is no doubt in my mind that Mr. Millsboro and the nurse are quite safe."

"Then nobody knows that we were in the house," said Jean slowly.

"Not a living soul. I told the nurse that I was waiting to speak to the butler. She may have thought that I got tired of waiting, and left, or that, as it was getting late, I went to the station to speak to him when he got off the train. It does not matter what she thought. She did not know that I was in the house. The cook and maid were in the basement, and would not have known if I had left the place. When the ruins are examined, and they find the bodies of the gang and the opened safe, it will not be difficult to judge pretty closely as to what actually occurred; namely, that the house was plundered by thieves, who set it afire before going out, then quarreled among themselves, and slaughtered each other. See here, Jean," I went on, "I have been thinking the matter over while you were resting, and it seems to me that we are under no obligation to make public our part in this terrible business."

"I have been thinking the same thing, Douglas," she answered.

"It would be better to say nothing for a number of reasons," I said. "The inquiry would bring you, particularly, a notoriety which might do you a great deal of harm. It would bring out the fact of Mr. Millsboro's having made a will in your favor, and of your being in attendance on him when the doctors discovered the phosphorus in the medicine which you were about to give him. Then, there would be the fact of your presence in the house shortly before the nurse called my attention to the phosphorus in the medicine she herself was about to administer. People might choose to doubt our story of having been shut up in the insane room, and the valet, the only witness against Charles, is dead. Charles himself is dead, and it might be claimed that you had taken advantage of this fact to fix the crime on him. He might be glorified as the heroic, devoted butler who lost his life in defense of his master's property. As for my evidence, that would be vitiated by the fact of our having contracted a civil marriage this morning.

"The case, as it now stands, will always be more or less of a mystery, and for my part I think that it had better remain so. I shall call up Doctor Lorenz, or drop him a line, saying that I found you after he had left, and that we returned to the city. If he questions you, say that you were waiting to see me after he had gone. If he asks you where, say here at the fork of the road. You can tell him that you wished to thank me for befriending you. And I would advise that you lose no time in seeing Mr. Millsboro's lawyer and renouncing your claim to the estate, on the ground that in your opinion he was too vague, mentally, to appreciate

his act, and that you do not know of any reason why he should have made you his heiress."

"I do not want his money," she answered. "I would not touch a penny of it." She raised her face, and I saw her tears glistening in the bright starlight. "There is only one thing which I want—only one thing. Don't go to that awful place, Douglas. Or if you must, then take me with you."

"I can't, Jean. Neither could you go. Will you wait for me? Only two years?"

"*Only* two years!" she echoed bitterly. "Why not say two hundred years? But you are right, Douglas. Some of us are doomed to wait, and long, and yearn for the happiness which we can imagine, but never feel—and plod along under the load of other lives—oh, my dear!" she cried passionately. "Don't you sometimes hate them all? Is it very wicked?" She began to sob.

"Jean—Jean!" I said soothingly, and took her in my arms. I understood that wail of protest; that plea for the right to live one's own life. "Jean—darling."

Her arms slipped up around my neck. Her eyes glowed up at me from her pallid face.

"I am your wife," she whispered.

Jean, white and tense, stood on the edge of the wharf and watched me with tearless eyes as the ship edged remorselessly away from the end of the pier. Long after her features had grown indistinct I could feel that last yearning look.

But this parting, while it wrenched me to the very core, still left a certain curious exaltation. I was going, but I should return. I was sure that I should return.

I shall not dwell on that separation. I reached the Mazaruni, and found it worse than all description. Acclimated men died about me like sewer rats stifled in a trap. Supposed immunes, negroes from the stagnant rice belts, coolies spawned under the fever mists, tropic-hardened whites, came, and labored, and died. They went to their work sound men in the morning, and at night one would have said that they had been dead a week.

And through this devastation I moved like a phœnix in the flame, thin, sweating, yellow, but unscathed. I built my plant, saw it in successful operation, received my bonus of stock, and learned that in six months it had quadrupled its value as the result of my development of the properties.

I saw myself in the near future as a man, if not actually rich, yet independent of toil. In the last six months I was able to send checks of small denomination to my father, and those of large ones to my wife. Her letters were my tonic; the divine elixir which they contained put into my blood a strong fluid which defied the fever.

I finished my work, refused munificent offers from the company to remain and conduct their operations, for I had come to be regarded as a prodigy; and then, as joyous and elated I set foot upon the steamer at Georgetown to return, the blow fell—fell like an avalanche of festering poison, to plunge me deep in a flaming delirium, which lasted the whole of the voyage.

Jean, with Mr. Stuart, our secretary, came down to the ship to claim the yellow, fever-ridden rack of bones which, from their reception of it, one might have considered as an object of value. And then, as they were getting me ashore, who should appear but Lorenz Feldsburg! These two men had proved loyal friends to Jean, and she had told them both our story.

Mr. Millsboro had recovered to such health as might be expected of his age, and to the clear possession of his mental faculties. It was Lorenz's opinion that Charles had been administering some form of poison during a considerable period. The old gentleman and his lawyer had been impressed most favorably by Jean's refusal to accept a fortune to which she did not feel herself entitled, and the will had accordingly been altered. But when a few years later the aged millionaire succumbed to an attack of grippe it was discovered that he had not forgotten her.

An examination of the ruins of the Millsboro house revealed the charred corpses of the criminals, and the explanation of their presence was such as I had foretold. People were divided in their opinions as to the parts played by Charles and the valet, but public interest did not linger long about the tragedy.

Jean and I are prosperous, now, and our future is filled with the brightness which comes of perfect love and sympathy, and the happiness which we take in our dear children.

George Pattullo will write the next novel for us. It is called "Jack of Hearts," a romance of the cattle country. It will appear complete in the January month-end Popular—the Christmas number—which will also contain a Christmas story called "Ol' Man Martin," by A. M. Chisholm. On sale two days before Christmas.

A FIGHT THAT LASTED ONE ROUND

WHEN Charlie White, now a promoter of prize fights, was himself a handy fellow with his fists, horse cars were common things in the city of New York. One night in March, when the wind was blowing high and the sleet was skating through the air like knives, Charlie and a friend were riding downtown on one of these crowded horse cars. It was so crowded that they took refuge on the front platform with the big Irish driver.

In spite of the intense cold, Charlie grew facetious.

"It's a pity," he said, in a voice that carried above the roar of the wintry blasts, "that Irishmen can get all the soft jobs in the world. You see 'em everywhere, digging ditches, carrying bricks, and driving street cars. It's a shame that they get all this soft work, when a white man can't turn a trick."

Then, noticing that the veins in the back of the Irishman's neck had swollen so that the flesh hung over his collar, he enjoyed the mild jest immensely.

Just as he was about to step off the car, the Irishman gave him a scientific and well-directed kick, lifting him five feet in the air, and landing him on the sleety cobblestones. The ruin was complete, Charlie sustaining two torn trousers legs, one skinned nose, one bruised chin, and two broken hands. His friend was highly indignant.

"Charlie," he shouted excitedly, "aren't you going back and kill that guy?"

"Lord, no!" groaned Charlie. "He's killed me."

WHAT THEY ALL FINALLY SAY

LIEUTENANT JOHN H. TOWERS, of the United States navy, is the man who miraculously escaped death last summer when he fell sixteen hundred feet with an aëroplane into the waters of Chesapeake Bay. He is also the man who played the part of ardent young lover in the moving pictures produced by the navy department some time ago—pictures for which twenty thousand dollars' worth of powder was used and seven warships employed in a great battle scene.

In the picture, the young hero, the naval officer, comes upon the scene to bid a tragic farewell to his lovely sweetheart. His lips move slowly and with effort. The girl looks up at him in sadness. It is easy to imagine what tender words fall from his lips.

According to those who saw the pictures made, what he actually did say at this juncture was:

"Let's hurry and get this over, and go out for something to eat. I'm starved."

The Flower of the Flock

By Peter B. Kyne

Author of "A Reasonable Profit," "Hamburger Steak—Without Onions," Etc.

Captain Johnny Packard of the Bloody Fourteenth was the "flower of the flock." Troth, he was the wild man, as Sergeant Ryan says. "Auld Cut-the-Daisies" they called him, from a habit he had of drawing his sword and making a wide right moulinet before bringing the blade to attention.

ME son," quoth First Sergeant John Ryan, B troop, —th United States Cavalry, "I've just come t'rough a wild adventure wit' a whole skin."

I was curious. Wild adventure is rare with troops on stations at the Presidio of San Francisco, and I had difficulty associating anything very alarming with the lazy attitude of my friend, as he tilted back in his chair and lifted his immaculate legs to the barrack veranda rail.

"Have you been drinking, John?" I demanded severely; for Sergeant John, while an excellent soldier and a wholly lovable character, has upon occasions been known to gaze upon the wine when he found extreme difficulty in ascertaining just what color it really was.

The old rascal smiled reminiscently. "Not when I had me wild adventure this mornin', although be the same token 'tis to drink I owe it. Have ye not heard the news? Sure 'tis all over the reservation. They've been talkin' av nothin' else this fortnight in Soapsuds Row, but how Sergeant Ryan av B throop was to be bobtailed out av the service. The danger's over now. Heaven be praised, but 'twas a tight squeak for the auld soger bhoy. Faith, the divil always minds his own. 'Tis a frightened man I was, but Miss Julie was wort' it. 'Tis for her sweet sake I risked dishonor in the shank av me long service—Miss Julie O'Neill, daughter av O'Neill, our own sergeant major——"

"So you're in love, you villain!" I interrupted.

"Divil a hair. Wit' Miss Julie O'Neill and her a slip av a girrl, whilst I'm forty-three and facing her father every blessed morning at guard mount. 'Tis shame I'd take on meself. Faith 'tis not that soft I am. But a good girrl's a good girrl, and I have great respect for O'Neill; so, enlisted man or commissioned officer, whin I find him philanderin' around Miss Julie that I held as a child on me knee, I'll have a look into his intintions or I'll know the reason why."

Wirra, wirra, 'tis a long time back that the story started—twelve years gone come April next—and it only inded this morning. Let us, thin, I'ave the evints of this morning for the nonce, as the pote says, for an inspection av me dark past. As the pote says ag'in:

> Descind wit' me the steps av time,
> Into a warrm and sunny clime,
> Walk bravely down the long, long way
> Until ye reach an April day.
> Thin "Halt!"

Ye must know that whin I firrst took to sogerin' I took on in the infanthry—E av the Bloody Fourteenth, 'twas, and we was a regiment av the finest. John-

ny Packard was our captain, and we was in luck to have a captain in thim days, what wit' the sudden increase av the arrmy to a war footing and shavetail second lootinints, just out from the P'int commanding comp'nies bekase av the scarcity av officers.

Faith, our Johnny was the flower av the flock. Troth, he was the wild lad. Auld Cut-the-Daisies we called him, from a habit he had av drawin' his sword and making a wide right molineaux before bringin' the blade to attintion. He was a bit auld for a captain, for promotions was slower before the Spanish War than they are now, Johnny was risin' fifty before they made him a major and took him away from us, to brevet him a colonel av United States volunteers. From Kentucky he was—a straight man, wit' a straight back, proud as Lucifer, auld-fashioned and high-minded to a degree. He was democratic as the divil in his cups. Faults he had and to spare, but he had virtues, too, and never a braver soger nor a finer gintleman ever presinted his comp'ny to the colonel at dress parade. An average drinkin' man he was, as they rate thim in Kentucky, but it never got him into throuble. But on wan occasion he got pickled to the chin celebratin' his fiftieth birthday, and E throop j'ined him in his drunken abandon and there was the divil to pay. 'Twas I that saved him, for I was young and tough in thim days and could float in strong drink wit'out visible effect.

'Twas in the trenches at Pasay it happened. For three mortial months we'd done nothing save sit still and twiddle our thumbs, whilst the snipers in the bush plugged away at our outposts. 'Twas our job to howld the line to the south av Manila and keep Aguinaldo's forces in check, whilst Lawton was hammering them to the north. 'Twas dull to a degree until, be great good luck, a mild little Chinaman come along and set up a fly tent on the roadside back av our trenches. He stole two impty potato crates from our comp'ny cook, rustled a board somewhere else, made him a bar, and set up in a fly-benight saloon.

Our top sergeant, a sour, puritanical man that always played the field organ and led the psalm singing whin the chaplain preached av a Sunday, reported at wanst to auld Johnny that a godless son av Cathay had set up a saloon too close to the lines for comfort.

"Is that so?" says auld Johnny, who, be the same token, was as dhry as a covered bridge himself. "Thank ye, sergeant, for warrnin' me av this impindin' evil that's threatenin' the morals av the enlisted men. I'll go see what he's up to," and wit' that Auld Cut-the-Daisies called his Spanish Filipino interpreter and descinded upon the Chino.

"Have ye a license, Jawn Chinaman?" says he; m'anin', av coorse, had he the permission av the brigade commander to cater to the thirrst av the throops. The interpreter put the question.

"He has not," says he, turrnin' to Auld Cut-the-Daisies.

"Very well, thin," says Johnny, "do you tell him he have my permission to sell to E comp'ny, for cash or credit, but that I'll listen to no complaints if wan av me men should beat him out av a liquor bill. Tell him to confine his iniquitous thraffic to mild lager beer and timperance dhrinks. Whisky, cognac, and native *bejo* is barred, as tindin' to desthroy what little linin' av the men's stomachs the cook has left. There must be no furrniture polish sold on these premises. Good whisky I would not object to, but imitation hell fire, made be himself, I will not tolerate. Tell him that now, and tell him also, if I catch him wit' a spoonful av contrabrand booze in his possession I'll make him an almighty hard Chinaman to catch."

And wit' that Auld Cut-the-Daisies wint off about his own business.

Well, sir, for a week things was that quiet and peaceful along our lines, savin' the bushwhackers that was forever firin' at us, ye'd never have suspected the Demon Rum was in camp if it hadn't been for auld Johnny himself. But it was. It seems a light quartermaster's cart dhruv up the road wan

day and deposited a case av forty-year-auld Kentucky whisky that'd been agin' all that time in an oak barrel. 'Twas a presint from his people in the Blue Grass, and by the powers, auld Johnny wint around smilin' like a pike.

There was nothin' unginerous about Auld Cut-the-Daisies. He sint a bottle to the brigade commander, another to the colonel, and four more to his favorite brother officers; thin, wit' the other six left, he sat down to dhrink his own health. He disposed av a bottle a day for three days, and whilst he was not at any time what ye might call intoxicated, he had a wild, rovin' look in his eye and 'twas judged safe not to miss a call whilst the Blue Grass was wavin'.

The thirrd day after the arrival av auld Johnny's case goods I was standin' in the kitchen yarnin' wit' the cook, whin who should I see but a scut be the name av Barney Brookston comin' from the direction av the Chino's booze barracks, and him as full as a fiddler. Barney—poor man!—was sadly out av alignment when he passed the door av Auld Cut-the-Daisies' tent, and out come the auld codger foamin' at the mouth.

"Private Brookston," says he, "stand to attintion!" So Barney stood to attintion as best he could, and give the captain a ragged figger four.

"Private Brookston," says Johnny, "ye have been dhrinkin'. In fact, I will go further and state that ye're dhrunk."

"The same to you, sir," says Barney, "and many happy returrns av the day."

"Silence!" says auld Johnny. "Cease this impidince. Ye have not only been dhrinkin', I repeat, but ye're dhrunk."

"If the captain pl'azes," says Barney, wit' a continted smile, "we might let that bet go double."

"Silence!" says auld Johnny ag'in. "Where have ye been dhrinkin'?"

"At the Chino's," says Barney, for he was a truthful man at times.

"What did ye dhrink?"

"Beer, sir," says poor Barney thickly, "and what wit' the heat and the beer bein' a new brew——"

"I'll have a sniff av yer breath," says auld Johnny. "Blow gintly in me face."

So Barney, like a good soger, obeyed his comp'ny commander, and blew in the captain's face. Whin Auld Cut-the-Daisies come to, says he to Barney, says he:

"Begorry, 'tis the grand breath ye have! Wan more dhrink av the fixed bayonets that Chino's sellin' in defiance av me ordhers, and the guard would have a job handlin' ye. Ye may retire to the shade av a convanient bush and go to sleep, Private Brookston. I'll attind to your case later."

Barney saluted and was off about his business, whilst auld Johnny crooked his finger at wan of our bugler boys.

"Sind Copril Ryan to me," says he.

Whin I reported, I saw at wan look that auld Johnny was pretty far gone himself. Faith, whin he jumped Barney 'twas a case av the pot calling the kettle black. But I give no sign, and says he to me, says he:

"Copril Ryan, ye will take two men to help ye, and proceed at wanst to this Chino saloon up the road. The two men will howld the Chino whilst you searrch his place av business for any liquor stronger nor lager beer. Whin ye have completed yer search do ye report back to me."

Well, sir, I took two men and did as I was towld; and, mixed in among a barrel av imported Milwaukee beer, what do I find but three bottles av cognac that the Chino had made himself from a solution av varnish and wood alcohol, and in a big olla that was supposed to contain dhrinkin' wather I found a two-gallon jug av native *beno*. So back I wint to auld Johnny and made me report.

"Sound assimbly," says he to the bugler bhoy. We all fell in at wanst, facin' the captain.

"E comp'ny," says he, "far be it from me to deprive ye av yer canteen; but we have ocular evidence, in the person av Private Brookston, that this vile Chino is plannin' agin' the peace and dignity av these United States by sellin', agin' me express ordhers, a vile concoction labeled cognac. Also, he

do have *beno* for sale. As you well know, I'm not for bossin' ye like childher and puttin' a guard on yer morals save in the line av djooty, but whilst I'm yer captain I'll look well for yer bodily comfort and let yer immortal sowls take care av themselves. We will now, wan and all, raid this Chinaman's place av business, confiscate his liquor, and remove the source av temptation. Also, we will kill two birrds wit' the wan stone. To-day yer comp'ny commander celebrates his fiftieth birthday. Owin' to the exigencies av war, it appeared for a while that he would have to celebrate it alone, for lack of enough *good* liquor to go around, but this Chino has providentially obviated all that. So not only will we confiscate his stock in trade, but we'll dhrink it. 'Tenshun! Right dress! Steady! Right forward! Fours right! March!" and away we wint, wit' Auld Cut-the-Daisies marchin' on ahead. Troth he was the Christian soger!

Whin we got there, Auld Cut-the-Daisies, who'd put two bottles av his birthday liquor undher his belt within six hours, and was, therefore, in no mood for thriflin', took the Chino be the hair av his wicked head, faced him about, an' wit' a well-placed kick undher the tails av his coat—if he'd been wearin' a coat, which he was not—sint him flyin' down the Pasay road. We saw him no more.

Thin we took an invintory. We found four twinty-gallon kegs av lager, fresh from the brewery of San Miguel in Manila; two ten-gallon kegs and wan five-gallon keg. Then there was half a barrel av imported bottled beer, a sack of sweet soda, the six bottles av cognac, and the jug av *beno,* forty pounds av cigars and cigarettes and native candy, and betel nut.

Auld Johnny smiled at the sight av it. Wit' seventy-odd men 'twas hardly enough for a proper celebration, but 'twould do—particularly whin poured into impty stomachs.

"Half a dozen av ye take howld av thim beer kegs," says Auld Cut-the-Daisies, "and lift thim up on the bar. We'll tap thim as we need thim. Copril Ryan, do you take two men and escort that little five-gallon keg out to the men on outpost, wit' my complimints. 'Tis a crool, hot day, and 'twould not be fair to deprive thim av their share."

So what could I do but obey ordhers, though well I knew our Captain Johnny was on a rampage and bound an' determined to take his comp'ny wit' him. So I left the five-gallon keg wit' the outpost and hurried back, in time to find every keg of beer tapped, wit' a noncom in charge av each one, and the comp'ny passin' in review wit' their tin cups held out. Auld Cut-the-Daisies, wit' his blouse off, was in command av the festivities.

"Have a glass av beer, Copril Ryan," says he, "ye look hot an' worried, and 'tis not fittin' that this should be on the fiftieth birthday av yer comp'ny commander."

"Thank ye kindly, sir," says I, grabbin' for the beer quick enough. "And wit' yer permission, sir, I'll be afther givin' ye a toast."

"Silence in the ranks!" roars Auld Cut-the-Daisies. "Copril Ryan is about to complimint me on me birthday be givin' a toast, which, be the same token, is more nor the rest av ye volunteered to do. What have I here, I dunno at all, at all A lot av ribald rookies, I'll be bound. Ye may commince firin', Copril Ryan," says he.

I raised me glass. "To the right av the line and the pride av the serrvice," says I, "and that's yer amiable self, captain, dear. Gawd bless ye, and spare ye to us this many a year to come."

Auld Cut-the-Daisies bowed to me, like the auld-fashioned gintleman that he was. "Ye're a bright man, Ryan," says he. "I must remimber ye for a sergeantship whin the next vacancy occurs. Let every man," says he, turrnin' to the men, "do his djooty. These be the spoils av war. Let not the sun av another day rise and find ye unthrue to yer trust. Down wit' dhrink," says he, and tossed off a beer. He set down his glass an' took an eyeful av our top sergeant, who was viewin' the tumult

wit' a disapprovin' sneer on the long face av him.

"Brother McMurdo," says he, "ye auld Scotch thistle, have ye no complimint to make me on me fiftieth birthday?"

"I have, sir," says the top. "I'll give ye a toast," and he took up a glass av beer, which was unusual wit' him. "Two cigars for two hussars," says he, "and a chew av tobacco for a captain that gets dhrunk wit' his men!" And, wit' that, he set the beer down untasted.

"Now ye'll dhrink that beer, me man," says Auld Cut-the-Daisies kindly, "or I'll take that diamond off yer blouse and tack it on this graceful young man, Copril Ryan. Dhrink down that beer," says he, "and quick about it!"

So McMurdo, sore agin' his will, dhrank the beer, and six more hand runnin'.

"Now go," says Captain Johnny; "ye've had enough, and ye're a kill-joy at me party. Run along wit' ye. Lucky for you, me man, 'tis me birthday and I can do nothin' unkind this day."

So away wint the top, as mad as a wet hen, and back he came in half an hour, as cheerful as sin. The beer had gone to his Scotch head and he was meltin' wit' the milk av human kindness. He apologized to Johnny and wint to it wit' mad abandon, as the comp'ny clerk described it later.

Well, sir, to make a long story short, we finished the beer, and fell to on the cognac and the *beno*. Ordinarily, beer is not a heady dhrink unless ye take a lot av it, but in the tropics 'twill not take more nor a half ration to set a man's head buzzin', and be the same token E comp'ny, barrin' the outposts, was fuller nor goats before the last av the liquor was gone. The cook was fair overcome, and forgot all about dinner, and about four in the afthernoon Auld Cut-the-Daisies retired to his tent in the arrms av the quarthermaster sergeant and two cook's police, afther firrst announcin' that in honor av his birthday there would be no roll call at retreat. McMurdo, our pious top sergeant, was laid out under a tree, weepin' bitther tears at his own downfall.

Now ye must not think from all I've been tellin' ye that E comp'ny was a wild, graceless, lot av dhrinkin' soger bhoys. Far from it. I doubt if ye could find a more sober set av men anywhere under normal conditions, but what wit' our own captain takin' off the lid, and the natural desire to do somethin' to kill time and take the currse off sogerin', they'd flocked joyously to the festival. We had fights an' foot racin' and singin' and cryin' and laughin' such as was never seen before.

Now I dunno whether 'tis because av me native caution, a strong constitootion, or a reluctance to mix me liquor, but I'd sinse enough to quit dhrinkin' afther the barreled beer run out. Thinks I to meself, 'twill be well for wan noncom to be sober in case av accident, so I slept for two hours and woke up as fresh as a daisy.

And faith that was a wise move, for I'd no sooner poured a bucket av wather over me throbbin' head, whin who should I see comin' up the Pasay road like he'd been sint for and delayed but a young officer on a big black American horrse. American horrses were scarce in the Islands in them days, and I knew this wan well be sight. 'Twas Gineral Lawton's own mount, and at the sight av him I knew they'd finished the campaign in the north and the auld man had come south to rout us out and make us face the music. Faith 'twas like him to start the campaign at sunset, and in a pig's whisper I'd smelt war and the rumors av war. The man on the black horrse was wan av Lawton's staff, and well I knew he was in a hurry, else why would he have taken the gineral's horrse? Bekase his own mount was a native pony and too slow for the quick message he had for us!

"Be the Rock av Cashel," says I to meself, "'twill not do to let him lay eyes on Auld Cut-the-Daisies, snorin' in his tent, and too full to fan himself. And be the same token 'twill not be well to have the aid get a fair look at E comp'ny, fightin' dhrunk just around the bind av the road." And wit'out any definite plan av campaign I stepped out into the middle av the Pasay road. I'd

suddenly remimbered I was the wan sober man in E comp'ny.

The officer pulled up when he saw me, and I saluted.

"Copril," says he, "is not E av the Fourteenth stationed in some trinches along here somewhere?"

"We are, sir," says I, "back in the bush a bit, a hundred yards from this road."

"Direct me, if ye plaze," says he, "to the quarthers av yer comp'ny commander."

"Wit' pleasure, sir," says I, "only ye'll not find Captain Packard in his quarters. He was took wit' a bad colic afther lunch, and half an hour ago I helped him down to the major doctor's quarthers in the auld convent at Pasay. 'Twas nothin' serious, so the doctor towld him; a bit av indigestion, and he'll be back directly."

"I have not time to wait," says the aid. "I have orders for him from division headquarthers. Do ye give him this envelope, copril, and see that ye do not forget about it. 'Tis most important. He's to move out wit' his command at wanst. A comp'ny av the Eighteenth'll be along in half an hour to relieve him. The complimints av the commander in chief to Captain Packard, an' tell him he's expected to make all haste."

"I'll give it to him directly he's back, sir," says I.

I saluted, and away he wint back down the road in a divil av a hurry.

Begorry, I was a frightened man! Here we were, wit' orders to light out an' hike on a half hour's notice, and every man jack av us, wit' the exception av meself and the outposts, helpless wit' liquor. I saw in a jiffy 'twas up to Jawn Ryan, so I wint to the tint av Auld Cut-the-Daisies and looked in. He was snorin' like a caribao, so I wint in and shook him. No answer. I shook him ag'in, good and hard, but he would not wake up. I sat him up on his camp cot, but the minute I let him go back he fell, wit'out wanst wakin' up. Ochone, he was far gone, for he'd mixed beer wit' his Kentucky whisky, and whin he awoke 'twas the sick man I knew he'd be. I was that frightened, for fear he'd be caught in his condition and bobtailed out av the serrvice that I rubbed his red nose wit' the heel av me fist—and whin I found *that* wouldn't wake him, I give up and opened the envelope that'd been give me be the aid.

'Twas special order No. 241, headquarthers second division av the Eighth Army Corps, directin' Captain Jawn Packard, commandin' E comp'ny av the Fourteenth United States infantry to march at wanst, immediately upon bein' relieved, to San Pedro Macarti and report to Brigadier Gineral Ovenshine. And Auld Cut-the-Daisies was to issue three days' rations and wan hundred and fifty rounds av ammunition exthra —so well I know 'twas to no strawberry festival we were bound.

Wit' that I run out and found a bugler sober enough to blow a call. Whilst he was assembling E comp'ny, I rounded up our camp coolies and their caribao carts, made a bed on wan av the carts, and lifted Auld Cut-the-Daisies onto the cart, bag an' baggage. I put the bugler in charge av the cart.

"Do you run auld Johnny off up the road a bit and into the bush, where no wan can see him from the road," says I. "An' whin ye see the comp'ny marchin' by to San Pedro Macarti, do ye come outer the bush wit' Auld Cut-the-Daisies and follow in the rear."

I managed to shake the glimmerin's av sinse into the top sergeant, and wit' the help av wan or two lads not too far gone, I dug into the quarthermaster's stores and handed out the ammunition. The rations I did not attimpt to distribute right thin, but piled them all on the bull carts. Thin I took forcible possession av McMurdo's shirt be reason av the fact that it sported the chevrons av a top sergeant; and my shirt, wit' the chevrons av a copril, I put onto McMurdo. Sure he never knew the difference, and be the time the Eighteenth come up the road to relieve us, I had E lined up afther a fashion and was ready to receive the relief. I showed the officer in charge our line av entrinchmints, turrned over the outpost orders to him, took me sober men in E

off outpost, and away we wint for San Pedro Macarti.

'Twas about dusk whin we started, and such whoopin' an' singin' and laughin' an' crackin' av jokes ye never hearrd the like. There was no alignmint or simblince av military order, and I made no pretinse to maintain it. I was a bogus top sergeant, and the min would pay no attintion to me, but kept hollerin' for Auld Cut-the-Daisies. I was puzzled they was that slow soberin' up—and them sweatin' like bullocks in heavy marchin' order, until I found they'd brought along the big jug av *beno* on wan av the bull carts. So I druv the butt through the jug, and the last av the liquor was gone. However, two quarts av auld Kentucky that I'd found in the captain's tint I had safe in me own haversack, and, like a sinsible man, I said nothin'.

I dropped out afther we were up the road a bit, and found the bugler wit' auld Johnny, still snorin' peacefully on the bull cart. The cart fell in behind us, and about nine o'clock that night, hungry as divils, half sober an' wit' splittin' heads, we rolled into San Pedro Macarti, and I wint up to brigade headquarthers to report our arrival.

"Captain Packard presints his complimints, sir," says I to the gineral. "Inasmuch as he have no commissioned officer second in command, he has ordered me to report E comp'ny av the Fourteenth arrived in town, sir, and to express his regrets that physical inability alone prevints him from comin' himself to report."

"What," says the gineral, much concerned, "is Captain Packard ill, or has some sniper, be chance——"

"A bit av indigestion, sir. Cramps in the stomach, sir, wit' pains in the kidneys an' the back av the head. He lays it to a bit av somethin' off color he ate for lunch. He's restin' quiet and thinks he will not have to go on sick report if he's left quiet, sir. He trusts ye will not be alarmed at his absince, sir, and bids me tell ye he will be at the head av his comp'ny in action to-morrow mornin'."

"Me complimints and regrets to Captain Packard, sergeant," says he very kindly, "and tell him not to worry. He should not—havin' a smart firrst sergeant like you. Tell him to report to me in the mornin' if he can."

Be the cow that ate the piper, 'twas a tight squeak, and me only a copril! Whin I got back to the comp'ny, camped for the night in the wet grass av the plain foreninst the town, I changed shirts wit' the top, he bein' main sober and repintint at the time and desirous av takin' out his grudge on the comp'ny. Thin I wint to the cart where Auld Cut-the-Daisies was slumberin', and I woke him up.

Arrah, 'twas the frightened man he was whin he come to.

"Good heavens, Copril Ryan," says he, "why did ye not wake me up? Sure if this indiscretion av mine ever gets to the ears av the gineral I'll be tried be gineral court-martial, an' given the sack."

"Have no worry, sir," says I, "for be the luck av the Irish I stayed sober an' took command. Not a commissioned officer has seen ye, and here are the orders the gineral sint ye. I made so bowld as to open the envelope meself an' carry them out. Remimber, I've lied for ye. I've towld the brigade commander ye ate somethin' that didn't agree wit' ye an' that ye'll be up to report in the mornin'. Ye must not fail me, sir, for ye should sign for the orders I took for ye from the aid."

He stuck out his hand in the dark. "God bless ye," says he. "Ye have saved me honor, and I'll not forget it in a hurry. But tell me, Copril Ryan, did ye, be any chance, find two bottles av good Kentucky whisky in me tint when ye struck it an' piled me up on this bull cart?"

"I did, sir," says I. "They're in me haversack. I mistrusted ye'd need a nip to sober up on, and I brought them along."

"Give them to me," says he, and I did. He cracked both bottles agin' the wheel av the cart, and the fine, rich smell av the lost liquor come floatin' around me like a saint's blessin'.

"I've taken the pledge, me man," says

he. "Not wan little dhrink to train off on. Copril Ryan, I give ye me worrd av honor, as a soger an' a gintleman, I'll never touch another dhrop av liquor whilst I live," and he held out his hand.

"Gawd bless ye, sir," says I, and shook it, and that was the ind av Auld Cut-the-Daisies' birthday celebration. He was with us for a few months longer, and then he left us, and I laid eyes on him no more.

And all that took place twelve year ago come April next, whin I was a bhoy in me earrly thirrties. 'Twas the firrst time I'd ever got familiar wit' me commandin' officer—also the last, until two weeks ago, whin I had a bit av a fallin' out wit' me throop commander, and all on account av sweet Julie O'Neill!

Ye know the man I mane—and he's no betther than he ought to be. The presidint and Congress made him an officer, but they didn't finish him, for nothin' on this green earrth could make him a gintleman. I never liked him, and I never will. He come to us, if ye remimber, from ten years' detached serrvice in Washington, and rotten he is to the core wit' dissipation an' bad manners where women is concerrned. 'Twas he that fixed his bad eye on Miss Julie—and she his own sergeant major's daughter! Bad luck to him, the sassenach!

We were paid two weeks ago, and to make a long story short I let go the brake and wint on a wild rampage; but if I did I had a three-day pass to do it in! I started in at the Presidio gate, workin' downtown be rushes, and along in the fag ind av the night I found meself on the fringes av the Barbary Coast, filled wit' contintmint and a dago dinner. I was settin' alone in a box in the Il Trovatore Restaurant, pickin' me teeth wit' the fork and wonderin' what I'd do next to spend me pay day, when who should I hear speakin' in the box next me but me throop commander!

Well, sir, I was a bit cur'ous, an' wit' that I pricked up me ears, and bimeby I hearrd the little pipin' voice av a girrl sayin': "No! No! L'ave me alone. I tell ye!"

"Musha," says I, "there's somethin' goin' on here, and I was cur'ous ag'in. So what wit' the good dinner I'd had an' all, I clumb up on a chair and took a look over the top av the box, and there sat me bowld throop commander and Julie O'Neill, and him insistin' on her downin' a green cocktail as harrd as fixed bayonets. Sure, I could see his intintions was none av the best, so wit'out thinkin' av the mess I was gettin' meself into, I shpoke up.

"Ye low scut," says I, "I'ave be! What do ye mane by forcin' liquor on that good girrl? Thry to remimber ye're an officer, even if ye never was a gintleman. Julie, dear, do ye throw that green cocktail in his face, the schamin' blackguard," and I shook me fist at him over the top av the box.

"Well, I'll be darned!" says he. "Me own firrst sergeant spyin' on me! How dare ye, Ryan?" says he, and reached for the wather bottle. "I have a notion to break yer impidint Irish head," says he.

"Not off djooty sir," says I. "And put a bridle on that tongue av yours, or I'll lep over this box stall and twist yer nose for ye."

"Oh, sergeant, dear," says poor little Julie. "I'm afraid av him! He has not been nice to me, and do ye, like the dear auld friend, take me home."

"What, Miss O'Neill!" says he. "Go home wit' that dhrunken enlisted man?"

"Me father's an enlisted man," says she, wit' spirit.

"And well he knows it," says I. "Sure, I'll take ye home, Julie. I'm fair full, I'll admit, but me alignment is unbroken, and I'll not make a spectacle av ye." And wit' that I hopped down from me chair, and into the other box, and took Miss Julie be the arrm.

"Come wit' me, Julie," says I. "and I'll take ye home, and we'll say nothin' about it at all, at all, to no wan."

She come wit' me at wanst, and glad she was to be out from under his bad infloonce.

"Ye'll sweat for this, Ryan!" says he, his eyes burrnin' like two coals av fire. "Report to yer quarthers under arrest."

I grinned in his wicked face. "Very

well, sir," says I, "and I wish ye joy av the job av gettin' up the charrge an' specifications when ye thry me. 'Twill take more nor the pull av the likes av ye to lift the rags off me," says I, and I took the weepin' Julie on me arrm and left him.

On the way home I give her a good dressin' down and a bit av good advice. Sure, she's a simple little thing. Whin he come around, makin' love to her on the sly, she t'ought he meant it! She knew the difference now, so I said nothin' at all, at all, to O'Neill.

Whin reveille sounded, says I to me firrst djooty sergeant: "Hurrly, do you call the roll. I'm under arrest in quarthers."

And in me quarthers I stayed for twinty-four hours, waitin' for the throop commander to prefer charrges agin' me. Whin there was none preferred, says I to him: "Sir, ye must take me out from under arrest or prefer a charrge agin' me, as is me right." An' says he: "Ye may returrn to djooty, Sergeant Ryan."

So I wint back to djooty, and he started in on me. He picked on me and growled at me on dhrill. He humiliated me—an auld soger—before the throop. He took me good throop horse away from me and give me a broken-winded brute wit' corrns an' a hint av a spavin. Also he had high withers, and I knew the saddle would gall him, which it did; whereupon the throop commander called me down for not knowin' betther. And whin that nag was condimned he give me another worrse, and, to top it off, in the presince av the throop he called me a dirrty soger!

Ye can see the plan av him. He was minded to make it so unpleasant for me, failin' a hook to hang a charge on, that I'd ask for a thransfer to another throop and be rejuiced to the ranks. But I was on to him, and was for bearin' patiently wit' him and givin' him no satisfaction until he called me a dirrty soger, and that is somethin' no man can say to me and have me hang me head.

Whin he called me that, I made up me mind to shame him before the men. Says I to him:

"Ye low-bred, vulgar son av a quarthermaster's mule! Ye evil-minded, foul-mouthed, coffee-coolin' scut that calls yerself a soger and never saw a shot fired except at a field review; ye cowardly whelp that used yer political pull to dodge bullets so ye could dance attindance on the ladies in Washington, whilst ten t'ousand betther min nor you wint to the line and did their djooty—ye white-livered poltroon, ye've been pickin' on me for a chanst to file charrges agin' me. Here's yer chanst, thin. Go to it, ye——" And, faith, I called him the name no man can swallow!

Why did I do such a thing? Me, an auld soger, wit' pride in me serrvice? Ah, 'tis little ye know av sogers. Let him prefer his charrges! Who were his witnesses but the min av B throop—and they'd have died lyin' for me! I called him bekase I could do it—that's why, and because I hated him for the scrub he was.

He grinned like a hyena, and his glance wint past me and over me head, and there on the veranda—we was lined up foreninst our quarthers—stood two officers from K throop and they had hearrd every blessed worrd I'd said! Ochone, ochone! I'd spoke too quick, like all the Irish, and I knew I was in for it now; that nothin' would save me!

"Ye'll not be afther feelin' so gay, Sergeant Ryan," says he, as cool as ye plaze, "whin ye're doin' time on Alcatraz for insubordination an' conduct to the prejudice av good order an' milit'ry discipline. Step out av ranks. Sergeant Hurrly, ye will take two men and conduct First Sergeant Ryan to the guardhouse. Tell the officer av the day I'll prefer charrges agin' him at wanst."

Hurrly—Gawd bless that bhoy; I raised him meself—stepped out av ranks and faced me. Wit' a wink at me, says he:

"Forward! March! Right face! Forward! March!" And away we wint to the guardhouse. And sure, whin we got to the guardhouse and Hurrly made his report to the officer

av the guard, we got the answer we all knew we'd get.

Back we come to where the throop was doin' saber exercise where we'd left 'em, only, instead av bein' escorted be Hurrly and his two men and me a prisoner, I was in command and Hurrly and the two troopers was double-timin' wit' their tongues out an' me lashin' them wit' orders. I pulled them up, shot them back into ranks, and took me place back in line, cockin' me head in the air like a robin an' smilin' at the two officers on the veranda.

"May the divil strike me pink," says the throop commander, "but I'd give two cints to know the m'anin' av this. Sergeant Hurrly, did ye not hear me tell ye to take Sergeant Ryan to the guardhouse?"

"I did, sir," says Hurrly, and all the throop grinned, for well they knew what was comin'.

"Then why do ye not obey at wanst?"

"Bekase, sir," says Hurrly, "First Sergeant Ryan won't let me."

"Explain, ye jackass!"

Hurrly opened his mouth, but I stopped him.

"Silence in the ranks, Sergeant Hurrly!" says I. "I rank ye, and ye cannot speak whilst I'm first sergeant and tell ye not to. Remimber, Sergeant Hurrly, 'tis a soger's djooty to obey the last order av his rankin' officer. Never mind what ye were towld to do in the firrst place, even if the secret'y av war himself give ye the order. If I come along a minute later and give ye a different order ye must obey it, if I rank ye, and for that ye cannot be thried."

"Well, thin, Sergeant Ryan," says the throop commander, so mad he was ready to cry, "perhaps ye will have the kindness to explain yer conduct yerself."

"I will, sir," says I, salutin' him respectful. "The officer av the guard sinds his complimints, and bids me tell ye that if ye'd spint more av yer time studyin' the regulations instead av dodgin' active serrvice, ye would know that a first sergeant cannot be incarcerated in the guardhouse Neither can any noncommissioned officer, for that matter. If ye wish to confine me, ye must firrst disrate me for cause, but whilst I wear the chevrons av a top sergeant ye have power only to confine me in me quarthers under arrest. Until I am thried be your superior, sir, I cannot be clapped in clink. Sergeant Hurrly took me to the guardhouse under arrest, but he had no power to chuck me in, *and no instructions to bring me back to ye under arrest.* The officer av the guard refused to receive me, so I took command and brought Sergeant Hurrly and his detail back to ye, double time."

Well, sir, a snicker wint up and down the line at that, and the two officers on the veranda all but doubled up and died. I had him foul, and I'd made him feel cheap and showed him up for a fool before his own men and his brother officers. I was well contint.

For a minute he stood there, lookin' daggers at me, and his Adam's apple workin' like mad. Then, says he:

"First Sergeant Ryan, go to yer quarthers, under arrest."

I stepped out av ranks, wit' me back as stiff as a ramrod, give him the saber salute, made me a delicate about face, and marched away, filled wit' pride an' dignity, but sick wit' fear for all that at the pit av me stummick. I was a gone goose, and well I knew it.

He preferred charrges agin' me that same day, and me preliminary examination before the post summary court officer come up this mornin'. Pendin' to-day, the colonel had the good grace to order me returrned to djooty. He sint for me, and in a private interview says he:

"Ryan," says he, "Gawd knows ye spoke the truth to yer captain; but, for all that, I can't condone yer offense. The best I can do is to use me infloonce to lighten yer sintince and save ye from a bobtail if I can. And at that I'm not so sure I can do it. If yer case isn't set for investigation be the judge advocate gineral, I think I might see to it that ye're fined a month's pay and rejuiced to the ranks. Then ye can put in for a thransfer to another throop, and I'll

grant it. Ye have me permission to petition for a thransfer wit'out the sanction av yer throop commander," and he winked at me.

'Twas kind av him, and I thanked him for his interest in an auld soger. But he knew what me serrvice was; that I wore the Congressional Medal of Honor on dress parades, an' it hurrt him to see me in such trouble. Still, what could he do but his best to save me from a bobtail out av the serrvice. Wirra, I'd made a mad break!

Well, sir, as I was sayin', I was thried this mornin' be a summary court to see whether I'd be held over for a gineral court-martial. I knew I'd be disrated, come what would, and 'twas the worried man I was whin I come into the room and saw me throop commander there wit' his two witnesses, the officers from K throop. I hadn't summoned a single B throop man to lie for me, though they all wanted to come. I'd been caught wit' the goods, and I would not impeach the worrd av an officer and a gintleman whin he was speakin' the truth!

"Well, me man," says the summary court officer, "ye are charrged wit' a serious offinse. What have ye to say for yerself? Shall I read ye the charrge an' specification, or do ye waive that?"

I looked up, and be the powers, there sat Auld Cut-the-Daisies! He was a colonel av infanthry be now, and his auld head—Gawd bless it!—was as white as the driven snow. I stood lookin' at him like a gummick, and says he to me, says he:

"Me man," says he, "where have I seen ye before?"

'Tis an auld question, that. They all axes it, for lack av something else to say and to scare a man into admittin' he's been in throuble in some other enlistmint. But I did not take it so. I did not choose to.

"Sir," says I, "twelve years gone, I had the honor to soger under ye in E av the Bloody Fourteenth. I was wit' ye at Pasay, San Pedro Macarti, Guadaloupe, Paranague, Zapote River, Bacoor, Imus, Novelata, San Francisco de Malabon, Cavite Veijo, Taguig, Morong," and I rattled off the names av forty lovely rows he'd led us into and out in the auld days av empire.

He give a quiet smile at that, for well he knew I was for sneakin' up on the blind side av him.

"I make no doubt, me man," says he, "ye were a betther soger then than ye are now. Yer manners have not improved, I'm thinkin'. What do ye plead: Guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty, sir," says I, feelin' weak and sick at the pit av me stummick.

"Were ye dhrunk at the time ye made these opprobrious remarks to yer commandin' officer, me man?" says he.

"I was not, sir," says I. "I'm a noble soger, and have been this twelve years. I had a great object lesson in dhrink give me at that time, and it's a careful man I've been from that day to this. I knew a captain av infanthry who wint celebratin' his fiftieth birthday——"

"Stop!" says he, and looked at me sharp. "These remarks are not germane to the question, Copril Ryan——"

"Firrst Sergeant Ryan, if ye plaze, sir," says I, and I saw him blush up the back av his auld neck as he turrned his head away. I knew he'd remimbered me now, and that I'd said enough. He pretinded to be busy looking t'rough the charrge an' specifications. Finally he looked up.

"Have ye any extenuatin' circumstances to relate in yer definse?" says he, barkin' out the worrds.

"None, sir," says I, as meek as Moses, "except that the throop commander has a personal spite agin' me, and he called me a dirrty soger, which I am not, and I lost me temper. I am an auld soger, sir, and I know me place. Me record is clane, and I've been top cutter av B throop this ten years come next spring. And I——"

"Did ye not earrn a medal av honor at wan time, Sergeant Ryan?" says he. "It seems to me I remimber yer name."

"I did, sir," says I, "at Muntinlupa, though far be it from me to mintion it as a plea for mercy. I hate the throop commander, and I'll always hate him."

"And quite right, too," says Auld

Cut-the-Daisies, "a dirrty cad he is, and well we all know it, but 'tis a sign av bad luck for his top sergeant to tell him so. That privilege, me man, only comes wit' gray hairs, rank, an' long serrvice. But ye have pleaded guilty, and guilty I must find ye. Go back to yer quarthers, and don't let me see you here ag'in. I'll fine ye twinty-five cints. Remimber, ye cannot be thried twice for the same offinse. As for yer throop commander, I might suggest a change av scenery, and the hint that the colonels av his regimint will indorse his application for a thransfer to command av another throop. That is all, gintlemin. Ye may go. Sergeant Ryan, 'tis long since I've seen ye, but I remimber ye well. Ye're fuller in the waist and blacker in the jowls since I saw ye last," and he held out his hand.

Sure, I took his hand. For why should I not? I had a medal av honor, and I'd saved his honor wanst. He had towld me thin he would not forget, and he'd saved my honor now, as proof that he hadn't. Heaven bless him! I'ave you and I go down to me orderly room where I keep a bottle, and dhrink to his good health. Gawd spare him to us. He's an ornament and a credit to the serrvice.

A NEW COLOR FOR COFFEE

FRANK P. MORSE, who claims he has visited every American town that is big enough to have a theater in it, arrived one afternoon in a well-grown village whose one street had a straggly, dreary, discouraging appearance. He went to get his dinner at the only hotel in the place.

Everything progressed unappetizingly and smoothly until the old woman who waited on the table crept stealthily behind Morse, and asked, in a languid, lonely voice:

"Will you have black coffee or white coffee?"

Morse flinched.

"What's that?" he asked.

He had heard of blue pearls, brown roses, green carnations, and other violent color schemes, but here was a new one. He was seized by the thirst for discovery

"White, if you please," he said urbanely.

The old woman brought it in. White coffee, it developed, was coffee with cream in it.

TIPPING OFF THE AUDIENCE

WHEN Representative James B. Aswell, of Notchitoches, Louisiana, was superintendent of schools for his State, he made a tour of Arkansas for the purpose of persuading the Arkansans to submit to heavier local taxation for the benefit of the public schools. Mr. Aswell has never been a dub in the art of speaking, and on this trip he fairly burned up the countryside with his eloquence, inducing the rural populace to part with real money.

One night he was to face an audience far back in the country, in a neighborhood that had never been profaned by the screech of a locomotive or the soft rumbling of a spring wagon. At the appointed hour, the farmer who was to introduce him stepped to the front of the platform, mopping his brow with a bandanna, and gasping for breath. He then spoke as follows, with all the labor necessary to overturn a house or uproot an oak:

"Ladies and gentlemen, you know I ain't used to makin' no speeches. I ain't never pertended to be no oraytor. Besides, it's a hot night, a powerful hot night, an' you wouldn't expec' me nohow to wear you out with a long speech. But I'll now introduce a man who will."

The Court of the Bradley Brothers

By Robert V. Carr

Author of "Tamed," "That Perfect Confidence," Etc.

In the old days in the West they had little or no law, and they got along a heap better than we do now with five thousand laws on the statute books. In those days the doors were never locked, and a man's word was his word. Nor did a man talk about his neighbor, for the penalty of a lie was death. Those were good old days, and some Westerners are still living according to bygone rules. Here is a noteworthy instance.

I ONCE asked Doc Strate what he thought about law. Doc, you know, was in the legislature once, and had a hand in makin' many a law; aside from that there ain't a mark nor blemish on his reputation.

"Doc," I asks the wise old rannikin, "what do you think of this lawmakin'? I'm only a rustler of shipments of range steers, but it seems to me that we've more law than we know what to do with."

"In that respect," comes back Doc, strong, "you are entirely correct. Though I've made many a law, I can't say that I've much respect for my handiwork. Law is an acknowledgment of the crookedness of mankind; and the more law there be, the more crooks there be. I have looked at the question of law from all sides, and come to the conclusion that the only thing that we really need to do business under is the Golden Rule.

"Take it in an early day in the West, when I was young, and not gettin' my hair cut regular; in them times we had little or no law. And, I'm here to tell you, regardless of the dime-novel writers, that we got along a heap better than we do now, with five thousand laws on the statute books. In them days we never locked our doors, and a man's word was his word. Nor did a man talk about his neighbor, for the penalty of a lie was death. When a man threatened the welfare of the whole community, we took him to the nearest tree and let him dance on air. That was all, and you're bound to admit that it was simple. Down in his heart no man respects the law, but he does love his own life. When he knows that if he steals, lies, or endangers the welfare of the community that he will have to pay for it with his life, he sure steps soft.

"We didn't hang a man for killin' another, for we believed that men had a right to settle their own quarrels. Of course, we expected a man to always give his enemy a fightin' chance; if he shot him in the back, we strung him up.

"In them days there was no hair-hung points to be considered. If a man was on a piece of ground and workin' it, that ground was his. It didn't make no difference whether he had a piece of paper to show for it or not; the fact of him bein' on the ground and workin' it counted him as owner. Of course, if he got hoggish and tried to gobble the whole camp, he was waited on by a committee and told to pull in his lines. In them days a man was only told once to do a thing, and he did it, or left the country. We was short on law, but long on justice."

Such was the opinion of Doc Strate,

and you can take it for what you think it is worth, and I'll lope on into the affair of Attorney Dunn and the Bradley brothers.

You will understand that a man on the road don't always meet just the same kind and class of people. Though I was rustlin' live-stock shipments for the Dayton Live-stock Commission Company, of Chicago, I met many a minin' man. Most of the big towns in the cow country are located near the mountains, and most any saloon you'd go into in one of them burgs would have a sprinklin' of minin' men among the cowmen.

So it wasn't nothin' out of the way for me to meet the Bradley brothers, down from the hills on their yearly blow-out. They were big men, the Bradleys was; and blue-eyed, and eagle-beaked. Most soft-spoken men, too, I ever met; had that kind, gentle look of the real fighter who will stay with you, though your steel is in his heart.

I liked them boys. I call them boys, but it is just a manner of speakin'. They were young-lookin' men past fifty, and bachelors.

For a livin', and a whole lot better, the Bradleys placer-mined, which is to say that they washed the gold right out of the dirt without botherin' with a mill.

Well, I kind of fell in with them big, good-natured scoundrels, and nothin' must do but that I take a trip out to their camp. Jack Bradley tells me that he will show me how to pan out a nugget or two if I will pay 'em a visit. I takes them up for two reasons: first, there ain't much doin' in my line; and, second, my wife, Leona, was always after me to get her some of them gold nuggets to put on hatpins. So I accepts their invitation; and away we go behind a stampin' pair of ponies and in a mountain wagon.

The Bradley camp is sure fixed up for comfort. Plenty of good grub, and they're both smashin' cooks. The evenin' that we lands at the camp Rube Bradley goes out and kills a deer; and for supper we have fried venison and bacon, baked potatoes, wild raspberries and cream, and all the rich milk we can drink. It was some feed.

Near the big, roomy cabin is a spring, and they keep their butter and such stuff in that cold mountain water. Say, them boys sure lived.

Next day they take me out to see how they dig the gold out of the ground. There I get the surprise of my life. Them boys don't work hard to make a livin', not a bit of it. They have built a flume, and the water comes tearin' down and washes the dirt for them—"ground sluicin'" they call it. The water does four-fifths of the work.

While they're tryin' to beat it into my head how it is all done, Jack Bradley picks up a big flat nugget about the weight of a five-dollar gold piece. He passes it to me. We're standin' near a little stream that pours down from the flume, and, kind of excited, I drop the nugget in the water. I go to lookin' for it like a crazy man.

Jack laughs, and says: "Never mind it, Johnny; we'll get it some day."

I straightens up, and takes a think. I had let my city love of gold get away with me. I only considered gold safe while it was in my hand or a bank. Them boys considered it safe if it was in that cañon.

"We don't worry much about a nugget or two," goes on Jack. "The ground is a heap safer than any bank, and we only take out what we need. Just turn the water on and take out what we need."

My civilized hoggishness begins to get the best of me, and I turns loose in quick talk.

"Holy smoke!" I tells them, excited-like. "I should think you would throw a bunch of men in here and clean up this whole cañon. If the gold is layin' round loose like this, you could clean up a ton of it. Why don't you work it out?"

Rube laughs a good-natured laugh, and answers my question, the while he looks at me with his understandin' blue eyes.

"If we worked out the stuff, Johnny, and put it in the bank, we would be no better off. Banks fail and burglars break in from the inside and outside, but the bank of the Almighty can never be busted. We have few wants, and we only take what we need. We consider that the earth is for all to use accordin' to need. We believe that the earth is sort of like the air, for the use of everybody. As near as we can figger, the way we use it, this ground will not be worked out for fifty years. We expect to live at least thirty years longer. If there was any way to guard against hoggishness we would gladly let any man that needed it come in and work out what he could use for ordinary food and clothes. In fact, we have let many a man come in and dig out what he wanted to put himself on his feet financially. But the great trouble is human hoggishness, Johnny. Just as soon as they see the gold they go wild."

"I can see why they do," I admits; "that one nugget set me to rockin' myself. But, boys, how did you get this land? Did you homestead it or what?"

"No," Jack tells me, "we didn't do nothin'; just built a camp here and went to work."

"Jumpin' Judas!" I exclaims, all worked up, "ain't you a title to this ground?"

"Only by right of occupation and work," replies Jack.

"Then this whole layout can be jumped?"

"I suppose so, Johnny," Jack says, kind of slow; "but we ain't never been bothered that way."

I was sure puzzled. Of course I was range raised, but I had been on the road so long, and livin' in the city for so many years, that I had the civilized view entirely. How men could hold a valuable piece of minin' ground without a legal title was beyond me. Still, had I stopped to recall range days, I would not have been so puzzled. Also, had I stopped to study the Bradleys' blue eyes, I would have known more than I did.

II.

I knew Dunn, the attorney, slightly—very slightly. He was a nervous, button-eyed, thin man, with a little black mustache which he nibbled at continually.

Dunn, they said, had come into the town without any socks, or a union suit to his back. And, somehow, he wormed himself in, and began to gather in land and town lots, and everything else that was worth money. He was known as a man who could get a crook out of 'most any fix he could get into; he was a good lawyer. His business was to show lawbreakers how to get by; and at that he was a ding-daisy.

And the long suit of Attorney Dunn was land titles. In the West men were careless about titles, and for that reason Dunn got busy in that particular line. First thing he knew he had gobbled up a piece of land here and another there for little or nothin', because he was wise to the title proposition. He soon got on the inside with the town crooks and the fellers who were skimmin' the cream. They took him in because they were afraid he would shut off their graft.

Well, me and the Bradleys were wanderin' around over their ground, when who should drive up in a top buggy but Attorney Dunn. I can't figger it out that the feller had nerve. I'm inclined to think that he imagined that the law was made for crooks to work under, and that he was perfectly safe. To come right down to it, he had the law on his side.

He drives up as big as life, and mean and snarly lookin'.

He don't waste no time in politeness, does Dunn; he gets right down to business.

Says he, not lookin' at any one in particular: "I have to notify you that these minin' claims are now my property. For further information you can consult the records in the office of the county clerk."

As he finished speakin', Jack and Rube Bradley steps toward his buggy.

What they said sure surprised me.

Jack was the first to speak. Says he, as kind and gentle as could be:

"Mister Dunn, we won't talk of business just now, but will ask you to come up to the cabin and have a bit to eat."

"Yes," adds Rube, "come on up to the cabin. It is near noon. You can have a snack, and feed your team."

I looks first at Jack and then at Rube, plum' astonished. I looked for them to snake that lawyer out of his buggy and beat him into a jelly.

Dunn himself is puzzled, too.

"You understand, of course," he says, in his mean, brittle voice, "that I consider that I am on my own property."

"I'll get in with you and you can drive on up to the cabin," says Jack, ignorin' what Dunn said.

Jack crawls in alongside of the lawyer, and, before Dunn knows it, he is followin' directions.

Rube and me walk on up to the camp.

"We can get them nuggets later," Rube tells me. He seemed to be thinkin' deep about something.

At the cabin we finds Dunn in a homemade chair tryin' to act human. Seems as though he realizes that he's did a dirty trick, but the boys have treated him so fine that he is bound to act halfway sociable. Yet he looks around with the sizin'-up look of the new owner.

Jack and Rube fly into preparin' dinner, and I pick up a book and go on readin'. Of course, I don't talk to Dunn. I ain't so overcivilized that I've lost all sense of common decency. The Bradleys are my friends, and Dunn is their enemy. My business is to pass him up, and I sure did it. I was simply waitin' for the Bradleys to show their hand, and then play with them.

At dinner the brothers did everything to make it pleasant for the lawyer.

And there was class to that dinner. Light bread and fresh butter; fried chicken and cold-sliced venison; tea that would knock your eye out; potatoes with the jackets on, mealy and fairly prayin' for butter, salt, and black pepper. And, just before everything was all set, a neighbor woman sends her boy down with a deep-chested lemon pie. Believe me, it was *a* feed.

After dinner Jack rustles around and gets out a box of cigars, and the lawyer helps himself to one, but don't say much. In fact, he ain't said anything durin' the meal. I won't talk to him, and the Bradleys seem to be thinkin' about something, and so conversation is sort of shy.

Jack and Rube wash the dishes and wipe off the tablecloth, and then drag the table into the center of the cabin. I've taken up my book again, but when they start to fixin' that table, I drop my readin'. I begin to shed my city dullness, and smell smoke and sudden death.

The table has a white oilcloth on it, and is mighty clean and glistenin'.

Jack goes to a cupboard and gets what I take to be a legal blank, and pen and ink. Them articles he places on the table nearest Dunn. Rube then goes to a trunk and pulls out two long-nosed forty-fives. He proceeds slowly and without excitement to load the guns.

I get up and stand back just a little.

Lawyer Dunn begins to get the fidgets. He gets up and mutters, as he looks at his watch: "I'll be movin' along."

Suddenly Rube turns on him, a gun in each hand.

"Set down!" he roars, his blue eyes blazin' death and destruction.

Dunn sits down quick. Yet the poor fool still clings to his idea of law.

"You threaten me on my own property!" he snarls. "I'll send you both to the penitentiary!"

The Bradleys make no reply, but go on fixin' things.

Rube places a gun on the table with the butt of it near Dunn. Then he takes up a position on the other side of the table, layin' the other gun down in front of him.

Jack then explains.

"Mister Dunn," he opens up, in a voice that chilled even me, "we are goin' to give you a chance. Of course, Rube or I will kill you. There is, however, a trail out. Fill out and sign that quitclaim deed, or reach for the gun and

die. Failin' to do either, we will *execute* you."

Dunn's snake jaw begins workin'.

"You wouldn't dare," he squeals; "you wouldn't dare!"

"We'll give him five minutes from the tick of the clock now," said Jack to Rube.

"Five minutes is enough," agrees Rube.

I step back just a little bit more.

"This is ridiculous!" cries Dunn, with a crazy sort of laugh. "You can't kill a man in cold blood and escape. You would be captured and hung. Don't you realize that this is not blood-and-thunder days in Deadwood Gulch? We have law—law—law!"

The Bradleys did not speak, just glance at the clock.

I begin to feel little beads of sweat pop out on my forehead, and again I stepped back just a little bit more.

"*Tick-tock, tick-tock,*" went the clock.

Rube stands by the table, watchin' Dunn with one eye, and the other on the clock. Jack was doin' the same. I was tryin' to keep from swallowin' my tonsils. No, I wasn't scared, but it was a tryin' situation. Also, I knew, if they killed Dunn, I would have to lie like a son of a gun. I would have to get up and say that they, or one of them, did it in self-defense. I have not always told the truth, but I never liked the idea of lyin' on the witness stand.

"*Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock,*" and the little seconds skip by.

"Oh, this is all horseplay!" breaks out Dunn; and gets up from his chair and turns toward the door.

"Pick up the gun or pen!" orders Jack, in a calm, cold voice. "The pen, and you live; the gun, and you die."

Dunn then looks at the clock and sees two minutes have faded into the past.

"I'll deed back half," he whines, fairly eatin' his mustache. Red splotches begin to show on his face.

"You'll deed back *all*," Jack tells him between clenched teeth, "or you'll *die!*"

Once more I step back. I didn't want the lawyer to fall against me when they beefed him.

"*Tick-tock*——"

"One minute left," announces Jack. "Rube, on his failure to reach for gun or pen, I will seize the gun. You will aim for his heart. I will fire over your shoulder, and into the wall, so the evidence will be all correct."

I then sees that the Bradley brothers, in a pinch, are not such fools, after all. I begin to understand why their claims had not been jumped. Men who knew them were dead sure of one thing, and that was that they would shoot to kill. That was a point the little jackleg lawyer had overlooked. He seemed to forget that there were men in the world who would call for justice with a gun.

Dunn had spent a good share of his life bulldozin' people when he was perfectly safe. He had got out of the way of thinkin' that takes into consideration the fact that a forty-five slug slips into a lawyer's hide just as easy as it does a common scrub's. That, I think, is a good point for judges, who lecture helpless prisoners, and lawyers, who safely bulldoze witnesses, to remember.

And "*tick-tock*" goes the clock.

All of a sudden Dunn's chest falls down on his stomach, and he gives a kind of an animal squeal—and he reaches——

Again I move back.

——for the pen.

And, after the deed is made out to Jack Bradley, and witnessed by me and Rube, the two placer miners escort the lawyer to his buggy. They treat him politely, for he has ate their grub.

As they hitch up his team, a prospector and friend of the brothers comes along on a jo-dandy saddle horse. To him Jack Bradley gives the deed, with instructions to fan the breeze for town, and file it. The prospector nods and does as requested.

When Dunn is in his buggy, the Bradleys bid him a polite good-by, but they don't ask him to come again.

"Now," says Rube Bradley to me, "come on, Johnny; we'll go and get you some nuggets."

I think to ask them if they really meant to kill the lawyer, but somehow I got a good hold of my memory of range days, and kept still—*mighty* still.

The Broom of the Desert

By Sax Rohmer

A mystery story in an unusual setting amid the crumbling ruins of what was ancient Egypt. The central character is a white-robed figure upon a snow-white camel; he was known as "the broom of the desert"—a cleanser of uncleanness, who held the flail of God in his hands.

"HE is the lord of the desert, effendi," declared Mohammed, the dragoman. "From the Valley of Zered to Damascus he is known and loved, but feared. They say"—he lowered his voice—"that he is a great *welee*, and that he is often seen in the Street of the Attars, having the appearance of a simple old man; but in the desert he is like a bitter apple, a viper and a calamity! Overlord is he of the Bedouins, and all the sons of the desert bow to Ben Azreem, Sheik of the Ibn-Rawallah."

"What is a *welee*, exactly?" asked Graham.

"A man of God, effendi, favored beyond other men."

"And this Arab sheik is a *welee*?"

"So it is said. He goes about secretly aiding the poor and afflicted, when he may be known by his white beard."

"There are many white beards in Egypt," said Graham.

But the other continued, ignoring the interruption:

"And in the desert Ben Azreem, a horseman unrivaled, may be known by the snow-white horse which he rides; or, if he is not so mounted, by his white camel, swifter than the glance of envy, more sure-footed than the eager lover who climbs to his enslaver's window."

"Indeed!" said Graham dryly. "Well, I hope I may have the pleasure of meeting this mysterious notability before I leave the country."

"Unless you journey across the sands for many days, it is unlikely. For when he comes into Egypt he reveals himself to none but the supremely good"—Graham stared—"and the supremely wicked!" added Mohammed.

The poetic dragoman having departed, Graham leaned over to his wife, who had sat spellbound, her big blue eyes turned to the face of Mohammed throughout his romantic narrative.

"These wild native legends appeal to you, don't they?" he said, smiling and patting her hand affectionately. "You superstitious little colleen!"

Eileen Graham blushed, and the blush of a pretty Irish bride is a very beautiful thing.

"Don't you believe it at all, then?" she asked softly.

"I believe there may be such a person as Ben Azreem, and possibly he's a very imposing individual. He may even indulge in visits, incognito, to Cairo, in the manner of the late lamented Harun-al-Rashid of 'Arabian Nights' memory, but I can't say that I believe in *welees* as a class!"

His wife shrugged her pretty shoulders.

"There is something that *I* have to tell you, which I suppose you will also refuse to believe," she said, with mock indignation. "You remember the Arabs whom we saw at the exhibition in London?"

Graham started.

"The gentlemen who were advertised as 'chiefs from the Arabian Desert'? I remember *one* in particular."

"That is the one I mean," said Eileen.

Her husband looked at her curiously.

"Your explanation is delightfully lucid, dear!" he said jocularly. "My memories of the gentleman known as El-Suleym, I believe, are not pleasant; his memories of me must be equally unfavorable. He illustrated the fact that savages should never be introduced into civilized society, however fascinating they may be, personally. Mrs. Marsham was silly enough to take the man up, and, because of the way he looked at you, I was wise enough to knock him down! What, then?"

"Only this—I saw him to-day!"

"Eileen!" There was alarm in Graham's voice. "Where? Here, or in Cairo?"

"As we were driving away from the mosque of the Whirling Dervishes. He was one of a group who stood by the bridge."

"You are certain?"

"Quite certain."

"Did he see you?"

"I couldn't say. He gave no sign to show that he had seen me."

John Graham lighted a cigarette with much care.

"It doesn't matter, anyway," he said carelessly. "You are as safe here as at the Ritz."

But there was unrest in the glance which he cast out across the prospect touched by moon magic into supernatural beauty.

In the distance gleamed a fairy city of silvern minarets, born, it seemed, from the silvern stream. Beyond, lay the night mystery of the desert, into whose vastness marched the ghostly acacias. The discordant chattering and chanting from the river bank merged into a humming song, not unmusical. The howling of the dogs, even, found a place in the orchestral scheme.

Behind him, in the hotel, was European and American life modernity; before him, was that other life, endless and unchanging. There was something cold, somber, and bleak in the wonderful prospect; something shocking in the presence of those sight-seeing, careless folk, the luxurious hotel, *all* that was Western and new, upon that threshold of the ancient changeless desert.

A menace, too, substantial, yet cloaked with the mystery of the motherland of mysteries, had arisen now. Although he had assured Eileen that Gizeh was as safe as Piccadilly, he had too much imagination to be unaware that from the Egypt of Cook's to the Egypt of secrets is but a step.

None but the very young or very sanguine traveler looks for adventure nowadays in the neighborhood of Mena House. When the intrepid George Sandys visited and explored the Great Pyramid, it was at peril of his lite, but Graham reflected humorously that the most nervous old ladies now performed the feat almost daily. Yet out there in the moonlight where the silence was, out beyond the radius of "sights," lay a land unknown to Europe, as every desert is unknown.

It was a thought that had often come to him, but it came to-night with a force and wearing a significance which changed the aspect of the sands, the aspect of all Egypt.

He glanced at the charming girl beside him. Eileen, too, was looking into the distance with far-away gaze. The pose of her head was delightful, and he sat watching her in silence. Within the hotel, the orchestra had commenced softly to play; but Graham did not notice the fact. He was thinking how easily one could be lost out upon that gray ocean, with its islands of priestly ruins.

"It is growing rather chilly, dear," he said suddenly; "even for fur wraps. Suppose we go in?"

II.

The crowd in the bazaar was excessive, and the bent old figure which labored beneath a nondescript burden wrapped up in a blue cloth passed from the noisiness out into the narrow street which ran at right angles with the lane of many shops.

Perhaps the old Arab was deaf, perhaps wearied to the point of exhaustion; but, from whatever cause, he ignored, or was unaware of, the oncoming *arabeeyeh,* whose driver had lost control of his horse. Even the shrill scream of the corpulent, white-veiled German lady who was one of its passengers, failed to arouse him. Out into the narrow roadway he staggered, bent almost double.

Graham, accompanied by Mohammed, was some distance away, haggling with a Greek thief who held the view that a return of three hundred and fifty per cent spelled black ruination.

Eileen, finding the air stifling, had walked on in the direction of the less crowded street above. Thus it happened that she and the poor old porter alone were in the path of the onward-whirling carriage.

Many women so placed would have stood, frozen with horror, have been struck down by the frantic animal; some would have had sufficient presence of mind to gain the only shelter attainable in time—that of a deep-set doorway. Few would have acted as Eileen acted.

It was under the stimulus of that Celtic impetuosity—that generous madness which seems to proceed not from the mind but from the heart—that she leaped, not back, but forward.

She never knew exactly what took place nor how she escaped destruction; but there was a roaring in her ears, above it rising the Teutonic screams of the lady in the *arabeeyeh;* there was a confused chorus of voices, a consciousness of effort; and she found herself, with wildly beating heart, crouching back into the recess which once had held a bench.

From some place invisible, around a bend in the tortuous street, came sounds of shouting and of lashing hoofs. The runaway was stopped. At her feet lay a shapeless bundle wrapped in a blue cloth, and beside her, leaning back against the whitewashed wall and breathing with short, sobbing breaths, was the old porter.

Now, her husband had his arms about her, and Mohammed, with frightened eyes, hovered in the background. Without undue haste, all the bazaar gradually was coming upon the scene.

"My darling, are you hurt?"

John Graham's voice shook. He was deathly pale.

Eileen smiled reassuringly.

"Not a bit, dear," she said breathlessly. "But I am afraid the poor old man is."

"You are quite sure you are not hurt?"

"I was not so much as touched, though honestly I don't know how either of us escaped. But do see if the old man is injured."

Graham turned to the rescued porter, who now had recovered his composure.

"Mohammed, ask him if he is hurt," he directed.

Mohammed put the question. A curious group surrounded the party. But the old man, ignoring all, knelt and bowed his bare head to the dust at Eileen's feet.

"Oh, John," cried the girl, "ask him to stand up! I feel ashamed to see such a venerable old man kneeling before me!"

"Tell him it is—nothing," said Graham hastily to Mohammed, "and—er" —he fumbled in his pocket—"give him this."

But Mohammed, looking ill at ease, thrust aside the proffered baksheesh—a novel action which made Graham stare widely.

"He would not take it, effendi," he whispered. "See—his turban lies there; he is a *hadji.* He is praying for the eternal happiness of his preserver, and he is interceding with the prophet that she may enjoy the delights of paradise equally with all true believers!"

"Very good of him," said Graham, who, finding the danger passed and his wife safe, was beginning to feel embarrassed. "Thank him, and tell him that she is greatly indebted!"

He took Eileen's arm, and turned to force a way through the strangely silent group about. But the aged porter seized the hem of the girl's white skirt, gently detaining her. As he rose upon

his knees, Mohammed, with marks of unusual deference, handed him his green turban. The old man, still clutching Eileen's dress, signed that his dirty bundle should likewise be passed to him. This was done.

Graham was impatient to get away. But——

"Humor him for a moment, dear," said Eileen softly. "We don't want to hurt the poor old fellow's feelings."

Into the bundle the old man plunged his hand, and drew out a thin gold chain upon which hung a queerly cut turquoise. He stood upright, raised the piece of jewelry to his forehead and to his lips, and held it out, the chain stretched across his open palms, to Eileen.

"He must be some kind of peddler," said Graham.

Eileen shook her head, smiling.

"Mohammed, tell him that I cannot possibly take his chain," she directed. "But thank him all the same, of course."

Mohammed, his face averted from the statuesque old figure, bent to her ear.

"Take it!" he whispered. "Take it! Do not refuse!"

There was a sort of frightened urgency in his tones, so that both Graham and his wife looked at him curiously.

"Take it, then, Eileen," said Graham quickly. "And, Mohammed, you must find out who he is and we will make it up to him in some way."

"Yes, yes, effendi!" agreed the man readily.

Eileen accordingly accepted the present, glancing aside at her husband to intimate that they must not fail to pay for it. As she took the chain in her hands, the donor said something in a low voice.

"Hang it round your neck," translated Mohammed.

Eileen did so, whispering:

"You must not lose sight of him, Mohammed."

Mohammed nodded; and the old man, replacing his turban and making a low obeisance, spoke rapidly a few words, took up his bundle, and departed. The silent bystanders made way for him

"Come on," said Graham, "I am anxious to get out of this. Find a carriage, Mohammed. We'll lunch at Shepheard's."

A carriage was obtained, and they soon left far behind them the scene of this odd adventure. With Mohammed perched up on the box, Graham and his wife could discuss the episode without restraint. Graham, however, did most of the talking, for Eileen was strangely silent.

"It is quite a fine stone," he said, examining the necklace so curiously acquired. "We must find some way of repaying the old chap which will not offend his susceptibilities."

Eileen nodded absently; and her husband, with his eyes upon the dainty white figure, found gratitude for her safety welling up like a hot spring in his heart. The action had been characteristic; and he longed to reprove her for risking her life, yet burned to take her in his arms for the noble impulse that had prompted her to do so.

He wondered anxiously if her silence could be due to the after effects of that moment of intense excitement.

"You don't feel unwell, darling?" he whispered.

She smiled at him radiantly, and gave his hand a quick, little squeeze.

"Of course not," she said.

But she remained silent to the end of the short drive. This was not due to that which her husband feared, however, but to the fact that she had caught a glimpse, among the throng at the corner of the bazaar, of the handsome, sinister face of El-Suleym, the Bedouin

III.

The moon poured radiance on the desert. At the entrance to a camel-hair tent, stood a tall, handsome man arrayed in the picturesque costume of the Bedouin. The tent behind him was upheld by six poles. The ends and one side were pegged to the ground, and the whole of that side before which he stood was quite open, with the exception of a portion before which hung a goat-hair curtain.

This was the "house of hair" of the Sheik El-Suleym, of the Masr-Bishareen—El-Suleym "the Regicide" outcast of the great tribe of the Bishareen. At some distance from the sheik's tent were some half a dozen other and smaller tents, housing the rascally following of this desert outcast.

Little did those who had engaged the picturesque El-Suleym to display his marvelous horsemanship in London know that he and those that came with him were a scorn among true sons of the desert, pariahs of that brotherhood which extends from Zered to the Nile, from Tanta to the Red Sea; little did those who had opened their doors in hospitality to the dashing horseman dream that they entertained a petty brigand, sought for by the Egyptian authorities, driven out into ostracism by his own people.

And now before his tent he stood statuesque in the Egyptian moonlight, and looked toward Gizeh, less than thirty miles to the northeast.

As El-Suleym looked toward Gizeh, Graham and his wife were seated before Mena House, looking out across the desert. The adventure of the morning had left its impression upon both of them, and Eileen wore the gold chain with its turquoise pendant. Graham was smoking in silence, and thinking not of the old porter and his odd Eastern gratitude, but of another figure and one which often came between his mental eye and the beauties of that old, beautiful land. Eileen, too, was thinking of El-Suleym; for the Bedouin now was associated in her mind with the old peddler, since she had last seen the handsome, sinister face amid the throng at the entrance to the bazaar.

Telepathy is a curious fact. Were Graham's reflections *en rapport* with his wife's, or were they both influenced by the passionate thoughts of that other mind, that subtle, cunning mind of the man who at that moment was standing before his house of hair and seeking with his eagle glance to defy distance and the night?

"Have you seen—him again?" asked Graham abruptly. "Since the other day at the bridge?"

Eileen started. Although he had endeavored to hide it from her, she was perfectly well aware of her husband's intense anxiety on her behalf. She knew—although he prided himself upon having masked his feelings—that the presence of the Bedouin in Egypt had cast a cloud upon his happiness. Therefore, she had not wished to tell him of her second encounter with El-Suleym. But to this direct question there could be only one reply.

"I saw him again—this morning," she said, toying nervously with the pendant at her neck.

Graham clasped her hand tensely.

"Where?"

"Outside the bazaar, in the crowd."

"You did not—tell me."

"I did not want to worry you."

He laughed dryly.

"It doesn't worry me, Eileen," he said carelessly. "If we were in Damascus or Aleppo, it certainly might worry me to know that a man, no doubt actively malignant toward us, was near, perhaps watching; but Cairo is really a prosaically safe and law-abiding spot. We are as secure here as we should be at—Shepherd's Bush, say!"

He laughed shortly. Voices floated out to them, nasal, guttural, strident; voices American, Teutonic, Gallic, and Anglo-Saxon. The orchestra played a Viennese waltz. Confused, chattering, creaking, and bumping sounded from the river. Out upon the mud walls dogs bayed the moon.

But beyond the native village, beyond the howling dogs, beyond the acacia ranks out in the silver-gray mystery of the sands hard by an outpost of the Pharaohs, where a ruined shrine of Horus bared its secret places to the peeping moon, the sheik of the Masr-Bishareen smiled.

Graham felt strangely uneasy, and sought by light conversation to shake off the gloom which threatened to claim him.

"That thief, Mohammed," he said tersely, "has no more idea than Adam,

I believe, who your old porter friend really is."

"Why do you think so?" asked Eileen.

"Because he's up in Cairo to-night, searching for him!"

"How do you know?"

"I cornered him about it this afternoon, and, although I couldn't force an admission from him—I don't think anybody short of an accomplished K. C. could—he was suspiciously evasive! I gave him four hours to procure the name and address of the old gentleman to whom we owe the price of a turquoise necklace. He has not turned up yet!"

Eileen made no reply. Her Celtic imagination had invested the morning's incident with a mystic significance which she could not hope to impart to her hard-headed husband.

A dirty and ragged Egyptian boy made his way onto the veranda, furtively glancing about him as if anticipating the cuff of an unseen hand. He sidled up to Graham, thrusting a scrap of paper onto the little table beside him.

"For me?" said Graham.

The boy nodded; and, while Eileen watched him interestedly, Graham, tilting the communication so as to catch the light from the hotel windows, read the following:

He is come to here but cannot any farther. I have him waiting the boy will bring you. Your obedient effendi, MOHAMMED.

Graham laughed grimly, glancing at his watch.

"Only half an hour late," he said, standing up. "Wait here, Eileen; I shall not be many minutes."

"But I should like to see him, too He might accept the price from me where you would fail to induce him to take it."

"Never fear," said her husband; "he wouldn't have come if he meant to refuse. What shall I offer him?"

"Whatever you think," said Eileen, smiling; "be generous with the poor old man."

Graham nodded, and signed to the boy that he was ready to start.

The night swallowed them up; and Eileen sat, waiting, while the band played softly and voices chatted incessantly around about her.

Some five minutes elapsed; then, fifteen. It grew to half an hour, and she became uneasy. She stood up and began to pace up and down the veranda. Then the slinking figure of the Egyptian youth reappeared.

"Graham effendi," he said, showing his gleaming teeth, "says you come, too."

Eileen drew her wrap more closely about her and smiled to the boy to lead the way.

They passed out from the hotel, turned sharply to the left, made in the direction of the river, then bore off to the right in the direction of the sand dunes. The murmuring life of Mena House died into remoteness; the discordance of the Arab village momentarily took precedence; then this in turn was lost, and they were making out desertward to the hollow which harbors the Sphinx.

Great events in our lives rarely leave a clear-cut impression; often the turning point in one's career is a confused memory, a mere clash of conflicting ideas. Trivial episodes are sharp silhouettes, unforgettable; great happenings but gay, vague things in life's panorama. Thus, Eileen never afterward could quite recall what happened that night. The thing that was like to have wrecked her life had no sharp outlines to etch themselves upon the plate of memory. Vaguely she wondered to what meeting place the boy was leading her. Faintly she was conscious of a fear of the growing silence, of a warning instinct whispering her to beware of the loneliness of the desert.

Then the boy was gone; the silence was gone; harsh voices were in her ears—a cloth was whipped about her face, and strong arms lifted her. She was not of a stock that swoon or passively accept violence. She strove to cry out, but the band was too cunningly fastened to allow of it; she struck out with clenched fists and not unshrewdly, for twice her knuckles encountered a bearded face, and a suppressed exclamation told that the blows

were not those of a weakling. She kicked furiously, and drew forth a howl of pain from her captor. Her hands flew up to the bandage, but were roughly seized, thrust down and behind her, and tied securely.

She was thrown across a saddle, and with a thrill of horror knew herself a captive. Out into the desert she was borne, into that unknown land which borders so closely upon the sight-seeing track. And her helplessness, her inability to fight, broke her spirit, born fighter that she was; and the jarring of the saddle of the galloping horse, the dull thud of the hoofs on the sand, the iron grip which held her, fear, anger—all, melted into a blank.

IV

Mohammed, the dragoman, with two hotel servants, came upon Graham some time later, gagged and bound behind a sand hillock less than five hundred yards from Mena House. They had him on his feet in an instant, unbound; and his face was ghastly—for he knew too well what the outrage portended.

"Quick!" he said hoarsely. "How long is she gone?"

Mohammed was trembling.

"Nearly an hour, effendi—nearly an hour. Allah preserve us, what shall we do? I heard it in Cairo to-night—it is all over the bazaars—the Sheik El-Suleym with the Masr-Bishareen is out. They travel like the wind, effendi. It is not four days since they stopped a caravan ten miles beyond Bir-Amber; now they are in lower Egypt. Allah preserve her!" he ran on volubly. "Who can overtake the horsemen of the Bishareen?"

So he ran on wildly, panting as they raced back to the hotel. The place was in an uproar. It was an event which furnished the guests with such a piece of local color as none but the most inexperienced tourist could have anticipated.

An Arab raid in these days of electric tramways! A captive snatched from the very doors of Mena House! One would as little expect an Arab raid upon the Ritz!

The authorities at headquarters, advised of the occurrence, found themselves at a loss how to cope with this stupendous actuality. The desert had extended its lean arm and snatched a captive to its bosom. Cairo had never before entirely realized the potentialities of that all-embracing desert. There are a thousand ways, ten thousand routes across that ruin-dotted wilderness. Justly did the ancient people worship in the moon the queenly Isis; for when the silver emblem of the goddess claims the sands for her own, to all save the desert-born they become a place of secrets. Here is a theater for great dramas, wanting only the tragedian. The outlawed sheik of the Bishareen knew this full well, but, unlike others who knew it, he had acted upon his convictions and revealed to wondering Egypt what Bedouin craft, and a band of intrepid horsemen, can do, aided by a belt of sand, and cloaked by night.

Graham was distracted. For he was helpless, and realized it. Already the news was in Cairo, and the machinery of the government at work. But what machinery, save that of the Omniscient, could avail him now?

A crowd of visitors flocked around him, offering frightened consolation. He broke away from them violently—swearing—a primitive man who wanted to be alone with his grief. The idea uppermost in his mind was that of leaping upon a horse and setting out in pursuit. But in which direction should he pursue? One declared that the Arabs must have rode this way, another that, and yet another a third.

Some one shouted—the words came to him as if through a thick curtain—that the soldiers were coming.

"What's the good of it!" he said, and turned away, biting his lips.

When a spruce young officer came racing up the steps to gather particulars, Graham stared at him dully, said: "The Arabs have got her—my wife," and walked away.

The hoof clatter and accompanying martial disturbance were faint in the

distance when Mohammed ran in to where Graham was pacing up and down in an agony of indecision—veritably on the verge of insanity. The dragoman held a broken gold chain in his hand, from which depended a big turquoise that seemed to blink in the shaded light.

"Effendi," he whispered, and held it out upon trembling fingers, "it is her necklet! I found it yonder," pointing eastward. *"Sallee 'a-nebee!* it is her necklet!"

Graham turned, gave one wild glance at the thing, and grasped the man by the throat, glaring madly upon him.

"You dog!" he shouted. "You were in the conspiracy! It was you who sent the false messages!"

A moment he held him so, then dropped his hands. Mohammed fell back, choking; but no malice was in the velvet eyes. The Eastern understands and respects a great passion.

"Effendi," he gasped, "I am your faithful servant, and—I cannot write! *Wa-llah!* and by His mercy, this will save her if anything can!"

He turned and ran fleetly out, Graham staring after him.

It may seem singular that John Graham remained thus inert—inactive. But upon further consideration his attitude becomes explainable. He knew the futility of a blind search, and dreaded being absent if any definite clew should reach the hotel. Meanwhile, he felt that madness was not far off.

"They say that they have struck out across the Arabian Desert, Mr. Graham —probably in the direction of the old caravan route."

Graham did not turn; did not know nor care who spoke.

"It's four hundred miles across to the caravan route," he said slowly; "four hundred miles of sand—of sand."

V.

The most simple Oriental character is full of complexity. Mohammed, the dragoman, by birth and education a thief, by nature a sluggard, spared no effort to reach Cairo in the shortest space of time humanly possible. The source of his devotion is obscure. Perhaps it was due to a humble admiration which John Graham's attempt to strangle him could not alter, or perhaps to a motive wholly unconnected with mundane matters. Certain it is that a sort of religious fervor latterly had possessed the man. From being something of a scoffer—for Islam, like other creeds, daily loses adherents—he was become a most devout believer. To what this should be ascribed I shall leave you to judge.

Exhausted, tottering with his giant exertions, he made his way through the tortuous street of old Cairo, streets where ancient palaces and mansions of wealthy Turks displayed their latticed windows, and, at that hour, barred doors to the solitary, panting wayfarer.

Upon one of these barred doors he beat. It was that of an old palace which seemed to be partially in ruins. After some delay, the door was opened, and Mohammed admitted. The door was reclosed. And following upon the brief clamor silence claimed the street again.

Much precious time had elapsed since Eileen Graham's disappearance from the hotel by the pyramids, when a belated and not too sober Greek, walking in the direction of Cairo, encountered what his muddled senses proclaimed to be an apparition—that of a white-robed figure upon a snow-white camel, which sped, silent, and with arrowlike swiftness, past him toward Gizeh.

About this vision of the racing camel —a more beautiful creature than any he had seen since the last to carry the Mahmal—about the rider spectral in the moonlight, white-bearded, there was that which suggested a vision of the Moslem prophet. Ere the frightened Greek could gather courage to turn and look after the phantom rider, man and camel were lost across the sands.

Mena House was in an uproar. No one beneath its roof had thought of sleep that night. Futile searches were being conducted in every direction—north, south, east, and west.

Graham, feeling that another hour of inactivity would spell madness, had suc-

cumbed to the fever to be up and doing, and had outdistanced all, had left the boy far behind, and was mercilessly urging his poor little mount out into the desert, well knowing that in all probability he was riding farther and farther away from the one he sought, yet madly pressing on. He felt that to stop was to court certain insanity; he must press on and on; he must search—search.

His mood had changed, and, from cursing fate, Heaven, everything, and every one, he was come to prayer.

He, then, was the next to see the man on the white camel, and, like the Greek, he scarcely doubted that it was a wraith of his tortured imagination. Indeed, he took it for an omen. The prophet had appeared to him to proclaim that the desert, the home of Islam, had taken Eileen from him. The white-robed figure gave no sign, looked neither to the right nor to the left, but straight ahead, with eagle eyes.

Graham pulled up his donkey and sat like a shape of stone until the silver-gray distance swallowed up the phantom.

Out toward the oasis, called the Well of Seven Palms, the straggling military company proceeded in growing weariness. The officer in charge had secured fairly reliable evidence to show that the Arabs had struck out straight for the Red Sea. Since he was not omniscient, he could not know that they had performed a wide detour, which would lead them back an hour before dawn to the camp by the Nile beside the Temple of Horus where El-Suleym waited for his captive.

It was at the point in their march when to have intercepted the raiders they should have turned due south instead of proceeding toward the oasis, that one of them pulled up, rubbed his eyes, looked again, and gave the alarm.

In another moment they all saw it—a white camel; not such a camel as tourists are familiar with, the poor hacks of the species, but a swanlike creature, white as milk, bearing a white-robed rider, who ignored utterly the presence of the soldiers, who answered by no word or sign to their challenge, but who passed them like a cloud borne along by a breeze, and melted vaporously into the steely distances of the desert. The captain was hopelessly puzzled.

"Too late to bring him down," he muttered, "and no horse that was ever born could run down a racing camel. Most mysterious!"

Twenty miles south of their position, and exactly at right angles from their route, rode the Bishareen horsemen. The foremost with Eileen Graham across his saddle. And now, eighteen miles behind the Bishareen, a white camel of the pure breed which yearly furnishes the stately bearer of the Mahmal, spurned the sand, and, like a creature of air, gained upon the Arabs, wild riders though they were, mile upon mile, league upon league.

Within rifle shot of the camp, and with the desert dawn but an hour ahead, only a long sand ridge concealed from the eyes of the Bishareen troupe that fleet shape which had struck wonder to the hearts of all beholders. Despite their start of close upon two hours, despite the fact that the soldiers were now miles, and hopeless miles, in their rear, the racer of the desert had passed them!

Eileen Graham had returned to full and agonizing consciousness. For hours, it seemed, her captives had rode and rode in silence. Now, a certain coolness, borne upon the breeze, told her that they were nearing the river again. Clamor sounded ahead. They were come to the Arab camp. But ere they reached it they entered some lofty building, which echoed hollowly to the horses' tread. She was lifted from her painful position, tied fast against a stone pillar, and the bandage was unfastened from about her head.

She saw that she was lashed to one of the ruined pillars which once had upheld the great hall of a temple. About her were the crumbling evidences of the sacerdotal splendor that was ancient Egypt. The moon painted massive shadows upon the débris and carpeted the outer place with the black image of a towering propylæum. Upon the

mound which once had been the stone avenue of approach was the Bedouin camp. It was filled with a vague disturbance. She was quite alone; for those who had brought her there were leading their spent horses out to the camp.

Eileen could not know what the hushed sounds portended; but actually they were due to the fact that the outlaw chief, wearied with that most exhausting passion—the passion of anticipation—had sought his tent, issuing orders that none should disturb him. Many hours before he knew they could return, he had stood looking out across the sands, but at last had decided to fit himself, by repose, for the reception of his beautiful captive.

A sheik's tent has two apartments—one sacred to the lord and master, the other sheltering his harem. To the former El-Suleym had withdrawn; and now his emissaries stood at the entrance where the symbolic spear was stuck, blade upward, in the sand. Those who had thrown in their lot with El-Suleym, called the Regicide, had learned that a robber chief whose ambitions had been whetted by a sojourn in Europe, was a hard master, though one profitable to serve. They hesitated to arouse him, even though their delicate task was well accomplished.

And whilst they debated before the tent, which stood alone, as is usual, at some little distance from the others, amid which moved busy figures engaged in striking camp, Eileen, within the temple, heard a movement behind the pillar to which she was bound.

She was in no doubt respecting the identity of her captor and the author of the ruse by which she had been lured from the hotel, and now, unable to turn, it came to her that this was *he*, creeping to her through the moon-patched shadows. With eyes closed, and her teeth clenched convulsively, she pictured the sinister, approaching figure. Then, from close beside her, came a voice:

"Only I can save you from him. Do not hesitate, do not speak. Do as I tell you."

Eileen opened her eyes. She could not see the speaker, but the voice was oddly familiar. Her fevered brain told her that she had heard it before, but speaking Arabic. It was the voice of an old man, but a strong, vibrant voice.

"It is the will of Allah, whose name be exalted, that I repay!"

A lean hand held before her eyes a broken gold chain, upon which depended a turquoise. She knew the voice now; it was that of the old peddler! But his English, except for the hoarse Eastern accent, was flawless, and this was the tone of no broken old man, but of one to be feared and respected.

Her reason, she thought, must be tricking her. How could the old peddler, however strong in his queer gratitude, save her now? Then the hand came again before her eyes, and it held a tiny green vial.

"Be brave. Drink quickly. They are coming to take you to him. It is the only escape!"

"Oh, Heaven!" she whispered, and turned icily cold.

This was the boon he brought her. This was the road of escape, escape from El-Suleym—the road of death! It was cruel, unspeakably horrible, with a bright world just opening out to her, with youth, beauty, and—— She could not think of her husband.

"God be merciful to him!" she murmured. "But he would prefer me dead to——"

"Quick! They are here!"

She placed her lips to the vial, and drank.

It seemed that fire ran through every vein in her body. Then came chill. It grew, creeping from her hands and her feet inward and upward to her heart.

"Good-by—dear——" she whispered, and sobbed, once, dryly.

The ropes held her rigidly upright.

VI.

"Wa-llah! she is dead, and we have slain her!"

El-Suleym's Bedouins stood before the pillar in the temple, and fear was in their eyes. They unbound the girl, beautiful yet in her marble pallor, and

lowered her rigid body to the ground. They looked one at another, and many a glance was turned toward the Nile.

Then the leader of the party extended a brown hand, pointing to the tethered horses. They passed from the temple, muttering. No one among them dared to brave the wrath of the terrible sheik. As they came out into the paling moonlight, the camp seemed to have melted magically; for, ere dawn, they began their long march to the lonely oasis in the Arabian Desert which was the secret base of the Masr-Bishareen's depredatory operations.

Stealthily circling the camp, which buzzed with subdued activity—even the dogs seemed to be silent when the sheik slept—they came to the horses. Solitary, a square silhouette, against the paling blue, stood the sheik's tent on top of the mound which alone was still untouched.

The first horseman had actually leaped to the saddle, and the others, with furtive glances at the ominous hillock, were about to do likewise, when a low wail, weird, eerie, rose above the muffled stirring of the camp.

"*Allah el-'Azeen!*" groaned one of the party, "what is that?"

Again the wail sounded—and again. Other woman voices took it up. It electrified the whole camp. Escape, undetected, was no longer possible. Men, women, and children were abandoning their tasks, and standing, petrified with the awe of it, and looking toward the sheik's tent.

As they looked, as the frightened fugitives hesitated, looking also, from the tent issued forth a melancholy procession. It was composed of the women of El-Suleym's household. They beat their bared breasts and cast dust upon their heads.

For within his own sacred apartment lay the sheik in his blood—a headless corpse!

And now those who had trembled before him were hot to avenge him. Riders plunged out in directions as diverse as the spokes of a wheel. Four of them rode madly through the temple where they had left the body of their captive, leaping the débris and circling about the towering pillars as only Arab horsemen can. Out into the sands they swept; and, before them, from out of a hollow, rose an apparition that brought all four up short, their steeds upreared upon their haunches.

It was the figure of a white-bearded man, white-robed and wearing the green turban, mounted upon a camel which to the eyes of the four looked in its spotless whiteness a creature of another world. Before the eagle-eyed stranger lay the still form of Eileen Graham, and as the camel rose to its feet, its rider turned, swung something high above him, and hurled it back at the panic-stricken pursuers. Right among their horses' feet it rolled, and up at them in the moonlight from out a mass of blood-clotted beard stared the glassy eyes of El-Suleym!

The sun was high in the heavens when the gray-faced and haggard-eyed searchers came straggling back to Mena House. Two of them, who had come upon Graham ten miles to the east, brought him in. He was quite passive, and offered no protest, spoke no word, but stared straight in front of him with a set smile that was dreadful to see.

No news had come from the company of soldiers; no news had come from anywhere. It was ghastly, inconceivable; people looked at one another and asked if it could really be possible that one of their number had been snatched out from their midst in such fashion.

Officials, military and civil, literally in crowds, besieged the hotel. Amid that scene of confusion no one missed Mohammed; but when all the rest had given up in despair, he, a solitary, patient figure, stood out upon a distant mound watching the desert road to the east. He alone saw the return of the white camel with its double burden, from a distance of a hundred yards or more; for he dared approach no closer but stood with bowed head pronouncing the *fâthah* over and over again. He saw it kneel, saw its rider descend and lift a girl from its back. He saw him force something between her lips, saw him turn and make a deep obeisance to-

ward Mecca. At that, he, too, knelt and did likewise. When he arose, camel and rider were gone.

He raced across the sands as Eileen Graham opened her eyes, and supported her as she struggled to her feet, pale and trembling.

"I don't understand it at all," said Graham.

Eileen smiled up at him from the long cane chair. She was not yet recovered from her dreadful experience. "Perhaps," she said softly, "you will not laugh in future at my Irish stories of the 'good people'!"

Graham shook his head, and turned to Mohammed.

"What does it all mean, Mohammed?" he said. "Thank Heaven it means that I have got her back, but how was it done? She returned wearing the turquoise necklace, which I last saw in your hand."

Mohammed looked aside.

"I took it to him, effendi. It was the token by which he knew her need."

"The peddler?"

"The peddler, effendi."

"You knew where to find him, then?"

"I knew where to find him, but I feared to tell you; feared that you might ridicule him."

He ceased. He was become oddly reticent. Graham shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"I only hope the authorities will succeed in capturing the Bishareen brigands," he said grimly.

"The authorities will never capture them," replied the dragoman, with conviction. "For five years they have lived by plunder and laughed at the government. But before another moon is risen"—he was warming to his usual eloquence now—"no Masr-Bishareen will remain in the land; they will be exterminated—purged from the desert!"

"Indeed!" said Graham. "By whom?"

"By the Rawallah, effendi."

"Are they a Bedouin tribe?"

"The greatest of them all."

"Then why should they undertake the duty?"

"Because it is the will of the one who saved her for you, effendi! I am blessed that I have set eyes upon him, spoken with him. Paradise is assured to me because my hand returned to him his turban when it lay in the dust!"

Graham stared, looking from his wife who lay back smiling dreamily, to Mohammed, whose dark eyes burned with a strange fervor—the fervor of one mysteriously converted to an almost fanatic faith.

"Are you speaking of our old friend, the peddler?"

"I am almost afraid to speak of him, effendi, for he is the chosen of Heaven, a cleanser of uncleanliness; the scourge of God who holds His flail in his hand—the broom of the desert!"

Graham, who had been pacing up and down the room, paused in front of Mohammed.

"Who is he, then?" he asked quietly. "I owe him a debt I can never hope to repay, so I should at least like to know his real name."

"I almost fear to speak it, effendi." Mohammed's voice sank to a whisper, and he raised the turquoise hanging by the thin chain about Eileen's throat and reverently touched it with his lips. "He is the *welee*—Ben Azreem, Sheik of the Ibn-Rawallah!"

HIS VALUE AS A LAWYER

THE enraged client glared at the lawyer who had lost the case. The client was justified. The lawyer had bungled matters so atrociously that the lay mind could realize his incapacity.

"Nevertheless," said the lawyer, "I worked for you, and you will kindly give me my fee."

"Your fee!" shrieked the client. "If I went gunning for good lawyers, I wouldn't waste a paper cap on you!"

When the Red Hills Threaten

By Vingie E. Roe

In this vigorous novel, a story of dramatic events in a little settlement lost in the great wilderness of forest and blue sky, you catch the spirit of the North; you feel the lure of the dim trails in the dusky shadows of the big woods, the silence of far sweet places, the whisper of living things hidden in the paths. It is mainly the story of a factor to whom the Hudson's Bay Company was a god; the only pride of his lonely life his attainment of this post of honor. His treatment of the girl in the story is harsh, but there was a mystery about this girl, and being a plain-spoken man himself he could not understand her silence under the charges of theft.

CHAPTER I.

A THIEF.

"THIS," said McConnel, the factor, grimly, "is the thief!" With a circular sweep of his powerful left hand that sent her spinning, he flung into the midst of the group of men—a girl.

She whirled, staggered, nearly fell, caught at a hastily interposed hand, righted herself, and fronted him.

"You lie, m'sieu!" she said.

She closed her lips, and stood where he had flung her, tense, scarcely breathing, one hand clenched at her side.

McConnel's face was black with fury, but a rage that matched it faced him in her eyes, the bloodless compression of her lips, the fluttering spread and intake of her nostrils, the pinched, white line at their base.

With the sudden and theatrical advent of the two, an amazed silence fell upon the group of men gathered by the stockade wall in the soft twilight of a late spring night.

Behind them twinkled the lights of the settlement of Fort lu Cerne, a far-reaching arm of that friend and conqueror of the sullen solitudes of the great North, the Hudson's Bay Company. On every hand beyond the protecting wall of the post the forest shouldered grudgingly, grimly silent in its everlasting majesty, waiting with patience until time should heal this small scar made by the encroaching hand of man in its primeval heart.

Within the stockade huddled cozily the snug cabins of those who followed the long trails, voyageurs and trappers, soldiers of that force whose slowly creeping progress was doing much to subdue the wilderness—the stolid, log-built headquarters of the company, a veritable blockhouse in its squat strength, and on a tiny rise near the western wall a small edifice whose split-slab roof bore aloft a crude wooden cross. Amazement and consternation gripped the little group. The babble of talk ceased.

McConnel, usually a more than quiet man, was roused by that unreasoning anger which at rare intervals seizes the silent nature. He breathed hard, and a deep scowl drew between the steel-blue eyes. Speech had fallen upon him.

"There has been talk and grumbling," he said harshly, "against the company. I have heard, though you thought me deaf. Now, the book of accounts is stolen that there may be no proof of the

bad winter past. The company gave you your debt—how would you have lived without?—and now you betray it. And for agent you send this brazen hussy with the high head and daring fingers—but I caught her at her tricks, alone in the big room, searching my desk for more to steal, perhaps Courier's contract, or the promise of Fletcher down in writing, and I have brought her to face you. You thought to save yourselves because of a woman, eh? Well, she shall pay the price in full!"

The factor raised his right fist and shook it toward the soft evening sky.

"Ye'll fash yersel's befoor I'm done. I'll teach this post a lesson!"

In the stress of his passion his speech reverted to its birth tongue. The girl, standing in silence throughout this unusual burst, suddenly swung her weight forward on her right foot, lifting her head a bit higher with a certain loose grace of movement.

"M'sieu, the factor, has lied again," she said, and her voice, rich and full, was a whimpering blade of scorn. "No one sent me into the room at headquarters, and none knew of my going. The post is without blame. I alone am my own master. M'sieu may do what he pleases with me."

The ineffable scorn of her words and manner bit into the consciousness of all, and not least of those to feel it was McConnel himself. It roused his boiling fury to overflow. He reached and caught her by the arm.

"I'll put you out of mischief until that book is found," he swore, "or know the reason!"

By this time figures could be seen running toward the center of excitement from every direction. Little Jean Mercier, hanging at his father's heels listening to the group's discussion of the mystery of the disappearance of the accounts, had fled to his mother, cooking supper at her fireplace, with the startling cry of:

"It is Lois le Moyne who is thief of the factor's book!"

And Marie, as became a right-minded woman, had alarmed her neighbors before setting out herself.

As McConnel caught the girl, roughly with the force of his anger, and started toward headquarters, the men found their voices and their wits.

"She speaks truth, Mr. McConnel," cried young Pierre Vernaise, pushing forward among the men, his bright cap on the back of his curls, and his handsome eyes troubled; "whatever discontent there has been over the new rules, it has not sent Lois into the big room a thief. She speaks truth."

There was a certain dignity in his impulsive defense, a faith in her which did not wait for justification. Lois flashed him a grateful look.

A babble of protest arose.

"Lois le Moyne!" "We did not send her!" "Bah! A woman for agent!" "Let her go, McConnel!" "It is the outrage——"

Such excited ejaculations reached him in a mingling of sound and inflection, but McConnel was stirred to the bottom, and something had to answer. That it was a woman mattered not at all. The company, which was McConnel's god, had been insulted, they had dared to oppose its mandates. Now some one would pay, and pay dearly. As the turning group strung out to face the post, it was met by those who had heard the news, running.

Among the foremost was old Jacques le Moyne, tottering on his unstable legs, his weak eyes bulging with fright.

"Lois!" he shrieked, seeing her in the factor's iron grasp. "Lois!"

The girl, quiescent until now, walking with head up and eyes flashing, at the old man's cry gave a sudden sinuous twist which left her free with a dull red print of the factor's fingers upon her wrist. She faced him defiantly.

"I don't need that!" she said. Then she caught the withered form of old Le Moyne in her arms. Over his shaking shoulder she flashed a glance around that took in the faces of the crowd.

"I did not take the book," she said simply, "and I call on you to see that they give him my debt."

This trembling old man, long since past his usefulness at the trapping, fit only to sit in the sunglow of the short

summers or the fireglow of the long winters, dreaming over the high days of his youth, was the one known weakness of this girl's imperious nature. It was with a fierce affection that she toiled cunningly at the brilliant beadwork, carrying a good account on that same lost book of the factor's, because of the fact that there was not, in all the country south of the Ojibways to the northwest and the Crees beyond the Ragged Lands, another so skilled in the intricacies of turn and pattern, of color and design, and it was on old Jacques that the account was lavished, in warm coats with scarlet stripes for the cold winter, in tobacco and canned titbits brought with much hardship by the dog train which made the far post of Fort lu Cerne only once while the long frost held, and which, as might be supposed, came at the price of luxuries.

Now she held him, whimpering like a child, tight against her strong, young breast, and a light, strange and boding, began to flicker in her somber eyes. McConnel stood scowling heavily. His habitual silence was falling upon him, wrapping him about as with a garment. The small group of participators in this little scene had grown to the entire population of the post, gathered close, excited, tense, ready to take fire in a second, as is the way with those whose lives are cast together in the far places.

Resentment against the factor, sullen and leashed for many months, leaped into the faces pushing near in the rose-hued dusk. Had the girl spoken a word, caught the psychological moment at the turn, given to the half-conscious thing a thrill of life, there would have been added to the history of Fort lu Cerne a new page whereon riot and perhaps bloodshed would have held place. But she only looked down at old Jacques, loosened his palsied clasp, and, putting one arm around his wizened shoulders, led the way toward headquarters. The crowd fell sullenly in behind, and a silence, as tense, as waiting, as expectant as that within the silent forest beyond the stockade, settled down, broken only by the slip of the men's moccasins of moosehide, or the rustle of the women's skirts.

McConnel stalked ahead, still savage with unbridled anger.

It was noticed by more than one in the hushed crowd that Lois le Moyne, touching the highest point of studied insolence, gaited her pace to the slow steps of her father, thereby holding back the progress of the factor himself.

In the big room at headquarters, wide, long, low-ceiled, and hung with giant beams, all across the farther end of which and piled to the top were stored the winter's catch of furs, meager enough, in truth, a light was burning.

It was toward this room that the populace turned, expecting they knew not what of inquisition, of accusation. But it was not to the lighted room that the factor led them.

At the angle of the great house he turned smartly to the right.

The populace drew many breaths, of amaze, of anger, and disgust. That way stood the fort's guardhouse, a low, sinister building, whose stockaded walls, relieved by but one barred window, dark, dismal, impregnable, had held the one murderer which Lu Cerne had known. Cumac, who killed Jean Demary when the post was young and McKilgore was the first factor.

Before it he stopped, drew forth his jangling keys, unlocked and threw inward the heavy door that creaked. With his other hand he caught Lois once more by the shoulder. McConnel in this mood was more than a match for the populace of Fort lu Cerne.

"In with you, hussy!" he cried hoarsely.

Old Jacques broke the tension with a cracked cry, high, frightened, pitiful. Among the people there was but one voice raised, so completely at the last had the Scotchman's personality dominated them, the voice of Marcel Roque who, sturdy, kindly soul, had never feared man or power.

"Mon Dieu!" she cried, aghast.

McConnel dragged the girl along the narrow passage and thrust her into a room on his right. Then he stamped

back to the outer door, clanged it shut, turned the grating key, and faced his people.

"Go home!" he said, and his voice had lost its harshness. It had slid to a cool quiet that was a great deal worse.

CHAPTER II.

A CHAMPION.

The voyageurs, followed by their women who held their lips shut upon the odd whispers choking for free utterance, melted away into the dusk amid the cabins. Dark had fallen quickly, as it does where the forest swings its somber mantle of shadows close up to the abodes of men.

There was an unwonted silence after the first babble of sound at the beginning of the happening. It was as if they had rushed into an unfamiliar place in the dark, only to stand affrighted at what they saw at dawn. The grimness of McConnel's action had assumed another light when he had actually thrown Lois into the guardhouse. No one had thought his anger so deep as that. They had never understood him.

To-night the feeling of uncertainty which had ever followed at the factor's heels changed into something more. What it was no one could have said. Fear, probably, and an uncanny dislike, a growling blame that skulked like a coward in every consciousness. An uneasy, half-formed knowledge that they should not have permitted the thing to be held the men mute.

Only the irrepressible Marcel Roque, holding the frantic old Le Moyne in the hollow of her arm, petting him with voice and hand, dared to break the strange hush.

"Mother of Mercy!" she said aloud, and her voice carried clear across the cool night, "Mother of Mercy! There, there, Jacques; it is only that the factor is one more fool than God made, having laid aside his wits himself. Is Fort lu Cerne but a string of starved dogs under the master's hand in the long winter? Mon Dieu! Had I been a man this night, there would have been more than one to say whether Lois is a common thief, to see who should lie in the dark of the guardhouse! Eustace Roque, I am shame for the day I married you! Brave? Bah! You men! One man, and you let him rule as a king, all because behind him is the H. B. Company! Mon Dieu! For men who can stand alone!"

McConnel, going in at the door of the big room, stopped and listened. The blackness of his features clouded a little deeper. Then he entered and closed the doors.

The lights in the huddled cabins flickered uneasily a while, sputtering against faces grave with the mystery and tense with the excitement; then one by one, seemingly with a common consent, they winked out, leaving the post hushed and dark, but under its odd quiet there was a ruffle of feeling that seethed beneath many a blanket and skin until the silver of day shot up over the forest.

And what of the girl thrust so roughly into disgrace and the eerie post prison?

When McConnel shot her forward into the darkness she stumbled and nearly fell. In throwing out her hands to right herself, they came in contact with a heavy table. She caught it and came to poise, panting, quiet, her lips open in the night, and a deadly curse hanging breathless behind them.

The fury of her face, kindled into a living fire by the man's touch, blazed forth in the pitch dark. Her eyes burned red and green and yellow, like those of a great cat in the shadow of the forest, and her breath came softly. Where old Le Moyne had got the girl's mother, or what that mother had been, no one at Fort lu Cerne had ever known. Now, in the silent blackness of the deserted guardhouse, standing erect and tall and strong, her wide eyes blazing with an unspeakable passion, her breath coming softly, she was strangely like her mother. Old Jacques, could he have seen her then, would have trembled with the memory of certain days when his old blood was young and he had done some daring

deeds for a woman who looked like that.

Until the last step of the retreating populace had died away, leaving a great blank of quiet after the whirl of these quick adventurings, Lois stood so, poised, held without the quiver of a muscle, her whole body given over to the passion that rode it, a silent, breathing, dangerous thing. Presently she slid her hand along the table, the stare of her wide eyes fluttered, broke, and she drew a good deep breath.

With a sigh, wholly of relief, not pensive, the girl gave herself a shake, lifting her head with a jerk, closed her lips, and flung her shoulders straight.

She walked around the table, feeling with one hand before her, went softly until she touched a rude bunk built against the logs and still holding the tumbled blankets of Cumac's last sleep. She tore out the musty coverings and threw them on the floor. At the bottom was a bearskin, the fur turned down and hanging through between the close slattings of the bed. This she pulled up, shook with the vigor of her young strength, wrapped it about her, and stretched herself on the hard couch.

Before the awed whisperings of those in the sanctuary of their own homes had died away, she was sound asleep. Her only thought of anxiety was of old Jacques, but him she trusted to Marcel Roque. The anger that had shook her like a dried lily stem in the fury of the winter blasts had coiled itself calmly away within her to await a distant time. So Fort lu Cerne lay quiet under the soft spring sky dotted with its many stars.

By early dawn, however, it was awake in every corner of its environs. The first excitement of the night before had returned, drawing in its train a bravery that was spawn of the bright day. At the public well near the great gate of the post that opened to the east a group of men gathered by one and one, coming with the buckets for the morning's water.

Big Jean Mercier coming first, lingered without fear of Marie's sharp tongue this morning. Presently he was joined by Eustace Roque and France Thebau, and from his cabin at the western wall, Palo le Roc, who had that winter moved Tessa down from the Ragged Lands, that she might be near to womankind in her time of trial that was to come.

Big Jean's sleepy eyes that were always kindly were wide with the unaccustomed thought that had kept him awake all night.

He cast over the faces of the others quickly as they joined him.

"Bo' jou'!" he said.

Palo le Roc, great of stature, black-browed, handsome, whose tongue never wasted a word, took the quivering thing that was in the minds of all, and laid it bare to the morning sun.

"It was a coward's trick that m'sieu, the factor, did, and it is in the heart of us to declare the rebellion," he said calmly.

France Thebau glanced around nervously. A strange thing had happened once to one Ceurmel, at the lower post of McKenzie for a plot against its factor. But big Jean's eyes sparkled and leaped quickly to Palo's words.

"Bien! M'sieu le Roc!" he cried. "Fort lu Cerne may be lean with the grip of a hard winter, but it has not turned thief to hide its poverty, neither have its maids lost the right of justice! The factor goes too far."

At that moment another comer joined the group by the well—young Pierre Vernaise, whose black eyes, the despair of half the maids of the post, held still their trouble of the night. The smile was gone from his merry face. The last words of Jean reached him as he came.

"A —— sight too far, Jean," he said swiftly, the inheld excitement breaking through his voice. "Marcel spoke true when she spoke of the string of dogs beneath the master's hand—the H. B. Company is father and mother, also the unquestioned law, north of Henriette—but Lois le Moyne is beyond the law."

A little silence fell with his words. How well they all knew that more than one in the group could have told. That Lois le Moyne was beyond all law had

been patent to the post since first old Jacques had brought her there, a wee, frowning child, whose haughty nature had made room for none, whose straight man strength, as she grew to womanhood, had held her silently apart, depending upon none for associate, self-sufficient, capable, strange—beyond the law of youth with its merrymaking, of social intercourse, beyond the law of love as the young men of the post knew well, for there was none in whose veins the red blood of young life leaped, who had not paid tribute of longing to her somber eyes; her cool, dark cheeks; her straight, red lips, and the thick braids of hair, blue-black, piled high on her lifted head.

That Lois le Moyne had been found in the factor's room had no significance. That fact in itself was descriptive of the girl.

No one but McConnel himself considered it. The post saw only the factor's action.

The trappers set down their pails, and while the women waited impatiently in the cabins, many words went back and forth, the skulking blame of the one in command of the post crept out with its ugly head in view, and as one and another was added to the group, presently it grew to all the masculine portion of the populace, save only old Jacques, trembling by Marcel's hearth, and the factor, grimly at work already in his big room.

The Scotchman's face had set into lines that meant more than any one in Fort la Cerne could have guessed, and his steely eyes were steady.

As the crowd by the well broke up, excitement was sitting leashed on every shoulder. Action was leaping for liberty in their breasts. As they separated, the cool voice of Palo le Roc stopped the eddying of the breaking mass a moment.

"But look you," he said justly, "we go to Lois for her denial first."

But long before they had eaten their frugal meal and gathered themselves again, one had already been to Lois—Marcel—who tapped at the barred window.

"Lois!" she called, peering into the darkness still within, for the red bars of the morning sun were just shooting up from the green sea of the big woods when she came in her indignant eagerness.

The girl slid off the bunk and went to the window. Marcel, peering anxiously, saw no change in her face, only the soft look of healthy sleep.

To Marcel only of all the women of the post had Lois ever deigned a relaxation of the cold hauteur that set her apart.

Now she smiled a little, a slow, cool smile that swept the black fringe flickering across the deeper darkness of her eyes.

"It is over early, Marcel," she said; "you should have slept another hour."

"And you in this hole of a prison? I am of better friendship than that, Lois. Mon Dieu! It is dark in there. And he put you here! A stupid fool, that factor! A fool without the grace to know it! But here is your breakfast—the breast of a duck that Eustace caught but yesterday at the Black Lakes, and ash cakes. The legs I save for the small Solierre when he shall wake." Unconsciously Marcel's voice softened as she spoke the name. It always did when she mentioned her one child, a wee little boy, whose pretty head with its dark curls and wistful eyes was too heavy a weight for the poor misshapen shoulders which supported it.

"Also the tankard of black tea."

She pushed the cakes, wrapped in a white cloth, through the bars, talking rapidly, turned the plate with the duck sideways, and slid it in, then poured the tea into a tiny tin cup.

"It will revive you after the hard night. What! The sleep—how was it possible? And the dark!" She was rattling on after her kindly, execrable manner. Lois took the things and caught a break in her words.

"Jacques père, Marcel?" she asked.

"Wearied a bit the fore part of the night, but slept well after. Ease your mind of Jacques. There is room in the cabin and to spare. Also I make the herb brew that he likes. He will take

no harm for the few days until you are out of this. But I forget! The men gather but now beside the well at the big gate. I think that the factor will have more than a girl to handle with his rough hands, if he does not loose you, Lois. Mon Dieu! They have waited too long already! To creep to their cabins like the dogs when the lash sings, cowed by the sound of the factor's voice! He is one pig—a common pig with his thick wits and hardness. The duck is good? Pass back the plate, Lois. I go to watch the child awake. Keep up good heart. There will be more to this than was to be."

Marcel wrapped the plate in the cloth and took the cup, preparing to leave. She turned back as she was going.

"But how was it so unfortunate that he came upon you in headquarters, ma chère?" asked this good friend in simple wonderment. "What took you there?"

For the first time the girl Lois showed a flicker of consciousness. She dropped her eyes, and a slow flush spread up across her throat and stained the darkness of her smooth cheek. But only for a moment. Then she looked up and straight into the face of her friend.

"What took me there, Marcel, had naught to do with the factor's book. It was not wrong, this I tell you; but for the rest—that concerns myself."

She said no more, added no word of justification, just stood by the barred window with her hands quietly folded on the ledge, but the light in her eyes was not due to the splendor of gold and rose and palest blue that was beginning to riot up the morning sky. It grew and mounted into a sparkle of flame that waited and hung while Marcel took in the import of her words, a sentient flame that quivered a short moment in the quick crisis.

For a breathless space the two women stood so, looking deep into each other's souls. For Lois that was no great task, for the heart of Marcel Roque was as fresh and open as her plain face, but for Marcel it was something more. Yet what she saw in the mysterious recesses of the girl, even though it were but a glimpse, dimly lit with instinctive knowledge, was sufficient. She smiled, dispelling the momentary amazement of her face.

"I need no more, Lois," she said quietly, "and now I must get back to Eustace and the child."

The flame in Lois' eyes dropped gently down, as gently as anything about her could be said to do.

"You are a good friend, Marcel," she said, "and that is a rare thing."

CHAPTER III.

THE FACTOR.

McConnel sat in the big room. He was busy over rows of figures, long columns of items which told of so many packs of furs brought at such times by this one and that, of supplies given out to this one and that, of obligations due the H. B. Company, of payment to be made to this and that one among the trappers, and he was doing it all from the illumination of a memory whose orderly archives held record of most of the doings of Fort lu Cerne in the space of time that he had been in command.

Thirty-six hours had elapsed since the discovery of the loss of the great book that never left the huge pine desk with its polish of the wear of many hands, and he was already at work at the reorganization of the accounts. The heavy lines were still between his sandy brows, and the blue eyes beneath them were sharp and uncompromising. It was no small thing, the task that he had set himself, but it was the best to be done in the situation. Such an account would be questioned, he knew, and it would not stand authentic, yet he knew the people of Fort lu Cerne, and on many of them he counted.

It was a pleasant room, this great, square place, with its huge piles of furs, its great moose heads and elk antlers, rudely dried and mounted after the fashion of unskilled craft; its wide, low-browed, mouthing fireplace at the south side, its giant beams and windows set deep in its two-foot walls. The big doors led in from the east, and all the

south part of it was free of all who came and went on the various business of the post. But across the upper portion, breast high to a man and having in the center a gate that might be locked, there ran a solid pine partition, a heavy railing topped by a wide, smooth slab, which reached from wall to wall.

Within this inclosure sat the desk of the factor, with its back against the railing, and here no one entered save only the factor himself or some rare visitor from Henriette bent on the business of the H. B. Company. It was here within the inclosure that McConnel had come upon the girl Lois the night before, bending forward in the early dusk of the room above the desk itself.

If any thought of her, waiting his pleasure in the fear-haunted guardhouse, came to the mind of the man, it was not visible in his face. He went methodically on with his work, sorting and tabulating with wonderful accuracy the long list of accounts. So deeply absorbed in the task was he that he did not hear the opening of the big doors nor the entrance of those who came filing in until they filled the whole space of the open room. It was not until they reached the rail before him that McConnel looked up. He met squarely the eyes of big Jean Mercier, Palo le Roc, and the young Pierre Vernaise.

Within his own was a quiet readiness for any development. He expected a crisis. Instead, he met a sullen, wondering defeat, that was nevertheless but a shifting mask before a grim determination.

For this is what had happened when the men gathered after the morning meal and went in a body for the spoken word of Lois le Moyne to the guardhouse. Le Roc, for his cool and steady balance, was chosen spokesman.

Arrived, he had addressed her where she stood calmly at the window to face the populace.

"Bon jour, Lois," he said.

"Bon jour, m'sieu."

Palo went simply to the point:

"We would go to the factor to demand your release, ma'amselle, but first we would have your testimony of clearness. We would tell the reason for which you went to headquarters." The question was but a matter of form, as simply put as it had been by Marcel herself, of so small account as to the uncertainty of its answer that already those on the outskirts of the crowd, beyond the curiosity to get a glimpse of Lois through the bars, were filled but with the business of getting on to the factor, some of them moving off in their eagerness and the strength that comes of numbers and a certain purpose.

What was the effect, then, when the girl, once again flushing under the tawny darkness of her skin, dropped her eyes for the second time in her life.

"M'sieu le Roc," she said bravely, lifting her head after that one moment, "I cannot tell you."

Every tongue in the crowd was still. The faces of the three men close to the window fell into blank wonder. If a giant hand out of the heavens had fallen upon them, cupping them all in its covering palm, there would not have been a more stunned silence. They had not even thought of the reason for which Lois had gone to headquarters. They would probably never have thought of it had it not been for the resolution of the masculine portion of the post that no woman should lie within the guardhouse, and the necessity of giving it to McConnel in the line of regular defense.

Now, this unexpected answer suddenly posted it huge before their more than amazed minds. They stood without speech, the foremost facing her blankly, those in the rear and out at the edges craning wonderingly.

For a moment it held, that silent wonder; then a wimple of change passed over the faces crowded close, a different look, as the face of a clearing changes when a cloud drives over it high above, trailing its delicate shadow. Once more the flame had flickered up in the eyes of the girl, once more she waited as she had waited for the change in the face of Marcel Roque, and this time it did not drop gently down as it had then. Now, it burned suddenly higher, a dancing light, that leaped and

grew. The hands folded on the sill curled tight around each other.

"M'sieu le Roc," she said clearly, "you have my great appreciation for that you would demand my release, but what I did in the big room concerns—myself." And, turning from the window, she deliberately walked away.

So that is what brought them into the presence of the factor, dazed, already half defeated, crippled in their purpose. Yet they would have Lois loose, no matter what of sudden suspicion, of staggering conjecture, of helpless bewilderment had begun to flicker in the minds of all with the passing of the shadow of the little cloud.

"M'sieu," said Palo le Roc straightly across the high railing, "we ask that you turn out of the guardhouse Lois le Moyne."

McConnel did not lay down his pen, merely pausing in his work as if the interruption were but a matter of moment.

"Has the book of accounts been found?" he asked.

"No, m'sieu," said Palo.

"Then find it!" rapped McConnel, falling to on the long columns without another word.

The crowd stood still. McConnel's pen scratched on the paper. It was a little sound, but it loosened the breath in the mighty breast of big Jean, which came forth with a whistle of rage. He leaned forward across the railing, reached out a great hand, and the spirit of revolt was once more close to the surface in the scent of blood; but Palo le Roc flung him back. He turned to the men.

"The guardhouse is but a step," he said quietly.

They needed something of its like, that quiet word. Tension was peering from their eyes again. The shifting emotions of the past night and the morning had strained them ready for action. Now they turned with loosed tongues, streaming out of the big doors, jamming, pushing in their haste, eager.

Out of the factor's room they bulged, a mob of giant men grown in the forests and among the desolate reaches of the Lost Country, black of brow and eye, strong, sinewy, a power for one man to fear if they forsook the law for which he stood. And that one man sat still at the desk behind the railing of the pine partition watching them go, while the cold steel of his eyes hardened to a colder blue.

From the doors of the cabins scattered around the post, the women watched them gather at the guardhouse. In the lead was big Jean Mercier of an account now that action, not words, was needed.

Close behind him with flushed face was young Pierre Vernaise. A girl standing in Marie's doorway, frowned and tossed a pretty head.

"It is strange, Marie, is it not, how the turning away of a flaunting face is more to a man than a willing smile?" she asked.

"A face like Lois', Jaqua, yes, of a certainty," said Marie absently, her excited eyes on the surging mass at the prison doors.

From the northern wall a man came running, two, three, four of them, between their bent bodies jerking forward a great log, long and tough of fiber.

"Bien!" roared the deep voice of big Jean, catching a quick place at its head. Like ants covering a scrap of offal in an ash heap, the black mass of the men covered the timber.

"They will batter down the guardhouse door!" shrieked Marie. "Mary, Mother! They have all gone mad!"

"Hold your tongue, Marie!" cried Marcel Roque, her merry eyes alight with battle, one hand clenched into a goodly fist, the other straying softly on the silken head of the little boy whose wistful face peered around her skirts. "They are but doing what they should have done last night!"

"One!" came the heavy boom of big Jean, and they saw the long, black wedge draw back.

"Two!" It swung a moment, th-ering momentum.

"Three!"

With a sound like a cannon, it shot against the guardhouse door. A woman screamed somewhere. With inheld

breath, the women watched the mass draw back again. Once more came the thunder of the deep "One! Two——" But before the last cry had left the lips of the leader, a new voice rang loud across the morning air:

"Stop!"

Framed in an open window in the north wall of the headquarters, stood McConnel, his stern face livid and set, the narrow pin points of his contracted eyes looking down the barrel of a gun trained on the mass of voyageurs.

"Scatter!" he cried in the momentary silence that fell. Any man among them at another time would have known the danger in that voice and done its bidding. Now the sleeping flame, the smart of unjust accusation, the excitement, above all the firing touch of a woman in disgrace, pumped the blood of impulse to the drowning of reason.

Two words, spoken, held each a turning of the mob.

"Scatter!" cried Palo le Roc, seeing with that quickness which stamps the general the better point; and——

"Three!" shouted Pierre Vernaise, with the reckless abandon of youth and the courage which knows not fear.

Above all sounds carried his exulting dare. It fired that thing which in all hardy men lies ever sleeping with one ear pricked, the love of venture and the desperate chance, and, with a whoop, they charged again.

As the log struck the door with its hollow boom, the crack of the gun flared sharply across its roar. The front end of the ram sagged suddenly out of the hands of big Jean, who lurched across it among the feet of the surging men. The danger in the factor's voice had crystallized.

Then, indeed, reason leaped back to her throne. Those who had but a moment before been but part of a lawless whole, loosened and separated, shaking each man himself out of the mass, until presently there was no mass, only a crowd of sane men gathering around with amazed faces to view what had been done.

The crumpled heap across the log head lay silent. Palo le Roc, always sane, paying no heed to aught else, knelt beside it. There was no word spoken in the crowd. In the window above and behind them, the factor stood, without motion or speech, his gun leveled steadily. Only of them all young Pierre Vernaise held to his wit and his spirit. He pushed through, and, facing the window, shook his fist at the factor.

"Liar! Coward!" he cried, inviting his death.

But they were yet to learn that McConnel was a man of principle who did not shoot from inclination. He paid no heed to the fiery youth.

"Le Roc," again came that ringing voice, smooth, confident, strong, "you and De Bois take home that man I have shot. The rest will go away in orderly manner. Don't delay. I mean it."

CHAPTER IV.

QUIET TIMES.

The forepart of the spring had worn away. The soft green of the forest deepened day by day to a hardier shade. In the crevasses of the stockade, tiny, timid flowers peered shyly forth, lifting their adoring little faces to the sun, while the great trees, bounding the horizon of Fort lu Cerne on every side; whispered contentedly in the gentle breeze that came up from the south.

Things in the post had fallen into a settled quietude. The coming idleness of the summer season spread its lazy wings over the populace, which lounged and gossiped as was its wont, only now the talk was veiled, an uneasy passing to and fro of thoughts which shunned the light of open speech.

In the big room at headquarters sat the factor at his endless tasks, or went back and forth among them, silent, stern of face, unafraid, a mystery with his uncanny power of personality, and those who had braved him once to their undoing kept free of his hand and tongue. The youths and maidens laughed together at the well, went beyond the confines of the fort in merry parties, coming home laden with the wild, green things of the forest, or danced in the

open of nights by the light of the leaping fire. Only one among them lowered by himself, untouched by smile or coquetry, Pierre Vernaise, who had developed for the first time in his carefree life a sadness that had its seat beneath the surface. To the blandishments of pretty Jaqua Bleaurot he turned an ungallant shoulder.

And pretty Jaqua, pouting out her crimson under lip, carried her grievance to Marie Mercer, tending patiently beside the bed which held the emaciated form of big Jean, pitiable remainder left by the factor's bullet.

"Is it that I am of the ugliness unpardonable, Marie?" she demanded. "I, who have had the pick and choosing of all the youth in the post?"

Marie only smiled, and presently: "You must remember, Jaqua," she said, "the face of Lois le Moyne, and that she is still in the guardhouse."

To which the girl frowned and made no answer.

The weeks had come and crawled away, bringing their added breath of warmth to the soft air, their quota of brighter gold to the sunlight, their sense of joy and well-being. Seemingly attuned to the peace and quiet of the post outside, Lois le Moyne lived through the golden days of that spring inside the gloomy prison with as calm and unruffled a presence as though she walked the free ways as haughtily as ever. Never an inch did her high head bow, beneath the load of her ignominy, never a shadow betrayed her heart on the unreadable page of her face when those who would be friendly paused by the barred window.

With the aid of Marcel, she had transformed the one bare room into a habitable place. Across the eastern end a long, woolen blanket, bearing the stamp of the Hudson's Bay Company, hung as a curtain, formed a place of sanctuary. Here she had installed, bit by bit, those things of her possession which held a place in her strange affection—a small buckskin bag, beaded heavily and holding some few trinkets of the mother she had never known; a book of bright pictures, given her once when she was a child by the yellow-haired wife of a trader who had passed through Fort lu Cerne on a mysterious going into the far places; a prayer book, and a black iron crucifix. The hard bed, what with her own blankets brought from the cabin where she had lived all her life and those that could be spared from the comfortable stock of Marcel, had been draped into a decent couch. A panther skin and a silver fox lay on the floor.

To those who came to the window she turned a cold and uncompromising indifference. Of all the post, two alone were welcome at the window—Marcel, with her kindly heart and her unwavering faith, and the young Pierre Vernaise, whose girlish lips drooped with her shame that he made his own, impetuously and with a fierce vehemence.

Day by day he made his pilgrimage to the shrine of the girl, bringing those offerings which he judged might find favor in her uncertain sight—a bunch of pale flowers, delicate green things from the woods, now and then some trophy of his gun or trap, such as the beautiful silver fox skin which lay before her couch. And Lois, obeying some whim within her, took them and rewarded the giver by more speech than she had ever deigned to bestow on a man before. Of short duration were Pierre's visits to the guardhouse, short and palpitating with a hesitancy that was a stranger to the happy-go-lucky youth whose chief fault had ever been his boldness.

Of such import as this were the conversations that passed:

"Bon jour, ma'amselle."

"Bon jour, m'sieu," from Lois, coming to the opening.

"See, ma'amselle," holding for her inspection the delicate blooms, "how the blossoms are beginning to creep at the foot of the wall. Have you fresh water for the little earthen bowl? No? Then it is that I should fill your bucket at the well"—eagerly—"and there is a long runner of the golden trailer putting forth in the shadow of the church. It would grow finely in a little pail on the window ledge here." And the next

morning the slim plant with its shaky tendrils would be tied to the logs outside. Or——

"It is of a pleasantness, ma'amselle, here in the dusk, where the wind is soft and cool. I had rather watch the dancing from this distance if ma'amselle will permit." And so Lois, smiling to herself in the dark of her prison, would look at the graceful head of Pierre leaning against the guardhouse with a softening of the lines around her stubborn lips.

One other of the populace of Fort lu Cerne there was who spent his very soul at the window—old Jacques, shaky of hand and limb, with his sorrow-stricken eyes. He would have his breakfast with Marcel, ash cake and wild fowl cooked with thought of his toothless gums, and then he would take his stick and waver over to the squat structure behind headquarters. Pierre had made him a high stool, that he might see the more easily into the place where his child lived, and until noon drove him home again for the one pleasure of his helpless age, he would stay by the window, bemoaning that which had fallen with the pitiful iteration of hopeless years.

But one there was again who never so much as passed a step nearer to the prison in his goings and comings—the factor, who held the post under the spell of his cold eyes. At the beginning, he had given word to Marcel Roque to furnish Lois with the necessities of existence, but that most loyal friend had turned upon him without fear, scourging him with a flaying tongue:

"Buy my waiting upon Lois? Voila, m'sieu, you are overbold! Neither she nor I accept the insult of your patronage. You are excuse' from thought of her."

So indeed he seemed to be, literally.

The long columns of accounts, almost exact facsimiles of those on the soiled pages of the missing book, had been finished and shown to those with whom they had to do, in nearly every instance meeting with satisfied approval. McConnel was scrupulously just. He had much leisure these long spring days, but he did not employ it in a search for the missing property of the company. Once each week he unfailingly asked Palo le Roc: "Has that book been found, Le Roc?" and the answer was as unvaryingly the same: "No, m'sieu."

In the warm twilight of the evenings, he sat upon the clean, hard-beaten space of ground before headquarters, smoking in lonely silence, without companionship. A strange nature was that within his stocky, broad-shouldered body—a nature strong, self-reliant, self sufficient, as uninviting and contained as that of Lois herself. He was beholden to none for assistance of any kind. In the small room off the large one to the west of headquarters, he had his simple living—rude furnishings of bed and table and chairs, a stool or two, a shelf fastened into the great logs of which the place was built, which held a row of books. Here he cooked and ate his meals, keeping his things with orderly neatness, and no one was ever known to be admitted here, save, again, those rare visitors from the distant post.

One evening in the fifth week of Lois' imprisonment, McConnel sat, as was his habit, alone in the soft dusk, smoking his pipe beneath the stars.

There was no bonfire in the space before the church to-night. Over beside the well, a half dozen of the young people lingered with merry bursts of laughter, and now and then a song lilting across the scented dark.

In the cabin of Jean Mercier a candle guttered fitfully in the spring air. On her threshold, Marcel crooned in a soft ecstasy of exalted love for the child in her lap, while old Jacques nodded, already half asleep, on the bench. At the guardhouse window murmured the voice of Pierre Vernaise, fallen to a whisper.

Presently out of the enveloping shadows a figure emerged and went confidently across the beaten space before headquarters, dropping with odd familiarity on the broad sill, a figure which would have drawn comment anywhere outside of Fort lu Cerne. Slim and small, agile as a cat, yet slow with a languorous grace, it sat forward, taking its knees in its arms. By the flare of

the factor's match, shielded in his palms as he refilled his pipe, it stood out of the dusk with grotesque distinctness. Above the bent shoulders a face peered dreamily, an unlovely gargoyle face, with flaccid lips and light eyes, whose pale opaqueness was as vacant of expression as dead glass.

"Bo' jou'," said this visitor flatly, without grace of politeness.

"Good even', John," returned McConnel kindly.

The pair sat for some time in silence, listening to the sounds of the settlement and those that came from time to time out of the illimitable vastness of the mighty woods around. Presently——

"A stranger comes on the long trail from the south, master," ventured he of the vacant eyes.

"So?" said McConnel alertly.

"So. A stranger, with a friend's name. The birds flitter deep in the forest, and the winds whisper to Simple John—tales, many tales."

Speech dropped between them. After a while the strange figure arose and went silently away into the shadows. At a distance it halted.

"Stranger?" it said, in a vaguely troubled voice. "Stranger, with friend's name, but he makes the birds to flitter and the friendly wind to be uneasy on the trails. Lock the great gate, master."

CHAPTER V

THE FACTOR'S GUEST

The deep wall of the forest around the post was brave in its hardy hue of summer. The soft, light touch of spring had begun to press down upon the settlement with the caress of warmer passion. Doors stood open night and day, and the older ones among the men spoke of the signs of a hot summer. Once before the hazy, coppery shimmer that hung at dawn over the Red Hills far to the north, beyond the Pot Hole country, had shown itself as early as this. That had been twenty years back, and the pestilence had ridden through the months that followed like a scourge from hell. Old Blanc Corlier, white of hair and beard as the snow of winter, shook his wise head ominously. Once only a breath of this ill prediction reached McConnel.

He came one night silently upon a group stretched in idleness upon the grass while the low talk went round. He stopped and heard. Then he strode in among them.

"France Thebau," he said, like the snap of a whip, "Blanc Corlier, Thomas Defrayne—if I hear of another such word, I will arrest you and lock you up."

One day a band of the Blackfeet came into Fort lu Cerne. There were fifty of them, lean, splendid warriors, in breech clout and moccasins, with a single eagle feather braided into each scalplock. They came on a friendly visit, walking silently through the forest for the length of a three days' going, and they pitched their camp in the open space before the little church. Silent, savage-looking braves they were, hedged about with impenetrable dignity.

Head of the band, which was but a picked staff from a swarming legion over which he ruled with a rod of iron in the vague and almost unknown regions lying yet beyond the Red Hills, whose fastnesses were penetrated only by those solitary and venturesome voyageurs who had either nothing to lose or everything to gain, was Tilligamok, a chief of most imposing mien.

McConnel spoke in his own tongue with every stray who came within his gates, so he received the visitors with a courtesy in keeping with their customs, ordered a beef to be killed out of the treasured herd of the settlement, and prepared to entertain them.

For three days they stalked through the post in haughty silence, ate the factor's provisions, and finally trailed away as mysteriously as they had come, a memory of the wilderness. What they had accomplished in the way of establishing relations with Fort lu Cerne no one could have guessed, not even McConnel, who had gravely sat each night of their stay, smoking the pipe of peace with Tilligamok and holding the dignified and fragmentary conversations

wherein each assured the other of the faith and brotherhood of their following.

These Indians had never come under the power of the company, living apart from its largess, regarding it with a haughty indifference. The region over which they trailed their nomad camps was rich in game, its streams were full of fish, its furs, instead of being traded to the post for gewgaws and white man's fare, were made into primitive garments by the women, its flesh pounded into pemmican and stored into stiff cases made of wet skins dried swiftly over skeleton frames. Unlike the Ojibways who were great friends of the fort, having fallen into many of the white man's ways and taking pride in their connection, the Blackfeet held themselves stiffly aloof.

McConnel had tried, by way of discreet word dropped into the ear of an occasional runner to be recounted in the tepees to the north, to draw into Fort lu Cerne the rich stream of their trapping. But he had not succeeded. This visit of Tilligamok was his first result, and it was uncertain in its portent. If he could win them, it would mean gain for the company—the company, which was, to him, the law, the right, and the undisputed and infallible God of the North Country. So he fell to brooding in the evenings in many-sided speculation.

After the guests had gone, one day the factor summoned his two clerks, Marc Baupre, and yellow-headed, merry-faced young Henri, son of old Blanc Corlier.

He opened the doors leading to the spacious storeroom, whose walls from floor to ceiling were faced with the year's provisions, cases of tea, coffee, and canned things, barrels of flour and sugar, salt and meal, and in whose disorder of arrangement showed the winter's inroads of disbursement.

He waved a hand around.

"Put it in order," he said shortly, "even the tiers of cans, straighten the boxes and barrels, see that the floors are cleaned and the counters cleared."

Then he left them to the task, going himself to work alone in the great room, straightening and evening the gigantic stacks of furs, putting in nicer order the big desk at the railing, setting forth one other plate in the rack in the small room to the west, adding width to the solitary bunk. Then he waited, in readiness, for the stranger, the wind of whose distant coming had breathed upon the hushed spirit of Simple John.

"Marie," that day said Jaqua, whose sharp eyes missed no nook or corner of the settlement, nor that which went on therein, "the factor waits the coming of some important guest. He does of a surety, else why should headquarters be set to rights from stem to gudgeon?"

So presently the word went round that the factor waited the arrival of some personage of importance, and none doubted that it had to do with the lost book of accounts and the imprisonment of Lois le Moyne.

Four days went by, and on the evening of the fifth there came to the great gate which stood open to all comers, one who traveled. He bestrode a stocky shaganappy, small and tough, with sharp ears and a knowing little face, whose mate pattered eagerly behind, bearing for its part blankets and tins for the cooking of such scant fare as one may take who goes the long trails. The man himself was young and of a slightness which went not well with the importance of his bearing. His fair skin bore a stubble of light beard, and his face showed unaccustomed touch with that vast silence and fear-giving loneliness of the great forest which presses into nothingness the infinitesimal soul of man.

The factor, who was ready and waiting, met him halfway down the wide-beaten path that was a sort of street between the cabins leading from the big gate to headquarters. He bowed with the dignity which came from his Scots ancestors in the matter of receiving a guest, and which was never wasted on any less personage than his superior. Yet this man's face was strange. It had never been seen in Fort lu Cerne before.

"You are McConnel, the factor?"

asked the newcomer, and his voice was of that quality which would have been impatient with a tithe more strain of tire.

"I am," said McConnel. "Come this way."

Bareheaded in the pink and lavender light, he turned and led the way to his own door.

"He is a man, that factor," said Marcel Roque, with reluctant admiration, as she watched the small procession; "a man who would warp the path to purgatory to suit his ends. If he was but sharper of the perception and less hard of the head." Which was, as clever Marcel well knew, a stroke of truth.

The little horses were parceled out to France Thebau and Palo le Roc, each of whom possessed a team for the luxury of yearly summer trips and the consequent accouterments, such as halters and long ropes for the picketing out, and a tiny stable apiece.

Of the master the populace saw no more that night after he disappeared within the big doors.

"Teh! Jaqua," teased Marie Mercier, "he is a young man, an' many a maid of the settlements has married a great man of the company." For already the women had settled the traveler's estate as that of one in authority.

Jaqua, who was more often in the cabin of Marie than that of her father across the way, tossed her pretty head, and her dark eyes flashed. Already she had seen certain possibilities, though not of marriage, with the factor's guest. It is an exciting game, that of playing one man, and him of high estate, against another for the bringing back, or the awakening of interest, and who such past master of the art as she, pretty coquette of a hundred tilts? There might yet be a way of rousing Pierre Vernaise from his sickly pensiveness.

"It is of a precaution, then, Jaqua," bantered big Jean from the bed in the shadows, "that the window of the guardhouse be barred complete."

At which the girl, spoiled child that she was, flung out of the cabin and home.

"Now you have offend' the maid, who is a pleasure in the house, Jean!" reproved Marie. But Jean only chuckled weakly to himself.

The stranger rolled thankfully into McConnel's big bunk that night with no explanation of himself, and was dead asleep on the instant, the full lips fallen apart in the pale beard, the light eyes half shut in a weariness too deep for natural slumber. In the flickering glow of a candle, lighted out of courtesy, the factor stood a moment and looked intently at him, before going to an hour's work on his accounts.

It was a strange face, and the mighty wilderness had laid its hand heavily upon it these many days. As McConnel stood so, shading the candle with his hand, the words of Simple John came back to him: "A stranger with a friend's name, but the little winds are uneasy on the trails. Lock the great gate, master."

But though the man fell so swiftly into a sleep that took no heed of such things as hosts, or even of factors of the H. B. Company, it was no sign that he would not wake to a keen knowledge of them in the morning, and McConnel would be prepared for whatever he might disclose.

Indeed, the traveler was astir by daybreak, climbing out as McConnel set the breakfast on the pine table—for the factor of Fort la Corne was of an exclusive habit of life, himself attending his simple wants, sending his two clerks to live with the families of certain trappers.

Now he bade his guest a grave good morning, which the other met with a flashing smile.

"Pretty near done, wasn't I?" he vouchsafed cheerfully, under the influence of the enticing aroma of coffee which makes the world akin.

The factor assured him that it was so.

They partook of the simple fare, and ever McConnel was listening for the word that should reveal his guest; but it was not forthcoming until they had lighted pipes and were strolling forward into the big room.

At the gate into the sanctuary the factor paused for an uncertain moment,

then flung it open and bade the other enter.

"You will be from Henriette?" he asked.

"From Henriette," said the stranger, with a faint trace of superiority in his voice, "and I may as well tell you that I am sent of my uncle, Governor Stanton, with a view to learning the intimate life of the post, your manner of dealing with the Indians, of keeping accounts, and all things else. After a short rest here, I shall press on to the small new post on the Windage Lake, after which hurried trip I shall return to remain until the spring. As guarantee, m'sieu, I bring a letter from Governor Stanton."

And he opened the breast of his coat and handed McConnel a folded paper whereon was the somewhat familiar script of that mighty man of Henriette, Governor Stanton, whose dealings had ever borne the kindly hue of friendship.

It set forth to the factor the simple fact that the stranger, Richard Sylvester, was to be made free of Fort lu Cerne, its doings, its accounts, and its prospects, as in the following year he was to be made a factor of the company, and it was fitting he should understand the company's methods.

That was all, and as McConnel read it his sharp eyes took on a slight smile. "Should understand the company's methods!" Within a matter of months when *he* had given the slow years to that accomplishment!

He thought a moment with the paper spread in his hands.

So! Thus had Simple John foreseen the stranger with a friend's name. It was here on the paper, and something in McConnel's heart echoed the cry, "Lock the great gate, master!"

However, this was orders from headquarters, and he would obey them, however much he might wonder and disapprove.

The factor was a man of few words and no byways. He led the way into the big room, opened the gate in the solid railing, and ushered his guest into his sacred place. He laid before him his carefully compiled memory copy of the lost book.

"The book of accounts," he said straightly, "is stolen. This is as near as I could come to its contents from memory. It has proven satisfactory to all those with whom it has to do except Blanc Corlier, who insists on three red fox skins which I cannot place, and Jean Mercier, who——"

But the new man had looked up from the open page, and the rose of the early light showed his face. It was blank with amazement which was fast changing.

"Stolen," he gasped, "the year's accounts! And you offer the company—*as much as you can remember!*"

New authority, outraged, glimmered to the surface in his countenance. He pulled himself up impressively.

"This is a grave matter, Mr. McConnel," he said, "a grave matter. May I ask the particulars?"

For one moment the sharp eyes of the factor narrowed as he regarded the other. Then he pulled up the one other chair, and deliberately sat down. He had taken his measure of Sylvester.

"The book was stolen, here, in this room; taken from this desk, where it has been kept for years—all of the years of the life of Fort lu Cerne. One person there is who was caught in the room the evening after it disappeared, who had no business here, and whom I hold as the thief. That person has been in the guardhouse since the theft, awaiting such time as the book shall be returned. It has not been returned. Those are the particulars."

McConnel shut his mouth on the last word. Further, he did not offer.

Sylvester nodded a stiff approval.

"That much is good, Mr. McConnel," he said; "I approve you there. To have caught the thief is well. To have gotten back the accounts would have been better."

For four hours they two sat at the big desk, delving into the long lines of items, going over all together, yet between them rode a subtle thing that was neither trust nor liking nor that confidence which was a cast-iron rule of the H. B. Company between it and its factors.

Then they put away the books and rose, stretching the cramp of sitting from their limbs.

"Now," said McConnel, "we will go to the guardhouse."

CHAPTER VI.

A LINE IN SHALLOW WATER

The sap of the golden spring was running in the veins of all live things, the whispering trees in the forest, lifting their giant heads to the beguiling sky, the birds twittering in its depths, the flowers, no longer timid with fear of the swooping winds that came down from the snow yet lingering to the far north, the youths and the maidens whose songs rose on the air from all over Fort Ile Cerne, and stronger than in any of these, tugging with a wilder strain, more calling and insistent, it surged upward to the lawless heart of Lois le Moyne, pacing her prison with her face to the farther wall. Never in all her untrammeled life had the voice of the wilderness so pulled at her yearning soul.

The dim trails in the dusky shadows of the big woods spoke to her, the silence of far, sweet places hung on her ear, the whisper of live things hidden in the depths twitched her fingers, for Lois was deft with the trigger as with the beads and smoked buckskin. To-day the smoldering fire, so covered in and banked by pride and unbending coldness, was eating into the heart that sheltered it. Her eyes were dry and bright, and the hands shut at her sides were hot. Once she glanced at the ivory Christ on the black iron crucifix, and the spirit that was in her refused the softening service of the "Jésu mia." She paced, with her face turned from the window, that no chance observer might behold its weakness.

So a voice fell on her ear, a voice whose tones, never once heard since the last furious command of that night of her imprisonment, halted the girl in an instant hush of body and mind and sent the blood out of her face, while through her sudden pallor flickered faintly at the base of the delicate nostrils the pinched white line of rage.

"It is but circumstantial evidence," the factor's voice was saying; "the book has not been found; but none other holds so great a taint of guilt."

There was the slipping of feet on the sod outside, which halted at the window, and Lois could feel the breathing presence of some one at the bars. Then——

"Good Lord! A woman!" said a strange voice.

There passed a curious moment. McConnel vouchsafed no comment on the ejaculation. Richard Sylvester stood, staring. The girl in the prison did not move. Presently the stranger spoke again, incredulously.

"And this young woman was caught in the private office?"

"Aye—at dusk. Lois le Moyne, come here."

McConnel's voice shot from the window, stern, unbending as stone, with the same quality of harshness as on the night she had defied him.

He waited. Not one muscle moved in the straight young back presented to the window. A long braid of blue-black hair lay along it, reaching to the knees. The lifted head was motionless. It was as if she had not heard. The factor turned from the window grimly, his mouth set hard, and, taking out his keys, opened the heavy door and entered. Sylvester followed wonderingly. Without ado, McConnel strode to Lois, grasped her shoulder, and turned her round. The new man smothered a gasp at the living mask of hatred that was on the girl's face. Instantly that quality within him which had sent him across seas for adventure comprehended that here was an unending puzzle, erringly being played out between two forces equally strong and relentless. He turned the trick with a deft hand.

"Leave her to me, McConnel," he said, with a shadow of authority. "I will talk with her alone."

The Scotchman, accepting it, dropped his hand, walked to the door and out, closing it with the key left in. Left together, the two faced each other. The

man, fresh from the gayeties of civilization, stood silent, reading the unmatched beauty of the girl's disdainful face. Lois—sullen, dark-browed, haughty Lois—keen with the sharpness of those who keep apart and look on from afar, used the moment for the reading of a page also, a page of light eyes and lighter hair and beard, of full lips that told a tale, of a weak chin and a dominant head, and a thrill of feeling ran tingling to her finger tips. A sigh, that was relief from the grip of wild passion, loosened her breath.

"Ma'amselle," said Richard Sylvester, at last, and his voice betrayed his pleasure, "ma'amselle, let us talk it out—you and I—since I am one to understand you. The factor, while finely zealous for the company, is not one to handle a delicate point. I fear he has blundered here, in his stubborn haste."

He smiled with a languorous lowering of the yellow-fringed lids, and the quick wits of the girl formed on that instant a far-reaching plan.

She half turned from him, and for the first time in her life the red line of her lips drooped gently at the corners.

"There is no need, m'sieu," she said; "I, who am innocent, will not demean myself to plead my cause."

And that was the last word Sylvester got from her, though he talked with a silver tongue for many minutes. Lois did no more than shake her head and busy herself putting the faultless interior to more minute rights.

So after a while the stranger left the guardhouse, completely mystified by one slip of a girl in whose innocence he was already beginning to believe. Which was the first step in Lois' plan?

Every eye in the post had seen the going—and the coming—of the factor and his guest. Tongues wagged in every cabin, withal discreetly.

Saucy Jaqua, returning from the well at the big gate, smiled to herself, seeing yet another possibility. Old Jacques trembled in Marcel's dooryard, for the hand of authority loomed large and menacing to the soul of him, made timorous by age. But Marcel herself marched over to talk to Lois.

"What is toward, Lois?" she demanded. "Has he dared, that factor, another outrage of accusation?" But Lois was calm and ignorant.

"Nothing," she said; "no, Marcel. The new man but came for a look at the prisoner."

Marcel's dark eyes flashed. Then they clouded with ready tears.

"Oh, it is the outrage! Six weeks of the spring! Why will you not work at the beading, child? It would be an easing of the mind of its loneliness. I know where are the sewing strings, the boxes of beads in your house, and the uncut skin still hangs at the hearth. I would gladly fetch——" But the girl flamed out at her good friend with a tongue of fire that ever lay in her strange nature.

"Never speak to me of the beading again, Marcel Roque!" she cried fiercely. "Never again do I touch a bead—I have vowed to the Virgin."

A deep, red flush stained her lowering face, and the black brows drew together. For a moment she scowled over Marcel's shoulder. Then she put an impulsive hand through the bars, laying it with unwonted tenderness on her arm.

"Forgive me, Marcel," she said. "I would wrong my best friend."

From that first visit of Sylvester to the guardhouse grew many others. The days of a week went by with their soft airs, their warm suns, their general feeling of buoyancy, and on every one of them he stood at the barred window talking with Lois, who came readily to the sill, and the look of pleasure in his light eyes deepened and grew.

At the end of four days he was saying through the bars:

"I have not asked the reason of your going to headquarters, Ma'amselle le Moyne. A thousand missions might have taken you. McConnel is a blunderer in his blind zeal for the company, which, of course, is to be commended, and I am the one to right his mistakes."

By the week's end he accosted the factor. It was evening of a day when McConnel sat long over his accounts and was even then bent above the big

desk with a tallow candle burning beside his stooping face.

The younger man came in and stood silently leaning against the pine railing. He pulled at the light beard, pointing shortly over the narrow chin, and regarding the heavy, stooping figure. Presently he broke the silence:

"McConnel, I believe you have made a mistake."

At the words the factor looked up.

"So?" he said.

"It is only circumstantial evidence which keeps Miss le Moyne a prisoner, you know, and the book is no nearer found. I don't feel justified in holding her any longer. What do you think?"

For a moment there was absolute silence. Without came the little pleasant sounds of the post, a baby crying in a distant cabin and a wild boating song of the hardy voyageurs being crooned by the mother, a maiden laughing on the steps of the little church, a fiddle creaking by the southern wall. For the small space of a moment, McConnel did not speak. Then he said, in a voice as cold as his blue eyes:

"I have done as I thought best for the good of the company. I command in Fort lu Cerne." And he fell to work again at his task In his scale of values, the company could do no wrong.

"But see, McConnel," went on the other, "it does no good to keep her there—the book is not found—and I'm sure the governor would not advise the holding of a woman. If you will let me liberate her, I will take the responsibility—my uncle relies upon my word."

There was a covert meaning in his words, a hidden something that vexed McConnel; but after a long interval of silence, he said coldly:

"As you please, m'sieu."

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIRST RESULT.

Early on the following morning, Sylvester went to the guardhouse. His face was alight with a fluttering excitement. He carried the factor's bunch of keys.

Lois, already astir within, saw and trembled. At the window he stopped.

"For the last time, ma'amselle," he cried gayly, holding them up to sight, "three steps to the door yonder and you are free. The morning is golden, and I am full of happiness that it sees your release."

Lois looked widely into his smiling eyes, fluttering a hand lightly at her throat, her lips a bit apart in amazed wonder.

"Release?" she said, with a little gasp. "Oh, m'sieu!"

Then she straightened with the indefinable, haughty grace which had first delighted this loiterer in the ways of pleasure:

"If you please, m'sieu—Jaques père—the old man who sits on the stool each day. I would have him behold my justification."

"In one moment, ma'amselle. Such a woman! Such a child!" he finished to himself, already on the way to Marcel's cabin.

Old Jacques, routed out by Marcel, herself buoyant with hope since the stranger had influenced the factor, trembled, and hurried pitiably.

"Don't worry," assured Sylvester, bursting with good feeling and presage of the approbation he would win all over the post by this morning's work. "To-day sees your daughter, sir, set free. She would have you there to witness it. Come on!"

In the time that it took Jacques' unsteady legs to traverse the short distance to the guardhouse, and Sylvester to unlock the door, the whole of Fort lu Cerne, standing on every sill, beheld a sight worth seeing.

Down the wide road toward the cabin deserted so long ago, her head no higher than on the darkest day of her punishment, one arm tightly around the stooping, slim shoulders of the old trapper, the rising sun on her pale face, Lois le Moyne went home. And beside her walked Richard Sylvester.

Marcel, her tender eyes suffused with tears, waited on the cabin's steps, the door opened, a fire already beginning to leap on the hearth, and a kettle carried

from her own commencing its interrupted song. Around her skirt peered the timid child, hiding its misshapen shoulders in an old sensitiveness.

Lois made no sign for the eager eyes, but her own sought Marcel's with a light that the older woman understood with a thrill of joy. The three entered, and Marcel, following, closed the door to the outer world.

It talked in lowered tones, watching until presently Sylvester and Marcel came out, walking the length between the cabins, and the stranger shook Marcel's hand at her door, bowing gallantly over it in the face of the populace.

"Strange ways for a man of the company," muttered Blanc Corlier.

"A very fine gentleman, think you not, Pierre?" asked little Jaqua innocently of Pierre Vernaise, who flung disdainfully away without an answer, having seen all.

So Lois le Moyne took up her life just where she had dropped it, spending on her father more tenderly than ever that care which was lengthening his worn-out years. Marcel brought from the guardhouse her few possessions, and by nightfall the cabin had its old look and feeling of life. The black crucifix hung once more above the box which, draped in faded papers, did duty as a shrine, the two narrow, built-in beds bulged again with their pilfered covers, the trinkets stood bravely on the split log above the hearth, and on the floor the silver fox that was the gift of Pierre shone in the dancing light. Lois was at home in her sanctuary. One thing was changed.

The beautiful white deer hide, hung to the blaze to darken for the beading on the last eventful day, was gone. With her first lone moment the girl, flaming red with a scarlet blush, had pounced upon it and thrown it into the fire. So she put on the supper, brought from Marcel's house, with hands that tingled with the joy of familiarity.

In the corner settle old Jacques whimpered in a childish delight that caused her heart to ache.

Many a speculation went around as to how the girl would appear, whether or not the strangeness of her nature would be altered, or if she would be the same. They were not kept in doubt. The next morning Lois went to the well for water, as was her habit, with a quiet word for those she met, and for Pierre, whom she faced there, a look of such a deep, warm friendliness that the sullenness caused by Sylvester's notice of the girl melted under its glow. He took her pail from her.

"If I may, ma'amselle?" he asked diffidently, and Lois smiled, not as she had smiled at Sylvester, with drooping lips and eyes, but proudly, frankly.

"Next to Marcel, m'sieu," she said, "you are my friend."

Which word spoken by so upright a person as Lois, filled the merry heart of the youth with its truth. But not for long was he destined to keep his ease of mind.

The stranger was to have been gone by the week's end, pushing on to the tiny new post just beginning its life beyond in the wilderness to the west, a handful of men alone in a shining new stockade, one more finger of the great hand of the company. What his mission was there he did not say, and none asked. The day of his going came and passed and still he lingered at Fort lu Cerne. Each day saw him at the cabin of old Jacques, and each evening saw him sitting tilted back against its face, his light eyes on Lois' black-crowned head, his slow voice drawling in ceaseless talk. To Pierre it was as slow fire. Moody, silent, he gloomed alone on the steps of the little church, wishing that Father Tenau were due from the settlements to the south that he might ease his heart by the confession, for Pierre was one of those for whom the soul of the good father was burdened always, what with his defections and his repentances that lasted only through the absolving that he might have a wider field for the former again.

So to him came, of an accident, assuredly, pretty Jaqua, passing from a cabin at the northwest corner of the post down to that of her father in the more populous portion. The evening dusk lay daintily on her red cheeks, her

dark hair, and her darker eyes. Next to Lois le Moyne, she was of a rare beauty with her piquant ways, her dimples, and her short upper lip. Now the love that was in her heart for this reckless youth made her little face of a yearning tenderness. She stopped and accosted him.

"Is it the religion, M'sieu Vernaise, that caus' you to sit alone, so, in the dark? *Vraiment!* You have change'."

The resentment in the soul of Pierre had made it sore these five days. He yearned for the easing of companionship. So he held out an impulsive hand.

"If it is, I know of one who can administer the consolation," he said, in his old manner. "Sit here beside me, little one, for a space. Now talk. Your merry tongue is at times a blessing."

Jaqua's heart leaped as she slipped her small fingers within his clasp and swung down on the log step lightly, like a young child.

"Of a truth," she said saucily, "else why was woman's tongue given her, Pierre Vernaise? It has two ends, though. Never be sure of a woman's tongue." She laughed, a pretty sound, and Pierre doubled up and covered with his own the very little hand, holding it so a moment, then spreading out the fingers and making it look like an open water lily on the breast of a pond. The smoldering ache within him found soothing in the touch of a woman's hand, even though it was that of another than she whose stately image gave him no peace. He smiled in momentary content.

"So?" he said. "Then why warn me when you are a woman? I might want to be sure of yours some time."

It was inherent in his blood, the making of tender speeches, and meant no more than the passing of comment on the weather, a pleasant and usual form of conversation, and Jaqua knew it; yet now the words set her head to whirling and the heart in her breast to beating to suffocation, so that her usual cunning deserted her and she made a foolish cast:

"Why? Because I have seen you turned to a patient squaw these many days by the soft words of a woman who sits but now talking with that same tongue to another—he of the yellow beard and strange eyes. Be sure of both ends, Pierre Vernaise, before you trust too deeply."

It was a swift thrust, unguarded by any tact, and the girl could have bitten her own member of trouble for it the next second, but it was too late.

Pierre said not a word, but laid gently upon her lap the little hand he had been holding. He sat still a moment, staring into the dusk once more gloomily, then he rose.

"It gets late, Jaqua," he said. "I see the candle already in your mother's window," and strode away.

The little maid arose and went on her interrupted way, but the moment's tarrying had lost her a golden chance and filled her eyes with dismal tears. Into the heart of the man it had put a two-edged dagger. The growing hatred he had felt for Sylvester these many days hardened into a sudden desire for murder, and his slender fingers slipped to the hilt of the knife in his striped sash.

It was due to that destiny which rules the lives of men that at that evil moment he should meet full in the face Sylvester coming from Le Moyne's cabin. The cavalier was humming a careless song of the settlement as he swung forward, and the lilting notes fired the hot French blood Pierre had got from his father, while the stealthy strain of his Indian mother slowed his step unconsciously for a spring. The other did not slacken pace nor cease his gay air, but came lightly on in the dusk.

At the very turn of the second when Pierre's arm strained for a thrust of vengeance, he spoke sharply, like a shot in dark silence:

"Put up that knife, Vernaise—I am master here," and was gone in the shadows, humming his insolent tune.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MAID WITH A MAN.

Three days later, Sylvester stood at dawn at the door of Le Moyne's cabin. The little horses stood ready and wait-

ing, the outfit strapped on the one, the other bearing its saddle. The master's head was bared, and he held a hand of Lois in both his own. The new light showed his narrow face glowing with ill-repressed passion.

"Lois—Lois," he said tensely, "when I come back—tell me you will answer when I come back," and the girl smiled down at him with that drooping of eyes and lips learned in the guardhouse.

"When you come back, m'sieu—yes, of a surety, when you come back"

So Sylvester climbed into his saddle, settled his gear, the rifle at his shoulder slung by a strap, the knife in his belt, and turned his horses toward that wilderness of forest and stream and uncounted miles that lay between him and humankind until he should return to Fort lu Cerne again.

At the gate he looked back. The red sun lay on the dusky head of this girl he had found in the far places, touching the wondrous face into the weird beauty of a priestess of some ancient creed, outlining against the dull logs of the cabin the straight, young form with its mystic hauteur of poise and bearing, and his heart strained in his breast with a wild surge of passion. He rode into the forest, and the giant trees opened their arms and accepted him, hiding him from the light of day, inviting him to the solitudes of their untracked ways, the communion of their solemn souls, but to Sylvester it was a hateful going, and served only to cool the red blood in his flushed face.

He disliked the wilderness with its myriad tiny voices and its air of waiting. The monotonous days of twisting through dim aisles, of coaxing the little horses over fallen logs, of forcing a way through undergrowth where the old trails were overgrown, of stopping to build a fire and cook his solitary meal, of pushing on again until the early dusk of coming night darkened the green dimness of the day, were so many periods of a torture that he vowed more than once he would not bear again. Even the prestige he was to have in the following year when he had learned sufficient to satisfy that old martinet, his uncle, seemed at times but light price for this trying of the very soul of a man.

Still this trip was vastly better than that which had brought him to Fort lu Cerne. Then he had but the will-o'-the-wisp of ambition to dance before him through the endless days, a winsome enough lure when one is sated with the gayeties of so frivolous a world as that of Henriette; but now he saw down every leafy aisle, and in every shadow of his flickering fire, the unreadable face of Lois le Moyne, maddening in its cold aloofness, its sudden melting of eyes and lips that might portend anything or nothing, and which served to set his blood on fire.

Through the days of his travel, Sylvester brooded constantly. What was the girl; where had she gotten the dignity that hedged her about, even in her ignominy, as with a garment, the cold reserve and quiet of an Indian, the hauteur which hid—what? Was it but the coquetry of a woman, the love of conquest, such as he had met many times before, or was it something deeper, greater, more wonderful than anything he had ever glimpsed in his somewhat varied life, the priceless thing that seemed to glitter unconsciously in her dusky eyes, to reveal itself in that maddening droop of her red lips? He did not know, and no sooner did he convince himself of one thing than the other thrust itself before him and did his judgment damage.

So Sylvester rode his weary way through the big woods with dreaming eyes and thoughts of his return to Fort lu Cerne, which, he promised himself, would be as speedy as might be, with counting the time he must allow to the tiny new post struggling for existence on the frontier.

It was an uneventful trip. Only once did he see an Indian. Then it was to fall in with a small party of the friendly Crees traveling westward for a visit in the hunting season with a tribe of kin. He pitched his camp at their fires and smoked the peace pipe in friendliness, traveling with them for three days, at which time his trail turned north and he

left them with regret. So at last he reached his journey's end, and was again taken in from the grip of the lone places.

At Fort lu Cerne the golden spring was rounding into the more splendid effulgence of summer. On Lois' doorstep Marcel sat holding the child and talking, her comely, dark head shining in the sun. There was an anxious pucker on her forehead, and her face betrayed some inner thought that was not pleasant. Lois, sitting idly against the rude jamb, scanned the countenance of her friend with sidewise glance. Presently she said abruptly:

"What is it, Marcel?"

Marcel looked up with a smile of something like relief.

"May I say it?" she queried.

The girl smiled slowly, half closing her eyes and regarding the older woman with a look that made her uneasy, but which, had she been able to read with even more than her native quickness, was the highest compliment she had ever received in her life.

"Anything, Marcel," she said.

"Then it is this: When the winter's debt is gone, how will you live, ma chérie? I am of a worry for your sake, since you have refused the work of the beading."

Lois looked away, while the strange flush that ever accompanied word of this peculiar craft of her deft hands flamed to her forehead.

"I have arranged Henri Corlier already for a set of traps and his run on the south branch of Wau-gash stream," she said quietly, "and with first frost I take la père to the cabin there, built by old Judson for his Ojibway girl, who died the first year. I doubt not, Marcel, that I will carry as good an account at headquarters as ever I did with the beading."

"Voila! Lois, you are build' of the right material. It is the good plan of a surety," and Marcel gathered the little Solierre with his pathetic, wee face and questioning blue eyes into her arms, preparatory to returning to her house. "But yet it is a hard life, the trapping, fit more for a hardy man."

Lois sat on the steps and watched Marcel carry the child away up the short distance of the main way, his soft curls lifting with the mother's steps, and his little face like a picture turned back across her shoulder, and over her impassive features went a wimple of unwonted tenderness. She did not wave a hand to the little fellow to please his baby heart; she could not. She was not that kind, this Lois le Moyne, with her cold face, her frowning eyes, and her seemingly half brutal nature. Yet she would do some day for Marcel and the boy more than wave a hand.

The two passed in at their own threshold, and her softened gaze wandered idly over all the buildings of the post lying happily in the warm sun, the doorways open to the soft airs, the children playing on the sills. As her eyes swept the western wall, they lighted for a moment on the wooden cross so bravely holding up to all beholders here in this chance spot reclaimed from the wild, its promise of eternal hope, its dumb appeal to that inner man which is the best of one, and for the brief space of that moment the unusual melting of her nature caused her eyes to linger there with thoughts that had been strangers to her mind for many days.

In the next the shadow dropped like a curtain across her face, and the fire of her eyes, forever smoldering, flamed up again, turning her beauty into a sullen mask. Out from the eastern door of headquarters the factor was coming down the open way toward the gate. He must pass directly by her door and not twenty feet away. At the same moment old Jacques, himself again since the return of Lois, came hobbling happily from some conference of aged cronies by the stockade wall, giving the girl a chance for retreat into the cabin. Instead, she pushed toward him the low chair that was his comfort, and sat still, waiting quietly without a quiver until McConnel had strode heavily by. Then a long breath choked up through the tumult that stifled her breast, and her hands unclenched where they lay in her lap. 'Twas plain that whatever of hatred for this man had come to life

within her on that first dreadful night in the guardhouse was not only still living but grown to full size.

As for the factor himself, the stern face of him was sterner than ever, and his native taciturnity clung closer than before since the advent of Sylvester with his seeming of authority and his feelings that might be swayed for other sake than that of the company. To McConnel there was nothing above the company. In its service he had spent the years of his young manhood delving for its good with undivided heart, loyal, uncomplaining, undertaking any hardship with that tenacity of purpose which was his birthright. His father before him had lived on the frontier, a merry Scotch Irishman, serving the company as a very valuable scout, risking his life unnumbered times to keep in touch with conditions so far in the wilderness that his was the first white foot to press the virgin earth, and into the very blood of his son had been born the unswerving purpose of it. So now the insolent baiting of that company, which was to McConnel something after the manner of a god since he had risen in its slow favor to the place of factor, was as gall and wormwood to him. The only pride of his lonely life was his attainment to this post of honor, won by hard service and slow patience. It possessed him like a mania as the lure of gold possesses men, as a woman's love fills the lives of some of them, and as ambition of some sort dominates all.

So he went about among his people, silent, self-centered, more unapproachable than ever, a weight as of vague failure on his conscience, and the ceaseless mill of his thoughts grinding over the lost book of accounts. It was no matter that the people drew from him, avoiding him in a common dislike, still smarting under the harshness of his treatment concerning the suspected Lois and the misguided Jean Mercier, that the sleeping blame of him and his ways had grown with the spring. None approached him except for the necessary drawing of supplies and the signing of names, even Palo le Roc, who weighed all things so carefully and feared no man, meeting him with reluctance. A sad state of affairs to exist between a factor and his people. As he passed the cabin of old Jacques this day, he did not glance toward it, neither did his mind conceive its presence nor that of the girl who sat upon its steps defying the tumult of her passion that she might prove to those who might care to see that no fiber of her body cringed with fear of the man who had so mercilessly punished her.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIGHT BEFORE HEADQUARTERS.

Pierre Vernaise kept clear of Lois. Within him was raging such a wild sea of despair as lashed him into unwonted solitude and the company of his own thoughts. All through the week that followed Sylvester's departure he gloomed by himself, going into the forest at daybreak to come back at dusk laden with toll of the wild things.

The days drifted softly by until another week and more had passed, and then one evening Sylvester came back. His little horses were jaded with too hurried a trip, and his own face, turned eagerly toward Lois le Moyne's cabin, betrayed his haste. Thereupon Pierre said a great oath and packed that night a shoulder kit. By light he was gone upon the far trails. If the thing was to be, he would not witness it. And why should it not be? Lois was a maid and Sylvester was a man whom the gods of the company had seemingly marked for favor, since they bade McConnel defer to him. Therefore, it was natural and not to be wondered at. Yet Pierre wondered. And, meantime, many another in Fort lu Cerne wondered.

Sylvester took up his unwelcome habitat in the factor's room and overstayed all precedent. He bit deep into the silent heart of McConnel, who regarded him as a traitor to the company, one unaccountably risen to high places who was not worthy. But Sylvester paid no heed to the attitude of the factor, or aught save the face of the woman for whose sake he was wakening in every fiber of his light soul.

He came to her as soon as might be on the morning after his return, groomed, neat in his garments of civilization, glowing with eagerness, half confident—for what maid of the posts would refuse to be his wife? Yet Lois received him with her calm quiet, albeit the dark eyes drooped as he came in and caught her unresisting hands.

"Is it my answer now, Lois?" he cried, flushing like a girl. "Am I to know your strange heart now?"

They were alone, old Jacques having tottered away on some quest of the aged cronies.

The girl raised to his eager face eyes clouded with a vague trouble.

"M'sieu," she faltered, "m'sieu, it is that I cannot—I who have been disgrace' before the post. It is of a presumption that Lois le Moyne, late of the guardhouse, should raise her eyes to one so far above her. It is—it is—the shadow, m'sieu—the shadow of a disgrace which must be removed. The book of accounts must be found so that the factor will absolve me—and that, m'sieu, is of the impossibility."

She drooped her high head in the best similitude of a mighty humiliation.

The man stood silent in consternation.

Presently he lifted her face with a trembling hand.

"You mean——" he said tensely.

Then the somber eyes of Lois le Moyne did not lift themselves, for in their depths was not wistful sadness such as sat boldly upon their kindred features, but a hot fire that burned with eagerness.

"That only the factor himself can absolve me, m'sieu, and that he will not," she said gently.

"Mercy of Heaven!" cried Sylvester, "you mean that McConnel knows where the book is? And that he punishes you purposely?" He shook her slightly in his excitement.

"But why, Lois—why," he demanded, "why should he do so monstrous a thing?" Then Lois looked up, and the dark wells were clear as a child's.

"You, m'sieu, are not the only man who has spoken of love to me," she lied, "though all have not received your welcome."

So was laid another step in that far-reaching plan.

Sylvester dropped her hands, and the red blood of his manhood fled into his cheeks.

"My lady," he said, with a simple dignity, "I'll make this factor wipe out in dust and blood the shadow of your punishment before Fort lu Cerne, or I will kill him!"

Bowing like a courtier, he kissed her hand, and, turning, went out of the cabin.

And Lois le Moyne, the lawless, watched him go, and a premonitory peace settled upon her spirit.

All of Fort lu Cerne knew of the encounter that ensued, and indeed the news of it was noised abroad over the whole of the north country. Wherever the trappers gathered about a camp fire, or the Cree runners slipped into the scattered habitations of the Ragged Lands, it had its telling in many tongues and with many variations. In a land where men fight, perforce, to the death with never a word and no sound but the slipping of a moose-hide shoe and the whicker of knives, it had a place in the meager speech by reason of its ferocity.

Sylvester had come upon McConnel just at the door of the big room at headquarters as he stepped out to cross the bare space before the building. Marc Baupre, idling by in the golden morning, saw and heard the beginning. The younger man's face was purple beneath its fair skin, and his light eyes were overlaid with the darkness of excitement. He stopped the factor imperiously.

"McConnel," he said swiftly without the careful thought of a just and balanced man, "McConnel, this farce has been played out. You have lorded it a little too long in Fort lu Cerne. More than once the Hudson's Bay Company has proved the shield of a factor, but never, by Heaven, to the ruin of a maid! Nor shall it do so longer here. I want that book of accounts which you have so carefully lost."

He was panting with anger and fore-

tasted authority as he spoke, and he looked McConnel straight between the eyes.

It took the slow wits of the Scotchman the better part of a minute to gather in the portent of his words. He stood there, heavy, stolid, slow, planted squarely on his two feet, his compact body easily loose with the stoppage of his stride, yet giving no impression of laxness.

"Eh?" he said; and presently: "So?"

"So. And at once," said Sylvester.

McConnel's heavy fists hanging at his sides shut slowly.

"Ye mean, Mr. Sylvester, that I have the book?" he asked.

"Just what I mean. And as one close to the governors of the Hudson's Bay Company, I want it."

There was a moment, so said Marc Baupre afterward in the telling of it, when the muscles in McConnel's great shoulders contracted into bunches and lifted in hillocks the close-fitting flannel shirt, and his whole body seemed on the point of swinging forward to the certain destruction of the slight man before him, when the features of his face settled into the deep lines that stood for inner fire. Marc held his breath that moment, expecting murder, but the next the factor straightened up, and the hands at his sides unclenched, and he turned away toward the open door behind him.

It was then that Sylvester lost his last remnant of control. He flung himself forward and caught the other by the shoulder, and the sharp staccato stroke of his sweeping arm threw McConnel around like a wheat straw, and he was a big man. Marc Baupre said it was an amazing thing, that whirling stroke, for Sylvester was slight. His pale eyes were on fire, and the anger of a man who fights for a woman dignified his form. He faced the factor in a taut hush.

"McConnel," he said huskily, "it's man to man. I'm going to kill you if I can."

Within ten breaths after they had closed, a solid circle leaned, hushed and open-mouthed, around the clear space before the factor's house.

That was a fight to tell about, indeed, around the fireplaces in the long winters, a fight wherein two men, unequally matched except in unbridled anger, in soreness and mutual dislike, strained and struggled for the supremacy. The Scotchman, in that first moment of accusation, had known he must control himself, therefore he had turned away. But Sylvester had brought it on himself. So that, with the first stroke of his doubled fist, sharp and telling, he had loosed the blood in McConnel, never far from the thin ice of a hard-won and hard-held conventionality, and the indomitable blind fighting fury of generations of unknown ancestors in the Scottish hills was let loose within the square frame of the factor.

He reached out with one great hand and caught Sylvester by the throat.

They said that he stood a minute as if considering what he should do with him, his face growing whiter and whiter as the fury rose in him, and all the misunderstanding of the past months broke the bonds of toleration. But before he could form his slow wits to a decision, Sylvester made a swift, slipping motion and twisted free.

The slender fellow did not wait for that mighty grip again, but flew at McConnel like a tiger fighting for its life. The two men clenched together, and for a space there was neither fighting nor sound of it, simply a silence as they strained and breathed, taking out their satisfaction in simple gripping anger. Then the man from the civilized ways tore apart and his face had changed. He put up a guard, taut, eager, watchful, his legs, bending slightly at the knees, a bit apart, firmly planted and ready, his fists, small but hard as iron as the whitened muscles showed, beginning their wonderful play that was to make this fight a thing to be told through many seasons.

The factor knew naught of how men fight in dusted rings with hundreds of spectators in top hats and furs, of that science and perfected knowledge that can make of a small man a thing to

fear. He had lived through his life in the savage places, where men and beasts fight with the strength the good God had given them and look to it alone for victory. Therefore, he charged headlong with all his giant strength at Sylvester standing there, to be received by an empty space as the other stepped lightly aside and a blow like the stroke of an iron sledge caught him in the temple.

He wavered a moment and caught himself, to charge again, and again Sylvester landed a blow upon him that staggered him with the immensity of its weight. Again and again McConnel flung himself at his adversary, fighting blindly with that rage which takes heed of naught but the unmeasured desire to get at and twist into shreds the thing that opposes, and again and again Sylvester met him with those terrible, staccato blows, blows that landed and came again like lightning, punishing the great, square frame of the man as with a leaded flail.

In the doorways, ever open to the doings of this little world, the women stood on tiptoe, hushed into an unwonted silence by the magnitude of the struggle. Little Jaqua, eager and impudent, peeped and peeked on the very edge of the circle of men. McConnel struck and lunged and groped, vainly struggling for a grasp of the man who eluded him as lightly as the wind, plunging toward him only to be met by a blow that blinded him, a pitiful object at last in his mighty and unavailing strength. Sylvester had not a scratch, neither was he gasping for breath as was the factor. He stepped here and there, flailing his foe with terrific and unmerciful blows, light, limber, active, his flushed face cruel in its hardness, the cold light of murder in his eyes.

There was no word spoken, by those who fought or those who watched. It was beyond the time for speech. McConnel was staggering. Over and over Sylvester struck him in the face, and with each blow this alien was saying to himself with infinite pleasure: "Take that, you befouler of women, you avenger of balked love on a helpless girl!"

Wilder and more at random became the big man's rushes; he struck at the air, being blind, he wavered wherever he heard the slip of the other's leather shoes, and made heavy attempts to get at him. He was breathing hoarsely, and more than one in the hushed circle whispered an ejaculation of amaze, for it began to show that Sylvester meant it to the death.

Picking his unhindered way to one side, he measured a spot beneath the factor's ear, a spot a trifle toward the back, and, straining forward with all his weight, he struck him with the acme of his power. McConnel went down like a shot. For a moment he lay and quivered, and not a muscle in the crowd slipped from its taut stringing. Sylvester leaned forward and watched. But this man had not lived his clean and rugged life for naught. The vitality within his giant frame was not to give up without its last ounce of resistance. He lifted his blind head and crawled, first to his knees, and then, wavering, to his feet, still reaching darkly for Sylvester. The other waited until he was steadier on his feet and then went back to his punishment. In every heart in Fort lu Cerne had smoldered blame of the factor, but even so this was beyond enduring, this unthinkable punishing that was beating slowly into the thing he was, a strong man.

Young Henri Corlier, with the impetuosity of youth, cried aloud:

"It is enough, m'sieu!"

But Sylvester paid no heed. There was no mercy in his unrelenting face. He was keeping his word to Lois, and he meant to keep it to the letter. He knew with his sharp instinct that he would never be able to force atonement from McConnel living, therefore he meant to kill him.

And he would surely have done it had not the power of Chance taken it out of his hands—Chance, the protector of the under dog, who at the last moment, when McConnel was panting and veritably near his death, with all the strength of his big hands still flowing

in them in an agony of desire to get hold of some tangible thing that they might wring, there fell within the scope of them, groping, one of Sylvester's wrists as he reached for the landing of another stroke. That great hand, groping blindly, snapped shut. There was a sharp report, and the bone cracked smartly. McConnel drew Sylvester to him, and his wavering fingers crept up to his throat. They fastened there, and clung, and the silent circle leaned farther forward. For a moment they stood, swaying drunkenly as the greater weight of McConnel dominated them both, and at last the flying, nimble form of Sylvester was still, terribly still in that grip that had been dying, literally, with its might unexpended.

Not a muscle of Sylvester's writhing body availed him. In a breath the tables had been turned completely. McConnel was killing him. The red blood in his face became blue-black, his mouth gagged open, his eyes started. And so just did it seem at the moment that those gathered there uttered no sound, forgetting who it was that McConnel held across his swaying knees.

And then of a sudden the big man straightened up, his fingers relaxed their terrific grasp, and Sylvester slid to the ground.

"Tak' him awa'," he said thickly; "tak' him awa'."

CHAPTER X.

MESHES OF A TANGLED WEB.

They did take him away, when he had regained his breath, and since the small room at headquarters was henceforth to be too small to hold them both, it was destined for the cabin of Blanc Corlier to have the honor of holding this stranger who bore the mystic seal of the company's approbation. He walked among them, upright, holding his dangling right hand in his left, and the thin, flushed face of him was a study in its defeat. Palo le Roc, quiet and resourceful, picked up on the way a little slab and split it into many. When they had reached the cabin, he took command, and with deft fingers and the cunning of the Crees, whom he knew well, he set the broken bones in a wound splint. It was a neat thing, quick and common, and it ended the incident, except for the sight of McConnel going slowly with wavering steps that took more time than had the longer journey to accomplish, across the steps of headquarters.

He was alone and sorely bruised, yet none accompanied him. So ever begins the fall of those who rule.

"'Tis a wild state the post is coming to, Lois," said Marcel, next day, with furrowed brows. "The factor, he keep' indoors, an' the other nurse' his broken wrist all las' night, so Blanc, he tell Eustace this morning, an' I don' like the copper mist in the Red Hills yonder. An evil time looks from the future upon Fort lu Cerne. I wish that Father Tenau was due from Henriette."

And she looked uneasily toward her cabin, where her pathetic idol, the child, lingered in sleep.

Lois, tending her work of the house, smiled slowly.

"Cease the worry, Marcel," she said, "'tis no spirit work, the state of things, and the Red Hills have cast their light before."

"But only to presage the pestilence, ma chérie—I feel the creeps, an' Simple John come' whisperin' in the dusk las' night of the great sickness. I am vex' with that Simple John. He whisper—so—an' wave the hand to the north, an' be mysterious an' pass on in the night toward headquarters. 'Tis of a strangeness how the factor lets him come an' go like one of the company itself. An' Father Tenau not due for another month!"

The usual cheer of Marcel had deserted her. She went back along the wide way between the cabins, and the furrow was still between her brows.

But Lois le Moyne worked at the shining cabin with a calm face.

Far out on the banks of Wau-gash stream Pierre Vernaise gloomed sullenly beside a tiny fire that crackled merrily in the warm sun, his gun forgotten beside him, and the heart in his

breast sore with a new sadness that would not be assuaged, nor find curing, as had all previous troubles of its kind, in the laughter of the next woman's face. An aching sadness sat upon the soul of the merry youth that softened it beyond belief, filling it with a dim longing for the greater things, the yearning of self-worthiness, the desire of sacrifice. Those diffident loiterings at the guardhouse window had done more to turn to higher ways the currents of his life than had all the prayers and penances of the good father. This day he battled with himself, and strove to down the murder lust that assailed him at thought of Sylvester, because love had been born within him in its rightful name, the love that lays down its life for the beloved, a new thing to Pierre Vernaise.

At the Corlier cabin, Sylvester with frowns of vexation labored to present his customary appearance of natty clothes and silky hair and beard, grooming himself with one awkward hand, the while uncertain thoughts surged through his mind. He had done his best for this girl, whose winning possessed him like a mania, had honestly tried to kill a man that the shadow of disgrace might be removed from her beholding eyes, had failed, completely and unexpectedly, and now he was uncertain, for the first time really concerned, about the outcome.

She was not like any woman that he had known, this Lois, with her wonderful promise of hidden things and her belying face and poise. Too often he had seen the melting look in her face follow swiftly on that of cold and frowning hauteur. Which was truth? Which was the real Lois? For the soul of him, he could not tell, and the uncertainty fired his longing for her to a more consuming flame. He would have her against all things, even herself, if need be. So he preened and thought.

And in the rough sanctuary of headquarters on this morning there sat one other figure in this small drama of the wilderness—McConnel, the factor, with his stern face, bruised and blackened, bent silently at his accustomed work. Not a line of him had lost its suggestion of massive strength, no tremor of the giant form betrayed a lessening of the stern zeal that had made him serve his god, the H. B. Company forever, even at the galling cost of his own desire.

What thoughts kept him company, what disciplining his primeval spirit, surging sullenly within him, received at his own hands, none might know. He took no notice of those of the populace who passed softly by the open door, nor did he seem to take any pains to avoid them. Once he accosted Marc Baupre and sent him on some matter of daily affair to the cabin of a trapper beside the southern wall.

A tight-drawn feeling of strain settled down on the little settlement so lost in the great wilderness of forest and blue sky.

The days crept away, warmer, longer in their hours of sunlight, more languorous, bringing in the full glow of the short summer of the north country, and for a time nothing changed in Fort la Corne.

Big Jean Mercier still lay on the bed in the corner of his cabin, a pitiful shadow of the mighty man he had been, with Marie tending by hand and foot in an uneasy anxiety that grew with the passing days. Marcel Roque sang to her child in the soft evenings, and little Jaqua began to sit for hours staring into the dusk with big eyes that saw only pictures of a handsome youth afar on the wandering trails.

As for Lois le Moyne, she passed back and forth as she had ever done, silent, apart, bearing herself with her old poise that had changed neither with the shame of imprisonment or the pride of conquest that flaunted itself openly in Sylvester's devotion. Not a maid in the post but envied her, not a matron but thought of her chance of worldly gain, of the vistas that stretched before her in the centers of civilization far below the gloom of the north forest. For Sylvester paid her open court, begging with eloquent eyes and lips for the decision that he sought.

But Lois hung her head, and the

straight line of her lips drooped pathetically at the corners.

"No," she said ever, "no, m'sieu," and the slim fingers plaited the print of her gown. "I cannot. It is of the bitterness, the shadow that would stand before my face in the future. It would be madness, m'sieu. No."

Whereat Sylvester would rage in his impotence, despairing of success; and the flame of his love flared higher. Which thing did not escape the girl.

"I swear that I will kill this factor so soon as I can hold a gun! He shall pay the debt of your ignominy with his life. Then it will be all clear, Lois, and you will marry me then and come away with me? The summer is here, and the journey down will be a dream of heaven with the blue sky and the cool woods and the stars at night. I will forego my ambition of advancement. When I wipe it clear, you will come to me?"

But the pensiveness did not leave her face with his passionate words. "And what would his death avail to me, m'sieu? That is quick and merciful, the instant going out, and there would still remain the shadow. 'Twould be, what think you, m'sieu, of atonement for those bitter nights when one, innocent, lay in the dark of the guardhouse while those outside whispered among themselves? Ah, m'sieu, my friend, death would strike him in a callous place. He would not care for that. What is death to the humiliation that eats the very soul? You have my thanks, my deep thanks that will not forget, for the kindness of the thought, but—no. Some day I will avenge myself."

And, saying that, she would say no more, and Sylvester went away feeling in his shallow soul such anguish of desire as filled him with a scourging pain.

On the banks of the small streams the great red lilies flaunted their glowing beauty to the peeping sky, and by her door the golden trailer that Pierre had brought to Lois at the guardhouse lifted bravely great golden-throated bells.

There was no work in Fort lu Cerne. This was the season of idleness, and the trappers lounged and gossiped, for there was much to feed the whispered speech these days.

In the warm sun the old men, tottering on their sticks, gathered in little knots and talked with senile laughter of all things, though when old Jacques, brave in his finery of fringed leggings, of soft shirt and flaunting sash, for he had never lost his love of gay colors, came near they ceased the whispers and spoke of other things. And these old men were not the only ones who tattled in speculation of many sorts.

The women, ever hardest to their kind, never tired of finding reasons for the strange doings and silences of Lois le Moyne who had lain in the guardhouse rather than tell of that visit to the factor's room in the shameful dusk, nor of whispering of two men who fought because of her, yet one loved her and the other punished her. It was, of a truth, a fruitful subject and one that seemed to give promise of many things all of which bore the stamp of mystery and excitement. For Marcel Roque, loyal, fiery, ever ready with that tongue of hers which was as a two-edged blade, there was unending scope.

Coming unexpectedly upon a group of women by the well who filled their pails and chattered with unwholesome unction, she sailed in among them and flayed them without mercy.

"Take shame!" she cried, "you, Lucil du Bois, who have a daughter of your own of the same years as Lois! A mother, an' you talk, so, like an evil witch, of the girl! Take the care, Lucil, that it does not come home to you, your evil word, an' roost on your own doorstep. Mon Dieu! You women! I am shame' for you. Have you naught better to talk about? An' Lois, who never had a mother! Pick at her back like the vultures that wait for the moose to die. You don't say the same to the girl's face! Voila! A brave lot! But it is ever so. Never one is above the many in face and heart and soul but the little ones they whisper an' laugh an' talk to hide their own smallness! I am the friend of Lois, an' you talk not so while I am round—your hear me, all."

But over and over, by day and night, she fought Lois' battles and thereby fed and strengthened her own loyal love of the girl, for not even her sturdy defense could stop the tongues that found diversion only in the little happenings of the tiny world of the stockade.

They looked askance at Lois, even the while they envied her, for her beauty, for her unbending calm, and the contempt that sat so openly on her brow, for the devotion of Sylvester, and even for the hatred that she seemed to compel from McConnel, the silent, who vouchsafed to no other woman even the compliment of dislike.

Warmer and yet warmer grew the days. Over the distant hills to the north, the dull copper haze deepened and spread its uncanny hue across the heavens. Many an eye in that vast wilderness of country watched it uneasily, the white settlers at the posts, the red dwellers in the forests, gazing alike at its portentous glow and making obeisance to their different gods. The wise old heads shook, and the tongues of experience prophesied. In the villages of the Ojibways, thin columns of smoke arose from the ceremonial fires, and they danced the spirit dance. This Pierre Vernaise knew, for he wandered among them at last, driven by the sadness that would not let him rest or return to the post because of the fear that he might find it empty with an intolerable loneliness, Lois le Moyne having gone the long trail with the blond man from Henriette.

The Ojibways were hospitable, being friends of the post, and their fires were open to him. Here he found a peace which the forest had not given, for the dark-skinned people made room for him with a stately welcome and then let him sit among them without question, only Mahwahna, a grave and wrinkled chief, ever speaking of the trouble that sat upon the young man's face.

They smoked the peace pipe at Mahwahna's fire in the warm evening, for an Indian camp is not a camp without its fire though it be only a slim spiral of blue smoke above a coal or two, and the old man gravely scanned the other's features.

"My brother is sad," he said simply; "if it be matter of debt at the H. B. Company, there be many ponies in the herd of Mahwahna. Also, there be some skins not yet traded."

The changing eyes of the French half-breed clouded with quick moisture.

"Mahwahna is indeed my brother and my friend," he said, speaking in the Ojibway tongue, "whose words I shall keep in my heart, but mine is a trouble which he cannot help—a trouble of a woman."

So Pierre was left to smoke and ponder with a courtesy perfect in its kindness. He watched the ceremonies that went on day by day, and presently he questioned.

"My brothers fear a disaster?" he asked.

"The Spirit of the Great Sickness hovers over the north woods," they told him, "and Oshonee, medicine man, has seen the canoe of the Damned sail through the sky at the close of day. Also the loup-garou has cried three nights in the forest."

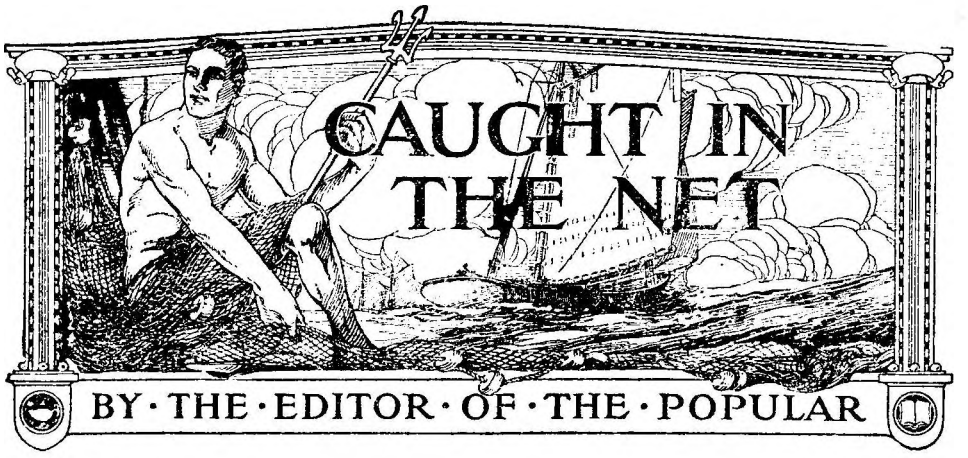
And Pierre, half Indian himself, crossed himself, and a new uneasiness was added to his heavy load. He thought of Fort la Cerne, and wondered sadly if Lois and Sylvester were gone. He hoped that they were.

The great sickness that falls but once in a matter of twenty years is a thing to fear, sparing none, reaching with its skeleton hand for those whom it should pass—the young, the strong, the beautiful.

So Pierre got from Mahwahna a candle with the stamp of the H. B. Company in its tallow side and burned it before the small crucifix which he carried always in his pocket.

TO BE CONTINUED.

The second part of this story will appear in the January month-end POPULAR, on sale two weeks hence, December 23rd.



AS OTHERS SEE US

THAT Scotch poet, who so fervently wished for the human family the gift to see ourselves as others see us, made his verse, like most poets, without wasting any time investigating the truth of the matter. To see ourselves as others see us would be a calamity. While it might save us from some unseemly blunders and top-heavy egotisms, which, after all, are rather harmless, it would stifle initiative and blight spontaneity and take the joy out of living.

One of the finest things in a man is a belief in himself and a feeling that what he does is worth while. It is that which carries him through drudgery and discouragement, and gives him a feeling at tired evening that the day was well. This same quality of mind which concentrates him on his own work, naturally makes work outside of his line appear relatively unimportant. The great electrical inventor, and the man who makes two blades of grass grow in one garden, do not waste much time admiring each other. The free-and-easy novelist laughs at the scientist, swelling with pride over the greatness he has achieved in discovering the slant of a grasshopper's eyebrows; while the scientist scorns the novelist's best seller.

Not only in a relative way, but actually his neighbors often do not see a man's real greatness. A flaming prophet may seem only a fanatic; an original thinker a fool. And if a man, working at white heat upon the task that seems to him good, could see the look of indifference, and ridicule, and scorn that others often turn upon him, how his ardor would cool, and his heart grow sick. No, it is a blessed thing that each can work in his own particular sphere; and see himself not as others see him, but as he hopes to be seen when that work is finished.

THE TEXTILE BOOM

THE greatest textile boom in the history of the world may come with the next change in styles. Women are wearing less clothes than at any time in a century, and are being scolded and derided for it. The man who pays the bills will have reason for more grief when fashion decrees a voluminous skirt.

The production of wool and cotton is not keeping up with the demand. Africa and Asia have become big markets for cotton and woolen goods. China is using four times the amount of cotton stuffs she did in 1900. South America is expanding at a great rate, and the opening of the canal will stimulate her growth still more.

The world depends upon the United States for its cotton. There is a fair amount of cotton grown in India, Egypt, Peru, and elsewhere, but the Southern States raise approximately sixty-six and two-thirds per cent of all the cotton that is grown. At the end of the season 1912-1913 the visible supply of American cotton was less than one million bales. As the world now consumes on an average one million two hundred thousand bales of American cotton a month, the margin is very narrow. Were it not that the world has an invisible supply—the cotton held in the mills by spinners—the situation would be serious.

The cotton crop of last year was of fair size. The crop of the coming season is not likely to be much larger, for the increase in acreage is less than three per cent, and the plant had a poor start.

The South, once wedded to cotton, is finding profit in diversifying crops. The labor problem has had something to do with it. Year after year the planter finds more and more difficulty in getting sufficient hands to pick his cotton.

The world will want decidedly more cotton when fashion decides that woman should be garbed in yards and yards of material instead of the slit skirt. When that time comes, all the mills of the world will have to draw on their reserve stocks to meet the demand. Every spindle will be employed, and the looms will know no rest. And, incidentally, cotton and wool will go to prices suggestive of war times.

RAILROAD MANAGEMENT

RAILROADS in the United States are doing the largest business in the history of the country. Their gross earnings are colossal. Against their bitter opposition they have been forced to abandon many of their bad and extravagant ways. The free pass, which cost the transportation companies millions of dollars annually, is a thing of memory. So is the cut-rate ticket. No longer the general passenger agent, who desires to make a showing for his department, enters into deals with scalpers. The general freight agent cannot, without danger of criminal prosecution, offer rebates to shippers of goods, or reduce the regular tariff. The government has made rates stable. A railroad cannot increase or lower its scheduled price for any kind of transportation service without furnishing a good reason for the change, and then obtaining permission. In many States railroads cannot issue new stocks or bonds without the sanction of a railroad commission or a public-service board.

All these restrictions have been safeguards against the follies that once beset the railroad business. They have been of immense benefit to the public and profit to the companies, yet, throughout the land, railroad chiefs are giving voice regularly to the most doleful predictions as to what will happen if the authorities do not stop interfering with them.

E. P. Ripley, president of the Atchison, ha. declared that many transportation companies will be forced into bankruptcy unless permitted to raise their tariffs, and, periodically, the interstate commerce commission is appealed to by the august presidents to "have a heart." It is true the high cost of living has affected the railroad adversely, but it also is true that there still is widespread extravagance in the transportation field that can be corrected whenever the masters of the rail set seriously to work on the problem. The waste in the use of cars is a horror. L. F. Loree, president of the Delaware & Hudson Railroad, is authority for the statement that the two million five hundred thousand freight cars in the United States are in service, on an average, only a trifle more than two hours a day. Certainly there must be great looseness in the system of loading, unloading, switching, and distribution, when such a condition prevails.

Any time the railroads standardize freight cars they will save millions of dollars. To-day there are thousands of different kinds of freight cars. Every

railroad has its cars built according to the whim or fancy of its car designer. This makes the cars more costly to build and more costly to use. When, for example, a Denver & Rio Grande car is damaged some place in the East, the repair-shop men of the Eastern railroad have to send to the Denver & Rio Grande shops for the parts necessary to restore the car to good condition. The car may, as a consequence, be laid up for a month.

A plan has been suggested to abolish all these independent car-designing follies, and have all railroads support a central-car association under the direction of the Master Car Builders or the American Railway Association, which would bring about complete standardization of freight equipment. This probably would save one hundred dollars per car per year. That would mean twenty-five million dollars annually, as the life for a freight car is approximately ten years.

The greatest waste of all in railroading is Wall Street. It has become the fashion to never pay a debt. When an obligation falls due a new loan is negotiated to wipe out the old one. The rate of which the new money has been obtained has risen steadily. There is one recent instance of a company paying sixteen per cent. That, of course, was extreme. Another railroad congratulated itself when it succeeded in floating sixty-three million dollars in bonds to pay off a fifty-million-dollar obligation. Borrowing from Peter to pay Paul is bad business. That is not the method employed in sound merchandising. Railroading is merchandising. The railroads sell transportation. When the railroads cease wasting their substance in commissions to big banking houses, and learn to use their equipment more economically, less will be heard of the hardships imposed upon them by governmental restrictions.

THE PERFECT BARTENDER

PERHAPS the most remarkable suggestion for the improvement of the American saloon has been advanced by William W. Dolph, a liquor dealer of Detroit, Michigan. He says the saloon keeper and bartender maintain as close, if not a closer, relationship to the male population than does the druggist, and he asks why a pharmacist should have to study for years and pass a mental and a character examination, while the ranks of saloon keepers and barfenders may be recruited from the lowest walks of society. He says the liquor question is an ever-present problem, and the saloons will be with us as long as man is on earth. That being the case, he thinks the best thing to do is to improve their character and safeguard them. He would license bartenders as pharmacists are licensed, and hold them to an accountability as strict. Revocation of a license would drive an offender out of the business.

Dolph can make this suggestion with good grace. He is known as the model saloon keeper of the City of Straits. He will not sell to a minor or a woman. He does nothing to attract custom. It has been said that he is the greatest influence for temperance in Detroit. He does not permit treating, card playing, or dice shaking in either of his saloons. There are no mirrors in his places, no "third rail," no display of bottles, and he never has served a mixed drink. Any person who utters profane language is asked to depart, and a loud or boisterous visitor is requested to go elsewhere. He prefers to sell beer to whisky, and patrons are limited to four drinks a day. He refuses credit, obeys the laws strictly, and wants the patronage of only those persons who drink moderately and abominate vulgarity and noise. One of his saloons is in a manufacturing center, and the other on the water front near the Windsor Ferry. On nights when there are prize fights in Windsor he closes his water-front saloon, because he does not want roughs and plug-uglies about his establishments. Once he did as other barkeepers did, keeping his resort open after hours and on Sunday.

Violating the law did not pay so well, he says, as obeying it. His receipts for six days exceed what they were for seven.

A bishop of the diocese of New York started a saloon about nine years ago, and the present commissioner of the fire department managed it. It was designed to be a model. You could get ice cream, soda water, cream puffs, a Manhattan cocktail, or brandy and soda at the same counter. It was a flat failure, despite such advertising as no other drinking place in America ever received. One of the results was to increase the patronage of near-by barrooms. Dolph's experience has been the reverse. He has prospered, and saloons near his places have been forced to close. He does what he suggests others should do. Of his twenty-four employees, eight are teetotalers, and nine are nonsmokers. Applicants for jobs are subjected to a more rigid examination as to character and general qualifications than if they were seeking employment in a drug store.

THE FRATERNITY THAT SLIPPED

AT one leap Alpha Delta Phi has become the most famous fraternity in the land. For decades it has been neck and neck with other brotherhoods. But at last, after panting effort, it emerges clear from the throng. It has voted Manhattan Chapter out of the fraternity. Manhattan Chapter is the branch situated in the College of the City of New York. For fifty-eight years it has been a chapter of the fraternity. But now twenty out of twenty-four chapters in other colleges have voted to expel it. Groups of boys in twenty American colleges have found the College of the City of New York an unfit associate. They have made the discovery that the "numerical preponderance of Jewish students" renders the college not a "fertile field for Alpha Delta Phi." It is stated that the fraternity is not a "social servant," nor a "weapon in the war of uplift."

These boys have not abolished Manhattan Chapter, nor the College of the City of New York, but at one stroke they have abolished Alpha Delta Phi, unless it swiftly repudiates its own vote. The College of the City of New York, like the University of Wisconsin, is an institution of which the nation is proud. We are proud of these two institutions because they are not rich men's colleges, because scholarship is honored, and because good citizenship results. We have yet to learn that Hebrew boys who have fought their way up from poverty are lacking in mental gifts and in character. It is notorious that they are diligent students, of exemplary behavior, of college loyalty, of a patriotism that often shames our "old American stock."

Carl R. Ganter, of Kenyon College, a New York lawyer, is one of those who were instrumental in the exclusion of Manhattan Chapter.

CHANGE

THE restless tides of this generation go sweeping by. In the fierceness of their urge, we think they will leap their banks, and channel new courses, striking to some undreamed goal. Caught into that speed and freshness, we become heady with the flight, and believe we are outpacing the eternal process, and already have distanced the ancient goal.

But no frenzy of motion can alter the sure direction, nor escape the final destination. It is the same unchanging river, through which the currents cut, swaying the waters in their grip, but leaving the bed and the channel untroubled, and the banks unfretted by their foam and bluster. And at the end of that blind rush, the sea waits, as of old.

Owsley and the 1601

By Frank L. Packard

Author of "On the Night Wire," "The Squealer," Etc.

Owsley the engineer's case is by no means rare. He loved his engine with a passion as engrossing as the love of a man for a woman. An undreamed-of fatality o'ertook him, but Owsley and the 1601 were linked with a chain that no human hands could break

HIS name was Owsley—Jake Owsley—and he was a railroad man before ever he came to Big Cloud and the Hill Division—before ever the Hill Division was even advanced to the blue-print stage, before steel had ever spider-webbed the stubborn Rockies, before the herculean task of bridging a continent was more than a thought in even the most ambitious minds.

Owsley was an engineer, and he came from the East when they broke ground at Big Cloud for a start toward the western goal through the mighty range, a comparatively young man—thirty, or thereabouts. Then, inch by inch and foot by foot, Owsley, with his ballast cars and his boxes and his flats bumping material behind him, followed the construction gangs as they burrowed and blasted and trestled their way along—day in, day out, month in, month out, until the years went by, and they were through the Rockies, with the coast and the blue of the Pacific in sight.

First over every bridge and culvert, first through every cut, first through every tunnel shorn in the bitter gray rock of the mountainsides, the pilot of Owsley's engine nosed its way; and, when the rough of the work was over, and in the hysteria of celebration, the toll of lives, the hardships and the cost were forgotten for the moment, and the directors and their guests crowded the cab and perched on running boards and footplates till you couldn't see the bunting they'd draped the engine with, and the mahogany coaches behind looked like the striped sticks of candy the kids buy, on account of more bunting, and then some, and the local band they'd brought along from Big Cloud got the mouthpieces of their trombones and cornets mixed up with the necks of champagne bottles, and the Indian braves squatted gravely at different points along the trackside and thought their white brothers had gone mad, Owsley was at the throttle for the first through run over the division—it was Owsley's due.

Then other years went by, and the steel was shaken down into the permanent right of way that is an engineering marvel to-day, and Owsley still held a throttle on a through run—just kept growing a little older, that was all—but one of the best of them, for all that—steadier than the younger men, wise in experience, and with a love for his engine that was like the love of a man for a woman.

It's a strange thing, perhaps, a love like that; but, strange or not, there was never an engineer worth his salt who hasn't had it—some more than others, of course—as some men's love for a woman is deeper than others. With Owsley it came pretty near being the whole thing, and it was queer enough to see him when they'd change his engine to give him a newer and more improved type for a running mate. He'd refuse point-blank at first to be separated from the obsolete engine, that was

either carded for some local jerkwater, mixed-freight run, or for a construction job somewhere.

"Leave me with her," he'd say to Regan, the master mechanic. "Leave me with her. You can give my run to some one else, Regan, d'ye mind? It's little I care for the swell run; me and the old girl sticks. I'll have nothing else."

But Regan, the bluff, fat, big-hearted, good-natured, little master mechanic, knew his man—and he knew an engineer when he saw one—Regan would no more have thought of letting Owsley get away from the Imperial's throttle than he would have thought of putting call boys in the cabs to run his engines.

"H'm!" he would say, blinking fast at Owsley. "Feel that way, do you? Well, then, mabbe it's about time you quit altogether. I didn't offer you your choice, did I? You take the Imperial with what I give you to take her with—or take nothing. Think it over!"

And Owsley, perforce, had to "think it over"—and, perforce, he stayed on the Limited run.

Came then the day when changes in engine types were not so frequent, and a fair maximum in machine-design efficiency had been obtained—and Owsley came to love, more than he had ever loved any engine before, his big, powerful, 1600-class racer, with its four pairs of massive drivers, that took the curves with the grace of a circling bird, that laughed in glee at anything lower than a three per cent grade, and tackled the "fives" with no more than a grunt of disdain—Owsley and the 1601, right from the start, clipped fifty-five minutes off the running time of the Imperial Limited through the Rockies, where before it had been nip and tuck to make the old schedule anywhere near the dot.

For three years it was Owsley and the 1601; for three years east and west through the mountains—and a smile in the roundhouse at him as he nursed and cuddled and groomed his big flyer, in from a run. Not now—they don't smile now about it. It was Owsley and the 1601 for three years—and at the end it was still Owsley and the 1601. The two are coupled together—they never speak of one on the Hill Division without the other—Owsley and the 1601.

Owsley! One of the old guard who answered the roll call at the birth of the Hill Division! Forty years a railroader—call boy at ten—twenty years of service on the Hill Division! Straight and upright as a young sapling at fifty-five, with a swing through the gangway that the younger men tried to imitate; hair short cropped, a little grizzled; gray, steady eyes; a beard whose color, once brown, was nondescript, kind of shading tawny and gray in streaks; a slim, little man, overalled and jumpered, with greasy, peaked cap—and wifeless, without kith or kin, save his engine, the star boarder at Mrs. McCann's short-order house. Liked by everybody, known by everybody on the division down to the last Polack construction hand, quiet, no bluster about him, full of good-humored fun, ready to take his part or do his share in anything going, from a lodge minstrel show to sitting up all night and playing trained nurse to anybody that needed one—that was Owsley.

Elbow Bend, were it not for the insurmountable obstacles that Dame Nature had seen fit to place there—the bed of the Glacier River on one side and a sheer rock base of mountain on the other—would have been a black mark against the record of the engineering corps who built the station. Speaking generally, it's not good railroad practice to put a station on a curve—when it can be helped. Elbow Bend, the whole of it, main line and siding, made a curve—that's how it got its name. And yet, in a way, it wasn't the curve that was to blame; though, too, in a way, it was—Owsley had a patched eye that night from a bit of steel that had got into it in the afternoon, nothing much, but a patch on it to keep the cold and the sweep of the wind out.

It was the eastbound run, and, to make up for the loss of time a slow order over new construction work back a dozen miles or so had cost him, the

1601 was hitting a pretty fast clip as he whistled for Elbow Bend. Owsley checked just a little as he nosed the curve—the Imperial Limited made no stop at Elbow Bend—and then, as the 1601 sort of got her footing, so to speak, as she swept from the tangent, he opened her out again, and the storm of exhausts from her short, stubby stack went echoing through the mountains like the play of artillery.

The light of the west-end siding switch flashed by like a scintillating gem in the darkness. Brannigan, Owsley's fireman, pulled his door, shooting the cab and the heavens full of leaping, fiery red, and swung to the tender for a shovelful of coal. Owsley, crouched a little forward in his seat, his body braced against the cant of the mogul on the curve, was "feeling" the throttle with careful hand, as he peered ahead through the cab glass. Came the station lights; the black bulk of a locomotive, cascading steam from her safety, on the siding; and then the thundering reverberation as the 1601 began to sweep past a long, curving line of boxes, flats, and gondolas, the end of which Owsley could not see—for the curve.

Owsley relaxed a little. That was right—Extra No. 49, west, was to cross him at Elbow Bend—and she was on the siding as she should be. His headlight, streaming out at a tangent to the curve, played its ray kaleidoscopically along the sides of the string of freights, now edging the roof of a box car, now opening a hole to the gray rock of the cut when a flat or two intervened—and then, sudden, quick as doom, with a yell from his fireman ringing in his ears, Owsley, his jaws clamping like a steel trap, flung his arm forward, jamming the throttle shut, while with the other hand he grabbed at the "air."

Owsley had seen it, too—as quick as Brannigan—a figure, arms waving frantically, for a fleeting second strangely silhouetted in the dancing headlight's glare on the roof of one of the box cars.

A wild shout from the man, fluttering, indistinguishable, reached them as they roared by—then the grind and scream of brake shoes as the "air" went on—the answering shudder vibrating through the cab of the big racer—the meeting clash of buffer plates echoing down the length of the train behind—and a queer, obstructing blackness dead ahead ere the headlight, tardy in its sweep, could point the way—but Owsley knew now—too late.

Brannigan screamed in his ear.

"She ain't in the clear!" he screamed. "It's a swipe! She ain't in the clear!" he screamed again—and took a flying leap through the offside gangway.

Owsley never turned his head—only stood there, grim-faced, tight-lipped, facing what was to come—facing it with clear head, quick brain, doing what he could to lessen the disaster, as forty years had schooled him to face emergency. Owsley—for forty years with his record, until that moment, as clean and unsmirched as the day he started as a kid calling train crews back in the little division town on the Penn in the far East! Strange it should come to Owsley, the one man of all you'd never think it would! It's hard to understand the running orders of the Great Trainmaster sometimes—isn't it? And sometimes it doesn't help much to realize that we never will understand this side of the Great Divide—does it?

The headlight caught it now—seemed to gloat upon it in a flood of blazing, insolent light—the rear cars of the freight, crawling frantically from the main line to the siding—then the pitiful yellow from the cupola of the caboose, the light from below filtering up through the windows. It seared into Owsley's brain lightning quick, but vivid in every detail in a horrible, fascinating way. It was a second, the fraction of a second, since Brannigan had jumped—it might have been an hour.

The front of the caboose seemed to leap suddenly at the 1601—seemed to rise up in the air and hurl itself at the straining engine as though in impotent fury at unwarranted attack. There was a terrific crash, the groan and rend of timber, the sickening grind and

crunch as the van went to matchwood —the débris hurtling along the running boards, shattering the cab glass in flying splinters—and Owsley dropped where he stood—like a log. And the pony truck caught the tongue of the open switch, and, with a vicious, nasty lurch, the 1601 wrenched herself loose from her string of coaches, staggered like a lost and drunken soul a few yards along the ties—and turned turtle in the ditch.

It was a bad spill, but might have been worse, a great deal worse—a box car and the van for the junk heap, and the 1601 for the shops to repair fractures—and nobody hurt except Owsley.

But they couldn't make head or tail of the cause of it. Everybody went on the carpet for it—and still it was a mystery. The main line was clear at the west end of the siding, and the switch was right—all agreed to that, and it showed that way on the face of it—and that was as it should have been.

The operator at Elbow Bend swore that he had shown his red, and that it was showing when the Limited swept by. He said he knew it was going to be a close shave whether the freight, a little late and crowding the Limited's running time, would be clear of the main line without delaying the express, and he had shown his red before ever he had heard her whistle—his red was showing. The engine crew and the train crew of Extra No. 49, west, backed the operator up—the red was showing.

Brannigan, the fireman, didn't count as a witness—the only light he'd seen at all was the west-end switch light, the curve had hidden anything ahead until after he'd pulled his door and turned to the tender for coal, and by then they were past the station. And Owsley, pretty badly smashed up, and in bed down in Mrs. McCann's short-order house, talked kind of queer when he got around to where he could talk at all. They asked him what color light the station semaphore was showing, and Owsley said white—white as the moon. That's what he said—white as the moon. And they weren't quite sure he understood what they were driving at.

For a week that's all they could make out of it, and then, with Regan scratching his head over it one day in confab with Carleton, the superintendent, it came, more by chance than anything else.

"Blamed if I know what to make of it!" he growled. "Ordinary, six men's words would be the end of it—but Owsley's the best man that ever latched a throttle in our cabs, and for twenty years his record's cleaner than a baby's. What he says now don't count, because he ain't right again yet—but what you can't get away from is the fact that Owsley's not the man to have slipped a signal. Either the six of them are doing him cold to save their own skins, or there's something queer about it."

Carleton—"Royal" Carleton—in his grave, quiet way, shook his head.

"We've been trying hard enough to get to the bottom of it, Tommy," he said. "I wish to Heaven we could. I don't think the men are lying—they tell a pretty straight story. I've been wondering about that patch Owsley had on his eye, and——"

"What's that got to do with it?" cut in the blunt, little master mechanic, who made no bones about his fondness for the engineer. "He isn't blind in the other, is he?"

Carleton stared at the master mechanic for a moment, pulling ruminatively at his brier; then—they were in the super's office at the time—his fist came down with a sudden bang upon the desk.

"I believe you've got it, Tommy!" he exclaimed.

"Believe I've got it!" echoed Regan, and his hand, halfway to his mouth with his plug of "chewing," stopped in midair. "Got what? I said he wasn't blind in the other, and neither he is—you know that as well as I do."

"Wait!" said Carleton. "It's very rare, I know, but it seems to me I've heard of it. Wait a minute, Tommy."

He was leaning over from his chair and twirling the little revolving bookcase beside the desk as he spoke—not

a large library was Carleton's, just a few technical books, and his cherished Britannica. He pulled out a volume of the encyclopedia, laid it upon his desk, and began to turn the leaves. "Yes; here it is," he said, after a moment. "Listen"—and he commenced to read rapidly:

"'The most common form of Daltonism'—that's color blindness, you know, Tommy—'depends on the absence of the red sense. Great additions to our knowledge of this subject, if only in confirmation of results already deduced from theory, have been obtained in the last few years by Holmgren, who has experimented on two persons, each of whom was found to have *one color-blind eye*, the other being nearly normal.'"

"Color-blind!" spluttered the master mechanic.

"In one eye," said Carleton, sort of as though he were turning a problem over in his mind. "That would account for it all, Tommy. As far as I know, one doesn't go color-blind—one is born that way—and if this is what's at the bottom of it, Owsley's been color-blind all his life in one eye, and probably didn't know what was the matter. That would account for his passing the tests, and would account for what happened at Elbow Bend. It was the patch that did it—you remember what he said—the light was white as the moon."

"And he's out!" stormed Regan. "Out for keeps—after forty years. Say, d'ye know what this'll mean to Owsley—do you, eh, do you? It'll be hell for him, Carleton—he thinks more of his engine than a woman does of her child."

Carleton closed the volume and replaced it mechanically in the bookcase.

Regan's teeth met in his plug and jerked savagely at the tobacco.

"I wish to blazes you hadn't read that!" he muttered fiercely. "What's to be done now?"

"I'm afraid there's only one thing to be done," Carleton answered gravely. "Sentiment doesn't let us out—there's too many lives at stake every time he takes out an engine. He'll have to try the color test with a patch over the same eye he had it on that night. Perhaps, after all, I'm wrong, and——"

"He's out!" said the master mechanic gruffly. "He's out—I don't need any test to know that now. That's what's the matter and no other thing on earth. It's rough, ain't it—after forty years?"—and Regan, with a short laugh, strode to the window and stood staring out at the choked railroad yards below him.

And Regan was right. Three weeks later, when he got out of bed, Owsley took the color test under the queerest conditions that ever a railroad man took it—with his right eye bandaged—and failed utterly.

But Owsley didn't quite seem to understand—and little Doctor McTurk, the company surgeon, was badly worried, and had been all along. Owsley was a long way from being the same Owsley he was before the accident. Not physically—that way he was shaping up pretty well, but his head seemed to bother him—he seemed to have lost his grip on a whole lot of things. They gave him the test more to settle the point in their own minds, but they knew before they gave it to him that it wasn't much use as far as he was concerned, one way or the other—there was more than a mere matter of color wrong with Owsley now—and maybe that was the kindest thing that could have happened to him; maybe it made it easier for him, since the colors barred him anyway from ever pulling a throttle again—not to understand!

They tried to tell him he hadn't passed the color test—Regan tried to tell him in a clumsy, big-hearted way, breaking it as easy as he could. And Owsley laughed as though he were pleased—just laughed, and with a glance at the clock and a jerky pull at his watch for comparison, a way he had of doing, walked out of the trainmaster's office, and started across the tracks for the roundhouse. Owsley's head wasn't working right—it was as though the mechanism was running down—the memory kind of tapering off. But the 1601, his engine—stuck. And it was train time when he walked out of

Thornley's office that afternoon—the first afternoon he'd been out of bed and Mrs. McCann's motherly hands since the night at Elbow Bend.

Perhaps you'll smile a little tolerantly at this, and perhaps you'll say the story's "cooked." Well, perhaps! If you think that way about it, you'll probably smile more broadly still, and with the same grounds for a smile, before we make division and sign the train register at the end of the run. Anyway, that afternoon, as Owsley, out for the first time, walked a little shakily across the turntable and through the big engine doors into the roundhouse, the 1601 was out for the first time herself from the repair shops, and for the first time since the accident was standing on the pit, blowing from a full head of steam, and ready to move out and couple on for the mountain run west, as soon as the Imperial Limited came in off the Prairie Division from the East. Is it a coincidence to smile at? Yes? Well, then, there is more of the same humor to come. They tell the story on the Hill Division this way, those hard, grimy-handed men of the Rockies, in the cab, in the caboose, in the smoker, if you get intimate enough with the conductor or brakeman, in the roundhouse, and in the section shanty—but they never smile themselves when they tell it.

Paxley, big as two of Owsley, promoted from a local passenger run, had been given the Imperial—and the 1601. He was standing by the front end, chatting with Clarihue, the turner, as Owsley came in.

Owsley didn't appear to notice either of the men—didn't answer either of them as they greeted him cheerily. His face, that had grown white from his illness, was tinged a little red with excitement, and his eyes seemed trying to take in every single detail of the big mountain racer all at once. He walked along to the gangway, his shoulders sort of bracing farther back all the time, and then, with the old-time swing, he disappeared into the cab. He was out again in a minute with a long-spouted oil can, and, just as he always did, started in for an oil around.

Paxley and Clarihue looked at each—and Paxley sort of fumbled aimlessly with the peak of his cap, while Clarihue couldn't seem to get the straps of his overalls adjusted comfortably. Brannigan, Owsley's old fireman, joined them from the other side of the engine. None of them spoke. Owsley went on oiling—making the round slowly, carefully, head and shoulders hidden completely at times as he leaned in over the rod, poking at the motion gear. And Regan, who had followed Owsley, coming in, got the thing in a glance—and swore fiercely deep down in his throat.

Not much to choke strong men up and throw them into the "dead center"? Well, perhaps not. Just a railroad man for forty years, just an engineer, and the best of them all—out!

Owsley finished his round, and, instead of climbing into the cab through the opposite gangway, came back to the front end, and halted before Jim Clarihue.

"I see you got that injector valve packed at last," said he approvingly. "She looks cleaner under the guard plates than I've seen her for a long time. Give me the table, Jim."

Not one of them answered. Regan said afterward that he felt as though there'd been a head-on smash somewhere inside of him. But Owsley didn't seem to expect any answer—he went on down the side of the locomotive, went in through the gangway—and the next instant the steam came purring into the cylinders, just warming her up for a moment, as Owsley always did before he moved out of the roundhouse.

It was Clarihue then who spoke—with a kind of catchy jerk.

"She's stiff from the shops—he ain't strong enough to hold her on the table."

Regan looked at Paxley—and tugged at his scraggly little brown mustache.

"You'll have to get him out of there, Bob," he said gruffly, to hide his emotion. "Get him out—gently."

The steam was coming now into the cylinders with a more businesslike rush—and Paxley jumped for the cab. As he climbed in, Brannigan followed, and in a sort of helpless way hung in the

gangway behind him. Owsley was standing up, his hand on the throttle, and evidently puzzled a little at the stiffness of the reversing lever, that refused to budge on the segment with what strength he had in his left hand to give to it.

Paxley reached over and tried to loosen Owsley's hand on the throttle.

"Let me take her, Jake," he said.

Owsley stared at him for a moment in mingled perplexity and irritation.

"What in blazes would I let you take her for?" he snapped suddenly—and attempted to shoulder Paxley aside. "Get out of here, and mind your own business! Get out!" He snatched his wrist away from Paxley's fingers and gave a jerk at the throttle—and the 1601 began to move.

The table wasn't set, and Paxley had no time for hesitation. More roughly than he had any wish to do it, he brushed Owsley's hand from the throttle and latched the throttle shut—and then, quick as a cat, Owsley was on him.

It wasn't much of a fight—hardly a fight at all—Owsley, from three weeks on his back, was dropping weak. But Owsley snatched up a spanner that was lying on the seat, and smashed Paxley with it between the eyes. Paxley was a big man physically—and a bigger man still where it counts most and doesn't show—with the blood streaming down his face, and half blinded, regardless of the blows that Owsley still tried to rain upon him, he picked the engineer up in his arms like a baby, and Brannigan, dropping off the gangway and helping, got Owsley to the ground.

Owsley hadn't been fit for excitement or exertion of that kind—for *any* kind of excitement or exertion. They took him back to his boarding house, and Doctor McTurk screwed his eyes up over him in the funny way he had when things looked critical, and Mrs. McCann nursed him daytimes, and Carleton and Regan and two or three others took turns sitting up with him nights—for a month. Then Owsley began to mend again, and began to talk of getting back on the Limited run with the 1601—always the 1601. And most times he talked pretty straight, too—as straight as any of the rest of them—only his memory seemed to keep that queer sort of haze over it—up to the time of the accident it seemed all right, but after that, things blurred woefully.

Regan, Carleton, and Doctor McTurk went into committee over it in the super's office one afternoon just before Owsley was out of bed again.

"What d'ye say—h'm? What d'ye say, doc?" demanded Regan.

Doctor McTurk, scientific and professional in every inch of his little body, lined his eyebrows up into a ferocious black streak across his forehead, and talked medicine in medical terms into the superintendent and the master mechanic for a good five minutes.

When he had finished, Carleton's brows were puckered, too, his face was a little blank, and he tapped the edge of his desk with the end of his pencil somewhat helplessly.

Regan tugged at both ends of his mustache and sputtered.

"What the blazes!" he growled. "Give us plain railroading. Has he got rights through—or hasn't he? Does he get better—or does he not? H'm?"

"I don't know, I tell you!" retorted Doctor McTurk. "I don't know—and that's flat. I've told you why a minute ago. I don't know whether he'll ever be better in his head than he is now—otherwise he'll come around all right."

"Well, what's to be done?" inquired Carleton.

"He's got to work for a living, I suppose—eh?" Doctor McTurk answered. "And he can't run an engine any more on account of the colors, no matter what happens—that's the state of affairs, isn't it?"

Carleton didn't answer; Regan only mumbled under his breath.

"Well, then," submitted Doctor McTurk, "the best thing for him, temporarily at least, to build him up, is fresh air and plenty of it. Give him a job somewhere out in the open."

Carleton's eyebrows went up—he looked across at Regan questioningly.

"He wouldn't take it," said Regan

slowly. "There's nothing to anything for Owsley but the 1601."

"Wouldn't take it!" snapped the little doctor. "He's *got* to take it—and if you care half what you pretend you do for him, you've got to see that he does."

"How about construction work with McCann?" suggested Carleton. "He likes McCann, and he's lived at their place for years now."

"Just the thing!" declared Doctor McTurk heartily. "Couldn't be better."

Carleton looked at Regan again. "You can handle him better than any one else, Tommy—suppose you see what you can do? And speaking of the 1601, how would it do to tell what's happened in the last month? Maybe he wouldn't think so much of her as he does now."

"No!" exclaimed Doctor McTurk quickly. "Don't you do it!"

"No," said Regan, shaking his head. "It would make him worse—he'd blame it on Paxley, and we'd have trouble on our hands before you could bat an eyelash."

"Yes; perhaps you're right," agreed Carleton. "Well, then, try him on the construction tack, Tommy."

And so Regan went that afternoon from the super's office over to Mrs. McCann's short-order house, and up to Owsley's room.

"Well, how's Jake to-day?" he inquired, in his bluff, cheery way, drawing a chair up beside the bed.

"I'm fine, Regan," said Owsley earnestly. "Fine! What day is this?"

"Thursday," Regan told him.

"Yes," said Owsley, "that's right—Thursday. Well, you can put me down to take the old 1601 out Monday night. I'm figuring to get back on the run Monday night, Regan."

Regan ran his hand through his short cropped hair, twisted a little uneasily in his chair—and coughed to fill in the gap.

"I wouldn't be in a hurry about it, if I were you, Jake," he said. "In fact, that's what I came over to have a little talk with you about. We don't think you're strong enough yet for the cab."

"Who don't?" demanded Owsley antagonistically.

"The doctor and Carleton and myself—we were just speaking about it."

"Why ain't I?" demanded Owsley again.

"Why, good Lord, Jake," said Regan patiently, "you've been sick—dashed near two months. A man can't expect to get out of bed after a lay-off like that and start right in again before he gets his strength back—you know that as well as I do."

"Mabbe I do and mabbe I don't," said Owsley, a little uncertainly. "How'm I going to get strong?"

"Well," replied Regan, "the doc says open-air work to build you up, and we were thinking you might like to put in a month, say, with Bill McCann up on the Elk River work—helping him boss Polacks, for instance."

Owsley didn't speak for a moment; he seemed to be puzzling something out; then, still in a puzzled way:

"And then what about after the month?"

"Why, then," said Regan, "then"—he reached for his hip pocket and his plug, pulled out the plug, picked the heart-shaped tin tag off with his thumb nail, decided not to take a bite, and put the blackstrap back in his pocket again. "Why, then," said he, "you'll—you ought to be all right again."

Owsley sat up in bed.

"You playing straight with me, Regan?" he asked slowly.

"Sure," said Regan gruffly. "Sure, I am."

Owsley passed his hand two or three times across his eyes.

"I don't quite seem to get the signals right on what's happened," he said. "I guess I've been pretty sick. I kind of had a feeling a minute ago that you were trying to sidetrack me, but if you say you ain't, I believe you. I ain't going to be sidetracked. When I quit for keeps, I quit in the cab, with my boots on—no way else. I'll tell you something, Regan—when I go out, I'm going out with my hand on the throttle, same as it's been for forty years—and me and the old 1601, we're going out to-

gether—that's the way I want to go when the time comes—and that's the way I'm going—I've known it for a long time."

"How do you mean you've known it for a long time?"—Regan swallowed a lump in his throat, as he asked the question—Owsley's mind seemed to be wandering a little.

"I dunno," said Owsley, and his hand crept to his head again. "I dunno—I just know." Then, abruptly: "I got to get strong for the old 1601, ain't I? That's right. I'll go up there—only you give me your word I get the 1601 back after the month."

Regan's eyes, from the floor, lifted and met Owsley's steadily.

"You bet, Jake!" he said.

"Give me your hand on it," said Owsley happily.

And Regan gripped the engineer's hand.

Regan left the room a moment or two after that, and on his way downstairs, he brushed the back of his hand across his eyes.

"What the hell!" he growled to himself. "I had to lie to him, didn't I?"

And so, on the Monday following, Owsley went up to the new Elk River road work, and—but just a moment, we've overrun our holding orders a bit, and we've got to back for the siding. The 1601 crosses us here.

Superstition is a queer thing. Speaking generally, we look on it somewhat from the viewpoint of the old adage that all men are mortal save ourselves—that is, we can accept with more or less tolerant condescension the existence of superstition in others, and, with more or less tolerant condescension, put it down to ignorance—in others. But we're not superstitious ourselves, so we've got to have something better to go on than that, as far as the 1601 is concerned. Well, the 1601 was pretty badly shaken up that night in the spill at Elbow Bend, and when they overhauled her in the shops, while they made her look like new, perhaps they missed something deep down in her vitals in the doing of it; perhaps she was weakened and strained where they didn't know she was; perhaps they didn't get clean to the bottom of all her troubles; perhaps they made a bad job of a job that looked all right under the fresh paint and the gold leaf. There's nothing superstitious about that, is there? It's logical and reasonable enough to satisfy even the most hypercritical crank among us anti-superstitionists—isn't it?

But that doesn't go in the cabs, and the roundhouses, and the section shanties on the Hill Division. You could talk and reason out there along that line until you were blue in the face from shortness of breath, and they'd listen to you while they wiped their hands on a hunk of waste—they'd listen, but they've got their own notions.

It was the night at Elbow Bend that Owsley and the 1601 together first went wrong, and both went into hospital together and came out together to the day—the 1601 for her old run through the mountains, and Owsley with no other idea in life possessing his sick brain than to make the run with her. Owsley had a relapse that day—and that day, twenty miles west of Big Cloud, the 1601 blew her cylinder head off. And from then on, while Owsley lay in bed again at Mrs. McCann's, the 1601, when she wasn't in the shops from an endless series of mishaps, was turning the hair gray on a dispatcher or two, and had got most of Paxley's nerve.

But what's the use of going into all the details—there was enough paper used up in the specification repair sheets! Going slow up a grade and around a curve that was protected with ninety-pound guard rails, her pony truck jumped the steel where a baby carriage would have held the right of way; she broke this, she broke that, she was always breaking something; and rare was the night that she didn't limp into division dragging the grumbling occupants of the mahogany sleepers after her with her schedule gone to smash. And then, finally, putting a clincher on it all, she ended up, when she was running fifty miles an hour, by shedding a driving wheel, and nearly killing Paxley as the rod ripped

through and through, tearing the right-hand side of the cab into mangled wreckage—and that finished her for the Limited run—do you recall that Owsley, too, was finished for the Limited run?

Superstition? You can figure it any way you like—they've got their own notions of the Hill Division.

When the 1601 came out of the shops again after that, the marks of authority's disapprobation were heavy upon her—the gold leaf of the passenger flyer was gone; the big figures on the tender were only yellow paint.

And so, while the 1601, disfranchised, went to hauling extra freights, kind of a misfit doing spare jobs, anything that turned up, no regular run any more, Owsley, kind of a misfit, too, without any very definite duties, because there wasn't anything very definite they dared trust him with, went up on the Elk River work with Bill McCann, the husband of Mrs. McCann, who kept the short-order house.

Owsley told McCann, as he had told Regan, that he was only up there getting strong again for the 1601—and he went around on the construction work whistling and laughing like a schoolboy, and happy as a child—getting strong again for the 1601!

McCann couldn't see anything very much the matter with Owsley—except that Owsley was happy. He studied the letter Regan had sent him, and watched the engineer, and scratched at his bullet head, and blinked fast with his gray, Irish eyes.

"Faith," said McCann, "it's them that are off their chumps—not Owsley. Hark to him singin' out there like a lark! An', bedad, it's mesilf 'll tell 'em so!"

And he did. He wrote his opinion in concise, forceful, misspelled English on the back of a requisition slip, and sent it to Regan. Regan didn't say much—just choked up a little when he read it—McCann wasn't strong on diagnosis.

It was still early spring when Owsley went to the new loop they were building around the main line to tap a bit of the country south, and the chinook blowing warm had melted most of the snow, and the creeks, rivers, and sluices were running full—the busiest time in all the year for the trackmen and section hands. It was a summer's job, the loop—if luck was with them—and the orders were to push the work—the steel was to be down before the snow flew again. That was the way it was put up to McCann when he first moved into construction camp, a short while before Owsley joined him.

"Then give me the stuff," said McCann. "Shoot the material along, an' don't I'ave me bitin' me finger nails for the want of it—d'ye moind?"

So the Big Cloud yards, too, had orders—standing orders to rush out all material for the Elk River loop as fast as it came in from the East.

In a way, of course, that was how it happened—from the standing orders. It was just the kind of work the 1601 was hanging around waiting to do—the odd jobs—pulling the extras. Ordinarily, perhaps, somebody would have thought of it, and maybe they wouldn't have sent her out—maybe they would. You can't operate a railroad wholly on sentiment—and there were ten cars of steel and as many more of ties and conglomerate supplies helping to choke up the Big Cloud yards when they should have been where they were needed a whole lot more—in McCann's construction camp.

But there had been two days of bad weather in the mountains, two days of solid rain, track troubles, and troubles generally, and what with one thing and another, the motive-power department had been taxed to its limit. The first chance they got in a lull of pressure, not the storm, they sent the material west with the only spare engine that happened to be in the roundhouse at the time—the 1601—and never thought of Owsley. Regan might have; would have, if he had known it; but Regan didn't know it—then. Regan wasn't handling the operating.

Perhaps, after all, they needn't have been in a belated hurry that day—McCann and his foreigners had done

nothing but hug their shanties and listen to the rain washing the ballast away for two days and a half, until, as it got dark on that particular day, barely a week after Owsley had come to the work, they listened, by way of variation, to the chime whistle of an engine that came ringing down with the wind.

McCann and Owsley shared a little shanty by themselves, and McCann was trying to initiate Owsley into the mysteries of that grand old game so dear to the hearts of Irishmen—the game of forty-five. But at the first sound of the whistle, the cards dropped from Owsley's hands, and he jumped to his feet.

"D'ye hear that! D'ye hear that!" he cried.

"An' fwhat of it?" inquired McCann. "It'll be the material we'd be hung up for, if 'twere not for the storm."

Owsley leaned across the table, his head turned a little sideways in a curious listening attitude—leaned across the table and gripped McCann's shoulders.

"It's the 1601!" he whispered. He put his finger to his lips to caution silence, and with the other hand patted McCann's shoulder confidentially. "It's the 1601!" he whispered—and jumped for the door—out into the storm.

"For the love of Mike!" gasped McCann, staggering to his feet as the lamp flared up and out with the draft. "Now, fwhat the divil—from this an' the misfortunate way he picks up forty-foive, mabbe, mabbe I was wrong, an' mabbe it's queer after all, he is, an'——" McCann was still muttering to himself as he stumbled to the door.

There was no sign of Owsley—only a string of boxes and flats, backed down, and rattling and bumping to a halt on the temporary track a hundred yards away—then the joggling light of a trainman running through the murk and, evidently, hopping the engine pilot, for the light disappeared suddenly, and he heard the locomotive moving off again.

McCann couldn't see the main line or the little station they had erected there since the work began for the purpose of operating the construction trains, but he knew well enough what was going on. Off the main line, in lieu of a turntable, and to facilitate matters generally, they had built a Y into the construction camp; and the work train, in from the East, had dropped its caboose on the main line between the arms of the Y, gone ahead, backed the flats and boxes down the west-end arm of the Y into the camp, left them there in front of him; and the engine, shooting off onto the main line again, via the east-end arm of the Y, would be heading east, and had only to back up the main line and couple onto the caboose for the return trip to Big Cloud—there were no empties to go back, he knew.

It was raining in torrents, pitilessly, and over the gusts of wind, the thunder went racketing through the mountains like the discharge of heavy guns. McCann swore with sincerity as he gazed from the doorway, didn't like the look of it, and was minded to let Owsley go to the devil—but, instead, after getting into rubber boots, a rubber coat, and lighting a lantern, he put his head down to butt the storm, goat fashion, and started out.

"Me conscience'd not be clear av anything happened the man," communed McCann, as he battered and sloshed his way along.

McCann lost some time. He could have made a short cut over to the main line and the station; but, instead, thinking Owsley might have run up the track beside the camp toward the front end of the construction train and the engine, he kept along past the string of cars. There was no Owsley—and the only result he obtained from shouting at the top of his lungs was to have the wind slap his voice back in his teeth. McCann headed then for the station. He took the west-end arm of the Y, that being the nearer to his destination. Halfway across, he heard the engine backing up on the main line, and, a moment later, saw her headlight and the red tail lights of the caboose as she coupled on.

Of course, it was against the rules—but rules are broken sometimes, aren't they? It was a wicked night, and the station, diminutive and makeshift as it

was, looked mighty hospitable and inviting by comparison. The engine crew, Fatty Hogan, and Greene, his fireman, thought it sized up better while they were waiting for orders than the cab of the 1601 did, and they didn't see why the train crew, MacGonigle, the conductor, and his two brakemen, should have any the better of it—so they left their engine and crowded into the station, too.

There wasn't much room left for McCann when he came in like an animated shower bath. He heard Merle, the young operator—they'd probably been guying him—snap at MacGonigle:

"I ain't got any orders for you yet, but you'd better get into the clear on the Y—the Limited, east, is due in four minutes."

"Say!" panted McCann. "Say——" And that was as far as he got. Fatty Hogan, making a wild dash for the door, knocked the rest of his breath out of him.

And after Hogan, in a mad and concerted rush, sweeping McCann along with it, the others burst through the door and out onto the platform, as, volleying through the storm, came suddenly the quick, staccato bark of an engine exhaust.

For a moment, huddled there, trying to get the rights of it, no one spoke—then it came in a yell from Fatty Hogan.

"She's *gone!*" he screamed—and gulped for his breath. "She's gone!"

McCann looked, and blinked, and shook the rain out of his face—two hundred yards east down the track, and disappearing fast, were the twinkling, red tail lights of the caboose.

"By the tokens of all the saints," stammered McCann. "It's—it's——" He grabbed at Fatty Hogan. "Fwhat engine is it?"

It was MacGonigle who answered, as they crowded back inside again for shelter—and answered quick, getting McCann's dropped jaw:

"The 1601. What's wrong with you, McCann?"

"Holy mither!" stuttered McCann miserably. "That settles it! It's Owsley! 'Twas the whistle, d'ye moind—the whistle!"

Merle, young and hysterical, was up in the air.

"The Limited! The Limited!" he burst out, white-faced. "There ain't three minutes between them! She's coming now!"

MacGonigle, grizzled old veteran, cool in any emergency, whirled on the younger man.

"Then stop her!" he drawled. "Don't make a fool of yourself! Show your red and hold her here until you get Big Cloud on the wire—they're both running the *same* way, aren't they, you blamed idiot! Everything's out of the road far enough east of here on account of the Limited to give 'em time at headquarters to take care of things. Let 'em have it at Big Cloud."

And Big Cloud got it. Spence, the dispatcher, on the early-night trick, got it—and Carleton and Regan got it in a hurried call from Spence over their private keys, that brought them running to headquarters.

"I've cleared the line," said Spence. "The Limited is holding at Elk River till Brook's Cut reports Owsley through—then she's to trail along."

Carleton nodded, and took a chair beside the dispatcher's table. Regan, as ever with him in times of stress, tugged at his mustache, and paced up and down the room.

He stopped once in front of Carleton and laughed shortly—and there was more in his words, a whole lot more, than he realized then.

"The Lord knows where he'll stop with the bit in his teeth, but suppose he'd been heading the other way *into* the Limited—h'm!" Head on—instead of just tying up all the blamed traffic between here and the Elk—what? We can thank God for that!"

Carleton didn't answer, except by another nod—he was listening to Spence at the key, asking Brook's Cut why they didn't report Owsley through.

The rain rattled at the windowpanes, and the sashes shook under the gusts of wind—out in the yards below the

switch lights showed blurred and indistinct. Regan paced the room more and more impatiently—Carleton's face began to go hard—Spence hung tensely over the table, his fingers on the key, waiting for the sounder to break, waiting for the Brook's Cut call.

It was only seven miles from Elk River, where the stalled passengers of the Limited grumbled and complained, pettish in their discontent at the delay, only seven miles from there to Brook's Cut, the first station east—only seven miles, but the minutes passed, and still Brook's Cut answered "No." And Carleton's face grew harder still, and Regan swore deep down under his breath from a full heart, and Spence grew white and rigid in his chair. And so they waited there, waited with the sense of disaster growing cold upon them—waited—but Brook's Cut never reported Owsley "in" or "out" that night.

Owsley? Who knows what was in the poor, warped brain that night? He had heard her call to him, and they had brought him back the 1601, and she was standing there, alone, deserted—and she had called to him. Who knows what was in his mind, as, together, he and the 1601 went tearing through that black, storm-rent night, when the rivers, and the creeks, and the sluices were running full, and the Elk River, that paralleled the right of way for a mile or two to the crossing, was a raging torrent? Who knows if he ever heard the thundering crash with which the Elk River bridge went out? Who knows, as he swung the curve that opened the bridge approach, without time for any man, Owsley or another, to have stopped, if the headlight playing on the surge of maddened waters meant anything to him? Who knows? That was where they found them, beneath the waters, Owsley and the 1601—and Owsley was smiling, his hand tight-gripped upon the throttle.

"I dunno," says Regan, when he speaks of Owsley, "if the mountains out here have anything to do with making a man think harder. I dunno—sometimes I think they do. You get to figuring that the Grand Master mabbe goes a long way back, years and years, to work things out—if it hadn't been for Owsley the Limited would have gone into the Elk that night, with every soul on board. Owsley? That's the way he wanted to go out, wasn't it—with the 1601? Mabbe the Grand Master thought of him, too."

WHAT A SHORT-CHANGE MAN CAN DO

OLLIE M. JAMES, United States senator from Kentucky, has an old friend who has hung up a great record as a prosecutor of criminals. On one occasion, however, the old man decided to defend a man who had been caught in the toils of the law.

A merchant named Fairchild had a stock of goods worth about seven hundred and fifty dollars, and he insured it for five thousand dollars. In the fullness of time, he sprang into the night, let out a horrible yell about fire, and dashed up and down the village street, howling for help. The flames burst from the roof of the store, and, despite the efforts of the villagers, the building and all its contents were destroyed. Mr. Fairchild accused one of his neighbors of having purposely started the fire.

The senator's friend, convinced of the untruthfulness of the charge, appeared for the defense, and won the case with the following remarks, which he emphasized by a loud voice and decorated with graceful gestures:

"As long as this merchant can insure seven hundred and fifty dollars' worth of stock for five thousand dollars, burn it up, collect the insurance on it, accuse his neighbor of arson, and get away with the whole job, he will continue to do it. Furthermore, if he does it very often, he will own all the money in the world, put a lot of people into jail, break two or three insurance companies, and, to cap the climax, change his name from Fairchild to Rothschild."

The Clock

A TALE OF THE COMPETENTS

By Roy Norton

Author of "The Plunderer," "Arroyo Jones," Etc.

NO one ever knew where it originated—the clock. It had no name on its humble dial, as if the manufacturer, through modesty, oversight, or lack of faith, had failed to stamp it. Perhaps he had been ashamed. There were sufficient reasons why he should be, for it developed, during our acquaintance with it, a peculiar failing. It would mark time only in an upright position. Lay it on its back, or be experimental and lay it on its face, and immediately it stopped. On its side it did fairly well, losing a little time now and then, mayhap, or sometimes negligently stopping; but, be it chronicled to its everlasting credit, proving quite accurate for full eight days when permitted to stand upon its turned brass legs. And so, through its idiosyncrasies, it established with us an individuality, and was more or less appropriately christened "Uncle Scythe" by Shakespeare George, who owned it, humored it, loved, and cherished it.

It was a wonderful clock, registering on miniature faces the day of the week, the date of the month, the changes of the moon, and the time; but all of these were slaves to position. George in turn was slave to it through sentiment, it having been presented to him by a blind fiddler. The rest of us, in turn, were slaves to George's whims through great affection for him.

Thus it was that on that day when we took our departure from Marook, discarding nearly all personal possessions that would be valueless to us in other and southern climes, George clung to Uncle Scythe. It was summer again. We had cleaned up our winter's work, and while the sum was small as Alaskan values went, to us it meant much. A trifle more than fifteen thousand dollars we had thawed and washed from the earth. Once it had been stolen and recovered, costing the lives of Phil Mahoney, wholly bad man, and "Laughing" Jim, good bad man, and now it was augmented by five thousand more, the proceeds of the sale of the claims to which we were bidding farewell. The stalwart group of men, partners for years, and known as the Competents, were homeward bound for some mysterious, glamorous, home place, called Willow Creek, their craving for Northern adventure satisfied and replaced by a yearning nostalgia; but I, barely more than a boy, fledgling from a mining school, fledgling in life, would leave them when we reached Seattle, take my share of that shining, yellow glory of gold, and carry it exultantly homeward to the far East as proof that I had not done so ill in my first venture into the world.

A steamboat, rough and ungainly, but efficient, that had wintered off the Yukon flats, came churning down the river, its big paddle wheel slapping the water, and its whistle giving a merry salute. We shook hands with those we had known and liked throughout the long winter, went aboard, saw the gangplank drawn in by native deck hands who shouted, and wriggled, and made a vast pretense at effort, the hawser came dripping to the blunt bow, and out we went. A sudden pang of parting regret assailed me as I looked back at the camp that I was to see no more, at its splen-

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did hills, and the loitering men, most of whom I should never again meet. Many of them, less fortunate, homesick and despondent, envied us, and others cared not at all for our going. I saw white-headed old Mayo, the post trader, waving his good-by salute from where he stood framed in the blackness of his door; the dogs in the native village on the opposite bank howled with excitement; the mouth of Russian Creek swept by; the steamer's nose turned sharply, and all was lost to view. My brooding was jarred by a familiar sound behind me, a rasping, wheezing, ratchety sound, and I turned from the rail.

"Dog-gone it!" drawled a voice. "I forgot to wind Uncle Scythe, and it's no wonder he stopped! Humph!"

Behind me stood Shakespeare George, with that cantankerous, half-useless, crippled but highly prized clock, and his solicitude for it caused me to smile. Any man but Shakespeare George would have thrown it away long ago, left it behind, or, at least, have packed it in his war bag; but not he! I foresaw that straight through our long journey "outside," Uncle Scythe would receive special attention. Four of us berthed in the same cabin, and Uncle Scythe ticked steadily from where it hung on the wall, and was jealously watched by George lest some one steal it, so certain was he that all the world might be after that treasured timepiece.

But the rest of us dropped Uncle Scythe from mind. There were too many other things to think about, and to observe. For instance, the two crosses on the hill where but a short time before we had laid Laughing Jim and Phil Mahoney; the mouth of the creek where once we had bade good-by to the steamboat that failed; the spot where Annie, the little Indian maid, had saved some of us from drowning in the ice-strewn flood; and so, one by one, the scenes of our adventures slid past us as the big wheel astern drove us downward and out toward the broad, irregular mouths of the river, and to the open and dangerous stretch of the Bering Sea which we must cross to reach St. Michaels.

It seemed to us that fortune had at last begun to smile when we saw, in the St. Michaels roadstead, a big black steamer; and that she was the *Campacenti,* outclassed Atlantic liner of the earlier days, did not lessen, for us, her majesty. We lost no time in booking our passage, learned that she was due to sail at once, and so put our heavy bag of gold dust into a boat with our slender bags of clothing, and were rowed out over the long stretch between land and anchorage. And as Shakespeare George climbed the ladder directly ahead of me, I saw that in one hand he held a battered war bag, one-third filled with old clothes, and in the other that precious clock; and Uncle Scythe, being in an upright position, was still merrily ticking!

Bill, carrying the heavy load of dust, advanced to the deck, and we others followed, to be met by a cold-eyed purser, who evidently guessed the contents of Bill's burden, and stopped him.

"This ship has a safety vault with a time lock," he said, "and you can put your gold and valuables in there, if you want to. The company's not responsible otherwise."

Bill dropped the sack to the deck and looked a question at the others of us.

"Sure!" declared George, and we nodded our assent. "Lead us to it."

We followed the purser to the vault that was in the back of his office, and to our surprise saw that it was of considerable size as if, at some time in her career, the old *Campacenti* had carried silken treasures from the Orient. The purser put his heavy corded seals on the bag, and we saw others forming a little pyramid of gold on the floor. Verily, there was strength and safety in that big metal room, and we were relieved.

"The vault has a new time lock," volunteered the purser grumpily, "and it's set for seven days, and will be closed as we go out. You are the last of the passengers."

"Which reminds me," said Bill, turning to George with a grin, "that perhaps you'd better put Uncle Scythe here beside the sacks, George, for safe-keeping."

We laughed; but George accepted this suggestion for the care of his treasure with a grave face, and answered: "Never thought of that! Reckon I better had," and promptly wound that terrible clock and religiously stood it up beside our bag of gold.

"He'll be runnin' when we get off the boat, all right," George asserted, "and we'll sure have exactly the right time. Some clock he is!"

Even the purser had to grin at this last deposit of treasure, as we turned out of the door, and curiously watched him shut it, turn the knobs, and try them to see that the tumblers had worked. Our treasure, and George's, was safe now for seven days at least. Of that we were confident.

"Time travels in divers places with divers persons, but he don't stand still withal," misquoted George, with a great air of relief, and we were happy in the fact that not for a whole seven days would we be asked to look in our stateroom to see if Uncle Scythe was still there. We prepared to enjoy our period of idleness and to loll and loaf away the days and nights that must intervene before the old *Campacenti* docked us at Vancouver. And as loafers we were marvelous successes for men who had been accustomed to almost constant toil. We were like children released from all restraint. We slept when we pleased, and played when we pleased. We sat up as late as we pleased, and disregarded hours. That is, George and I did, for the others were creatures of habit. And George observed everything, from stem to stern, of the *Campacenti,* and developed into such an old gossip that he knew all there was to know about every officer aboard her; what constituted ship's routine, and all sorts of useless information. Even the sea, the sun, and the moon conspired for our enjoyment on that homeward trip; but it was a day slower than had been expected, due, so George learned from one of the engineers, to the bad steaming qualities of the coal. George never heard a bell strike when he did not mention the time and consult his watch. He could point out irregularities; he could have told the captain things about his own ship! But he could not foresee the climax of that memorable voyage.

It was the seventh day, in the afternoon, and we were all together, in a little group of our own, lounging over the rail almost directly in front of the purser's office, when we heard one bell struck in the ship's time.

"That means," said George oracularly, "that it's half past four in the first dogwatch. These watches bothered me for a long time, but now they are——"

"Should have been in about this time, if the ship hadn't been so slow," a voice behind us interrupted, and we turned to see the purser standing in his doorway.

For the first time since we had been aboard he displayed a desire to be amicable, and the rôle appeared awkward. He came out to the rail and stood by us, grumbling about the ship's progress.

"My first trip in her," he volunteered, "and she's some job. But a man has to take what he can get these days."

He consulted his watch.

"'Most forgot it," he said, as if to himself; "but this is the day my time lock's off. Hope I haven't lost the combination."

He laughed carelessly, and turned back toward his door, and then paused as if struck by an afterthought, and said: "Want to see if your stuff's all right? I'm going to open up that box," and we, glad of anything to kill time, sauntered over to watch him.

He consulted a strip of paper in his pocket, and, although we could not see what numbers and combinations he worked, we heard the slow metallic twirls, until, at last, he slipped the paper back into his pocketbook, and looked around at us.

"That ought to do it," he said, and caught the turning catches in his hands and twisted them. The heavy steel doors opened readily enough, and swung back, exposing the dark interior. The purser flipped a light switch outside, and then bent forward from his hips as he stood in the doorway, and we heard an exclamation.

"Good Heaven!" he said excitedly. "What do you make of this?"

He jumped forward into the vaults, and we, surmising something must be amiss, stared after him. He came out again in an instant, his face white and his hands distractedly running themselves up to his head.

"Come here! Come here, quick! You men! Look here!"

We plunged through the door of his office, wondering what could have disturbed him, and crowded together and craned our necks and stared into the lighted recesses of the vault. On the floor, in confusion, lay many canvas bags, palpably empty, and with sealing cords and seals thrown carelessly around on the floor as they had been cut. George impetuously stepped forward and gave one a kick, as if to assure himself that the small, fat, buckskin bags of gold they originally contained had been removed. He thrust several of the bags aside with his foot, and turned anxiously toward us, then toward the purser, who stood helplessly leaning against the steel-plated wall, as if incapable of grasping the significance of such a robbery.

"Well, what do you make of it?" demanded George, scowling at him.

The purser gulped and wet his lips in his distress, and clasped his fingers together and twisted them, while his eyes stared wildly about the vault. George's voice seemed to rouse him.

"It isn't possible!" he declared. "It couldn't be done! It's a new lock, put on there by experts before she left Vancouver. It couldn't be opened for seven days—the lock men said so. They showed me that they had set it for that time. I didn't know—I didn't know how it was done, and told them I didn't want to know. They fixed it to open only after seven days. Seven days! It's been opened. I—I told 'em not to let me know, because I wanted to be protected—and—nobody but some one in the company does know. I'm lost! I'm lost!"

He staggered forward to the center of the vault, and looked at the heap of rubbish at his feet, as if overwhelmed by this outcome that could spell nothing but catastrophe to him, perhaps a sentence of imprisonment, the ruin of his life, an inconceivable wreck. For an instant he stood staring wildly, then swung back the vault doors and began feverishly inspecting the mechanism of the time lock, as if striving to compel it to answer the riddle. He threatened to attack it with his fists, but Bill Davis put a restraining hand on him.

"Hold on," he said. "Your chance of proving your own innocence is in that lock. Don't monkey with it. Let it alone. You've got us here to prove that you shut it, back there in St. Michaels, and we were here when you opened it."

Quite stupidly the purser stared for a full half minute, and then nodded dumbly, and seemed to lean toward Bill as if for protection and advice. George, in the meantime, continued to scowl around the vault that had proved faithless, and suddenly stooped and picked from beneath the corner of a sack something that shone dully in the light. It was Uncle Scythe, lying on his back, still and resting.

"Well, anyhow, boys," he declared, with an attempt at a grin, "I've got something left. They didn't grab my clock!"

In the stress of that loss, Tim consigned the clock to a very unhappy hereafter, and I'm not sure that I, too, was not somewhat annoyed by George's untimely jest. I had nothing left, save the clothes in which I stood. The day was suddenly overshadowed by gloom. I was staring despondently at the sacks that had held my hopes, when the purser spoke resignedly.

"If you men will come out now," he said, "I'll go up and tell the skipper. That's got to be the first thing done."

George, scowling abstractedly, and staring at the face of the clock that did not run, halted outside as the purser closed the doors upon the empty vault, but without locking them; for what was the use in locking the stable after the horse was gone? We passed on out of the office into the late afternoon sunlight, and stood by the rail, too dis-

tressed in that tumult of disaster to speak, and the purser slammed the door of his office, locked it, and slipped the key in his pocket. Despair was on his face, as he started toward the companionway leading to the boat deck and the captain's cabin.

"Hey, purser! Hold on a minute!" George suddenly said, starting after him. "Come back here. I've got something to say to you."

Knowing Shakespeare George so well, I recognized the change in his expression, and knew that some thought had been born in his mind, some line of reasoning worked out for trial. The purser returned, as if eager for any friendly counsel, and looked at George expectantly.

"There's nobody on this boat knows a thing about what the safe shows but us," George said. "And my partners always play the game with me, and keep their mouths shut when I ask 'em to. Don't tell anybody else but the captain, and when you tell him, just say to him that there's a man down here who thinks he can help find that gold without any fuss at all, and wants to talk to him after you get done. Sabe?"

The purser looked doubtfully at George, and then, as if merely entertaining a forlorn hope, said "Yes," and went on his trying errand. But George, as if pondering over something, walked away from us, carrying Uncle Scythe negligently under his arm, and disappeared in the direction of our cabins.

We stood discussing it, a strained little group, when the captain returned with the purser, his cap jammed down over his eyes, his fists clenched, and anger and excitement written large over all his grim face. There was something rather pleasing in the determination of the man, and determination was stamped all over him as plainly as ever it was stamped on an English master. We listened, and through the open doorway heard his sharp, direct questions as he inspected the scene of the loss, and also heard him order the purser to lock the doors.

"Here, get me a cord, or seal of some kind," we again heard him say, and surmised, by the fact that he was replacing a seal ring on his finger when he emerged from the purser's quarters, that he had affixed his own private seal on the locks, pending a legal investigation.

We waited for him to send for George, but no chit came. We filed into the dining saloon, and sat at his table, but aside from his usual evening greeting, he said nothing, ate a hurried, abstracted meal, and excused himself. I saw that George, who had been unusually thoughtful throughout dinner, was restless after its conclusion, and at last became impatient.

"I don't reckon it's best for the whole bunch of us to go buttin' up to the captain's cabin," he said to us, as we stood on the main deck aft, where we could be alone to discuss our calamity, "and I think I'll just take the boy, here, as a witness, and slip up there and have a talk with this skipper."

He beckoned to me as he spoke; the others, accustomed to George's way, made no objections, and I followed him above, where, within a minute, we were rapping at the captain's door and heard his voice bidding us enter. He whirled in his chair as we walked in, and his clean, fine English face, tanned by wind and sea, was a living depiction of trouble.

"Captain," George said, "may I ask if the purser told you that there was a man below, meaning me, who thought he could do somethin' about gettin' that stolen gold back?"

The captain straightened himself with a jerk, and his eyes opened a little wider as he stared at George. That lean, keen-eyed face was one that commanded attention, and the captain, being direct himself, seemed to recognize in George some one worth listening to.

"No," he said, arising from his chair, "the purser did not. You are—say, are you one of the men that was there when the safe was closed and reopened?"

"The same," declared George.

"Sit down," said the captain, and, as we seated ourselves, he stepped to the door, looked out as if to assure himself

of our privacy, returned, and drew a chair quite closely to us.

"What do you think of it?" he asked. "What theory have you of the way by which a tested vault, time-locked, could be broken into without a sign?"

George smiled at him tolerantly.

"Captain," he said, "you've not touched on the big point at all. Maybe it's because I'm a miner that I have. How much gold was stolen?"

"The purser doesn't know," the captain said, frowning; "but he estimates it at about twenty-five thousand pounds sterling—that is—say a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars of American money."

George nodded, and smiled.

"Have you any idea, sir, how much that would weigh?" he queried.

The captain shook his head hopelessly.

"Nearly five hundred and eighty pounds of weight, troy, with that gold going at eighteen an ounce, which it won't do!" declared George, tapping a finger on the arm of his chair in emphatic punctuation.

The captain opened his eyes wide, as if astonished by this presentation.

"Well—well—how on earth could any one carry off that weight?" he blurted helplessly.

George leaned forward.

"Captain," he said quietly, "I'm no Cleek, or Sherlock Holmes; but I think I've got the dope. And if you'll let me carry a bluff in my own way, and help me, I've got a notion that every ounce of that gold will be turned over to whoever owns it when this ship lands at the dock in Vancouver to-morrow, or next day. Anyhow, it won't do no harm to give me a crack at it, will it?"

The captain looked for a full half minute at the intelligent face that was bent toward him, and then banged his fist on the table.

"Go to it!" he said. "I'll do what I can, naturally. Now, what do you want?"

"A left-handed quartermaster!" George declared, with a trace of a grin, and the captain looked as if he regretted any shared effort with a man making such an absurd demand.

"You've got one, haven't you?" George insisted.

The captain frowned at the blotter on his desk for a minute, and then replied: "By Jove! I believe I have; but I hadn't thought much about it, except to notice that one of the men at the wheel did seem to be left-handed. You see, this is the first trip with most of this crew. The ship was turned over to me and the company, just before this voyage. There wasn't a man aboard her that I knew, and mighty few who knew any of the others. Wait a minute."

He got up and walked rapidly out through the door leading to the chart house, and we heard his steps in the stillness as he ascended to the bridge. He was gone scarcely five minutes, and yet the time seemed long as we waited, and I wondered, voicelessly, what George, brooding, could have in mind.

"He's at the wheel now," the captain said, when he returned. "Shall I have a man take his trick?"

"No hurry, sir," George said, adopting the politeness of the sea. "There's one other man I want. A stoker with three gold, or brass, rings on the little finger of his right hand."

This time the captain began to doubt, in earnest, the advisability of further humoring the vagaries of this strange passenger.

"But if you would kindly tell me what—that is, if you would explain why you want such men," he began; but George, intent on having his own way, avoided the information.

"I think," he said, "that if you will bring this stoker up here, before you call off the left-handed man at the wheel, it would be the best way," he said. "Of course, you know, there may be no such stoker—a man with three rings on his little finger; but I'd sure like to know."

The captain shook his head slowly, like a man facing a queer problem.

"It might take time to find that out," he said thoughtfully. "Suppose you give me until midnight. I'll let you

know before the middle watch comes on; or by then."

"Middle watch? Middle watch?" questioned George, with a frown. And then, as if recalling his nautical information: "That's the one that begins at midnight, ain't it?"

"Yes," replied the captain. "Also that's when your left-handed man at the wheel goes off duty."

"Then," asked George, "is it asking too much to have the left-handed quartermaster and the stoker with three rings brought here to your cabin right after midnight?"

"Asking too much? Don't you suppose I want to get this theft matter straightened out?" somewhat testily demanded the captain. "I don't know what you are aiming at, but I do know this: That if you think you can recover that gold dust, inasmuch as no one else has an idea to offer, you shall have the chance. You be here by midnight, and if there's such a stoker on board I'll have him here. Be sure of that!"

Before we left the room, he was calling for the chief engineer, in whose department and on whose log the stoker would appear, and George, with an appearance of satisfaction, beckoned to me with his head to go before the skipper could ask further questions. Outside, he was taciturn, although I was eager with questions; nor did he vouchsafe any information to our partners, beyond instructions.

"First," he said, with a grin, "I don't want anybody to ask me fool questions I can't exactly answer, because I'm doin' the best I can with a mighty small hand of cards and a big jack pot to play for. Next, all you boys might have your guns handy to-night, just in case of trouble. I think Bill, and Tim, and the boy here, better go with me to the captain's cabin at midnight. The others just be outside the purser's cabin, leaning over the rail, as if watching the sea. Understand?"

Still wondering, but hopeful that this strange man's acumen would lead us somewhere, we all agreed, whereupon George, as if he had dismissed the loss from his mind, sauntered toward the smoke room where, less than twenty minutes later, I saw him completely absorbed in a game of cribbage with a one-eyed, villainous-looking old prospector from Forty-Mile.

It was almost midnight when, after hours of misery over our loss, I found George, with the stocky Tim, and the big, good-natured Bill, at the foot of the stairs leading to the captain's cabin, and immediately we passed up. The captain was waiting to receive us.

"I've found such a man as you describe," he said; "the stoker with the rings; but they're gold. The chief will have him here as soon as he gets off shift. Also, I'll have the left-handed quartermaster out in the chart room. What are they to do?"

"Them? Oh, they're to help us. That's all," asserted George, with a mild grin. "I brought my pardners along, too, so they could help. You don't mind, do you?"

"Not at all," replied the captain, with a slight shrug. "Have your own way. The ship is yours."

Barely had he stopped speaking when the mellow clangor of the bell broke the stillness outside, the distant shriek of a boatswain's whistle told of the change of watch, and we heard the sounds of hurrying feet as belated men ran to their posts. We sat expectantly, George still wearing that placid smile, Tim and Bill staring curiously at their surroundings, and the captain scowling at the picture of a woman on his desk, until the chief engineer, in a worn service jacket, and a ferret-eyed man, begrimed with coal dust, wearing a torn, soiled shirt, open-necked, sleeveless, and with a greasy cap on his head, entered.

The stoker interested me the most. Streaks ran here and there where the sweat of his hard toil had rivuleted his face. African or Caucasian he might have been, as far as his color was concerned, but his straight hair betrayed his race. A white man of some sort, was he, and not all the dust of the world might conceal it. He jerked his cap off with a smutty hand, and I saw the glitter of three bands of gold. Nervous he was, or astonished at being called

to the "Old Man's" cabin by no less a person than the august chief himself. In his life such a visit was rare, so he stood, ill at ease.

"The quartermaster is outside in the chart room," the captain said, addressing himself to George.

"Then bring him along," George answered, rising to his feet, but watching the stoker with an unwavering eye.

We trooped downward, a little procession. The deck was deserted. The lights had been turned off, and only the moonlight, clear and strong, showed us the long promenades of the old *Campoccnti*. Over the side, the phosphorescence of disturbed waters raced with us in a myriad of sparks, and there was no sound save the muffled throbs of the engines, and the wash of waste water pouring from the condensers into the sea. George, leading the way, halted at the purser's door, and rapped. As he gained no immediate response, the captain brushed forward and took his place. He called in a commanding voice: "Maltby! Oh, Maltby! Open the door. It is I, the captain."

The door opened, and we filed in as the purser turned on the light in his cabin and, with ruffled hair and a sleepy air, stood before us. George stood to one side until all were in, then closed the door and bolted it, and motioned to Bill to guard it. He abruptly crowded to the foreground, and pointed an accusing finger at the purser.

"Maltby," he said, and his voice was firm, harsh, and confident, "the jig's up! We know all about it."

There was a movement and an exclamation behind us.

"Shut him up!" George shouted to Tim, and the latter suddenly gave the arm of the quartermaster, who started to speak, a wrench that caused him to gasp.

"Now, captain," said George, without moving his eyes from the frightened face of the purser, "perhaps we'd better break the seals from the vault doors so these men can be made to understand that we know how it happened."

Without waiting for permission, he broke the seals, turned the handles, and swung wide the heavy doors.

"About the time this ship sailed," said George, "there were two men floated together and got acquainted. One of them, the purser, wasn't so bad, and hadn't been so bad, before. Another one, a left-handed man—able seaman, all right, but who had been too keen to work at it, and so had turned crook—furnished a scheme. 'Here's a chance for two or three good ones,' he said, 'to get away with a wad.' That man was this quartermaster. The only one that would be difficult, for they wanted at least three men, was a stoker; for this real crook knew what gold weighed, and that it was heavy, and that it had to be cached, and that the best quick place would be in the bunkers. A hundred thousand don't take up much room. They got hold of a poor devil that had just done time, and made him think it was safe. That was this stoker here."

He turned and pointed at the stoker, who tried to glare back at him, then hung his head and looked at his feet.

"They got him to sign on as a stoker," George went on, "so if things came right they would have some one to help and to hide the loot. Maltby wasn't so foolish about safes. He'd handled a hundred, maybe, before he hit this ship. This time lock here was one of the kind that could be set by the cashier when he wanted to. Maltby had the men that put it in, the ones from down there at Frisco, set it at seven days. Then after that seven days going up to St. Michaels, he set it to suit himself; but the bluff was kept up, just to prove an alibi. On Wednesday night, at about midnight, Maltby looked out of his office. That's a week ago to-morrow, and it was just about seven minutes past twelve."

The purser, who had at first shifted and then tried to assume a highly amused but incredulous air, shouted a loud protest, and appealed to the captain. The latter merely said, in a voice of extreme quietude: "Hear him through before you say anything," and the purser subsided. The stoker still looked at the floor, and the quartermas-

ter's eyes roved from one to another with a stony, indifferent, brazen look.

"That's all right," asserted George, in his steady drawl. "I'll prove every item of time before I'm done. I've got the proof. The kind that will go in any court."

He paused for a moment, and shook a fist at the quartermaster.

"You might guess I have," he said suggestively, "if you had just a little more brains." Again he turned to the captain, as if the officer were a judge before whom he, the prosecuting attorney, was laying his case.

"Outside, standing by boat number eleven, was the quartermaster when Maltby looked out—and the quartermaster signaled that all was clear. He did it by suddenly dropping his cap as if it had blown off, then stooped and picked it up," George went on, and for the first time I saw the quartermaster's face show consternation. But George merely smiled knowingly, and continued:

"That was a sign to open the safe. It took Maltby just about three minutes, and then everything was clear. But this quartermaster crook, A. B., wasn't a chump, by any means. He knew that slings were needed to carry weight, concealed, and that slings were better than sacks. The sacks would show up to any miner they happened to meet on the deck. Some of 'em might be his own. So him and the stoker, at odd times, had made a sort of harness that would slip under a coat, or a jacket, or a blouse, or a stoker's shirt. A hundred pounds per man at a trip was a lot to carry; but it had to be done. So the quartermaster jerked out his clasp knife, cut open the canvas sacks in the vault, and he and the stoker loaded their slings and got away with the gold that we men had dug out of the frozen ground—away back there—back there in Alaska! Devilish little they cared how much it had cost of hard work, and sweat, and blood! All they knew was that Maltby, the purser, who had the biggest chance of being nailed, stood on watch, and left them to get away with it, and that they were to go below with it and bury it in a reserve bunker that wouldn't be used on this trip—a thousand to one in their favor. Twice these two men, the quartermaster and the stoker, made the trip; and each time they traveled, more than two hundred pounds of gold went with them. It was just exactly twenty-three minutes past twelve o'clock in the morning of last Wednesday when they took out the first load. That is, when they opened the first bags of gold that came within their reach. It didn't take long to make those two trips by which they might steal more than a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars; then it was the purser's turn. He shut the doors of the vault, leaving the combination so that it could be opened at any time—that is, with the time combination off.

"This forenoon he found time to reset the time combination to the seven-day run. His idea was that the safe itself would help to make this thing look like a mystery, and that he had five good, reliable witnesses, my pardners and me, to prove that he had locked the stuff in, turned on the time lock, and could not himself have opened it until to-day, when we were invited to see it opened. It was open when he called us; but he ran a bluff of opening it while we were there. He could take a chance on getting off through lack of evidence, or, if he had to do time, would get pretty well paid for it if his two pardners here played square. The chances were the gold wouldn't be found after it was well hid in a hollow davit, say, or some place as good, and the company would have to pay. The stoker would be a model stoker, and the quartermaster would be a model man, and stick with the ship. They would never be suspected. They could take their time to get the loot out. They might have to make a dozen trips in her; but some time, sooner or later, they could get at it and get away with it."

"That's right," said the chief engineer.

The faces of the purser and the stoker had run the gamut from pretended ignorance to consternation, and finally de-

spair; but the quartermaster, during the latter part of George's recital, took on a look of extreme interest, as if the tale did not in the least concern him, and he were sustaining a lively curiosity. It was quite evident that he was the brainiest, and probably the most hardened, of the three. The captain scowled, and occasionally doubled his fists, as if he would like to fall to and take physical satisfaction from the prisoners; and the rest of us wondered how on earth George had gathered all this information, of which we knew nothing.

"It's a lie! It's a lie!" the purser began to roar.

"Shut up!" the captain ordered, drawing back a clenched fist; and the purser subsided. The stoker still stood and scowled at the floor with an utterly hopeless expression. On him the captain turned, almost savagely.

"You lead these men to the place where the gold is hidden, and do it now," he said; but the man looked at the quartermaster as if for advice. The latter proved himself the leader. He suddenly burst into a cool laugh, as if he had participated in a mere schoolboy trick, and had been found out, then faced the captain.

"Hold on," he said calmly. "Where do we get off?"

"Where do you get off? You'll get off in some nice safe prison!" the captain snarled, shaking a fist under the man's nose.

"Better think it over, hadn't you?" retorted the quartermaster, with a grin. "In the first place you haven't found the gold yet, and you can take it from me this old plug will have to be laid up and scraped from keel to truck to find it. Maybe they won't get it then. Next place, she's due to sail back almost as soon as she lands, because this company is out to get the big Alaskan business, and delays don't help its reputation or bring in returns on its money. But that isn't all. If this company lets it get out that it was robbed on its very first trip and couldn't protect its passengers and take care of their gold dust, those fellows coming out of Alaska with a hundred times as much gold as you had on board this trip, will cross their fingers on this ship till all she can carry will be a lot of busted bums! And you bet the news will get to Alaska if there's ever a trial. Nice advertisement it would be—I don't think!"

For the first time the captain appeared almost beside himself with rage, and I thought I discovered a trace of helplessness in him as the cogency of the quartermaster crook's reasoning impressed him. And the latter stood and grinned, almost joyously.

"I'll throw you in the brig!" the captain shouted. "I'll call the master-at-arms, and slam you down there——"

"And let the news leak out that way, eh?" asked the quartermaster. "You know how long the story'll keep quiet then."

Again the captain was checked.

"Suppose you make a deal?" said the crook, getting to a business basis. "We find the gold and bring it back here to this vault. This poor chicken-livered purser gets a chance to walk ashore and turn in his papers and resign, and me and this other mut-head pal of mine just quietly go up, draw our pay, and go wherever we cussed please. That's what it'll come to! See if it don't!"

For further answer the captain rang for a steward, met the man at the door, summoned the master-at-arms, placed the stoker and the quartermaster under arrest, and ordered them taken to the hospital, with instructions that they should talk to no one, and that they were to be reported ill. The quartermaster bowed mockingly as they prepared to leave the purser's office.

"That's all right," he said. "You'll come to it yet. Me and my pal won't say anything; but before I go, I want to say I know who told all about the game —who blew the gaff! I'll hand this weak-kneed squealer one for luck!"

And before we could surmise his intention or interfere, he leaped forward and struck the purser such a mighty blow that the latter fell ten feet away, inside the vault he had helped to rob. The master-at-arms seized the quartermaster and brought him to his knees,

after which, cursing volubly, he and the stoker were led away.

"Well, anyhow, that proves that I had it right, don't it?" chuckled George, as the purser revived under the shock of a carafe of water doused over his head.

The purser, weak and confused, broke down, and begged the captain for mercy. He asserted that he had yielded to the quartermaster's guile, and had done so then only because he was in desperate need of funds; and that he had been long out of employment, and, quite feverishly, he pulled photographs and letters from his drawer, to prove that he had a wife and family dependent on him for support. He fell on his knees before the captain, there in the crowded little office, and I saw that the officer was slowly relenting, despite his desire to be stern. I think we were all of us touched by this poor, unfortunate, groveling man's penitence. I know I was, and George must have been, for he suddenly made his plea.

"Captain," he said, "let's let 'em go. What the boss crook said is right about the harm it'll do to the company to prosecute 'em, and, as it is, nobody's lost anything except this purser, who is out of a job and his recommendations. I'm sorry for him, I am."

The captain wavered, and said he would decide before we made a landing, or put it up to the officials of the company, and then we left the miserable man alone and walked out on the deck that was still deserted, and still flooded with moonlight. From the other side of the ship we heard the swishing of a hose as the decks were being washed down, and the sound of stentorian snoring from a near-by stateroom. We were eager with questions; but Shakespeare George merely yawned and said he would tell us all about it some time, but that now he was going to bed. And with this we were compelled to be content.

It was after we landed in Vancouver that we saw the manager of the company and one or two other men enter the captain's cabin, and the result was that a short time later we saw the left-handed quartermaster, and the stoker with three gold rings on his finger, going ashore, free and unattended. And then we, too, were invited to the captain's cabin, and George was asked to tell how he had arrived at those amazing facts.

"Three ways," he answered, with a grin. "First, it was against the rules to get into a lifeboat; but I took a snooze in Boat Eleven, and the sounds, and the moon, and the motion, just like bein' rocked to sleep, made me sleep too long. I was just about to crawl out when I saw a quartermaster standing below me; could tell him by his uniform, and I lifted my head and saw that what he was watching was the purser's door. The purser came out, and the quartermaster dropped his cap and hurried away. I crawled out of the boat, and stood taking a look over the side at the fireworks, when a stoker passed me with a queer sort of walk, and as he walked the moonlight shone on three rings on his finger. 'Humph,' says I. 'That man's got the lock step. He's just done time.' And I kept quiet and saw him go into the purser's office, and I wondered how they could be cronies. But I didn't think much about it and went to bed. When we found out we'd been looted, the first thing I looked for was Uncle Scythe, my clock. He can't run on his back, and had stopped at just twenty-three minutes past twelve on the morning of the twenty-third. Here he is!"

Quite triumphantly he displayed that battered old clock, and while the officials of the company examined it, went on:

"I knew at once that was the night I'd seen the queer things from the boat. But to get the quartermaster was the thing. And right there in the vault, I saw by the cuts in that hard sealing cord, being some used to reading signs, that they had been cut by a left-handed man, because a man naturally uses a knife with his right hand when cutting something as tough as that thick, hard cord was, and the cuts were plainly slanted the wrong way. I took a chance on it being the quartermaster who was

left-handed, also because I've noticed stokers don't carry heavy knives when they work, and the minute the captain landed me a left-handed quartermaster I sized him up as the real brains of the crowd. And I knew these men on this ship were all picked up in a hurry, and hadn't known each other because the skipper told me so, and that the purser couldn't have been a regular crook or he couldn't have got the job. From that I guessed how they had met. Then the weight of the gold told me how they must have gotten away with it, and that they had slings, because if that hadn't been so, they never would have cut and left the canvas sacks, and they'd want to make a quick job of it without attracting attention. Where could they hide it? thought I. And then I made another guess, and decided it must have been in the bunkers—temporarily, at least—and naturally they would have to be reserve ones, at least until they'd find a better place."

He reached over and took Uncle Scythe affectionately in his hand.

"This was the feller that kept check on 'em," he said.

"And the chief crook finally admitted to the master-at-arms," seconded the captain, "that what made them know their case was hopeless was that you had such accurate time that you must have seen the whole thing, except the hiding of the gold itself."

But Shakespeare George had apparently lost interest in the case, for he was most carefully winding and resetting that battered old clock.

THE CIRCUS AND THE SHOW-DOWN

HARRY BRYAN was one of the best-known dwarfs in the State of Kentucky. Scarcely as tall as a table, he had a tremendous head and face, and his body was so squarely and broadly built that his bulk was tremendous. A circus reached Harry's town, and he got his place in the crowding, hustling line which filed slowly past the window in the ticket wagon.

At last his time came. Reaching up as high as he could, he with difficulty put his only five-dollar note on the ledge, and, looking up in a pleading manner, said:

"Gimme one ticket."

The ticket seller slipped him a ticket and half a dollar. Harry emitted a heart-rending yell.

"Gimme my four dollars!" he shrieked, blocking the line, standing on tiptoe, and yet not able to see the ticket seller.

"Get on! Get on!" said the ticket seller roughly, from above. "I don't owe you no four dollars."

"Put him out! Push him out of the way!" yelled the countrymen behind him. "We want to buy our tickets."

The dwarf was pushed as far as the front wheel of the wagon. Leaping on the hub of the wheel, he leaned back at an acute angle and thrust his tremendous head and shoulders through the ticket window.

"Now, gimme my four dollars!" he said to the ticket seller in a deep, bass voice.

"I don't owe you no four dollars," repeated the seller, "and, what's more, you'd better get off that wheel."

"I ain't standin' on a wheel," said Harry tensely, squaring his great shoulders, "I'm standin' on my feet."

"Oh," said the ticket seller, his face turning pale, his long fingers flashing out the four dollars; "in that case, here's your money."

The Tuba Trail

By Robert J. Pearsall

Author of "With Squeegee and Holystone," "The Broken Cog," Etc.

Here is a very striking story of the "tuba men" by Pearsall. In writing us about it he said: "I might mention that the peculiar occupation of the 'tuba men,' upon which the plot hinges, is, or was when I was in the southern Philippine Islands—five years ago—carried on exactly as I have described it"

I HAD served with Rawlinson through the somewhat sanguinary campaign known unofficially as the "cleaning up of Samar," and then the chances of the service had thrown us apart. It was not to be wondered at, therefore, that when we met the other day in a business way in Santa Barbara, there were enthusiastic greetings, an immediate postponement of the matter of contracts, and an adjournment to the club. I have found few thrills in life comparable with the pleasure of meeting a man whom I have known in one of the out-of-way corners of the earth.

The talk had turned on brave deeds. I had told the story of my bravest man, the Sikh watchman who had alone held the gate of a convent filled with nuns and native Christian women against an inrush of fanatical Boxers, and had permitted himself to die only when his glazing eyes caught sight of the red jackets of the British marines as they beat down the mob.

"Remember," I said, "they were people of another race and another religion, he could have no real sympathy with them, and yet he stood by them and gave his life for them, simply because he considered it his duty. That is what I call bravery."

Rawlinson's eyes were gleaming. "Bravery, yes," he said warmly. "That was a man. Still—— Well, we must remember this, that it *was* his duty. Now, to my mind, it is when people go beyond their duties, when they do things which they cannot, by any human reasoning, be expected to do, that they attain the real heights. For example—I think we have time for this. And I want to tell you before I take you home.

"You remember that after the Samar expedition I was transferred to Malabang. I wasn't exactly sorry, for I was worn out with forced marches and dodging bolos and *kampilans,* and routine life in barracks looked good to me, from a distance. And the country around Malabang was at that time presumably peaceable, although, of course, the opium-fed datos were wholly unreliable. But for a year there had been no fighting worthy of the name, and the native rancheros had pretty well settled down to their business again, which was a good sign. I believe that for the fifth time 'Completely pacified' had been marked opposite the name of the Malanao tribe in the government records at Manila.

"Major Burdette was in command. A good officer and a good man; but, I've sometimes thought, a little too credulous and unsuspecting. It seemed to me, who, perhaps, had had more experience with the treachery of the natives than he himself, an example of this, that he permitted his daughter, Lena, to come down from Manila to Malabang. That was at first. Later, when, as his orderly, I became acquainted with the girl as nearly as a private soldier may hope to become acquainted with an officer's womenfolks, I found excuses for him. I did not

see how any human being could deny her a wish.

"It is very hard for me to describe her. When I think of her I think just of *her,* that's all, and it seems a sort of sacrilege to try to itemize her charms. She seemed a mixture of a child and a woman, and a fairy sent down to gladden the dull earth; she was as light as a feather, and quick as a Tagbanouas signal light. Her eyes were imperious, and yet there was always a maddening softness and suggestion of yielding in them, and her laugh—why, man, I'd lie awake nights listening to the echoes of her laugh in my brain.

"You can see how it was. Hopeless, I knew. Sometimes I'd curse the day that I'd been sent to Malabang. Then, again, when her sleeve would touch mine in passing, I standing like a graven image before her father's desk, or when, no officer being handy, I was permitted to help her mount or dismount from her pony, I'd feel that I was paid for all my heartaches. Oh, it was the real thing, Bob. I loved that girl; I'd have bartered my soul for her; and no one but a man that's seen service can understand the gulf that separated us.

"Still, I was egoist enough to think that, had things been different, she might have permitted herself to care for me. You know the little things a man will build on, the glance, the half smile, perhaps just the slightest pressure of the hand. But these very things which, under different conditions, would have meant ecstasy, were only an additional torture. I was unselfish enough for that. I did not want her to suffer as I was suffering. And I knew that she, daughter and granddaughter of an officer, understood her position and mine as well as I myself.

"Such were her attractions that it seemed almost a matter of course that every unmarried officer in the post was her suitor. It gave me an unreasonable sort of pleasure to observe that she picked out none of them for any special preference. Indeed, I was more frequently her escort on her rides than any other. Of course, such service came in line with my orderly duty, and my detail came from the major, but I could not help wondering whether it always originated with him. Sometimes I caught a curiously doubtful expression on his face as he gave me my orders. And it did not surprise me greatly when, in my second month in Malabang, I was relieved as orderly, and turned back to guard duty.

"Of course, that ended it. A nod and a smile when we met on the parade ground, or, perhaps, as she crossed my post, was all I could hope for, and even in that she violated the traditions of the service. A month went by without a word passing between us. Then we met again, on a practice march.

"We had been taking these regularly, company by company. Very frequently the major himself went with us, for he was purely an out-of-doors soldier. He must have been in a yielding mood when Lena proposed that she accompany him. At any rate, he consented, and she started out on her pony with us, for a two days' hike.

"She was the only one that was mounted; the major preferred to walk with the men, and, of course, the rest of the officers followed his example. For the most part we went single file, officers first, then the girl, then the rank and file. I was leader of the first squad, and consequently marched directly behind her; but for all the attention either of us could pay the other, we might as well have been separated by miles.

"Always beautiful, that day she was bewilderingly so. She was clad sensibly in knickerbockers, a drab shirt, and an officer's campaign hat, and, though this costume might have been expected to make a girl so slender look boyish, she was so delicately molded that it only emphasized her femininity. She rode, as she did everything else, with bewitching assurance and poise, and when we halted to rest, and she swung out of her saddle, it was with a movement as graceful and seemingly as effortless as the down swoop of a swallow.

"For hours our way led along a very

narrow trail, through a wilderness of thick grass that rose in many places well above our heads. Then we struck the hilly country, where there was less grass and more shrubbery, and, finally, well toward noon, descended into the Ganassi Valley, which is a fertile stretch of country pretty well taken up with *rancherias*.

"We reached a vast tuba plantation. You know, of course, what that means —a plantation of bamboo trees devoted to the production of tuba, which is obtained from their flower clusters. And you know the trade of the tuba men, flitting, by means of their light bamboo bridges, from treetop to treetop, with their *tongans* and *teremplans*, splicing fresh flower stems with *songas*, or hollow canes, and removing the ciderlike beverage from the *songas* that have previously been attached.

"I had been in tuba plantations before, but never in one so large, nor one in which the agility of the tuba men was so great. Several times we saw them, forty or fifty feet above our heads, running like monkeys from bamboo tuft to bamboo tuft, across the yielding poles. Sometimes, where the distances between trees were too great, an additional handrail had been supplied, but even then we wondered how they did it. However, that is one thing with which it is impossible for a white man to experiment, since the bridges are built to accomodate the weight of the tuba men, and the tuba men are light, even for Filipinos. A man heavy enough to get in the service would probably have broken down the first bridge he essayed to cross.

"It was in the middle of that plantation that the ladrones jumped us, a band of Dato Calbi's men, who had come up from the south.

"It was a complete surprise, and had they come at us with their full force at once they would have cut us to pieces. But there were three among them that had gone through the initiatory rites of the juramentado, and they precipitated the attack. They came at us out of the thick grass, attacking the center of the column, intent on two things—killing and being killed. They accomplished both purposes, but in the ratio of one to three, for Corporal Hilgren was the only man on our side that was killed, although half a dozen were pretty badly boloed.

"That was over in an instant, a mere flash of brown flesh, and cutting, white steel, and clubbed rifles. But a rushing sound and a most hellish yelling from the grass around us warned us that this was only the prelude to the entertainment. The major shouted an order to form hollow square—an order which the men hardly needed—and sprang for his daughter.

"I should have let him take her, I suppose, but I was nearer her, and, as I reached her, she leaped from her saddle. I caught her and stepped backward, and a Mauser bullet whistled past us in front and buried itself in the pony's side, tearing through the saddle just where her knee had been a moment before. It was a narrow escape.

"I whirled to my place in the line, with her clinging to me, and her eyes looking into mine. I'm afraid I told her something then, though not with words. Anyway, the answering light that came into her eyes, and the pressure of her arms tore my thoughts clear away from the coming fight, away from everything excepting just her. But by the time we'd got to the center of the rapidly forming square my brain had cleared, and I started to let her down. She tried to land on her feet. It was no time for mock courtesy. "Lie down," I said; "and stay down," and I pressed her, not overgently, I'm afraid, into the grass.

"Then I sprang back, fixing my bayonet, but in that moment the thing had happened that filled me at once with a great joy and a great despair. She, the major's daughter, had strained upward, and her lips had sought mine, and found them.

"Only one man had seen it, Sergeant Green, in charge of the right section of the square. He had looked around to order me into place. As I passed him I saw a smile on his face, and stopped. "'If you say anything of that I'll kill

you, sergeant," I told him, and I know that he knew I meant it. Then I sprang to my position.

"I was just in time, for the fanatical brown devils were upon us. They had rifles, as we discovered afterward, but they were attacking us now with their natural weapons, bolos, and *kampilans,* and creeses. Outnumbering us, as they did, three to one, and being for the most part perfectly willing to die, if they could only carry us along with them, it seemed at first a toss-up whether they would not sweep over us and chop us into mincemeat. Our rifles weren't much use, the thick grass enabling them to get within a few yards of us before we could see them distinctly. It was steel against steel, the straight blade against the curved, and the most prideful white man will hardly deny the superiority of the Mohammedan Malay in the use of the edged weapon.

"But we were fighting as a mass, and they as individuals. We held our formation. If we hadn't, if the line had given way at a single point, then they'd have taken the rest of us from front and rear, and there'd have been no doubt of the issue. But every man fought as though determined to die rather than yield a single inch. Even as I hacked and jabbed I wondered how much the thing that put me in a frenzy affected them, how much additional strength was given to their arms by the knowledge that Lena was in the grass at their backs.

"It was too hot an affair to last long. Although his followers were eager enough, their leader evidently had no intention of allowing his command to batter itself entirely to pieces against our bayonets. He probably thought he knew an easier way of killing us than that. There was a wild, wailing yell from a single powerful throat—I suppose it corresponded to our bugle notes for 'retreat'—and instantly we felt the pressure on our front slacken. A dozen or more altogether mad ones still came on, but they were shot from the left and right, while the men whom they attacked parried their blows. For the moment we were saved.

"But it was only for the moment. A rattle of shots came from the grass, and lead began to pelt us. The Malanaos had taken to their rifles, and now they had this great advantage: While they were scattered and hidden, and consequently presented impossible targets, we were compact and with a definitely known position, and could easily be riddled. It came to this, that if we scattered we would be easy meat for the bolo, and if we stayed where we were we would be food for powder—and just as this thought came to me there was a ringing cry from the major:

"'*Forward, double time!*'

"I turned for Lena, but the captain already had her by the arm, and was aiding her to the head of the rapidly forming column. The major's voice came again: 'Help the wounded, boys. Be sure they're dead before you leave any behind.' He himself was bleeding from a great gash in the left shoulder. I suppose this and the excitement of the fight caused him to forget himself. His order was unnecessary. It wasn't likely we'd leave any living men. We knew the habits of the Malanaos too well for that.

"There were three that had to be carried, so we couldn't move much faster than a walk. That was one time we blessed the sheltering grass, for, what with the firing and the yelling, the natives couldn't hear our movements, and they still kept pouring lead into the place we'd left. But after a minute the firing slackened, and we knew they were coming after us again.

"It seemed like the end to me, for our present formation was not one with which to repel a bolo attack. I was just cursing the major for a fool, when, suddenly, we broke out of the grass into a great level *rancheria,* which had been cleared of everything but bamboo, and which was freshly plowed, and ready for the sowing.

"Then I understood the meaning of the major's move. If we could win to the center of this field and intrench ourselves, we could hold them back

while the light lasted, at any rate. Of course, when night came—but that was in the future.

"The foremost of them broke out of the grass about two minutes after we did—and dropped, for we who weren't encumbered with wounded had been walking backward and watching for them. The rest of them wisely kept under shelter—their ardor for fighting had been cooled a little, I guess—but they peppered us with shot. We lost two more men on the way across the field, and four or five were wounded.

"When the major cried 'Halt!' we dropped to our faces. The ground was so soft that we wasted no time with intrenching tools. We scooped up breastworks with our hands, as you've seen children do at the seashore. Then, while the bullets whistled overhead, or buried themselves in the earth, we turned to examining our position and counting up our losses.

"As for our losses, they had been heavy enough. I don't like to talk of them; two of the best friends I had in the company had been left behind in the grass, and one other had died during the retreat. That is always the tragedy of battle; it is not while the fight is on that one feels it, but afterward.

"And, although we seemed safe enough for the moment, as far as the ultimate outcome was concerned, our position could not well have been more desperate. Sooner or later we knew it would come to hand-to-hand fighting again, and that, with our present ratio of wounded, would be a very one-sided affair. And while we lay there waiting, the native forces would be constantly growing stronger, augmented by fair-weather amigos from the near-by *rancherias* and *barrios*.

"We had just one chance. If the garrison at Malabang should in some way become aware of our plight in time, we were saved. But there seemed little enough hope for that. For one of us to attempt to break through the cordon of natives would simply mean that he would die a little sooner than the rest. And the possibility that the news would be carried by a friendly native—there were very few in those days—was too slight to be considered.

"Well, we set out to make our wounded as comfortable as possible, and to dig our trenches deeper. The former duty was taken over pretty entirely by Lena. It may sound rather foolish, but I tell you I believe that near half the pain of the bolo cuts and rifle wounds were taken away by her little fingers. I'd watch her make her rounds, and the men's foreheads would uncrease at her coming, and their tense lips part in a smile. And no wonder—some of them, poor fellows, hadn't felt the touch of a white woman in years.

"This, then, is the picture the sun saw as it dipped below the horizon: Ninety American soldiers, one-third disabled, and one American girl, lying behind great barricades of loose earth, in the middle of a brown field, half a mile across. Surrounding them, hidden in the thick grass, hundreds of naked native warriors. Tuba-bearing bamboos stretching their aërial thoroughfares over both. Fifteen miles to the north, Malabang. Twenty miles in the opposite direction—and this is something we did not know—another band of Malanaos hastening to be in at the death of the entrapped company.

"But our enemies *did* know of the approaching force, and that is the reason, I suppose, that the greater part of the night passed without a serious attack. True, they kept us awake by sniping, and there were single, fanatic attacks. One man had his head cleft from crown to chin. But the rush, which we were momentarily expecting, did not come off.

"However, early in the evening something happened that was infinitely worse, something that at least two men in the company would have given their lives to have prevented, more, would have yielded themselves up to the worst tortures that it lay in the brains of these fiends to conceive. Lena disappeared, vanished from our very midst, as though she had been caught up in the air.

"The thing seemed impossible. I had

heard the major calling for her softly, and had noted concern and then trouble come swiftly into his voice. I sprang up from the trench, with a vague idea of searching for her myself. But there was nowhere to look. She was gone, that was all. We knew it in a minute.

"The agony of that moment! The major and myself weren't the only ones that felt it; I thought the company was going to mutiny, demanding that they be allowed to go out to hunt for her. But the major, a soldier before he was a father, wouldn't hear of it. And while some—and I was one of them—cursed him beneath their breaths, we all knew in our hearts that he was in the right. It would have been a useless sacrifice. She had evidently stepped outside the trenches for a moment, and, whether she had been merely killed—how I prayed it was that!—or seized and borne off, in either case she was already beyond our reach. We had our wounded to consider, too. But I hate to think of what I'd have done if I'd been in the major's place.

"The hours dragged on slowly. No one slept. A silence that seemed in some way shameful hung over the camp. For once, the first time, I think, in my experience, there were no whispered jokes, nor low laughs, nor the humming of songs. It wasn't their peril that held them quiet, nor even the memory of their comrades that had died; a soldier is prepared for those things. It was the same feeling that I knew would cause them to look askance at one another in the morning light, if they ever saw the morning, the tormenting sense that they had fallen short of manhood. They had brought a woman with them, and she was gone, and they alive and inactive, and no amount of reasoning could argue away these elemental facts.

"It was a relief when, well toward morning, we became aware of an increase either of life or movement in the jungle around us. Really it was both, the arrival of the second party of ladrones, but we, of course, knew nothing of that. We guessed, however, and rightly, that it was a prelude to an attack.

"It lessened in a moment, and finally died away altogether. But we knew what that meant, that they had left the shelter of the grass, and were creeping toward us across the open field. The sentries that had been posted just outside the trenches were called in. We got ready to receive them. The Lord knows it was little enough trouble, just to steady our nerves, take a last look at our rifles, and creep a little higher up on our earthen ramparts.

"They came in a circle, closing in evenly. It was so dark that they couldn't see us, nor we them, until they were right on us. We gave them the lead, and then the steel, and then it was a hand-to-hand struggle again, with them scrambling like fiends up the sloping sides of the breastworks, and us beating them back with butt and bayonet.

"The natives yelled as they fought, but we worked in the same unnatural silence that had prevailed all night, and with a certain grim ferocity that capped anything I ever saw. The memory of Lena and the desire to avenge her, and to redeem themselves, had driven some of the men mad. One I remember who stood boldly up on top of the breastworks and swung at them as they came, gripping his rifle at the muzzle. I don't know how many he had knocked down, when a thrown *kampilan* caught him in the chest. He must have known he was a dead man, but instead of falling backward he plunged ahead, down the slope, into the midst of them. For a moment there was trouble among them, as though they were downing something that would not be downed, and then they came on again, but I wondered how many wounds he had received before he finally died.

"His fate didn't trouble me much, however, for I could see that it was only a matter of a very short time for all of us. We knew now that they had been reënforced; there were twice as many of them as the day before. And every moment our defenses were growing weaker. The heaped-up earth kept

sliding away beneath us, and beneath the feet of the charging Malanaos. And we were slacking up, of course; there were very few of us that were not bleeding from some wound.

"We might have lasted five minutes longer, certainly no more. It was the most timely thing I ever saw, the arrival of the cavalry relief. It swooped down upon us as silently as though it were borne on the black wings of death. The Malanaos must have thought it something miraculous, for we could hear them howling as they scattered before it and ran."

Rawlinson paused, looking at me quizzically. I stared back at him, with a curious sense of having been cheated of an ending. "The relief!" I stammered. "What relief? And where is your bravest man?"

"You are a story writer, you should be able to finish it," he said. "Six feet from our trenches stood a bamboo tree, its trunk notched at intervals, as you have often seen them, for the more easy ascent of the tuba man. Can you imagine Lena, knowing that she and she alone might do it, and that if her intentions were known she would not be permitted to make the attempt, stealing away at dusk, mounting the tree, and creeping across the shivering bamboo poles to the next tree, and so to the next, and on? Can you imagine her passing the cordon of Malanaos in that manner, knowing that a single false step would cast her among them, and, with a prayer in her heart that if this happened she would be dashed to death as she fell? Can you imagine her descending at last and covering the fifteen miles of jungle trail to Malabang in three hours of mixed walking and running? I am telling you of the bravest deed I have known, and not of the bravest man."

"And you and her?" I asked, after a minute.

"She loved me," he said simply. "I knew that. And I believed that to a girl who would cross the tuba trail alone the gulf that separated us would not be impassable. It wasn't as wide as it might appear, at that. I had my profession, though I was a ranker—— That is the reason I wanted to tell you before I took you home."

"SOMETHING JUST AS GOOD"

BEFORE Charlie Murphy sprang into fame as the owner of the Chicago Cubs, he worked as a clerk in a Cincinnati drug store, owned by old Doctor John Keeshan. The doctor was a prime chemist, an able business man, and an expert salesman. And one of the rules in his shop was that, if anybody asked for any preparation which was not in stock, the clerks must always answer:

"Sorry, but we haven't that. However," with a grand flourish, "here is something just as good."

One afternoon a middle-aged man came into the store and asked for a certain kind of hair tonic. At the time Doctor Keeshan, immaculate and imposing in his usual frock coat and high silk hat, was standing near by. Murphy was anxious, therefore, to make good on the store rules.

"Sorry," he said, with a deprecating bow, "we're just out of that preparation. However, we have something just as good."

"But," asked the prospective customer doubtfully, "is it just as good? I want it to keep my hair from falling out, and I'd like to be sure about it."

Young Murphy, in his desire to carry the thing out in the best style possible, waved his hand toward old man Keeshan.

"There's the very man who invented it," he said grandly.

The doctor, who was very deaf, construed the gesture to mean that he was being introduced to the newcomer. Accordingly, he took off his high hat, and bowed, thereby confessing his inability to mix good hair tonics. The head he bared was bald as an egg.

The Time That Was

BEING A TALE OF THE LOST LEGION

By Francis Whitlock

Author of "Stokeyne of the Lost Legion," "In Quest of the Fountain of Youth," Etc.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BASE PROPOSAL.

THE capture of Natalika was one of the causes which hastened the fall of Scutari. For months Essad Pasha had known that the result was inevitable; for the Greeks had cut his communications by land and sea with Constantinople, and, while his defenses were practically impregnable, there is a limit to the stores of food and ammunition of the best provisioned fortress. He had nothing to fear from the assaults of the Montenegrins; but already the civil population of Scutari was on the verge of starvation, and even the rations of the soldiers had been reduced.

Essad Pasha was an Albanian by birth, a brigand by nature, and an intriguing soldier of fortune by profession. Ghani, his elder brother, had been a protégé of Abdul Hamid; but for some reason lost favor—with the usual result. In accordance with the strict code of the Albanian vendetta, Essad had killed his brother's assassin, and then, to escape the vengeance of the sultan, he had fled to the protection of the Mirdites, and practiced for years the gentle art of brigandage. With the rise of the Young Turks, he returned to Constantinople, and aided in the deposition of Abdul Hamid, receiving as a reward the command of the bashi-bazouks stationed in Scutari.

When the ambassadors solemnly announced that the powers intended to preserve the independence of Albania, he proposed to Hassam Rizza Bey, the commander of the fortress, that they should forestall the action of the powers and raise the Albanian flag over Scutari; but the Turkish officer remained faithful to his salt. The proposition had been made over the dinner table at Essad's quarters, and Hassam was opportunely assassinated on his way home from that banquet.

On the following day, Nazim Pasha, the Turkish commander in chief, was murdered in Constantinople, and in the subsequent confusion Essad quietly stepped into the place of the man he had killed, proclaimed himself a pasha, and assumed command of the Turkish nazims of the garrison, as well as his own Kurdish irregulars. And then behind the defenses of Scutari he sat tight, laughing at the ineffectual siege of the Montenegrins, which he could have raised by one sally, and waiting with Oriental patience for things to come his way.

For a month he had been in secret negotiation with King Nicholas, ready to surrender the fortress for his price when he could decide definitely just what that price should be. Finally he had made his decision; it would be nothing less than the crown of Albania for his own head; a proposition which Nicholas had at first laughed to scorn, but which recent events were forcing him to consider.

It is always easier to place a king upon a vacant throne than to depose a ruling monarch, and if Austria carried out her threat to enter Albania she

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would at once declare for Ismail Kemal Bey, an inveterate enemy of Montenegro. Against that candidacy Essad, as a mere pasha, could not protest; for it was also the choice of Constantinople; but, as King Essad, he would gain the support of the troops under his command, and thirty thousand nazims, aided by sixteen thousand bashi-bazouks, was no insignificant army. Austrian intervention seemed imminent, and between two evils Nicholas was inclined to pick Essad as the lesser.

It looked far more advisable after Natalika had convinced him that an alliance between his own house and that of Zatriejebac's chieftain was impossible. Essad could count on the Mirdites, and a matrimonial alliance with Zatriejebac would bring about an offensive alliance by which the Malissora could be crushed and give the new ruler dominion over the highlands as well as so much of Low Albania as Nicholas was willing to share with him. The scattered bands of Turkish soldiers which the allies were harrying through Macedonia and Thrace would be glad to come under the protection of his banner, and the combined forces of Montenegro, High Albania, and the Scutari garrison could make good that defiance which Nicholas had already thrown in the face of Europe. Time was pressing, and hardly had Natalika left the hut under the protection of Rankin before Nicholas had dispatched a messenger to the outposts of Scutari demanding an immediate conference with Essad Pasha.

For obvious reasons, it was unwise to hold such a conference within the lines of either army; but the two commanders had met frequently during the past month; and, within an hour, each attended by a single orderly, both were at the usual trysting place—a spot well without the zone of actual hostilities, and shielded from the sight of the outposts by the great ridge of Tarakasch. And there in the darkness they discussed the fate of Albania in so far as they could decide and control it; a game in which Nicholas considered Natalika only a pawn.

Essad Pasha laughed scornfully when Nicholas had made his proposals, which included sending Buto as ambassador to Bairaktar to suggest the proposed alliance.

"Men must be cheap in Montenegro, if you can afford to use them so wastefully!" he exclaimed. "Bairaktar would strike his head from his shoulders and tack his skin to dry on the gate of the Castle of Gusinje. There is, however, always another way. Announce the matter to him; not as a proposal, but as an accomplished fact. Frankly, King Nicholas, not in the midst of my fanatical bashi-bazouks behind the walls of Scutari would I be safe if I offered indignity to a woman of their cursed clan. But she is in your power. Send her to me, and at dawn I will marry her in due form. If that wins us the support of Zatriejebac, good and well; if not—why, a wife more or less in my harem is of small moment. Bairaktar has already offered her as wife to one Moslem ruler; she was smuggled out of the Yildiz Kiosk by an accursed dog of an American, who robbed us of the fairest fruits of our victory after Abdul's banishment."

"Essad Pasha, you are not yet a ruler," answered Nicholas coldly. "The girl is a hostage in my camp; not a prisoner. I am willing to fall in with your plan to this extent: If she consents to become your consort, the ceremony can be performed at daybreak, and Buto will carry the news to Bairaktar; but I have pledged my word for her safety, and there shall be no coercion."

It was as well for the continuance of their negotiations that darkness concealed the expression on Essad Pasha's face. From her childhood, Natalika's beauty had been celebrated throughout the Albanian highlands. The Moslems had marveled when Bairaktar offered her for the yearly maiden tribute to the sultan's harem; but her beauty had led to a joyful acceptance of the sacrifice. Essad alone had guessed the real reason, and it was that guess which led him to return secretly to Constantinople ahead of her; to enter actively into the Young Turk conspiracy in the hope that

at the dispersal of Abdul's harem he might gain her for his own. For the moment his eagerness for the woman was greater than his ambition for the throne; but with Oriental cynicism he laughed derisively at Nicholas' scruples.

"And I suppose I must ride a-courting into that pretty little hornet's nest about your headquarters!" he jeered. "Come, come, King Nicholas; you must acknowledge that we Moslems know better how to manage women than you benighted Christians. Send the girl to Scutari, and I'll warrant——"

"You are speaking of the daughter of Bairaktar, and a hostage of Nicholas, of Montenegro!" interrupted the king sternly. "I do not invite you to my headquarters; for I could not guarantee your safety. This much I am willing to do: I will send my orderly to invite her to come here; but so long as she is under my protection she must be free to accept or reject your proposals."

After a moment of hesitation, Essad gave a grudging assent, and, calling his orderly, who was holding the horses out of earshot of their conference, the king scribbled a brief note by the light of a candle which the orderly drew from his saddlebag. Occupied with his own task, Nicholas paid no attention to the fact that Essad Pasha exchanged a few whispered words with his own orderly, and, plunging at once into a discussion of the proposed surrender of Scutari and the projected division of Albania between them, he was equally unconscious that in the darkness that orderly had galloped toward the Turkish lines as his own follower sped to the Montenegrin camp.

It was Rankin who received that note; for he lay stretched in front of the door which gave access to the hut which had been assigned to Natalika's use. At first, the orderly had demurred; but his orders had been imperative, and the Legioner obstinately refused him entrance. Without ceremony, Rankin read it, and then rapped softly on the door.

A moment later Natalika admitted them, and, after reading the note, she looked inquiringly at Rankin.

"I think it would be wise for us to go," she said thoughtfully. "I do not trust Essad Pasha; but King Nicholas assures us that there is no danger. Their meeting place is equally distant from the rival outposts, and by their agreement each of them is limited to a single orderly for escort." She spoke in English, and the Montenegrin listened suspiciously.

"That's just the trouble," answered Rankin grimly. "I didn't notice that I was included in the invitation, and this delegate refuses to let me accompany you. He has only two horses, and he says that if I went with you Essad's orderly would open fire on us without waiting to ask questions. I agree with you that it would be wise for us to go, for it is necessary to know what those two Orientals are plotting out there in the dark. Essad is bad medicine. I knew him in Constantinople. There is a way, however. Just take it easily, and fasten that door when I make my jump."

Natalika understood; for Rankin's chin had become ominously square. The Montenegrin had stepped forward impatiently; but the protest which rose to his lips was never uttered; for, with the agility of a wild cat, the Legioner launched his great body against him and bore him to the earthen floor. A hand on his throat checked the cry which he tried to give to summon help, and choked him into unconsciousness, and, before he had recovered, the Legioner had bound and gagged him.

"I hated to do it; but I can't see this hostage proposition when a Montenegrin and an Albanian renegade in the Turkish service meet in a back lot to discuss treason and stratagems," he said, as he stripped the long, white *struka* from the shoulders of the prostrate man. "They apparently don't trust each other; so why should we trust them? I reckon this cloak will make me a fairly good imitation of a Montenegrin in the dark, and the horses will know the way to the rendezvous."

He threw the cloak over his own broad shoulders; the bound Montenegrin from whom he had appropriated it

watching him with malevolent eyes. The Legioner smiled grimly as he drew a couple of American gold pieces from his pocket.

"The last of the treasure chest," he said, as he slipped them into the Montenegrin's broad sash. "That makes you just forty dollars richer than I am, my boy, and will pay for this garment, which I doubt you will ever see again. My account is closed, Natalika; for the moment I am a free man—and now I devote myself to your service."

With the greatest ease, Nicholas and Essad Pasha had arrived at the terms of capitulation of Scutari. The garrison was to march out with all the honors of war, which meant that they retained their arms and ammunition and all of the light artillery. Essad smiled furtively over the bargain; for he was leaving an impoverished, disease-infected city for the cleaner air beyond the walls at the head of an army quite equal in numbers and far superior in discipline and equipment to the force of his nominal conquerors, receiving as a free gift that for which he had been tempted to fight every day during the past month. Scutari, its shops plundered clean by his bashi-bazouks, its civil population impoverished by plundering and emaciated by starvation, its streets littered with the unburied dead, was a lemon which he had squeezed dry and which he was entirely willing to hand over. And, in return for that hollow victory, Nicholas was willing to indorse his claims to the Albanian crown and enter into a defensive and offensive alliance to support his pretensions.

The last detail of the capitulation had just been agreed upon when the thud of hoofbeats on soft ground came from the darkness, and Natalika, guided by the glow of Essad's cigarette, reined up her horse in front of them. Behind her, the white *struka* of the orderly was just visible in the darkness. The two men, who had been sitting together on a ledge of rock, rose to their feet; but Natalika refused the king's courteous invitation to dismount. She sat quietly on her horse, making no comment, while King Nicholas eloquently stated his case. It was a long argument which he made, enlarging upon the material benefits which would accrue to the clans of the highlands, the people of Low Albania, and his own Montenegrins if by alliance they might end the perpetual border feuds and abolish hostile frontiers; so long that the first warning of daybreak was visible in the east before he reached the vital point: The marriage of Essad Pasha and herself, through which he hoped it might all be accomplished.

And perhaps it was just so much of the two faces before him which that pale dawn light revealed which made him hesitate to put that proposition into words; for the contrast which he saw there warned him that he had built his fabric of ambitions upon a foundation of sand. Race, courage, a fearless frankness, and an unimpeachable personal purity were stamped upon every feature of her high-bred, classical face; a pride which would never stoop was proclaimed by the imperious, defiant carriage of her head.

Gazing at her with heavy-lidded, sensual eyes, in which covetousness grew as every second of increasing light revealed a new beauty, Essad Pasha resembled an unwholesome, bloated animal.

Hundreds had died of starvation in the beleaguered city; but there had never been evidence of want or scarcity in the pasha's palace. Six months of soft living, of indulgence in every riotous pleasure which his absolute and despotic power gave him had put the ineradicable mark of the beast on a face which had never been anything but animal; and, looking from one to the other, Nicholas paused abruptly, the proposition which had seemed so feasible in the darkness unspoken.

Natalika looked down on them with fearless eyes, although her soul was filled with loathing at what she read in those of Essad Pasha.

"That is a golden dream, your majesty; a dream which, I fear, will come true only when the lion and the lamb lie down together," she answered

quietly. "I can conceive of no common ground of interest, no bond of friendship, which could unite these hereditary enemies in a peaceful union."

Nicholas hesitated. He could not bring his thick lips to formulate the demand which he realized this girl would regard as a gratuitous insult.

But Essad Pasha was troubled with no such scruples, and he stepped forward, a smile which he intended to be ingratiating serving only to make his sensual mouth more revoltingly hideous.

"There is always a way, my girl," he said, with an offensive familiarity. "The Austrians alone can eat up my army, the forces of Montenegro, and the highland clans if they take them in separate mouthfuls; but, united, they would offer a meal which the combined armies of Europe could never digest. Nicholas offers Montenegro; I can pledge my own command, and I will answer for the Mirdites if we can arrange an alliance with Zatriejebac."

She looked at him scornfully, and, answering the touch of her fingers, her horse backed away sufficiently to place the original distance between them.

"And it is just that 'if' which is the insuperable obstacle," she replied coldly. "With Malissora an alliance might be within the range of possibilities; for they are men of pure race and of a common faith. But Zatriejebac will never meet the Mirdites, save with an armed front. We have no dealings with mongrels and curs, an outcast tribe which welcomes renegades and fugitive criminals of every race and creed."

A harsh, disagreeable chuckle came from Essad's fat throat.

"It's well that I am not of Mirdite blood; that I am of the clan only by adoption, or I might take offense," he retorted cynically. "My good friend Nicholas and I have discovered a solution of the difficulty. To-day, or to-morrow, at the latest, I shall be proclaimed King of Albania. It will be a wide throne, with ample room for two, and a swift courier shall carry to Bairaktar the announcement that his daughter shares it with me. Choose your own priest to tie the knot so firmly that he——"

Half sickened with disgust, Natalika recoiled from the hand which Essad Pasha extended, and so tightly did she draw the bridle reins that her horse reared and with menacing hoofs checked his advance. She turned a face white with passion to Nicholas, who stood before her like an abashed schoolboy under his teacher's reproof.

"Is this the protection which Nicholas of Montenegro gives to his hostages?" she demanded. "You stand silently by and let the ears of a woman who trusts herself to your generosity be outraged by a proposal of marriage from the foul lips of this infamous renegade, who has been false to every morsel of bread he has eaten in a career of treachery; who has snapped at every hand which fed him, and hired assassins less cowardly than himself to murder those whom he could not corrupt? It is of such filthy dregs of the Constantinople slums that you think to make a king! Let word of this reach the ears of Bairaktar and the men of Zatriejebac will flay the hide from your body and tan it with the ashes of Cettinje!"

From the moment the first streak of dawn had lightened the eastern horizon, the king had realized his mistake, and he listened without protest.

Essad Pasha listened with a cynical smile distorting his lips as Nicholas haltingly acknowledged his error and hastily assured Natalika that never for a moment had he contemplated employing a suggestion of coercion to his guest. Natalika listened with a curling lip. She had gathered the reins to wheel her horse and leave them; but Essad Pasha checked her with a word of warning.

"Just a moment, my girl!" he said jeeringly. "Once seated on the throne of Albania, I may be content to take lessons in kingcraft of Nicholas of Montenegro; but in the management of your charming sex I concede mastership to no man. It is foolish to regard promises to a woman too seriously, and I have taken steps to redeem the foolishness of Nicholas. You shall be given

a free choice at the door of my harem, my dear; the choice to enter it as a queen or a concubine; but enter it you must. Do nothing foolish; for I have no wish to harm you, to rub the bloom from the peach which is within my grasp. You are trapped, and it is useless to struggle; we are surrounded by my bashi-bazouks, and escape is impossible. King Nicholas, the rest of the bargain stands, and you are at liberty to return to your own camp if you go quietly; but this woman rides to Scutari with me. I make no idle boast; if I raise my hand, we shall be surrounded by a ring of steel bayonets which you cannot break through."

"Then I should advise you not to raise it, unless you are hankering for a bullet through your black heart, Essad!" With an oath on his lips, Essad Pasha wheeled about; for that advice, spoken in *Osmanli* and given in a quiet but determined voice had come from behind him. He was not reassured by what he saw; for he had cause to remember the flashing blue eyes which gazed down on him, and there was no wavering of the pistol barrel which protruded from the opening of the white *struka*.

Suspicious of treachery from the first, Rankin had remained as close as he dared to the group, and for the past ten minutes he had gradually urged the horse which his heel furtively made restless nearer and nearer. Here and there in a wide circle about them he had detected figures lurking in the brush or imperfectly concealed among the rocks; but he had quickly realized that an attempt to break through the cordon would be justified only as a last desperate resource.

Essad Pasha's face became a sickly, mottled horror, as he gazed with fascinated eyes at the muzzle of the revolver and remembered that the man behind it had proven himself absolutely incorruptible. Rankin's narrative of his experiences in Constantinople to which Jones-Morgan had listened, had omitted many interesting details. He had made no mention of the fabulous bribes he had refused, of the chastisement he had administered to some of the would-be corruptionists who had been annoyingly persistent. Now, corrupt and rotten as Essad Pasha was, he was no coward; but he was too much of a fatalist to fight against the inevitable. He realized that he was facing certain death if he made the slightest move to summon his hidden followers, and, announcing his surrender with an inclination of his head, he stood passive and in sullen silence.

"King Nicholas, I hold you guiltless of knowledge of this treachery, but guilty of having subjected Natalika to the insult of listening to this dog's proposals," said Rankin sternly. "I consider that even our tacit parole is canceled. You will kindly write a safe-conduct which will save us from annoyance by your people on our return journey to the frontier of the Albanian highlands. Essad, if you so much as twiddle your thumb, I will shoot you like the dog you are; but you may call to your orderly to fetch those horses here. Say one word too much, and I fire!"

Huskily and with all circumspection, the order was given, and the orderly obeyed. Essad's horse was a sleek, well-fed Arabian; but the orderly's mount was a gaunt, saddle-galled scarecrow. Oblivious of the Legioner's threatening pistol, the orderly, a grizzled nazim cavalryman, respectfully held the ornate stirrup of the gaudy saddle; but Essad was wise enough to remain motionless, his eyes fixed on those of the Legioner.

"No, we shall do a little shifting," said Rankin grimly, in response to his mute questioning. "King Nicholas, Natalika seems to have appropriated your horse; but you will lose nothing in the exchange by taking Essad's. Essad, after his majesty has mounted, you may climb on the back of that crowbait. Natalika and the king will ride ahead. We shall follow side by side, and at the first sign of treachery from you I shall be pleased to send you to the tender embraces of the houris of the Mohammedan paradise. That goes until we are beyond rifle shot of your men, and

then we shall go into executive session and consider any unfinished business. That provides for every one but your orderly, and I would suggest that you inform him that the slightest indiscretion on his part will lead to his early demise after I have settled you."

Humiliated beyond expression, the king had said no word since Rankin first dominated the situation. At the first confession of treachery, he had determined to so far fulfill his promise of protection as to kill Natalika with his own hands before permitting her to fall into the clutch of Essad and his bashi-bazouks. Rankin had let him down easily, and in dignified silence he mounted the high-peaked Turkish saddle.

With a few words of explanation to his orderly—words which he was painstakingly careful to make distinct to the Legioner's suspicious ears—Essad climbed on the back of the wretched animal that was left, the orderly rendering a sullen assistance. Had Rankin not been so absorbed in watching for possible treachery from Essad, he would have caught the gleam of malignant hatred in the orderly's eyes. Like most of the Turkish cavalrymen, he had been recruited from the desert, and the desert horseman loves his mount just a shade better than his wife. Greedy for graft, Essad had appropriated most of the money which was supposed to purchase forage for his cavalry, thereby earning the hatred of the troopers. That was bad enough; but now the hated thief was riding off on the miserable wreck of what had once been a beautiful animal, and—crowning and unforgivable insult!—leaving a saddle-bred man afoot!

It was only fear of the American's revolver which made the Turk maintain his sullen silence as the little cavalcade started. Essad, conscious that the watchful eyes of his men were eagerly fixed on him, was studiously careful to keep his hands down, and at Rankin's suggestion he even tried to force a smile —which ended as a pitiful grimace. His men were well trained, and they made no sign until Natalika and the king had passed the cordon. Even then there would have been no trouble if Essad had not robbed the forage account; but with that memory rankling in his heart the orderly had waited only until he believed they were out of effective pistol range before giving the alarm. He had counted that the first volley would involve his thieving commander in the destruction of the infidels; for the bashi-bazouks shoot straight and mercilessly; but he had not counted upon the fact that the very quality which had earned his hatred had gained for Essad Pasha the adoration of his irregular troops.

Himself a systematic and consistent thief, he had never stayed their greedy hands from looting, and no scruples of mercy had ever led him to interfere with their other diversions when they were employed in their usual occupation of harrying villages which were delinquent in their tax payments. At the first alarm, every man had risen to his feet; but only the half dozen who were within close range dared risk a shot for fear of killing their own commander.

Two of these Rankin killed with quick right and left snapshots. King Nicholas wheeled and shot a third, and then at Rankin's shouted order galloped on with Natalika, while the Legioner reached over, and, grasping Essad's bridle reins, urged his wretched beast to a gallop.

When they took stock out of rifle range they found that the only casualties were a trifling flesh wound of Rankin's thigh and an insignificant scratch on the flank of the king's mount; but Essad glibly volunteered the statement that his first act on returning to Scutari would be to hang the idiot who had so wantonly invited their destruction.

"You're not back there, yet, Essad," Rankin grimly reminded him. "If that horse holds out, I am tempted to take you to Gusinje to let you repeat your proposals in Bairaktar's hearing. King Nicholas, you are within a half hour's ride of your outposts."

The king bowed low. Action and excitement had softened the sting of his

humiliation, and there was much that was truly kingly in the old despot's curious composition.

"So long as you are in the territory which Montenegro has won, you are Montenegro's guest, sir, and with your permission I shall give myself the pleasure of riding with you to the frontier," he said simply. "I am sorry to have given cause of offense to Bairaktar's daughter; but if you wish, I, too, will ride to Gusinje, to repeat to him the apology which I now make to you."

Rankin looked at him with a new respect in his eyes.

"Your majesty will, I believe, have ample opportunity to make peace with Natalika between here and the frontier," he said quietly. "I would suggest that we move on, and while I watch this delegate you will have your chance."

And so interested and absorbed did the king become in the not unpleasant occupation of winning back his place in the girl's good graces that the miles were unheeded as they galloped over the great plain of the Zeta.

The tall minarets of Scutari were just visible on the horizon when Rankin aroused him by calling a halt. Essad Pasha's horse was exhausted, and, after the Turkish commander had obeyed his curt command to dismount, Rankin mercifully ended its sufferings with a bullet. Then, turning in the saddle, he pointed across the great plain over which they had ridden.

"Essad, there are several things which I should like to say to you; but they would hardly be fit for a lady's hearing," he said sternly. "If chance ever brings us together again, I shall be pleased to enlighten you; but for the present our roads part here. Yonder lies Scutari, and I advise you to beat it while the beating's good!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE CAMPAIGNS OF THE NEW SKANDERBEG.

The men of Zatriejebac were hardy and active; but in following their new leader their power of endurance was tested to the utmost. At his heels they swept through the lands of the Malissora like a destructive hurricane. Of their traditional method of warfare he knew nothing, of the science of military strategy even less, and his whole campaign seemed to be conducted according to the rules of Donnybrook Fair, which implied hitting every head in sight. His appetite for fighting was insatiable, and instinct apparently led him to where it could be indulged. Fortunately, the Malissora had never labored to construct the massive masonry castles which the Christian knights had deemed essential. Numerically far superior in strength to the little band of castaways from whom the Zatriejebac were descended, it had been easy to hold their own by defending their borders, and it was so long since they had been even threatened with invasion that the simple defensive fortifications of their towns and villages had been neglected.

A single well-fortified town would have saved them from the humiliation of a successful invasion; for the Zatriejebac possessed no siege train, and a prolonged investment would have enabled the Malissora to concentrate in force and crush them; but it was just the lack of such impedimenta which gave the invaders the chance of victory. With no baggage or artillery to hamper it, this little force which followed the modern Skanderbeg was even more mobile than Stonewall Jackson's famous "foot cavalry," and skillful in foray the abstemious mountaineers subsisted comfortably in the enemy's country at the enemy's expense. There was no line of communications to be guarded, and, inspired by the madness of fanaticism, they gave no thought to maintaining a line for possible retreat.

Once across the border, every man knew that he could never recross it except as a victor, and such a blind, unreasoning faith in the invincibility of their leader filled their hearts that the victory was already half won. The country was aroused; but the flower of the fighting men were guarding the passes on the far frontier, and the others, accustomed to the leisurely methods of border warfare, were so

slow in answering the call to arms of the flaming beacons that by forced marches the Zatriejebac had cut the territory in halves before they could mobilize.

And then in detail Zatriejebac proceeded to smash its hereditary enemy as it had never been able to do in mass. Climbing trails in the darkness at which a goat would have hesitated in broad daylight, they crossed ranges of hills and mountains to fall unexpectedly on drowsy encampments at dawn, only to cover an incredible distance in the rough country to strike another force by midday.

No matter how unmercifully their tireless leader forced them in the marches, they were never too weary to give eager response to his battle cry, and with that "To me! To me! With God and Skanderbeg for Albania!" he had called them to many a furious charge in which he was always in the forefront.

More than once those charges had resulted in fierce hand-to-hand combats; but against bullet, bayonet, and clubbed musket he seemed to have a magical immunity. The most fanatical of the nobles and their followers threw themselves no more recklessly against the enemy than did he; but while many of them died in that desperate fighting he always emerged unscathed from the thick of it. And so day by day their faith in him grew, and the increasing belief in their own invincibility more than compensated for the loss in numbers resulting from the incessant fighting.

In a week the tough rawhide *opanki* which had protected their feet had been worn through by the incessant marching over rough trails, and the white fustanella of their costumes hung in rags and tatters from gaunt figures toughened to bone and sinew. They were hollow-eyed and haggard from lack of sleep; but in those eyes burned the fire of fanaticism which made them forget their flesh-and-bone weariness. Without meeting with a single reverse, they had swept over a fair half of the Malissora territory, and where they had passed only carrion eaters could have gleaned subsistence.

The tales of their prowess preceded them, carried by the fugitives who escaped their fierce onslaughts, and in those tales the descriptions of their leader lost nothing. With their own eyes the fugitives had seen the genii which the black magic of the infidels controlled, guarding him from harm in the mêlées; they had felt the grip of the *djins* whom he summoned from the black pit of Eblis to make the hands which held their rifles waver and the arms which would have wielded their scimitars powerless to strike him down. Fear became magnified to panic, and when that tatterdemalion army marched from the territory it had so mercilessly harried, the chiefs of the Malissora had abruptly broken off all negotiations with Ferdinand of Bulgaria, and sent a cartel to arrange a truce with the invaders. In numbers the Malissora was still far superior to the Christian clansmen; but recent events in the Balkans had lessened the faith of the Moslems in the invincibility of the green banner of Islâm under which they fought.

Now that Adrianople had fallen, the Bulgarian veterans who had taken it could be hurled against them at the frontier, and with Zatriejebac threatening them from the rear they were in no position to haggle for terms. The plenipotentiaries accordingly found the new Skanderbeg as abrupt and implacable in a peace council as he had been impetuous and terrible in conflict. As a matter of fact, it was distinctly a one-man show, rather than a council; for their new leader did all the talking, and in the curtest language he stated his terms.

The guardianship of the Macedonian passes was to be given over to Zatriejebac, a strong force of the Malissora was to march at once against the Mirdites, and twenty hostages selected from the families of the Malissora chieftains were to be sent to Gusinje as a guarantee of the tribe's good behavior. The alternative was immediate attack, and when the plenipotentiaries saw the light which kindled in the eyes of the Zatriejebac nobles as that alternative was stated, there was no further hesitation. Humiliating as the terms were, they

were accepted, and at the announcement a shout of victory came from the Zatriejebac.

Now, while the terms of the peace compact had been stated in the language of Skanderbeg, they had been unconsciously dictated by the subconscious mind of the slumbering Jones-Morgan; suggested by his experience gained in the American national game which is played with fifty-two cards and stacks of variously colored ivory disks; for they were the veriest bluff.

Without doubt the weary and battle-scarred army could have prevailed against the demoralized remnant of Malissora; but while its leader was presenting a bold front to one enemy he was conscious that another—even more formidable—was threatening its rear. The Mirdites, watching argus-eyed from their mountain fastnesses, had seen the lands of Zatriejebac's denuded of its defenders and had been quick to grasp the opportunity for an easy conquest. Like hungry crows settling on a newly planted cornfield, they had swooped down, ravaging with fire and sword, wantonly destroying the temporarily deserted villages, and raging against the weakest of the isolated castles to which the villagers had fled for protection.

Couriers had brought the evil tidings from Zatriejebac. Plava was already surrounded, and the advance guard of the renegades had been descried from the battlements of the Castle of Gusinje. Those two fortresses could hold out indefinitely; but unless the clansmen speedily returned the weaker castles would be starved into surrender or carried by assault. Therefore, although the first part of the campaign which he had mapped out in the great banquet hall had been swiftly carried to a successful conclusion, they could not tarry for recuperation before entering upon the second.

It was necessary to cut his force in two to provide defenders for the Macedonian passes; but, in fighting effectiveness the part was greater than the whole when the sadly depleted ranks turned their faces homeward. They had lost nothing of fanaticism, and now it was stimulated by a fierce thirst for vengeance against the marauders; a thirst in which pain, fatigue, and everything save blood lust was forgotten. The Malissora were sent over the passes to invade the mountainous country of the Mirdites, which would recall a portion of the invaders for its defense, and with an almost incredible speed the Zatriejebac retraced their steps to attack those who remained to plunder.

They were worn to emaciation and half naked; but their arms were free from rust. Like a pack of ravening wolves, they fell on the raiding Mirdites, who were burdened with plunder, giving no quarter and taking no prisoners. Lulled into a false security, the renegade tribesmen had scattered in search of loot, wantonly destroying what they could not carry off, and ruthlessly butchering such of the unfortunate inhabitants as fell into their hands. In payment of their barbarities, the Zatriejebac exacted a bloody toll of vengeance from the raiding parties, which they encountered on their swift march, a toll which struck terror to the hostages of the Malissora who marched wearily with them. They swept the country clean before them, raising the siege at each of the outlying castles, which they passed by, annihilating the besiegers; but that was child's play compared with what lay before them.

Smarting under his humiliation, Essad Pasha had reached Scutari worn and footsore; but before he slept he dispatched couriers to the tribe of his adoption, offering a tremendous reward immediately and a large privilege of plundering in the future for the capture of Natalika and her escort. Believing that he would make good his claim to the Albanian throne, the Mirdites had risen to a man in his support, and, while a fair portion of its members were tempted by the easy loot which the abandoned countryside offered to indulge their propensity for brigandage, the main body had pushed on to invest Gusinje; for spies had reported the ar-

rival of Bairaktar's daughter at his castle. Essad Pasha had promised to assault the passes and send artillery as soon as he had evacuated Scutari, and, strong as was the old medieval stronghold in its period, its defenses would crumble before an attack of modern guns.

It was a formidable army which lay before the walls of Gusinje for the remaining remnant of Zatriejebac to attack. For the first time their leader hesitated and restrained, rather than stimulated, the enthusiasm of his men. There was nothing of cowardice in that hesitation, although the attack seemed a forlorn hope; but for the first time the fatalistic fanaticism which had developed after that terrible blow on the head wavered.

Bairaktar, who stood beside him on the knoll from which he surveyed the great camp of the Mirdites before the walls of Gusinje, looked at him anxiously, for a curious change had come over his face. It was still unmistakably that of Skanderbeg; but in the eyes there was a strange suggestion of bewilderment and a softness which had been wanting for many days. The change had come suddenly; for it was with the eagle's look that he had gazed first on the flaunting war banners of the Mirdites; it was softened only when he raised his eyes to the grim battlements and towers of the old medieval keep. Bairaktar's eyes followed his, and then he knew.

From the high donjon of the castle the blue with the white cross of Zatriejebac banner still flung defiance at the besiegers; but beside it, equally honored, another banner of which he had heard, but had never seen, floated on the breeze. Horizontal stripes of red and white formed the body of it, and in one corner was a constellation of white in a field of blue. That vision of the stars and stripes was struggling to rouse dormant memories in the reincarnated Skanderbeg, and, although he did not realize it, in that strange conjunction of banners Bairaktar was seeing an omen of approaching and unforeseen change in the destinies of Albania.

CHAPTER X.

ZATRIEJEBAC TRIUMPHANT.

The tale which Kuc related after welcoming Natalika and her cavalier on their arrival at the little frontier fort so lightened their spirits that they forgot their weariness and pushed on for Gusinje in the hope that they would overtake their comrade who had been so miraculously recalled from the dead. There was a song in the girl's heart as they rode; but while Rankin's loyalty and unselfishness was above suspicion, he rejoiced for her, rather than with her. Self-contained and unemotional as he was, there had been something closely akin to envy in his eyes as she made that frank confession of love for the man who she believed had died for her; and then, as he was a very human person, he had permitted himself to build castles; edifices which Kuc's very confused narrative had brought tumbling about his ears.

The gold pieces which he had donated to King Nicholas' orderly finished the last of the American's money which he had had in his possession and incidentally left him penniless; but believing Jones-Morgan to be dead, it had also left him free. But now he realized that he was not yet his own master; for, while Natalika was restored to her own people, he was still bound in loyalty to Jabez Cooper to do his utmost to realize the young American's strange ambition for him.

On their arrival at the castle of Gusinje, Natalika, on learning the strange particulars of the events which had led to the selection of the American as the commander of the Zatriejebac army, would have set out in pursuit of that expedition which had marched from the castle gates only a few hours before; but that proposal Rankin absolutely refused to entertain.

For weeks they had been under a tremendous strain; for the last three nights she had hardly closed her eyes, and there is a limit to human endurance. Gently but firmly he insisted that she should rest, and when she finally consented she acknowledged that rest in

a secure place for a night would be a blessing. And so peacefully did she slumber in the safety of that old castle where she had been born and passed her childhood that she slept the clock around and awakened only to find every trail to the interior blocked by the hosts of the renegade Mirdites.

They discussed the possibility of breaking through; but the reports of the fugitives who sought the protection of the castle walls convinced them that such an attempt would be utter madness, and reluctantly they were forced to inaction; for the Mirdites contented themselves with investing Gusinje so completely that a mouse could not have stolen through their cordon, waiting for the arrival of the artillery which Essad Pasha had promised before attempting an assault.

In their enforced idleness, Natalika stimulated Rankin to play the part of troubadour which she had played for Jones-Morgan during their long and perilous journey from Salonica, and she listened with as rapt attention to his stories of America as the New Yorker had listened to her tales of the medieval and romantic history of High Albania.

Although she would not confess it to herself, the return to the stronghold of her forefathers had been a distinct disappointment. When she left it as a young girl, she had known nothing of life save what could be learned within its walls; nothing of luxury beyond the rude abundance which satisfied the primitive mountain folk who formed its garrison. In their isolation, the chiefs of the Zatriejebac had jealously nourished the chivalric traditions which the crusading knights had brought with them to the country; but gradually such arts and graces as softened the stern lives of those steel-clad warriors had been lost. At the great banquets there was still a very definite distinction between those who might sit above and those who must remain below the salt; but there was nothing of elegance in the food or service.

Of education there was none, and even the priests were so illiterate that the wonderfully illuminated old parchment manuscripts which chronicled the early history of the clan were never consulted and, transmitted from generation to generation by word of mouth, that history had become so interwoven with myth and legend that in the light of her broader knowledge Natalika lost its glamour.

Secluded as her life had been in Salonica, her teachers had been wisely selected, and into that seclusion they had brought the knowledge of all that is best in modern civilization. Added to that, they had taught the ignorant little barbarian the advantages of modern luxuries, so that both the intellectual and material crudeness which in her ignorance she had accepted as a matter of course, made the return to her childhood's home anything but an unalloyed pleasure.

It was touching to have all the simple-minded old feudal retainers drop on their knees and kiss the hand of the daughter of Bairaktar; but even in the most luxurious apartments they knelt on a rough, stone-flagged floor. The ancient tapestries which covered the walls of the banquet hall were magnificent; but in all of that great castle there was not a trace of modern comfort or luxury. No printed word had ever been carried through the great portal; save for the modern firearms, it had made no advance and admitted nothing new in centuries. Every man in the garrison would have willingly died for her; but there was not one of them who would have understood her if she had spoken of anything which they had not learned in the monotonous routine of their simple, isolated lives or from the lips of the story-tellers whose one theme was the apocryphal history of the clan.

Therefore, she listened eagerly to all that she could induce Rankin to tell her of the customs and manner of life of his own countrymen, and more especially to such very limited information as he could give her of his countrywomen. And, while he talked, her deft fingers were at work fashioning the banner of his country which was to arouse the dormant memories of Jones-Mor-

gan as he gazed at it as the leader of a savage and desperate little army.

It was a curious interchange; for, while the young American was carrying fire and sword through the enemy's country in the personality of the old Albanian hero which he had become as a result of absorbing the romantic stories which the Albanian girl had told him; that girl was no less eagerly absorbing a sympathetic knowledge of the country he had left from the stories of the Legioner. Day by day, as they waited impatiently for news of their own army and watched from the battlements the constantly growing host of the besiegers, the crudeness and narrowness of her surroundings became more distasteful to her; the prospect of a long life spent in such a barbaric environment more horrible.

But, in spite of all modern education and the luxury she had known in Salonica, Natalika was primarily a daughter of Albania, and for one glorious hour she was destined to forget everything but that. For on the day when smoke signals from the far hilltops announced the approach of the men of Zatriejebac she had raised the banner which her own hands had fashioned in honor of the man whom she had taught to fight for her clan and country, and then, as women of her race had done throughout the centuries, she watched with straining eyes from the battlements for the safe return of the man she loved.

Swiftly as Zatriejebac had marched, beacons and signals from hilltop to hilltop had outsped them to the encampment about the walls of Gusinje. Believing that Zatriejebac was marching to certain destruction in its mad attack on the powerful Malissora, the Mirdites had volunteered so eagerly at Essad Pasha's appeal that they had left their own country and their ill-gotten accumulations of spoils practically unprotected. But with the astonishing tidings that Zatriejebac was marching back victorious, while Malissora was marching to invade their own territory, the ambition of Essad Pasha was forgotten. Rallying their own particular followers about them, scores of the Mirdites chieftains had set off hurriedly to defend their own homes, and the camp of the besiegers was in disorder. In numbers, those who were left far exceeded the Zatriejebac force; but they lacked the discipline, and, above all, the spirit of the comparatively small band under the leadership of the modern Skanderbeg.

Curious as had been the effect of the sight of the Stars and Stripes on the entranced American, it had not served to dull the fighting spirit which had been so rapidly fostered in his new incarnation. Rather, it had stimulated it, and never in one of the many fights of the past few days had he shown greater determination and reckless bravery than when at the head of his war-worn veterans he charged into the very thick of the Mirdites host. One withering volley had preceded that charge; but, following that, it was the bayonet and butt of hand-to-hand fighting, and never in the old days when armored knights sallied across the drawbridge to attack the swarming infidels had a daughter of Albania watched from the battlements a more desperate conflict.

Bound together only by the loosest of tribal ties, the followers of the individual Mirdites chieftains were not drilled in concerted action, and at first the compact body of Zatriejebac had cut through their lines as a great ocean liner cleaves through a head sea. So furious had been the onslaught that had the Zatriejebac merely wished to gain the shelter of the castle walls they would have done so with hardly the loss of a man; but, once they had broken through that hostile line, they turned to rend it. Shouting their fierce battle cry, "With God and Skanderbeg for Albania!" they flung themselves desperately against the renegades, losing the advantage of their compact formation in the indiscriminate mêlée which followed. It had been maintained sufficiently long to bring a certain demoralization to the enemy, however; and the resistance was that of men fighting for their lives, rather than with the hope of victory.

Watching it with flashing eyes from the castle walls, Natalika realized how hopeless would be that conflict if the Mirdites had been actuated by the same spirit as the men of her own clan; but her heart sank as she saw that mere force of numbers bade fair to accomplish that in which poor organization had failed.

Carried away by their rage, the Zatriejebac were loosening their ranks that every man might be face to face and chest to chest with an enemy, and, stabbing and clubbing, they became separated into groups, so that the entire surface of the plain became dotted with miniature whirlpools of conflict. In such a fight superior numbers gave a tremendous advantage; but, in spite of their acknowledged leadership, the young American and Bairaktar were unable to hold the force together.

And there, under the very walls of their strongest fortress, the Zatriejebac would have gone down to defeat, had it not been for another American, Rankin, of the Lost Legion. Drilled to exact obedience, the weakened garrison watched the tide of battle set against their own banners without thought of disobeying the last injunctions of Bairaktar, that every man should die at his post if need be; but under no circumstances and in answer to no cry of distress was a man to sally out. No argument would induce the duka in command to lower the drawbridge for a sortie; but Rankin had not been included in his orders, and at his earnest pleading he opened a small postern and permitted him to make a precarious exit on the narrow string piece on which the bridge rested when it was lowered.

At that very moment the fortunes of the Zatriejebac were at the lowest ebb. More than one of the fighting groups had been overwhelmed, and even the leaders at the head of such a force as they had managed to hold together were hard pressed. Natalika could foresee nothing but disaster, the death of her father, the death of the man she loved, and the practical annihilation of her clan. With none to hold it, the great stronghold would be a useless possession, and in a few fiery words she roused the garrison to mutiny. She was but urging what their own desires prompted, and disregarding the orders of the duka they lowered the great drawbridge, raised the portcullis, swung wide the heavy portals, and poured from the castle close on the heels of the Legioner.

It was a pitifully small reënforcement, but the moral effect of its appearance on the confused and irresolute renegades was tremendous. Perhaps through the haze of combat the numbers seemed magnified; but, in any case, the rank and file of the Mirdites broke and fled when victory was within their grasp, despite the commands and curses of their officers and chiefs.

And so the siege of Castle Gusinje was raised and the supremacy of Zatriejebac in High Albania established, but at a heavy cost. Many of the clansmen had fallen in that last battle, and hardly a man of the survivors but who was more or less grievously wounded, while the man who had walked out of the past to lead them lay unconscious, surrounded by a circle of enemies who had fallen by his hand. Dealing death and destruction, Rankin had fought his way toward him, and he and Bairaktar alone knelt beside him after the victory was won.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GREATEST GIFT.

In the vaulted passageway outside of the room in which Jones-Morgan was struggling back to consciousness under the watchful eyes of Rankin, Bairaktar and Natalika paced up and down. Gathered in the great banquet hall, the nobles were celebrating their victory and impatiently awaiting for the news of the outside world and of possible further plotting against their liberties which they believed that Natalika had brought with her; but she refused to satisfy even Bairaktar's curiosity until he had satisfied hers as to the doings of the man she loved, and, carried away by his own enthusiasm as he talked, her father had fairly deified him.

"By St. John of Medua, Albania owes much to the Montenegrin dog who gave him that blow on the head!" he exclaimed, in conclusion. "It knocked all memory of America out of him; but it made him Skanderbeg!" Natalika's eyes which looked up at him were filled with tears.

"But I do not want Skanderbeg; I want my American," she answered passionately. For just a moment Bairaktar looked at her in blank astonishment, and then a new light came to his eyes.

"Aye, and you shall have him; but you must share him with Albania!" he answered. "The dungeons of the castle are filled with the hostages of Malissora and the captive chiefs of the Mirdites; but they shall be released to carry the news to their clans; that the man who conquered them shall rule over them as the king of all Albania. And the daughter of Bairaktar shall share that throne with him, or——" Natalika placed a slender hand over his mouth.

"Wait until he asks me," she said, blushing. "I have learned much of the ways of his people." There was a twinkle in Bairaktar's eyes as he pointed to the closed door.

"I go to announce my decision to our clan, and you may have until I return to bring it about. Having known you since childhood, I think that will be more than enough," he said, with a chuckle.

Even as Natalika entered the door, Jones-Morgan found himself, and straightened up on the couch where they had placed him. One glance at his face, and she knew that it was the American who had come back; for, while there was still a suggestion to the likeness of Skanderbeg, the merry twinkle had replaced the fierce battle glare in his eyes, and he greeted her joyfully in English. Rankin considerately turned his back and gazed out of the window; for as their hands met there was that on their faces on which it was profanation for another to look.

"But, my boy, you have missed one glorious, riproaring round of unadulterated pleasure by not sticking to me!" exclaimed Jones-Morgan, after a decent interval. Rankin turned, to find the couple sitting side by side and in very close proximity on the edge of the couch. "It has been a regular debauch, which I suppose accounts for this very fine beehive of a head I'm wearing; but it was worth the katzenjammer. I'm a little hazy as to details; but the Honorable William F. Cody hasn't got anything on me in the way of the strenuous life since we inaugurated the proceedings down there on the plain of the Zeta. Natalika, these little old Zatriejebacs are all to the mustard, and right here I'm going to acknowledge that this good old scout and myself are rank frauds and impostors. I came over here with the king bee buzzing in my bonnet, and Runt Rankin was aiding and abetting my nefarious designs. I was going to climb up on the Albanian throne and——" She jumped to her feet and looked from one to the other incredulously.

"Do you mean to say that you would even consider such a paltry thing?" she demanded. "As the savior of Zatriejebac, its chief has done you the greatest honor in his power. According to our traditions, you are most luxuriously lodged; but look about you! This room represents all that Zatriejebac knows of human life; it is the best in this musty, fusty, mildewed old relic of medieval barbarism——"

"Hold on, Natalika; I've forgotten all about that—but not from the causes you are suggesting," interrupted Jones-Morgan, and Rankin noticed just a trace of the old boredom in his expression. "There are trimmings which do a lot to temper the sweetness and light of this modern civilization you are boosting; but that's not what makes me shy about claiming the job I set out to annex. I've bumped up against a good deal of the internal economy of this country in the last two weeks, and I find that it's terribly wasteful of human life, especially of the lives of those misguided individuals who try to boss any one else. I'd as soon think of trying to annex the throne of a hive of industrious honeybees, where royalty seems to descend in the female line, as to——"

The entrance of Bairaktar cut him short, and, while the Albanian looked inquiringly at the three faces before him, there was a peculiar deference in his manner. Natalika alone knew the reason, and her face was very white as she laid a tremulous hand on her American lover's arm.

"Sir, I am overjoyed to find that you are again yourself," he said to the man whom he had so faithfully followed; but there was something in the shrewd old eyes which qualified the greeting. "In the great hall the nobles who have followed your banner await your pleasure."

Jones-Morgan looked at him in bewilderment; but, fortunately, Rankin had quickly moved to his side.

"Go on, you chump; get all that's coming to you!" muttered the Legioner between his teeth. "That's what we came over here for, and I reckon we'll pull this king stunt off yet!"

And so Jones-Morgan, entirely unsuspicious that his bizarre ambition was upon the point of realization, followed Bairaktar to the great hall of Castle Gusinje. Opening a small door in the massive wall, Bairaktar admitted them to the dais at the end of the room, and the American found himself looking at the upturned faces of all the surviving nobles who had marched with him to Malissora. Habit is strong, and with a simple "Well met, O brothers!" he advanced to the edge of the platform.

"Well met, O Skanderbeg, lord of Zatriejebac, and by the will of Zatriejebac and the grace of St. John of Medua, King of Albania!" came in a mighty chorus, and then, obeying the pressure of Rankin's great hand on one shoulder and the appealing, persuasive touch of Natalika on the other, he sank to his knees. When he rose to his feet again a circlet of turquoise-studded gold was about his head, and Albania had found its king.

There were still formalities, however, and a smiling priest touched him on the arm and invited his attention to a parchment-strewn table. From some long-forgotten corner an ancient ink horn and a still-serviceable quill pen had been resurrected, and on the top was spread an imposing parchment half covered with black-letter script and bearing the signatures of Lex Dukani and Skanderbeg, the only rulers that High Albania had ever acknowledged.

"Your majesty will be good enough to subscribe to this declaration of the eternal independence of Albania," suggested the priest unctuously. "Sign right here, if your majesty pleases."

"What shall I sign?" asked Jones-Morgan irritably, as he dipped the archaic pen in the ink which had been hastily improvised from soot and vinegar.

"With your majesty's permission, I shall dictate the regular form, which must be signed to all royal warrants and other official documents," answered the priest.

The royal head nodded curtly, and then with many a grimace of the royal face the royal hand wrote to the singsong dictation:

Skanderbeg the Second, by the grace of God and under the patronage of the blessed St. John of Medua, chosen defender of the Holy Cross, Warden of the Passes, Overlord of Zatriejebac, Duka of Gusinje, Prince of Plava, Lord of the High Justice, the Middle and the Low, and by the choice of the Most Christian Clan of the Zatriejebac, King of Albania.

With a sigh of relief, King Skanderbeg laid down the wretched pen; but after sprinkling sand over the writing the priest suggestively fingered the huge pile of parchments which remained.

"I suppose that these can await your majesty's pleasure; but they are not unimportant, and my colleagues are preparing others which——"

"Sign 'em yourself, or, at least, fill in the trimmings!" interrupted the king curtly. The priest shook his head.

"That cannot be done, your majesty," he said apologetically. "I doubt if it would be legal, and—and—your majesty is the only man in High Albania who can write!"

For a moment the king looked at him in bewilderment, and then, raising his hands, he lifted the insignia of royalty from his brow and placed it on the table. And, to the consternation of

Bairaktar, with that strange action every trace of the resemblance to Skanderbeg vanished from the face, and the knowledge of the language of Zatriejebac was apparently lost to the tongue. But without embarrassment, Jones-Morgan stepped to the edge of the platform and addressed the wondering nobles in perfectly good Manhattan English.

"Boys, here's where I renig," he said simply. "The next time you feel inclined to take a little stroll in the adjoining territories you'll find me Johnny on the spot if you'll tip me off; but when it comes to accumulating chilblains and acquiring rheumatism by living in this old medieval tomb for the privilege of signing a bale of pay checks a day, you can count me out——"

Rankin stepped forward and touched him on the arm.

"Carefully, old man; remember Natalika!" he whispered warningly.

Jones-Morgan wheeled quickly and faced her.

"Natalika, must a man be a king to win you?" he asked. She smiled as she extended her hands.

"Assuredly; but if you were a beggar you would still seem a king to me," she answered.

Now the nobles of Zatriejebac had understood no word of the strange speech; but they were human, and a mighty shout went up as the man they had chosen to rule them took the daughter of their chief in his arms. But Bairaktar, although he had no English, had made a very shrewd guess as to the substance of his future son-in-law's remarks, and, knowing the temper of his people, he was wise enough to bring the audience to an abrupt ending. In the anteroom he argued fruitlessly for an hour against the American's obstinate determination to abdicate.

Perhaps he realized that save as the reincarnation of Skanderbeg the success of his rule would be doubtful; but, in any case, he at last acquiesced in the decision. Natalika was quite as obstinate as her lover, and, yielding to the inevitable, he accepted the situation with a good grace. But he knew that the nobles would resent the abdication as an affront to their pride, and affronts in Albania are not easily forgiven. Accordingly, at dusk he escorted the two adventurers and his daughter through a long-disused postern to where three fresh horses were held by one of his trusted retainers.

As they galloped away toward the Dalmatian frontier, he shouted something after them, and Jones-Morgan turned inquiringly to Natalika.

"I seem to have forgotten all the Albanian I ever knew; what was it?" he asked.

Natalika laughed, and glanced at Rankin, who rode at her right.

"It was an old Albanian proverb, which I cannot translate literally; but it was the same advice which Mr. Rankin gave to Essad Pasha: 'To beat it while the beating's good!'" she answered.

Just four weeks later, Rankin entered the office of the patron of the Lost Legion, and Mr. Cooper looked up from a document he was studying; a proposition to restore the Manchu dynasty to the Dragon Throne.

"Ah, Mr. Rankin, I trust that you have had a pleasant and profitable trip!" he said.

The Legioner nodded.

"I haven't seen it mentioned in the papers; but it's all right, the guy was King of Albania."

"I am not surprised that you use the past tense," answered Mr. Cooper genially. "Of course, I was confident that you would arrange it for him; but I never believed he would stick. In fact, I wondered why he bothered about it."

"So did I, until he confided in me before I left him with his bride in Venice," agreed Rankin. "It bored him to death that every time he took a drink at the club or wanted to draw a few thousands for pocket money he had to sign 'Sturtevant van Winkle Beekman Stuyvesant van Twiller Jones-Morgan' at the bottom of the check."

THE END.

The Man Who Wouldn't Be Clerk

A STORIETTE FROM LIFE

By Arthur H. Gleason

Author of "Getting Away With It," Etc.

WHEN the big moment comes by land or sea, and the airship spirals in the Dip of Death, or the army enters the city gate, there are some of us who feel, "Now is the time for Jimmie Hare." For this man has the knack of arriving at the tick of doom. Like the king's presence at the play, he adds a little tension to a climax by consenting to be present. You would decide it wasn't much of a climax, after all, if it was Hare's night off. Hare has been the photographer of the world's great events for fifteen years. He is the eye of humanity for every crisis.

He is little and old and gray, but he is a free man. For at middle life Hare stepped out of the pale indoors, fussing over the mechanism of camera making into the lordliest life on earth—that of the free adventurer, who plucks the heart of each international climax. These are the days of little, inanimate jobs, of being niched while you are still fresh and young, and then growing gray in lowly service for uncaring strangers, and finally falling to lower levels as the natural force is abated. Hare saw it coming—age and the rut—so he went to Cuba.

In his first battle, the Cubans, with whom he was, used old-fashioned black powder in the big gun, and the smoke of the discharge rose slowly in a thick cloud, and hung just overhead. It made a perfect locater for the enemy, by revealing the exact position of the Cubans.

Stephen Crane wrote of Hare and the battle of El Paso:

"My friend, Jimmie, the photographer, mounted to the firing line with me. It was Jimmie's first action, and, as we cautiously were making our way to the right of our lines, the crash of the Spanish fire became uproarious, and the air simply whistled. I heard a quavering voice near my shoulder, and, turning, I beheld Jimmie—Jimmie, with a face bloodless, white as paper.

"'Say,' he said, 'this is pretty hot, ain't it?'

"I was delighted. I knew exactly what he meant. He wanted to have the situation defined. If I had told him that this was the occasion of some mere idle, desultory firing, and recommended that he wait until the real battle began, I think he would have gone in a bee line for the rear. But I told him the truth.

"If this was a big action, then he was willing to pay in his fright as a rational price for the privilege of being present. He accepted my assurance with simple faith, and deported himself with kindly dignity, as one moving amid great things. His face was still as pale as paper, but that counted for nothing. The main point was his perfect willingness to be frightened for reasons."

But Stevie never lived to be a veteran campaigner. He wore his red badge of courage jauntily for the shortest of times, and then went away from us, leaving the vivid memory of a brilliant and stricken thing. He never saw Jimmie again. But Jimmie has lived through many campaigns, imperturbable in their hottest fire. His face sometimes is brown as copper, and sometimes beet red, but it never went white as paper again. Years later, when he was in Mexico, and entered the three days' fighting of Juarez, and then

of an evening crossed to El Paso, and telegraphed the news north to the New York office, his managing editor sent this telegram to him:

To JAMES H. HARE, Hotel Sheldon, El Paso, Texas: Don't take any more foolish chances. Nothing heroic about that. Your job is to take photographs, not to make a target of yourself. Wounded or dead you won't be of any use to the paper, your family, or yourself. ALBERT LEE.

That was the man he became—a man who has to be held back from the storm center. He went to Cuba to make good. It was just plain necessity that drove Hare to Cuba. His market for photographs, the *Illustrated American,* had burned down. He had to earn a living for his family, so he went to Cuba grimly to win out. The Cuban campaign whittled thirty pounds from his leanness. It wasted him with fever. When he got aboard the train at Port Tampa he gave the porter ten dollars to care for him on the through ride. He stayed at full length till Newark, and then crawled into his clothes.

"I'll wheel you down the platform at Jersey City," said the porter.

"No, you won't," said Hare. "My wife's meeting me, and she's had enough shocks."

So he stepped out to meet her, but she walked past him, because she did not recognize him.

But his photographs and his fame had preceded him by many months. What you get in his photographs are human beings doing human things—folks cooking a native supper, breaking up camp, reconnoitering. To catch a fever in a swamp, to go hungry till you can beg food, to take the insults of aids-de-camp—these worries punish a man, and they had worn Jimmie down to a wreck, but they leave him a man. It is still the day's work, still routine—but oh, the difference to him! For he is a free man. He is not a clerk. You can jolly Jimmy Hare, but can't boss him.

The urge that drove him through fever and hunger, he states like this:

"You lie out in the woods through a wet night in wet clothes. 'I'm through,' you say.

"Next morning, a bright sun. Clothes dried, the world agleam. The rays shine through into your shutter. It's the right day for pictures.

"You walk along through the troops.

" 'Here comes a fool with a camera,' yells a soldier, and he turns to his comrade, and he says:

" 'I wouldn't be here, unless I had to.'

" 'No more would I,' you say.

"You see the men snaking through the grass, winding, retreating, advancing. You think they're not fighting, so you don't take any pictures. Then you find out that's the way they fight.

" 'Where are you going?' they say to you.

" 'I'm going to the front.'

"I had seen men killed all the morning. But I wanted the two lines close and plugging at each other—close fighting."

Hare went to Cuba without a military pass. So he kept away from headquarters, where a general might have challenged him and sent him home.

"I didn't see you in Cuba," said Roosevelt to him, years later. Hare wasn't meeting the officers on that trip. It would have been lots easier for him if he had that pass, for they gave out rations at headquarters. Hare had to forage, and often go to a friendly correspondent.

That was the Cuban experience. The Russian-Japanese War was Hare's next great action. When he first saw shells bursting, and scattering their two hundred or three hundred shots in a wide area, he disliked the display. But after a few days under fire with the Japanese rank and file behind trenches, he saw that what he really wanted was a picture of the big guns themselves, and how they were behaving. So he wandered out in front, and aimed his camera at a couple. This irritated the Japanese, because it revealed the position of their masked battery to the Russians. And sure enough, a moment after he started walking back again, a shell tore up the ground where he had been standing.

"There is the place for you," said a Japanese officer sarcastically one day, pointing to a town that was being shelled by the Russian forces.

"I have your permission, then," said Hare, and he jumped aboard his horse and rode over. He climbed to the roof of one of the huts. From that vantage he could hear the spent bullets as they pattered softly on the leaves of the millet in the broad fields around.

Hare's horse in those days was a large-boned animal, which he had bought from Jack London. Hare's beard was down to his breast—a great rectangular growth. On his big horse, with his astonishing beard, Hare looked like a Russian.

"You're the man that once got lost," said General Oyama. It was against rules for a correspondent to disappear as Hare had done. He had gone ahead and entered the fallen city of Liaoyang before the victorious troops, and then had photographed them as they flashed in.

"I had a Russian horse," replied Hare, "and he was so used to running away that I couldn't stop him."

Somewhere he knows that the perfect picture is waiting for him. It may be just ahead at the front. It may be on the other side the world, or overhead in an airship. He will keep going for that picture in his wiry, intrepid way till he dies.

GOOD OPPORTUNITIES OVERLOOKED

AT a convention of automobile salesmen in the Middle West, the big agents in the business were making speeches demonstrating that their particular concerns and machines were the best in the world. Oratory was splashed about, tremendous figures were flung around, and superlatives bounded against the ceiling.

Finally, the limit was reached when a gentleman arose and remarked, as follows:

"My company is the most wonderful known to the business. Our salesmen have proved that they can give all other salesmen cards and spades, and yet beat them out. As the result of a close calculation and minute investigation, I am now ready to assert that for every minute in the past year one-half of a machine made by our firm was sold. There you are!—half a machine sold every minute."

An envious, pallid, thin-chested man arose in one of the far corners of the room, and made this helpful suggestion:

"You're overlooking fifty per cent of your field, brother. There's a whole sucker born every minute."

NOT SURE OF HER FIGURE

ATTORNEY GENERAL McREYNOLDS tells this on himself:

Some years ago he was the attorney for the defense in an important case which hinged on the testimony of one woman. Consequently, he conducted the cross-examination of the fair witness with elaborate caution.

"How old are you?" he led off, preparing to trap her if her reply did not tally with an important date in the story she had just told.

"Fifty-four or sixty-four," she answered, flustered by the ordeal she faced.

"What do you mean?" demanded McReynolds, leaning far forward in his chair and looking particularly stern. "Don't you know your own age?"

"I'm not sure," the woman replied doubtfully. "Indeed, I'm not sure. You see, I always get my age and my bust measurement mixed."

At Number Four Below

By Stephen Allen Reynolds

What happened at "No. 4 Below Discovery"—a claim that had never given signs of being an especially rich one; yet the man who owned it was known as "Lucky" Nelson, and as evidence of his former "luck" he had brought with him from Bonanza Creek two mammoth nuggets known as the Goose Egg and the Giant's Thumb. It is about these two freak nuggets of dark reddish gold that the story centers.

(*A Novelette*)

CHAPTER I.

CROOKED WORK.

BUSINESS was dull in the Happy Thought that October evening. All Angel Creek seemed to be across the way in the larger and more pretentious log structure known as the Big Poke. John Henderson, proprietor of the Happy Thought, sat at his faro table, idly fingering a stack of chocolate-colored chips. Near by him, perched upon the lookout's stool, a frown upon his face, was "Hank" Powers, the roulette wheelman.

"Pretty slow, Hank," ventured Henderson half laughingly, as he glanced up at his scowling aid.

"Yep," returned the big wheelman. "And, what is more, you never will do the business that 'Frenchy' Nemour does across the way. He caters to what the boys want—you know what I mean as well as I do."

"Yes—dancing girls and drink—I understand." A smile faded from Henderson's face as he went on: "But I don't want any o' that kind of money. If I can't make a decent living dealing straight bank with a legitimate percentage, I'll go back to the coast and get a raisin-packing job—that's all. No honkatonk proposition for me. Why, Hank, I swear I'd starve before I'd cash a percentage check, or sell a bottle o' hooch!"

His fist crashed down upon the check rack as he ceased speaking. It was quite evident that the implied suggestion of his gray-headed employee annoyed him.

"Now, Buddy, there ain't no call for you to get riled," said Hank soothingly. "I wasn't proposin' anything."

The roulette man got down from his stool. He picked up a white chip which had been jarred to the sawdust-covered floor, and tossed it upon the layout. Then he strode around the end of the table and clapped his hand upon the shoulder of the younger man.

"John," he went on, "you needn't have said what you did. I reckon I know you by this time almost as well as I did your daddy before you. They didn't call him 'Square Deal' Henderson from Boundary Bay to Tia Juana for nothin'. He could look any man or woman in the face as long as he lived—and I reckon you'll always be able to do the same. I don't want any rum or painted dancers around this shack any more'n you do. If gamblin' falls off so that you can't afford to pay me my fifteen a day, I'll work for you for my grub. And I reckon 'Scotty' Brown'll stick with you on the same terms."

Hank patted his employer upon the

back, and then turned to look out of the single two-by-four window which faced the American side of the creek. Barely thirty yards away, on the opposite bank of the frozen stream, stood the two-storied Big Poke. A dozen shafts of yellow light from its many windows stabbed the arctic night. Beside the "honkatonk" was Lee Foo's Delmonico, where salmon, beans, bacon, and dried-apple pie could be had at all times, while moose meat, ptarmigan, salmon-berry pie, and "Outside" delicacies could be found in season.

Around these two structures clustered a score or so of smaller log cabins, which constituted the "American half" of the settlement at the junction of Angel Creek and the Porcupine. Up the creek, split in midstream by the imaginary—and still undetermined—international boundary line, straggled the five-hundred-foot claims of the gold seekers, from "Twenty-five Below Discovery" to "Sixty-seven Above."

To the eastward of the Happy Thought lay the Canadian part of the town, consisting of a cabin occupied by a pair of horseless Mounted Police, the log warehouse of the Alaska Commercial Company, and possibly a dozen other moss-chinked structures of lesser importance.

"Still clear," muttered Hank, as he turned away from the window and approached the big "cannon" stove which stood in the center of the floor. "And we need deeper snow, too," he resumed. "Then the boys can sled in their winter's timber and firewood, and we can expect a mail."

"Better get your supper, Hank," suggested the man at the faro table. "You needn't wait for Scotty to get back, and *you* needn't hurry back, either; but if you can dig up that Moosehead and tell him that he hasn't swept up the place to-day, or brought in a chunk of wood, I'll be obliged to you."

"S'pose he's drunk again," Hank growled, as he struggled into his bearskin coat and made for the door.

Left to himself, Henderson stuffed his brier, and for five minutes blew smoke ceilingward. He was wondering when the next mail would arrive, and speculating upon what was happening in the Big Outside, when he heard a cheery whistle, and the next instant his lookout—freckled, good-natured Scotty Brown—came bustling in.

"Big doin's over to the Poke to-night, boss," were his first words, as he pulled a belted mackinaw over his head before donning the knitted cardigan he reserved for indoor wear.

"Seems to be more or less going on there every night," laughed Henderson, through the blue veil of tobacco smoke.

"Yes, but it's different to-night," said the wiry Scotch American, as he dropped a chunk of green spruce into the stove. "Frenchy's dealin' himself; and he's trimmin' that big Swede from Four Below to a fare-you-well."

"'Lucky' Nelson?" Henderson took his pipe from his mouth, and sat erect.

"The same. I looked on for about five minutes, while Frenchy ran out a boxful. Nelson must have dropped about twenty ounces durin' the deal. If he wasn't half soused he'd have noticed that the cases didn't come out right. Frenchy's dealin' brace. I didn't wait long enough to tumble whether it was a 'drop-plate' box, or an 'end-squeeze.' It's too bad."

John Henderson's blue eyes narrowed. Of all the abominations upon the face of the earth—his father had taught him—the "sure-thing" gambler was the most contemptible. Such men, aided by ingenious mechanical contrivances and deftness of hand, too grasping to remain content with the usual percentage in favor of the "bank," were responsible in a great measure for a suspicious and distrusting public. John's father had belonged to the old school. He had never accepted a bet from a man who could not afford to lose the sum wagered. Men in liquor kept away from "Square Deal" Henderson's table, because experience had taught them that the big-hearted sporting man would have none of their play. Game to the core, Square Deal had never "turned his box" while there was a dollar left in the bank roll; and that he was generous with his winnings

may be grasped when it is stated that he died poor. No needy person was ever turned away; no hungry man or woman ever left the presence of the gambler empty-handed. And the son was like him.

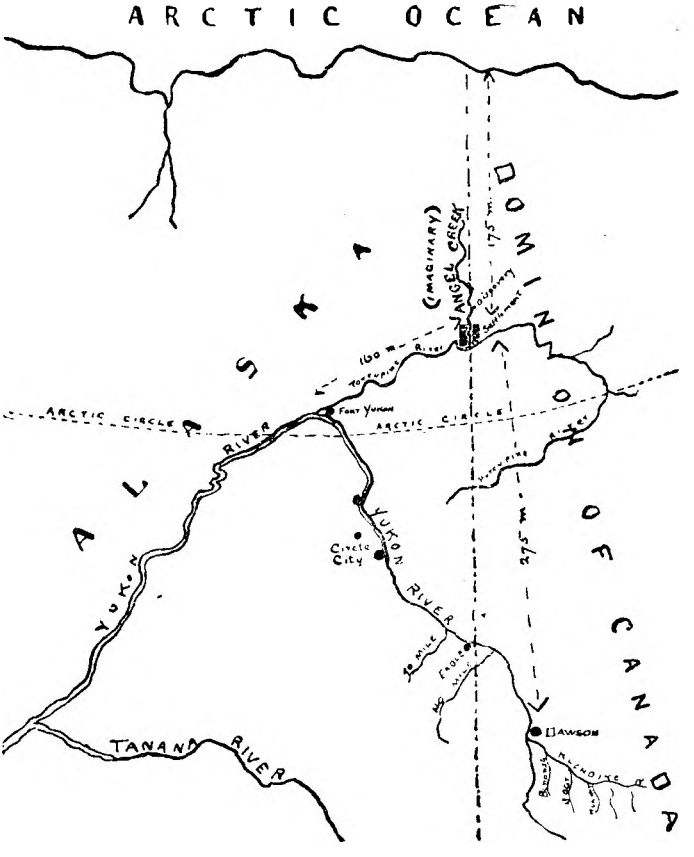
"Lucky Nelson was the man that started that collection last summer, wasn't he?"

Scotty nodded. "If it hadn't been for pup with the broken leg that he took away from that party of Mooseheads?"

John Henderson's reply was inaudible, for he was drawing over his head a hooded sweater of spotless white.

"Where you goin'?"

"I'm going over to the Big Poke to watch the game." John knotted the puckering cord beneath his chin, and



Nelson startin' that purse, there'd sure be a woman and three kids in a Indiana poorhouse this winter. If you hadn't been down to Yukon I s'pose *you'd* have started one. I wonder what made that feller do the Dutch, knowin' that he had a wife and little ones to look after."

John shrugged his shoulders.

"He's white, Nelson is," went on Scotty. "Remember that Malemute added: "If Frenchy's still dealing brace, I'm going to tip Nelson off. It's robbery, that's what it is!"

Scotty's freckled face showed his alarm. "Better not," he warned his employer. "They're bad eggs over there. Frenchy isn't backward about usin' a gun. He got run out o' Circle on account o' gun play. Besides—he's got that tinhorn, 'Cat-hop' Cook, to back him up, and some of those breeds and

dancin' women are pretty handy with a knife. You'd better wait for Hank to get back, and then we'll all go over together."

"No," said Henderson. "You stay here in case anybody drops in. I'll be back inside o' half an hour. I'm not afraid of Nemour and his pack."

He slipped a pearl-handled forty-four into the waistband of his trousers. Pausing for a moment to pull down the sweater and adjust its hood, he plunged into the night.

He ignored the rickety footbridge which spanned the frozen creek a few yards above, and struck out across the ice, heading for the twinkling lights upon the opposite bank. The distance was trifling, the farther bank low, and a few moments later he was pulling at the latch cord of the main entrance of the Big Poke—an uninvited and unwelcome guest.

CHAPTER II.

AT THE BIG POKE.

Things were lively in the honkatonk that evening. When John entered, the dancers were just "forming a basket," the preliminary movement to the obligatory "promenade to the bar," where a slant-eyed Canadian of French extraction served adulterated cognac for fifty cents a drink. At least a dozen couples were on the cleared space of the floor. Bearded gold seekers from "Up Creek," in the old-fashioned mukluks of "sour-dough" days; a ne'er-do-well from somewhere Outside, his feet incased in buttoned patent leathers; a surveyor's chainman or two from the camp of the boundary commission; "Old Man" Ryan, the discoverer and solid citizen of Angel Creek; and an A. C. Company clerk in natty flannels—helped make the scene one which may only be viewed in a two-year-old mining settlement well within the arctic circle.

But the greater part of the crowd within the Big Poke that night had neither eyes nor ears for the dancing and music. Two score of rough-and-ready men in mackinaws and leather jackets stood four deep around the faro table, where a blond giant was spreading ten-dollar chips over the enameled layout with a reckless disregard for the consequences. Nemour himself was dealing; while upon the lookout's stool sat Cat-hop Cook, a pockmarked individual, who had spent three winters in Dawson. He might have remained there longer, but an unsympathetic magistrate had given him his choice between the woodpile and the first boat downriver. He had chosen the boat; but, upon reaching Fort Yukon, and learning of the new diggings at Angel Creek, had ascended the Porcupine, and found employment at the Big Poke.

As Henderson edged his way toward the layout with a view of getting an insight into Frenchy's particular method of robbing his patron, the latter held up a huge fist.

"Yust a moment!" he said. "Ay t'ink ve'll all have a smile—den I play some roulette."

There was a roar of approval. Then the men lined up at the rude bar, and the bottles circulated.

"Evenin', neighbor. Lookin' for action?"

There was a touch of sarcasm in Frenchy's voice as he addressed John; but the man in the white sweater calmly bit off the end of his dollar cigar, and faced the other.

"No," he replied, in an even voice. "It seems as if Lucky Nelson's getting all the action to-night."

The words were commonplace, yet Frenchy seemed to find some hidden meaning in them, for, before turning to the roulette wheel, he scrutinized Henderson closely.

As the flute ceased its shrieking, and the violin its wailing, the crowd at the bar became augmented by the dancing contingent. Some one started a squeaky gramophone; every one seemed to be talking at once; then Nelson's big voice drowned all other sounds as he tossed a buckskin pouch upon the bar.

"Weigh out vot's right; but don't snatch!" he boomed.

Giving the house the benefit of the "down" weight—which in itself meant a profit of some forty or fifty dollars a

day—the man behind the bar weighed out his payment, and returned the poke. Meanwhile, the sallow-faced proprietor had taken his stand behind the roulette wheel, and had set the big mahogany bowl revolving.

Using markers, the big Swede strewed his bets over the layout, playing the numbers two, fourteen, twenty, and twenty-eight continuously. But luck seemed against him, for not once did the rattling ivory ball hop into a pocket of Nelson's choice. Lighter and lighter grew the miner's poke, as he paid his losses. Finally, the last bit of coarse gold having found its way into Nemour's scales, the big fellow reached inside the breast of his buckskin shirt.

"Look!" he cried, as he held an object aloft.

The onlookers crowded around them, among them Henderson, who had been watching closely and biding his time. He had not as yet seen quite enough to warrant his interference. The wheel had been spinning too fast.

Between the thumb and finger of one hand, the miner held a huge nugget of gold, weighing fully two pounds. Symmetrical in shape, worn smooth by the water action of centuries, it resembled in a way a large egg. "Dat's der 'Goose Egg,'" explained Nelson.

Laying the nugget upon the layout, he plunged his hand within his shirt, and once more held something up to view. The crowd held its breath, for lying in the horny palm of the miner was another freak of nature: an elongated chunk of darkish gold, in the shape of a man's thumb, but three times as large.

"Dis von is called der 'Yiant's Tumb,'" said the Swede, as he tossed it upon the oilcloth.

That he intended to exchange the monstrous nuggets for chips, and continue his losing play, was quite evident; but just as Nelson was about to shove his gold toward Nemour, Henderson laid his hand upon the miner's shoulder and spoke.

"Just a moment, Nelson," he said.

His eyes were upon the slowing roulette wheel. He fancied that he saw what he had been looking for. At last he was certain of it.

"Nelson, you're being cheated!" were his next words.

"You're a liar!" came like a shot from across the table. Frenchy Nemour stood erect and reached toward the wheel, but John was too quick for him. With one hand he grasped the outstretched wrist of the trickster, whipping out his gun with the other.

"Hands off that wheel!" he cautioned.

A grim silence swept over the room. The dancers—again at the bar—tiptoed their way toward the roulette wheel. Some one stopped the gramophone. Nelson, his face turning scarlet, slowly clenched his mighty fists. And then John spoke again.

"I want some of you men to see that I ain't plugged from behind," he said, his eyes upon Nemour as he spoke. A dozen guns were drawn as he ceased speaking. Assured of fair play, he continued:

"Stop that wheel, Nelson." The miner obeyed. "Now, men, I don't want any of you to think that I came over here to cap for my own game. It's not so. I came over here to-night to save a man from being robbed. I'm sorry I didn't get here earlier—but I guess Nelson can persuade Mister Frenchy to fork over his losings. Now, I'll go on and explain. What four numbers has Nelson been playing for the last half hour?"

"Two, fourteen, twenty, and twenty-eight!" came from a dozen throats.

"Look in the wheel pockets under those numbers, and see what you find."

Henderson's grasp upon Nemour's wrist tightened as he spoke. The polished barrel of his weapon pointed straight at the heart of his unfair rival. Meanwhile, the big miner was exploring the cup-shaped receptacles corresponding to his favorite numbers. At his first glance, nothing seemed to be amiss with the pockets alternately colored red and black, but as he inserted a stubby forefinger into one of them, he felt something soft and resilient. An instant later four tablets of soft rubber colored

to correspond with the pocket lay upon the oilcloth-covered table.

"Those are known as 'bouncers,'" explained Henderson. "They can be slipped into a wheel while it's in motion. The ball never comes to rest in a pocket containing a bouncer."

A murmur came from behind him, but he kept his eyes upon the cringing gamester before him.

"Nobody but a thief would think of using unfair apparatus," he snapped. "It's just such curs as these——"

But his sentence was never completed, for as soon as Lucky Nelson realized that he had been cheated, he leaped across the table. Active as a wild cat—in spite of his bulk—he cleared the layout at a bound, and flung himself upon Nemour.

Then came a woman's scream, a cry of pain, and a fusillade of pistol shots. Stung in his right shoulder, and realizing that he had been shot from the rear, John whirled around in time to see the pockmarked lookout collapse, a smoking revolver in his hand. Across the room, near the open door, stood Hank Powers and Scotty Brown, revolvers in hand, their backs to the log wall.

Even as he looked, John saw Scotty raise his weapon, and heard two reports. Another of Frenchy's henchmen fell to the sawdust-covered space before the bar. Here the bartender took a hand. Aiming almost point-blank at Hank Powers, he was on the point of firing a big-calibered derringer, when John floored him with a hastily aimed shot. All was in confusion. The women were screaming and wringing their hands. Old Man Ryan, with a pair of heavy revolvers in his hands, stood in the center of the room, loudly calling for peace and order.

Adherents of Nemour and hangers-on crouched behind tables and chairs awaiting opportunities for sly shots across the smoky room. From behind the roulette wheel came the sound of steady thumping. Nelson was doing his best to break every bone in the crooked gambler's body. And then, suddenly, came a new development.

Fired by some unknown hand, through the open door, came a shot, aimed probably at one of the large lamps. The bullet failed to extinguish the lamp, but it perforated the two-gallon oil tank suspended above the double burner, and the next instant a stream of kerosene spurted fairly upon the hot sheet-iron stove beneath. There was a flash and a roar as the oil ignited and the tank exploded. The room was filled with puddles of blazing oil. Then came the inevitable rush for the door and windows; the crash of breaking glass; and the roar of the hungry flames as they ate up the tinder-dry structure.

Thirty minutes later all that remained of the Big Poke was a heap of charred and glowing embers. As for John Henderson—he was lying upon a pile of blankets in the rear of Lee Foo's Delmonico. Badly burned while dragging the unconscious Nemour from the burning building, suffering from the loss of blood from a serious wound in his shoulder, he was in urgent need of medical attention.

He had a faint recollection of "Doc" Knowles cutting away his saturated sweater, a suspicion that some one was poulticing his hands and arms, then came a twinge of pain in his shoulder, a sensation of weakness—and his senses departed.

CHAPTER III.

MISS GRAY EYES.

Three weeks saw big changes at Angel Creek. More snow had fallen and hardened sufficiently to make the sledging good; a mail had arrived from Fort Yukon, one hundred and sixty miles below; and the boundary commission had broken up its camp and departed with its reports for Ottawa and Washington. Frenchy Nemour's ribs and head were slowly mending; a new grave or two had been blasted out of the frozen tundra; and the long arctic winter had set in in earnest.

Moreover, a new girl had arrived in town. Not a mining-camp "girl" in the ordinary sense of the term; but a wholesome young woman, whose cheeks were

innocent of rouge daubings; whose sparkling gray eyes needed no belladonna drops to enhance their brightness. She came in with the mail; her name was Ruth; she was a near relative of Doctor Knowles—this much all Angel Creek learned of her the day of her arrival. Later, when she accompanied the doctor on his professional rounds, it became known that she was an orphan, a Californian, and a trained nurse.

In a bunk house near the Delmonico—it had not been thought safe to move him far—John Henderson first saw the new girl. Impersonally, scarcely looking at him, she deftly changed his bandages and dressings, while the doctor went on to explain that he felt gratified that he now had a capable and competent assistant.

"Scarcely think we can keep her with us more than this winter," said Doc Knowles, as he pulled on his heavy mittens and picked up his case. "But, as long as the boys will fall down shafts, mash their thumbs, and get frozen, burned, and shot, we'll find plenty of work for her."

Her task over, the nurse slipped into a dainty muskrat parka, raised her hood, and, without a glance at her patient, followed the doctor out of the cabin.

A few days passed by, during which John learned more and more of his nurse—but not from her.

"It's funny she don't talk to you when she comes to fix you up," commented Scotty Brown one forenoon, when he visited his employer to report business at the Happy Thought. "She talks to most every one else. Take that Galavan chap that got caught in the cave-in above Discovery—'Miss Gray Eyes' talks and laughs with him as much as you please Then there's that Scotch clerk over at the A. C., that's got his hand near cut off by an ax—she couldn't be nicer to him if she was his own sister. I don't see what call she's got to put on a long face when she's workin' over you."

"Well, I'm not kicking," laughed John. "Don't you understand? I simply asked you if the nurse was tongue-tied, or a dummy. I've never heard her voice—as I said before. Nor have I seen her smile."

"And she's mighty nice to the natives, too," went on Scotty. "She's been scoldin' that Moosehead Sam of ours for gettin' drunk, and has hired his *klooch*, Sarah, to work for her and the doctor. It seems she's a niece of the doc's."

Upon the morning following this conversation with Scotty, Henderson addressed the gray-eyed nurse.

"I hear you're from California," he ventured to say as she finished binding one of his arms. The doctor had gone on to a cabin near by to attend to an aching tooth.

The girl bent lower over his arm, but made no reply.

"I hear that you talk with your other patients," John went on courageously. "Why do you make an exception of me?"

The brown head bent still lower. But suddenly she straightened up. It seemed to John as though her bosom heaved a trifle, much as if she were taking a full breath to nerve herself for an answer. Her face was a study—her lips drawn into a straight line. And then she spoke for the first time, meekly but firmly:

"The other arm, please."

Puzzled, yet respecting her unspoken wish for silence, Henderson forbore further questioning; but the next evening, when Hank Powers dropped in for a pipe and a chat, John spoke to the old man of the girl's strange behavior.

Hank heard him through. "I never did understand women—much less this one," commented the wheelman. He filled and lit John's pipe and his own for the second time. "But there's one thing I noticed about her," he resumed; "she don't recognize a single gambler in camp. Take my case, for instance—you know how I act and feel toward womenfolks."

John nodded. He knew that Powers had daughters of his own; married, and well-to-do, yet respecting their gambler parent. Hank, as well as his own father, was a member of the old school.

"Well—you see, she's learned to drive the doctor's Malemutes—that is, after a fashion." Hank chuckled, and then continued: "I was takin' a walk early to-day down toward the Bend, when I came across the lady. Her team was all tangled up, and five of her dogs was makin' a meal out o' the sixth one. By the time I beat some sense into 'em, and showed her how to trail her whip and make her leader keep ahead, I thought we was pretty well acquainted. She smiled and thanked me, and I was just goin' to ask her when she thought you'd be able to get around and about, when she asked me my name. I'd no sooner opened my mouth and told her that I worked at the Happy Thought, and that you were my boss, when she froze right up and drove off."

Henderson puffed hard at his pipe. "What ails her? I swear I never laid eyes on her before," came from his clenched teeth.

Hank shrugged his shoulders. "It's like callin' a three-way turn," he replied. "I give it up. Besides—Scotty tells me that since she saw him in here talkin' with you, she won't even bow to him. I got a hunch that she hasn't got any use for gamblers—that's all."

Shortly before noon the next day, Henderson heard the whining of sledge runners before the door of the bunk house, and the cheery voice of Doc Knowles, as he brought his dogs to a halt. But the doctor entered alone.

"The girl's got a bad cold to-day," he explained. "She managed to get tipped over into a soft drift and got a lot of snow down her neck. Anyway, you won't need her but a day or two longer, for I'm going to have you out in a week or so."

"Doc," said Henderson, coming straight to the point, "do you mind telling me what your niece has got against gamblers in general, and me in particular?"

The physician looked up from a bandage he was preparing. "It's a rather delicate subject," he said, a troubled note in his voice. "Since you're frank enough to ask, I don't mind telling you. Her father—my own brother—left his sickly wife, and went into the Klondike the year of the big rush. He was too late to stake out anything valuable for himself, but he had a little capital, and bought an interest in an undeveloped claim on Eldorado. The owners found all kinds of gold along bed rock, and, after the first summer clean-up, Frank Knowles found himself a rich man.

"He sold out his quarter interest, paid his royalty to the gold commissioner, and started to leave the country. When he struck Dawson, he bought a ticket downriver via St. Michaels. The *Leah* was scheduled to sail at noon the next day. Frank walked into the Aurora for a drink and a meal. He was worth—as near as he could figure—about two hundred thousand dollars in dust, nuggets, and bills of exchange. When the *Leah* sailed the next day, Frank was lying in the Jesuit Hospital, breathing his last. There was a hole in the side of his head that you could put your fist in. It's a miracle that he lived a minute. But that's not the worst of it, for he died alone, and died penniless. The invalid wife and the daughter in high school never received a dollar."

"Robbed?" breathed John.

"No—not exactly. He gambled and lost—everything."

For several minutes there was silence; then the snapping and crackle of burning wood roused the doctor into action. Noiselessly he went on with his work. Almost smothered in blankets and furs, Lee Foo shuffled in with a can of soup for his charge; and, as the injured man had been able to use one arm for several days, and could now feed himself, the Chinaman soon shuffled out again.

"Doc," said John, in a low tone, "do you mean to say that her father gambled away nearly a quarter of a million, and then shot himself?"

The physician nodded. He threw a piece of wood into the stove and turned to leave.

"Was it a fair game?"

"In Tom Chisholm's Aurora—reputed to be as square as a die."

Henderson bowed his head. "And how did you learn all this?" he asked.

"Through a letter from him." The doctor approached the bunk. "Might's well tell you all about it, then we needn't speak of it again. After he'd gambled away his last penny, and decided that he hadn't the courage to go back empty-handed, he sat down and wrote a long letter. In it he spoke of how hard he'd worked, and how proud he'd been when he expected to return with a fortune. He spoke of how much gold he had intended bringing back, and even went so far as to describe two souvenir nuggets he was fetching out—one he called 'The Goose Egg,' and the other 'The Giant's Thumb.' They were found——"

"You don't mean the same ones that Nelson has?"

"Yes; I've no doubt but that they're the identical nuggets." The doctor smiled faintly, and continued: "Nelson came by them honorably so far as I can learn. But, to get back to the letter. Frank brought it to a close by stating that he'd lost all his money at faro and roulette—even the souvenir nuggets—and that he intended taking his own life. All this happened long before my time in the country.

"As luck had it, Ruth opened the letter. She fainted, and I found her in that condition. We kept the news from her mother, but she must have thought something was amiss, for she kept falling away month after month, and within a year we buried her. As long as I couldn't afford to support Ruth decently on my slender earnings, I advised her to qualify as a trained nurse. This she has done. Meanwhile, I struck out for this part of the country myself; and, contrary to my advice and wishes, Ruth has followed me here. I'm glad to have her, you understand, but it's no place for a woman. Now you know what the girl thinks about gamblers." The speaker strode to the door and laid his mittened hand upon the latch.

"And does she know that those nuggets are right here in camp?" asked John, scarcely knowing what else to say.

"No. It's best she shouldn't, either. It would only stir up her feelings. It's bad enough for her to spend a winter so close to where her father died. I suppose the country has some strange attraction for her on that very account, though."

As the heavy door slammed behind the doctor, Henderson faced the frost-coated logs which formed the back wall of his bunk. Ignoring the fast-cooling soup, oblivious to his surroundings, he spent the next few hours in pondering over what he had heard, and the principles involved. Life was, indeed, a complex proposition, he decided.

"Poor little girl!" he murmured to himself from time to time.

That evening, when Lee Foo entered the bunk house, bearing a choice bit of broiled venison, John asked him for writing materials. Provided with a pencil, paper, and envelope, and an old magazine upon which to write, he propped himself up and scribbled a note. It was a painful task, and took time; but at length he completed it, sealed it up, and placed it beneath the fawnskin robe at the head of his bed.

One looking over his shoulder as he wrote might have read:

MY DEAR MISS: This will be handed to you the next time I see you. I've heard your story, and my heart bleeds for you. I haven't the courage to address you personally, and I wouldn't stir up your feelings for worlds, so this note will have to fill the bill.

There will be very little gambling in Angel Creek this winter. I'll attend to that. I thought there was a difference in gamblers, but it seems we're all more or less alike—all wrong.

The first day I'm able to get back to my place I'm going to show you something. Maybe then you won't look upon me as you would upon a yellow dog. Until then, I remain, very respectfully yours,

JOHN HENDERSON.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LAST TURN.

The Happy Thought was fairly well filled with patrons when John Henderson, for the first time since the burning of the Big Poke, entered and took a seat. A dozen hands stretched forth to

help him out of his borrowed parka, for he was still weak, and his right arm as yet unhealed.

"Business is boomin', boss," called out Scotty from across the faro layout, where Old Man Ryan was keeping cases.

"And it's going to better still, after this," added one of the players.

"You can bet!" declared Ryan. "From now on, you got a monopoly. Frenchy saved most of his gold after he clawed through the ashes, and he wanted to build again. He was goin' to send down to Yukon for another wheel. But on account of the public sentiment, we sent a little committee to wait on him. I happened to head the committee. I told him if he ever turned another card, or spun a wheel around Angel again, that we'd lock him up until next mosquito time; and then we'd strip him, daub him with molasses, and chase him down the Flats."

"I hear he's bought out that claim above Nelson's," observed Scotty, as he finished shuffling his cards and slid them into the nickel-plated box.

"That's correct," Ryan affirmed. "I witnessed the transfer papers myself. He paid fifty-five thousand—all he had left, after Nelson made him pony up his losses."

"What became of the rest of his outfit?" John asked. Confined in the bunk house for several weeks, he was more or less out of touch with developments in camp.

"That pockmarked Cat-hop and most of the women hit the trail for the Tanana," volunteered an onlooker.

"And that bartender you winged is goin' to help Frenchy work his claim," supplemented another. "Two of the girls are housekeepin' Up Creek, and the Jap's workin' for Lee Foo."

"We're right glad to se you back on the job," declared Hank Powers. His wheel idle for the time being, he had joined the group at the faro table. "Now we'll make things hum for the rest of the winter," he added.

Thoroughly warmed and rested, John arose from his seat near the big stove, and approached the players. There was a serious expression upon his clean-cut face as he watched the dealer for a few moments.

"Who wants to call the turn?" asked Scotty, as he neared the end of the deal.

"What's left, Ryan?" asked one of the players.

Ryan consulted his case. "King, eight, five," he pronounced.

"I'll copper the king for a stack o' whites," said some one.

"She goes," replied Scotty, as he tossed a marker to the better.

"I call the turn," declared a bearded plunger, who was well ahead of the game. "Heeling" a stack of red chips from the eight to the five, he called: "Eight—five."

Scotty had moistened his finger, and was about to make the turn, when John spoke.

"Boys," said he, "you want to watch this turn very closely. It'll be the last card turned in this place!"

Scotty's hand, on its way from his lips to the dealing box, paused in mid-air. Old Man Ryan wheeled in a twinkling, a puzzled expression upon his rugged features. Some one dropped a half-filled pipe. Hank Powers took a step toward the young man.

"I'm not crazy, boys," were John's next words. He laughed—a bitter laugh—and then resumed: "I mean exactly what I say. After to-night—right after this turn—there'll be no more gambling in this house. It's my house, and my stuff, and I'm through with all gambling — ab-so-lute-ly through!"

"What ails you, Buddy?" asked Hank, the first to find his voice. He approached John and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Nothing, Hank," was the reply; "what's *been* ailing me is a thing of the past." Henderson turned to the dealer. "When you've made this turn, Scotty," he said, "the bank's closed."

Without waiting to see the result of the bets, John turned away and found his seat by the fire. Mechanically, Scotty slid the cards from the box. Five—king, they came, the bank win-

ning both bets. Scotty swept the chips and markers into the rack.

"Boys," said Hank, "if you'll fade away, it might be the best thing. I don't know what's wrong with the youngster; but Scotty and I are goin' to find out."

There was an awkward pause; and then, two by two, and singly, the men filed out of the Happy Thought, leaving John Henderson alone with his employees. Three of them were there, for besides Scotty Brown and Hank Powers, there was his man of all work, "Sam the Moosehead," otherwise "Moosehead" Sam, comfortably asleep near the fire.

"Hank, how do we stand?" asked Henderson abruptly, as the door closed behind the last patron.

"What d'you mean—the bank?"

John nodded. "Who are the big losers and winners since we've been running?"

Hank thought for a few moments. "Pretty even break, so far," he finally made answer. "Luck's been a bit against us, even with the percentage. I reckon most o' the boys are either winners—or about even up. There's that feller, McAvoy, from Twenty Above, though, that *will* play the high card all the evenin', and catch every split in the deck. He must be twelve or thirteen hundred loser—ain't he, Scotty?"

The faro dealer looked up from his card press. "He can't be *over* thirteen hundred to the bad," he averred.

"Got any chechahco money?" asked Henderson shortly.

Scotty opened the iron box which served them for a safe. After a thorough search he produced a worn wallet containing some paper money. This, together with a double handful of coined gold, he laid upon a bench before John.

"Eighteen seventy-five," said Scotty, after he had counted the money over.

"Will you men do what I tell you; and ask me no questions?" Henderson's inquiry was both sharp and direct.

Hank glanced at his fellow employee, and then back at John. Perplexed, yet loyal to the marrow, he roared his "Sure," closely followed by Scotty's hearty, "You bet!"

"Then listen to me." John's voice was husky. He cleared his throat, and went on: "Take that money and pay the loser out of it. Don't argue for the sake of a hundred or two—pay him what he *says* he's lost. Take the rest of the bank roll—those pokes of dust and the small bag of nuggets—and put up at Lee Foo's bunk house. Get out of here with the first outfit of dogs that you can get hold of. You ought to get over the Pass and make the coast soon after Christmas. When you get to Los Angeles, hunt up my sister, Bertha. Give her what's left of the roll after you help yourselves to two thousand apiece."

John paused to wake up the sleeping native.

"And what are *you* goin' to do?" asked Scotty.

"Why——" Henderson laughed grimly. "I'm going to look for an honest job. I've come to the conclusion that *all* gambling is wrong; no matter whether you run a square game or not. But I'm not going to preach a sermon about it. Get your stuff out of here and over to the bunk house. I'll join you in half an hour or so."

As Scotty and Hank departed with their scant belongings, John spoke sharply to the man in the greasy parka.

"Sam," said he, "it's still early. You hump yourself over to the A. C. and fetch me one of those five-gallon cans of coal oil. I notice ours is about gone."

As the native slouched off, John followed him to the door, and stepped outside upon the well-trodden snow. For an instant he faced the north, where the purple and violet streamers of the Aurora put to shame the twinkling lights of Angel Creek. In spite of the intense cold, he wet one of the fingers of his sound hand and held it aloft. What little air was moving came from the north, he determined. With a grunt of satisfaction, he faced the other way. No buildings lay to the southward of the Happy Thought—nothing but the dreary expanse of snow, and ice, and stunted hemlocks.

An hour later, Henderson stumbled into the bunk house near the Delmonico. Following him came Moosehead Sam, bearing some extra blankets and other personal effects belonging to his master. Across the creek, oil-fed flames leaped skyward from the doomed Happy Thought, while fragments of blazing moss floated harmlessly southward toward the Bend.

Up and down the creek, and in the town proper, men gathered to watch the flames. To extinguish them was out of the question, since it was necessary to melt ice in order to obtain barely enough water for household purposes.

And in the last cabin of a row of four—facetiously called "Front Street"—a gray-eyed girl pressed her face to the double windowpane, and watched the flames upon the Canadian side.

"I wonder if he fired it purposely," she whispered to herself.

But later she knew as much about the fire as Angel Creek did, for she heard from her uncle's lips the story of the last turn.

CHAPTER V.

AT "NUMBER FOUR BELOW."

Offered his choice between a quarter "lay," or employment at ten dollars a day, John chose the former, and took up his quarters in Lucky Nelson's cabin upon the American side at "Four Below Discovery." Scotty and Hank had "gone out," after ineffectual attempts to persuade John to join them.

His arms healed, and the stinging pain gone from his shoulder, Henderson went bravely about his new work. It came hard at first. He was unaccustomed to chopping cordwood, handling a pick in the smoky drift, and to long hours at the windlass. But he persevered, and his muscles soon hardened, his back ceased to ache, and his palms grew callous.

Number Four, so far, had not given signs of being an especially rich claim. Nelson, working single-handed, had reached bed rock during the previous winter, and had cleaned up some twelve or fifteen thousand dollars in fine gold. He had earned his nickname, "Lucky," not by reason of his performances at Angel Creek, but on account of a lucky strike made on Bonanza some years before. He was reputed to be a wealthy man; and rumor had it that he still held a number of A. C. Company receipts for several heavy shipments of gold. That he had brought Klondike gold with him to Angel Creek was an open secret in camp. The two mammoth nuggets were, supposedly, souvenirs of his Bonanza Creek holding.

One evening, after supper of beans and "sowbelly," John broached the subject of the big nuggets.

"Where did you get 'em?" he asked.

"It vos gold from Eldorado," answered the big Swede. "Ay don't know who dug dem. Dey vos bein' raffled off in der Aurora ven Ay bane in Dawson, yust before der big fire. Ay bought some chances, und drew der lucky number. Dey veigh yust under four pounds, und de're vort' about a t'ousand."

"Did you ever hear of a man down Dawson way by the name of Frank Knowles?" asked John, wondering if Nelson had ever run across Ruth's father.

Lucky Nelson shook his head. "No," he said, "der only Knowles Ay ever heard of bane der doctor here in Ainyel Crick. He ask me vonce about der Goose Egg und der Yiant's T'umb."

From a shelf near his bunk, the Swede took down a five-pound tobacco tin partly full of fine, light gold from the previous year's clean-up. Placing it upon the rough plank which served as a table, he lit an extra candle and removed the box lid. Lying on top of the fine dust, in conspicuous contrast, were the freak nuggets of dark-reddish gold. For the second time, John gazed upon what had no doubt once been the property of Ruth Knowles' father.

Now and again, while on the two-mile mush to the settlement after supplies, John met Ruth and the doctor on their way Up Creek. Upon these occasions, unless his errand happened to be a particularly urgent one, the doctor never failed to stop his dogs and inquire as to how things were going at

"Four Below." Favored with one of the gray-eyed girl's rare smiles, and a hearty handclasp from the doctor, John would then trudge on his way to town. Those were red-letter days, indeed, for him.

One never-to-be-forgotten day in January, after a galling four-hour trick at the windlass, John was halfway to town, when he heard the sound of sledge runners behind him. He had scarcely turned, when the team overhauled him and slowed down.

"Whoa! You Kootlik! Whoa!" came from beneath the hood of a familiar fox-skin parka; and the dogs stopped. Ruth Knowles was driving, and she was alone.

"Mr. Henderson," she began timidly, "I've just been to your cabin to ask a kindness of you."

Surprised beyond measure, John stepped to her side. "You can ask me for anything in the world, Miss Knowles," he said.

The girl flushed. Her eyes were upon the beaten trail as she resumed: "Does that Moosehead Sam still work for you?"

"Not exactly. He cuts and hauls wood for our claim. We pay him twenty dollars a cord for what he delivers. We've got about enough wood on hand now, though, and I suppose he'll drink up his earnings."

"That's just the point." Ruth gripped her long-lashed dog whip firmly, and went on: "It seems you pay him every week or so; and that as soon as he gets his gold he proceeds to fill up on that miserable stuff they sell in town. That's none of my business; but when he comes and beats his wife—'*klooch*,' I believe you call it—it's got to stop. Sarah works for me, and she's a good girl. I'm going to look to you to see that he never strikes her again."

"The miserable skunk!" declared John. "I'll take care of him."

"And now," said the girl, "if you'll climb in, I'll give you a lift into town."

It was John's turn to color, but he could scarcely refuse the invitation, since it came so spontaneously, and there was plenty of room for two. Indicating the space behind her, usually occupied by herself when the doctor was driving, Ruth handed John a wolf-skin robe, and almost before he realized it the driver cracked her whip and cried: "Mush! You Kootlik! Mush on!"

"How'd you come to miss me?" asked John. "You didn't pass me on the trail."

"Took a short cut across the flat," came back with the biting wind. It was too cold for further conversation.

All too soon the memorable ride was over; but, as Henderson got off at the footbridge, where their ways parted, he paused for a moment.

"How do you like Angel Creek so far?" he ventured.

"Really, I like it better than I thought I would." She smiled up at him as she spoke. "But isn't it a funny country, though? Look!" She pointed southwestward, over the head of her leader. "There's that lazy sun—just got up an hour or so ago—cut a little circle—and now it's setting. And then, next June—so they tell me—the same sun only disappears for an hour or two. That's the season you miners have to work so hard getting the gold out of your winter dumps."

"Indeed, we work hard almost all the time," asserted John, thankful for her words, you miners. "I ought to be working now," he added, "but Nelson and I were out of tobacco, so we tossed a penny to see who'd mush to town for it."

"Why can't you borrow from your neighbors?" Ruth asked.

A grave expression swept over Henderson's face. "Seeing that the man at Number Five Below neither smokes nor chews, and that most of the boys this side of our place either *eat* tobacco, or happen to be short o' smoking, I had to come to town."

And then it occurred to Ruth, that John's next neighbor on the up-creek side was none other than Frenchy Nemour, the owner by purchase of Number Three Below Discovery. She regretted her question.

But John relieved her quickly of her embarrassment. Indicating with a sweep of his mittened hand the frozen creek, the cluster of cabins half buried in snow, and the disappearing sun, he said: "This isn't much like California."

"No," she returned. Then, half audibly, as if speaking for her own ears alone, she breathed: "To think that the roses and lilies are now blooming in the San Gabriel——"

"And that people are bathing at Coronado," John finished for her. "I was born in San Diego," he added.

"And I, in Pasadena." There was a tender expression in the gray eyes, her lips were parted to say more, but suddenly she raised her whip and drew the butt back sharply. The long lash flew forward and cracked within a foot of her leader's sharp nose.

"Mush! Kootlik! Mush on!" she cried to him; and, as the dogs strained forward, she turned and waved to John. "Good-by, Mr. Henderson," she called. "Don't forget about that Moosehead Sam!"

Nor did he; for within an hour he twisted his hand into the greasy parka of the native, and backed him up against a woodpile.

"Sam, you rat!" said Henderson. "I'm not going to beat you up to-day, but if I ever hear of you laying a finger on your *klooch*, I'm going to chop you up into bits and feed you to the dogs! Ain't you ashamed of yourself—after all your schooling—to lay hands on a woman?"

Sam, educated and polished by the good fathers of the Holy Cross Mission, mumbled a scared reply. He had no desire to become food for the dogs, and several years spent in mining camps had taught him that the white gold seekers usually kept their word. Ashamed, and badly frightened, he made off. Nothing was seen of him for several days. Then, it was learned, he was cutting and hauling wood for Frenchy Nemour.

Not greatly concerned — having enough wood on hand to carry them through the balance of the winter— John and his partner kept on with their work, and day by day the dump of dirt grew broader and higher.

From time to time, making use of a tub partly filled with melted ice, Nelson would soak a gold pan full of partly frozen muck. After adding hot water, he would rotate the "specimen" carefully, and weigh the shining particles left in the pan. But these tests ran far from uniform. With a one-fourth interest in the claim, Henderson's heart beat faster one evening when the big Swede announced that he had washed out a "two-dollar pan"; but when the next pan barely showed a "color," John wondered what the clean-up would bring forth.

Their work now consisted of driving tunnels and cross tunnels along the uneven surface of the bed rock, and in getting the gravel to the surface. Nelson, burly and more skillful with the pick and shovel, usually remained in the drift, while John stood upon the rude platform and manipulated the windlass. Winding up the one-hundred-and-fifty-pound basketfuls of thawed gravel, and dumping them, while the thermometer ranged from thirty to forty-five degrees below zero, was cruel, man-killing work; but Henderson stuck to it, for at last he had a definite purpose in life —an object worthy of the best efforts of any man.

There were bitter days when the colored alcohol fell low in the glass—short, sunless days, when even the hardy Mooseheads kept within their snow-banked lean-tos, and dared not venture forth. On days such as these, the two men would heave large quantities of wood into the thirty-foot shaft. Fires kindled at the tunnel headings, they would then shut themselves up in their cabin and while away the hours as best they might. John read and reread his letters from the Outside, until he knew them by heart. Nelson played his one tune, "The Sailors' Hornpipe," over and over again, until John wished he could throttle either the inventor of the accordion, or the composer of the hornpipe.

Visitors from neighboring claims would occasionally drop in for a pipe

and a chat. Nelson would once in a while narrate a thrilling story of rough days in Montana and the Cœur d'Alenes; and Old Man Ryan, down from Discovery, would come back with a grim tale of sour-dough days in the Klondike. These sessions would invariably end with the oft-repeated question: "What day will the ice go out?" The gold seekers were impatient for open-running water, that they might "rock" and sluice their winter dumps, and reap the reward for their sacrifice and toil.

Although Frenchy Nemour's cabin stood less than two hundred yards away from their own, the partners saw very little of either the former owner of the Big Poke, or his bartender assistant. Moosehead Sam ran most of their errands, therefore it was only upon rare occasions that either of the men from Four Below encountered their immediate up-creek neighbors. When they did meet, however, Nemour and his man always gave the others the full width of the beaten-down trail. They seemed to realize fully that their presence at Angel Creek was tolerated rather than desired.

Rumor had it that Nemour's claim was turning out far from satisfactory, and that he already regretted having put his money into it. But neither the big Swede nor Henderson knew or cared what was going on at the next claim above. They had all they could do to work their own ground. Thus, the weeks dragged by—weeks spent in maddening toil, varied by spells of equally maddening enforced idleness.

CHAPTER VI.

ANGEL CREEK CELEBRATES.

During the first days of April the temperature moderated; the sun was up for sixteen hours, and the men of Angel Creek exchanged furs for sweaters. Sluice boxes were built, cradles constructed, and preparations were made for attacking the big pyramids of pay dirt which lined the banks of the frozen creek. Later, the sun removed the white quilts from the near-by hill crests, and robin redbreasts hopped boldly up to cabin doors.

May was half over before the ice went out on its long trip to the Bering Sea, and then came the busy times for the miners. Sluicing, rocking, panning—pausing barely long enough to snatch a cold bite, or an hour or two of sleep—the gold seekers attacked their dumps. Their time was limited, for early in September the creek would surely freeze over again.

John Henderson, by this time thoroughly hardened and seasoned to the work, labored as he had formerly gambled—straight and hard. Although he had never spoken to Ruth upon other than commonplace subjects, she was ever in his mind, and something told him that when the time came—when he could go to her with clean hands, and a modest fortune wrung from the frozen soil by the dint of his own exertions—he would find her a not unwilling listener.

Day by day, as the partners removed the top of their rocker and scraped out the gold, the five-gallon kerosene can beneath Nelson's bunk grew heavier. The pay dirt, while not especially rich, was far from disappointing, although Nelson grumbled, accustomed, as he had been, to handling the rich gravels of the Klondike.

Announcing his intention of "going out" with the first snow, the big miner declared he would return with a gang of men, that he might the more quickly exhaust the pay dirt in his claim.

"Und you can be foreman on a quarter lay, yust as long as you vant to stay on der claim," concluded Nelson.

But John smilingly shook his head. The proposition was a tempting one, to be sure. A one-fourth interest would surely net him a snug fortune within another year. A score of laborers hired at ten dollars a day would "gut" Four Below in another winter, and the ensuing clean-up promised handsome returns. But Henderson had other plans in view.

By the time the ice "made" in Angel Creek, September was half over. Sluicing and rocking were abandoned, for

the light gold seemed to possess an affinity for the particles of ice in the water. Old miners, carefully panning their tailings, found more precious metal in the waste than they cared to see. Idle days ensued. It was too late to work the dumps, and the drifts were still too wet. Divisions were made, men were paid off, and the discontented ones who had not already left camp prepared to do so as soon as the first snow fell.

Late in September, the unnavigable Porcupine froze over, and the days grew sensibly shorter. Nelson then began his preparations for the trip to Fort Yukon. He anticipated finding some unemployed men there, and expected to be able to make the round trip within a fortnight. Meanwhile, while his partner spent the time in bargaining for dogs, Henderson was nerving himself up to speak to Doctor Knowles. Of the three thousand odd ounces of gold in Nelson's kerosene can, some twelve thousand dollars' worth of it belonged to John. Surely, he thought, if Ruth really cared for him, that sum would be enough for two. He resolved to speak to her uncle first—man fashion. If *he* had no objection, then it was time to speak to *her*.

But, one raw afternoon in late September, when all Angel Creek was celebrating the third anniversary of its discovery day, came the first of a series of tragic happenings, which cast a shadow over Henderson's plans, and left him standing—he knew not where.

That noon he had received his share of the gold, and had placed the heavy buckskin sack containing it at the head of his bunk. Nelson immediately busied himself with his dog trappings, whereupon John started for the settlement in hopes of running across Ruth. He had not yet screwed up his courage to the calling point.

She was in the Alaska Commercial Company's store, laughing and chatting with the agent, when John entered. McMurray, busy with his gold scales and receipt book, was telling her of Klondike experiences, while a group of men from Up Creek listened while awaiting their turn—their ears for the old trader, their eyes for the girl.

Between a dainty thumb and forefinger, Ruth held a three-ounce nugget aloft.

"It's the largest one I've ever seen," she said, as she bowed to Henderson, laid down the nugget, and shook his hand.

"Why, bless you, miss, there's nothing vurra wonderful aboot this trash," commented the old Scot behind the counter, as he scratched down some figures and reached for another poke.

"You ought've seen some of the chunks they washed out down at Eldorado and Bonanza durin' ninety-eight," put in an old-timer at her elbow. "Lucky Nelson's got a pair o' those Klondike beauties. Didn't he ever show you that two-pound Goose Egg, and the other one, the 'Yiant's Thumb'—as *he* calls it?"

John turned away. He could not bear to witness further this unfortunate opening up of an old wound. He knew that, as Lucky Nelson's partner, she might question *him* about the nuggets which her dead father had named and described. As a former professional gambler—no matter what he had been since—he felt that he himself was already, even if remotely, linked far too closely with the cause of her father's undoing.

Even as he gained the door, from the tail of his eye he saw the girl pluck the sour dough by the sleeve of his ragged, blue shirt, while she plied him with questions. Swearing softly to himself, Henderson crossed the footbridge to the American side, where a party of convivial miners intent upon celebrating the discovery of Angel Creek fell upon him and haled him before a rude bar.

After a bottle or two of stout, and a "drink all around," which lightened his own poke appreciably, he was permitted to depart. The sun was setting as he started off on his two-mile mush to the cabin at Four Below, and by the time he reached the lowest of the claims night had fallen—not the night of the tropics, nor yet that of the temperate

zones, but the starlit night which reigns over the wastes of the Northland.

Over the soggy trail, dotted with niggerheads of frozen moss, occasionally crashing through crusts of "young" ice into puddles of water almost knee-deep, Henderson kept on his way. Most of the cabins he passed were in darkness, their occupants having gone to town to celebrate, but as he drew near the cabin at Four Below he saw a dim light shining through its single window.

As he passed off the main trail and covered the thirty yards which lay between it and the cabin, John halted for a moment. Nearly half a mile to the northward a large bonfire had been kindled on Discovery. As he listened, he could distinguish the sound of rough voices raised in chorus. Then came the crackle of pistol shots, followed by answering shots both up and down the creek. Old Man Ryan was keeping open house. His guests were tearing down his wood pile, and helping him find the bottom of a ten-gallon keg.

"There'll be many a headache along Angel to-morrow," reflected Henderson, as he listened. Then he continued on and turned the corner of the cabin.

To his surprise—for the night was nipping cold—he noticed that the door was wide open, sagging forlornly upon its hinges of rusty strap iron. Sensing that something was wrong, John stepped across the threshold, and entered the dimly lighted interior—entered, and paused in horror. For an instant he closed his eyes—tried to persuade himself that what he had seen was not real—then opened them, slowly and fearfully.

Upon the rough table stood an empty bottle corked with an inch of flickering candle. Face down upon the table, one powerful arm dangling inert, the other pillowing his shaggy, blond head, lay Lucky Nelson, bathed in blood. And between the table and the door, lying still and white, with a pearl-handled revolver in one hand, was Ruth Knowles!

In an instant John was kneeling at her side, his finger at her pulse, his ear at her breast. That she lived, and that she had suffered no injury, he quickly decided. He was on the point of crossing the cabin for water, when it occurred to him to see if Nelson still lived. He raised the miner's head; but, after one glance at a purple hole at a point beneath the jaw, he shuddered, lowered it again, and turned to the living.

As he sprinkled water over the white face of the girl, and chafed her cold hands, he wondered what circumstances had led up to the shooting. "She came out here to ask Nelson about those nuggets," ran through his brain, as he noted her wet skirts and leggings. "She wasn't satisfied with his explanation as to where he got them," he went on reflecting. "Some crazy idea possessed her that Nelson won the gold from her suicide father. She snatched my revolver from its holster on the peg—and shot him as he sat at the table—shot him to avenge——"

And then the eyelids fluttered, and a moan came from the girl. Suddenly John thought of the revolver—*his* revolver. Gently removing it from her hand, he "broke" it, and found one chamber discharged, just as he had expected. He tossed the weapon into his bunk, just as the gray eyes opened and stared into his own.

For an instant she seemed scarcely to realize where she was, or what had happened. Then, as she rose weakly to a sitting posture, and caught sight of John's bloodstained hands, she covered her face and moaned.

"I'm afraid Nelson's dead," John murmured. Slowly, the girl raised her face and gazed at him in wide-eyed horror. "You'd better leave here," he went on, thinking only of her safety; "now—at once."

Ruth struggled to her feet. With trembling limbs she stood erect for a moment, and then, half involuntarily, she turned and looked toward the table. She wet her dry lips and seemed to be about to speak, when there came a whine at the open door, and the next instant a half-bred Malemute stole into the cabin and sniffed around Nelson's feet. The candle flickered and went out.

In the semidarkness which ensued, Henderson found a fresh candle and lit it; but barely had he thrust it within the neck of the bottle, than a lapping sound came from beneath the table. The wolf dog was licking up the lifeblood of its master! It was more than human flesh and blood could stand, and even as John's foot crashed into the ribs of the half-starved animal, the girl screamed and fled into the night.

Half dazed by what had happened, John closed the door and set about putting the cabin to rights. As yet he had no clear idea of what course he should pursue. That the girl must be protected at all hazards was the thought uppermost in his mind, therefore his first action was to secure the revolver, that he might clean it and replace it in the holster which dangled from a peg near his bunk.

With fingers that trembled he tore a strip from the hem of his blue handkerchief and went to work on the revolver. Barely had he ejected the empty cartridge shell, however, and threaded the rag through the barrel, when he was startled to hear a groan from somewhere close at hand. He dropped the revolver, jumped to his feet, and looked toward the table just in time to see the big Swede move his head and clench his fist.

"He's alive! Thank God, he's alive!" John exclaimed.

Thinking neither of himself nor of the girl he had been trying to shield, John darted out of the cabin, intent only upon summoning the doctor to his partner's aid. That he left behind him upon the cabin floor his own revolver, still threaded with a strip of cloth torn from his own handkerchief, meant nothing to him. Straining every nerve to make fast time, he plunged toward town—slipping and falling flat at times, only to arise and run on the faster.

A man's life was at stake! The life of his big-hearted, good-natured partner. What mattered it if upon the floor lay a telltale, empty cartridge shell which fitted the single empty chamber of the pearl-handled revolver?

Luckily he found the doctor at home, anxious as to the whereabouts of his niece. Ignoring the physician's question as to whether he had seen her or not, John told him of Nelson's condition.

Record time was made upon the return, and Henderson was congratulating himself that his partner's life might yet be spared; but as the two panting men entered the cabin, strong arms seized John and bore him to the floor. When he could see plainly, he perceived that the cabin was crowded with men; and standing guard over him was Old Man Ryan, the pearl-handled revolver in his hand.

"Looks kinder black for you, young man," he said grimly.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LAW OF THE NORTH.

In the Far North, beyond the jurisdiction of courts, where no sheriffs, marshals—nor even humble constables—exist, the residents make their own laws; banishing, hanging, and shooting whom they will, according to the consensus of opinion.

Angel Creek was no exception to mining camps of its age and growth. True, there was a pair of the justly famous Northwest Mounted Police quartered upon the Canadian side of the settlement, from whose rulings appeal was useless; but at the time of the shooting of Lucky Nelson, they were in Dawson City awaiting their semiannual relief from Winnipeg.

Thus it was that, in the big log warehouse of the A. C. Company—the most commodious structure at Angel Creek—a miners' meeting was in session to try the supposed assailant of Lucky Nelson.

Between two husky miners, selected on account of their sobriety and strength, sat John Henderson, the accused; while before and around him sat the jury—three score of rough-and-ready gold seekers, who held his life in their hands.

A week had passed by since that horrible night at the cabin—a week of ex-

quisite suffering, both physical and mental. Overpowered upon his return to the cabin with the doctor, he had been conducted back to the settlement and thrown into an empty meat house. Unshaven, mute, and sullen, watched constantly by volunteer guards, who saw to it that he did not cheat the law of its revenge, Henderson had endured a week of torment—a week that seemed a year in the passing.

From scraps of conversation which passed between his guards at relief times, John had gathered that Nelson was hovering between life and death, still unable to move or speak. Likewise he knew that the doctor's niece was suffering from a severe attack of pneumonia, and that a heavy snow had fallen several days since. Visitors, outside of a friendly disposed miner who had mushed in to fetch him his sleeping robe, and Lee Foo, who came thrice daily with food, he had had none.

The case against him seemed to be a clear one. Old Man Ryan, as chairman of the miners' meeting, arose to address the assembly. Two witnesses had been heard, one of whom testified to the finding of the revolver and empty shell, and the other as to meeting the accused, hatless and breathless, upon the trail.

"Men," began the old man, as he removed his hat and scratched his gray head, "while I appreciate the honor that you've made me stand for by 'lectin' me chairman o' this meetin', I want to say that I don't hanker none after the job. But even so, it's *your* duty to say whether or not the prisoner's guilty—not mine. If you find him guilty, I'll pass sentence on him; if you don't, we'll lock him up again till Lucky either dies or gets well enough to speak out—then we can try him again accordin' to law. You've heard the evidence—how McAvoy stopped in Lucky's cabin and found him bleedin' to death; how he noticed Henderson's fancy-handled gun on the floor with a piece of his blue handkerchief stickin' out o' the barrel. You heard him swear how he found the empty shell and the five loaded ones; and how, after Henderson came back with the doc, he acted so funnylike that Mac came up to Discovery and notified me.

"You've heard Gallagher tell how he met Henderson runnin' to town with no hat on—like as if he was crazy or soused. Now, we've all got work to tend to, and we can't afford to jaw about this business any longer. Hopin' that Lucky'd get well enough to give us direct evidence against the prisoner, I've been puttin' this affair off from day to day. Now, I'm goin' to ask you-all one straight question before you give a verdict. Would any innercent man keep his mouth shut like this Henderson has?"

"No! No!" came from a dozen throats, while as many heads wagged an emphatic negative.

"Then there's another matter," the chairman went on, "we'd like to know how comes it that the only gold in Nelson's shack was found in a big buckskin poke at the head o' the prisoner's bunk. What became o' Nelson's gold that I've seen more than once in a coal-oil can? What became o' those two big nuggets and the Klondike gold in the tobaccer caddy? It looks to me as if the prisoner shot his partner and then cached the——"

"It's a lie!—a damnable lie!" shouted John, stung into speech by the cruel and unjust charge. It was the first he had heard of the missing gold. It put an entirely new complexion on the affair.

"Glad to see you've found your voice," said Ryan grimly. "Now maybe you'll tell us your little story, and explain away all these suspicious circumstances."

Closely watched by his guards, Henderson rose to his feet. As yet he had had no time to ponder over the matter of the stolen gold. He could not connect the shooting of Nelson with the theft. Even were Ruth Knowles inclined to carry away the gold with her, such a task was beyond her strength. Nelson's share of the clean-up weighed not far from one hundred and fifty pounds—to say nothing of the two nuggets and the contents of the tobacco

caddy. Besides, he had seen the girl flee empty-handed.

Every eye in the warehouse was upon John as he commenced to speak.

"Boys," he began, in a low voice, "I've only a few words to say. I'd have let even them gone unsaid, but the stolen gold is news to me, and it puts me in a different light. I feel that I owe it to myself to explain—so far as I can. I entered the cabin the other night, and found my partner dead—as I supposed—shot through the neck. My revolver had been used. It occurred to me that I'd better clean the gun, and put it back in the holster where it always hung. I'd just commenced cleaning, when Lucky moved and groaned. Seeing that he was still alive, I ran to town as quick as I could and fetched Doctor Knowles back. Soon afterward I was grabbed by four or five of you, and imprisoned in the meat house."

John paused for a moment, looked around him at the stern, bearded faces, and then, with bowed head and reverent mien, concluded:

"You can do with me what you like, for you outnumber me fifty to one; but I hereby swear in the name of all I hold dear, that I didn't shoot Nelson, and know nothing about the missing gold."

Henderson resumed his seat. A murmur ran around the room, but it died away as the tall chairman arose.

"You've heard all the evidence," he said; "you've heard the prisoner's story—he's certainly kept it back long enough—and now it's up to me to find out the sense o' this meetin'. All those who find this man guilty o' the attempted murder, raise your right hands!"

Two score of horny palms were thrust upward.

"All those who find this prisoner not guilty, raise your right hands!"

Half-heartedly, knowing that they were beaten, a dozen men who had known John well, and still had faith in him, raised their hands.

"It's the sense o' this meetin' that the prisoner's guilty," declared Ryan, "and I, as duly elected chairman, do so pernounce him guilty. John Henderson, stand up!"

John arose and stood erect. Likewise his guards arose on either side of him.

"Accordin' to this miners' meetin', a peaceable and orderly gatherin', which makes the only law we've got up here in the North, you've been found guilty of shootin' your partner. That's murder. Also, you've robbed him and cached the gold somewhere. It's up to me to say what's to be done with you. I offer you the followin' chance for your life: If you'll confess to the deed, and'll tell us where you've planted the gold, I'll send you back to the meat house pendin' Nelson's death, or till such time as the doc can be sure that he's goin' to be O. K. If you give up all the gold, and Lucky gets well, the ends o' justice might be served by chasin' you out o' the settlement with three days' grub."

A murmur of approval followed the speech, but was quickly silenced, however, by the raised hand of the chairman.

"What do you say, Henderson?"

But John stood mute. His nostrils widened at the mention of the gold; his jaw muscles rippled as Old Man Ryan put the question; otherwise he gave no sign that he had heard. And then the chairman spoke again:

"The prisoner refuses to confess and save his life. So it becomes my painful duty to sentence him to death; and I so order it. John Henderson, at sunset this afternoon, 'bout four o'clock, I order you to be hung from the south handrail o' the footbridge—hung by the neck until you're dead! That gives you 'bout half an hour to pray or write farewell letters—whichever you choose. This meetin' now stands adjourned for a half hour."

Dumfounded with the trick that fate was playing him, yet resolved to play out the grim game to the end, John sat upon the head of a flour barrel. There was no useful purpose to be served at this time by dragging the name of the girl into the case. In all probability, he reflected, she knew nothing of the stolen gold. It was more than likely that Nelson's cabin had been looted while he was on the way to the doctor. There

were several shady characters along the creek who were not above taking advantage of the unconscious miner. Probably one of them blundered in to borrow something. Frenchy Nemour and his helper might have peered in at the window and taken advantage of the situation. Even as this thought occurred to him he raised his eyes and encountered the unsympathetic glance of the sallow ex-proprietor of the Big Poke.

Quickly—all too quickly—the short October day drew to a close, and the men in the warehouse prepared for the execution. Some one handed John a heavy mackinaw, remarking that "he might's well keep warm as long as possible." Then the big door swung open, and the men of Angel Creek filed forth with their prisoner.

No time was lost in ceremony. A few yards out on the bridge the procession halted while some one knotted one end of a piece of rope around the handrail. With averted eyes, another fashioned a noose and drew it close around John's neck.

Off to the southwestward, beyond the Porcupine, the rim of the sun touched the white hill crests. His time was up! Then, from the Canadian side, behind the A. C. warehouse, came the voice of a driver urging on his dogs. 'The mail!" some one exclaimed, as a sledge pulled up before the big log house. John, his thoughts upon other matters, glanced to the eastward. He saw the Malemutes curl up as the driver got down from his heavily laden sledge. He noted two other men mushing along in the rear. One was a tall man; the other, of medium height. They reached the entrance of the warehouse, and were conversing with old McMurray. The trader was pointing toward the footbridge. The three men started toward him. They——

Then, as if in a dream, John heard the voice of Old Man Ryan.

"If the prisoner's got the nerve we think he's got," the chairman was saying, "he'll save us a whole lot o' trouble by steppin' up on the rail, and off *on the other side.*"

Game to the core—game as his father before him had been—John stepped upon the rail. It should never be said of Square Deal's son that he showed the white feather.

"And God have mercy on your guilty soul!" said Ryan, his voice trembling with emotion.

At this, breathing a silent prayer for those he loved and whom he was leaving behind, John stepped off into vacancy.

Immediately he felt an awful tug at his neck, followed by a terrible blow. Then came a horrible choking sensation—a babel of voices—and all grew black.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BACK TRAIL.

When Henderson's senses partly returned to him, he did not at once open his eyes. His head seemed swollen to twice its natural size. A mighty hand with muscles of steel seemed to be gripping him by the throat. Then some one pressed a flask to his lips, and he felt rather than tasted the burning liquor which trickled down his throat.

Roused further by the sound of angry voices, John opened his eyes to find Hank Powers kneeling by his side, a flask in one hand, a cocked revolver in the other. He thought the big croupier was far away in California. He tried to speak, but his swollen tongue refused to serve him. Then Hank smiled and spoke:

"Lie still, Buddy. They ain't goin' to get you again—not in a hundred years."

And then John realized that he was lying on the ice, ten feet below the handrail. Beside him he noted a rotten section of the flimsy rail, which had given way under the sudden strain, and had thus saved him from a broken neck. Around the spot where he lay was a circle of miners, some of them with weapons in their hands. They were angrily demanding possession of their late prisoner, that they might hang him again.

But, standing back to back, with their

carbines at the "ready," and the magazine cut-offs open, were a pair of the Northwest Mounted Police, who threatened sudden death to the first man who should advance a pace or raise a weapon.

"But this man committed a murder on the American side," Old Man Ryan was protesting. "You've got no jurisdiction over that. We demand the prisoner, so's we can hang him proper!"

"And you're not goin' to get him," returned Sergeant Burke. "You're twelve or fifteen feet inside o' Dominion territory, and I'm the boss. You're a mob. We've got a right to shoot you down. You outnumber us; but we'll get a half a dozen of you if you start anything! Now I order you to disperse. This man remains in my custody."

"But he's a murderer," shouted one of the miners, "he shot——"

"You're a liar!" came from Hank Powers.

"It makes no difference what the man's done," said Burke sternly. "He's on Canadian territory, and he's our prisoner. We'll take him down to Dawson as a fugitive from justice. Your commissioner at Eagle can get out extradition papers for him. Then if he's tried and found guilty, he'll be taken to Sitka and hanged. Now I order you for the last time: Fall back and disperse!"

The carbines clicked ominously as the soldier-policemen leveled them, but an angry murmur came from the ring of baffled miners. It seemed as though serious bloodshed was certain to ensue, for they held their ground. Old Man Ryan was on the point of raising his revolver, and Sergeant Burke's finger had moved from the guard to the trigger, when, suddenly, there came an interruption.

"Hold!" cried a voice above the heads of the angry men. Looking up, they beheld Doctor Knowles standing upon the footbridge near the broken railing. A little distance off stood his sledge and team of panting dogs.

"Nelson has spoken," were his next words. "You have an innocent man there!"

"Well, who *did* shoot Lucky, then?" came in a surly voice from one of the crowd.

"It's a long story," replied the doctor. "Bring Henderson over to the store. He'll freeze, lying there. Is he hurt?"

Deprived temporarily of the power of speech by the cruel tug of the rope, John could not answer, but the doctor was soon at his side. Removing his gloves, he made a hasty examination.

"Head bruised — shock — badly choked," he murmured.

Friendly arms bore John to the warehouse and laid him upon a pile of robes. Revolvers were thrust out of sight. Men who but a short while before had been clamoring for his life, now pressed forward and tendered their awkward services. McMurray sought and found a long-treasured bottle of old cognac.

His patient made fairly comfortable, although still unable to speak above a whisper, the doctor turned to the others.

"You've made a big mistake, men," he began. "Henderson had nothing to do with the shooting of Lucky. The bullet which nearly cost Nelson his life grazed his larynx and passed out through the muscles at the back of his neck. Luckily for him, and for all concerned, the bullet missed the carotid, and only punctured and ruptured a few comparatively unimportant blood vessels. He lost considerable blood, and is still very weak, but I'll have him around in a few weeks.

"To-day, for the first time, he's been able to speak. This is what he knows about the shooting: Upon the evening of the celebration, shortly after sunset, he was sitting at the table, making up his mind whether or not to go to town. He heard footsteps outside. They seemed to halt at the window on the south side of the cabin, much as if some one were looking in. Thinking it might be his partner, Nelson glanced around. He saw no one at the window. Then, to his surprise, the door on the creek side was thrown violently open. Two men stood in the doorway. In the dim candlelight Nelson couldn't make out their faces. He was on the point of asking 'em what they meant by yanking his door open in that fashion, when one

of the visitors raised his arm and fired at him. Nelson felt something hit him. That's all he remembers."

An angry hum went around the room. The gold seekers pressed closer around the doctor, all hungry for further details.

"Now come some peculiar developments," went on the speaker. "Hearing for the first time that Nelson owned two big nuggets which she had reason to believe once belonged to her father, my niece started off for Nelson's cabin that same evening shortly before sunset. She intended to ask the big fellow if he'd known her father, and how he came by the freak nuggets. She found the cabin door open, and Nelson lying, face down, on the table, in a pool of blood. At her feet lay a pearl-handled revolver. She'd seen Henderson with this same revolver one day below town when the boys were having a little target practice, and, womanlike, jumped to the conclusion that he'd shot his partner.

"She picked up the revolver—for some reason why she can't explain—and just then she heard the sound of footsteps outside. Like a flash it occurred to her that if any one should enter the cabin and find her there with the dead man, with the revolver in her hand, she'd be taken for a murderess. She fainted at the very thought. The next thing she remembers was Henderson chafing her hands and sprinkling water upon her face.

"There's not very much more to my story. Ruth made her way home, wet to the knees from plunging through thin ice into muddy holes. She has a faint recollection of a man overhauling her upon the trail—a man who was running like mad. That person must have been Henderson on his way to me. She reached the cabin soon after I left it, and it was the next afternoon before I saw her. I found her very ill; but she's now improving fast. She'll soon——"

"But what about Lucky Nelson?" broke in an impatient listener. "Who shot him and robbed him?"

"I was just coming to that," replied the doctor. His face grew stern. An impressive silence reigned. Then he went on to say:

"Several things go to show that John Henderson had nothing to do with the shooting. Here's one of them."

From a buckskin bag the doctor produced a small object—a bit of shining metal a little less than an inch in length, and as big around as a lead pencil.

"That's the bullet that passed through Nelson's neck," said the doctor, as he handed the pellet to Ryan. "I dug it out of a log in the rear of the cabin—behind the place where Nelson was sitting."

"And it never come out o' that forty-four," pronounced Ryan, as he examined the bullet. "This is a nickel-jacketed thirty-eight, almost as perfect as it left the muzzle."

"Then how come it that the pearl-handled forty-four was found fired off?" asked a curious bystander.

"That revolver was taken out of its holster and deliberately discharged and thrown on the floor, so as to throw suspicion on Henderson. Here's the proof. I dug it out of a log on the creek side—the side away from where Nelson was sitting."

Doctor Knowles produced a partly flattened-out bullet of lead. Its tip was mushroomed, but its base was as round and shapely as the day it was molded.

"It's a forty-four all right," was Old Man Ryan's verdict.

"And here's the third proof that you tried to hang an innocent man," continued John's champion. Plunging his hand into the buckskin bag, the doctor held a third object aloft. It glinted dully. It was a piece of gold shaped like a man's thumb, but much larger.

"The Giant's Thumb," breathed those nearest the doctor.

"Where'd you get it?" demanded Ryan.

"From Ruth, my niece," answered the doctor.

There was a stir in the room. McMurray had lit his big kerosene lamps. The men eyed each other in surprise, wondering what was to follow. It was a dramatic moment.

"And *she* got it from Sarah, Moosehead Sam's *klooch*. Sam saw two men bury a heavy five-gallon can two feet deep in a corner of a deserted lean-to near the claim at Three Below. The men didn't know he was watching them. They acted in a sneaky kind of a manner. Sam waited until they'd left, and then investigated matters for himself. He found the gold, and helped himself to a few nuggets. Sam loves his liquor, as you all know. Last night he visited the cache and took away some of the larger nuggets—among them the Giant's Thumb. About an hour ago, drunk as a lord, he stumbled into my cabin. Sarah found this nugget in a poke hanging around his neck.

"She wormed the truth out of him, and told Ruth. They hailed me as I was passing the cabin on my way here, gave me the nugget, and told me the names of the two men that Sam saw burying the gold. They were——"

The doctor broke off in the middle of the sentence. Down by the door a group of men were struggling. There came oaths, the flash of steel, and then the sudden, whiplike cracks of pistol shots. Long before the soldier-policemen reached the spot, all was over. Upon the rough floor of the warehouse, grim and sallow in death as he had been in life, lay the bullet-riddled form of Frenchy Nemour.

And near by, with his sightless eyes turned up to the smoky ridgepole, lay the man who had once tended bar at the Big Poke.

Much can happen in four weeks; and many things happened at Angel Creek during the month immediately following the "hanging" of John Henderson.

Lucky Nelson continued to improve, and had arranged to engage Powers for his foreman in place of Henderson, for John was preparing to leave the country. Nor was he to travel alone.

It was a clear day when John prepared to leave the cabin at Four Below for the last time. Nelson, still unable to speak above a whisper, grasped his hand in silence. Hank was straightening out the traces of the best team of dogs that money could buy from the Mooseheads.

John stood by his sledge as Hank stepped up to him. "It was awfully good o' you to mush way up here. I wish you were going back with me."

Hank laughed as he gripped John's hand. Then his face grew sober. "Buddy," said he, "I'm goin' to stay up here for a spell, and see what I can knock out o' the gravel. You're off my mind now. I promised Bertha I'd find you and stick to you until you promised to leave the country. I reckon I kept my promise—and that I got here just in time. Give Bertha my regards; and if you run across Scotty down on the coast, tell him to keep out o' bad company."

Off, along the trail to town, waving his hand as he passed the claims, sped John. He knew that in the last cabin on "Front Street," a gray-eyed girl was waiting for him.

As he drew up before the doctor's cabin, Ruth stepped forth, muffled to the eyes in dainty furs. Closely following her, dressed in native fashion, equipped for the Long Trail, came Sarah, the chaperon-maid. Then came the good doctor. There was a lump in John's throat as he shook hands; but a few moments later, as the well-fed Malemutes sped down the back trail, it seemed to have disappeared. And the reason was not far to seek, for the woman he loved was riding with him.

Southwestward, one hundred and sixty miles away, nestling among the dwarfed pines and cedars, within rifle shot of Fort Yukon, he knew he would find a Jesuit mission, with good Father Renaud in charge. Bridesmaids, also, he knew they would have, in the persons of the kindly Sisters of Sainte Anne.

And beyond lay the frozen bosom of the Upper Yukon, the way to the Big Outside, and—their own California.

Beginning in next issue, "The Fight on Standing Stone," by Francis Lynde.

The Scientific Gunman

AN ADVENTURE WITH CRAIG KENNEDY, SCIENTIFIC DETECTIVE

By Arthur B. Reeve

Author of "The Silent Bullet," "The Poisoned Pen," Etc.

"If there is a gunman back of it all, it is no ordinary fellow but a scientific gunman far ahead of anything you dreamed of." This trenchant phrase from the lips of Craig Kennedy, himself a scientist of considerable renown, comes after his initial investigation of the mystery of the liquid bullet. You can easily surmise that there is to be a mighty battle between the scientific crook and the scientific detective.

(In Two Parts—Part One.)

CHAPTER I.

THE STOLEN CAR.

"YOU are aware, I suppose, Professor Kennedy, that there has been considerably over a million dollars' worth of automobiles stolen in this city during the past few months?"

Our visitor was a sandy-haired, red-mustached, stocky man, with everything but the name detective written on him from his face to his mannerisms.

He was accompanied by an athletically inclined, fresh-faced young fellow, whose clothes proclaimed him to be practically the last word in imported goods from London. I had not been surprised at reading the name of James McBirney on the detective's card, underneath which was the title of the Automobile Underwriters' Association. But I had been surprised when the younger of the visitors whom I had admitted at the sound of the buzzer on our apartment door had handed me a card with the simple name, Mortimer Warrington.

Mortimer Warrington, I may say, was at that time one of the celebrities of the city, at least as far as the newspaper men were concerned. He was one of the richest young men in America, and good for a "story" almost any time.

Warrington was not exactly a wild youth, in spite of the fact that his name appeared so frequently in the headlines. As a matter of fact, the worst that could be said of him with any degree of truth was that he was gifted with a large inheritance of red blood as well as real estate. More than that, it was scarcely his fault if the guardian press of the nation had been busy in a concerted attempt to marry him off safely—with a weather eye on future black-type headlines for possible domestic discord. Among those mentioned by the society reporters of the papers had been, I knew, Miss Violet Winslow, well known on Fifth Avenue and at Tuxedo, an heiress to a moderate fortune, closely guarded by a rather duennalike aunt, Mrs. Beekman de Lancey.

"I wasn't aware of the exact extent of the thefts," remarked Craig, taking in the situation at a glance, "though I knew of their existence. What's the matter?" he added, turning from the

detective to young Warrington. "Have you had a car stolen?"

"Have I?" chimed in the youth eagerly and with just a trace of nervousness. "Worse than that. I can stand losing a big nine-thousand-dollar Maillard, but—but—you tell it, McBirney. You have the facts at your tongue's end."

"I'm very much afraid," responded the detective, "that this theft about caps the climax of car stealing in this city. Of course, you realize that the automobile as a means of committing crime and of escape has rendered detection much more difficult to-day than it ever was before. There's been a murder done in or with or by that car of Warrington's, or I'm ready to resign from the profession."

McBirney had risen in the excitement of his revelation, and had handed Kennedy what looked like a discharged shell of a cartridge. Craig took it and turned it over and over critically, examining every side of it, and waiting for McBirney to resume. McBirney said nothing.

"Where did you find the car?" asked Kennedy, still examining the cartridge.

"We haven't found it," replied the detective.

"Haven't found it? Then how did you get this cartridge, or at least why do you connect it with the disappearance of the car?"

"Well," explained McBirney, getting down to the story, "you see, Mr. Warrington's car was insured against theft in a company which is a member of our association. When it was stolen, we immediately put in motion the usual machinery for the tracing of stolen cars because—with all deference to the police—it is the insurance companies and not the police who get cars back usually. I suppose it's natural. The man who loses a car notifies us first, and, as we are likely to lose money by it, we don't waste any time getting after the thief.

"Late this afternoon, word came to me that a man, all alone in a car which in some respects tallied with Warrington's, although, of course, the license number and color had been altered, had stopped early this morning at a little garage over in the northern part of New Jersey. The car was stained with blood, but the fellow was in a rather jovial mood, said he had run into a cow a few miles back and had been stung a hundred dollars by the farmer.

"The garage keeper's assistant had swallowed the story and had cleaned the car. But afterward the garage keeper himself had been told. He met the farmer in town later, and the farmer denied that he had lost a cow. That set the garage keeper thinking. And then, in cleaning up the garage later in the day, they found that cartridge where the car had been washed and brushed out. We had advertised a reward for information about the stolen car, and when he heard of that reward he telephoned in, thinking the story might interest us. It did, for I am convinced that his description of the machine tallies closely with that which Mr. Warrington lost."

"Where had you left the car?" asked Kennedy of Warrington.

The young man seemed to hesitate. "I suppose," he said, at last, with a sort of resigned smile, "I'll have to make a clean breast of it. The fact is that I had started out for a mild little sort of celebration, beginning with dinner at the Mephistopheles Restaurant with a friend of mine. You know the place, perhaps—just about on the edge of the automobile district and the white lights."

"Yes," encouraged Kennedy, "near what ought to be named Crime Square. Who were you with?"

"Why, Angus Forbes and I were going to dine together, and then we were to meet a bunch of fellows who used to belong to the same upper-class club at Princeton with us, and we were going to do a little slumming. No ladies, you understand," he added. "It may not have been pure sociology, but it wasn't as bad as some of the papers might make it, anyhow. I may as well admit that Angus is some sport, has been going the pace pretty lively since we graduated. I don't object to a little flyer now and then, but I guess I'm not up to

his class. That doesn't make any difference, though. The slumming party never came off.

"Angus and I had a very good dinner at the Mephistopheles, and by and by the fellows began to drop in to join us. When I went out to look for the car, which I was going to drive myself, it was gone. I had left it in the parking space half a block below the restaurant. A fellow standing near the curb told me that a man in a cap and goggles had come out of the restaurant, or seemed to do so, had spun the engine, and ridden off—just like that."

"What did you do then?" asked Kennedy. "Did you and Forbes go anywhere?"

"Oh, he wanted to play the wheel, and went around to a place on Forty-eighth Street. I was all upset about the loss of the car, got in touch with the insurance company, who turned me over to McBirney here, and the rest of the fellows went down to the club."

"There was no trace of the car in the city?" asked Craig of the detective.

"I was coming to that," replied McBirney. "There was at least a rumor: I happen to know several of the police on fixed posts up there, and one of them told me he had noticed a car, which might have been Mr. Warrington's or not, pull up, about the time his car must have disappeared, at a place in Forty-seventh Street that is reputed to be a sort of pool room for women. At any rate, some one must have been having a wild time there, for they carried a girl out to the car. She seemed to be pretty far gone, and even the air didn't revive her—that is, assuming that she had been celebrating not wisely but too well. Of course, the whole thing is only speculation. Maybe it wasn't the car, after all. I am telling it only for what it may be worth."

"Do you know the place?" asked Kennedy of Warrington.

"I've heard of it," he said, I thought a little evasively. "I know that some of the swifter ones of the smart set go there once in a while for a little poker, bridge, and even to play the races. I've never been there myself, but I wouldn't be surprised if Angus could tell you all about it. He goes in for all that sort of thing."

"After all," cut in McBirney, "that's only rumor. Here's the point of the whole thing: For a long time my association had been thinking that merely in working for the recovery of the cars we have been making a mistake. It hasn't put a stop to the stealing, and the stealing has gone quite far enough. We have got to do something about it. It struck me that here was the case on which to begin, and that you, Professor Kennedy, are the one to begin it for us, while I carry on the regular work I am doing. The gang are growing bolder and more clever every day. And, then, here's a murder, too. If we don't round them up, there is no limit to what they may do in terrorizing the city."

"How does this gang, as you call it, operate?" asked Kennedy.

"Most of the cars that are stolen," explained McBirney, "are taken from the automobile district, which embraces also not a small portion of the new Tenderloin and the theater district. Actually more than nine out of ten have disappeared between Forty-second and Seventy-second Streets. Some of the thefts have been so bold that you would be astonished, and it is those stolen cars, I believe, that are used in the wave of taxicab and motor-car robberies, holdups, and other crimes that is sweeping over the city. They are taken to some obscure garage and their identity destroyed by men expert in the practice.

"We have frequently had occasion to call on the police for assistance, but somehow or other it has seldom worked. They don't seem to be able to help us much. If anything is done, we must do it. If you will take the case, Professor Kennedy, I can promise you that the association will pay you well for it."

"I will add whatever is necessary, too," put in Warrington. "I can stand the loss of the car—in fact, I don't care if I never get it back. I have others. But I can't stand the thought that my car is going about the country as the

property of a gunman, perhaps—an engine of murder and destruction."

Kennedy had been thoughtfully balancing the exploded shell between his fingers during most of the interview. As Warrington concluded, Craig looked up.

"I'll take the case," he said simply. "I think you'll find there is more to it than even you suspect. Before we get through, I shall get a conviction on that empty shell, too. If there is a gunman back of it all, he is no ordinary fellow, but a scientific gunman far ahead of anything you dream of. No, don't thank me for taking the case. My thanks are to you for putting it in my way."

CHAPTER II.

THE LIQUID BULLET.

I doubt whether Kennedy slept much during the night. Certainly he was about early enough the following morning.

"That's curious," I heard him remark, as he ran his eye hastily over the front page of the morning paper, "but I rather expected something of the sort. Read that in the first column, Walter."

The story that he indicated had all the marks of having been dropped into place at the last moment as the city edition went to press in the small hours of the night. It was headed: "Girl's Body Found in Thicket."

The dispatch was from a little town in Jersey, and, when I saw the date line, it at once suggested to me, as it had to Craig, that this was in the vicinity that must have been traversed in order to reach the point from which had come the report of the bloody car that had seemed to tally with that which Warrington had lost. It read:

Hidden in the underbrush, not ten feet from one of the most traveled automobile roads in this section of the State, the body of a murdered girl was discovered late yesterday afternoon by a gang of Italian laborers employed on an estate near by.

Suspicion was at first directed by the local authorities at the laborers, but the manner of the finding of the body renders it improbable. Most of them are housed in some rough shacks up the road toward Tuxedo, and were able to prove themselves of good character. Indeed the trampled condition of the thicket plainly indicates, according to the local coroner, that the girl was brought there, probably already dead, in an automobile which drew up off the road as far as possible and left her screened by the thick growth of trees and shrubbery.

There was only one wound, in the chest. It is, however, a most peculiar wound, and shows that a terrific force must have been exerted in order to make it. A blow could hardly have accomplished it, so jagged were its edges, and if the girl had been struck by a passing high-speed car, as was at first suggested, there is no way to account for the entire lack of other wounds which must naturally have been inflicted by such an accident. It is not like a pistol or gunshot wound, for curiously enough there was no mark showing the exit of a bullet, nor was any bullet found in the body after the most careful examination.

Until a late hour the body, which was of a girl perhaps twenty-one or two, of medium height, fair, good looking, and stylishly dressed, was still unidentified. She was unknown in this part of the country.

Almost before I had finished reading, Kennedy had his hat and coat on and had shoved into his pocket his little detective camera.

"I think we ought to go up there and investigate that," he remarked. "The circumstances of the thing, coming so closely after the report of Warrington's car, are very suspicious. I feel sure that we shall find some connection between the two affairs."

Accordingly, we caught an early train, and at the nearest railroad station engaged a hackman who knew the coroner, a local doctor.

The coroner was glad to assist us, and on the way over to the village undertaker's, where the body had been moved, volunteered that the New York police, whom he had notified immediately, had already sent a man up there, who had taken a description and finger prints, but had not, so far at least, succeeded in placing the girl, at least on any of the lists of those missing.

She was rather flashily dressed, and although good looking, rouge and powder had long since spoiled what might otherwise have been a clear and fine complexion, and the condition of the roots of her hair showed plainly that it had been bleached.

Kennedy examined the body closely, and more especially the jagged wound in the breast. It seemed utterly inexplicable. There was, he soon discovered, a sort of greasy, oleaginous deposit in the clotted blood of the huge cavity in the flesh. It interested him, and he studied it long and carefully, without saying a word.

The coroner expressed his belief that the woman had been shot with a rifle, but Kennedy finished his minute examination of the wound without passing any opinion of his own on it.

"If you will be kind enough to take us around to the place where the body was discovered," he concluded, "I think we shall not trespass on your time further."

In his own car, the coroner drove us up the road in the direction of the New York State boundary to the spot where the body had been found. It was a fine, well-oiled road, and I noticed the numbers and high quality of the cars which we passed.

Kennedy began a minute search. I do not think he expected for a moment to find any weapon or even a trace of one. It seemed hopeless also to attempt to pick out any of the footprints. The earth was soft, even muddy, but so many feet had trodden it down since the first alarm had been given that it was impossible to distinguish them from one another.

Still there seemed to be something in the mud, just off the side of the road, that did interest Kennedy. Very carefully, so as not to mar anything himself that more careless searchers might have left, he began a minute study of the ground. Apparently he was rewarded, for although he said nothing, he took a hasty glance at the direction of the sun, upended the camera he had brought, and began to photograph the ground itself, or rather some curious marks on it which I could barely distinguish. The coroner and I looked on without saying a word.

That concluded Kennedy's investigation, and we started back to town.

"Well," I remarked, as we settled ourselves in the suburban train, "we don't seem to have added much to the sum of human knowledge."

"Oh, yes, we have," he replied almost cheerfully, patting the black camera which he had folded and slipped into his pocket. "We'll just preserve the records which I have here. Did you notice what it was that I photographed?"

"I saw something, but I couldn't tell you what it was."

"Well, those were the marks of the tire of an automobile that had been run up into the bushes from the road. You know, every automobile tire leaves its own distinctive mark, its thumb print as it were. You will see that the marks that have been left there are precisely like those made by the make of tires used on Warrington's car, according to the advertisement. Of course, that mere fact alone proves nothing. Many cars may use that make of tires. Still, it is an interesting coincidence, and if the make had been different I should not feel half so encouraged about going ahead on this clew. We can't say anything definite, however, until I can compare the actual marks made by the tires on the stolen car with these marks which I have photographed and preserved."

On our return to the city, I was not surprised to find that Kennedy had decided on visiting police headquarters. It was, of course, our old friend, First Deputy O'Connor, whom he wanted to see.

In his office on the second floor, O'Connor greeted us cordially in his bluff and honest voice that both of us knew and liked so well. "I thought you'd be here before long," he beamed, leading us into an inner sanctum. "Did you read in the papers this morning about that murder of a girl whose body was found up in New Jersey?"

"Not only that, but I've been there and picked up a few things that your man overlooked," confided Kennedy.

"Say, that's one of the things I like about you, Kennedy. You're on the job. Also, you're on the square. You don't go gumshoeing it around behind a fellow's back, and talking the same

way. You play fair. Now, look here. Haven't I always played fair with you?"

"Yes, O'Connor," agreed Kennedy. "Jameson can vouch for that, too. But what's the occasion of all this?"

"You came for information, didn't you?" pursued O'Connor.

Craig nodded.

"Well, do you know who that girl was? Of course not. We haven't given it out yet."

"No," agreed Kennedy, "I don't know and I'd like to know. My position is that we shouldn't work at cross-purposes. To put it bluntly, it seemed to me that she was of the demimonde."

"She was—in a sense," vouchsafed the commissioner. "That girl," he went on impressively, "was one of the best stool pigeons we have ever had. Now, as for me, I hate the stool-pigeon method. I don't like it. I don't relish the idea of being in partnership with criminals in any degree, and I hate an informer who worms himself or herself into a person's friendship for the purpose of betraying it. But the system is here. I didn't start it, and I can't change it. As long as it's here I must accept it, and do business under it. And if I do business under it, I can't afford to let matters like this killing pass without getting revenge, quick and sure. Some one's going to suffer for killing that girl, not only because it was a brutal murder, but because the department has got to make an example or no one whom we employ is safe."

He was shouldering his burly form up and down the office in his excitement. He paused in front of us, to proceed.

"I've got one of my best men on the case now, Inspector Herman. I'll introduce you to him if he happens to be around. Herman's all right. But here you come in, Kennedy, and tell me you picked up something that my men missed up there in Jersey. I know it's the truth, too. I've worked with you enough to know."

He was evidently debating something in his mind. "Herman'll have to stand for it," he went on, half to himself. "I don't care whether he gets jealous or not. I'd like to have you, Kennedy, take up the case for us, too. I've heard already that you are working on the automobile cases. You see, I have ways of getting information myself. We're not so helpless as your friend, McBirney, maybe thinks."

He faced us. "For instance, it may interest you to know that we have just planned a new method to recover stolen automobiles and apprehend the thieves. A census of all cars in the questionable garages of the city has been taken, and each day every policeman is furnished with descriptions of cars stolen in the past twenty-four hours. The policeman then is supposed to inspect the garages in his district, and if he finds a machine that shouldn't be there, according to the census, he sees to it that it isn't removed from the place until it is identified. The description of this Warrington car has gone out with extra special orders, and if it's in New York I think we'll find it."

"I think you'll find," remarked Kennedy, "that this machine of Warrington's isn't in the city."

"I hardly think it is," replied O'Connor. "Whoever it was who took it is probably posted about our new scheme. That's not the point I was driving at. You see, our trails cross in these cases in a number of ways. Now, I have a little secret fund at my disposal. In so far as the affair involves the murder of that girl, and I'm convinced that it does, will you consider that you are working for the city, too? The whole thing dovetails. You don't have to neglect one client to serve another. I'll do anything I can to help you with the auto cases. In fact, you'll do better by both clients by joining the cases."

"O'Connor," answered Kennedy quickly, "you've always been on the level with me. I can trust you. Consider that it is a bargain. We'll work together. Now, who was that girl?"

"Her name was Rena Taylor," said O'Connor, apparently much gratified at the success of his proposal. "I had her at work getting evidence against a

ladies' pool room in Forty-seventh Street—an elusive place that we've never been able to 'get right.' I don't know just what happened. But I do know that she had the goods on the place. As nearly as I can find out, a stranger came to the place well introduced, a man, accompanied by a woman. They got into some of the games. The man excused himself, and apparently he found this Rena alone in a room in some part of the house. No one heard any pistol shot, but then I think they are lying. At any rate, we haven't been able to find in the house a particle of evidence there that a murder or violence of any kind has been done. At any rate, Rena Taylor disappeared from that gambling place the same night, and about the same time that Warrington's car disappeared. Now we find her dead over in New Jersey."

"And I find reports and traces that the car has been in the vicinity," added Kennedy.

"You see," beamed O'Connor, "that's how we work together. Say, you ought to meet Herman." He rang a bell, and a blue-coated man opened the door. "Call Herman, Tom. I have given Herman carte-blanche instructions to conduct a thorough investigation. He's been getting the goods on another swell joint on the next block, in Forty-eighth Street, a joint that is just feeding on young millionaires in this town, and is or will be the cause of more crime and broken hearts if I don't land it and break it up than any such place has been for years. Herman, shake hands with Professor Kennedy and Mr. Jameson."

The detective was a quiet, gentlemanly sort of fellow, who looked rugged, strong, and a fighter to be respected. I would much rather have had a man like him with us than against us. But I knew Kennedy's aversion to the average detective, and was not surprised that he did not overwhelm Mr. Herman by the cordiality of his greeting. Kennedy always played a lone hand, preferred it, and had only taken O'Connor into his confidence because of his official position and authority.

"They are going to work independently on the Rena Taylor case," explained O'Connor. "I want you to give Mr. Kennedy every assistance, Herman, and I'm sure he'll do the same by you."

Kennedy nodded with a show of cordiality.

"Some one cooked her, all right," remarked Herman. "They don't take long to square a rapper to the 'bulls.'"

"No," agreed Kennedy, "nobody likes a snitch."

"That's right. Well, gentlemen, I'm glad to meet you, and I'll work with you. I wish you success, all right. It's a hard case. Why, there wasn't any trace of a murder in the place she must have been murdered in, and I suppose you have heard that there wasn't any bullet found in her?"

"Yes," answered Kennedy, "so far it looks inexplicable."

A telephone message for O'Connor about another departmental matter terminated the interview, and we went our several ways.

"Much help I've ever got out of a regular detective like Herman," remarked Kennedy, as we paid the fare of our cab a few minutes later and entered his laboratory.

"Yes," I agreed. "Why, he's stumped at the start by the mystery of there being no bullet. I'm glad you said nothing about the cartridge, although I can't see, for the life of me, what good it is."

I had ventured the remark, hoping to entice Kennedy into talking. It worked, at least as far as Kennedy wanted to talk. "You'll see about the cartridge soon enough, Walter," he rejoined. "As for there being no bullet, there was a bullet, only it was of a kind which you never dreamed of before. The bullet was composed of something soft or liquid, probably confined in a gelatin capsule. It mushroomed out, like a dumdum bullet, and then the heat that remained in her body melted all evidence of it. That was what caused that greasy, oleaginous appearance of the wound. In other words, it was practically a liquid bullet."

CHAPTER III.

THE BLACKMAILER.

It was late in the afternoon, while Craig was busy with his high-power microscope, making innumerable microphotographs, when the door of the laboratory opened softly, and a young lady entered.

She was tall and gave promise of developing with years into a stately woman—a pronounced brunette, with sparkling black eyes.

"You are Professor Kennedy?" she asked of Craig. Then, before he could answer, she added: "I am Miss Violet Winslow. A friend of mine, Mr. Warrington, has told me that you are investigating a peculiar case for him, the loss of his car."

Kennedy had placed a chair for her in the least cluttered and dusty part of the room. "I have the honor to be able to say 'Yes' to all that you have asked, Miss Winslow," he replied. "Is there any way in which I can be of service to you?"

I thought a smile played over his face at the thought that she might be asking him to work for three clients instead of two. The girl was very much excited and very much in earnest, as she opened her hand bag and drew from it a letter which she handed to Craig.

"I received that letter," she explained, "in the noon mail. I don't know what to make of it. It worries me to get such a thing. What do you suppose it was sent to me for? Who could it be?"

Kennedy had glanced quickly at the envelope, the postmark on which showed that it had been mailed that morning at the general post office. Then he opened it and read, the writing being in a bold scrawl and hastily executed:

> You have heard, no doubt, of the alleged loss of an automobile by Mr. Mortimer Warrington. I have seen your name mentioned in the society columns of the newspapers in connection with his several times lately. Let a disinterested person whom you do not know warn you in time. There is more back of it than he will care to tell. I can say nothing of the nefarious uses to which that car has been put, but you will learn more shortly. Meanwhile, let me inform you that he and some of the wilder of his set had that night planned a visit to a gambling house on Forty-eighth Street. I myself saw the car standing before another gambling den on Forty-seventh Street about the same time. This place, I may as well inform you, bears an unsavory reputation as a gambling joint to which young ladies of the fastest character are admitted. If you will ask some one in whom you have confidence and whom you can ask to work for you secretly to look up the records, you will find that much of the property on these two blocks, and these two places in particular, belong to the Warrington estate. Need I say more?

The letter, which was without superscription or date, was signed merely with the words, "A Well-wisher." The innuendo of the thing was apparent.

As Kennedy finished reading, and before he could speak, she remarked: "Of course, I know that there is something back of it. Some person is trying to injure Mortimer. Still——"

She did not finish the sentence. It was evident that the well-wisher need not have said more to sow the seeds of doubt. More than that, I fancied I could tell from her tone that the newspapers had not been wholly wrong in mentioning their names together recently.

"I hadn't intended to say anything more than to explain how I got the letter," she went on. "I thought that perhaps you might be interested in it. Of course, I know Mr. Warrington isn't dependent for his income on the rent that comes in from such places. But I wish just the same that it wasn't true. I tried to call him up about the letter, but he wasn't at the office of the Warrington estate, and no one seemed to know just where he was."

"You will leave this with me?" asked Kennedy, still scrutinizing the letter.

"Certainly. That is what I brought it for. I thought it was only fair that he should know about it."

Kennedy regarded her keenly for a moment. "I am sure," he said, "that Mr. Warrington will thank you for your frankness. More than that, I feel sure that you need have no cause to worry about the insinuations of this letter.

Don't judge harshly until you have heard his side. There's a good deal of graft and vice talk flying around loose these days. Miss Winslow, you may depend on me to dig the truth out and not deceive you."

"Thank you so much," she said as she rose to go; then, in a burst of confidence, added: "Of course, after all, I don't care so much about it myself, but, you know, my aunt is so dreadfully prim and proper that a thing like this would throw her into a fit. She'd never let Mr. Warrington call on me again. There, now," she smiled, "don't you even hint to him that that was one of the reasons I called."

She had scarcely shut the door before Kennedy was telephoning about the city to get in touch with Warrington himself. "I'm not going to tell him too much about her visit," he remarked. "It might make him think too highly of himself. Besides, I want to see if he has told us the whole truth."

Half an hour later, Warrington himself burst in on us, apparently expecting more news about his car. Instead, Kennedy handed him the letter.

"Say," he demanded, slapping it down on the table before Kennedy in a high state of excitement, "what do you make of that? Isn't it bad enough to lose a car without being slandered about it into the bargain? And to do it in such an underhanded way, writing to a girl like Violet, and never giving me a chance to square myself. If I could get my hands on the fellow, I'd show him a few things."

Kennedy had ignored his anger as natural under the circumstances, and was about to ask him a question.

"One moment," Warrington forestalled him. "I know just what you are going to say. You are going to ask me about those gambling places. I give you my word of honor that I did not know until to-day that the property in that neighborhood was owned by our estate. I have been in that joint on Forty-eighth Street, I will admit. As for the other place, I don't know any more about it than you do.

"You see, it's like this: Since this vice investigation began, I have read a lot about landlords, and I know that Violet's aunt has been a crusader, or something of that sort. So it just occurred to me lately to go scouting around the city, looking at the Warrington holdings, making some personal inquiries as to the conditions of the leases, the character of the tenants, and the uses to which they put the properties. The police have compiled a list of all the questionable places in the city, and I have compared it with the list of our properties. I hadn't come to this one yet. But I shall call up our agent, make him admit it, and cancel that lease. I'll close 'em up. I'll fight until every——"

"No," interrupted Kennedy, "not yet. Don't make any move yet. I want to find out what the game is. It may be that it is some one who has tried and failed to get your tenant to come across with graft money. If we act without finding out first, we might be playing the game right into the hands of this blackmailer."

Kennedy had been holding the letter in his hand, examining it critically. While he was speaking, he had taken a toothpick and was running it hastily over the words, carefully studying them. His face was wrinkled, as if he was in deep thought.

Without saying anything more, Kennedy had walked over to the windows and pulled down the dark shades. Then he unrolled a huge white sheet at one end of the laboratory.

From a corner he pulled out what looked like a flat-topped stand, about the height of his waist, with a curious boxlike arrangement on it, in which was a powerful light. For several minutes he occupied himself with the adjustment of this machine, switching the light on and off and focusing the lenses.

Then he took the letter to Miss Winslow, laid it flat on the machine, switched on the light, and immediately on the sheet there appeared a very enlarged copy of the writing.

"This is what has been called a rayograph by a detective whom I know,"

he explained. "In some ways it is much superior to using a microscope."

He was tracing over the words with a pointer, much as he had already done with the toothpick.

"Now, you must know," he continued, "or you may not know, but it is a well-proved fact, that those who suffer from various affections of the nerves or heart often betray the fact in their handwriting. Of course, in cases where the disease has progressed very far it may be evident even to the naked eye in the ordinary writing. But it is there, to the eye of the expert, even in incipient cases.

"In short, what really happens is that the pen acts as a sort of sphygmograph, registering the pulsations. I think you can see that when the writing is thrown on a screen, enlarged by the rayograph, the tremors of the pen are quite apparent."

The marks were quite evident even to us as he pointed them out.

"The writer of that blackmailing letter," continued Kennedy, "as I have discovered both by hastily running over it with the toothpick and more accurately by enlarging and studying it with the rayograph, is suffering from a peculiar conjunction of nervous trouble and disease of the heart which is latent, and has not yet manifested itself even to him. If I knew him I might warn him in time."

"A fellow like that needs only the warning of a club or a good pair of fists," growled Warrington impatiently. "How are you going to work to find him?"

"Well," reasoned Kennedy, rolling up the sheet and restoring the room to its usual condition, "for one thing, the letter makes it pretty evident that he knows something about the gambling joint, perhaps is one of the regular habitués of the place. That was why I didn't want you to take any steps to close the place up immediately. I want to go there and look it over while it is in operation. Now, you admit that you have been in the place, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, I've been there, with Forbes and the other fellows, but as I told you I don't go in for that sort of thing."

"Well, anyway," persisted Kennedy, "you are well enough known to be able to get in again."

"Certainly I can get in again. The man at the door will let me in—and a couple of friends, too, if that's what you mean."

"That is exactly what I mean," returned Kennedy. "It's no use to go early. I want to see the place in full blast, just as the after-theater crowd is coming in. Suppose you meet us, Warrington, about half past ten or so. We can get in. They don't know anything about your intention to cancel the lease and close up the place yet, although apparently some one suspects it or he wouldn't have been so anxious to get that letter off to Miss Winslow."

"Very well," agreed Warrington, "I will meet you at the north end of Crime Square, as you call it, at that time. Good luck until then."

"Not a bad fellow, at all," commented Kennedy when Warrington had disappeared down the path to the laboratory. "I believe he means to do the square thing by every one. It's a shame he has been dragged into a mess like this, that may affect him in ways that he doesn't suspect. Oh, well, there is nothing we can do for the present. I'll just add this clew of the handwriting to the clew of the automobile tires against the day when we get—pshaw, he's taken the letter with him. I suppose it is safe enough with him, though. He can't wait, I suppose, until he has proved to that girl that he's straight. I don't blame him much. I'll wager the younger set are just crazy over Violet Winslow."

CHAPTER IV.

THE GAMBLING DEN.

In spite of the agitation that was going on at the time in the city against gambling, we had no trouble in being admitted to the place in Forty-eighth Street. They seemed to know Warrington, for no sooner had the look-

out at the door peered through a little grating and seen him at the head of our party than the light woodwork affair was opened.

To me, with even my slender knowledge of such matters, it had seemed rather remarkable that only such a door should guard a place that was so notorious. Once inside, the reason for it was evident. It didn't. On the outside there was merely such a door as not to distinguish the house, a basement and three-story affair in old brownstone, above the others in the street.

As the outside door shut quickly, we found ourselves in a sort of vestibule, confronted by another door. Between the two the lookout had his station. The second door was of the "ice-box" variety, as it was popularly called at the time, of heavy oak, studded with ax-defying bolts, swung on delicately balanced and oiled hinges, carefully concealed, about as impregnable as a door of steel might be. There were, as we found later, some steel doors inside, leading to the roof and cellar, though not so thick, and the windows inside were carefully guarded by immense steel bars. The approaches from the back were covered with a steel network, and every staircase was guarded by a collapsible steel door. There seemed to be no point of attack that had been left unguarded.

Yet, unless one had been like ourselves, looking for these evidences of fortification, they would not have appeared much in evidence in the face of the wealth of artistic furnishings that was lavished on every hand. Inside the great entrance door was a sort of marble reception hall, richly furnished, and giving anything but the impression of a gambling house. As a matter of fact, the first floor was pretty much of a blind. The gambling was all upstairs.

We turned to a beautiful staircase of carved wood, and ascended. Everywhere were thick rugs, into which the feet sank almost ankle-deep. On the walls were pictures that must have cost a small fortune. The furniture was of the costliest; there were splendid bronzes and objects of art on every hand.

Gambling was going on in several rooms that we passed, but the main room was on the second floor, a large room reconstructed in the old house, with a lofty ceiling. Concealed in huge vases were the lights, a new system, which shed its rays in every direction without seeming to cast a shadow anywhere. The room was apparently windowless, and yet, though every one was smoking furiously, the ventilation must have been perfect.

There was, apparently, a full-fledged pool room in one part of the house, closed now, of course. But I could imagine it doing a fine business in the afternoon. There were many other games now in progress, games of every description, from poker to faro, keno, klondike, and roulette. There was nothing of either high or low degree with which the venturesome might not be accommodated.

As Warrington conducted us from one to the other, Kennedy noted each carefully. Along the middle of the large room stretched a roulette table. We stopped to watch it.

"Crooked as it can be," was Kennedy's comment after some five minutes. He had not said it aloud, naturally, for even the crowd in evening clothes about it, who had lost or would lose, would have resented such an imputation.

For the most part there was a solemn quiet about the board, broken only by the rattle of the ball and the click of chips. There was an absence of the clink of gold pieces that one hears as the croupier rakes them in at the casinos on the Continent. Nor did there seem to be the tense faces that one might expect. Often there was the glint of an eye or a quick and muffled curse, but for the most part every one, no matter how great a loser, seemed respectable and prosperous. The tragedies, as we came to know, were elsewhere.

We sauntered into another room where they were playing keno. Keno

was, we soon found, a development or an outgrowth of lotto, in which cards were sold to the players, bearing numbers which were covered with buttons, as in lotto. The game was won when a row was full after drawing forth the numbers on little balls from a "goose."

"Like the roulette wheel," said Kennedy grimly, "the 'goose' is crooked, and if I had time I could show you how it is done."

We passed by the hazard boards as too complicated for the limited time at our disposal.

It was, however, the roulette table that seemed to interest Kennedy most, partly for the reason that most of the players flocked about it.

The crowd around the table on the second floor was several deep now. Among those who were playing I noticed a new face. It was of a tall, young man, much the worse, apparently, for the supposed good time he had had already. The game seemed to have sobered him up a bit, for he was keen as to mind now, although a trifle shaky as to legs.

He glanced up momentarily from his close following of the play as we approached.

"Hello, W.," he remarked, as he caught sight of our young companion. A moment later he had gone back to the game as keen as ever.

"Hello, F.," greeted Warrington. Then, aside to us, he added: "You know they don't use names now in gambling places if they can help it. Initials do just as well. That is Forbes, of whom I told you. He's a young fellow of good family, but I'm afraid he's going pretty much to the bad, or will go, if he doesn't quit. I wish I could stop him. He's a nice chap. I knew him well at college, and we've chummed about a good deal. He's here too much of the time for his own good."

The thing was fascinating, I must admit, no matter what the morals of it were. I became so engrossed that I had not noticed a man standing opposite us. I was surprised when he edged over toward us slowly, then whispered to Kennedy: "Meet me downstairs in five minutes in the grill, and have a bite to eat. I have something important to say. Only, be careful and don't get me in dutch here."

The man had a sort of familiar look, and his slang certainly reminded me of some one we had met.

"Who was it?" I inquired, under my breath, as he disappeared among the players.

"Didn't you recognize him?" queried Kennedy. "Why, that was Herman, O'Connor's man, the fellow, you know, who is investigating this place."

I had not recognized the detective in evening clothes. Indeed, I felt that unless he were known here already his disguise was perfect.

Kennedy managed to leave Warrington for a time, under the pretext that he wanted him to keep an eye on Forbes. We walked leisurely down the handsome staircase into the grill and luncheon room downstairs.

"Well, have you found out anything?" asked a voice behind us.

We turned. It was Herman who had joined us. Without pausing for an answer, he added: "I suppose you are aware of the character of this place? It looks fine, but the games are all crooked, and I guess there are some pretty desperate characters here, from all accounts. I shouldn't like to fall afoul of any of them, if I were you."

"Oh, no," remarked Kennedy. "It wouldn't be pleasant. But we came in well introduced, and I guess no one suspects."

Several others, talking and laughing loudly to cover their chagrin over losses, perhaps, had entered the buffet.

With a gratuitous promise to stand by us in case we got in wrong in any way, Herman excused himself, and returned to watch the playing about the roulette table.

Kennedy and I leisurely finished the little bite of salad we had ordered, then strolled upstairs again. The play was becoming more and more furious. Forbes was losing again, but was sticking to it with a grim determination that was worthy of a better cause. War-

rington had already made one attempt to get him away, but had not succeeded.

"Well," remarked Kennedy, as we three made our way slowly to the coat room downstairs, "I think we have seen enough of this for to-night. It isn't so very late, after all. I wonder if it would be possible to get into that ladies' poolroom on the next block? I should like to see that place."

"Angus could get us in, if any one could," replied Warrington thoughtfully. "Wait here a minute. I'll see if I can't get him away from the wheel long enough."

Five minutes later he came back, with Forbes in tow. He shook hands with us cordially, perhaps a little effusively. Perhaps I might have liked the young fellow if I could have taken him in hand for a month or two, and knocked some of the silly ideas he had out of his head.

Forbes called a taxicab, that apparently being one of the open sesames to the place around the corner. It seemed to be a peculiar place, and as nearly as I could make out was in a house almost in the rear of the one we had just come from.

We were politely admitted by a negro maid, who offered to take our coats. "No," answered Forbes, apparently with an eye to getting out as quickly as possible, "we won't stay long to-night. I just came around to introduce my friends to Miss Lottie. I must get back right away."

For some reason or other he seemed very anxious to leave us. I surmised that the gambling fever was running high, and that he had hopes of a change of luck. At any rate, he was gone, and we had obtained admittance to the ladies' pool room.

We strolled into one of the rooms in which the play was on. The game was at its height, with huge stacks of chips upon the tables, and the players chatting gayly. There was no large crowd there, however. Indeed, as we found afterward, it was really in the afternoon that it was most crowded, for it was rather a pool room than a gambling joint, although we gathered from the gossip that some stiff games of bridge were played there. Both men and women were seated at the poker game that was in progress before the little green table. The women were richly attired, and looked as if they had come from good families.

It was not many seconds before we were introduced to Miss Lottie, as every one called the woman who presided over this feminine realm of chance. She was a finely gowned woman, past middle age, but remarkably well preserved, and with a figure that must have occasioned much thought to fashion along the lines of the present slim styles. There seemed to be a man who assisted in the conduct of the place, a heavy-set fellow with a closely curling mustache. But as he kept discreetly in the offing, we did not see much of him.

Miss Lottie was frankly glad to see us, coming so well introduced, and outspokenly disappointed that we would not take a chair in the game that was in progress. However, Kennedy passed that over by promising to come around soon. Excise laws were apparently held in puny respect in this luxurious atmosphere, and while the hospitable Miss Lottie went to summon a servant to bring refreshments—at our expense—we had ample opportunity to glance about at the large room in which we were seated.

"We keep that light burning all the time," remarked Miss Lottie, as she returned and found Kennedy looking at a huge arc light that was inclosed in a soft-glass globe in the center of the ceiling. "You see, in the daytime we never use the windows. It is always just like it is now, night or day. It makes no difference with us. You know, if we ever should be disturbed by the police," she rattled on, "this is my house and I am just giving a little private party to a number of my friends."

I had heard of such places, but had never seen one before. I knew that well-dressed women were sent out from these poker rendezvous to the Broadway cafés, there to flirt with men, and rope them into the game. Perhaps

some of the richly gowned people in the game were "cappers."

"Have you ever had any trouble?" asked Kennedy.

"We had a sort of wild time a couple of nights ago," she replied. "Several ladies and gentlemen were here playing a little high. They—well, they had a little too much to drink, I guess. A girl was the worst of all. She was pretty far gone. Why, we had to put her out—carry her out to the car that she had come in with her friend."

The story, or, rather, the version of it, seemed to interest Kennedy.

"Do you know the girl?"

"Only by sight, like lots of people who are introduced here, and come again."

The woman was evidently sorry that she had mentioned the incident, and was trying to turn the conversation. She had not expected that we would take any further interest in it.

Kennedy did not arouse suspicion by pursuing the subject. Apparently he was convinced that it had been Rena Taylor, and was willing to let future developments show what had really happened.

Warrington had kept silent during the visit, and seemed relieved when it was over. Apparently he had no relish for a possible report of it to get to Miss Winslow's ears. He was first to leave as Kennedy, after paying for our refreshments, and making a neat remark or two about the tasteful way in which the gambling room was furnished, rescued our hats and coats from the negro servant, and said good night with a promise to drop in again.

CHAPTER V.

THE MOTOR BANDIT.

Early the next morning the telephone bell began to ring violently. The message must have been short, for I could not gather from Kennedy's reply what it was about, although I could tell by the startled look on his face that something unexpected had happened.

"Hurry and finish dressing, Walter," he called, as he hung up the receiver.

"What's the matter?" I asked, from my room, still struggling with my tie.

"Warrington was severely injured in a motor-car accident late last night, or, rather, early this morning, near Tuxedo."

"Tuxedo?" I repeated incredulously. "How could he have got up there? It was after twelve when we left him last night."

"I know it. Apparently he must have wanted to see Miss Winslow. She is up there, you know. I suppose in order to be there this morning early he decided to start after he left us. I thought he seemed to be anxious to get away. Besides you remember he took that letter yesterday afternoon. I'll wager it was something concerning that, and that he wanted to explain it to her as soon as he could."

There had been no details in the hasty message over the wire except that he was now at the home of a Doctor Mead, a local physician in a little town just across the border of New York and New Jersey. It looked to me very much as if some strong-arm man had set out to get him, and had almost "got him right."

We made the trip by railroad, passing the town where the report had come to us before of the finding of the body of Rena Taylor. There was no one at the station to meet us, and, after wasting some time in learning the direction, we at last walked to Doctor Mead's cottage, facing the State road that led from Suffern up to the park, and northward.

Doctor Mead, who had telephoned, admitted us himself. We found Warrington swathed in bandages, and only half conscious. He was now under the influence of some drug, but before that, the doctor told us, he had been unconscious, and had had only one interval in which he was sufficiently lucid to talk.

"How did it happen?" asked Kennedy, almost as soon as we had entered the doctor's little office.

"I had had a bad case up the road,"

replied the doctor slowly, "and it had kept me out late. I was driving my car along at a cautious pace home some time near two o'clock, when I came to a point in the road where there are hills on one side and the river on the other. As I neared the curve, a rather sharp one, I remember the lights on my own car were shining on the white fence that edged the river side of the road. I was keeping carefully on my own side of the road, which was toward the hill.

"As I was about to turn I heard the loud purring of an engine coming in my direction, and a moment later I saw a car with glaring lights, driven at a furious pace, coming right at me. He slowed up, and I hugged the hill as close as I could, for I know some of those reckless young drivers up that way, and this curve was in the direction where the temptation is for one going north to get on the wrong side of the road—that is, my side, in order to take advantage of the natural slope of the macadam in turning the curve at high speed. Still, this fellow didn't prove so bad, after all. He gave me a wide berth.

"Just then there came a blinding flash, right out of the darkness. Back of his car another huge, dark object had loomed up almost like a ghost. It was another car, back of it, without a single light, which had overtaken the first car, and had cut in between us with not half a foot to spare on either side. It was the veriest piece of sheer luck I ever saw.

"But with the flash I had heard what sounded like a bullet zip out of the darkness, the driver of the forward car had stiffened out for a moment, then he had pitched forward helpless over the steering wheel, his car had dashed ahead into the fence instead of taking the curve, thrown the unconscious driver, and been wrecked."

"And the car in the rear?" inquired Kennedy eagerly.

"Had dashed ahead between us safely around the curve, and was gone. I caught just one glimpse of its driver, a man all huddled up, his collar up over his neck and chin, his cap pulled forward over his eyes, goggles covering the rest of his face, and shrouded in what seemed to be a black coat, absolutely as unrecognized as if he had been a phantom bandit, or death itself. He was steering with one hand, and in the other he held what must have been a revolver."

"And then?" prompted Kennedy.

"I stopped with my heart in my mouth. Pursuit was impossible. My own car was capable of no such burst of speed as his. And then, too, there was a groaning man down in the ravine below. I got out, clambered over the fence, and down in the pitch darkness. Fortunately the man had been catapulted out before his car turned over. I found him, and, with all the strength that I could muster, carried him as gently as I could up to the road. There did not seem to be a minute to lose, and, fixing him in my car as comfortably as possible, I carried him as quickly as I could here."

Cards in his pocket had identified Warrington, and toward morning in his one moment of lucidity he had mentioned Kennedy's name, which Doctor Mead had looked up in the telephone book, and then at the earliest moment had called.

"He was a wonderful driver, that fellow in the second car," pursued the doctor, admiration getting the better of his horror. "I couldn't describe the car, but it seemed like some foreign make. He was crowding Warrington as much as he dared with safety to himself—and not a light on it, too, remember."

Kennedy's face was puckered in thought.

"And the most remarkable thing of all about it," added the doctor, rising and going over to a white cabinet in the corner of his office, "was the wound from the pistol. Apparently it put Warrington out. And yet, after all, I find that it is only a very superficial flesh wound of the shoulder. Warrington's condition is really due to the contusions he received owing to his being thrown from the car. His car wasn't going so very fast at the time, and really I am

sure that even the shock of such a wound wasn't enough to make an experienced driver like himself lose control of the machine. It is a fairly wide curve, after all, and—well, my case is proved by the fact that I examined the wreck of his machine this morning. I found that he had had time to shut off the gas and cut out the engine. He had time to think of and do that before he lost absolute control of the car."

Doctor Mead had opened the cabinet, and had taken from it the bullet which he had probed out of the wound. He looked at it a minute himself, then handed it to Kennedy. I bent over and examined it as it lay in Craig's hand. At first I thought it was an ordinary bullet. But it did not take long to see that there was something peculiar about it. In the nose, which was steel-jacketed, were several little round depressions, just the least fraction of an inch in depth.

"It is no wonder that Warrington was put out even by that superficial wound," remarked Kennedy at last. "His assailant's aim was bad, as it must necessarily have been from a rapidly moving car at a person in another rapidly moving car. But the bandit had provided for that. This is an anæsthetic bullet."

"An anæsthetic bullet?" both Doctor Mead and I repeated.

"Yes," explained Kennedy, "a narcotic bullet, if you please, a sleep-producing bullet, a sedative bullet, that lulls its victim to almost instant slumber, invented quite recently by a Pittsburgh scientist. It provides the poor marksman with all the advantages of the gunman of unerring aim."

While we were talking, the doctor's wife, who was attending Warrington, came to inform us that the effect of the sedative which the doctor had administered when he had grown restless was wearing off. We waited a little while, and then Doctor Mead himself informed us that we might see our friend for a minute.

Even in his half-drowsy state of pain, Warrington appeared to recognize Kennedy and assume that he had come in response to his own summons. Kennedy bent down, and I could just distinguish what Warrington was trying to say.

"The letter," he murmured. "I have it—in my apartment—in the safe. Going to see Violet—explain slander—tell her closing place—didn't know it was mine before—Forbes heavy loser——"

Then he lapsed back on his pillow, and Doctor Mead beckoned to us to withdraw so that we might not excite him further.

At any rate, he had said enough to explain his presence in that part of the country. Kennedy had guessed right. The letter and what we had seen at the crooked gambling joint had been too much for him, and he had not been able to rest until he had had a chance to set himself right in the eyes of Miss Winslow.

There seemed to be nothing that we could do for him just then. He was in excellent hands, and now that the doctor knew who he was, a trained nurse had even been sent for from the city, and arrived on the train following our own.

Kennedy gave her strict instructions to make exact notes of anything that Warrington might say, and then requested the doctor to take us to the scene of the tragedy. We were about to start, when Kennedy excused himself and hurried back into the house, reappearing in a few minutes.

"I thought, perhaps, after all, it would be best to let Miss Winslow know of the accident, as long as it isn't likely to turn out seriously in the end for Warrington," he explained, joining us. "So I called her up at her aunt's at Tuxedo, and broke the news as gently as I could. Warrington need have no fear about that girl."

The wrecked car had not yet been moved, nor had the broken fence been repaired. The part of the road near the fence seemed to interest Kennedy greatly. Two or three cars passed, and he noted how carefully all of them seemed to avoid that side toward the broken fence, as though it was hoodooed.

"I hope they've all done that," he remarked, as he continued to examine the road, which was a trifle damp under the high trees that shaded it. It was not long before I began to realize what he was looking for in the marks of cars left on the oiled roadway.

For, perhaps, half an hour he continued studying the road. At length a low exclamation from him brought me to his side. He had dropped down in the grease, regardless of his knees, and was peering at some rather deep marks in the road. There, for a few feet, were plainly the marks of the outside tires of a car, still unobliterated.

He had pulled out copies of the photographs he had made of the tire marks that had been left at the scene of the finding of Rena Taylor's body, and was busily comparing them with the marks that were before him.

"Of course," Craig said to me, "if the antiskid marks had been different, it would have proved nothing, just as in the other case. But a glance shows that it is at least the same make of tires."

He continued his comparison. It did not take me long to surmise what he was doing. He was taking the two sets of marks and, inch by inch, going over them, checking up the little round metal insertions that were placed in this style of tire to give it a firmer grip.

"Here's one missing, there's another," he cried. "By Jove, it can't be chance. There's one that is worn, another broken. Yes, that was the same car, in both cases. If it is the stolen car, then it was Warrington's own car that was used in chasing him, and almost in making away with him."

We had not noticed a car which had stopped just past us, and Kennedy was surprised at hearing his own name called. He looked up from his discovery to see Miss Winslow waving to us. She had motored down immediately from Tuxedo.

As we approached, I could see that she was much more pale than usual. Evidently her anxiety for Warrington was thoroughly genuine. The blackmailing letter had not shaken her faith in him.

"How is Mortimer?" she asked eagerly. "Is he as likely to be better soon, as Mr. Kennedy said over the telephone?" she appealed to me. Knowing that if Kennedy had said that, he had meant it, I hastened to reassure her that we were not concealing anything.

We promised to accompany her over to Doctor Mead's after Kennedy had made an examination of the wrecked car to confirm what the doctor had observed. He found nothing additional, and a few minutes later we were on our way back again.

Warrington was in much less pain than he had been when we left, and the nurse had made him so much more comfortable that Doctor Mead decided that no further drug would be necessary. The patient brightened up considerably after even a momentary glimpse of Violet, and though they saw each other only for a moment, I think it did both good. Miss Winslow's fears were quieted, and Warrington seemed to realize that, in spite of its disastrous ending, his trip had accomplished its purpose anyway.

There was, we felt, every prospect now that Warrington would pull through after the murderous assault.

We saw Miss Winslow safely off on her return trip, after Doctor Mead had promised that she might call once a day to receive word of the progress of his patient. Then Kennedy announced that he would return to New York.

At the railroad terminus, he called up both our apartment and the laboratory in order to find out whether we had had any visitors in our absence. The caretaker in the Chemistry Building replied that there was a man waiting, but did not give any name.

A half hour or so later, when we pulled up at the laboratory we found McBirney seated there, patiently determined to find Craig. Evidently the news of the assault on Warrington had traveled fast. McBirney wanted to know how he was, and all about it, but scarcely had Craig begun to tell him, than he interrupted with his own budget of news.

"Say," he exclaimed, as Kennedy be-

gan to tell about the marks of the car he had discovered, "that car must be all over at once. You know I have my own underground sources of information. Of course, you can't be certain of such things, but one of my men, who is scouting around the Tenderloin, looking for what he can find, tells me that he saw a car near that gambling joint on Forty-eighth Street that may have been the repainted Warrington car—at least it tallies with the description the garage keeper in north Jersey gave."

"Did he see who drove it?" asked Kennedy.

"Not very well. It was a short, undersized man, as nearly as he could make out. Some one whom he did not recognize jumped in it from the gambling house, and they disappeared. Even though my man tried to follow in a taxicab they managed to shake him, going toward the West Side, where those fly-by-night garages are all located."

"Or, rather, the ferries to Jersey," corrected Kennedy.

"Well, I thought you might like to know about this undersized driver," sulked McBirney.

"I do," said Kennedy soothingly. "But I don't think he figured in the case afterward. Have you any idea who he is?"

"Not unless he might be the keeper of one of those nighthawk garages; that is possible."

"Quite," agreed Kennedy.

McBirney had delivered his message and had received the news, or, at least, such of it as Kennedy chose to tell. He was apparently satisfied and rose to go.

"Keep after that undersized fellow, will you?" asked Kennedy. "If he should happen to be connected with one of those suspected garages we might get on the right trail at last."

"I will," promised McBirney. "He's an expert driver of motor cars; my man knows that."

McBirney had gone. Kennedy sat for several minutes gazing squarely at me. Then he leaned back in his chair, with his hands behind his head.

"Mark my words, Walter," he said. "Some one connected with that gambling joint has got wind of the fact that Warrington is going to revoke the lease and close it up. We've got to beat them to it—that's all."

CHAPTER VI.

THE RAID.

Kennedy was evidently turning over and over in his mind some plan of action.

"This thing has gone just about far enough," he remarked, meditatively looking at his watch. It was now late in the afternoon.

"But what do you intend doing?" I asked, regarding the whole affair so far as a hopeless mystery from which I could not see that we had extracted so much as a promising clew.

"Doing?" he echoed. "Why, there is only one thing to do, and that is to take the bull by the horns without any further attempt at finessing. I shall see O'Connor, get a warrant, and raid that gambling place, that's all."

He called up O'Connor and made an appointment to meet him early in the evening, without telling him what was afoot.

"Meet me down at police headquarters, Walter," was all that Craig said. "I want to work here at the laboratory for a little while first testing a new contrivance, or, rather, an old one that I think may be put to a new use."

At the appointed time I was at headquarters to meet Kennedy. We ascended the staircase to the second floor, where O'Connor's office was, and were admitted immediately.

Craig had scarcely begun to outline what he intended when I could see from the deputy's face that he was very skeptical of success.

"Herman tells me," he objected, "that the place is mighty well barricaded. We haven't tried it yet, because you know the new plan is not only to raid those places, but first to watch them, trace out some of the regular habitués, and be able to rope them in in case we need them as evidence. Her-

man has been getting that all in shape, so that when the case comes to trial there'll be no slip-up."

"Can't help it," asserted Craig. "We've got to go over his head this time. I'll guarantee you all the evidence you'll ever need."

"All right," assented O'Connor. "But how are you going to get in? Won't you need some men with axes and crowbars?"

"No, indeed," almost shouted Kennedy, as O'Connor made a motion as if to find out who was available. "I've been preparing a little surprise up in my laboratory. It's a rather cumbersome little arrangement, and I've brought it down, stowed away in a taxicab outside. I don't want any one else to know about the raid until the last moment. Just before we begin the rough stuff, you can call up and have the reserves started around. That is all I want."

"Very well," agreed O'Connor, after a moment. He did not seem to relish the scheme, but he had promised at the outset to play fair, and he had no disposition to go back on his word in favor of his judgment. "But, first of all, we'll have to drop in on a judge and get a warrant to protect us."

Kennedy had given me instructions what to do, and I started uptown immediately, while they went to secure the secret warrant.

I had been stationed on the corner, which was not far from the Forty-eighth Street gambling joint which we were to raid. It was not difficult now to loiter about unnoticed, because the streets were full of people, all bent on their own pleasure, and not likely to notice one person more or less who stopped to watch the passing throng. From time to time I cast a quick glance at the house down the street in order to note who was going in.

It must have been over an hour that I waited. It was after ten, and it became more difficult to watch who was going into the gambling joint. In fact, several times the street was so blocked that I could not see very well. But I did happen to catch sight of one familiar figure across the street from me. It was Angus Forbes. I watched him narrowly as he turned the corner, but there was no use in being too inquisitive. He was bound as certainly for the gambling joint as a moth would have headed toward one of the arc lights. Evidently Forbes was making a business of this sort of thing, I thought.

A taxicab pulled up hastily at the curb near where I was standing, and a hand beckoned me, on the side away from the gambling house.

I sauntered over and looked in. It was Kennedy, with O'Connor, sunk back into the dark corner of the cab, so as not to be seen.

"Jump in," whispered Craig, opening the door. "We have the warrant all right."

I did so, and the cab started on a blind cruise around the block. On the floor was a curiously heavy instrument, on which I had stubbed my toe as I entered. I surmised that it must have been the thing which Craig had brought down from the laboratory, but in the darkness I could not see what it was, nor was there a chance to ask a question.

"Stop here," ordered Kennedy, as we passed a drug store with a telephone booth.

O'Connor jumped out and disappeared into the booth.

"He is calling the reserves from the nearest station," fretted Craig. "Of course, we have to do that to cover the place, but we'll have to work quickly now, for I don't know how fast a tip may travel in this subterranean region. Here, I'll pay the taxi charges now and save time."

O'Connor rejoined us, his face perspiring from the closeness in the booth.

"Now to that place on Forty-eighth Street, and we're square," ordered Kennedy of the driver, mentioning the address. "Quick!"

There had been, we could see, no chance for a tip to be given that a raid was about to be pulled off. We could see that, as Kennedy and I jumped out

of the cab and mounted the steps. The door was closed to us, however. Only some one like Warrington could have got us in peacefully, until we had become known in the place. Yet, though there had been no tip, the lookout on the other side of the door had seemed to scent trouble. He had retreated, and, we knew, shut the inside, heavy door, perhaps given the alarm inside.

There was no time to be lost now. Down the steps again dashed Craig, after our expected failure to get in peaceably. This time O'Connor emerged from the cab also, and together they were carrying the heavy apparatus up the steps.

They set it down close to the door. It looked at first sight like a short, stubby piece of iron, about eighteen inches high. It must have weighed fifty or sixty pounds. Along one side was a handle, and on the opposite side an adjustable hook with a sharp, wide prong.

Kennedy bent down and managed to wedge the hook into the little space between the sill and the bottom of the flimsy wooden outside door. Then he began pumping on the handle, up and down, as hard as he could.

Already a crowd had begun to collect. O'Connor went through the form of calling on them for aid, but the call was met with laughter. A Tenderloin crowd had no use for raids, except as a spectacle. Between us we held them back, while Craig worked. The crowd jeered.

It was the work of only a few seconds, however, before Kennedy changed the jeers to a hearty round of exclamations of surprise. The outside door had been literally lifted up until its hinges bulged and cracked. It crashed in before the unwonted attack.

Then Kennedy attacked the ice-box door, and upward, by fractions of an inch, by millimeters, the door was forced. There was such a straining and stress of materials that I actually began to wonder whether the building itself would stand the strain.

"Scientific jimmying," gasped Craig, as the door bulged more and more, and threatened to topple in at any moment.

The door buckled, and was literally wrenched off its hinges. Craig sprang back, grasping me by the arm and pulling me, too. But there was no need of caution. What was left of the door swung back, seemed to tremble a moment, and then, with a dull thud, crashed down on the beautiful, green marble of the inside reception hall.

Inside all was darkness. At the first sign of trouble the lights had been switched out. It was as silent as a tomb.

The clang of bells woke the rapid echoes. It was the patrol wagons, come just in time, full of reserves, at O'Connor's order. They swarmed up the steps, for there was nothing to do now in the limelight of the public eye but their duty. Besides, O'Connor was there.

"Here," he ordered, "four of you fellows jump into each of the next houses and run up to the roof. Four more men go through to the rear of this house. The rest stay here and await orders," he continued, detailing them off quickly.

On both sides of the street heads were out of windows, in others the steps were full, and thousands of people must have swarmed in the street. It was pandemonium. Yet inside the house we had broken into it was darkness and silence.

The door had yielded to the scientific sledge-hammering where it would have shattered all the axes in the department. What was next?

Craig jumped briskly over the wreckage into the building where, instead of the lights and gayety which we had seen on the previous night, was black mystery. Some one struck a light. He found the switch, and one after another the lights in the various rooms winked up.

I have seldom seen such confusion as greeted us, as he hurried upstairs to the main hall, where the greater part of the gambling was done. Furniture was overturned and broken. There had been no time to remove the heavier

gambling apparatus, but playing cards, chips, racing sheets from the afternoon, dice, everything portable, and tangible, and small enough to be carried had disappeared.

But the greatest surprise was in store. Though we had seen no one leave by any of the doors, nor by the doors of any of the houses on the block, nor by the roofs, or even the back yard, there was not a soul in the house from roof to cellar. Search as we did, we found not one of the scores of people whom I had seen enter in the course of the evening.

O'Connor, ever mindful of some of the absurd rules of evidence in such cases laid down by the courts, had had a photographer summoned, and he was proceeding from room to room, snapping pictures of the apparatus that was left, and the condition of things generally.

Kennedy was standing ruefully beside the roulette wheel at which so many fortunes had been dissipated.

"Get me an ax," he asked of one of O'Connor's men, who was passing.

With a well-directed blow he smashed the wheel. Inside he laid bare the magnets and wires that ran down to buttons and switches under the carpet, which controlled the thing.

He did not need to say anything more to expose the character of the place.

"Well, at any rate, we've got evidence enough to protect ourselves and close the place, even if we didn't make any captures," congratulated O'Connor, still blinking from the effects of the flash-light powders which his photographer had been using freely. "After we get all the pictures of it, I'll have the stuff removed to headquarters—and it won't be handed back on any order of the courts, either!"

"Still," ruminated Kennedy, "that doesn't settle the one remaining problem: How did they all get out? Let's take a look at the cellar."

It was only too evident that he had guessed right. In the cellar we quickly discovered at the rear a sheet-iron door. Battering it down was but the work of a moment for the little ram. Beyond it, where we had expected to see a yawning tunnel, we found nothing but a pile of bricks, and earth, and timbers that had been used for shoring.

There had been a tunnel, but the last man who had gone through had evidently exploded a small dynamite cartridge, and the walls had been caved in. It was impossible to follow it until its course could be carefully excavated with proper tools in the daylight.

We had captured the stronghold of gambling in New York, but the gamblers had managed to slip out of our grasp, at least for the present.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GANGSTER'S GARAGE.

"I have it," exclaimed Kennedy, as we were retracing our steps upstairs from the cellar. "I would be willing to wager that that tunnel runs back to the pool room for women which we visited on Forty-seventh Street, Walter. That is the secret exit. It could be used in either direction."

We climbed the stairs and stood again in the wreck of things, taking a hasty inventory of what was left in the hope of discovering some new clew.

Kennedy shook his head mournfully. "They had just time enough," he remarked, "to destroy what we wanted, and carry off the rest."

The telephone bell rang. Evidently in their haste they had not cut the wires, anyhow. Some one who had not yet learned of the raid was calling up.

Kennedy quickly unhooked the receiver, with a hasty motion to us to be quiet.

"Hello," he heard him answer. "Yes, yes, this is it. Who is this?"

He had disguised his voice. We waited anxiously, and watched his face to gather what response he received.

"The deuce!" he exclaimed, with his hand over the transmitter.

"What's the matter?" we asked eagerly.

"Whoever he was, he was too keen for me. He caught on. There must

have been some password or form. He has hung up the receiver."

Craig waited a minute or so. Then he whistled into the transmitter. It was done apparently to see whether there was any one listening, but there was no answer. The man was gone.

"Operator, operator," Craig was calling, insistently moving the hook up and down rapidly. "Yes, I want central. Tell me what number that was which just called up. Bleecker seven-one-eight-aught? Thank you. Give me information, please. Hello! What is the street address of Bleecker seven-one-eight-aught? West Sixth Street, three hundred? Thank you. A garage? Good-by."

"A garage?" echoed O'Connor, his ears almost going up as he realized the importance of the news.

"Yes," cried Kennedy. "Walter, call a cab. Let us hustle down there as soon as we can."

"One of those garages on the lower West Side," I heard O'Connor say. "You know already that there are some pretty tough places down there. This is bully. I shouldn't be surprised if it gave us a line on the stealing of Warrington's car."

I found the cab and we jumped in. "I tried to get McBirney," said Craig, "but he was out, and the night operator in his office didn't seem to know where he was. But if he can locate him, I imagine he'll be around at least shortly after we get there. I left the address."

O'Connor had issued his final orders to his raiders about guarding the gambling joint, and stationing a man at the door. He banged the door shut, and we were off, threading our way through the crowd which still lingered to gape at the place.

After a quick run downtown we entered narrow and sinuous streets that wound through some pretty tough-looking neighborhoods. On the street corners were saloons that deserved no better name than common groggeries. They were vicious-looking joints. And the farther we proceeded into the tortuous twists of streets that stamp the old Greenwich Village with a character all its own, the worse it seemed to get.

"Any one who would run a garage down here," remarked Craig, "deserves to be arrested on sight."

"Except for commercial vehicles," I ventured, looking at the warehouses here and there.

At last our cab turned down a street that was particularly dark. "This is it," announced Craig, tapping on the glass for the driver to stop. "We had better get out and walk the rest of the way."

The garage which we sought proved to be nothing but an old brick stable. It was of such character that even charity could not have said it had seen much better days. It was dark, evil looking. Except for a slinking figure here and there in the distance, the street about us was deserted. Even our footfalls echoed, and Kennedy warned us to tread softly. I longed for the big stick that went with the other half of the phrase.

He paused a moment to observe the place. It was near the corner, and a dim-lighted saloon on the next cross street ran back almost squarely to the stable walls, leaving a narrow yard. Apparently the garage itself had been closed for the night, if, indeed, it was ever regularly open. Any one who wanted to use it must have carried a key, I surmised.

We crossed over stealthily. Craig put his ear to a regular door cut out of the double, big swinging doors, and listened. Not a sound.

O'Connor tried the door gently. It moved. I could not believe that any one could have gone away and left it open, expecting that the place would not be looted by the neighbors before he returned. There must be somebody in there in spite of the darkness.

The deputy pushed in, followed closely by both of us, prepared for an onrush or hand-to-hand struggle with anything, man or beast.

A quick succession of shots greeted us. I do not recall feeling the slightest sensation of pain, but with a sickening sensation in the head I can just vaguely remember that I sank down on the oil

and grease of the floor. I did not fall. It seemed as if I had time to catch myself and save, perhaps, a fractured skull. But then all was blank.

It seemed an age, though it could not have been fifteen minutes later, that I came to. I felt an awful, choking sensation in my throat. My lungs seemed to rasp my very ribs, as I struggled for breath. Kennedy was bending anxiously over me, himself pale and gasping. The air was reeking with a smell that I did not understand.

"Thank Heaven, you're all right," he exclaimed, with much relief, as he helped me struggle up on my feet. My head was still in a whirl as he helped me over to a cushioned seat in an automobile. "Now I'll go back to O'Connor," he added.

"Wh-what's the matter? What happened?" I gasped, gripping the back of the cushion to steady myself. "Am I wounded? Where was I hit? I—I don't feel anything—but, oh, my head and throat."

I glanced over at O'Connor. He was white and pale as a ghost, but I could see that he was breathing, though with difficulty. In the glare of the headlight of a car which Craig had turned on him I looked to discover traces of blood. But there were none anywhere.

"We all were put out of the business," muttered Craig, as he worked over O'Connor. O'Connor opened his eyes blankly, then struggled up. "You got it worst," remarked Kennedy to him. "You were closest."

"Got what?" he sputtered. "Was closest to what?"

We were all still choking over the peculiar odor in the air about us.

"The bulletless gun," explained Kennedy. "It is a German invention, and shoots, instead of bullets, a stupefying gas which temporarily blinds and chokes its victims. The fellow who was in here didn't shoot bullets at us. He evidently didn't care about adding any more crimes to his list just now. Perhaps he thought that if he killed any of us there would be too much of a row. I'm glad it was as it was, anyway. He got us all this way before we knew it. Perhaps that was the reason, for if he had shot one, I had a pistol ready myself to blaze away. But he got me, too."

"A stupefying gun?" repeated O'Connor. "I should say so. I don't know what happened yet," he added, blinking.

"I came to first," went on Craig, now busy looking about as we were all recovered. "I found that none of us were wounded. However, while we were unconscious the villain, whoever he was, succeeded in running his car out of the garage and getting away. He locked the door, but I have managed to work it open again."

Craig was now examining the floor of the garage, turning the headlight of the machine, which he had lighted, on successive parts of the floor.

"By Heaven, Walter," he exclaimed suddenly, "see those marks in the grease? Do you recognize them by this time? It was the same tire again—Warrington's car, without a doubt."

O'Connor had taken the photographs which Craig had made the other day, and was comparing them himself with the marks on the floor, while Craig explained them to him hurriedly as he had already to me.

"We are getting closer to him every time," remarked Craig. "Even if he did get away we are on the trail, and know it is the right one. He could not have been at the gambling joint, or he never would have called up. This has turned out better than I expected. I suppose you don't feel so, but you must think so."

It was difficult not to catch the contagion of Kennedy's enthusiasm. O'Connor grunted assent.

"This garage," he put in, looking it over critically, "must act as a fence for stolen cars and parts of cars. See, there over in the corner is the stuff for painting new license numbers, here's enough material to rebuild a half dozen cars. Yes, this is one of the places that ought to interest you and McBirney, Kennedy. I'll bet the fellow who owns this place is one of those who'd engage to sell you a secondhand car of any

make you wanted to name. Then he'd go out on the street and hunt around until he got one. Of course, we'll find out his name, but I'll wager that when we get the nominal owner, we won't be able to extract a thing from him in the way of facts."

Craig had continued his examination of the floor. In a corner, near the back, he had picked up an empty shell of a cartridge. He held it down in the light and examined it long and carefully. He seemed to be considering it. Then he dropped it carefully into his inside vest pocket as though it were a rare treasure.

"As I said before," quoted Craig, "we might get a conviction on cartridges. Anyhow, our man has escaped from here. He won't come back, probably ever, not at least for a long time until he figures that this thing has blown over."

"I'm going to watch it all the same," stoutly insisted O'Connor.

"Of course, by all means," reiterated Craig. "I expect our next important clew will come from this place. Only, I mean don't be hasty and make an arrest. You won't get the right man; you may lose one who points straight at him. Watch the place."

The opening of the little outside door startled us. O'Connor leaped forward. Stupefying guns had no taming effect on his nationality.

"Well, commish, is that the way you greet an old friend?" laughed McBirney, as a threatened strangle hold turned to a hearty handshake. "How are you fellows? I got your message, Kennedy, and thought I'd drop around. Well, this is some place, isn't it? Neat, cozy, well located—hello—that's that ninety-horse-power Despard that was stolen from Murdock, or I'll eat my hat."

He had raised the hood, and was straining his eyes to catch a glimpse of the maker's number on the engine, which had been all but obliterated by judicious blows of a hammer.

Kennedy was busy telling McBirney what had happened, as the detective looked over one car after another as if he had unearthed a veritable treasure-trove.

"Your man could not have been at either of the gambling joints," agreed McBirney as Kennedy finished, "or he wouldn't have called up. But he must have known of them. I wonder whether he's the short fellow who drove the car when it was seen up there or the big fellow who was in the car when he shot Warrington up the State?"

The question was, as yet, unanswerable. The murderer, desperate as he was, was still at large. What might he not do next?

We sat down in one of the stolen cars and held a midnight council of war. There were four of us, which meant four different plans. McBirney was certain on one thing. He would claim the cars he could identify. They would know that we had been there, and we conceded that point to him.

"I'm for arresting the garage keeper, whoever he proves to be," asserted O'Connor.

"It won't do any good," objected Craig. "Better to seem to accept his story and watch him."

"Watch him?" I asked. "How can you watch one of these fellows? They are as slippery as eels—and as silent as a muffler," I added.

"You've suggested the precise idea, Walter, by your objection," broke in Kennedy. "I've got a brand-new system of espionage. Trust it to me, and you can all have your way."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DETECTAPHONE.

I found it difficult to share Kennedy's optimism, however. It seemed to me that again the best-laid plans of one that I had come to consider among the cleverest of men had been defeated, and it is not pleasant to be defeated, even temporarily. But Craig was certainly not discouraged.

It was no ordinary criminal with whom we had to deal. That was clear. There had been gunmen and gangmen

in New York for years, we knew, but this fellow seemed to be the last word, with his liquid bullets, his anæsthetic shells, and his stupefying gun.

We had agreed that the garage keeper would, of course, shed little light on the mystery. He was a crook. But he would find little difficulty, no doubt, in showing that there was nothing to hold him on.

Still, Craig had evidently figured out a way to go ahead while we had all been floundering around, helpless. His silence had merely masked his consideration of a plan.

"You three stay here," he ordered "If any one should come in, hold him. Don't let any one get away. But I don't think there will be any one. I'll be back within an hour or so."

It was far past midnight already, as we sat uncomfortably in the reeking atmosphere of the garage. The hours seemed to drag interminably. Almost I wished that something would happen to break the monotony and the suspense. Our lonely vigil went unrewarded, however. No one came; there was not even a ring at the telephone.

McBirney was the only one who seemed to have gained much so far. He had looked over the cars most carefully. There were half a dozen.

"I don't doubt," he concluded, "that all of them have been stolen. But there are only two here that I can identify. They certainly are clever at fixing them up. Look at all the parts they keep ready for use. They could build a car here."

"Yes," agreed O'Connor, looking at the expensive "junk" that was lying about. "There is quite enough to warrant closing the place, only I suppose Kennedy is right. That would defeat our own purpose."

At last Craig returned from his hurried trip up to the laboratory. He brought with him nothing but a plain, black box, like a camera. It contained in reality nothing but a couple of ordinary dry cells, and attached to it were two black disks, about two and a half inches in diameter. They had in the center of each a circular hole, about an inch across, showing inside what looked like a piece of iron or steel.

"I wonder where I can stow this away so that it won't attract any attention?" asked Kennedy, drawing from his pocket another little, round, black disk, about the same size as the other two, in the face of which dozen of little holes seemed to be perforated and arranged in the shape of a six-pointed star.

He had looked about for the least used part of the garage, near the back. Near the barred window was a pile of worn tires which looked as if it had been seldom disturbed, except to be added to. When one got tires as cheaply as the users of this garage did, it was folly to bother much about the repair of old ones.

Back of this pile, then, he threw the little, black disk carelessly, only making sure that it was concealed. That was not difficult, for it was not much more than a watch in size. To it, I noticed, he had attached two plugs that were "foolproof"—that is, one small and the other large, so that they could not be inserted into the wrong holes. A long flexible, green-covered wire, or, rather, two wires together, led up from the disk. By carefully moving the tires so as to preserve the rough appearance they had of being thrown down hastily into the discard, he was able to conceal this wire, also, in such a way as to bring it secretly to the barred window and through it.

Next he turned his attention to the telephone itself. Another instrument which he had brought with him was inserted in place of the ordinary transmitter. It looked like it, and had evidently been prepared with that in view. I assumed that it must act like the ordinary transmitter also, although it had other uses. It was more of a job to trace out the course of the telephone wires and run in a sort of tap line at a point where it would not be likely to be noted. This was done by Kennedy still in silence, and the wires from this led behind various things, until they, too, reached out of another window.

As Craig finished his mysterious

tinkering and rose from his dusty job to brush off his clothes, he remarked: "There, now you may have your heart's desire, O'Connor, if you want to watch these people."

"What is it?" I hastened to ask. "It is not a dictograph, or a microphone, such as we have used before. I can see that."

"It is much more sensitive, I think," he answered, "than any mechanical or electrical eavesdropper that has ever been employed before. It is the detectaphone—a new, unseen listener. For instance, that attachment which I placed on the telephone is much more than a sensitive transmitter. There are in it the minutest globules of carbon which are floating around, and make it alive at all times, and extremely sensitive. But, as it only replaces the regular transmitter, its presence will never be suspected. That operates just as well when the receiver is hung up. Even if they find the other one back of the tires, the most suspicious person would not think to look here for anything. We are dealing with clever people, and two anchors to windward are better than one.

"The other thing back of the tires is the ordinary detective form. All that we need now is to find a place to install this receiving box, with its two batteries and the two earpieces, one to be held to either ear. You see, the whole thing is only about six inches square, and not four inches thick. Then there is another box about four inches square, and, perhaps, nine inches long, that I am going to bring down later for another purpose when we find out what we are going to do with the ends of these wires that are now dangling on the outside of that window. We must pick up the connection in some safe and inconspicuous place outside the garage."

The window through which the wires passed seemed to open, as I had already noticed, on a little yard, not much larger than a court. Craig opened it, stuck his head out as much as the iron bars would permit, and sniffed. The odor was anything but pleasant. It was a combination of "gas" from the garage and stale beer.

"That's the saloon," he exclaimed. "They must pile empty kegs out there. Let's take a walk around the corner and see what the front of the place looks like."

It was a two-and-a-half story building, with a sloping tin roof, of an archaic architecture, in a state of terrible decay and dilapidation, and quite in keeping with the neighborhood. Nevertheless, a sign over a side door read, "Hotel Entrance."

"I think we can get in there to-morrow on some pretext," decided Craig, after our inspection of the "Old Tavern," the crazy letters all askew on one of the windows denoted the place. "The Old Tavern looks as if it might let lodgings to respectable gentlemen if they were roughly enough dressed. We can get ourselves up like a couple of teamsters, and pick up the ends of those wires to-morrow, I'm sure."

We had returned to the garage.

"I leave you to do what you please, O'Connor," said Craig, "as long as you don't pinch this gold mine. McBirney, I know, will reduce the number of cars here to-morrow by at least two. Don't, for Heaven's sake, let out any suspicion about those things I've hidden. As for me, I am going uptown and get a few hours' sleep."

O'Connor and McBirney followed, leaving us shortly to get a couple of men from the police station in the precinct to see that none of the cars were taken out before morning.

We rode up to our apartment, where a message was awaiting us, telling that Warrington had passed a very good day. I had a sound sleep, although it was a short one. Craig had me up very early, and, by digging back in our closets, we unearthed the oldest clothes we had, which we improved by sundry smears of dirt in such a way that when we did start forth no one would have accused us of being other than we were prepared to represent ourselves, workmen who had been laid off from a job, and were seeking another.

"I don't know whether to give you a

meal ticket or call a cop, when I look at you, Walter," laughed Craig.

"Well, I feel a good deal safer in this rig than I did last night in this part of the city," I replied, as we hopped off a surface car. "I almost begin to feel my part. Did you see the old guy with the gold watch on the car? If he was here, I believe I'd hold him up just to see what it is like. I suppose we are going to apply for lodgings at the famous hostelry, the Old Tavern?"

"I had that intention," replied Craig. "This place looks even more sordid in daylight than at night. Besides, it smells worse."

We entered the tavern, and were greeted with a general air of rough curiosity, which was quickly dispelled by spending ten cents, and getting change for a bill. At least we were good for anything reasonable, and doubts on that score settled by the man behind the bar he consented to enter into conversation, which ultimately resulted in our hiring a large back room upstairs in the secluded caravansary which supplied furnished rooms to gentlemen only.

Craig said we would bring our things later, and we went upstairs. We were no sooner settled than he was at work. He had brought a rope ladder, and, after fastening it securely to the window ledge, he let himself down carefully into the narrow court below.

That was the only part of the operation that seemed to be attended with any risk of discovery, and it was accomplished safely. For one thing the dirt on the windows both of the garage and the tavern was so thick that I doubt whether so much caution was really necessary. Nevertheless, it was a relief when he secured the ends of the wires from the detectaphone and brought them up, pulling in the rope ladder after him.

It was now the work of but a minute to attach one of the wires that lead to the watch-case disk back of the tires to the black box with the two storage batteries. Craig held two earpieces, one to each ear.

"It works—it works," he cried, with as much delight as if he had not been positive that it would.

"Here, try it yourself," he said, handing the receivers to me.

I put them at my ears. It was marvelous. I could hear the men washing down one of the cars, the swash of water, and, best of all, the low-toned, gruff gossip.

"Just a couple of the men there now," explained Craig. "I gather that they are talking about what happened last night. I heard one of them say that some one they call 'the chief' was there last night, and that another man, 'the boss,' gave him orders to tell no one outside about it. I suppose the chief is our friend with the stupefying gun. The boss must be the fellow who runs the garage. What are they saying now? They were grumbling about their work when I handed the thing over to you."

I listened, fascinated by the marvel of the thing. I could hear perfectly, although the men must have been in the front of the garage.

"Well, there's two o' them yer won't have to wash no more," one man was saying. "A feller from the police come and copped two—that sixty tin can and the ninety Despard."

"Huh! So the bulls are after him?"

"Yeh. One was here all night after the fight."

"Did they follow the chief?"

"Follow the chief? Say, when any one follows the chief he's gotter be better than any bull that ever pounded a beat."

"What did the boss say?"

"Mad as ——. We gotter lay low now."

"The chief's gone up the State, I guess."

"We can guess all we want. The boss knows. I don't."

"Why didn't they make a pinch? Ain't there nobody watchin' now?"

"Naw. They ain't got nothin' on us. Say, the chief can put them fellers where he wants 'em. See the paper this morning? That was some raid up at the joint, heh?"

"You bet. That Kennedy's a pretty

smooth chap. But the chief can put it all over him."

"Yep," agreed the other speaker.

I handed the receivers back to Craig with a smile. "You are not without some admirers," I remarked, repeating the conversation. "They'd shoot up the neighborhood, I imagine, if they knew the truth."

Hour after hour we took turns listening at the detectaphone. We gathered a choice collection of slang and epithets, but very little real news. It seemed that the real head of the gang, if it was a gang, had disappeared, as one of the men had already hinted, "up the State."

Craig had meanwhile brought out the other detectaphone box, which was longer and larger than the black box. In one of the long faces were two square holes, from the edges of which the inside walls focused back on two smaller, circular diaphragms. That made the two openings act somewhat like megaphone horns to still further magnify the sound which was emitted directly from this receiver without using any earpieces, and could be listened to by a room full of people if you chose. This was attached to the secret arrangement that had been connected with the telephone by inserting the imitation transmitter.

One of us was in the room listening all the time. I remember once, while Craig had gone uptown for a short time, I heard the telephone bell ring in the device at my ear. Out of the larger box issued a voice talking to one of the men.

It was the man whom they referred to as the chief. He had nothing to say when he learned that the boss had not showed up since early morning after he had been quizzed by the police. He left word that he would call up again.

"At least I know that our gunman friend, the chief, is going to call up tonight," I reported to Craig on his return.

"I think he'll be here, all right," commented Craig. "I called up O'Connor, and he was convinced that the best way was to seem to let up on them. They didn't get a word out of the fellow they call the boss. He lives down here a couple of streets, in a pretty tough place, even worse than the Old Tavern. I let O'Connor get a man in there, but I haven't much hope. He's only a tool of this one they call chief. By the way, Forbes has disappeared. I can't find trace of him since the raid on the gambling joint."

"Any word from Warrington?" I asked.

"Yes, he's getting along fine," answered Craig mechanically, as if his thoughts were far away from Warrington. "Queer about Forbes," he murmured, then cut himself short. "And, oh," he added, "I forgot to tell you that speaking about Forbes reminds me that Herman has been running out a clew on the Rena Taylor case. He's been all over the country up there, he reports to O'Connor, and he says he thinks the car was seen making for Pennsylvania. You know they have a peculiar license law there—at least he says so—that enables one to conceal a car pretty well. Much good that does us, though."

"Yes," I agreed. "You can always depend on a man like Herman to come along with something like that——"

Just then the "master-station" detectaphone connected with the telephone in the garage began to talk, and I cut myself short. We seemed now at last about to learn something really important. It was a new voice that said "Hello."

"Evidently the boss has come in without making any noise," remarked Craig. "I certainly heard no one through the other instrument. I guess he was waiting for it to get dark before coming around. Listen."

It was a long-distance call from the man they called chief. Where he was we had no means of finding out, but we soon found out where he was going.

"Hello, boss," we heard come out of the detectaphone box.

"Hello, chief. You surely got us nearly pinched last night. What was the trouble?"

"Oh, nothing much. Somehow or other they must have got on to us. I guess it was when I called up the joint

on Forty-eighth Street. Three men surprised me, but fortunately I was ready. If they hadn't stopped at the door before they opened it, they might have got me. I put 'em all out with that gun, though. Say, I want you to help me on a little job that I'm planning."

"Yes? Is it a safe one? Don't you think we had better keep quiet for a little while?"

"But this won't keep quiet. Listen. You know I told you about writing that letter about Warrington to his fiancée, Miss Winslow, when I was so sore over the report that he'd close up the Forty-eighth Street joint, right on top of finding that Rena Taylor had the goods on the Forty-seventh Street place? Well, I was a fool. You said so, and I was."

"You were."

"I know, but I was sore. I hadn't got all I wanted out of those places. Well, anyhow, I want that letter back, that's all. It's bad to have evidence like that around. Why, if they ever got a real handwriting expert they might get wise to something if they ever get hold of my own writing. I must have been batty. Now, I've found out from her maid that she hasn't got it. She took it to that fellow Kennedy, and I happen to know that Warrington that night came to his apartment and put something that looked like a letter into the safe he has there. He's got it all right. Now, I want to get in there while he's laid up near Tuxedo, and get back that letter. It isn't much of a safe. I think a can opener would do the job. We can make the thing look like a regular robbery by a couple of yeggs. Are you on?"

"No, I don't get you, chief. It's too risky."

"Why?"

"Why? That fellow Kennedy is just as likely as not to be nosing around up there. I'd go but for that."

"Well, I know. But suppose we find that he isn't there, not in the house, has left it. That's right, nothing doing if he's there. But say, I know how to get in all right without being seen. I'll tell you later. Come on. We won't try it if anybody's there. Besides, it'll help to throw a scare into Warrington."

"I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll meet you at the same place as we met the other day—you know where I mean—some time after twelve. We'll talk it over. You're sure about the letter?"

"As sure as if I'd seen it."

"All right. Now be there. I won't promise about this Warrington business. We'll talk that over. But I have other things I want to tell you."

"I'll be there. Good-by."

"And so," remarked Kennedy as the little machine stopped talking, "it appears that our friends, the enemy, are watching us as closely as we are watching them, with the advantage that they know us, and we do not know them, except this garage fellow."

He lapsed into silence.

"A plot to rob Warrington's safe," I exclaimed.

"Yes," he repeated, "and if we are to do anything about it it must be done immediately before we arouse suspicion and scare them off. I just heard the boss go out of the garage. They expect me around there, at Warrington's apartment. Now if I go, and ostentatiously go away again, that will lure them on."

He reached his decision quickly. Grabbing his hat he led the way out of the Old Tavern and up the street, until we came to a drug store with a telephone.

I heard him talking first with Warrington, getting from him the combination of the safe. Then he called up his laboratory and asked one of the students to meet him at the Grand Central subway station with a package, the shelf location of which he described minutely.

"We'll beat them to it," he remarked, as we started uptown to meet Craig's man coming downtown.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

The second and concluding part of this story will appear in the January Month-end POPULAR, on sale December 23rd.

The Maeterlinck Society

By Frederick Niven

Author of "Sheriff and Bad Man," "A Wyoming Accident," Etc.

The happenings of a year or two in a section of the West, where faro and whisky had given place to afternoon teas and Maeterlinck

THERE are many tales of men who have gone back East; but not so many about those who have gone back West—certainly few about those who have gone back West to be disappointed. Yet I heard of one such disappointment, heard of it from a man of thirty; and the story was his own. I mention his age because, young though he was, he had known the pang that comes, in our less mutable land, chiefly to the aged.

When quite a youngster, he had gone West—to Colorado, with Denver for his "jumping-off place." He had felt the bigness of the country very heavy upon him. The sand hills of the Platte and the cañons of the mountains had depressed him instead of exhilarating him. As he told me his story, I saw him, a youth fleeing West from a kind of belated pride-and-prejudice society in a back-East village, fleeing West through sheer boredom; and then, in the sand hills of the Platte, being stricken with loneliness; and, farther on, among the Colorado gulches, with terror.

He told me, laughing, how he was "scared to step off the cars" at some of the stopping places of old Nebraska, so wild did the men seem that loafed about to watch the train go through. They all looked to his eyes, accustomed to the quietists of the pride-and-prejudice village, "like the cover of a dime novel." He told me, chuckling, of his first night in Denver; he looked under the bed before turning in, and put a chair against the door, so much had he been overwrought by seeing the unwontedly wild characters in the barroom and the vestibule below.

He accepted a berth as a waiter to begin, with a furtive thought of how "low" his people at home in pride and prejudice would think he had fallen. Later he felt ashamed of himself when, the annual cowboy sports being on then in Denver, he served a table of broncho busters, heard them talk, and remarked to his intimidated soul upon the freedom of their lithe movements and upon the devil-may-care rake of their pliant shoulders. He laughed as he told me of this; and when I knew him he was as devil-may-care as any. He had crept before he walked, indeed.

His next job had been waiter—still waiter—but in a mining camp in the mountains Leadville way. There he kept his eyes on the cook, picked up the simple culinary arts of a camp—and then went off to another camp, as cook!

He told me how later, at a mine in Colorado, the leading proprietor arrived from the East and, in his tour of inspection, entered the kitchen. My friend was smoking—and the premier shareholder fired him on the spot, sent him forth of the camp.

"A cook—smoking! A cook smoking in his kitchen over the soup!" says he.

So my friend had gone back to Leadville to rustle another job. "Funny," he said to me. "I was sure an expert with pots and pans then. Some other cook was rustled promiscuous into my job; and then the mine had to shut down, for the boys went on strike. What was the trouble? 'We want

"Red" back again,' they says; 'and we won't go to work till he comes back. He can cook; and this plug you have now can't cook worth a cent with a hole in it!'

"When they heard I had been fired for smoking, they roared. So I was sent for. Had I got another job? Was I still open? I was open. I hadn't begun to look for another job. I was looking at Leadville, and wondering how I could ever have been scared into rubbernecking under the bed in Denver. Even Leadville was sweet enough for a Christian Endeavorists' picnic."

I laughed at the way Red opened wide his eyes in astonishment at what he had been; and he went on, telling how at length—despite the great ovation at his return to the camp and the superb gastronomical acknowledgment he made upon that day, so that the tables groaned and half the camp suffered from water brash—cooking seemed a childish or effeminate employment; and, with an old prospector who had come to the mine to work just long enough to gather money for a trip, he took to the hills.

"How long had you been in the West by then?" I asked.

"Oh, maybe a couple of years!" he said, and plunged into the next link of his story. He had prospected with the old man, and put in assessment work on more claims than it seemed possible for two men to hold; then one had sold well —and the old man disappeared with the entire takings.

"Just plain disappeared," said Red. "He left me his outfit and what he had taught me. I went back cooking for a spell, but always itching to get into the hills for myself again. It wasn't so much the dough that might be coming to me as the life," he explained. "The dough is good, of course; and I allow that dough gets you a lot of things. But the life in the hills!" he exclaimed. This from the youngster who had put a chair against the door in Denver!

So he had wandered in the Rockies, from the Mogollons to Idaho. When funds gave out for prospecting, he worked at the town, or camp, nearest to the scene of the expiral of his last bag of flour. He had undertaken all kinds of work—bridge building, sheep herding, tie cutting in the tie camps of the Southern Pacific railways, mining, and mucking in the silver-lead camps of Idaho, gold washing on the bars of the Pend d'Oreille.

And then came to this man who had learned insidiously to love what once had given him shivers down the back—lonely camp-outs in hidden valleys by solitary fires, where he sat smoking the evening pipe, a friendly pack horse perhaps coming in to nuzzle over his shoulder and beg salt when the owls hooted—came to this man, success, attainment.

He had learned to love the panoramic life, with hills and valleys gliding past to the slow motion of a walk, with pack horse astern, climbing up hill, slithering down dale—and then he had struck a lead that assayed so as to make his heart jump. He had put his claim on the market, and then gone to work in a camp near by to await the sale.

Other prospects were opening nearer rail head, were put on the market, were bought, were worked. He stayed on. The little camp boomed. It showed signs of growing to be a supply town, a center. The railroad was talked of. Soon it was more than talked of. The way was surveyed. The gangs of Italians and Swedes were at work clearing for the grade. The town went on with its boom. There were no women in it so far—or none to mention.

There were a great many card sharpers also. The bars were open both day and night. If you happened to have the toothache at two in the morning and lay till three wondering if it would be possible to get, anywhere, a thimbleful of whisky to hold in the cavity, and at last rose and slipped downstairs in the half hope that maybe there might be a bottle somewhere which you could use, and inform the proprietor about the appropriation when the breakfast hour at last arrived, you found, on descending, that you could have had the thimbleful at two—or a barrelful, for that matter—and all the fun of the fair. The bartenders worked for four-hour spells, and the bars never closed.

And underneath all the ferment the strenuous went on working, clearing lots, building houses, laying sidewalks, setting up telegraph poles, teaming ore out to the smelter town, and teaming in provisions. The thud and the crunch of the stamps at the wealthy Deadwood Mine over on the hill could be heard when the wind was favorable, like the thud of a giant crunching giants' biscuits up there among the firs.

Then my friend Red sold his claim for twenty thousand dollars and took the stagecoach out of the camp, marking how, as he came out, the rail-laying gang was gliding in, deliberate, slow, terrible, with its two lines of gleaming steel.

Red then went to the pride-and-prejudice village—and could not stand it. He passed on to New York; thence to Paris, Marseilles, Rome, Florence, smoking cigars all the time—and in one year was back in Denver, Colorado, in the condition known as "broke." But he did not look under the bed; he did not even trouble to report that the door catch of his bedroom was broken.

When the hotel happened to fill up on the second night, and as there was a spare bed in his room, a green-looking youth was sent up to occupy it, he noticed how the youngster looked at him. Turning about, he saw the boy's eyes watching him furtively—scared.

"Shall I put out the lamp, partner?" he asked.

The lad winced, and then, with a firm voice, said:

"If you wish, sir."

Red remembered how he had thought, once upon a time, that all Westerners were like the holdup characters on the covers of dime novels; he went out of himself, he tried to comprehend the youth more fully, looked at him again with more precision—and noticed that he clutched something with a hand under the pillow.

"That your money you've got under the pillow?" he asked; and the kid went white, and looked grim, as if he might die in the last ditch. So Red did not turn out the lamp, but sat on the edge of his bed, a man, and gave advice to the boy. Red recalled that chat for my benefit.

"'I was a kid once myself,' I said to him, 'and, when I came West, first night in one of the hotels, I looked under the bed and put a chair against the door.' The kid laughed, and said he: 'I did that last night. I had a room to myself, and the door wouldn't lock.' So we laughed together—and I felt as if I were old. Anyhow, I did him good. I asked him what he meant to make of himself. 'It's very different here from back East, I suppose?' says I. 'It is that,' says he, and laughed, and then looked as if he might near cry. He was just plumb fresh, that kid. I guess he still felt in his bed the shaking of the cars he had come West on. I told him a whole lot about how to make a man of himself, and fell asleep in the middle with a cigar in my mouth and nearly set a light to the bed!"

He paused. "But would you believe me, nothing I could do could make that kid sure about me. I got awake again and suggested putting out the lamp. He was sure just going to feel hopeful, and at that I saw he had his doubts about the wild figure I cut in his eyes. And when I wakened in the morning that kid was sleeping with one eye open—all same dog."

Red laughed and "Get up, you!" he ejaculated. He was driving me, I forgot to say, from Bridget into the Catamount Valley. If you go there now he won't drive you. There is an automobile—otherwise "gasoline buggy." He flicked the flies round the leaders' ears. Then he came back to the marrow of his story.

"I didn't go back to that lively burg at once. I couldn't. It would have made me feel too mean to go and see it; for it was still on the upward boom; and I saw that I had sold the Red Top claim too quick. If I had held on, I could have sold out for fifty thousand dollars instead of twenty. The Vampire prospect, fifty mile farther back, and away on a mountaintop, where they had to erect a bucket tramway to get the ore down, sold for that—and she didn't assay like the Red Top. But

after a spell, maybe a year or two, I just had to go back. That valley was sure the sweetest spot in America, lying there with a blue lake to one side and mountains to the other, and a creek coming down, with the wagon road taking through it at a ford where there was a bunch of cottonwoods made it as beautiful as a picture. I heard that the card men had all long since been driven out, and the undesirables had been coralled into one corner and kept in the background.

"I couldn't stand a back-East village at any price. But that little burg was sweet! I reckoned on starting a store there, or maybe a livery stable, and taking a day off now and then for a bit of fishing. So I went back. Get up, Molly!" And he flicked the long whip with a vicious crack along the length of the team.

"I got a kind of a welcome. Not that there was a soul there that I knew, except a man that had opened a livery stable just before I left—and *he* was fishing every day now; and a little old fellow that opened the first store—he was still there; but he wasn't just at the top. Other men were the mandarins of the town. Oh, but say! What a change in the scenery! There was a trestle bridge over the creek just at the ford. Wouldn't that rush you? And a little ways down there was a smelter sticking up its chimneys and belching into the air, and down from the smelter was a sloping dump of slag as far as to the creek. It was sure a prosperous and ugly burg.

"I saw in the hotel book that the man I had sold out to for his company was in the hotel. He had just arrived. I saw in the little paper—the burg had a newspaper; sure thing!—that he had hopes of the country, and so on. 'Mr. ——, of the Red Top, says——' He came into the vestibule right then, when I was reading, and I reintroduced myself. We shook hands and talked of the old days. And I sat on his right hand, by special request, at a dinner the burg gave to him, and they coupled our healths in a toast. So I got into the swim. The dinner was all right; but it led me beyond anything you can ever believe.

"I stayed over just one month, and visited everybody, and was fussed over in a kind of a way, just as if I was a curiosity. But I didn't mind that, because I was surely interested. Only a little spell before—and that burg was not a burg. It was only trees and a creek; and now it was full of bungalow houses, and lawns in front of them, row below row, row above row, the way the hill sloped so steep. And you could look up from the hotels on the main street and see them, all the same—row above row, row below row, young men all watering the lawns with hose pipes in the evening, just so soon as the sun slipped away off that side, in their shirt sleeves—white shirts; and the lady in each house is lying in a hammock; and when the sun sets there's a Chinese lantern over her—one over each, in each and every bungalow. No—it wasn't the hotel whisky. It was what they call progress. I tell you, some of the sports in that burg even carried around—what you call them?—visiting tickets. Come night, the windows of each bungalow house would light up, and pianos would begin tinkling all along the hills, and up and down the hill. And sometimes you could see all a house lit. They took turn about at that. That meant what they call 'An evening-at-home—all same party.' And there would be dancing; the boys from the banks and drug stores dancing with the young ladies that lay in the hammocks by day."

Red paused and clicked to the horses.

"Oh, but say!" he continued. "The afternoon-at-homes—they were the thing! They were certainly it!"

"They were?"

"Yes, sir. But they called them Maeterlinck Societies."

"What?"

"That's what! Oh, I went to several!"

"What were they like?" I asked.

"I'll tell you," said Red. "You go up and say: 'Mrs. So-and-So at home?' and the Chinaman says: 'Yes.' You walk right in, and the lady of the house runs at you like a pigeon strutting and

fanning, and holds her hand away up. You take her fingers, and then she introduces you to them you don't know; and they all bow; you don't shake hands. And when any of them stares like this"—and he showed me—"the lady adds quickly: 'The discoverer of our town, you know; owner of the Red Top Mine.' Then they bows. Being a lover of truth, you say: 'Well, ma'am, if you'll pardon me, not exactly the owner——' And somebody murmurs: 'How unassuming!' And somebody else says: 'Oh, I know! Part owner. You would be a happy man if you owned the whole company, would you not?' And then one of the boys shakes your hand, and you feel better.

"You sit down and put your hat under your chair, and the hostess says how we shouldn't drink tea—and how, theoretically, we don't—and on principle we don't—but we drink it all the same. And in comes one chink, all in ducks, and set down a table; and another chink—hired for the afternoon from Ah Sing's laundry and posted up in the ropes of it all—comes right after the first one with a tray of little cups and saucers, and carries it round, and everybody takes a cup. Then he leaves the tray on the table and them chinks get out. Future cups you helps yourself. Then one of the chinks comes back with a long thing made of plaited grass, in rows, one above the other, and a plate in each row; thin bread and butter in the bottom one, doughnuts above, cake above that. And you get a little bit and put it in your saucer. That's what they call a Maeterlinck Society."

There was a slight twinkle in his eyes as he looked along the horses' backs.

"Where does Maeterlinck come in?" I asked.

"He's there all the time," said Red. "They talk about spooks, and how their aunt in Virginia, or somewhere, knew a woman who heard three knocks on the door when her niece's young man died. And somebody chips in that eating vegetables is good, and that on principle they eat them, but like a bit of duck on Sundays, and a change one or two days of the week. Or maybe they talk very near the bone about the relation of the sexes and what a soft job a man has compared with a woman. And the druggists' assistants look very solemn. I've sat and listened with my eyes to the carpet trying to make sense of it all, and a little cup of tea in my fist, and my hat under a chair, and squinted up sideways sometimes and caught somebody's eye. By heck!" And he laughed at some, I think, especial recollection, and continued:

"It is only a name for these at-homes—Maeterlinck Society. The talk need not chiefly be about ghosts and dieting; but the scheme is to mention these matters here and there. But *the* great scheme is to speak about things you ain't sure about, or, if you are sure, to talk as if it was all mysterious and you didn't know the end of the story. But you must sure know yourself what a Maeterlinck Society is? They always come along when a town is, as you might say, getting plumb civilized."

He was sitting a few inches higher than I, on a folded blanket, the more easily to handle his ribbons, and he turned his head and looked down on me knowingly.

He had a delightful eye.

THE HIGH COST OF HIGH LIVING

SOME reasons why it costs a lot of money to live:

In the last fiscal year the gentlemen drinkers of the United States bought and consumed 143,300,000 gallons of whisky and brandy, and 64,500,000 barrels of beer.

During the same length of time, the nervous, energetic smokers of the country burned up 7,707,000,000 cigars and 14,012,000,000 cigarettes.

What was left over in the way of money went for beefsteak, clothing, rent, and other luxuries.

A Chat With You

YOU know already that our policy, so far as we have formulated such a thing, is the best at any price. We want the best stories. We publish what we think the best. And yet there are so many different ways of looking at a story, there are so many different rules by which it may be measured, that a word more as to what we think the best may be not amiss. As to what makes a good story we have had something to say before. But now and then we get a view from a new angle, and we like to speak of it.

THE use of good English will not make a story good. The dullest stories we have ever read were written by professors of English. The faithful delineation of the superficial aspects of life will not make a story. Some of the saddest stories we have ever read have been most photographic in their accuracy and fidelity of detail. The inculcation of the highest moral principles, sad to state, will do little to kindle interest in a story. The most insufferable stories we have ever read have been written with a high moral purpose. It is hard to say what makes the difference between good and bad, but we know of one effective test at least. There are stories that seem to comply with every possible law of technique, and yet it seems to make no difference to us whether we read them or not. They run along smoothly. It is easy to keep turning the pages. They have just enough placid and negative hold on the interest to keep us from turning to something else. They are in the main conducive to a not altogether unpleasant feeling of drowsiness. One can dream his way through them, thinking of other things at the same time, and perhaps nodding now and then.

THE other sort of story has a different effect. It stirs and disturbs the reader. It is not a soothing, negative influence, but an awakening, stimulating one. Read the first installment of "When the Red Hills Threaten," by Vingie E. Roe, in the present number of the magazine, and you will understand what we mean. You can't read it without thinking and without feeling, also. You don't have to turn many pages to find that McConnel, the Hudson Bay factor, is a live, interesting human being, not just a mere character in an idle tale; that there is a solid and patient strength behind his dour exterior. And young Sylvester, with his softer manners, with his culture and mentality, is no less human. And Lois herself is, perhaps, the most living and vital of the three. We don't have to ask you to read further installments of that story. You will ask for it yourself. You won't fall asleep reading it; you won't even be conscious of a comfortable drowsiness, beautiful as such a sensation may be. Instead you will forget yourself, forget the magazine even, in your acute interest in the drama that is being enacted before your eyes.

IT used to be a favorite saying of theatrical managers, who staged unworthy productions, that they made them silly just because they were appealing to the "tired business man." We don't believe the business man is ever

half so tired as when he has to sit through that sort of a play. That's what it is that makes him tired. You may get tired walking or running, or adding up columns of figures, or eating, or playing cards, but your mind—the higher, apprehensive, unmechanical, observant part of it—never gets tired. Your body tires out and you must sleep, but your mind needs no sleep. It is busy all night weaving fantastic dreams for you. If you sleep well you forget the dreams as you awake, but you dream all the same. What we mean when we speak of a dreamless sleep is that the dreams were not of so disturbing a nature as to be carried in our consciousness on awaking. Your brain may be cramped in some way by thinking too long on some particular subject such as chess or mathematics, but what it needs under these conditions is not rest but exercise. Nine times out of ten the more brains a man has, and the more mental work he does, the less sleep he needs. A hodcarrier needs nine or ten, and his heaviest mental labor is counting the bricks in the hod or the steps in the ladder. Edison, or Napoleon, or Humboldt needs three or four. So we have no faith in stories for the tired business man. If you want rest, go to sleep; don't read THE POPULAR. But if you want a new zest in life, a new mental freshness, let your mind exercise itself as it will, and let your body rest for a while.

JACK OF HEARTS," the complete novel which opens the next issue of the magazine, is not written for "the tired business man." It won't soothe you, it won't act as a narcotic. We claim none of these things for it. All it will do is interest and delight you. Perhaps it will make you forget some of your own aches or worries, but it will do this not after the fashion of an opiate, but by making you live in the spirit and imagination a little more, and in the body a little less. Ralph Bergengren's story, that follows it in the same issue, "The Pirate Vote," will keep any one awake till he finishes it. Also it will make any one laugh out loud. We guarantee that. Perhaps you have read some of Bergengren's delicious pirate yarns in some other magazines, but this first one which he has written for THE POPULAR is the best he has ever done. It is a pirate tale, a story of woman's suffrage, a historical tale of old New York, a political story, a humorous story, all in one. You can see from this that it must be something remarkable. It is. Read it and see if you don't agree with us.

NO less exhilarating and funny in its own way is A. M. Chisholm's story, "Ol' Man Martin," which appears in the same number of the magazine. Perhaps you remember Chisholm's story, "Shibboleth," which appeared in THE POPULAR some time ago. "Ol' Man Martin" introduces to us once more some of the characters you met in "Shibboleth." It is just as funny as a story, which, in our opinion, is saying a great deal.

ALSO in the next issue of THE POPULAR you will find the first large installment of a great railroad serial, by Francis Lynde, called "The Fight on Standing Stone." This is the biggest thing that Lynde has done in years. There is also a second complete novel by Charles E. Van Loan. It is called "The Fighting Doctor," and is a strong, human interest story of sporting life. There is a third funny story by Rupert Hughes, and altogether the number is a memorable one.

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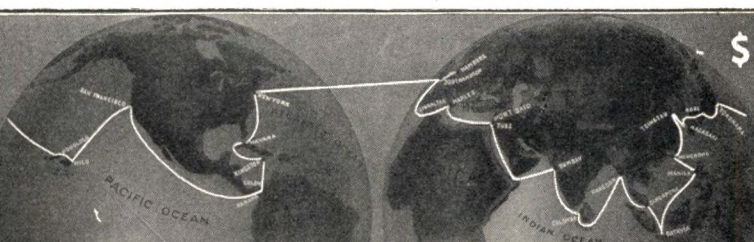

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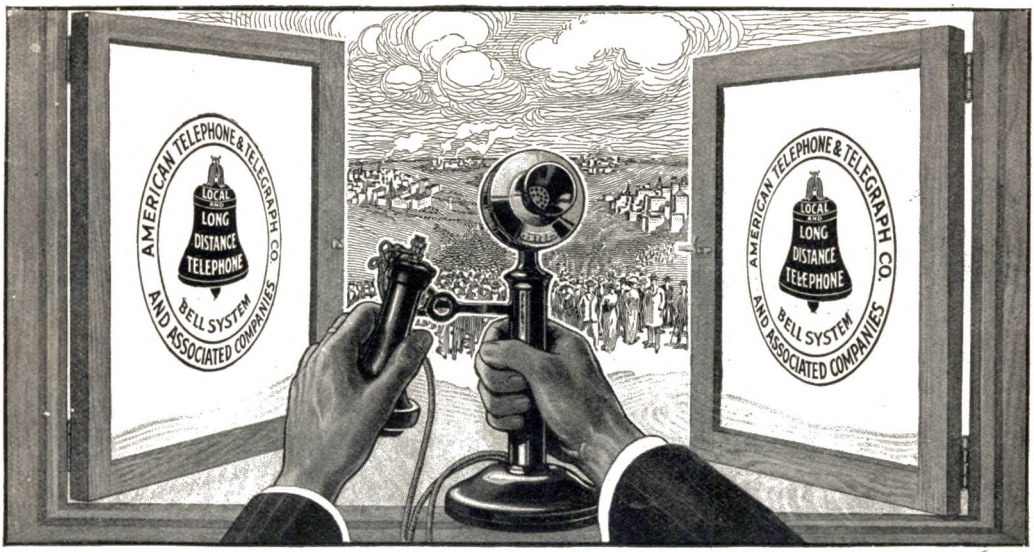

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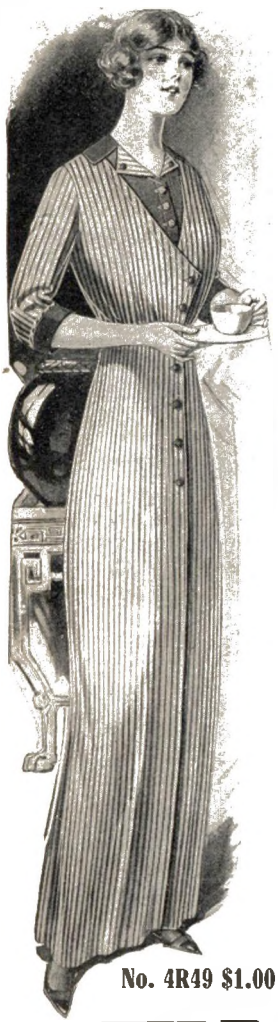

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THE UP-TO-DATE MAN

The readers of the magazine may write to this department about any problem of dress. Every question will be promptly answered, provided that a stamped, self-addressed envelope is enclosed.

IN the cut of overcoats this winter there is no sharply defined fashion to hedge you in. Both close-clinging and loose-swinging garments are good form, the only distinction being in the kind of fabrics which the one cut or the other best befits.

If your overcoat is made of a smooth-finished black, dark gray, or any quiet, plain-color material, it may be close clinging and back tracing, with a rather "waisty" effect and a bit of a skirt flare.

If it is made of roughish-surface "fancy" materials, such as Shetlands, Donegals, Homespuns, Isle of Harris tweeds, chinchillas, blanket cloths, fleeces, and the like, it may be loose swinging and "boxy," with a free drop from the shoulders and room to spare.

It is well, also, to draw a line of demarcation between the purpose for which your overcoat is intended. The garment for "dress up" and formality should fit snugly. The garment for business, lounge about, and sport should be free hanging.

Belt-back overcoats of the type much in vogue a year ago are too "popular" to be "exclusive," and the leaning of fashion is toward beltless garments of the "Chesterfield," "Balmacaan," and "Throw-on" sort.

For evening dress, to accompany the "swallowtail" or a "Tuxedo," the cape coat—inverness—or the Paletot—frock overcoat—are the over-garments most countenanced. A belted coat of any sort does not comport with evening dress, as the occasion is ceremonious, and a belt signifies the contrary.

The hat, illustrated this month, is meant for Tuxedo dress. It is made of soft felt or velour, always black, and has a silk underbrim. This hat is much worn with the "dinner jacket" this winter instead of the black derby.

Also pictured are the correct evening "pump" and black silk hose clocked in white. The ribbon on the "pump" may be flat or pinched in the center after the manner of an evening tie.

Silk Hose and "Patent" Pump.

With the "Tuxedo" suit one often wears an English Oxford of all patent leather. It laces through invisible eyelets, and has a narrow, receding toe without the usual "perforated" tip.

Fashion ordains that, evening-suited, a man be "tightened up," and this season it adds an extra twist to accentuate the accentuation of the back slope, waistline, hip-hug, and skirt-cling.

If you're youngish, slim, an "unabridged edition" in figure, you're lucky. If you're old-ish, thickset,

and an "abridged edition" in height, pluck up courage.

Tight-looking clothes are not necessarily tight. The trick is to make a tight-seeming coat really comfortable by easing and distributing the strain. It's the simple principle of supporting without confining.

So-called velvet neck scarfs "died a-bornin'." Flitting forth last spring in

Felt Hat with Silk Underbrim.

cotton-backed velveteens, masquerading as velvet, they are now hawked about for a fiddler's pence. No man having even a bowing acquaintance with the finesse of dress would wear these sleazy stuffs with their spurious "pile" and luster.

The genuine article of pure-silk velvet chiffon fetches a couple of dollars, but the "velveteens" and "velverets" have sucked its life, as weeds kill grass.

A "chic" London four-in-hand of the advanced type is spanned with a leaf design, instead of the too familiar stripes, which have been done to death. If the body of the silk is green, the leaf is brown, and vice versa.

Some new evening waistcoats, now the vogue among Parisians, are brocaded, and have raised figures, shot with gold and silver glints, upon white

and black grounds. The effect is breath-taking, but sumptuously rich. Double-fold collars have been dropped from wear with the dining jacket. Only the wing collar is countenanced now.

A fad of the hour is to tie your own soft hat ribbon. Usually this is done with an ordinary polka-dot batwing or butterfly tie procurable at any haberdasher's. You snip off the black band that spans a soft hat and knot the batwing or butterfly tie around the crown into a loose, soft bow, precisely as one would knot it around a collar.

Many soft hats are made of soft felt with a drooping or "mushroom" brim and a pleated wide ribbon-scarf patterned after the Anglo-Indian "puggaree" or "cummerbund" seen on sport helmets last summer. The ribbon may match or contrast with the color of the felt.

Hatbands are of silk or velvet, narrow and broad, and brims are of almost every conceivable droop, curl, or roll, including the "dish brim" and the "saucer scoop." Bows are at the side, back, or quarter.

This season, Mackinaw coats are cut of big, bold plaids, as well as the plain colors formerly countenanced. The plaid tam-o'-shanter golf hat is the most picturesque and befitting of all hats, notably with "knickers" and long stockings to give it the true smack of the heather-clad hills.

A cheerful splash of color is lent to dun-colored days by the new cream-colored mackintoshes from London. These are made with velvet collars, and in cut look very like English driving "smocks."

Cloth-topped boots have never been countenanced as in the best form. To the virile mind, they seem effeminate, and should be left to women. Perhaps the newest and "smartest" afternoon boot is laced, with a patent-leather bottom and a calfskin top. Its distinctive feature is the squarish, spade-shaped toe and the long, slim Parisian vamp. The tip is "perforated" far back.

This boot, confessedly a French fashion, is too "ultra" for the everyday man. Another noteworthy mode is the "gaiter-top" boot. It is made with a shiny-leather vamp and buff cloth uppers having flat pearl buttons. The tip is stitched, the toe is sloping, and the heel is low. BEAUNASH.

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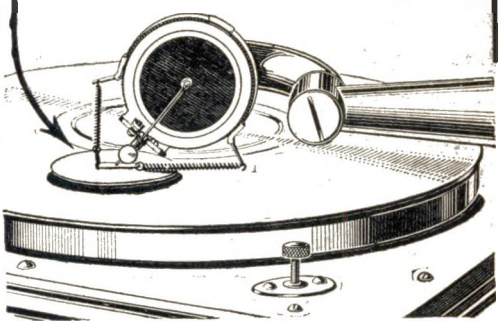

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A fine needle is used with the "Masterphone" which greatly increases the life of your records. The reproduction is clear and true.

The "Masterphone" may be obtained from your dealer. If he cannot supply you, send us **$1.00** and we will send you one with 50 needles by return mail. State if for Victor or Columbia and type of sound box. Money back if not satisfied.

Notice to Dealers: Write for trade discounts. Sells on demonstration every time.

THE MASTERPHONE CORPORATION

187 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

WHITE VALLEY GEMS LOOK LIKE DIAMONDS

Stand acid and fire diamond test. So hard they easily scratch a file and **will cut glass.** Brilliancy guaranteed 25 years. Mounted in 14k solid gold diamond mountings. **See them before paying.** Will send you any style ring, pin or stud for examination—all charges prepaid. **No money in advance. Money refunded if not satisfactory.** Write today for free catalog.

WHITE VALLEY GEM CO., 708 Wulsin Bldg., Indianapolis

Sunshine Lamp 300 Candle Power FREE!

To Try in Your Own Home

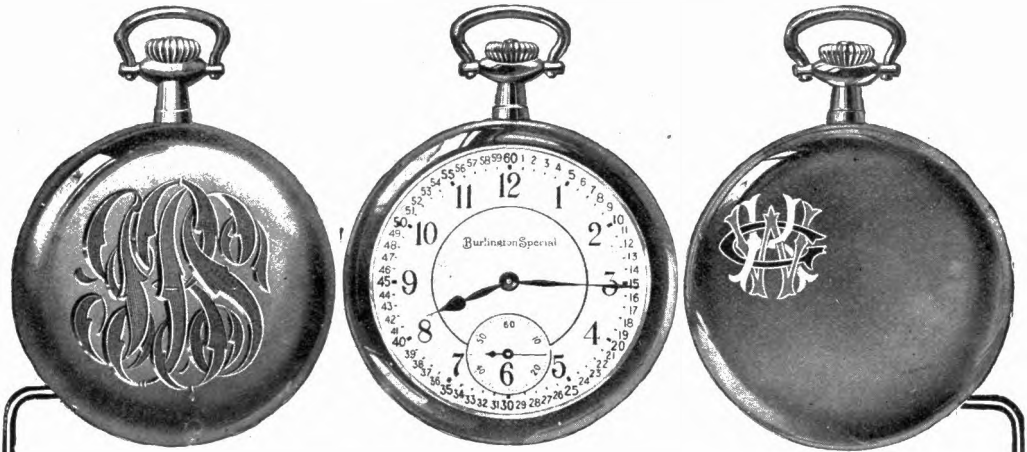
Turns night into day. Gives better light than gas, electricity or 18 ordinary lamps at one-tenth the cost. For Homes, Stores, Halls, Churches. A child can carry it. Makes its own light from common gasoline. Absolutely SAFE.

COSTS 1 CENT A NIGHT

We want one person in each locality to whom we can refer new customers. Take advantage of our SPECIAL FREE TRIAL OFFER. **Agents Wanted.**

SUNSHINE SAFETY LAMP CO.

702 Factory Bldg. Kansas City, Mo.



New Idea in Watches

The ***masterpiece*** *of watch manufacture—the* ***Burlington Special****—19 jewels,* ***adjusted*** *to the second—****adjusted*** *to positions—****adjusted*** *to temperatures—****adjusted*** *to isochronism. Open face or hunting case, ladies' or gentlemen's.*

Special Burlington Offer!

The Superb Burlington Watch **now** at the *direct* rock-bottom price — the same price that **even the wholesale** jeweler must pay—and in order to encourage everybody to secure this watch at once, pay this rock-bottom price, either for cash or $2.50 a month on this great special offer! We send the watch on approval, **prepaid.** You risk absolutely nothing—you pay nothing, not one cent, unless you want this *exceptional* offer after seeing and thoroughly inspecting the watch. Read the coupon below.

New Book on Watches!

Send Free Coupon

FREE Book Coupon

Learn the inside facts about watch prices, and the many superior points of the Burlington over double-priced products. Just send the coupon or a letter or a postal. Get this offer while it lasts.

Burlington Watch Co.
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Dept. 9141 Chicago, Ill.

Please send me (without obligation and prepaid) your free book on watches and a copy of your $1,000 challenge, with full explanation of your cash or $2.50 a month offer on the Burlington Watch.

Name.....

Address.....

Burlington Watch Co.
19th Street and Marshall Blvd.
Chicago
Dept. 9141

New Ideas In Watch Cases!

Newest Ideas: Inlay Enamel Monograms, Block and Ribbon Monograms, Diamond Set, Lodge, French Art, Dragon Designs.

Open face or hunting case, ladies' or gentlemen's 12 and 16 sizes.

Imagine a beautiful hunting case with your own monogram on one side and the emblem of your lodge or any other emblem on the other side. Our catalog shows complete illustrations. See coupon.

The Movement!

In connection with our sweeping *direct* offer we have selected our **finest highest** grade watch for a special offer direct to the people. **Material:** *The best that money can buy.* **Workmen:** *World renowned experts in their line.*

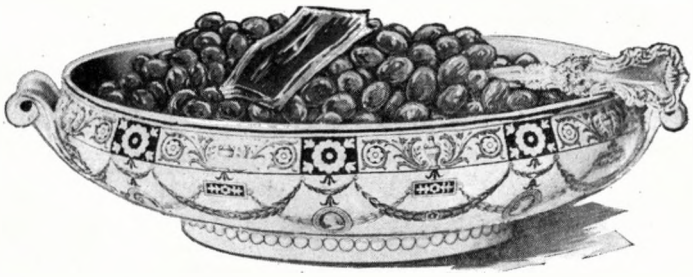
The Jewels: 19 finest grade selected genuine imported rubies and sapphires, absolutely flawless. (It is well understood in the railroad business that 19 jewels is the proper number for maximum efficiency.)

Factory Fitted and factory tested. Fitted right at the factory into the case made for that watch—and *re-timed* after fitting. No looseness or wearing of the parts. No rattle or jar.

Adjustment: *Adjusted to temperature* AND *isochronism* AND *positions.* The most rigid tests.

That $1,000.00 Challenge

money still lies in the bank waiting, waiting for four years for someone who dares to make a competitive test with the Burlington Special. Ever since we dared to come out with our DIRECT OFFER at the **rock bottom** price, we have been waiting for someone to cover the challenge money in a test with the *higher priced* products. Why **don't** they accept? Look at a Burlington Special, the perfect works the exquisite case, consider the rock bottom price, and **you'll know why our challenge stands unaccepted!**



An Example of Ideal Cooking

Here is an example of what one chef can do, working without any restrictions.

The chef came here from the Hotel Ritz in Paris. He came with medals which he won in Parisian rivalries.

Here we supplied him, regardless of cost, with the finest materials grown.

Here we built for him modern steam ovens, where beans can be baked without crisping or bursting.

And here he devoted himself to producing the daintiest dish of baked beans in existence.

The result is Van Camp's Pork and Beans. You have never tasted anything like it.

A dish where the beans are nut-like, mellow and whole. Where a tomato sauce of wondrous zest permeates each bean.

Where the dish comes to you with the fresh oven flavor. A dish which is always ready. And yet the cost, despite all this delicacy, is only three cents per serving.

"The National Dish"

Van Camp's
BAKED WITH TOMATO SAUCE
PORK AND BEANS

"The National Dish"

This dish is for those who want something unusual—the utmost in baked beans.

There are many other kinds for those who don't care. But one meal of Van Camp's will spoil your taste for the others.

You can get Van Camp's from any grocer, wherever baked beans are sold. To get them, simply ask for Van Camp's.

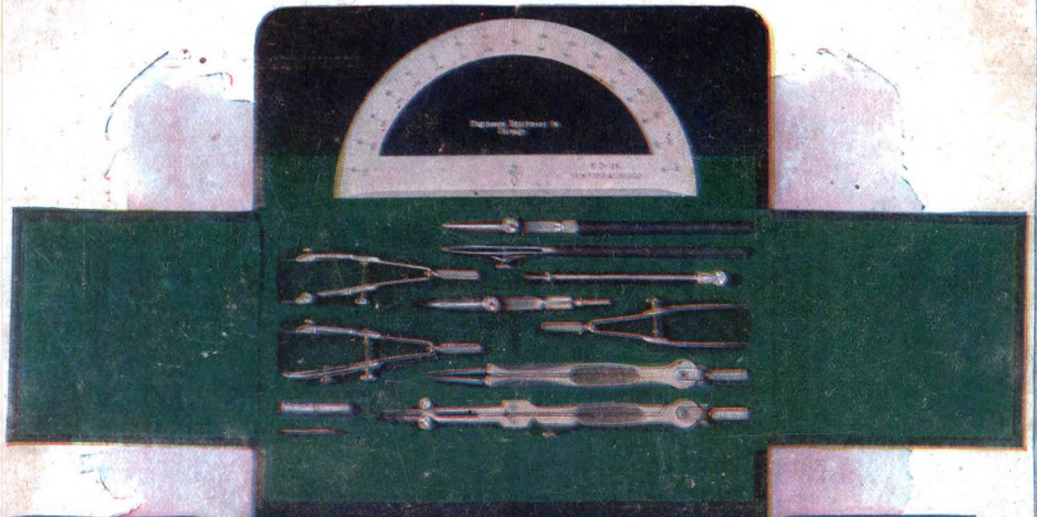
Just try them once. Let the dish itself tell its story. Then leave the verdict to the folks you serve.

Order a trial meal now.

Three sizes: 10, 15 and 20 cents per can

Prepared by
VAN CAMP PACKING COMPANY, Indianapolis, Indiana
Established 1861

(280)



FREE

$15.00 Draftsman's Complete Working Outfit

Yes sir. I will give you a complete draftsman's outfit absolutely free. It does not cost you a penny. Besides these German Silver Draftsman's Instruments shown here I also give you absolutely free a 20x25 inch drawing board, a 24 inch **T** square, 12 inch rule, supply of drawing paper, 2 triangles and French curve, pencil and eraser, drawing ink and thumb tacks, etc., etc. This is just the kind of an outfit I use myself. Genuine working instruments. You couldn't get this outfit anywhere for less than $15.00. But you must hurry. I cannot give these outfits away to everyone that writes but will consider the names in the order in which they are received. Send the free coupon. Act quick.

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Thousands of positions paying big money are open right along. **All over,** concerns are constantly wanting trained men. They pay big money. Hundreds of positions open paying from $75.00 to $100.00 weekly. A prominent chief draftsman will give you just the kind of training that you need, practical training the kind demanded by firms that pay the biggest salaries. You can learn to become a draftsman in your own home—during your spare time—by mail. I will give you personal instruction until you are in a position drawing $125 to $175 a month. Write for full particulars.

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For 20 years I have been doing the highest paid expert drafting work as Chief Draftsman of a large and a well known company. I will train you personally and give you just the kind of practical training that you need to hold one of the biggest paying positions. I know what the big firms demand and I will give you this kind of training as long as required during your spare time, in your own home. Send me the free coupon at once. Do not delay. Write today—now.

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