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The Popular Magazine

JANUARY MONTH-END EDITION OUT-DEC. 23, 1913

Xmas Stories

Oswald Tyng

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An all-absorbing novel of cow-puncher turned circus star, in the next issue, by ROY NORTON; entitled "THE REATA."

MONTH-END EDITION

VOLUME XXXI NUMBER 1

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XXXI. JANUARY 15, 1914. No. 1.

Jack of Hearts

By George Pattullo

Author of "The Sheriff of Badger," "Pitchfork Pat," Etc.

He was willing to make one heap of all his winnings and risk them on one turn of pitch and toss; and lose, and start again at the beginning, and never breathe a word about his loss. That is the kind of man who dominates this story. Riker Keene, of the Heart Ranch—Jack of Hearts—is a character who at first seems to have just two dimensions: straight up and across; but when you get to know him better you'll strike angles and turns that will surprise you. We know you are going to like this whole-souled product of the cow country, lord of a million acres, tallying his cattle by the scores of thousands, yet pleased as a boy by a word of praise, and ingenuous as a child, particularly where women were concerned.

(*A Complete Novel*)

CHAPTER I.

IF you fellows can't work a door quicker'n that, let somebody at it who can. Get back there with the kids, and prod them cattle up. Here, let me show you."

The voice was strident and domineering. Followed a tremendous heave of the shoulder; the rusty iron bar gave way, and the door dropped out.

Forty-three yearlings surged from the car onto the platform, and a yell of glee burst from the spectators, howls and objurgations from the shipping crew. Everybody scattered to the top of the pens to be out of harm's way—everybody except the man who had caused the turmoil. He grabbed a prod pole, and began to belabor the brutes threatening to engulf him.

"Hi-yi, boys!" he yelled. "Come to me! Quick! Drive 'em back from the end there. Open the gates, somebody. Now we've got 'em. Don't let that one slip down!" A heifer was disappearing between car and platform. "That's the ticket. Now, all together. In you go!"

By a concerted rush his men drove the dangerous, jostling bunch down the chute and into the crowding pen. The gate was slammed; he yelled for a hammer, and with the assistance of a trainhand repaired the door in a trice.

"Let 'em come again," he ordered. "No—wait!"

His eye had taken cognizance of the two who had been reprimanded. They were indolently rolling cigarettes and exchanging amused remarks in lowered voices. Stepping toward them, he said: "Get back there with those kids. Or

get up on the fence. Do one or the other, but move quick. You're both useless."

"Is that so?" one retorted sulkily. "We don't figure on being talked to that way, Keene."

"Hold 'em a minute! Lock the gate!" roared Keene.

He sprang on the nearer, and hurled him off the platform to the ground, a fall of five feet. The second would have banged him over the head with a two-by-four had he been given the opportunity, but Keene kicked him shrewdly in the shin, and he dropped the weapon, hopping about with cries of pain. A light push sufficed to remove him.

"Now, let 'em ride"—ignoring the two utterly. "Hurry with that gate. Prod 'em up, boys! In you go!"

As they again pushed and wrestled the cattle into the car, a brisk fight was in progress on the ground, but Keene gave no heed. Not until he had tailed the last yearling behind the crossbar did he deign to notice the combat. Then he asked genially, as he sealed the car: "Finished with him, Red? Good! Now you two loafers take yourselves off before I lose my temper."

From the track beyond a soft, petulant voice repeated: "Until he loses his temper! Oh, did you hear him, dad?"

"Now, I wonder who that is?" muttered the cowman.

The next car to be loaded was laid opposite the chute, and he jumped in to fix the board on the far door. That brought him close to the rear coach of a passenger train on the main line. And there stood the owner of the voice. An elderly man and a young girl were on the observation platform. She was clinging to his arm.

"Howdy, colonel!" called Keene, busy jamming the board into place.

"Why, surely it can't be—yes, it is, too! Hel-lo, Riker, is that you?"

"This dog-gone railway—never did—send me a whole car in ten years. Hammer here. Get busy!" So far as Keene was concerned, the girl might not have existed.

She whispered to her companion.

"Mr. Keene—hey, Riker, pay attention! This is my daughter."

The cowman stopped hammering long enough to tilt his hat.

"Maybe"—bang, biff, bang—"it's like you heard some of the boys using profane language, ma'am?"

"Yes, some of the *boys*"—laying stress on the word—"certainly did."

"Well, you see, Miss Stinson," said Keene, stopping to look straight at her, "that's only business talk. These ornery cattle are just naturally so ignorant they wouldn't understand anything else. Isn't that so, colonel?"

His friend smiled indulgently, and agreed that such was the case.

"It reminds me of a horse I drove once. Well, sir, I beat that horse and argued with him and talked civil, and not a foot better'n four miles an hour could I raise. Come to find out, he'd been drove by a Swede."

He broke off. Miss Stinson queried: "What had that to do with it?"

"The rascal couldn't understand, you see. I went to work and learned to talk Swede, and that same sorry animal run away with me eleven miles. Yes, ma'am!" And Keene turned his back to resume the loading.

"Shipping much, Riker?" bawled the colonel.

"Some. I was a little overstocked. I reckon I'll get rid of six or seven thousand head, maybe."

"Well, so long."

"Adios!" yelled Riker, leaping nimbly out of reach of an indignant cow.

The passenger train drew away, and the observation platform came into full view of the pens.

"Say," Keene added, making a megaphone of his hands, "I'll likely see you next week, Stinson. Coming in."

The colonel nodded to show that he had caught it, and they remained staring back at the frenzied mass of cattle and men.

"Who is he, anyway, dad?" Her arm was through his, her head pressed lightly against his shoulder.

"Who? Riker? Why, that's Keene."

"I know his name," she said fretfully.

"But who is he? I think he's perfectly dreadful!"

"Dreadful fiddlesticks!" snorted Colonel Stinson. "Keene's the best cowman in America. He's in a class by himself as a trader."

"Well, he may be," Doria returned. "But he's awful, just the same. I never heard such language. And he's so insolent. Didn't you see how he stared at us?"

"No, I was thinking—I wonder what he's holding his steers at—hem! I'll wire him—he'd never answer a letter. Let's go in to lunch, Dot. This air makes me hungry."

After two hours of sweating labor, Red took advantage of a halt to draw a breath and get a drink of water. He remarked to his boss: "That was shore some gal, Keene."

"Who? I didn't see any girl. Oh, on the train? That's ol' Stinson's daughter. You remember him, Red? Used to run the Bar T Bar."

"I knowed the ol' rascal."

"So you think she's some girl? Uh-uh—spoiled. When you meet a girl with brown eyes who bosses her pa, Red, you'd best duck for the tall grass. Take it from me."

"I ain't never been out of the tall grass." answered Red wistfully.

CHAPTER II

There was an informal dance at the Country Club. The month was September, and the night warm, so that the floor was almost deserted. The majority of the guests were gathered on the wide verandas, or strolling down the drive and on the lawns.

Among those who braved the heat was Dora Stinson, in a thin white dress with green sash and slippers to match. Her dark-red hair and smoldering eyes were in sharp contrast to the milky whiteness of her skin, and gave her a foreign look. Alone of her set, she scorned make-up.

"Who's the big man leaning against the wall over there?" she asked her partner as they rocked about in the turkey trot.

"Who? Where? Search me—never saw him before. Wait a minute, though. Yes, I know him. He's a rich cowman from somewhere in the Panhandle. I saw him at lunch with old J. B. Carver to-day. They say it's forty miles from his gate to his front door, Doria."

"I wonder—I know I have—I've seen his face before somewhere."

Said Halsell: "He came in a few minutes ago with a bunch of sports. You likely saw him then. The rest of them are down in the grill, getting pickled."

"Let's go over that way. I've—I believe I know him."

They zigzagged toward the orchestra and the sun-browned man, who was in a dinner coat and smoking a cigarette. He was not big; he only conveyed that impression. About five feet ten in height, he had a tremendous sweep of shoulder, and there was an arrogance in his bearing that created the idea of bulk. His back was against the wall, and he had his hands deep in his trousers pockets. Although his survey of the dancers was devoid of expression, nevertheless was he alert to all that occurred, and when one couple performed an exaggerated dip, he smiled. It was not an especially nice smile—such a smile might Attila have worn at a revel of Roman dandies.

"Yes, that's he. It's the same chap," said Halsell, when he glimpsed the smile. "One of those rich roughnecks who blow in here and people take 'em up. And Lord knows where they come from and how they got it. Look at him—got a mug like an Indian."

"I don't think so at all," replied Doria resentfully.

Just then the newcomer put a question to the conductor, thereby bringing his profile into strong relief. His nose was aggressively prominent, the quick turn of his head had something of insolent authority in it. Mouth and chin denoted resolution that might prove cruel, but somehow the puckers of wrinkles around the shrewd, steel-gray eyes—wrinkles not of age but of the glare of baleful skies—offset them. Those

infinitesimal lines hinted of humor and kindliness.

Halsell made an unfortunate effort to be funny. "I wonder how he got in?" he whispered.

To which Doria snapped: "What's the matter with him? Why shouldn't he be here?"

"Do you know him?" he quizzed, faintly amused.

"I've seen him before somewhere. But for the life of me I can't think where."

"Carver brought him here. He ought to be more particular."

"Don't be nonsensical!" she rebuked, with a measure of contempt. "It makes me tired to hear any one talk that way. Where did your father and mine get their money? We're fine ones to criticize!"

Halsell flushed uncomfortably, for she had touched him on the raw. It was not a form of vanity to which he was given, but—why he could not have told—he resented the man's presence. Just then the music stopped, and Doria cried, with a clap of her slim, white hands: "Now I know. It's the same man!"

"Same man? Who?"

"The—the man who swore."

Lorne gaped at her method of identification, and treated the stranger to another inspection.

"Yes," he said judicially. "He looks like he could."

At that moment Keene straightened, took his hands out of his pockets, buttoned his dinner coat, and came toward her. Oddly enough his approach threw Doria into a flutter.

"Lorne," she began, "take me over to the punch bowl. Quick! No, never mind. He'd think——"

"What's the matter?" inquired Halsell. "Don't you want to meet that fellow? You aren't afraid of him, are you?"

"How do you do, Miss Stinson?"

"It's Mr. Keene, isn't it?" She affected doubt with perfect skill as she gave him her hand.

The cowman's eyes twinkled, he gripped Halsell hard enough to make him wince, and then began to stare at her intently, tranquilly, and with frank pleasure.

"Say, that's a pretty dress," said he, just as though they were old friends and alone. "I didn't get a right good look at you last time. Do you remember those yearlings? I nearly fired Red for the talk he made."

Her reply was unintelligible, because Lorne was doing pantomime behind Keene's back.

"Thanks for that dance, Doria," Lorne put in, with unnecessary formality; "I've got this next one."

And off he went, chuckling, while the pink of anger flooded Doria's face and neck. Keene perceived that he was the cause of this confusion, and glanced gravely from the slender, carefully tailored youth back to the bridling girl. The music started again.

"I'd like to ask you to dance, Miss Stinson. But I don't dance."

"The walk is very easy to learn," she suggested.

"Oh, *that!* I could do that." The look he threw over the gyrating couples was surcharged with amusement. "But I wouldn't do that with you."

While you could count twenty she regarded him in incredulous astonishment. He was smiling at her much as an older brother might. Then she walked calmly away, holding her head rather higher than usual. He followed in awkward haste.

"Miss Stinson," he pleaded, "I didn't mean—won't you let me explain?"

She did not seem to hear.

"I want to talk to you," said Riker, with an abrupt assumption of sternness.

"Really?" glancing about for a seat.

They were near the open doors.

"Let's go outside."

She would have refused, but that she perceived Lorne and his partner watching them with glee. So she inclined her head and led the way onto the veranda. At least a score of people were walking there.

"Couldn't we go down the drive?" Keene proposed, almost with timidity. "I mean, would it be all right?"

"Of course," assented Doria, break-

ing into a smile in spite of herself. To see him diffident was so wholly unexpected.

"I couldn't say what I want to say in front of all those folks," he told her.

"That sounds very interesting," she answered coldly.

The clubhouse was built on the crest of a knoll, with a wide terrace sloping down toward a patch of small trees. There were benches amid the trees, and they could see the shimmer of dresses and hear voices and laughter. The drive swept in a circle; a path led off from it past the trees and over a rustic bridge that spanned a tiny lake. The moon was almost at the full, and it was bright as early dawn. The soft southern night teemed with pin-point sounds. A mocking bird sang his heart out from a chinaberry tree.

He paced silently at her side until they reached the bridge. Doria was wondering—she halted in the middle, put her elbows on the railing, and gazed down at the glinting water. Keene stood stiffly erect beside her.

"Why wouldn't you do the turkey trot?" she demanded at last.

"Because," he answered, measuring his words, "it ain't decent."

"Mr. Keene—I—let us go back, please."

"No, wait a minute"—laying a detaining hand on her arm. His manner of doing it robbed the act of all offense—"I just want to tell you why, Miss Stinson. I learned that dog-gone dance from a half-breed girl in a dance hall in Naco. That was years back. We were bringing a herd up from Sonora to the border. So I wouldn't do it—with you."

"Why, everybody—— Let me go, please. We must go back."

He perceived that she could not be placated, and offered no further protest, but followed her off the bridge. Before they reached the trees, she stopped of her own accord.

"That was so unnecessary," she said. "I don't suppose you realize how it sounds. But why did you tell me?"

"Yes, I reckon it was a bit rough," he admitted dismally. "But you see, I never did any of these—stunts"—indicating the club and its revelers with a movement of his arm. "Still, you'd ought to know about that dance."

"It's much pleasanter not to," she answered, less frigidly.

"So you think it's better to always do the easiest thing?"

Women dislike casuistry, and she was framing a crushing rejoinder when some men came out onto the veranda, and called his name:

"Keene! Oh, Keene! Riker!"

"Let 'em holler," said he. "That's the bunch I came with. It's like they're going back to town."

"Or they may want to see you. Really, we had better go in."

"Not just yet. Perhaps they only want to give me a drink."

She shrugged her shoulders, and in the same tone he had first heard her employ to her father, said: "I don't see what men have to drink Scotch high balls for all the time."

To have rules of life laid down to him by a miss of her age did not strike Keene as out of the way at all. He replied placidly: "I used to drink rye. But I'm sort of educated up to Scotch now."

"Is—is that the cultivated taste?"

"They usually come to it."

She slowed as they neared the steps. Having roused no response to their shouts, Keene's friends had gone indoors. He was watching her face, and wondering what next to say. Without any preliminary, she broke out: "Oh, I hate it!"

"Hate what?" he inquired, in much surprise.

"Nothing. Don't pay any attention to me." Yet he could see that she was distressed. "Tell me—when a man drinks a good deal he drinks Scotch?"

"Not necessarily. It all depends on his taste." Keene was frankly puzzled. "I'm awfully sorry, Miss Stinson, if I've said anything to——"

"You haven't," she interrupted. "Let us go in. I promised Mr. Halsell this dance."

Lorne was not on the floor when they entered, and did not come to claim it

"You mustn't wait," she commanded. "He'll be here soon."

"I'll wait," said Keene.

And they stood watching the dancers. A girl went by with her arms clasped behind a man's back, and swaying at the hips and shoulders like the lady who advertises the side-show attractions for adults only. Doria glanced at her, and gave a slight shudder.

"They're not all as bad as that," she said quickly, as though in defense of her friends.

He smiled in understanding, and Doria followed the girl's progress about the room. Gradually an expression of doubt and chagrin dawned in her face; it was as though she saw them all for the first time.

"That does look——" and she broke off.

"If you like," Keene volunteered, to divert her, "I'll go look for that slave of yours."

"If you don't mind, Mr. Keene."

Off went Riker, feigning that he expected to find Halsell in one of the small sitting rooms, or smoking with the men in the hall; but as soon as he was hidden from her sight, he repaired straight downstairs to the grillroom, a brick-floored retreat of kegs in the mission style and English hunting prints, where golfers were wont to stretch their legs after eighteen holes, and quaff high balls It was crowded with men, and the air was blue and pungent.

Lorne was drinking with four others. He was deadly pale, small beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead, and his black eyes glowed like coals. Keene laughingly, but nevertheless firmly, took him in charge.

"Here he is," he reported, returning toward the end of the dance, and he squeezed hard on the arm by which he was piloting the boy. Halsell responded to the warning like a thoroughbred.

"I'm awf'ly sorry, Doria," he apologized. "I got mixed up and thought it was the next one."

"It was the next one, too," answered Doria steadily. But there was relief in her tone, for Lorne appeared normal, except for his pallor.

Making her an old-fashioned bow, Keene thanked her punctiliously for the dance, and betook himself off.

"Let's dance."

"All right," she replied; but as he started the trot: "No, we'll do the two-step."

Lorne stopped, and held her at arm's length to make sure that she was serious. With tragic pathos, he inquired: "For the love of Mike, what's the matter?"

"Nothing," she answered shortly. "But it's so ungraceful. Besides, it's against the rules of the club."

"You've broken 'em a thousand times. Come on!"

"I won't, Lorne. I won't. If you don't want to two-step, we'll sit out."

"Something," he said portentously, "has happened. I fear the worst."

However, they did the two-step.

"You've been drinking."

"I had one claret lemonade," he confessed glibly, turning his head aside.

"Please don't—tell me that," she entreated.

He could feel the pounding of her heart, and stammered something in remorse.

"Let's not talk about it," she interrupted, and they finished the dance in constraint.

Afterward they sat on the veranda. Lorne was feverishly restless, and talked at random. Having endured this for some minutes—"If you want to go, Lorne, why, go. Don't let me keep you."

"Doria!" he protested, doing the injured lover very well.

Yet he had been leading up to an escape by devious hints, and when somebody arrived to claim her for a waltz, he greeted him like a fraternity brother. Also he went back downstairs with great promptitude.

"I wonder," queried Doria, "if Mr Keene has gone home?"

"You mean the new man? The sunburned fellow? He's downstairs now with a bunch of old rounders—Carver and that lot," answered her partner.

"Is he? I shouldn't have thought it."

About midnight Keene emerged from

the lower region at the head of the bunch of old rounders. The others were flushed and talked loudly; he appeared to be about the same as usual. Doria noted with an uneasiness she could not analyze the way in which he dominated the group, even in walking across the floor. And she wondered why they should pay this coarse man—for he was coarse, she assured herself—a species of homage. Two of his satellites were powers in the local world of finance, men to whom her father would defer. Yet Keene did dominate them—without doing anything, but none the less unmistakably. It was patent to any beholder.

On his lips was a faintly amused smile as he listened to their babble, an almost fatherly tolerance in his glance. They tagged behind like a flotilla of excursion boats escorting a dreadnaught. Once, when he flung back a "Yes," Carver, rated a multimillionaire, placed a hand on his shoulder affectionately. Riker shook it off brusquely and came straight to where Doria was sitting.

"I wanted to tell you good night, Miss Stinson," he began.

She introduced her partner. On him Keene bestowed a swift, appraising look, and then nodded perfunctorily, as if in that second he had classified and labeled him.

"Will you tell your father that I'll call to see him at ten o'clock to-morrow morning, Miss Stinson?"

"Yes, if I see him before that," she laughed.

"Well, make it twelve, then. He wired me about some stuff three days ago, and I hadn't time to answer."

His friends, who were waiting near the door, now discovered that the car was not ready, and recrossed the room and descended the stairs, to wait for it in comfort. They called to him to join them.

"I've asked some people to come out to the ranch next month, Miss Stinson," said Keene, ignoring their importunities. "I hope you'll join the party?"

The invitation was such a surprise that she was at a loss. Sensing that he was not wanted, her partner murmured an excuse, and departed precipitately.

"Come outside"—with a glance at those who sat near, and who were trying to look as if they were not listening—"I'll tell you all about it."

As they were descending the steps: "We're going to start gathering steers on the eleventh. It'll take a month. And I thought perhaps the work would be interesting. Mrs. Harry Walton has promised to chaperon a party. I've asked six already."

"Mrs. Harry Walton?" repeated Doria rather dubiously.

"Don't you know her?"

"Yes, I know her—very slightly."

He chose not to comprehend.

"I've asked Annielee Carver, and Miss Sloan, and Harriet Gilmour. Are they friends of yours? Aye, I thought they were. And then young Seth Gilmour's coming, and Dave Scoles, and Tom Hall."

"How did you happen to—no, I won't ask that, either."

He betrayed no curiosity.

"And I'd like to ask young Halsell, if you think he'd come."

"Why Lorne?" she countered, with a fine assumption of carelessness.

"Well, he seemed—I like the boy's looks. And the ranch'd do him good. Two weeks out there would—would do anybody good."

She pondered this for a few minutes, while they paced up and down the terraced slope. Somehow she found herself probing everything he said; casual commonplaces seemed beneath him.

"It's awfully kind of you, Mr. Keene, to ask me, too."

"Kind?" he exclaimed, in his most abrupt manner. "Don't talk foolish!"

The moon's pale light made a sheen about Doria's head. She was very lovely, and Keene had been in the grill-room for two solid hours.

"Kind?" he said again, with a snorting laugh. "I'd do something worth while for you if I had the chance, Miss Stinson."

"Something worth while?" with a

soft uplift of her eyes. "I don't understand."

"You will, though, later. The minute I saw you to-night I knew you were the one woman in the world for Riker Keene. Don't be scared. Them other fellows——"

"We must go in," Doria said hastily.

That brought Keene back to earth with a jar. He laughed, and the harsh forcefulness of his manner gave place to diffidence. Doria did not like it half so well—the other was deliciously uncertain, so full of possibilities.

"I reckon you'll think I'm a rough customer, Miss Stinson?"

She did not answer, but ascended the steps, and he followed very meekly. Halsell was waiting for her just inside the door.

"Everybody's going," he announced. "I told Frank to bring the car around."

She inclined her head, and went to the dressing room for her wrap, without bidding Keene good night. Neither did Lorne.

Riker did not hesitate long, but went in search of his friends. As they were about to start for town, he remembered something to telephone to his hotel. The telephone was in a short hallway leading from the ladies' dressing room.

He lifted the curtain to enter. Then he let it drop, and stepped back. When he rejoined his friends, Riker was chewing on a cigar—vigorously, as he did when dickering on a hard trade. Twice during the ride back to town he laughed, and it was not called forth by anything said by his companions.

"Oh!" Doria breathed, starting back when the curtain lifted.

Lorne held her dust cloak in his hands, entirely collected. Yet he was angry.

"Do you think he saw?" she whispered anxiously.

"Search me. What does it matter, anyhow?"

"I wouldn't have had him see—oh, I'd rather it had been anybody else in the world," she cried in a fierce whisper, beating one small fist against the palm of her other hand.

"Pshaw! What's the difference? What's Keene to us? Come on. Frank's waiting."

CHAPTER III.

At the Clover Club there was jubilation and sharpening of shears, for a new lamb offered—a frisky, fleecy lamb.

"They say this new man—what's his name?—Keene—has all kind of money," remarked Tressider in the billiard room, apropos of nothing.

"Who put him up?"

"Old Carver and Sloan."

"They tell me," another interjected, "he'll play poker till the cows come home. I heard Bassett say that he saw this fellow put up ten thousand dollars to call on a pair of sevens."

"And he got away with it, too."

"Then he's either broke, or a new millionaire."

The conclusion provoked nods of assent. They knocked the balls about carelessly for a while, and then Bassett, Tressider, Pitblado, and Smith adjourned to the smoking room and went into executive session. Not a word had been said; they acted in unison as by silent understanding.

These were the champion card players of the Clover. At auction or rum, at poker or pitch, or the humble forty-two, they could be relied on to scoop the money. The quartet usually operated together, yet nobody felt sufficiently sure of his ground to assert that a definite understanding existed among them. They worked by instinctive collusion. And Bassett was said to make his living by dexterity and luck. At any rate, he enjoyed a comfortable income ranging from six to ten thousand, and seldom stirred outside the club portals except for an airing.

While they had their heads together, came loud laughter on the stairs, and a party of five entered the room for a drink. Among them were Riker Keene and Carver. The latter pounded a bell vigorously for a waiter. Talk was brisk. It was characteristic of Keene that wherever he circulated men livened and became breezy, as though drawing from the dynamo of his own energy.

"So you won't join us to-night?" demanded Carver.

"Can't do it, man," replied Riker. "I've got to go to a party."

Carver was convulsed.

"Riker Keene doing the butterfly among the buds," he cried, flapping his hands. "Go to it, old man. The older we get the younger we like 'em."

"All joking aside," Riker responded, "some of this young she-stuff is simply beautiful."

So evident was his sincerity, and his use of the range term was so free from any implication of disrespect, that even Carver, who had a daughter among the last season's débutantes, joined in the gale of laughter.

"We'll have to call you the Jack of Hearts," he chuckled. "Annielee tells me that you just bowl 'em over without even trying, Riker. Instead of Keene of the Heart, it ought to be Jack of Hearts. Hey, boys?"

It was a simple matter for Bassett, Tressider, et al, to mingle with the group and meet Mr. Keene, the new member. For that matter, they had a habit in the Clover of crowding where drinks were being served. They did it very gracefully, and joined in the chat. As it was nearly seven o'clock, somebody proposed dinner, and the orders were instantly given.

About nine, Riker shoved back his chair and remarked: "I must be running along, fellows. Got to dress and go to that dance. So long, Carver. Adios, everybody. No, don't ring for a taxi. My new car's outside."

"I have to drop in myself for a minute," Carver informed him, with a grimace. "That's what comes of having a grown-up daughter, Riker."

"From what I've seen of her it's worth it," returned Keene heartily.

Evidently garrulous old Carver had carried the tale before him, because, after Keene had shaken hands with the hostess, she turned to him confidentially, and, with a twinkle of her blue eyes, said: "Now, Mr. Keene, I want to introduce you to some of these girls. We've got the finest bunch of she-stuff this year we've ever had."

"They're sure good lookers," agreed Riker gravely, all unconscious of any thrust; "I'd like to meet some of 'em, ma'am."

A swift survey of the room showed him that Doria was not there, and from that moment he began to speculate on the propriety of sneaking off. Yet he danced dutifully with those to whom the hostess led him. To her he was a find, and she picked out the saddest of the unspoken ones.

At last he contrived to escape into the hall.

"Jinks," he muttered, as he loafed a couple of numbers alone. "Some of these girls sure do go all the gaits."

He was taking stock of them through the door. Perceiving young Halsell, he grinned. Lorne waved his hand, threaded his way through the dancers, and joined him. Their meeting was cordial; Keene could not help liking the boy, lightly as he held him, and for the cowman Lorne had an immense respect.

"They're going it a bit strong to-night, aren't they?" he remarked, offering Keene a cigarette from a flat, gold case that was dwarfed to absurdity when Riker stuck his big fingers into it.

"They sure are. Say, do these girls hit it up?"

"How do you mean? Take a drink?"

"Huh-huh!"

"Of course. A few don't. And then again some do more than others."

As though to cap this cautious admission, a tow-headed young man lifted a girl bodily from the floor, and swung her around in the manner of a wrestler whose aim is to pin his opponent's shoulders to the mat.

"I reckon," observed Riker calmly, "that that girl's one of them that does —hey?"

"Oh, they don't mean any harm."

"No, maybe not." After a thoughtful pause, he added: "But I don't like to see it."

"I take it," ventured Halsell, "that you don't approve of ragging, or the trot, either?"

"Well, I should say not!"

"Nor the tango?"

"What's that? A fruit?"

"So you don't like the trot," mused Lorne. "Hum!"

"Look at 'em go for that punch. And it's strong," said Keene. "That stuff would stiffen the hair on a billy goat—I tried some."

"Yes, a few of them do like it," Halsell assented easily.

"If this young she-stuff was mine," declared Riker, with emphasis, "I'd spank 'em all. I tell you what, Halsell, I hate to see it. If a girl's going to be a sport, let her be a sport. But this pretending—to see nice girls doing stunts like that gives me a pain. I want 'em either good or—or the other kind."

A discreet silence on Lorne's part; oblivious of that, Riker plunged ahead vehemently: "Why, I see some of these girls every afternoon down at the Tivoli, all alone, drinking cocktails. Some of 'em actually go for the Scotch high balls out of teacups."

"Well," smiled Halsell, "there's no occasion for getting warm over it, Mr. Keene. I don't see why it should worry you especially, anyway. And, besides, if I were you—well, you're a newcomer here, Keene. I wouldn't let people hear me talk like that."

The cowman stared at him without resentment, and gave a slow nod.

"That's so," he responded. "That's good sense, Halsell. It really ain't any of my business, is it? Thanks, Halsell. I'll remember."

Some of the younger people had congregated in a corner of the room, and were giving vent to deep groans under the leadership of a youth considerably the worse for wear.

"Now, then," he cried, in the fashion of a cheer leader at a football game, "the angry mob again."

And they groaned dismally and in unison. Keene laughed.

"That ain't so bad. He's a funny guy, that boy."

Next they formed in line, and did the lockstep around the room, chanting a dirge. The turkey trotters were much discommoded, and tried to break the formation.

"Not dancing?" inquired Riker.

"No. Laid up with a bum ankle." Halsell flushed as he mentioned the ankle.

"Well, I'm going to beat it. There's no use my staying here. I ain't doing any good."

"Same with me."

"I've got my car," Keene offered. "If you want a lift, I'll drop you wherever you say."

"Thanks! I'll take you up on that."

They made their excuses and said good night. As they sped through empty streets, Riker remarked, with a yawn: "I'm not a bit sleepy. That yawn don't mean anything. Say, let's drop around to the club for a minute. We can get a drink and see who's there."

"I'm on the wagon. But I'll be glad to go with you."

Keene gave directions to the driver, and they whirled through the business district. With evident reluctance, and choosing his words carefully, Lorne asked: "Do you ever—play, Mr. Keene?"

"Play what?"

"Cards. Auction, or poker."

"I'd rather play poker than eat," Riker confessed. "Why? Is there a game on?"

"There would be quick enough, if you said the word. I merely wanted—well, I thought somebody ought to tip you off. They're cold-blooded."

"Hum!" said Riker thoughtfully, stroking his nose. As Lorne gave no indication of enlightening him, he finally inquired: "Tip me off about what?"

"There's a bunch at the Clover," said Halsell, "who always have their hooks baited for new fish. You look like a tarpon to them. It's likely they'll try to get you into a game."

"I've heard of that—what d'you call it?—tarpon fish giving more'n he got."

"I thought you ought to know, anyway," answered Lorne. "In fact—well, I was taking a nap in the smoking room this afternoon, and I heard Bassett and his crowd fixing up a deal."

The announcement elicited a chuckle from the cowman.

"A deal, hey? I met Bassett and

those others to-night," he said, "and I sized 'em up about that way. You know, Halsell, when a man lives alone a good part of each year—away off from other people—he learns to size up another man as far as he can see him. Sort of instinct, I reckon."

He said no more, but strummed on the door of the car with his fingers until they came in sight of the club windows. Then he asked: "What sort of game do they play?"

"I never sat in with them. Nobody has ever actually accused the bunch of cheating, although one time—well, the board made Bassett give back forty-five hundred dollars to a cotton man from Liverpool. But then, the Englishman was drunk. No, I wouldn't like to say any of 'em are crooked—but they surely do whipsaw. You bet—they crowd the game."

The car drew up at the club door, and they alighted. Keene appeared much amused.

"I didn't mean how they play," he said, "but what they play for? Is the game worth while? What sort of stakes?"

His interest in it seemed to make Lorne apprehensive.

"You'd better watch out, Keene," he warned. "I tell you these fellows are good. And they've got their knives sharpened for you. As near as I could make out, they've pooled their money, so they can give you a run worth while."

"So-so," murmured Riker, clucking with his tongue.

He was in high spirits as they went up in the elevator, and there was the joy of battle in his face. The two looked into the cardroom, where latecomers to the club were always sure of finding company. There sat Bassett, Pitblado, Tressider, and Smith solemnly playing pitch.

They drew up chairs near them. Privileged by immemorial custom to stare at the hands, they peered over the shoulders of the players. Lorne ordered a drink; he was nervous and on edge, and ordered a high ball. Keene contented himself with a lemon squash.

"Say," exclaimed Pitblado, throwing his cards down in disgust. "This is slow. Let's switch to poker. I don't seem able to hold anything. You chaps willing?"

"I'm on," Bassett acquiesced, "if we can raise a quorum. Who's in the club? It's pretty late to start."

Casually the four glanced toward Keene. Young Halsell was too small fry for their net; besides, he lived in town, and his father was influential.

"Hum—I don't know," said Riker doubtfully; "I believe you boys are too good for me. What do you play? How high is it?"

Tressider threw out his hands, palms upward, and shrugged his shoulders.

"The roof."

"Whew!" The cowman whistled. "Is there that much money lying around loose? How big a roll would I need? What have you boys got?"

"We can give you action on fifteen or sixteen thousand," answered Bassett, with a praiseworthy attempt at lightness.

Pitblado hastened to say: "And your check's good with us, Mr. Keene. I'll bank. You can have all you want."

"Hum!" Riker said again, and he twiddled his under lip between forefinger and thumb. "Sixteen thousand. That's a lot of money, boys."

Turning to Lorne: "Want to play?"

"I'm not in your class. Go ahead. I'll drift."

Again Keene faced the four at table. His eyelids were blinking sleepily, and he seemed bored.

"No-o-o"—stifling a yawn—"I don't reckon I'll sit in. I've been going it all day, and I'm tired. But"—drawing a silver dollar from his waistcoat pocket—"I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll toss you for that sixteen thousand. One throw. You call the turn, Mr. Bassett. Heads or tails? No? You don't want it? Well, I'll be dragging it, then. Come on, Halsell."

CHAPTER IV.

His range boss wired Keene that the Heart was caught short on grass, and seven thousand cows threatened to lie

down and die. Moreover, grasshoppers had swarmed northward, and were occupying one hundred thousand acres, devastating the same.

It was bad news, but Riker did not even swear. He grunted, and cabled Blake, in London, inquiring whether he could accommodate five thousand head in his cañon brakes. The Englishman answering in the affirmative, because of past friendship—and a further inducement of thirty cents per head per month—Riker telegraphed his boss to start an outfit gathering cattle, and he would join them for shipping out the following week.

"If it ain't one thing," he informed Doria, "it's another. The way things have broke this year reminds me of ol' Tom Rooker. Tom never had any luck, no matter what he drew to. 'It's queer how things will turn out,' says Tom; 'I've sat till four o'clock in the morning without taking nary a pot. And then the luck'd change—it'd take a turn for the worse.' "

When the boss received Keene's message he raved and tore his hair.

"Why, dog-gone my fat haid!" he cried. "I tell you Riker's gone locoed—sure as you're born. How do I know what stuff he wants moved? Why don't he come out and 'tend to business? That gal—he's going to lose forty thousand dollars this year a-chasing that gal, if he loses a cent."

"Gal? You must of got it wrong, Carl. He done told me," protested Red Williams, "that he was going to town to get his teeth worked over."

"They'll be worked, all right," the boss snarled. "They'll be wore clear down to the gums. Say, ain't it queer how a man'll have sense in some things, and be a fool in another? Look at Riker—he's a first-rate cowman. There ain't a better in the world."

From this it will be surmised that rumors had found their way to the outfit—which was the case. And well they might.

For quite a week after the dance at the Country Club, Keene did not go near Miss Stinson. Instead, he spent his days and nights with a set of bachelors who made the Clover Club their headquarters, and were steeped in the theory that a man lives only once. Also, he took sundry ladies motoring—among them Mrs. Walton—and gave luncheons and dinners until those who weren't asked nearly died of spite. They put this entertaining down to a brazen attempt on the part of the rich cowman to break into local society.

As a matter of fact—well, it would have made local society sit up and gasp to have learned what Riker actually thought of them. But large hospitality, a generosity that seemed vulgarly prodigal to people differently reared, were inherent in him. His lavish entertaining and the expensive presents he made were merely a spontaneous expression of his nature.

Then he abruptly changed tactics. He deserted the coterie of seasoned rounders, and began to haunt the Stinson house. Nor did he make any secret of his hopes. He came right out in the open, and, when rallied about Doria, would say without embarrassment: "Isn't that the finest girl in the world?"

The morning he determined to call there, he said to himself, as though his conscience required an excuse: "I don't give a whoop if she does love him. I'll go try for her, anyhow. Let the best man win."

Papa Stinson encouraged his visits. Doria's mother was noncommittal, like the wise woman she was. She knew Doria.

All Doria's girl friends made no end of fun of her latest conquest. She bore this in good part for a few days; then her mood changed. And when his name was mentioned she made mock of his appearance—the cut of his hair, his uncomfortable collars—laughed at his large, red hands—gave imitations of his mannerisms. She could take off the quick, domineering turn of Riker's head to perfection.

"Huh-huh!" said Annielee Carver placidly. "You're very clever, Doria—aw'fly clevah. But I'll bet you marry Mr. Keene."

Had she exploded a bomb at Doria's

feet, she could not have startled her friend more.

"Marry him?" echoed Doria, scarcely crediting her ears, and into her eyes came a suddenly frightened look.

"Yes, marry him. A girl nearly always marries a man she begins by making fun of."

This might be structurally involved, but the sense was clear, and Doria glared. Anger held her speechless for a minute; then, to Annielee's distress, Doria burst into hysterical tears.

"Marry that old man?" she sobbed. "Why, I'd rather be dead."

"Well, if you're not going to," retorted Annielee, with her customary shrewdness, "what's the use of crying?"

The shot told. Doria dried her eyes; but she wondered why on earth she had endured Annielee's friendship for so many years.

She had an engagement to go motoring with Keene at five o'clock that afternoon. About three he rang her up—Riker always telephoned her twice or thrice a day.

"I've got a trade on with a man for some steers," he explained, "and maybe it'll put me ten minutes late."

"You mustn't let me interfere with your business, Mr. Keene," came back sweetly. "Hadn't we better call it off to-day? I'm going out to dinner, you know, and I can use that time to dress, very nicely."

"No, we won't call it off. If you and business can't mix, I'll cut out business," with an embarrassed laugh.

"Then I'm afraid you'll have to be on the minute," she informed him acidly, "for I have to be back here early."

"There at five o'clock sure. Will you be ready sharp? What's that? Hello—hello—central, what the devil! Oh, hello, is that you? I was talking to—— Hello! No, I want Oak Lawn! Consarn this rotten service, anyhow!"

And Keene flung out of the hot booth, mopping his forehead. At ten minutes to five his car was at the door—he was stopping at the Tivoli—but the buyer had not yet put in an appearance.

"It takes eight minutes," Keene reflected, consulting his watch, "to get out there. I'll give him two more minutes."

As he snapped it shut, a man in a big felt hat and gray hand-me-down suit hurried across the rotunda.

"Hello, Riker. Been looking for you. Let's sit and talk business."

"I haven't got time now, Martin. Honest Injun! I'm just the busiest man you ever saw. See you to-night. Here, at eight. So long."

"But I have to catch that northbound at six-forty-five," protested the buyer. "Give me just ten minutes. It's a fifty-thousand-dollar deal, Keene. I want some ones and twos for——"

"Sorry," Riker shouted back over his shoulder. "Time's up. Wire me."

The buyer followed to the sidewalk, and watched him climb into his six-cylinder and glide around the corner. Then he spat resentfully into the gutter.

"Wire hell!" said he in disgust. "If he don't want my money, let him go. There're lots of other steers."

The loss did not trouble Keene, either. He laughed when he narrated the meeting to Doria.

"You shouldn't have done that," she reproved in genuine concern. "If I made you do—why, you're sacrificing your business."

"Don't worry," replied Riker, with a grin. "I still got my steers. And the country has to have beef.

"Besides," he added cannily, at the end of a period of smiling reflection, "that'll just make Martin all the more eager. It'll be worth fifty cents a head, treating him that way."

The remorse that had been Doria's fled precipitately—here was a fine object for sympathy, forsooth.

"You may be all heart, like Annielee says," she thought, studying his profile, "but your head will run things when it comes to a show-down, Mr. Jack of Hearts."

CHAPTER V.

A kind friend recited to Keene the gist of the conversation between Doria and Annielee Carver. Being eighteen, she could gush impertinences to a man

of his age without risk of offending him.

On receiving this blow, Riker regarded her with paternal indulgence, and remarked: "Is that so? So Miss Stinson won't believe I'm a romping boy, hey?"

She was vaguely disappointed that he should be so undisturbed. Yet her prattle left a sting that she never guessed. It was reflected in a return to former habits. He again took up with the idlers who cluttered the Clover Club and usually began the day at noon. They were facetiously known as the Free Thought Brigade, after a cocktail invented by one of their number.

"This being good," he said to Lorne Halsell, whom he chanced upon one day in the lobby, "don't get a man anything. Look around you. There's Fred Houston—the worst rounder in town, and he gets him one of the nicest girls we know. It looks to me like a fellow who tries to run straight don't stand any show with a girl. She'd rather take up with a bum."

"You're too apt to generalize from one or two cases," the younger man remonstrated. "Fred is no good, but those two have known each other since they were in the cradle. She's marrying him to reform him—of course, she'll fail. A woman usually does unless she gets a fellow who'd reform himself anyway, given time."

Lorne was unusually spruce. Standing beside him, Keene experienced an inexplicable sensation of sick helplessness; he felt suddenly old and shoddy. It was the fear middle age is seized of when forced to compete against youth in the game of love. Of what avail to enter the race against this slim, erect, handsome boy? What had he to offer—what was there in the world to offset the appeal that his youth alone could make to youth? And Halsell had every other advantage—assured position, moderate wealth, polish.

Riker glanced down at his shoes—why, even they were not the correct shape. He felt cloddish; a longing for the range stole over him.

After a moody silence devoted to a covert scrutiny of Lorne's appearance, he said brusquely: "I'm going to have a Free Thought."

"None for me," returned Lorne. "I'm high and dry still. Well, ta, ta, Keene. And remember this—there's lots of nice girls who'd rather meet a clean, decent man than an amusing cad."

He said it with a significant nod of the head, and went out to his waiting car. Lorne was connected with a storage concern owned by his father, but his duties were nominal except on pay day. He golfed and motored at any hour that suited his fancy.

To Doria, whom he took out for a round on the links, he mentioned that Riker Keene appeared downcast.

"Some girl must have thrown him down," was his surmise.

"What makes you think that?" She had much ado to keep a straight face.

"Well, he—oh, a lot of things. When you see a man like Keene get cynical, then there's a girl in it somewhere. Cheap cynicism, too. I'm sorry—for there's a man, Doria, every inch of him."

"Yes," she assented musingly, "I think he is."

"Simple and sincere—nothing to conceal. He rings true every time." He was staring meditatively at the road in front.

"I wish," he said almost wistfully, "I'd give a good deal if I had been that kind of a man. There're just two dimensions to Keene—straight up and across."

"Don't be too sure about that," she answered, wise with a woman's intuition. "If you got to know him better, you'd strike angles and turns that might surprise you, Lorne. He's sincere—yes—but Riker Keene isn't simple enough to get hurt, no matter where he goes."

"But there's such solid worth, Doria. Good, quiet value in the fellow."

"Yes, that is true."

"Anyhow, I gave him a tip to cheer him up."

"What did you say?"

When she found out, Doria broke into delighted giggles—men were such simpletons. Her merriment puzzled

Lorne, but she would not explain. During the afternoon she dimpled frequently, and was in fine fettle.

On the homeward ride she confided: "That girl must have disgusted Mr. Keene with all womenkind, whoever she is."

"Why so?"

"He canceled two engagements he had with me."

"What for?"

"I haven't the least idea. Unless—no, that couldn't be it. But even in breaking them he was nice. I don't believe Riker Keene could do a harsh thing—to a woman."

"No, he couldn't. How did he go about it?"

"Sent me a huge basket of flowers," Doria explained, "and an awfully nice note to say that business would prevent him keeping our engagements. Business—huh—his business seems to be running around with that Mrs. Walton. Do you think she's pretty?"

"Peach! Takes more pride in herself than any woman in town."

"That's all she has to do," retorted Doria resentfully. "Well, anyway, Mr. Keene's note was faultless. It quite surprised me. You wouldn't think he —— He doesn't look like a man who could write a graceful excuse. Especially when it was nothing but a big lie."

"Hum!" said Lorne, with a cough, and became thoughtful.

They went humming down a long, steep hill, and made a sharp turn to the right around a brick fence that inclosed terraced lawns topped by a huge house supposed to imitate Italian architecture. In making the turn they almost collided with a car coming from town. The driver swerved far out, and there were feminine screams. In the machine were Keene and Mrs. Walton, with another man and woman.

"That's Harvey Whitman," said Halsell, when they were straightened out. "What does Keene want to hang round with a professional affinity bunch for? He didn't strike me as that kind."

"He isn't," asserted Doria vehemently. She was red in the face.

"Whitman's no good!" continued Lorne obstinately.

"Neither are those two creatures," she broke out. "But he doesn't know that."

"Doesn't he?"

"No, he doesn't. A woman could fool Riker Keen as easily as—as that." And she gave a snap of her fingers.

Her resentment amused Lorne, but only for a moment. Then a thought seemed to strike across his mind; he eyed her narrowly; his forehead became puckered.

"What is it?"

"Nothing," he answered, but she descried distrust growing in his eyes, and guessed the cause. Her surmise was proven correct later—when she reverted to an old bone of contention between them.

"Lorne, why don't you go to work seriously?"

"There you go again. I do. I work pretty hard—as much as any of them."

"You don't know the meaning of the word," said Doria, without mercy. "You're out with me this afternoon, for instance—you know you oughtn't to be. No man who doesn't work can attain to his best, Lorne—it doesn't matter what other advantages he has. Work builds up character. It helps to——"

The sweet seriousness of her manner only irritated him.

"Now, you listen to me," he cut in, with heat. "This is about the thousandth time you've lectured me on this. And it's got to stop. I do my work. Look at all the other fellows you know—don't I work as hard as any of them? But what's the good of slaving when you don't have to? Be reasonable."

"You don't average half a day at the office. And if there's a tournament or anything else, sometimes you won't go near it for a week. If it weren't for your father, you couldn't—don't you see, dear?—I want you to stand on your own feet."

"Why should I get out and take a living away from somebody who needs it, when we've got more than we can spend anyway? Father doesn't——"

"But think how people respect a man

who makes his own way. Look at Mr. Keene. They all——"

"Yes, Mr. Keene—it's Keene, Keene, Keene, all the time." Jealousy stung him beyond his powers of repression, the first error in tactics of which he had been guilty.

"Do you think so? Well, what have you to say about him?"

"Does he look to be working so hard? You saw him just now. And he's been doing the butterfly like a nineteen-year-old kid for the last two weeks."

She had never before heard Lorne talk with malice.

"Yes, but you ought to see him at his ranch. Dad says Mr. Keene thinks nothing of thirty hours in the saddle, only resting for meals and to change horses. Besides, his fortune is made."

"And we've made ours. Had it twenty years."

"That's different. Mr. Keene keeps right on, Lorne. He's working even when at play. I heard dad laughing because Mr. Keene talked him out of eleven hundred dollars in a deal they had a little while ago."

"Oh, let's forget him," said Lorne testily.

And they finished the ride in sullen silence. As she alighted from the car, Doria permitted herself to say, with the proper frigidity: "Thank you for a very pleasant afternoon."

"May I come out to-night?"

"No; I'm going to the Russells."

"All right!" jerking viciously at the brake.

"Have you decided about joining the ranch party?"

"Yes," he answered.

"So you won't go?"

"I wasn't going. But I am now."

As he went down the street, leaving a swirl of dust, Doria stared after him with a slight smile on her lips.

"He's so nice," she murmured; "but ——" and went slowly into the house.

CHAPTER VI.

Mrs. Walton bore the reputation of being the best-groomed woman in town. She also bore another reputation among those on the outer edge of the circles in which she moved, but it was wholly undeserved. Had not that been so she could scarcely have retained the secure position she enjoyed. Indeed, Fanny Walton divided leadership with Mrs. Billy Gilmour, and was much sought after as mentor and friend by the mothers of marriageable daughters.

Yet nobody could deny that she appreciated male admiration. There could always be found a man who was not Mr. Walton, nor remotely resembling him, tagging at her heels. People merely said: "Who's Fanny Walton's new affinity?" And as they propounded the query frankly in public, you will perceive at once that no importance was attached to these friendships by those who knew.

She was of medium height, with an especially trim figure, and her taste in dress was exquisite. Gray eyes, heavy black hair, and heavy black eyebrows; when she smiled, one saw perfect teeth of dazzling whiteness. To be sure, her complexion had lost the first bloom of youth, but so skillfully did she imitate nature that at a short distance no man could detect the difference. Women could, of course, but Mrs. Walton did not care about women.

On a day she drove downtown in Keene's car, to do some shopping, Riker was at the wheel. Everybody regarded him as her latest catch, and joked Fanny good-humoredly. Nothing of this appeared to bother her husband, who always greeted Riker affably when they chanced to meet. Keene, on his side, was distant toward Walton at first, being wholly unable to comprehend his attitude. Later he accorded him a genial tolerance somewhat lacking in respect.

"There'll be twelve in the bunch," Riker was saying, "not counting you and Harry."

"Harry won't come," she declared positively.

"He won't? What'll we do then?" His disappointment was very real. "I sure counted on you."

"Well, you can count on me," promised Mrs. Walton calmly.

"You mean you'll come anyhow?"

"Of course."

"Would that be"—his tanned face grew darker with a flush—"would that be all right?"

It was so like Keene to come straight out when pricked by curiosity or troubled by doubts that Fanny laughed. This was a boyish trait that she admired in him.

"So you don't want me to do anything I shouldn't?"—her eyes full of mischief. "It's hardly complimentary, but you're a dear, you're so thoughtful. Of course it is all right. You're so funny. But I'd go anyway. Nobody would ever think anything of what I did."

Her serene contempt for public opinion so rattled Keene that he almost ran down an express wagon at a corner, and was roundly cursed for his carelessness.

"Gee," he said admiringly. "Can't that boy swear, though?"

Very casually: "That Stinson child is going, isn't she?"

"I've asked her."

"And her lover—what's his name?—young Halsell?"

She saw him wince.

"He promised to come if he could."

"Promised? Promised to come? Riker Keene, you're an idiot. I'm going to speak right out in meeting—you're an idiot. Here you give invitations to a lot of these youngsters who aren't fit to lace your shoes, and if they accept you're grateful. You, a great, big man who does things. Why—here, stop here. I want to get a wedding present."

He swung the car up to the curb and helped her out. They had stopped in front of a jewelry establishment.

"Are you going to leave me here alone?"

"Why, do you want to come in?"

"Well, it's been my experience," said Riker, grinning, "that when a woman gets inside a shop, you can't never tell when she'll come out. I don't want to hang around here all by myself. And maybe if I'm along you'll hurry."

"Come along," cried Fanny gayly.

The proprietor himself opened the door to them, for he had recognized Keene—the great Mr. Keene, of the Heart and Triangle, whom the Sunday supplements called the mightiest of the cattle barons, and whom the Retail Merchants Association reported A-1 for anything and everything he wanted—be it diamonds, automobiles, or houses. Mrs. Walton, whose husband's credit was not A-1, and to whom clerks politely excused themselves in order to confer with the boss whenever she requested that articles be charged, experienced a novel and delicious sense of security.

She bought a couple of silver bonbon dishes, and ordered them sent. Then she paused in front of a tray of rings and uttered a low exclamation of rapture.

"Look at that," she breathed, "the one in the platinum setting."

Because Keene was there, lolling on a show case and speculating as to why a string of pearls should be worth as much as seventy steers, the clerk hastened to draw out the tray. The proprietor promptly abandoned another customer; this looked like business.

"This one," she said, taking it up delicately and slipping it on, "is the only one I like. It's so beautiful. How much is it?"

The clerk was about to speak up from inspection of a price tag, but his chief froze him dumb with a baleful glance, and himself consulted it.

"This," he purred, "is five hundred and twenty-five dollars."

"Oh, dear, why am I not rich?" pouted Mrs. Walton.

Riker whispered eagerly: "I could make a suggestion——"

"Yes, but don't do it," she cut him off.

"Now, that's a curious coincidence." The proprietor actually indulged in a genuine smile. "Your husband was in here only yesterday, Mrs. Walton, looking at that ring. But he said he couldn't give more than four hundred and fifty for it."

A long and incredulous stare from Mrs. Walton; then a light seemed to break on her, and she beamed. With a swift, indescribably girlish movement, she turned to Keene .

"Lend me twenty-five dollars until I get home, will you? I've got fifty. To think he'd do it—it's so unlike Harry. Maybe—yes, that must be it."

These speculations did not interest Keene. He peeled off the bills from a roll; she noted with amusement that he had a rubber band around the money.

"To-morrow's my birthday," she bubbled happily. "Harry and I had a spat on Sunday—oh, nothing much—at least not much worse than some others. I do believe——"

"Sure he is," assented Riker, but there was lacking the ring of sincerity.

Too overjoyed to detect this, Mrs. Walton handed seventy-five dollars to the proprietor, and said: "Will you please telephone Mr. Walton, and say you've changed your mind, and will let him have that ring for four hundred and fifty?"

"We'll do that at once, Mrs. Walton," came the hearty assurance. "With pleasure."

Greatly cheered, Mrs. Walton tripped out to the car. She was as pink as a young girl. Keene followed, not so elated as he might have been.

"So to-morrow's your birthday?"

"Yes. But don't ask me which one."

"All right. I won't. But I'll tell you what I will do: You tell me who you want, and I'll give a dinner at the Tivoli for you to-morrow night. Is it a go?"

"You're a darling," she cried, and they fell eagerly to discussing details.

They agreed that it should be a dinner dance, and progressive; the hour, eight o'clock.

The first to arrive next night, Fanny found Riker giving final instructions in the dining room to the chef. Keene had engaged the entire mezzanine floor, for they would dance between courses.

"Harry couldn't come at the last minute," she said dispiritedly. "I hurried down to tell you, so you could seat us differently."

"That's all right. But what's the matter? This is no way for a girl to look on her birthday. Why, you're as solemn as an owl."

"Don't!" she begged. "By the way—here's that money you lent me. Thank you!"

He thrust it into his pocket with an embarrassed air.

"Let's see how the ring looks."

"I—I haven't got the ring," came the answer in a faint voice.

Mrs. Walton was fingering the flowers on a table, and her head was lowered.

"How—I—I don't understand," he said helplessly.

By a strong effort she managed to say: "It's quite simple. He gave it to another woman. A—a girl in a stock company at the Majestic. And she's—she's not even pretty."

"Oh, I'm sorry."

So spontaneous and genuine was his sympathy that Fannie choked, and hurriedly sought her handkerchief.

"I'm glad"—her lips quivering—"that you don't see the joke."

The chef hurried toward them with mincing steps, and interrupted with a question. When he had gone back, Riker smote the table near which he stood so heavily with his fist that a glass bounced off and smashed to splinters.

"Don't let it distress you so," she entreated. "It—it isn't the first time. Something—like it—has happened before."

"What sorry hounds some of us are," was all he could find to say.

"Yes. Some men are. Not—not worth shooting, as you say. But there're good ones, too, of course. If you—if you had a wife, I think you would be loyal to her, Mr. Keene."

A tendril of her black hair touched his cheek. In a blue dress slashed with white, she looked very alluring. Keene leaned forward, and one of his hands closed above hers on the table.

"Yes," he said, "if I had a woman like you."

From the reception room sounded the flunky's voice: "Mr. and Mrs. Fisher."

CHAPTER VII.

"Yes, I think you had better go."

"Why, dad?"

"Well, for one thing, you'd enjoy it. And the rest would do you good. It's ridiculous, a girl of your age gadding round every night and getting up at noon. I tell you, your mother never did that. Did you, mother?"

"I thought a party once a month was going some," replied Mrs. Stinson, who had acquired a working knowledge of slang along with auction bridge.

"And you cooked and took care of a house," the colonel reminded her. "It was six o'clock for you, and not eleven."

"I've heard all that before," put in Doria calmly.

They were at breakfast, and she was bewitching in a blue silk kimono, girdled by a golden dragon.

"To hear young folks talk nowadays gives me a pain!" snorted the colonel. "I heard young Tom Hall yesterday blithering about a house party. House party! Why, Tom's father used to keep the butter in a sock, when he had any. House parties! In my day we called those things just plain visiting."

Anxious to divert him: "But I hardly know Mr. Keene."

"Well, your father does," cried the exasperated colonel, "which is more than I can say for a lot of the jumping jacks you herd with. Riker's much too good for this crowd. I'm surprised at Keene. Why, Riker's a man."

"So I had supposed."

"And he runs around with a lot of fool boys and girls. These society people don't amount to anything, Doria."

"Will you have some more marmalade?" inquired Doria sweetly, and the colonel subsided.

"I believe I would go, Doria," said her mother, pouring a second cup of coffee.

"But Mrs. Walton, mother—you know——"

"Fanny is all right, my dear. She goes everywhere."

"She may be, but anyway I think she's bad style."

The colonel listened to this with fast-fading patience. Thrusting back his chair: "You two make me tired. Fanny Walton is a fool in some ways, but she's a good woman. All of Bill Sommers' daughters were good women. It's her husband who's no-account."

"The car's at the door, dad," Doria cooed.

He glared at her a moment, then pinched her ear, and kissed them both good-by.

"When does Keene want you people?" he asked, as he pulled on a dust coat.

"They're going to-morrow night, on the six-forty-five."

"Then, for Heaven's sake, make up your mind. You can't keep people waiting like this, Doria," protested her father. "He might want to ask somebody in your place."

"Oh, I accepted a week ago," his daughter replied tranquilly, and the colonel grew apoplectic.

"Doria!" said her mother in reproach.

"What I don't understand"—tossing a telegram to her father—"is why he should send this to me."

"'Sorry I cannot bring party all way out,'" the colonel read. "'Detained here shipping bunch of stock cattle. Will meet train at Junction.'"

"Humph!" grunted Stinson. "I'm glad to see he's got some sense. He never lets business get away from him, I notice. Keene is a trader."

"But why doesn't he wire Mrs. Walton instead of me?"

"Maybe he has."

She repeated petulantly, yet with a note of interrogation: "I don't see why he should send that to me."

"Probably sent every one of 'em a wire." The colonel chuckled. "That would be just like Keene. He never will write letters. His spelling's rotten. Worse than mine. And he puts capitals in the wrong place. So he telegraphs. Costs him thousands every year."

Doria pushed her plate away, and picked up the telegram. Something had displeased her.

"If he thinks more of a lot of cows

than he does of his guests, then he'd better stick to the cows," said she. "He looks more at home among them, anyway."

"Steady, steady," laughed her father. "You've got a terrible temper, child. You'll have to learn to correct that."

"Oh——" began Doria angrily, stamping her foot.

She did not finish, for her father fled precipitately. That was always the way. He might reprimand and scold, but when the red flag of danger showed in Doria's cheeks, and her brown eyes darkened, the colonel's nerve failed, and he wilted. He had been afraid of Doria since she was five; he could never quite forget the day on which she held her breath in a fit of childish rage until seized with convulsions.

"Doria," said her mother, when he had gone, "come here."

Wondering, the girl went close to her mother's chair, and rested one hand on its arm.

"Is Lorne Halsell going to Mr. Keene's ranch?"

"Yes—I think so. He's been asked."

Mrs. Stinson scrutinized her a while before she said: "I'm sorry."

"What's the matter with Lorne?" exclaimed Doria resentfully, straightening.

"I hoped you'd outgrow it."

"Outgrow what? Oh, I hate these innuendoes and—we're nothing but good friends."

She crossed to the sideboard, picked up a silver cream pitcher, and replaced it with an angry movement.

"Is there anything between you and Lorne, Doria?"

"Of course not!"

"Is that the truth? Come here, and let me look at you."

But she would not even turn her head, and her mother sighed.

"I'd like to see you marry a man like Mr. Keene, Doria. He's so safe."

"Mr. Keene?" Doria turned on her in amazement, mixed with relief. "Why, he's old enough to be my father."

"He's thirty-six," said her mother evenly. "And your father is twenty years older than I."

She glanced at her reflection in the shining coffeepot with great complacence and patted her thick hair. Mrs. Stinson was a comely woman of forty years and one hundred and sixty pounds. Doria gaped a moment; put both hands to her chin, and giggled.

"Why, of all things——"

"Don't do anything foolish about Lorne," Mrs. Stinson cautioned, with an air of finality, as she finished her coffee. Then she gathered her letters and rose from the table.

"I must get ready for Mrs. Gilmour's luncheon. What'll you wear on the train?"

"My gray suit," answered Doria shortly.

"Yes, you look very girlish in that."

Her mother rustled from the room, and Doria, after waiting until she had ascended the stairs, went to the telephone in the hall.

"Is that you, Lorne? Huh-huh! No, we'd better not. Why didn't you—— I can't. No, dad won't let me. All right. But it's the last time. Huh? Yes, at the Main Street entrance. One sharp, now. You're always late. Yes—no—yes. Good-by."

Having rung off, she remained near the telephone, thoughtfully eying the rug. Then she looked up and caught sight of herself in a mirror, and smiled. Smoothing her skirt at her hips, she turned first to one side, then the other.

She was good to look upon—a wealth of dark-red hair, brown eyes fringed by long, black lashes, heavy eyebrows, and a milky skin. And in figure the full bloom of Southern womanhood at twenty.

"Riker Keene," she murmured, as though testing its sound.

Mention of his name seemed to switch her thoughts in another direction. The smile vanished. She regarded her image with somber disfavor.

"What did mother want to say that for?" she exclaimed, under her breath.

Again she looked at herself, but without conscious recognition.

"Oh," she burst out, "is that all there is in life? Marry, marry, marry—pick out the safe and comfortable man.

Make him a good home and bear children for him, and—oh, I wish I was dead. If only Lorne——"

She was biting her under lip. Whatever her thoughts, they shook her so that she trembled. And once she repeated again: "Riker Keene." Then she cried in a passionate whisper: "I never will. He'll never get me!"

CHAPTER VIII.

It was the gray time before dawn, and roosters were hoarsely hurling long-distance challenges across town when the ranch party alighted from the sleeper at the Junction and climbed into a bus. The air was chill, with a biting wind, and their spirits were at lowest ebb, for they had been routed out at four.

"I wonder where Mr. Keene is?" asked Mrs. Walton irritably. "He said he would meet us here."

Her voice sounded more than usually vibrant in the expectant hush that preceded sunup. She sniffed and wrinkled her nose, for the bus had an abominable, stale smell of damp leather and cigars.

"Well, I swan!" answered the driver, slapping his leg in sudden recollection. "If I didn't go off and forget to call for him! It's like he'll meet us at the other depot, ma'am. He's at the hotel."

"Well, I never!" "Really, to leave us here in a perfect wilderness." "Suppose we miss him?" "I was never so uncomfortable in my life."

"All we've got to do," Halsell suggested, "is to ride across town. I've been here before. He'll pick us up at the other station."

Having shown them the way out, Lorne considered his duty done, and retired into his turned-up collar for another forty winks. They drove through echoing streets, the windows rattling and banging. Frequently the driver lashed his horses. Doria leaned back in a corner and closed her eyes. The others sat in glum silence, except Anniee and Dave Scoles, who talked in undertones.

"Whoa!" bellowed the driver, stopping his team in mid-career.

He wheeled on the jump and backed up to the station. The tracks were bare. Opening the door, he said in a slightly anxious voice: "Do you know, ladies, I do believe that dog-gone train has went!"

"You believe it has?" echoed Lorne. "You know mighty well it has."

"Well, this is too much," said Mrs. Walton resignedly, sinking back in her seat.

"What'll we do now?"

"Where'll we go?"

"How did we happen to miss it?"

The men in the bus shuffled their feet, and stared stupidly at the driver and at one another. None of them seemed able to comprehend the situation.

"Isn't there another train soon?" inquired Lorne, first to recover his wits.

"Not till to-morrow morning." The driver addressed his answer to Mrs. Walton, as though feeling that he was responsible to her.

"This is awful," Doria complained fretfully. "I'm so tired I'm just sick. What on earth does Mr. Keene mean by it?"

"Where is he? That's what I want to know. Why don't you go and bring him?" Mrs. Walton demanded of the driver.

"I'll go telephone."

They all descended grumblingly from the bus, and waited in a disconsolate group while the driver ran into the station. A weak light sputtered above their heads, revealing tracks and cinders, and a small restaurant where a man in his shirt sleeves was quartering pies.

Young Tom Hall suggested rather hopelessly: "We might get a bite to eat."

"Isn't there somebody who can do something?" It was Doria, and she turned imperiously on Lorne.

"What is there to do?" he replied, making no effort to stifle a yawn. "We'll just have to wait until Keene comes."

"I suppose," she retorted, with scath-

ing sarcasm, "that the whole world must wait on Mr. Keene."

"It seems to out here," he said tranquilly.

Hard on his words came a clatter of horses' shoes on brick pavement, and they espied a hack careening toward them from town. The driver was beating his team lustily.

"Here he comes!" cried Mrs. Walton in relief.

"How do you know it's Mr. Keene?" inquired Doria.

"I just know." And she gave a tiny smile.

"Oh, indeed!" said Doria, growing rigid.

Spurting sand and gravel in the violence of its stop, the hack disgorged Riker Keene.

"I'm terribly sorry," he said in his strident voice, coming swiftly toward them. Nobody knew quite what to reply.

Then the bus man emerged from the station, wearing a propitiating grin.

"I sure did forget you, Mr. Keene."

"You're fired," Riker told him sharply.

"Fired, am I? Who fired me?"

"I did. I bought this line coming down from the hotel."

"Oh!" Doria ejaculated.

"Is that so, Mr. Robinson?" the driver asked of the man who had driven Riker to the station.

"I reckon it is," was the uneasy reply.

The driver hesitated, seemingly in two minds whether to fall upon Keene or take his medicine. He unbuckled and rebuckled a bit of the harness, and at last remarked stoically: "Well, if I'm fired, I'm fired. But that's playing it low-down."

"Please, Mr. Keene," breathed Doria, feeling sudden pity, and going close to her host.

"He disobeyed orders," answered Keene harshly, "and he's fired."

Rudely turning his back on her, he went bareheaded to Mrs. Walton, and offered his excuses for failure to meet them. She began to pur in her soft, caressing voice.

"If you'll wait here a minute, I'll go and see about a train," he ended. "Or, hold on. You must be tired. Let's tackle this lunch counter, and get some sandwiches."

He led the way to the restaurant, with the entire party trooping at his heels. Their absolute dependence made Doria feel very small and insignificant.

The mustached individual in shirt sleeves eyed the new arrival dubiously, and wiped his fingers on his apron.

"What'll yez have?" was his stern inquiry.

"Sandwiches," Keene ordered. "Cut 'em thin, Dutch. And coffee. Draw it mild. Anybody want eggs?"

"Yes, I do," Dave Scoles spoke up.

Dutch treated him to a contemptuous sneer, and asked, out of the side of his mouth: "Will I shuck them aiggs for you, bo?"

"Scrambled, please," Dave answered meekly, and Dutch yelled through an aperture in a partition: "Eve and Adam on a rock. Wreck 'em!"

While he was slicing ham, the party dawdled in front of the counter, inspecting the mince pies and doughnuts displayed on a shelf. There was a small table in front, with a spotted cloth barely covering it, and Mrs. Walton sat down wearily. She reflected that in the final accounting, when the last trump sounded, her sufferings now would surely be found on the credit side of the ledger.

The very sight of the place dissipated Doria's appetite, and she was obliged to go outside. Instantly guessing what was amiss, Keene followed.

"Aren't you hungry?" he laughed.

"I—I was. But those pies—I think I'd better wait out here."

Riker chuckled and took hold of her arm.

"Come along with me," said he. "I've got to go get a train."

"You say it as if you were going to buy a cigar," she answered, brightening.

The waiting room in the station was empty, but a lamp shed a wan light. Keene, pounding on the closed wicket: "Hey, wake up in there!"

Agent, opening it reluctantly: "Well, what is it now?"

"I want a special train."

Agent: "Say, which one of the Vanderbilts are you, anyhow? Run along, brother, and sober up."

"You wire for a train right now."

Agent, attempting to close the wicket: "They ain't got any. Special train! Say, I've seen a man locked up for less'n that."

Keene thrust his arm in, thereby frustrating the agent's design to end the parley, and said in a soothing, businesslike tone: "Just wire your general superintendent that Riker Keene wants a special of an engine and one coach here by ten o'clock."

Assailed by doubts, the agent queried: "Do you mean it?"

"Don't I look it?"

"Keene?" mumbled the agent, sorely troubled. "What Keene?"

"Tell him Keene, of the Heart."

"All right," the agent consented, still reluctant, but partially convinced, and he turned to his key.

The scene made Doria smile, especially the grandiloquent way in which Riker uttered "Keene, of the Heart," as though that were a talisman to smooth out any difficulty. Yet she experienced an odd thrill, too. He was so competent—so adequate to every occasion.

"Now let's go back," Keene said jovially. "I can't leave those poor people in Dutch's hands."

The party had already emerged, and was strolling loosely up and down under the light.

"What next?" cried Tom Hall, refreshed by two cups of coffee and a cigarette.

"We'll get into this hack and go up to the hotel. You ladies can sleep for three or four hours."

"Oh, goody!" cried Annielee Carver.

They trundled back to town, and he engaged rooms. All except Halsell and Keene went to lie down. The latter dug out a telegrapher and began dispatching messages.

When his guests came downstairs at half past eight, they found Riker waiting for them at the door of the dining room, clean-shaved, fresh, and more youthful than his younger companions. They went in to breakfast, and none save Mrs. Walton wondered how he had contrived to provide so dainty a meal. Presently the clerk entered, ushering the station agent.

"Your train will be here at nine-thirty, Mr. Keene," reported the agent, with much respect. "Here's the answer."

Riker skimmed over it, grunted, and shot at him: "All right."

"Oh, you Jack of Hearts!" Doria giggled.

CHAPTER IX.

By eleven o'clock they were passing through a rolling, browned country, broken by brick-red gullies. Frequently they came upon cattle, that stared composedly at the train. Doria wondered what they found to live on.

The bare soil showed red through the scant, short grass; but mesquite trees were plentiful. She saw a cow eating the pods. Jack rabbits would crouch, with ears laid flat, and then scamper off, hind quarters flirting like those of a running antelope. And prairie dogs—plump, alert little fellows—would rear on their hind legs, dip thrice as though signaling, and chatter insults at the passengers gaping through the windows.

Then across a whining bridge fifty feet above a wide, dry river bed—this was the Salt Fork of the Brazos. Mrs. Walton wanted to know where the river was. On and on through bleak, flat stretches, with high buttes rising on their left like mushrooms. As they took a curve, far ahead showed a line of sandstone bluff, stretching to the limit of their vision—the walls of Blanco Cañon, which marked the edge of the Staked Plains.

They flashed by a wire fence.

"We're on my range now," Keene announced.

"Gracious, are we?" cried Mrs. Walton, peering out the window, as if she anticipated a complete change of landscape.

The train rocked and clacked for another hour.

"Still on your little place?" asked Lorne.

"Yes. This train quits in the middle of it. We'll be there in"—consulting his watch—"an hour and ten minutes."

At their next stop, which was in front of three plain, square frame buildings, a man sauntering on the platform recognized Keene, and came to the car window.

"Oh, excuse me," said he in some confusion, "I didn't see there was ladies."

"Hello, Sam. Want to see me?"

"Nothing partic'lar, Riker. I've got some steers, but I ain't anxious about them."

"Huh-huh," said Keene carelessly. "What are they, Sam?"

"Twos," replied Sam. "They's in fine shape, too, Riker. They's fat."

"Well, I'm sort of busy, and got more'n I can handle. No, I'm not in the market just now, Sam."

And Keene resumed his interrupted conversation with Mrs. Walton. Yet Doria divined that he was not through with Sam, that he had one ear cocked for him.

Just as the conductor yelled all aboard, Keene called to him casually: "How many you got, Sam?"

"Seven hundred."

"What d'you hold 'em at?"

"Forty-two," said Sam.

"Too high. Prices have gone off, Sam. I might go forty."

"You've bought something," yelled Sam. "When'll you take 'em?"

"Tenth of next month," howled Keene, leaning far out to make himself heard.

Doria bent toward him, with her eyes sparkling.

"How much will that be?"

"Twenty-eight thousand dollars. Why?"

"No wonder," she answered, drawing a long breath, "that dad said you were a wonderful trader."

"Did your father say that?" Keene inquired, pleased as a boy. "So the colonel said that, did he?"

Shortly after one o'clock they arrived at their destination, where an automobile and a four-mule team were waiting to convey them to headquarters.

"Only sixteen miles more," Riker told the tired travelers, and went to arrange the loading of their luggage.

The fagged guests heaved a sigh. Some of them piled into the car to wait, others climbed aboard the hack. Mrs. Walton, Doria, and Tom Hall followed in Keene's wake to the baggage car, and watched him direct operations. Several times he lent his shoulder to the hoisting of a heavy trunk.

"He always does the useful things," Doria mused, her glance involuntarily roving to the other men, to none of whom it occurred to proffer help.

"I see we're going to be cheerful," remarked the observant Mrs. Walton, pointing her parasol at a case of liquids.

Doria drew Tom Hall aside, and whispered: "Is that whisky?"

"I'm not familiar with the sight or smell of what is generally known as liquor," replied Tom gravely, "but it listens like it. She gurgles when she's moved."

"What does he want with that stuff at a ranch party? None of you boys drink, do you?"

"Not me. It's the proper stunt nowadays to be on the wagon. I've been on for a year, and Dave never touches a thing since he had that mix-up with the trolley car."

Keene, busily engaged though he was, caught the drift of the colloquy. He paused in the work and motioned to Doria to draw near.

"Would you rather I didn't send this out, Miss Stinson?" he asked.

"Why, what put that into your head?"

"Would you rather," he repeated, with a scarcely perceptible inclination toward Lorne, "that I didn't send this out?"

Doria flushed and looked the other way. She was strongly tempted to assure him that it made not the slightest difference, but the decision being put up to her thus squarely, she did not flinch.

"Yes," she said steadily, "I would—personally. But you must consider the others."

"Then it won't go," he answered. "I'll leave it here."

Mrs. Walton approached in time to hear the concluding sentence.

"Now, I wonder," she speculated as Riker went off, followed by Doria and Tom, "what that girl is up to. The young she-stuff of this generation, as he calls it, is wiser than my grandmother."

When all was made ready, Keene took the wheel of the car. One of his cowboys was on the seat of the mule hack.

"All aboard?" he called.

"Hi, wait a minute." The agent came running.

"Say, Mr. Keene," said he, "there's a man here that wants to see you. Jenks, he says his name is. Here he is now."

A squat, shambling individual in a wide felt hat approached the car and tilted his headpiece awkwardly.

"Hello, Riker!"

"Howdy, Dave!"

Jenks rested one hand on the door of the car, and dropped a solemn observation on the scarcity of grass. He did not seem to be in any hurry.

"Yes, it's poor," Keene assented. "Want to see me, Dave? I'm right busy, but I'll be in town day after to-morrow."

"Have to pull out on the two-thirty. You got any two-year-old steers, Riker?"

"Nary a one fit to sell. Yes, I have, too; I'd 'most forgot 'em. Got seven hundred fat ones, Dave."

Dave stirred a clump of dirt with his toe, because the ladies confused him, while he tried to marshal his usual trade tricks. Then he asked: "What'll you take for 'em?"

"They're worth forty-five, these are. Some of those Diamond Bar steers. You remember—you got a bunch of them last year."

"Tol'able high," Jenks murmured, fishing out a knife with intent to whittle on the car door. Riker made no movement to prevent him, although he perceived his design, and the car was new. Before the blade could touch the polished wood, Doria said "Oh!" very softly, but it was sufficient to distract Mr. Jenks, and he desisted. The incident tendered to rattle him further.

"Well, we're late. So long, Dave. Look me up when you get back."

"Say," said Jenks anxiously, "I'll go you forty-four fifty on them."

"Maybe," replied Keene reflectively, "we can trade."

When a man says "We can trade" in a certain tone, it means the consummation of a deal in cowland, and Dave inquired when he could get the cattle.

"Tenth of next month," Keene replied, and they left the buyer in a cloud of dust.

"Seven hundred times four-fifty is three thousand one hundred and fifty dollars," Doria computed aloud, and Keene grinned back at her. "Gracious, you never even saw those cattle."

"No, and I won't have to put up a cent. It's a tol'able fair trade," Riker admitted, with one of his self-satisfied smiles.

CHAPTER X.

The personnel of the party does not concern us especially, aside from the chaperon, Doria, Halsell, and Keene, but a numerical feature is significant. There were five couples, without Mrs. Walton and the host; and any one can see with half an eye what fine possibilities of complications offered.

The Heart headquarters were built on a fringe of small hills and in a ravine that split them. They consisted of three adobe houses that had once held as many families under a former owner—each topped a hill—and in the ravine a mess house where the outfit ate, a bunk house where they slept, a commissary of stone, four shacks that served on occasions for extra sleeping quarters, stables, and corrals. The whole constituted a no inconsiderable village. There was a lane leading from the stables to the mess house, called Broadway.

Riker assigned the largest of the

houses on the hills to the ladies. Another was temporarily fitted up for an eating house. This consisted of dining room and kitchen. In front of its porch he had built a wide platform for dancing. Nobody guessed that his freighters had hauled the lumber for it sixty miles.

"You boys'll have to sleep in the bunk house," Riker informed the men. "Each of you can pick out his own bed —there's blankets and sheets. And say —see that board shack under the windmill? Well, that's a shower bath."

His outfit was absent on a round-up, with the exception of three punchers detained for fence work and riding the thoroughbred pasture, who quietly, but with much expedition, vacated the bunk house and carried their blankets over to one of the shacks. When they chanced to meet any of the visitors they were polite enough in a heavy, voiceless way, but obviously suspicious of them, too. As a matter of fact, they never really forgave Keene for the party, and Red Williams had subsequently to whip two husky gentlemen from a neighboring county who dubbed the boss of the Heart, "Dress-suit Keene."

"Bad news," said Riker late on the afternoon of their arrival, to Mrs. Walton and the girls, who were settling down in the Roost. "Lost my cook. Got drunk and tried to shoot up the place, the dog-gone rascal!"

The bearing of this on their own situation did not hit them for several minutes, despite his apologetic misery.

"Me and one of the boys," he went on, "will get supper to-night. And I'll try to round up another cook to-morrow. But they're awful scarce."

Cried Doria, all out of breath in her eagerness: "We'll turn in and help."

Every one impetuously fell in with the suggestion—Annielee clapped her hands over the prospect, and decided in a flash that her lavender would look most becoming; Dave Scoles liked her in lavender—every one approved except Mrs Walton, and she smiled demurely. Being the only one there with experience in washing dishes, she was wondering just how long it would be before they were ripe for scratching and pulling hair.

"No," smiled Keene, skeptical, but pleased nevertheless, "not to-day. You'd best rest up. To-morrow you can start in if you feel so eager for it. But I'll let you help wash dishes. Are you game? Good! Well, I'll run along. Those other boys are making themselves beautiful. I mustn't let 'em get ahead of me."

A whispered consultation took place on his exit, and Mrs. Walton called after him to know why they could not get water from the taps.

"I'll see," Keene promised.

At the gate he noted that the windmill which supplied the Roost was idle, and shinned up the ladder to fix it. The platform was fully forty feet from the ground.

"What're you doing?" called Doria from the door.

"Want to help?" he answered.

Doria promptly ran down the path.

"Nobody can dare me!" she cried.

"Me, either!" said Annielee. Scoles was in sight.

And the two began swarming up to join him.

"Two at once is enough," he warned the others. "Careful where you put your feet now. There—hang on tight. I tell you what—it's great to be hung on to."

Doria, who had grasped him around the waist to steady herself against the breeze, immediately let go. She wavered, and Keene threw an arm over her shoulders. With the other around Annielee, who did not seem aware of it, he held them tight and laughed.

"You two children," he said, paternal toward them for the first time in his life, "had best go down. You're dizzy. I can see it in your eyes. But you're plucky girls."

"I believe we had," Doria agreed shakily.

Two of his cowboys, climbing the hill to get orders for the morrow, saw the tableau and halted, doubtful about advancing, ashamed to retreat. They grinned sheepishly, and their embarrassment diverted the girls.

Said Keene, suddenly sober: "Now, you'd best go down. It's mighty risky up here on this platform."

Indeed, the frail structure swayed perceptibly. So down they went, very cautiously and without thought of appearances. And they waved friendly hands toward the watching punchers.

"Them gals," confided Mrs. Ducey to her neighbor the following Sunday, at church sixteen miles away, "is fly! I tell you they must be. Didn't you hear? Why, they was dancing up on top of the windmill, right in front of the cowboys. Think of it. And"—Mrs. Ducey swelled her figure with a deep breath, tucking her chin sideways—"there was a high wind, too, Mis' Turner."

CHAPTER XI.

"I want to sleep all the time," yawned Mrs. Walton.

"It's the air. That's the way this country affects one at first."

She swallowed another yawn.

"Where on earth is everybody, anyway?"

"Search me. They're around somewhere, I suppose—or I hope," said Keene dismally. He lighted a cigar and nursed his knees.

They were sitting alone on the steps of the Roost. Level with their feet were the tops of the cottonwoods in the ravine. A stream purled somewhere through it. Beyond the ravine the ground rose to a high ridge; and then the open range, vague and ghostlike under a silver haze.

An owl hooted. Then from the south reverberated the mournful yelp of a coyote. Zack, the great staghound that lived in the commissary, answered in a furious bay.

Mrs. Walton eased her back against a post and pretended not to be watching him as she remarked: "It looks as if this was going to be a twos-ing party."

"It does look that way," he admitted calmly.

"After all the trouble you went to, to build that platform, and everything," she continued. "It seems a pity that they won't use it. They won't even stop to listen to the graphophone."

He grunted mournful assent.

"Why can't they stick together? It's a fine party when they go off two by two, and never see one another from supper until bedtime."

Understanding quite well the phase of his grievance that rankled worst, Mrs. Walton did not reply. Presently she began to croon a song, and Keene, fearful lest he might say something he would regret, changed the subject. They talked indifferently for an hour. Then Keene inquired again, standing up to stare around at the dim outlines of knolls and mesquite trees: "Where in Sam Hill can they all be?"

"I suppose," Mrs. Walton said lazily, "that as chaperon I ought to keep an eye on these young people. But what's the use? If they needed it I would. They don't. I know them all so well."

Her host was in no wise quieted by this assurance. He resumed his seat, but fidgeted. They could hear murmuring from a knoll to their left, and once, low laughter from the ravine. She made some indifferent remark, but he paid no attention. A repetition of it in a higher key was equally ineffective; Riker was engrossed in his own broodings.

"Come," she said, nettled; "I see that they're worrying you. Do you want to know where they are? I'll show you one couple, at any rate."

Somewhat at a loss to account for this move, Riker followed her over toward the eating house. Back of it was a gentle slope, terminating in a ledge of rock above a spring. Mrs. Walton guided him straight for the spring, but halted a short distance off.

There on the rock sat a man and a girl, clearly outlined in the moonlight. They were very close together. So absorbed were the two in each other that it was not until Mrs. Walton spoke that either became conscious of observation.

"It's ten o'clock, you two," Mrs. Walton reminded them good-naturedly. "Only half an hour more."

"All right," came from Doria. Then she moved abruptly and stood up.

"Is that you, Mr. Keene?"

"Yes," Keene rapped out.

He turned sharp around on his heels, and said loudly to Mrs. Walton: "Let's go."

Was it contentment engendered by the soft languor of the Southern night, or was it feline triumph that brought a smile to Mrs. Walton's lips as they sauntered back?

"I wonder," she said ingenuously, "if they'll ever marry?"

Keene took time to get a grip on himself before he answered: "Why not?"

"Well, they've been sweethearts so long. She's always been crazy about Lorne. And you know how it is—girls so seldom marry their first loves."

One of his hands clenched in an impatient gesture, but he restrained himself. He asked her evenly: "Is he any good?"

"Lorne's a dear boy, but—do you mean will he ever amount to anything? Oh, no. He has a fatal weakness—runs in the family, you know."

"No. I didn't know. Booze?"

"Yes; he drinks.'"

"So I thought," Riker grumbled. Then he added: "But I can't help liking the boy."

"He's the nicest boy I know," Mrs. Walton agreed. "Nobody could help liking him. Lorne's always so thoughtful and considerate. But he will go off on these awful tears. The last one was about a month ago, and he smashed his car all to pieces. I think he sprained his ankle, too."

That brought a reminiscent smile from Keene.

"Annielee told me that Doria threatened never to see him again unless he promised faithfully to leave it alone for good. He has kept his promise so far."

"Hum!" said Riker, with a comical side look at her. "A month."

"He may, though," she defended stoutly.

"Yes, he may. But I've had some experience with drunks in my day, Mrs. Walton, and I've only known one to quit. And ol' Pete Gilpin could have quit eating if he'd made up his mind to it."

They returned to the Roost, and sat down again on the porch. Still none of the young people gave sign of coming in. After a while Keene suggested that they play the graphophone; the music might attract them, he urged; but Mrs. Walton demurred.

"You don't want to bother talking to me. That's what's the matter."

"Nonsense!"

"If you're so bored," she insisted, "go to bed. I'll round these children up."

Keene flapped a hand as though brushing aside trivialities, and continued stargazing. For a space she watched him—studied the harsh outline of nose and chin, and the placid strength of his face in repose. At last she stirred, and he roused to his whereabouts.

"Do you remember," she asked reluctantly, "what I told you about—the ring—the night of your dinner?"

He would have stopped her, but she went on: "Well, we've agreed—that is to say—Harry and I will separate."

There was silence between them while Keene digested this announcement in all its bearings. It was patent that the idea made him uncomfortable.

"Does that mean—a divorce?"

"It depends," was the slow reply. He could hear how rapid was her breathing; she was keeping control of herself only by an effort.

"Depends upon what?"

"I haven't decided whether to or not." The look with which she answered his through the half dark was timid as a girl's.

It made Keene nervous. He took another pull on his cigar, and laid the stub down on the edge of the steps, with a foresight that was habitual with him. Wiping his lips, he said deliberately: "And do you remember what I said that night of our dinner?"

"How—could I forget?"

"Well, I say it again now. You divorce Harry, and we'll——"

For the life of him he could not get out the word. Marriage had always

seemed so sacred to Keene that a proposal in this fashion stuck in his throat.

"To-morrow," she retorted jestingly, "you wouldn't ask me that. It's the air out here. Or—perhaps what we saw at the spring?"

Yet her eyes were searching his yearningly. The reminder of what he had seen at the spring was enough.

"You get your divorce from him," Keene went on, and he was very much in earnest, "and we'll marry. You go over to Europe and I'll join you there. It'll make less talk."

She was trembling so that he took pity.

"Do you—really want me?"

"I want you."

"When did you know?" the words fluttering from her throat.

The question provoked a sharp scrutiny from Riker.

"I always—liked—you. No—more than that. But I didn't know until to-night."

"Ah!" she said, drawing a long breath. "I was afraid so."

After a minute one of her hands reached out and rested on his. Keene was not used to the near presence of women, and the warm contact set his heart pounding.

He bent forward swiftly, but she held him off.

"I will—once," she said, "If you'll promise never to do it again until—until we meet in Europe."

"All right," he agreed huskily.

Next instant their lips met in a long kiss.

CHAPTER XII.

Lord of a million acres, tallying his cattle by the scores of thousands, Keene had yet to perform on his own ranch many petty tasks which you and I would have servants do for us. That was because servants could not be had.

He could hire men to do menial tasks, but they were not menials. Aside from drawing his pay, they were on equal footing with the owner, and they expected willingness from him to tackle the jobs he exacted of them. Had Keene ever intimated by the slightest sign that he considered himself above performance of any work that fell to them, they would instantly have refused to do it also. One man was as good as another out there, except when he was a little better.

For one thing, Riker had always to saddle his own horse, and usually hitched or unhitched the teams he drove. Should a cowboy chance to be dawdling near by, he might assist or he might not. If he failed to do so, Riker took no notice, but scored one against him for laziness in his mental ledger. That was where Keene carried all his business. His trading ran into a million a year, and he kept no books.

Once upon a time, finding his bank account unaccountably shy over sixteen thousand dollars, Keene spent an entire night trying to recall how this chanced. In the morning he remembered a pair of overalls left with the chuck wagon on the round-up a month previously. In the hip pocket of the overalls he found a check for sixteen thousand three hundred dollars received for a bunch of heifers, which he had entirely forgotten. They always told this on Keene to prove it was luck that made him successful.

Arriving at the corrals late in the afternoon of the third day with a pair of gray mules to a buggy, he helped Mrs. Walton down, and proceeded to turn the team out. The Merry Widow, as Doria had christened her, perched on the tongue of a wagon and jiggled her heels.

Shortly came a rawboned, hairy man from the shack next to the bunk house, walking with the peculiar rigidity of the "stove-up" puncher. His hat was on the back of his head, and he didn't care a hoot. Establishing himself near Keene, he watched him remove the collar, but made no offer to assist. The boss glanced at him and grunted a salutation.

"Say, Keene," spoke up the tall individual, with sandpaper in his tone, "I'm getting sick of this. They've been telephoning out here from town nigh a dozen times to find out if you don't

want a cook. Them fellers are after my job. Am I fired or ain't I?"

Mrs. Walton stopped swinging her feet.

"Hadn't you best wait till I tell you you're fired? There's no sense in hunting for trouble."

"No, I hadn't better wait. Do you think I'm a-going to lie around here and have a lot of loafers get after my job right under my nose? What do you aim to do, anyhow?"

One of the mules was an obstinate beast, and tried to jerk loose from Keene. His good humor vanished.

"Whoa, confound you! Stand still! Terry, I've just got one thing to say to you. Wait till you're fired before you let out a roar. Now, run along." Stepping toward the red-mustached person, he wagged a forefinger under his nose. "I'll ramrod my own business in my own way, Terry. And nobody will tell me how to run it, neither. See? Don't you ever forget that."

The other quailed before the concentrated anger in Keene's eyes. He looked toward Mrs. Walton, who was serenely regarding the horizon, kicked some gravel uncertainly with the toe of his boot, muttered something, and betook himself off.

"And say," called the boss, "you quit drinking, too. I won't stand for drinking on this ranch."

"I ain't been drinking," came the stout denial.

"You're full as an owl right now," Riker retorted.

As he disappeared into his shack, Terry was mumbling sullenly.

"I'm sorry you had to hear that, ma'am," Keene apologized.

"Oh, I enjoyed it. The next time I want to discharge a cook, Riker, will you do it for me?"

"You know our contract," he laughed. "That's the fellow who shot up the place when I was away. I'd fire him, only he's been with me so long. Reckon I'll have to put him over on the Crawfish."

He led the mules through a gate into the horse pasture, and returned to her side, carrying their bridles over one arm. Mrs. Walton was staring past him.

"Mercy," she breathed. "Here he is again."

Terry was advancing on them swiftly, walking on the balls of his feet, a rifle in his hands. He was panting, and his eyes were wild. Ten yards away he shouted: "No man can talk to me like you done, Keene."

"Put down that gun!"

"I'm a-going to kill you, you——"

With the words he jerked back the lever, throwing a cartridge into place, and raised the weapon. Not a hurried movement did Keene make, nor did he show any trepidation. Depositing the bridles in Mrs. Walton's passive hands, he went toward the maddened cook leisurely, and without anger.

"Terry," he said in an earnest voice, "any one who will shoot another in cold blood is a cowardly cur. I always thought you were a game man."

"I am a game man. I am a game man. You keep off," whined the cook, his rifle wavering uncertainly over Keene's figure.

The cowman did not hesitate, but continued to advance, his eyes on those of the drink-crazed Terry.

"No man who's a game man would kill another without even giving him a chance," said he, in a dispassionate, argumentative tone.

"Keep off!" shouted the cook, his finger trembling on the trigger.

"Terry"—Keene was now within ten feet of him; he seemed more grieved than shaken—"I always thought you had pluck. Here I've been your best friend. And look!"

"I am a game man," the cook asseverated quaveringly. "I am a game man."

And then abruptly he clicked the hammer, banged the butt of the rifle on the ground, and burst into sobs.

"I can't do it! I can't!" he groaned. "Go get a gun so I can kill you!"

The boss stepped close to him and placed a friendly hand on his shoulder.

"There, there," he said kindly, as one might talk to a wayward child. "I

knew you wouldn't shoot me, Terry. Why, me and you have been friends for years. Don't you remember when you were sick and broke, boy? Here, let me take that gun. That's a good boy."

The puncher surrendered the weapon, and dashed a hand across his eyes, sniffling.

"Now go and lie down," Riker advised, "and we'll forget all about this. You're not fired, Terry. I'll give you the camp over on the Crawfish. Cut out a mount and go over there to-morrow."

"You're the only friend I ever had," gulped the cook, groping for his hand. Keene returned the pressure and patted him on the back. Then Terry walked off, his shoulders still heaving. Mrs. Walton saw him cast himself down behind the bunk house.

"You're white as a sheet," smiled Riker, rejoining her.

She did not reply at once. Then—— "I'm frozen stiff!" she confessed. "I couldn't even scream. Oh, thank Heaven he didn't do it."

"Pshaw! He was just a little excited. Terry is one of the best men I've got. That's what booze does to these boys. I never let them bring it on the ranch."

Together they started to climb the long hill to the Roost. In difficult places, Riker gave her his hand, or caught her familiarly by the elbow. Mrs. Walton welcomed this assistance.

"Oh, if I could only live my life over again."

The exclamation seemed wrung from her. Keene, who had been pondering the episode with Terry, did not catch it, and asked: "What did you say, ma'am?"

"Nothing. Don't ever call me ma'am, Riker. You'd think I was fifty."

"Not to look at you," he assured her admiringly. "Say, Mrs. Walton, best not say anything about this to those girls."

"Why not?"

"Well, it would only scare 'em. Promise?"

She promised, but was not proof against Doria's inquisitiveness and persistence when the girl observed how distrait she was in dressing. However, Mrs. Walton in turn swore Doria to secrecy.

At dinner, which the men had cooked from canned goods and eggs and coffee, Riker was especially jovial. The largeness of his manner, which grated on Doria's nerves in town, became him out here. It seemed to fit the setting.

"We'll have a new cook to-morrow, boys and girls," he cried. "So this is the last night for washing dishes."

"Hooray!" shouted Annielee, and beat a tattoo on a glass with a fork.

"What's the matter?" whispered Keene of Doria.

"Nothing. Why?"

"You're so absent-minded. And you've been staring at me so hard. Don't you like this collar? It's the latest thing, they told me in town."

She replied: "The collar's all right. I was just wondering."

"Wondering what?"

"If any one could ever get to really know you."

"I'm plain as a blank page," he chuckled.

Doria replied doubtfully: "I don't know about that."

CHAPTER XIII.

An opal-blue haze enveloped the cañon when Doria and Keene drew rein on the crest of a ridge next morning. The rims of two outstanding buttes pushed, dark and sullen, above it. The sun was only an hour high, and gilded the line of cap rock in narrow slants, through rifts in dirty clouds.

There were hills to their left, and back of the hills the grim wall of Blanco, above which were the plains. Around the base of their ridge, thin mists were shredding before the sun. The swelling bosoms of the hills glowed coldly under it. And over all was the awesome calm of the perpetual.

"Oh!" escaped softly from Doria.

"You bet!" Riker agreed in his vibrating bass. "This is what I call living. I tell you, Miss Doria, a man gets mighty close to—to things, out here.

All that back yonder where we just come from, it's belittlin' to a man. I swear I get awful small and mean in town. But out here—well——"

Unable to convey all that was in his mind, he slowly shook his head from side to side, and smiled. Doria tingled as she looked at him. What a man he was, bestriding a big black stallion as though welded with the animal. Mechanically she glanced back at Lorne, tagging dutifully behind with the Gilmour girl—rather sullen, he humped over a sad-faced gray in evident discomfort. With his bleached skin, delicate features, and slim grace of body, he looked almost effeminate in that environment. The moisture of sleep was clammy on his forehead, and his eyes were heavy-lidded.

"What's wrong now?" Lorne demanded of her peevishly.

"Don't you think it's lovely?" she laughed.

"Good enough," he admitted glumly. "But I hate scenery. Mother must have lugged me up a million mountains last year. Gosh, I'm sleepy. Let's go back. This getting up in the middle of the night to look at some hills——"

Keene slued his horse around, carrying Doria's with him by sheer pressure.

"We'll go down here," he told her, as though giving orders to one of his men. "There're some cattle I want to look at. See those cows over yonder?"

"Oh, aren't they pretty? The dear little calves—did you ever see anything look as innocent in your life?"

"Those cows," observed Riker impressively, as they went along, "are high-grade stuff. I sold three hundred of 'em last month for sixty dollars. What d'you think of that?"

"It's wonderful!" she answered, although five or sixty were the same to her.

"Yes, that's money. It set a new mark. But them cows—those cows are sure worth it."

Side by side they ambled down a draw, heading for a wide flat. Toward this flat cattle were converging from all directions, propelled by cowboys.

"What're they doing? Where're all the cows coming from?"

He answered: "Just a little round-up. I thought maybe you'd like to see one."

"Then this is for our benefit?"

"For yours," he replied.

For several minutes there was silence. The cattle came in hundreds. Then she said: "You do such wonderful things, Mr. Keene. What a remarkable life you must have led."

"Hi, Riker!" howled a rider some distance off, and bellowed a question at him.

She remarked: "I notice that your men call you Riker."

"Sure! Why wouldn't they? If you were my wife, it's like they'd call you Doria."

To relieve the embarrassment he was quick to perceive: "Yes, I expect you'd call my life remarkable. Then, again, it hasn't been. Just an ordinary cowman's. I've done some work, though."

On arrival at the round-up ground they found all the party from the ranch—Annielee and Dave Scoles horseback, Tom Hall driving the hack, with Margaretta Sloan beside him, and Mrs. Walton and Seth Gilmour on the back seat. Shortly Keene changed from his big black to a chunky sorrel, and entered the herd. They saw him ride through the surging mass for a few minutes, knee to knee with his range boss. The two consulted as they scanned the cattle.

Then Riker laid his horse alongside a steer to cut him out. Followed a mad scramble—plunging, whirling, and darting amid the scampering cattle. The mass split and the steer shot out, Keene at his tail to give him the necessary "shove."

"By Geminee!" cried Lorne in admiration. "Look at that fellow ride! Doria, look! Go it, you beauty. I'd give five hundred for that pony."

"Why, it beats polo!" cooed Harriet Gilmour.

Instead of exclaiming admiration, Doria put her handkerchief to her mouth and openly giggled.

"What're you sniggering for?"

"Oh, he's such a boy. He's nothing but an overgrown boy."

"So?" said the puzzled Halsell, but he was too absorbed in the contest of agility before them to be curious.

Doria went laughing over to the hack. Of course, Mrs. Walton inquired the cause.

"It's Mr. Keene. Look at him trying to show off!"

Mrs. Walton glanced at her shrewdly.

"Do you think so?" was what she said, but her thought was: "Humph, she's a sharp one, that miss!"

And Riker was trying to show off. There was no finer horseman in the Southwest; he had purposely chosen Tommy, the pick of the cutting horses, and he knew quite well that in the hot turmoil of working a herd he was at his best.

"Oh, look, look! Isn't he splendid?" Annielee raised her voice so that all might hear, as Riker rocketed in pursuit of a dodging bull, weaving from side to side, his body responding so readily to the swift whirlings of his mount that they seemed one flesh.

Then Tommy stuck his foot into a dog hole—he that had never before faltered—and turned a somersault. Somebody shrieked; Annielee and Margaretta covered their eyes; Doria did not utter a sound or budge, but gazed, fascinated. Mrs. Walton jumped hastily out of the hack.

The fall threw Keene clear, a good twenty feet. He sprang up and ran to Tommy. The horse took its time rising, and limped painfully from a strained foreleg. Otherwise he was uninjured.

"Are you hurt?" called Mrs. Walton.

Doria felt herself resenting that she was the first to ask.

The boss of the Heart did not reply immediately, but dusted his clothes and made some remark to the cowboys who had jumped to his aid. They burst into a gale of laughter.

Soon he came toward the hack, wearing an abashed grin.

"What does it say about pride going before destruction, Mrs. Walton?" he asked loudly.

"That isn't it," said Doria. "It's a haughty spirit before a fall."

A spasm of pain cut short Keene's appreciation, and he said to Hall: "Tom, go get on my horse—the black one there. You ride him home. He won't do nothing. I've had enough for one day." And he climbed over the wheel.

"What about me?" asked Margaretta.

"What do you want to do?" smiled Riker.

She leaned toward him and whispered confidentially: "You don't want to drive with me. You know you don't. I'll ride Doria's horse. See, I wore my skirt."

With that she leaped lightly down, and strolled across to Doria.

"Give him to me," as though it were all settled. "You're going to drive back."

"Who said so?" came the rebellious answer.

"He did." To Margaretta this sufficed.

"Did he, indeed? I'll do what——"

"Come along here," Keene called jovially. "You're my partner for the day, ain't you? Well, partners never throw off on each other."

Her hesitation endured only the fraction of a second. Then she jumped down and entered the hack.

"Where do you feel it?" she inquired very quietly.

"Feel what? How did you know it hurt me?"

"I can tell. Where?"

"In my side. Rib broke, I reckon. I've had 'em bust three times. But, say, don't let on to the others. It might spoil their day."

Mrs. Walton took her place in the back seat, and they started for the ranch. Although he strove hard to be entertaining, Keene was moody as they went along, and Doria suspected it was not pain that caused it.

"I wouldn't have had that happen," he broke out, "for a thousand dollars."

Doria turned her head and looked at him in grave interrogation.

He hastened to explain: "It's like to

ruin the best cuttin' horse in five counties."

Nothing more for a mile or two; at last his face relaxed into one of his boyish smiles.

"What's the use of me bluffing? It isn't Tommy that's worrying me. It's —it's—well, I must have looked ridiculous."

"Nonsense!" said Doria reprovingly.

He was grateful for her reassurance.

"Anyhow," said he, "it served me right. Maybe I was trying to show off. What do you think?"

"Of course you were."

"Well, I'll be dog-goned!" muttered Keene.

CHAPTER XIV.

The horses were a dun team that Riker had acquired in a recent purchase of the Triangle Range. Caught short of grass, he had moved a hundred head of them down country to the Heart.

"That one on the left is mean," he informed Doria. "You've got to watch him. Hi, you, Bob—quit that, you scoundrel!"

The animal gave over nipping at its mate, but never elevated its ears from the horizontal.

"Gracious, there's a snake!" exclaimed Mrs. Walton.

A menacing rattle came from the roadside. Riker pulled the team to a halt and handed the whip to Gilmour.

"Scotch him," he said. "But keep your eye peeled. Those ol' rattlers can hit like lightning."

While Seth was beating the reptile into a pulp—with the venomous hate, tinged with fear, that is a heritage of man—the team pawed restlessly, making several false starts. Bob kicked once, banging the doubletree.

"Cut that out!" ordered Keene.

The horse appeared to understand, and became quiet until Gilmour returned the whip and was preparing to get in. Then it tossed its head, lowered it to the level of the breastyoke, and scratched its ear on the pole. Something snapped in the bridle. It dropped off.

"Hush!" Keene cautioned, in a dread whisper.

Doria sat tensely quiet, but her heart seemed to stop. Fearing to hand the reins to her and jump down to their heads, lest Bob perceive his advantage and elude him, Riker spoke reassuringly to the team, and stepped out on the pole, in the hope that he could restore the dangling bridle. But Mrs. Walton had discerned their predicament. She screamed.

The dun rolled the white of his eye back at Riker and kicked. Barely missing the lashing heels, Keene sprang back to the footboard. Bob snorted and plunged sideways, dragging his mate along. Feeling himself free, he was frightened; the swaying bridle contributed to his panic. Caught by the infection of fear, his mate sprang with him, and they tore out across country.

"Well, we're off now," said Keene composedly.

They went streaking along a ridge, the hack bumping off stones and clods. Doria was bouncing around in the seat, the clasps of which were loose; she threatened to fall out any moment. Wild outcries from Mrs. Walton—Gilmour was hanging tight to the iron support of the top, and holding her in with his free hand.

"Don't be scared!" Keene roared above the tumult.

It was magnificent and timely advice, but they were scared stiff. He braced himself with his feet, passed his left arm around Doria, and pulled hard on the one rein left to him.

"We'll be all right, honey," feeling her tremble. "Now don't—you be—scared. Forty thousand acres—this pasture—keep 'em going. If only we don't—tip——"

They were sweeping in a wide semicircle. Three hundred yards ahead was a wire fence, but that did not seem to trouble Keene. He peered under the top to the right.

"Run 'em into the fence! Run 'em into that fence!" yelled Gilmour.

Riker roared back, "Sit down!" and butted him with his head when Seth, in

unreckoning fright, would have grabbed the reins over his shoulder.

They veered away from the fence, going always to the right. The bridleless horse had to follow where the bitted one was pulled. They covered a mile. Far in the distance Doria could hazily see a dark, moving mass—that was the herd they had left. Dots detached themselves from it and came dancing toward them.

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed Keene.

In front showed a dry creek bed, whose banks dropped sheer away to a depth of ten feet. It curved sharply to their right. Pulling would only precipitate them into a deeper chasm.

Afterward Doria could not recall that he hesitated a second. Releasing her, Riker stood up, let the rein go loose, and, leaning far out over the horses, lashed the one on the right with all his strength.

"Oh, he's making them go faster. He'll kill us. He'll kill us. Stop him! Stop him!" shrilled Mrs. Walton.

Under the sting of the punishment, the brute let out another notch, and his head showed in front of Bob's. Like a maniac, Keene howled: "Run, you devils! Run!"

He continued to beat the bridled horse. It drew ahead of Bob. That veered them to the left. A hundred yards from the brink and they were approaching it at a tangent; fifty yards and Doria gasped a prayer.

"You, Sam! You—you!" Riker yelled, and plied the whip.

Five yards from the edge they were skirting it along a parallel line. He did not let up. Bob began to falter under the fearful pace. His mate gained inches on him.

Suddenly Riker fell back and cried: "We're all right."

Came a rush of hoofs behind, and Red Williams sped past them, heading the team farther to the left. A rope whined. The noose settled over Bob's head, and Red caught up the slack. Then shoulder to shoulder they thundered, the cowboy sitting back against the runaways. Gradually their speed slackened. They stopped.

"You hammer-headed devil!" was Red's comment. He addressed Bob, wet and quivering, with the rope around his neck shutting off his wind.

Other cowboys galloped up and surrounded them. The bridle was replaced. Despite the anguish of his injured side, Keene lifted Doria out, and then aided Gilmour with the chaperon; for, the danger past, Mrs. Walton had promptly fainted.

"We'll lay her down under this tree," said Riker. "Look, she's coming round. How do you feel now? Better? Good! Ruef, hit for the ranch and bring the buggy to take her home."

Then he stood up and put his hand on Doria's shoulder. There was a world of pride in his: "Well!"

She began to shake, and plucked at her skirt aimlessly.

"You sit down and help with Mrs. Walton," he suggested. "They'll bring the mules and the buggy. So you needn't be scared. They're gentle."

Still she did not answer, but her under lip trembled.

"I'll take the hack back with Gilmour. They'll behave now."

"Aren't you going—to take me with you?" she faltered. "We're—you said we were partners."

Keene stared hard at her.

"You're some girl!" he said hoarsely.

And then came the reaction to Doria. Her self-command giving way, she clung to him hysterically, whimpering.

CHAPTER XV.

"How is the rib?"

"Doing fine. All I've got to do is to watch myself and not jump around. The doc says it's knitting good."

They were on the porch of the eating house, Doria in a chair, Keene with his back to a post. Although it was not much past sundown, Mrs. Walton had retired, pleading headache. The others were dancing on the platform to the music of the graphophone.

Worry and the trials of the day drop from one at the coming of dark in that country. They seem trivial when the majestic hush settles like a soft blanket.

The business of life is remote; one feels tolerant of human frailty. It is all so very soothing.

"You don't like ragtime, do you?" she asked curiously.

"It makes most too much noise. I like that one where the fellow plays on the fiddle—a minuet, I think you call it."

"Beethoven's minuet?" she replied, with a smile. "It's funny you should like that. That's rather sad."

"I know it is," Riker agreed. "It makes me blue. And it gives me a queer feeling up the back. I don't know why, but I like it."

Meanwhile the machine was playing "Everybody's Doin' It."

"Tell me about your life," Doria murmured. "You promised you would."

Her face was upturned to the star-powdered sky, so that he got the full benefit of her profile. It was very exquisite, which she knew.

Keene did not reply for a space, and when he did the husk in his throat gave Doria a thrilling premonition. She noted, too, the tight clenching of his hands.

Just to gain time: "Where'll I begin?"

"At the start, of course. Tell me everything—all about your struggles."

He gave a jeering laugh that was not meant, but which jarred on her.

"Well, I've been broke three times, and I've been flush occasionally. There really ain't anything to tell, Miss Doria. I've been shot twice, and got cut once. Nothing much has happened."

Disappointed, she said petulantly as a child: "You promised—you know you did. You said you'd tell me everything from the start."

"Oh, all right," he consented indulgently. "Let's see. First, how old do you think I am?"

He was smiling, but she saw that he waited for her guess with real anxiety.

"I'm no good at guessing. Thirty?" she fibbed.

"Thirty-five."

Doria gave him a quick look, and then her pure, steady eyes were raised again to the evening star.

"My father," began Keene, clearing his throat, "come to this country from Georgia. Of course he was broke. So was my grandfather before him, for that matter. I went to punching cows on the Canadian when I was twelve. Twenty a month, and I wrangled the horses. The boys called me Runt."

"You never went to school?"

"Not since I was ten," he replied. "Well, they'd take me with 'em on their sprees. I learned to smoke, too, and play poker pretty good for a kid. And I made a hand. Things run along, and at eighteen I was top hand for ol' Tom Gresham. Seventy-five a month they paid in those days."

"Come with me, come to the ball," sang the graphophone.

"I'd saved about three hundred dollars. Most kids don't save, but my dad—well, he'd always spent so free that it learned me to hang onto mine. Ol' Gresham kind of took a shine to me, and backed me for nine hundred head of stock cattle. I run 'em on his range. Grass was dirt cheap then, and I made money. Since then I've been on my own."

It appeared that his recital was over, for he mused, scratching a mosquito bite on his ankle.

"How did you go broke?"

"Bad year. In nineteen-two that was. It wiped me out clean, me and my partner. Three thousand head just laid down on us along the Pecos and died. The country was as bare as your hand. Judgment against us for six thousand dollars after we'd paid all we could. That sickened my partner, and he quit cold. Poor ol' Harry—he couldn't stand it. He's working for wages still. Gosh, that was a hard time. Miss Doria, I bet I didn't sleep a wink in a month. Why, I hadn't even railroad fare."

A fleeting memory stirred his risibilities, and he rocked with soundless mirth. Nor would he enlighten her as to the cause, but went on seriously:

"It's funny the way things turn out. Grass is everything in the cow business, Miss Doria. If you've got cheap grass you can make money. And when you

run short, you blow up. A cowman can go broke before he knows it. Well, I heard around that they were in a bad way over in New Mexico, so I beat my way there on a freight. I had six dollars and eighty cents to my name, and needed all that for meals.

"Sure enough they were in bad shape —Lon Tulwiler worse than any of them, and down in the dumps a mile. Unless he got rid of a big bunch he'd be cleaned out. So I bought nine thousand cows from Lon for seventy-two thousand dollars, delivery in two weeks. Just think of that—cows at eight dollars a head! And now you can ask forty for 'most any ol' pelican."

"And you had just six dollars and eighty cents?"

"It had got down to two-ninety by then." Riker said gravely. "Ol' Lon knew me, though. He figured I could raise it somewhere. Told me to fire ahead and take 'em and pay him when I got paid. He didn't ask for a cent.

"Well, I made like I'd forgot my check book, and borrowed thirty dollars from Lon. Then I caught a train for Kansas City. Say, maybe I didn't do some worrying there in that smoker. Owed seventy-eight thousand dollars, and hadn't a cent. But I had nine thousand sizable cows if I could pay for 'em.

"At Carrizzozo a buyer got on. As soon as I spotted his back I knew him —Lanigan, of Lanigan Brothers.

"'Hello, Riker,' he says. 'Howdy?' I says to him, mighty polite. 'Got any cattle?' 'A few cows.' 'What are they?' 'Some of that B V stuff,' I says. 'They're good, Lanigan.' 'What're you holding 'em at?' says Lanigan. Well, Miss Doria, it knocked the wind out of me, that question, often as I had heard it before. But I pretended it didn't listen good.

"'Oh, I hadn't thought much about it,' says I. 'They ought to fetch thirteen dollars,' I says. He looked at me kind of queer, and says: 'Humph—I should say they must be good stuff. Don't you know what the market is?' Then he gave me a cigar and we smoked for a spell. 'If you'd said eleven, Riker. or even eleven-fifty now,' Lanigan says a little later, 'I'd have taken 'em.'

"'You've bought something,' I told him so quick that it made him blink. 'They're yours at eleven-fifty.'

"I'd bought those cows, remember, at eight dollars a head—nine thousand tol'able cows. Well, Lanigan received the cattle all right, and I cleared thirty-one thousand five hundred dollars. That gave me another start.

"I went back and bought six thousand Block yearlings, and trailed 'em over into the Panhandle in the middle of winter. Everybody said I was crazy —that they'd all die. A bad norther come along, and I had to take those herds across the Canadian on ice. Yes, ma'am, it was froze solid. We spread sand and took 'em along careful, and we got there in good shape. I peddled those yearlings around, a few here and some more there, and made close to ten dollars a head on that stuff. That give me more capital to work on. I got going stronger. Bought a bunch of land. Then another."

He broke off to light a cigar.

"The last big deal I made," he concluded, "was that Triangle outfit. I figure it stands me two hundred and fifty thousand clear. That's about all, Miss Doria. Yes, that's all, I think. It's just good luck and—and horse sense."

Having told thus tamely the story of his life, which Doria had excitedly anticipated as full of heroics, Keene smoked and beat a tattoo with his foot on the edge of the platform. No one came to ask her to dance. Lorne was over at the bunk house, and the other two men seemed to recognize that their host would appreciate a clear field.

"It's a wonder," she remarked pensively, "that you never married."

"Married?" in almost a snort. "What chance had I to marry? Too busy. Out on the range most of the time, and whenever I got to town those commission men would give me a hoorah time —automobiles and champagne and shows and all that. You know how it is. We'd certainly hit her up lively.

And I never met any—nice girls. Leastways, never more'n to say 'hello' to."

"And you never met a girl you—you were never in love?"

The question came softly as a caress. She saw his figure stiffen; she could not see that he was staring at her with suspicion through the gloom.

"Never."

Doria straightened in her chair.

"Never until now," he added.

Abruptly, as he did everything, Riker sat bolt upright and seized one of her hands.

"Miss Stinson," he said, "will you marry me?"

CHAPTER XVI.

She had half hoped for this, had led him on to it. Yet when the declaration came, the suddenness with which he moved, and his desperate earnestness, shook her and bereft her of speech. Doria tried weakly to withdraw her hand. Body and spirit were quaking.

"Somebody's coming," she cautioned. "Please!"

Scoles approached through the gloom, whistling a rag and dragging his feet along the floor in time to its lilting cadences. He spoke for the dance, and Doria went with him, leaving Riker alone. Not a word did he say at being thus deserted, but lighted a fresh cigar.

He did not get another opportunity to talk with her. When her dance with Dave was ended, Doria joined the other girls, and whisked one of them about in a wildly capering Boston. It was plain to Keene that she wished to avoid him, and he strolled away from his guests under the pretext of giving orders for the morrow.

Savagely he told himself: "You're a consarned fool! She could never care for a broken-down cow-punch like you. It's that boy; yes, sir. What in thunder did I make a break like that for? Now she'll laugh. Lord, but the girl has got into my blood."

He paced about under the brow of the hill until he heard them close the graphophone and call good nights. Upon that he returned up the path in leisurely fashion, and was at the platform steps when Doria hopped down them.

Said Keene: "I just wanted to make sure that you got home safe."

"Why? Are there bur-gu-lars around?" she exclaimed, with a mock shudder.

"No-oo, but the Sandman holds mighty close. He's nearly got you now."

"I'm not sleepy," she protested. "I always yawn when I'm most comfy."

The distance between the eating house and the Roost was about sixty yards, and they broke no records covering it. Two others of the party passed them and hurried through the gate. Doria glanced behind, and saw that nobody was near.

"I hope," she said, with the sweet melancholy a girl assumes when dealing a crusher, "I hope you'll never mention that again to me, Mr. Keene. I'm having such a good time—and I don't want to go home."

"All right," acquiesced Riker hastily. "Don't let's say anything more about it."

His manner was so hearty and free from depression that Doria had a twinge of disappointment. It is all very well to refuse a man, but she had looked for a few tender passages at least—and here he was dismissing the whole delicious subject as he might have closed a horse trade.

They reached the gate and halted. There she held out her hand, gave him a firm, boyish clasp, and started along the path. Clicking the latch behind her, Keene watched the slender, trim figure—he always waited until she reached the door and called good night.

"Miss Stinson."

"Yes?" turning in some surprise, but with alacrity.

"There's something I'd forgotten." He spoke in evident confusion, still clicking the latch.

"What is it?"

Riker paused before he answered, and then said, with the naïve straightforwardness of a young boy: "There's

something I'd like to get from you, Miss Stinson. We may never see each other again after this party leaves—you're the finest girl I've ever known, Miss Doria—and I'd like to think—I'd like to remember—would you——"

"What is it you want?" very softly. Oh, the coquetry of tone and drooping head!

She was standing on the stoop, one foot inside the door. Riker opened the gate.

"May I come for it?"

"What is it?" Then, as he hesitated: "Yes."

Riker stalked solemnly up the gravel walk and went close to her. He said nothing, and she would not meet his eyes, but toyed with the handle of the door. Her bosom was fluttering under its filmy covering.

"What—what was it—you wanted?" she asked almost inaudibly.

"I'd like," said Riker Keene, "a drink of water."

CHAPTER XVII.

On entering the bunk house that night, Keene found Halsell sitting cross-legged on the floor in his pajamas, playing Canfield by the light of a lantern. The other men had gone to the storm cellar for cold beer.

"I thought you'd gone to bed?" said Riker.

"Couldn't sleep."

"Why didn't you get dressed then, and come over?"

"Oh, pshaw!" dealing cards. "Those girls get tired of me hanging round all the time."

A certain crispness of articulation caused Keene to look at him a second time; usually Lorne was indolent in speech. His eyes were unnaturally bright; a wisp of his shining black hair hung, damp with perspiration, low down over his forehead. The pallor of death, breathing rapid and deep—Riker knew the symptoms as unmistakably as the path to the Roost.

The lantern was untrimmed and the light dim. He began to take off his clothes, very slowly and thoughtfully.

"Feeling bad?"

"No; bully. Why?"

"Oh, I thought you looked sort of peek-ed," replied Riker.

Lorne went on doling the cards and, having stripped to his underwear, Riker stretched, scratched his ribs luxuriously, and turned the pillow on his bed. These nightly rites over, he padded across the bare floor to Halsell's side and stood over him.

"Now tell me where you got it," he said, in affectionate banter. "That's a good fellow."

"Got it? Got what?"

The attempt at innocence was feeble, and the older man's smile grew broader. He patted Lorne's shoulder. There was a benign kindliness in his bearing that seemed to touch Halsell. He threw down the cards with a gesture of despair.

"You've guessed it," he confessed. "I'm weak."

"Where've you got it hid out?"

For answer Lorne pointed to the niche between washstand and wall.

"Don't ask me where I got it," he begged.

"I could guess."

"Well, don't try. I saw him with it, and we had one. Then I talked it out of him. Keene, that stuff's got me."

"Shut up!"

"I tell you it has. Here I promised Doria and mother by the most sacred ——"

"Oh, quit that!"

Riker turned from him, found the bottle, sniffed at the contents, and held it up to the light. It was scarcely half empty.

"Halsell," said he impressively, "this stuff hasn't got you. It hasn't got any man with guts. Don't you ever give up. The men who knock under to it never really want to quit, 'way down in their heart of hearts. No, sir—a man's never licked till he admits it himself. Now, don't you."

"That's all very well," distractedly pacing the room, arms jerking, fingers snapping. "That'll apply to a normal man. But I was doomed from the cra-

dle, Keene. Don't you know? My father and my grandfather——"

"Hush!" said Riker. "Here they come."

Hurriedly he slipped the bottle into the washstand drawer. There was a key to it. His color heightened as he locked the drawer and placed the key in the pocket of his trousers, hanging over a chair.

"I'm sorry," he apologized in genuine regret; "but it's wisest."

"That's all right," answered Halsell glibly, and then the others entered.

For upward of an hour they lay in the dark, smoking and gossiping of the day's happenings. Then Tom Hall dozed off and burned himself with a cigarette. Waking with a start, he swore freely and brushed away the sparks. Sleep claimed him quickly. Scoles soon followed; he always snored, with a harsh, grating intake and a soft whistle in expelling.

As for Halsell, he lay perfectly still—too still. Wide awake on his back, Keene began to wonder that no stir came from his bed. At last, just as Riker was sinking into a dream of a line of fat cattle moving slowly over a hill to water—one by one, one by one—a cautious sound roused him. Instantly he was alert.

Bare feet had touched the boards of the floor. They moved with infinite circumspection, and vague against the faint glow of the open door he descried Lorne bending over the chair on which hung his clothes. A moment of soundless groping and he tiptoed to the washstand. The key creaked in turning. A pause to ascertain that nobody had heard, then Lorne drew forth the bottle and put it to his lips.

"Poor, poor boy!" breathed Keene, sitting up in bed, his heart full of pity.

A moment's reflection, and he stifled his first impulse to rise and plead with him; shame at being caught in such extremity of surrender would be worse for Halsell in his fight than a barrel of the fiery stuff. Therefore he stretched out again, stirred as might a restless sleeper, and listened.

Having locked the washstand drawer, Lorne replaced the key, and went warily back to bed. He cleared his throat once or twice as he squirmed a place for his body on the hard mattress, and sighed deeply. Very soon his steady breathing apprised Riker that he had sunk to rest.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Where's Lorne this morning?" inquired Doria at breakfast.

The hour was ten. In the mess house below the hill the new cook was preparing the cowboys' dinner and musing darkly over the godless ways of the visitors.

"Them's a swift bunch," he muttered as he sliced the steak. "Yes, sir, they're high rollers. I swan they never go to bed until nigh midnight."

"Where is Lorne?" Doria asked again.

"He's feeling a bit under the weather," Riker responded. "So he took a horse and went after rabbits."

"Humph!" put in Mrs. Walton, who was always cross in the morning. "That boy's getting restless."

The acidity of her words nettled Doria, who stared intently and rudely, as was her custom in anger. She was all in white, with a sailor blouse cut very low at the neck.

"Say," said Keene in an eager whisper. "You don't look a day over sixteen."

"And you—what do you wear such a low collar for? It makes you look forty-five at least."

If the thrust rankled, he did not betray it, but passed her the toast and helped her to jam and coffee; she had more than once been in bad humor with him since the party started. Without a shadow of cause, and quite regardless of who was by, she would sometimes catch up his most harmless words. Her retorts carried barbs that made him wince, but he never lost patience with Doria. Instead, he would look in a quizzical way toward the others, as though to ascertain what they thought of this treatment, and how he ought to take it.

"You're positively brutal to him," remonstrated Annielee one night. "It's outrageous, Doria. I never in my life saw a man so thoughtful of any one as he is of you. And here you jump——"

"That's just it!" snapped Doria. "What does he do it for? I'm sure I don't want him to. Why can't he leave me alone? If he only had enough get-up in him to say 'no' to me, instead of—instead of——"

"Jumping through a hoop when you whistle?" Annielee filled in for her. "That's what Seth says he does."

"Seth Gilmour," cried Doria, "is a fool! Who did the jumping in that runaway? Ask him that. The coward—he was scared to death."

"Well, anyway, it's pitiful."

"What's pitiful?"

"The nice way he treats you, no matter how spiteful you are with him," answered Annielee stoutly. "I'd be ashamed of myself, Doria. He's our host, you know. You ought to remember that, at least. And all he does is to look hurt——"

"That's what makes me so wild," blazed Doria. "His eyes are just like my collie's sometimes. If he'd only —— I believe I could care for him if he'd beat me once."

"I don't believe," said Annielee reflectively, as with a shadow of doubt, "that he'd ever do that. Still——"

Mrs. Walton interrupted at this point, scenting a conversation of interest, so they switched at once to other topics. When she had departed in considerable resentment over their reticence, Doria returned to discussion of Riker. She might flout him and laugh at him, but he stuck in her mind.

"Did I tell you about the ring?" she giggled.

"Ring?" gasped her friend, flouncing in her chair. "Mercy, no! Don't tell me—he hasn't—he didn't——"

"Yes, he did, too," asserted Doria. "The ridiculous creature sent and got a ring. You never saw such a beauty, Annielee. A solitaire in a platinum setting. And when we went out driving the other day, what did he do but haul it out and ask me to wear it."

Annielee was agog with excitement.

"And what did you do?"

"Of course I tried it on. There was no harm in that. Some way or other, he'd even got my measurement. Oh, it was a beauty."

"Well?"

"When I told him I could never, never wear it for him, guess what he said."

"Search me," said her friend. "Tell me. Quick! You're the most maddening creature."

"He wanted to know—honest Injun, Annielee, it's true—if I wouldn't keep it, anyway, as a present. Said he could afford it well enough, and it would be a comfort to him to think I had something of his."

Annielee threw herself limply back in her chair, in two minds whether to laugh or feel sorry.

"Of course I said 'No,' and gave it back to him. He was driving those awful mules. Here comes the best part. Listen! He looked at the ring a minute, and said, 'Well, it's no good to me,' and threw it away. Actually he did. Tossed it into the weeds beside the road, and it must have cost a thousand dollars at the very least."

She paused dramatically in order to enjoy the stunning effect of this intelligence on her friend. Annielee was too overcome for mere words. She could only move her lips and waggle her head.

"However," ended Doria demurely, "he didn't lose it."

"How was that?"

"I made him stop the mules and get out and find it. And, oh, Annielee"—she burst into fits of laughter, rocking back and forth—"you should have seen him. He had to get down on his hands and knees. And there were sand burrs. And he swore."

CHAPTER XIX.

Halsell had not returned when they sat down to a cold lunch about three o'clock.

"I wonder where he went?" said Doria.

As none of the others showed any concern, she deemed it discreet not to refer to him again until they were rising from table, when she said in an aside: "It's so peculiar, his riding off that way. Won't you send after him, Mr. Keene?"

He looked down at her anxious face and laughed, rather mirthlessly.

"What makes you worry so?"

"I'm not worrying."

"All right. But nothing could have happened. How could anything happen to him? It's like he strayed off. Some nester'll put him on the road. There're houses every five or six miles."

Still she was not satisfied; he could see that. About six, the entire party congregated at the horse corrals to watch the buster top a broncho, but amid the excitement over the beast's pitching and squalling, and the superb riding of the boy on his back, it was apparent that Doria's attention wandered. She was visibly anxious.

"How did you like it?" asked Riker. They were ascending the hill.

"It was splendid."

"I got that up for you," scrutinizing her narrowly. "Now, tell me—don't try to deny it—what's up?"

"I'm afraid," she admitted frankly, and her manner bore out her words.

"What of?"

"Well, I sent Lorne a note this morning—the new cook took it—and I'm afraid——"

"A note? When you could just as easy talk? What the Sam Hill—— I beg your pardon. I shouldn't have asked that, of course."

Perhaps she already repented of having made the confidence, for she offered no explanation, and they arrived at the Roost under constraint. The plan was for a ride over to the Big Tank with guns. Quail were out of season; buf they are just as succulent when called plover.

"I'll go down and send one of the boys to find him," Riker told her at the gate. "You change your skirt while I do that and get the horses. Tell Annielee she can ride Streak, that big roan she wanted to yesterday."

On the table in the bunk house he descried a small, oblong envelope addresse to Halsell, so he put it in his pocket for safe delivery later. Another letter was on the table, a corner of it held down by the lamp. To his surprise, he saw that it bore his name.

As he weighed it in his hand, a sense of foreboding caused him to hesitate. What had happened that Halsell should write him? But Keene was never one to shun an issue. He tore open the envelope.

DEAR KEENE: You said a man was never beaten until he admitted it himself. Well, I admit it.

And when a man is broken in spirit—when he has grown to fear himself and dread the days—what is the use of dragging out existence? Anyway, I was doomed from the cradle. Generations ago somebody sealed my fate to-day, here on the Heart.

Doria must never know. And my family—they're always the ones who have to bear the brunt of a thing like this. Try to keep it from them. An accident is so easy on a huge place like this.

I know you will be a good husband to her. Yes, I mean that. You are the man for her. That is one of my reasons—no, it isn't, either—to say so would be cowardly. But it would ruin her life to marry a man like me, even if she would, and I believe she has too much sense if it came to the point. So I hope you get her. Do not let any of those other fellows, who hang around her in town, win out. They're a poor bunch. You're the best man she knows—I told her so one night, too.

You will see that I am quite sane and in possession of all my faculties. I am doing this deliberately, seeing nothing ahead but countless agonizing struggles which I know I would lose. So good-by.

I will turn the horse loose and probably he will come home.

Good-by, old man. You hardly know me—but you stood by me more than once, and I was not worth it. I am sorry to give you all this trouble.

Don't let father or mother know. Doria must not know at any cost. L. H.

With a hasty glance over his shoulder, as though there might be prying eyes there to see, Riker tore the letter into minute particles. Then he stepped to the door.

"Johnson," he shouted in a voice that brought two men running from the stables, "saddle Corazon and tell Red Wil-

liams to catch his best horse and come to me."

Red he could trust as he could his good right hand. There was that in the boss' manner that sent Johnson on the run toward the corrals. Something had happened, or was about to happen; he could sense that, and the knowledge incited him to move faster than he had moved in years.

After a few minutes of thought, Riker went to the table and wrote a note, in the big, stilted schoolboy hand that gave him so many pangs of shame:

DEAR MISS DORIA: Knowing how anxious you are I am going out to hunt for Mr. Halsell he cannot be gone far because the roads are plain all over this country now. If I should be getting home late do not be anxious because maybe me and Red will stop to look at some stuff over on the West side so don't you be scared. we will go shooting birds some other day tell them. Your friend truly, RIKER KEENE.
P S
tell the others. Dave Scoles he will take care of you all while I am gone.

This note he handed to one of the boys, with instructions to send it up the hill shortly after his departure. Then he mounted, and led the way toward Big Bend, Red Williams at his elbow. Neither said a word. If Keene had business afoot, well and good; if something more serious than business was imminent—a fight, perhaps—better still. He had only to say the word and Red would ask no explanation.

As they were going through the gate into the open range south of headquarters, a shout brought them back. Johnson was waving at them from the corrals.

"Where did you find him?" demanded Keene.

The dependable old gray on which Lorne had ridden out was standing there, nosing wistfully at the feed troughs.

"He just come in. Trotted down over the hill, from the east. Must of run off while that feller was down on the ground, don't you reckon?"

"That's probably it," Riker acquiesced, staring at the horse and then at the hill. "Hum! Johnson, you unsaddle him, and don't say a word to anybody."

"Shore not."

"Don't you say a word until about nine o'clock to-night. And then you go up to the Roost and ask for me. When you find I'm not there, just mention sort of careless—pay attention now—just mention that Halsell's horse came in alone, and you're afraid he may be hurt. Do you understand? Just that and no more."

The cowboy scratched his head.

"I got you all right, all right, Keene. But I swan I don't understand——"

"You don't have to," said Keene, and rode away eastward over the hill, with Red Williams following quietly at his heels.

After going a mile or more in a trying silence, Red remarked casually: "You ain't heading Big Bend way, then?"

"No," returned Riker, "I missed my guess. We'll go over toward the Saucer."

They went along wordlessly for ten minutes, Keene maintaining a vigilant lookout. It was all open and devoid of trees, and he could see for miles. The light was waning, and long shadows were creeping over the country. Twice he clambered to the summits of ridges to scan the draws below. Still Red did not put a query, but chewed tobacco thoughtfully and waited.

They had ridden ten miles before he said, in a toneless voice: "I reckon we're more like to find him in the Saucer, Riker."

"That," answered Keene, betraying no surprise, "is what I figured on."

They found him in the Saucer. He was lying on his back at the base of a giant cottonwood, and his hands were gripping the grass.

Rising from his knees, Keene stared long at Red across the body. On his face was the look of patient, almost sad, determination that came to it in repose, and which Doria had so often observed with a certain awe.

"How," asked Red, "did he do it?"

The question brought Riker to himself.

"Do it? That ol' outlaw threw him off and dragged him to death."

"Huh-huh! Shore!" Red agreed. "But let's look round and see what we can find."

They prowled the Saucer, and Keene came upon a vial. Evidently Halsell had thrown it far from him on swallowing the poison.

"He bought it in town," said he, examining the label.

"Been figuring on this for quite a spell, then, I take it?"

Riker nodded wearily, and answered: "He never had a chance, Red." And he relapsed into a moody survey of the body, and the manner in which the knees were drawn up.

"Red," he demanded suddenly, "what was your father?"

No whit taken aback, Williams replied frankly: "He was a tough ol' guy, my dad was. Yes, sir, he used to beat me up pretty regular. But in politics he was a hard-shell Baptist, if that's what you mean."

"Thank your God," said Keene solemnly, "that he was. But for luck and environment, that might be me or you there."

Evans wagged his head doubtfully.

"Uh-huh," he protested. "I want to live to be a hundred."

It was growing to dusk, and there was need of immediate action.

"Help me to lift him on to Corazon," Riker ordered, "and we'll go back. Lord, what'll I tell her?"

CHAPTER XX.

Voices and laughter floated to them from the hill as they opened the last gate and rode to the bunk house with their burden.

"I have a true and noble lover,
He is my sweetheart, all my own."

The old favorite from "The Chocolate Soldier" came to them from the eating house. His guests were dancing. The rhythmical swish of their feet on the waxed floor was plainly audible as he and Red bore the body inside and placed it on a bed. In the midst of his distress he wondered whether Doria was among those light-hearted merry-makers. Surely not—he glanced at his watch. It was just nine. Perhaps Johnson had not yet told them.

At that moment he heard the clack of a boot on a stone, and guessed that the cowboy was even then going up the hill on his errand. A few minutes later the music stopped. There were voices raised in loud interrogation and astonishment; then swift, ominous quiet.

"Don't light up yet," he told Red, as they waited beside the bed in the dark.

Presently Johnson passed the bunk house on his way back to his own quarters.

"I want to fix up his things before anybody knows," continued Riker. "Now you can go up the hill and head those fellows off, Red. Don't let them come in here. They can sleep with the boys. Or, better still—get that extra beddin' out, and spread it in the commissary for 'em."

Red clanked off to do as he was bidden, and Riker closed the door and hung a blanket over the window. Then he lighted a lamp, and set to work sorting Halsell's papers and effects.

Only one document did he subtract from the litter of letters and old bills he discovered in Lorne's bag and in the pockets of his coats. The others he tied into a neat bundle.

It had been penned months before, probably in a fit of remorse attendant on dissipation. And then Lorne had changed his mind and forgotten to destroy it. The writing was jerky and irregular, and smudges were numerous:

To My Creator: It is held to be the last resort of cowardice to surrender voluntarily the life You gave.

But of what use to cling to a thing without worth? Why should I preserve what is a curse?

Living, I bring wretchedness and misery to all whom I hold dear. To myself existence means only a plumbing of the depths at increasingly frequent intervals.

So why should I hesitate? A few short moments of pain—a shock to them that Time will quickly heal—and the peace I have always sought.

For You would not punish the soul You

marred in the making. I cannot believe that.

I have blamed myself with bitterness, but I do so no more. It was predestined. It had to come. You placed me in the world hopelessly handicapped for the struggle. Endowed with the sensibilities of a woman, a man's part was expected of me. Given a love for the beautiful, I was expected to conquer it for sterner tasks. And to add to this blight of temperament, there was born with me the craving that will not die.

Who dare point the finger for throwing up the fight? Who would have me continue, when beaten before the start?

Whether there be another existence or we are snuffed out with our last breath, I do not greatly care. Grant me oblivion.

I go now to give my final accounting. And I cannot hold the going a sin. In a little while I must face You and there learn the Great Secret.

For once I am almost at peace. And yet—and yet—Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.

Three times did Keene read through it. His only emotion was a great pity. He hunched on a stool with the paper on his knees, and something of the anguish of the poor, warped soul that had flown, entered into his own.

Red did not return. Nobody came to disturb him as he sat with his dead. The ticking of an alarm clock on a shelf seemed to tap-tap-tap at his brain. He glanced up at it; the hour was eleven.

A timid knock made him strengthen. Who would seek him there in such fashion at that hour? He waited, rigid. It came again.

Keene tiptoed to the door, as though the man on the bed might be disturbed by a footfall, and softly opened it. The moon had risen, and a silver sheen made the figure he saw ghostlike in its loveliness. There stood Doria, her hands clasped in front of her, mutely putting a question.

She was clad in a Japanese kimono, and on her feet were Turkish slippers. Her hair was caught up loosely into a gleaming crown.

"What are you doing here?" he whispered, stepping out and closing the door.

"You found him. Didn't you? I want the truth."

"Yes, I found him."

"He—he is dead?"

Not for all the world could he have told her. He tried gently to take her arm and lead her away.

"Is he dead?"

Again she asked it, and waited.

"I can see he is. And you won't tell me. Lorne is dead."

A white hand went to her forehead, and she swayed.

"And it was I who killed him," she said, in a faint voice.

With that she fell forward, and Keene caught her in his arms. Lifting her easily, he carried her up the steep hill to the Roost.

She looked so fragile, so very young and spotless as she lay inert against his breast, that Riker experienced a holy reverence for her that almost unmanned him. He was gasping when he reached the gate, but more from emotion than fatigue. As he set her feet down in order to free one hand to open it, Doria revived and murmured something.

"That's good!" exclaimed Keene. "That's fine! I was wondering how I'd get you in."

Supporting her against the fence, he fanned her with his hat. Not a sound came from the Roost. They were sleeping peacefully.

"I'm better now," whispered Doria. "Oh, what have I done? Good night."

"Nobody saw you? Then sneak in as quiet as you can. If anybody wakes up, tell 'em you have a headache. Good night."

He watched her flit along the walk to the door and saw her shadowy form hesitate there a moment. Then she vanished.

And Keene went back down the hill, to sit the livelong night beside the dead.

CHAPTER XXI.

Early next morning Keene sent one of his cowboys to the Roost with the letter to Halsell that he had found on the table. He had not the fortitude to deliver it personally.

Doria did not come to breakfast, which was eaten in a depressing silence.

All knew now of the accident to Lorne, and what the bunk house held.

"What time does that train leave town?" Mrs. Walton asked the host.

"It goes at two-thirty. You won't hardly have time to catch it to-day. Rest up, and we'll go in to-morrow. I've got to go in to the inquest this evening."

"Very well," she said, with a seriousness new in her.

Annielee came to Keene after breakfast, with word that Doria wished to speak with him. He found her in the dingy sitting room of the Roost, very white, and with dark circles under her eyes.

"I couldn't sleep," she said, by way of greeting.

"No, I suppose not," and his two big hands closed over the one she extended.

"I wanted to thank you for sending that letter. Where did you find it?"

Riker told her.

"Then he never saw it?"

"The cook left it on the table after he had ridden off."

"That," she said prayerfully, "was a great mercy. If he had read it—if I had to carry the thought that my letter had anything——"

She broke off and gazed at the carpet. One foot was nervously tapping the floor, and the hand on which she propped her chin was atremble. Keene did not take a chair, but stood awkwardly opposite her, waiting for what she might have to confide. After some deliberation and two false starts, she held out the letter he had found, and said:

"Mr. Keene, I wish you would read this."

"But"—fumbling it—"it isn't for me."

"I would like you to understand." She glanced up at him, then lowered her gaze quickly. "For of course you must think—probably we'll never see each other after to-day—but I'd like you to know——"

"You don't ever need to explain to me anything you do," he assured her, almost sternly.

"I don't—I don't mean about last night," she went on bravely. "I know you'd understand that. But once—back there at the Country Club—you remember—I think you saw——"

"I never see or hear, Miss Doria, what I ain't supposed to."

"A gentleman," she answered, "never does. But I want you to know."

Still he would not look at it, glancing from her to the letter.

"Read it," she said imperiously, and he read:

MY DEAR LORNE: As I told you yesterday, it would be better if we gave up at once all thought of each other. The whole thing has been a mistake—I can see that now—and we would only make each other miserable.

For I don't believe I love you. I thought I did, but I don't. It came to me two days ago that I did not, and since then I haven't slept a wink.

You have always been so good to me and so considerate that it hurts to say this. But you must see it yourself as I do. What we took for love was only a boy-and-girl fondness for each other. You are twenty-five and I am twenty-one, but I am years and years older than you are.

When a girl thinks of marriage she thinks of a man on whom she can rely. She wants a strong man, one who will stand between her and the hard knocks of life, yet who will need her, too. A woman wants to be protected; she wants to feel that if the need came she could lean on him. I would not hurt you, dear, dear Lorne, but you must know that your weakness would make it a frightful risk for any woman.

Please try to see it as I do. And let us always be good friends, for you are so clean and chivalrous. But anything more is out of the question.

Do not think there is any one else. For there is not—indeed, indeed there isn't.

But from now on you and I can be nothing but friends. Tell me that you understand.

DORIA.

When he had finished and had studied the envelope for several minutes, Riker folded the sheets with painstaking slowness, and gave the letter back to her. Neither spoke.

At last: "Will you tell me something?"

"I reckon so. It depends."

"Was he killed, or—did he——"

"His neck was broke," answered Keene

CHAPTER XXII.

The party broke up next day. So strong is habit that more than half of them murmured to Keene as they shook hands: "We've had such a delightful time." Then they remembered, and grew confused.

Riker sent his guests sixty miles across the plains in motor cars to catch a southbound train that made quick connections. Halsell's body would go from town, and he would accompany it. The prospect hung heavy over him.

"How'll I do it?" he besought Mrs. Walton. His nervous dread was pathetic.

"Just be yourself," she counseled. "Trust to your instincts. They always go true."

"It's the hardest thing I ever had to do. I'm not a coward, I hope—but how I am to face his mother I don't know."

"Poor, dear Mrs. Halsell," she answered softly. "Lorne was so lovable. Did you ever meet her, Riker? I don't see how that boy—I don't see how anybody could ever lie to her. She looks at you so straight, and she's so gentle and—and aloof from the world."

The others of the party were busily engaged in seeing to it that their luggage was loaded into the wagons. Riker and Mrs. Walton paced up and down in front of the Roost gate, and a peculiar shyness descended upon them. The thoughts of each seemed to revert to the same thing at once. She had aged perceptibly in a few days, but he remarked a dignity, too, that had never been there before, and he wondered.

"I suppose," she spoke steadily, "that this is the end of our friendship."

That brought a swift glance of interrogation from him.

"Why—our agreement—have you gone back on——"

"Don't," she entreated. "Neither of us meant that. At least—you never did."

He was silent, very ill at ease.

"It's in the air out here. Do you know that Dave Scoles and Annielee, and Tom Hall and Harriet are engaged? Oh, you poor, blind creature!—they are. And we—well, we were just a little lonely that night—and disappointed."

"You are always right," Riker agreed in some relief.

After a short interval, he asked: "What about—how about Harry?"

"Oh, I have forgiven him again, as I always do." There was more of resignation than bitterness in her voice. "He has written to me and promised—Harry makes really beautiful promises. So I shall take him back. And we'll try it again. Perhaps this time——"

"I hope you'll be happy. You deserve to be—I'm dog-goned if you don't."

"And I'm dog-goned," replied Mrs. Walton, smiling, although her eyes were wet, "if you don't, Riker Keene. I'm not the sort of woman that would make you happy, though. You want a different—type. And I—I do so hope you'll get her."

"I'm going to try," he said stoutly.

"And I—perhaps love will bloom again, as the books say—anyway, I'll do my best."

Thereupon they shook hands punctiliously in front of the young people, exchanged some polite and meaningless commonplaces, and Mrs. Walton stepped into the front seat of the car that was to bear them away.

CHAPTER XXIII.

They were motoring on the road to the Country Club. Car after car passed them. Frequently the occupants waved a friendly hand, and smiled. Some turned to stare back.

"All those people think——" began Doria, and bit her lip with signs of confusion.

"What do they think?" Keene inquired. "Gosh, here come some more. Too much traffic on this road for me."

"Where're you going?" she demanded.

"Up this side street." And he turned the car down a tree-arched road known as Mocking Bird Lane.

For two or three miles they ran without exchanging a word, she listening contentedly to the pur of the en-

gine, he busy with his own thoughts and mechanically taking heed of bad spots.

Without turning his head, and very casually: "Bill Burkett, of Kansas City, wants to buy me out."

"Why, what would you sell out for?"

"He offered me four million," he evaded, "for the Heart, down to the pigs and chickens. That'd give me the Triangle, and close to a million dollars clear of everything. A man had ought to live on that."

"But surely you wouldn't give up your work? You wouldn't want to retire at your age?"

"Speaking of age," he said, flushing, "I lied to you once. I'm thirty-seven—not thirty-five."

The lie did not seem greatly to hurt Doria's faith, or dampen her spirits.

"Yes," she answered, smiling, "I knew all the time. Dad told me." Then: "Are you going to sell?"

"The Triangle would give me enough to do to pass the time," he said, with hesitation.

Doria sat up straight, and told him emphatically: "You could never be content with just that. No—you couldn't be. You've got to be doing big things, or—or you'd eat your heart out."

"Well, that depends." He swallowed, and went on: "I told Bill I'd let him know to-morrow morning."

Out of the corner of her eye she discerned symptoms that alarmed her. The car was slowing. It came to a stop.

"What's the matter? What is it? Drive on. Please do."

Her loss of poise—it was almost panic—gave him courage. Always before she had been mistress of the situation. His hands left the wheel and found both of hers.

"What'll I tell Bill?" he asked.

Her head was down, so that her hat protected and hid her face; but the hands were warm, and their resistance was so feeble that Riker felt suddenly the glow of the conqueror.

"Tell me," and she began to quake at the note of mastery in his heavy voice. "What'll I say to Bill?"

"I don't—see—what I've got—to do with it?"

"You've got everything. Look up. Honey—I want to see your eyes. If you—marry me—then I'll sell out so we can spend more time in town. On the other hand—by George, I'll buy still another and work—work."

"Oh," exclaimed Doria quickly, "you must always work. You must just keep on doing things and be you."

Riker cleared his throat, regarded the top of her head reflectively, as though deep in a baffling problem, and then took her chin between two fingers, and with steady pressure raised her face that he might see. The tale was plain, and the oldest in the world. Doria began to cry.

"What will we tell Bill, sweetheart?" he whispered.

She was in his arms, and speech and breath were broken.

"He can't have—our Heart—Ranch. And, oh—if you hadn't—Riker, dear—said that about the—the drink of water—I'd never have taken you seriously. Don't! Start the car. Somebody's coming."

Roy Norton's latest novel, which he calls "The Riata," will appear complete in the first February POPULAR, on sale two weeks hence, January 7th.

PETS ON A BIG SCALE

SENATOR BOIES PENROSE, of Pennsylvania, believes in doing all things on a big scale—a habit acquired from such large matters as running State political machines. He is fond of collecting bear cubs. Whenever he can get hold of one, he keeps it in his home grounds until it has developed a sixty-eight-inch chest development, and then presents it to a zoo. He has had pets of the black and cinnamon varieties.

The Pirate Vote

By Ralph Bergengren

The merry whirl of nine piratical gentlemen who drifted into New York at election time, ninety years ago, and were promptly wooed and won by the siren oratory of the "Vote for Pipp" shouters; only to have their emotions as profoundly stirred by the "Vote for Pottle" folks with the siren song of unlimited rum-and-water. The funniest of funny stories.

MR. BARNABY HENCH, election agent and professional provider of riots at the polls, leaned on the bar of the Mermaid Oyster Palace and surveyed the crowded room with a keen eye for corrupt voters. It was the second evening of the New York City election of 182—, for at that period it took three days running to elect a mayor, and for a week past political feeling had fairly boiled in Gotham. Placards, pasted up at midnight, and often pasted over again before dawn, covered walls and fences; handbills clogged the gutters; here and there a pig, rooting in the street, wore a ribbon tied to its tail, and bearing the command, "Vote for Pottle," or "Vote for Pipp."

Joshia H. Pottle, a retired brewer, led one army; plain John Pipp, who painted houses for a living, led the other. Behind these candidacies—Pottle was for the innovation and Pipp was against it—loomed the vital question of a city water supply and a *tax on water!* The town pump was threatened. A thousand placards shouted that Joshia H. Pottle never drank water; a thousand others sharply retorted that plain John Pipp never took a bath.

Mr. Barnaby Hench personally cared little which of these candidates was elected. Professionally he was committed to Pipp; and to-night he was looking for Pipp voters. New faces, faces that would not be recognized at the polls as having voted several times already, were what he was after. And in a group of nine men, seated around a table, and devouring oysters, it seemed to him that he had found just what he wanted.

Not only, in Mr. Hench's judgment, were these men strangers in the city, but there was about each of them a devil-may-care audacity that would make the boldest election official hesitate to ask him impertinent questions. They were dressed like gentlemen, although the unrefined way in which they attacked their oysters and gulped their rum-and-water contradicted the refinement of their fashionable attire, and any Pipp voter dressed like a gentleman was a moral influence.

That they were not registered voters did not disturb Barnaby. In his pocket was a long list of names and addresses thoughtfully compiled for the benefit of voters who were not registered. Nor was it likely that nine real gentlemen, or even a couple, would have been found together in the Mermaid Oyster Palace, patronized, as it was, exclusively from the wharves, sailors' boarding houses, and shipping that flavored all the neighborhood with salt, tar, bilge water, pine, and profanity.

The next table happened to become vacant. Barnaby Hench, glass in hand, crossed the room to it, and the position

brought him within earshot. Even that close, such was the babble of political discourse in the crowded oyster palace, it was difficult to catch what they were saying. But it interested and startled Barnaby to hear that they called each other by nickname—"Red Whisker," "Nose Ring," "Yellow Mustaches," "Bald Head," "Piggy," and others. At that period these names were notorious, belonging, as they did, to the single small company that still maintained in North American waters the vanishing traditions of piracy.

Granting the names, the rest followed: *they were pirates*, and their fashionable garments were the former property of unhappy passengers on some missing packet, now worn by their murderers to avoid observation when away from their vessel.

To make the matter certain, one of them tipped back his chair, twirled his long, graceful, yellow mustaches, and struck up a ditty. On the hurly-burly of the room the song made no impression, but it was plainly enough audible to the listening political agent.

"Let them as will remain ashore,"

sang the pirate, with a wild kind of cheerfulness,

"To till th' soil or run a store,
Pick out a gal an' settle down
To poppylate their native town.
It ain't fer us!

We loves to feel
Th' good ole sea aneath our keel.
We loves to murder, drink, an' rob.
Fer pirucy's our steady job.

"Let them as will fer heaven steer
An' twang a harp from year to year,
An' dress all day in garmints white
Like them ye wear in bed at night.
It ain't fer us!

But down below
Where wicked folks are signed to go
We'll meet a more con-genial mob.
Fer pirucy's our steady job."

"An' that's a pooty song, too, Yaller Mustaches," said the man they called Red Whisker, opening them to swallow his last oyster. "Signed to go below we be, an' sure to find company as we'll feel to home in. But wot I says now be as we pays our leetle reckonin' an' puts to sea ag'in. As fer this city election as we hears so much about, I don't rightly onderstand wot they're a-doin', an' I don't very much care, cuss me! As th' song says, it ain't fer us, messmates."

"Howsomever," remarked another, thoughtfully blowing a puff of smoke through his large brass nose ring, "I'd like to hear a bit more about it. Wot's th' matter of another dozen oysters while th' feller over there's makin' th' speech as he's jest cast loose fer?"

Apparently the majority was with him. They ordered more oysters, and the fact that the orator had visibly mounted a table, and was pounding for attention with his walking stick, stilled conversation and made his speech audible.

"Gentlemen," he was shouting, wagging his head impressively. "We stand to-night facing the final dawn of the greatest political contest in history—a contest, gentlemen, not of men, but of principles. The hour is too great for trivial personalities. *The* question, Shall the city of New York sell water? —*water*, gentlemen, the first good gift of Divine Providence to thirsty Adam, and ever since called Adam's Ale in consequence; not Pottle's Ale, but Adam's [laughter and applause]—this question, I say, eclipses alike the democratic simplicity of a Pipp and the plutocratic hypocrisy of a Pottle.

"The sale of water, gentlemen, a tax on that pure element which every signer of the glorious Declaration of Independence enjoyed the inalienable right of drawing freely from the town pump, not only shocks the reverence for the historic past that dwells sweetly in every bosom of this intelligent assembly [cheers]; but it adds instantly to the steadily increasing drain upon the steadily diminishing resources of every patriotic father of a steadily increasing family! [Groans and mutters of anger.]

"Wherever water is used with liquor, the combination will increase in price. The widow, washing the pretty face of her orphan child, will be taxed out of her scanty means to pay for the very

liquid needed to fill its tiny washbowl. And if, gentlemen, that widow takes in washing; if, on bended knee, she scrubs a Pottle floor [great excitement and cries of "Hang him! Hang him!"] in order that her little one may thrive and flourish like a little bay tree—a portion of her meager income must go to pay for the very water in her pathetic washtub or scrub bucket. Already the price of soap rises like a yellow tide that threatens to engulf representative government.

"But to-night, gentlemen, I see a new star shining in the firmament of American statesmanship to stem the current—and I name that star 'Pipp!' I hear the eagle scream a name of promise from the empyrean—and that name is 'Pipp!' I see a million million schoolchildren, going to school, as the great poet has said, with their faces washed—and on every clean, innocent little forehead I seem to see written in letters of gold, 'Pipp did it!'"

It was an impassioned effort, and if any voter in that crowded oyster palace needed persuasion, just the thing to persuade him. In cold print, as so often happens, the appeal does not look particularly convincing; but in the excitement of an election the speaker carried everything and everybody before him. Even the nine pirates found themselves cheering him; forgot completely, for the moment, their own evil profession, and lived only to protect the widow washing the orphan. It seemed quite natural that Barnaby Hench should have drawn his chair to their table.

"An able bit of oratory, gentlemen," remarked Mr. Hench affably. "And true as Gospel. Everything is going up—and now the very water that we add to a helpful drop of likker. If this fellow Pottle gets elected, and they put that tax on water, it will come hard on seafaring men who make port in New York. But, perhaps," he added craftily, "you gentlemen are Pottle supporters?"

"Not us!" said Red Whisker bitterly. "Cuss him, say I—a-risin' o' th' price o' rum-an'-water, an' oppressin' of th' widders! Ef we had votes at all, sir, we'd vote fer Pipp."

Barnaby Hench leaned across the table and embraced them all in a smile that would have been genial had it been less serpentine.

"Being strangers and having no votes doesn't make any real difference," he said significantly. "Trust yourselves to *me*, gentlemen, and you shall vote tomorrow, not once, but often."

II.

In a small omnibus, decorated with blue Pipp streamers, five fashionably dressed pirates sat in a row and stared discontentedly at four others, and a rather pretty, but evidently nervous, gentleman with a soft, brown beard. Except for this gentleman, they were all smoking vigorously; and the smoke of their black cigars, trailing behind the flying vehicle, almost hid Mr. Barnaby Hench as he stood on the step and clung desperately to the handles. They had already voted several times apiece; but so far Barnaby Hench, knowing the real character of his little company of voters, had done his best to steer them clear of the alcoholic indulgence that was then an important part of Election Day. More than that, the effect of the oratory to which they had last night yielded was wearing dangerously thin in places. Perhaps the more sober they got the less they thought of it.

"Dust we be, says th' parson," remarked Red Whisker, bloomily moistening his lips with a tongue that tasted always a little of rum-and-water, "an' dust I feels like. I'm a-dryin' up, messmates. Ef I don't git a good all-round wet afore long I'll blow away, cuss me!"

"Everybody but us seems to be a-drinkin' as well as a-votin'," muttered Nose Ring rebelliously. "Why ain't we a-drinkin' as well as a-votin', —— —— —— it!"

"Wot I says be as I'd like to hear th' argymints o' th' other side," declared Yellow Mustaches, with a dogged kind of earnestness. "Now, as we knows how to vote, Mr. Hench, fer two cents I'd climb out o' this cussed omnybus an' vote by m'self."

Mr. Hench clung grimly to the

handles, and nearly fell off the step as the omnibus rounded a corner.

"There's no time to stop and drink if we're going to vote for Pipp in all the seventeen wards of this city, gentlemen," he shouted, in a tone that he tried in vain to make genial. "*I* don't stop and drink. Think of Pipp, gentlemen, and conquer your thirst."

They were on their way from one poll to another. The vehicle rattled, traveled on two wheels as it turned the corner, ran over a pig, and dispersed a company of gentlemen—old enough to know better—marching arm in arm in the middle of the street, and singing:

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!
We are coming, too!
Watch us toddle
Out for Pottle.
Cock-a-doodle-doo!
Rah! rah! rah!—Pottle!"

Then it bounced horridly as it went over one of them. The gentleman with the soft, brown beard screamed hysterically; and, looking back curiously, they could all see the black mark of the wheel—it looked like a belt—right across the fallen gentleman's white waistcoat. But there was still some life in him. He kicked his heels and cock-a-doodled feebly. They lost sight of him as the omnibus two-wheeled another corner, and stopped with a flourish in front of an especially disreputable-looking groggery.

It was a period when few observers, if any, questioned the wisdom and economy of locating the polls in an open barroom; and this in itself had made Barnaby Hench's job harder than he had at first anticipated. There was a fight going on in the gutter between two evenly matched and patriotic supporters of Pipp and Pottle; naturally they all wanted to stop and look at it, but he managed to get them past and into the polling place. Conscientious election agent as he was, the work was palling on him. Twice already he had lost sight of Yellow Mustaches, and found the rascal gaping with dangerous interest in front of a Pottle orator. And now, at the entrance, the gentleman with the soft, brown beard hung back timidly, and remarked with emphasis that it was no place for a lady.

"Nor ever will be," agreed Mr. Hench testily as he grabbed the gentleman by a trembling elbow. "Politics *is* politics, and ladies *is* ladies, and I hope they'll stay so and mind the babies!" And with a vigorous effort he dragged the timid voter with one hand, and peremptorily waved the others past the bar toward the ballot box. Except for the strangeness of the experience, and the authority that experience had given Hench over a block of voters, he could never have done it. He mopped his brow as he lined them up in a corner within sight of the ballot box.

"Here we are again, gentlemen," he went on, with an effort at lightness. "I'll call the roll to make sure you haven't forgotten your names and addresses. Patrick Henry Jones, twenty-seven Fork Alley."

"Here, sir," said the timid voter. "But I don't like it."

"Thomas Jefferson Peters, nineteen Egg Lane."

"Aye, aye," growled Red Whisker, "Dry as dust, an' likely to blow away, cuss me!"

"Ben Franklin Smith, thirty Doyer."

"Aye, aye," muttered Nose Ring. "Everybody but us a-votin' an' a-drinkin' to once! Why ain't we a-votin' an' a-drinkin'——"

"George Washington Glover, fourteen Egg Lane."

There was no answer—none whatever. Yellow Mustaches was again missing; and with an oath of vexation Barnaby Hench disappeared in search of him. Hardly ten seconds later the bartender, even on Election Day, shuddered at the thirsty ferocity of eight faces that appeared simultaneously in front of him. Patrick Henry Jones hesitated, but he kept close behind the others. He might be too refined by nature for this rough-and-ready environment, but these eight men were at least his only acquaintances.

"Rum-and-water fer eight, barkeep," said Red Whisker briskly, "an' as soon as ye've mixed th' fust round, start on th' second, an' I guess we'll manage to

catch ye afore ye've got th' third goin'. As fer you, sir," he added, turning to Mr. Jones, "name yer fav'rite pizen an' name it lively." And he stood so excitedly, first on one foot, and then on the other, that his tall hat joggled.

But Patrick Henry Jones visibly hesitated to select a poison.

The bartender waited; lined up in front of the bar the eight vile ruffians danced monotonously with thirst; and, as always happens in like circumstances, everybody else at the bar stopped drinking and regarded Mr. Jones with a deep, attentive interest. Even a stout, fussy gentleman, who had been closely reading the latest edition of his favorite newspaper, as he refreshed himself before voting, paused in the middle of an editorial and focused his eyeglasses on the prospective suicide.

"Could the man speak?" they seemed to be asking each other. "Would he ever speak?" "Was he ill?" "What kind of a man was he, anyway?" "Who were his parents?" "Did his mother know he was out?" "If he could speak, why didn't he?" "If he couldn't speak, why didn't he say so?"

A profound silence, terrifying in its intensity, spread even to the ballot box. The election waited. The Constitution and representative government trembled in the balance until mankind should know what Mr. Jones selected as his favorite poison.

"L-l-lemonade," murmured Mr. Jones feebly—and then, shuddering, he hid his face in his hands and wept hysterically. And now everybody who had just been trying to hear what he would say tried tumultuously to see what he was doing. Only two men paid no attention—the bartender, methodically mixing the lemonade, and the fussy gentleman, hastily scrambling to the top of the bar, and waving his newspaper. He, anyway, was both visible and audible.

"Citizens!" he shouted. "A crime is about to be committed at this poll." Never again, perhaps, would he get such an opportunity to appear in public, and he was evidently determined to make the most of it. He bent over and pounded the bar with a glass to attract attention. Then he stood up and pointed to a page of his paper to indicate that he was about to read them an editorial. The barroom listened.

"'After two days of the most important election that has ever occurred in this country,'" read the fussy gentleman impressively, "'we learn with horror of the most nefarious attempt to corrupt the purity of the ballot that has yet fermented in the diseased brains of political thieves and robbers. Never before has the honest citizen, with his one incorruptible vote, been so threatened by the illegal ballots of a horde of imported ruffians, thugs, blacklegs, and other human riffraff. The very seas have been called upon to pour a wave of corruption on the land; the very bounds of sex are being set at naught to defeat an outraged and indignant citizenship. Pirates, red-handed from their trade, are to-day voting in this city. Nor is this all. Dressed in the garments of a man, and assuming for the nonce the most splendid prerogative of the sterner sex, the Bearded Lady of the Omega Museum is to-day casting, we know not how many ballots, in our municipal election.'"

He paused significantly, and pointed dramatically with his paper at Patrick Henry Jones and his eight suspicious companions. At least such was his intention. But all that visibly remained of them was an untasted glass of lemonade and eight empty glasses that had once contained rum-and-water.

III.

In a small taproom, half a block north of the poll, eight indignant pirates, and Patrick Henry Jones—as we must still call her—gloomily surrounded a table, fortunately vacated just after they had hurriedly entered. Lacking the distinction of a ballot box, this barroom was quite as busy as the one from which they had vanished. Gentlemen in tall beavers and brass-buttoned, swallow-tail coats were entering and leaving in a flurry of excitement and self-importance, pausing, however, to shake hands cordially with humbler citizens.

and ask affectionately after these humbler citizens' wives and children. Several of these gentlemen cordially pressed the hands of Mr. Jones and the eight pirates, and asked affectionately after *their* wives and children—which would have been embarrassing if they had ever waited for answers.

Escape from the poll, after the fussy gentleman had centered every intelligent—and unintelligent—eye on himself, had been an easy matter. The brisk statement that they were going for the police had cleared the way for them; and, once in the street, the resourceful but still thirsty fellows had looked instinctively for another barroom. Nor, under the circumstances, could human wisdom have selected a better one. The last place where any one would that day look for corrupt Pipp voters would be the headquarters of the Joshia H. Pottle ward committee; and Patrick Henry Jones, calmer now, but still sniffing at intervals, had tagged along after them.

"Th' way I looks at it now, messmates, an' you, too, m'am," said Red Whisker angrily, "be as that feller Hench has worked this merry company like a passel o' brainless jellyfish! Puttin' of our lives an' liberties in danger fer his own pocket, ef I onderstand politicks, an' a-foolin' of us with th' notion as we was a-votin' correct an' proper, an' like real citizens. An' that's as plain as plain John Pipp hisself, cuss him! Eight glasses o' rum-an'-water," he added savagely to the expectant waiter, "an' a lem'nade fer this feller."

"How th' lady comes into it I don't know," said Nose Ring moodily, "an' that ain't none of our business, not bein' wot ye might fairly call bearded ladies ourselves. Wot hurts me be th' thought o' everybody but us a-votin' an' a-drinkin', an' us a-votin' an' not a-drinkin'. Afeard he was that we'd find out accidentallike that we weren't a-votin' honest. I'm a bad man I hopes," he added, grinding his teeth on his nose ring, "but wot's th' use o' votin' at all ef ye don't vote honest?"

It was the general sentiment; and if Barnaby Hench had come in at that moment a crime would have been committed that would have made the fussy gentleman recoil with far more horror than any editorial that he had yet read in his favorite newspaper. To the direct, primitive natures of these lawless men voting was a serious matter. When they elected a leader they voted—and if they didn't vote honest, what was the use of doing it? Oaths met rum-and-water in an angry sizzle as they emptied their glasses; and, in spite of herself, Patrick Henry goose-fleshed. He was a woman, and at that period few if any of her sex were interested in the ethics of politics. To Mr. Jones, indeed, the best use for the ballot would have been to make curl papers, and whether you preferred a blue Pipp ballot or a yellow Pottle one depended entirely upon your complexion. But she fully agreed with them concerning Barnaby.

"It's that wretched Mr. Hench got me into it, too," Mr. Jones explained nervously. "You see, everybody in the musee has a vote but me, and the fat lady, and the Circassian beauty; and Mr. Hench is a dear friend of the proprietor. And when Mr. Hench told him that Mr. Pipp would take something off his bill for painting the musee last summer—why, everybody who could vote just *had* to vote for Pipp, or lose his job in the musee. And then Mr. Hench suggested, on account of my profession, that there was no reason whatever——"

"An' that's wot they calls politicks!" exclaimed Red Whisker disgustedly. "Fill 'em up ag'in, waiter, an' stand by fer th' next order, cos we've all had a shock as it's goin' to take a ocean o' likker to make us feel nat'ral an' self-respectin' arter." He went down in his trousers pocket for a handful of silver; but the waiter, gathering up the glasses, shook his head genially.

"Drink all ye can carry away, gentlemen," he replied cheerfully, "but you ain't allowed to pay a cent for it. Compliments of Mr. Pottle!" And as he shot toward the bar as actively as the crowd would permit the passage even of a waiter's body, he left them staring amazedly after him.

It was a cruel discovery. All that morning, with the guileless innocence

that often characterizes the wicked in a strange environment, they had been voting for Pipp. And now—— Oh! Burning coals of fire!—they were drinking on Pottle! They *might* stop drinking—but, even at that moment, none of them thought of it. They were abominable men; their souls, if they had any, were black and leathery with congenial murder; their bodies were hypocritically covered by the very garments of their innocent victims—but they were not venal voters. Barnaby Hench, keen judge of human nature that his occupation made him, had discovered it early in conversation, and had played on their ignorance. But they were human like the rest of us. The worst that could be said of them was that they had yielded easily to the siren song of oratory; and now their emotional natures were just as profoundly stirred by the siren song of unlimited free rum-and-water. A man who gave away rum-and-water was not going to raise the price of it! They had misjudged Pottle. They knew without thinking that a man who gave away rum-and-water was not the man who would oppress widows.

It was not so much—as a gentleman at the bar was vividly declaiming—that the defeat of Pottle would be a national calamity. *That* went without saying. But just see what Pipp was really trying to do to the great American widow and orphan! The fellow actually stood between them and a beneficent system that would bring water—water, that most necessary fluid in the lives of the widowed and the fatherless—through pipes, democratically, mark you, into every dwelling. And who would pay for it? The wealthy, the landlord class would have to pay for it! The defeat of Pottle, said the orator, would cause the very stars to shed tears of fire in the empyrean. And the American eagle, dying on his perch, would be found by post-mortem to have the name of Pottle written on his proud, but broken, heart.

"An' all that needs, sir, be a leetle ditty to top it off with," said a patriot who had just entered, arm-in-arm with two others who wore the honorable insignia of Pottle committeemen. "Rum-an'-water fer me, barkeep, an' two Monongahelas fer th' committee! An' all hands pipe th' chorus while he's a-mixin' an' a-settin'.

And, to the astonishment of his eight associates, Yellow Mustaches himself leaned gracefully on the bar, beat time with his forefinger, and gave voice to one of those stirring melodies that seem to arise spontaneously from the passions of such an hour. They knew without telling that he, too, had come in convincing contact with the great Pottle argument.

"Wot'll we do,
Wot'll we do,
Wot'll we do to Pipp?"

demanded Yellow Mustaches lyrically—and the whole room answered him:

"We'll wash his face with turpintine.
We'll shampoo his head with calsomine.
We'll putty his mouth and paint him blue
And comb his hair with a paint brush, too.
And then we'll varnish him, living or dead,
And head him up in a keg of white lead."

Everybody sang it together, repeated it, kept it going, were altogether unable to get enough of it: and in that wild confusion the eight pirates, Patrick Henry Jones timidly but tenaciously following, elbowed through the crowd and confronted their comrade. Hardly knowing how it happened, they found themselves shaking hands with him, with each other, with the committeemen, with Patrick Henry herself. It was an ovation. Eventually they were able to talk more calmly.

"Th' truth on it, messmates," said Yellow Mustaches, "be as we've all been makin' a infunnel mistake. An' th' way to fix it, as these gentlemen has just been explainin' to me, be to go th' hull hog an' become natur'lized citizens. They're just taking of me to be natur'lized arter we've had a leetle drink or two more on ole Josh Pottle, bless him, as we're goin' to elect mayor or bust. So wot's th' matter o' all hands bein' natur'lized together?"

IV.

There was no time to waste; but fortunately the court of naturalization was not very far distant. Altogether they

swallowed nine glasses of rum-and-water, two Monongahelas, and one lemonade, and climbed aboard the omnibus that the committeemen found for them. Already they had cast eight votes apiece for Pipp; the only way to undo the damage, as one of the committeemen explained to them in the hurtling vehicle, was to cast nine votes apiece for Pottle. He bunched them altogether, included Patrick Henry Jones as a matter of course—for the timid creature still clung to their company rather than risk herself alone in the masculine excitement of Election Day—and worked the sum for them with a stubby pencil on the back of a Pottle ballot:

Nine votes (technically illegal) for Pottle.
Subtract eight votes (technically illegal) for Pipp.
One vote (technically and morally legal) for Pottle.

What the committeeman did not explain to them was that, being naturalized did not immediately make them registered voters. It was a small detail, considering that he proposed to have them vote anyway, and hardly worth mentioning when nine men and one bearded lady had so little time in which to be naturalized.

"An' everybody a-drinkin' an' a-votin' to once," added Nose Ring contentedly to Mr. Jones, who sat beside him in the omnibus with the same distant, yet almost affectionate, intimacy that our modern trolley car still imposes upon the most reticent men and women. "Rum fer men," he went on gallantly, "an' lem'nade fer th' fair sex as don't need anythin' stronger to make 'em intoxicatin'."

Mr. Jones tittered.

"The idea of *me* voting!" she exclaimed frankly. "I'm sure I don't know what I would have done without you gentlemen."

Unlike many ladies of our own period, Mr. Jones saw no reason whatever for pretending an interest in political matters. As the perspicacious reader has already noticed, the sex of this gentleman made him a clinging tendril. If anybody had told her that a time was coming when ladies would *want* to vote, she would have laughed spontaneously and "guessed she knew better."

"So long as the boss doesn't know the difference," she added, with a pretty toss of his head, as the omnibus stopped before the court of naturalization, "I don't care a copper cent whether I vote for one or the other. And you take my word for it, there isn't much to choose between 'em."

One after another they climbed down from the omnibus and stood at the entrance of that wonderful funnel where the foreign exile—poor grub!—went in at one end and came out at the other a radiant butterfly of an American citizen. But the place, nevertheless, was a court, and the pirates hesitated. Only Yellow Mustaches, whose longer acquaintance with the committeemen seemed to have given him a firmer grasp on the custom of his about-to-be-adopted country, advanced with real confidence.

"I don't like it," said Red Whisker doubtfully. "Looks to me like puttin' of our heads in a halter, an' not a weepon among us——"

"Puttin' yer grandmother's head in a halter!" replied Yellow Mustaches reassuringly. "It ain't that kind of a court, Whisker, an' bein' natur'lized wouldn't hurt a cussed fly, ole feller." And although the others still looked worried and uncomfortable, a moment later found them standing in a wicked row in front of the naturalization clerk.

It was an unusual experience, probably unique in the annals of piracy, politics, and dime museums. But at that period election was a busy time in the court of naturalization. Citizens were made by wholesale, answered the formal questions in chorus, and took the oath of allegiance in bunches. The committeeman lined them up, and evidently regarded them as, to all intents and purposes, one man with ten names and an equal number of votes. The presence of Patrick Henry Jones made this composite candidate for citizenship nine-tenths pirate and one-tenth a trusting woman. Speaking for the ten of them, the committeeman quickly but solemnly

swore that they were men of good moral character, attached to the principles and Constitution of the United States, and well disposed to the good order and happiness of the country in which they were now so keen to become citizens. It was an ideal description of a citizen, but almost an insult to any pirate who was proud of his profession.

"Good moral char-akter!" muttered Nose Ring contemptuously. "Wot's th' feller think we be, anyway, Yaller Mustaches?" And he jerked a thumb toward the perjured committeeman.

"He don't know, an' he ain't axed no questions," whispered his companion. "It's wot they calls a formal'ty, an' don't mean nothin' whatsomever. All we has to do arterward be to make a bluff at signin' our names where th' feller shows us, an' there's th' end on't."

Under the committeeman's direction they made the necessary bluff, and piled back into the omnibus where the other committeeman was waiting for them. It was a good job over—and now they were citizens.

"Wot'll we do,
Wot'll we do,
Wot'll we do to Pipp?
We'll wash his face with turpentine.
We'll shampoo his head with calsomine.
We'll putty his mouth and paint him blue
And comb his hair——"

Dust hid the new-made citizens as the omnibus missed a pig and rounded a corner on its way to the nearest poll.

Night was falling. It was almost time to close the polls when the omnibus dashed with undiminished fury into the last of the seventeen wards that then constituted the political subdivisions of the city. And the city was tired. Pipp and Pottle supporters still rolled in the gutters, clinging to each other with patriotic hatred; but now they pommeled each other with a weary inefficiency, and were hardly worth watching. And as the omnibus passed a cross street the five indomitable rascals on the port side could see blue water and the masts and spars of shipping.

"I see th' *Polly!*" exclaimed Red Whisker with a grunt of satisfaction. "One more vote fer Pottle, messmates, an' we'll go aboard fer supper, an' come ashore arterward to see th' torch-lighters."

In the poll itself smoky oil lamps contended with the growing twilight and accumulated tobacco smoke. And now Patrick Henry Jones, femininely anxious to get his voting over and done with, stepped impulsively to the front, and poised her neatly folded slip of paper above the ballot box.

"I challenge that voter!" said a familiar voice quickly; and the hand of the election official intercepted Mr. Jones' ballot for Pottle and purity.

"I recognize the voter!" said another voice with equal alacrity, for there was a Pottle man beside the box ready and waiting for just such emergencies. "His father and mine fought through the War of Independence together. Whoever challenges that gentleman's vote ——"

"Nobody's challenging a gentleman's vote," said Barnaby Hench coldly. *"That gentleman is a lady!* And the men behind her," he added, in a sharp whisper to an individual beside him whom the dim light revealed as wearing the uniform of a lieutenant in the United States navy, *"are the pirates!* Order your marines to close in, lieutenant——"

He spoke low, but Red Whisker was close behind Mr. Jones; Yellow Mustaches close behind Red Whisker. Even if their keen eyes, used to following a quarry in the dark night, had not known that uniform, the sight of any uniform so near the red nose of Barnaby Hench would have told them what had happened. They had been betrayed—and now they were ambushed; unarmed as they were, citizens as they had just become, they confronted the gallows! This, then, was to be the end of so much voting, so much patriotism and love of country—to dance pitifully on nothing for the interested pleasure of their newly acquired fellow citizens.

Already a growl from the crowd reached them—a threatening murmur, and they turned bravely to face it. But no one was looking at them. Every

eye in the room stared past the pirates straight at Barnaby Hench, and the slight, pathetic, trembling figure, back to them as it was, of Mr. Jones, still holding her challenged Pottle ballot, and not knowing what to do with it.

For even in that brief interval the louder accusation of Mr. Hench against Mr. Jones had spread through the poll. A lady at the poll! The thing was unheard of. Nobody had ever discussed it privately or publicly. And now, sprung upon them in this unexpected fashion, the situation appealed instantly to the American sense of chivalry.

Why not?—if the lady felt like it.

Were we not in America, where liberty is in the very air, and the boys breathe it; and if boys breathe it, why shouldn't women?

Were we not men? Were we not gentlemen?

Instinctively, rough as many of these intelligent voters were, some of them took off their hats; several stopped smoking and drinking; a few even apologized to each other for the profanity that the refining discovery that a woman was in the poll had promptly stifled.

"If the lady wants to vote," said a voice grimly; *"let her vote!"*

It was the natural protest of indignant manhood against any opposition to the wishes of an unprotected female; and so doubtless it would be to-day if the women hadn't raised the argument that if they voted like men they would also vote much more intelligently. More than that, the voice came as an inspiration to one of the most resourceful minds that has ever practiced piracy.

"Down with th' cuss as won't let th' lady vote!" bellowed Red Whisker; and, with a single wild and wrathful roar, all wildly and wrathfully roaring together, the nine pirates leaped at Barnaby Hench. And every intelligent voter in the room followed.

Riot, that culminating glory of an old-time municipal election, swept the poll and hid the endangered desperadoes from the grim company of marines that had been closing in around them. Marines, pirates, Barnaby Hench, the lieutenant, and Mr. Patrick Henry Jones—to say nothing of the sacred ballot box and its Pipp and Pottle guardians—became a confused mass in which it was impossible to distinguish one from another.

And then, from under this mass of humanity, at the point nearest the door, crawled a damaged but still living pirate; and then another, and another, and another.

Half an hour later, from the deck of a small, rakish-looking schooner, leisurely dropping away from her moorings, nine tired miscreants looked back curiously at the wharves and roofs of the metropolis. And where now they would have seen a skyscraper, a single rocket burst into one pale star drifting against the deepening indigo of evening.

"Wot I'd like to know," said Nose Ring thoughtfully, "be whether they're a-shootin' off fireworks fer Pipp or Pottle, tho' th' more I think on't th' more I guess as Patrick Hinry Jones were right an' it don't make much difference. Voted a hundered an' forty odd times we has since sunup, an' th' more I figgered th' less I see as we helped either on 'em."

"An' cussed dry work at that, th' fust half on it," added Red Whisker. "Dust we be, says th' parson, an' dust I felt like. Ef we hadn't changed over from Pipp to Pottle, I'd 'a' blowed away, cuss me!"

Ralph Bergengren has written another funny story. It's about a man who wouldn't sell his house to anybody but a Chinaman. It will appear within a few weeks.

The Sporting Doctor

By Charles E. Van Loan

Author of "Carmelita's Honeymoon," "The Strategy of Battle," Etc.

Faith, determination, and a willingness to literally put himself in the other man's shoes—these are the things that enable the Sporting Doctor to make over a prize fighter who had lost his grip and was spoken of as "the man who couldn't come back"

WHEN the lightweight champion of the world went to his corner after the eighth round, he was puffing badly, and his knees were shaking.

"What are you stalling for, Billy?" demanded "Tacks" McLowrie, the champion's manager, chief second, and adviser. "Why don't you tear into this stiff and show him how to take a joke?"

"I—I ain't stalling," panted the champion. "This is a tough fellow—strong as a bull—can't seem to get started, somehow."

"You copped him nice with that right swing," said McLowrie, realizing that encouragement was needed. "It set him back on his heels."

"Yes, and he laughed at me—didn't hurt him a bit—just as strong in the clinches as ever—I'll get him—when I get started."

"Aw, there's lots of time," said McLowrie soothingly. "Make him lead more, Billy. Pull him out of position, and cross him with the right. Hands hurting you any?"

The champion nodded. In spite of the soft bandages, the old dislocations were bothering him. A fighter, like a baseball player, a short-card dealer, or a pianist, is no better than his hands—and "Billy" Wade's hands were bad. The right, which he had damaged on "Buckskin" Kelly's head two years before, was throbbing painfully.

"Use your left more," said McLowrie. "Keep him away from you. Nix on the infighting; make him box. You've had every round so far."

"Think so?"

"Why, a thousand miles!" Thus do seconds and advisers stimulate confidence at the expense of veracity.

"In the other angle of the ring, "Frankie" Brady, a freckled, shock-headed young thunderbolt, was also listening to counsel.

"I knew this sucker wasn't half trained," said "Bo" Brooks, his manager. "Go right after his body; there's where he's weak. Forget that he's got a jaw at all; cave in his belly, and he's yours."

"Leave it to me," said Brady. "Did you hear him when I sunk that right into his stomach? Grunted like a pig. I tell you, he don't like 'em down there!"

"Yes," said Brooks, "and the fellow that does is a fool. He's tired, and he wants to stall. Keep right on top of him all the time—make him fight himself out. Rough him up in the clinches."

Back in the third row of the reserved-seat section, a fattish young man peered through his glasses. He was watching the champion's corner intently, noting every move. He saw the heaving chest, the drawn look about the mouth, and the distress in the half-closed eyes.

"I think Billy has hung it all over Brady so far," said a red-faced man, sitting beside the one with the glasses. "He's a slow beginner you know, Doc."

"My friend," said the fattish young

man calmly, "the champion is all through. He shot his bolt in the first six rounds."

"Huh!" said the red-faced man. "He ain't started yet!"

"Take a good look at him, and tell me when you think he's going to get started. In the first place, he's in no sort of shape for a hard fight, and in the second——"

The red-faced man sputtered incoherently as he fished out a thick roll of bills.

"Fifty will get you a hundred if you think so, Doc! Two to one that Wade wins!"

The fattish young man smiled sadly. With thumb and forefinger he extracted several pasteboards from his vest pocket and spread them fanwise, like a hand at whist.

"I'm sorry I can't take you, Joe," said he. "I'm already down—and out."

The red-faced man glanced at the pool-room tickets, and his face grew redder than ever.

"Why, what the—— Say! You got eight hundred bet on him, and you're quitting already?"

The fattish young man solemnly returned the tickets to his pocket.

"Not quitting," said he, "merely conceding that I haven't got a chance. I never allow my bets to influence my judgment, Joe, and I'm afraid in this case that I didn't allow my judgment to influence my bets. There will be a new champion of the world inside of fifteen minutes."

"Bet you ten to one there ain't!"

The young man with the glasses explored his pockets and brought forth some halves, quarters, and dimes.

"Your price is all out of line, Joe," said he; "and, besides that, you're betting on sympathy. I never hedged before in my life, but if you insist—four dollars and eighty-five cents against forty-eight-fifty that before ten-twenty-one p. m. Frankie Brady will be the lightweight champion of the world."

"Why not five against fifty?"

"Because," said the fattish young man, "I make it a rule never to bet more than I can pay. Four-eighty-five just taps me, Joe, and if you win I'll have to hold out breakfast money."

"All right, shoot the four-eighty-five," said Joe, "but it seems to me that if I had eight hundred iron men bet on a fighter I'd be rooting my head off for him to win instead of waiting for his finish."

"There's no virtue in rooting," said the other, opening his cigarette case. "All the encouragement in the world, vocal or otherwise, won't take the place of stamina."

During the ninth round, Brady landed a solid right-hander to the stomach, and the champion wilted under it. The challenger, aware that his man was weakening, followed his advantage with a vicious streak of infighting. Wade tried to clinch and blanket the piston-like blows, but Brady would not have it so, and crowded the champion along the ropes, driving in short, punishing jolts to the body. Wade was weak and gasping when the bell rang.

"I don't know what's the matter with me," he wailed, when he reached his corner. "I can't seem to get started!"

"You'd better start pretty soon," said McLowrie.

Reddy Burke was swinging a towel in Wade's corner. A sturdy little boxer who just escaped the top-notch flight of lightweights, he had attached himself to Wade's fortunes in the capacity of sparring partner, and the boys were inseparable companions.

"Aw, go git him, Billy!" said Burke. "He ain't got a thing. Tear his block off!"

The tenth round saw the champion on the floor twice, and the second time he took nine seconds before rising.

The fattish young man nodded at the red-faced one during the interval between the tenth and eleventh rounds.

"Smelling salts and brandy," said he. "It's about over. Good-by, Billy Wade."

The red-faced man did not answer. His lower lip was trembling, and there were tears in his eyes.

"I know how you feel, Joe," said his friend. "I hate to see him whipped, too.

because he's been a great little fighter; but—they all get it sooner or later."

"He ain't fighting his fight!" groaned Joe. "If he only had a flash of his old form—just a flash! Doc, he used to *murder* fellows like this Brady. There wasn't a lightweight that could stand up to him at infighting; but Brady's licking him at his own game. What's wrong with him? Can he be doped or something?"

"Yes," said the fattish young man; "doped with alcohol and nicotine. The stamina isn't there. That was all that ever made Billy Wade a champion. He's lost it, and now he's a mark for a second-rater. Too bad!"

The sting of brandy in his throat, and the pungent odor of aromatic spirits of ammonia in his nostrils, the champion was helped out of his corner at the beginning of the eleventh round. His arms hung like leaden weights, and he shuffled rather than walked to the middle of the ring. Brady rushed to meet him, smothered a last dying flurry in a clinch, and the crowd rose to watch the passing of one of the blue ribbons of the athletic world. After the third knockdown, Tacks McLowrie picked up a sponge and fingered it thoughtfully. Reddy Burke snatched it from his hand.

"Not that way!" said he fiercely. "He's a champion yet, and a champion never quits!"

Billy Wade did not quit, nor was the sponge thrown into the ring. Brady measured the reeling figure carefully, plumped a right-hander home under the heart, and followed it with a short hook to the chin. This time Wade did not attempt to rise, and Frankie Brady's first act as a champion was to carry the defeated man to his corner, where he placed him gently upon his stool.

"Poor old scout!" said Brady. "He gave me a tough battle."

"Yah!" sneered Reddy Burke. "You was lucky to catch him out o' condition! Wait till we get you again, that's all!"

Brady grinned, and, recalling his ring manners, shook Wade's limp right hand. Then the advance guard of hero worshipers poured through the ropes and surrounded the winner, patting him on the back and showering him with florid compliments.

"Oh, you Brady!"

"Didn't I tell you he'd be soft for you?"

"Hooray for the new champion!"

The fattish young man pulled out his watch.

"Not quite eleven minutes," said he coolly. "Joe, I'll trouble you for that forty-eight-fifty. I'm going to need it."

It was some time before the arena was cleared. The fattish young man climbed upon his chair and watched the defeated champion as he was assisted toward the dressing room. His arms dangled at his sides, his shoulders sagged, and he was mumbling to himself:

"Couldn't get started—don't know why—Brady can't hit hard enough to stop me."

The fattish young man took the poolroom tickets from his pocket, tore them small, and tossed the bits into the air.

"Serves me right!" said he. "It'll be a lesson to me."

II.

In every college class there is one beloved youth who wins the engaging pseudonym of "Sport."

Arthur Phelps had been "Sport" Phelps from his grammar-school days. Happy-go-lucky, irresponsible, open-handed, and generous to a fault, whether his own or another's, the name clung to him through medical college.

The poker-playing freshmen soon discovered that Phelps would draw four cards to an ace, or stand a back-raise upon a pair, no matter how small. This is not a system which recommends itself to those who desire to profit at cards, but it is very certain indication that the man who follows it gambles because he loves the game and not because he has any great desire to win.

A brilliant student when he felt there was need of study, Phelps managed to squeeze through the medical course and pass his final examinations. The winning of a diploma did not seem to interest him nearly so much as the win-

ning of several bets at seven to five—Phelps on the short end—that he would be "plucked" by the examining board.

His average was not particularly high, apropos of which he remarked:

"Three deuces beat aces and kings—not very much, fellows; but just enough to take the pot. Send in."

He gave an elaborate dinner to the losers, who presented him with a loving cup which was almost silver, addressed him ceremoniously as "Doctor," and grieved very much at parting with him, for Phelps had announced that he was going West to "establish himself in the profession."

Time was heavy upon his idle hands in the Western city, and an empty office is a lonely place in which to wait for a practice. Phelps joined a few clubs of the sort where cards are played and checks passed underneath the table, thus circumventing the house committee and the strict rules against gambling upon the premises. He came to spend a great deal of time at auction bridge, which he found a permanent investment, for he could never resist the temptation to "kick" a strong bid.

His associates, idle young men for the most part, welcomed him joyfully as "Doc." Some preternaturally grave young men with pinfeather whiskers are "Doctor" to their intimates, and rather insist upon this form of salutation. The only difference which a diploma made in Arthur Phelps was that he ceased to be "Sport" and became "Doc."

Absence from office during office hours is not good for a budding practice, nor does it help a practice which shows no signs of flowering. Unfortunately for Phelps, he had an assured income—not as large a one as he would have liked, perhaps, but still enough to keep the wolf at a respectful distance. Lacking the spur of necessity, he fell into careless habits of life and of mind. He did not worry over the fact that his date book was a blank, and that the steady plodders who stayed in their offices were building up paying practices.

Doc Phelps was a drifter, in danger of becoming a moral derelict and a victim of fatty degeneration of the ambition. He was idle, and the worst thing about an idle man is that he is seldom fit to choose his amusements. Anything which involved physical exercise was out of the question, for he had the short breath of the cigarette smoker, and every muscle and tissue in his body was overlaid with soft, unwholesome fat. A brisk run up a single flight of stairs was enough to set his heart to drumming, so he chose sedentary amusements and took as much of his pleasure as possible sitting down.

The city in which he was located was the logical center of the boxing world, and Phelps, interested in all forms of sport, fell into the habit of driving his runabout out to the different training camps to watch the men at work. It was a pleasant way to pass an afternoon, and certainly a better one than sitting in a leather chair at the club, playing bridge at five cents a point and taking a drink every fourth hand.

The boxers came to know this amiable loafer with the double chin, the glasses, and the ready smile, and as time went on, they honored him with their friendship, and gave him their confidence. All the members of the Queensbury brigade are not seasoned and sophisticated; many of them are honest, earnest youngsters, simple and direct as children and untutored as Hottentots. Doc Phelps found them entertaining, and their quaint philosophy of life interested him.

One day "Laddy" McGrath, a preliminary boy of more than ordinary ability, showed Phelps a badly swollen right hand.

"These bum trainers around here have been fooling with it, Doc, but they don't seem to do it much good. I hurt it six months ago, and it hasn't been right since."

Phelps made a careful examination of the hand.

"When do you fight again, Laddy?"

"Next week—the Washoe Kid."

"H'm! Well, if I were you, I'd cancel that date, son. You've got two dislocated joints here, and if you keep on boxing with your hand in this shape, you'll have to quit for keeps pretty

soon. I can fix this up for you, but what it needs most is rest. Come to my office at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning."

"I ain't got no dough, Doc."

"Who said anything about money? Do you want that hand fixed up or not?"

"I sure do," said the boy. "I'll be there, Doc."

That was the beginning of Phelps' pork-and-bean practice, as he called it. Laddy McGrath, his right hand as good as new and his nose slightly remodeled so that he could breathe with his mouth closed, was a walking, talking advertisement of the virtues of his friend, Doc Phelps, and the other preliminary boys flocked to him with their troubles. Broken hands, sprained thumbs, flattened noses, and the various mischances of battle—they took them all to the sporting doctor, and he patched them up. Not the least of his treatment was the sound advice which he gave them, explaining simple hygienic principles in words of one syllable.

"The Doc is all right," said the pork-and-bean fighters. "He always tells you why you ought to do things, or why not, and he knows how a feller can keep in shape. Some gambler, too! He'll bet 'em as much money as they'll take whenever he thinks he's right."

It was Phelps' habit of betting them as much money as they would take which put a serious crimp in his bank account—wiped it out altogether, in fact. Like many followers of the boxing game, the Doc was a firm believer in supporting a champion as long as he bore the title, and the Brady-Wade battle laid him low for several months, during which period his bets were small. But it was only because they had to be, and compulsory virtue does not strengthen the flabby tissues of the soul.

"It'll be a lesson to me," said he; but in his heart he knew that the lesson would not last beyond the lean period.

III.

Another young man might have learned a profitable lesson from that battle, but it is the hardest thing in the world to convince an ex-champion that he is entering into the physical decline which leads to the Queensbury scrap heap. A prima donna may admit that she has lost her top notes; a matinée idol sometimes drops gracefully into character parts, but the passing of a champion is a thing which must be demonstrated upon his stubborn jaw. Defeat wrought in Billy Wade nothing but a wild, unreasoning rage and the firm belief that he was the victim of a widespread conspiracy.

"Here's all the papers hollering that I'm through—down and out," said he to Tacks McLowrie. "You'd think I had whiskers a foot long, the way these sporting editors pan me. Brady is afraid to fight me again—says I'll have to wait, eh? All right. Go get any of these lightweights for me; I'll meet 'em all. After I've trimmed up the bunch, Brooks and Brady won't have a chance to give me the go-by. The public will force that stiff to fight me again!"

So Tacks McLowrie, who was no intellectual Sandow himself, stepped into the open market and hawked the services of the late lightweight champion of the world. Promoters were perfectly willing to give Wade matches, because he was a drawing card; but they pointed out to McLowrie that he was no longer in a position to demand the promoter's right eye as a bonus, a piggish habit into which champions' managers have fallen.

"Well, that's all right!" fumed Wade. "What we want is the fight. I want to show these knockers where they get off."

Tacks made the first match with Eddie Mahoney, a dazzling boxer who had been trying for several seasons to jab his way to a championship. Wade had beaten him before quite handily, and with the bright light of the championship still in his eyes, he held Mahoney cheaply and refused to train as if for a hard match.

"I got him before in a punch, didn't I?" was his argument. "Watch me do it again."

Honest training is hard work, and

Billy was fond of long, black cigars, cocktails, late hours, and other energy destroyers. He liked to have people pat him on the back and tell him how great he was, consequently he haunted the places where people of this sort could see him. A few runs on the road, a week of boxing with the faithful Reddy Burke, and Wade announced himself as ready to put up the battle of his life.

Eddie Mahoney ran rings around the ex-champion for fourteen rounds, and then fought him to a standstill in the remaining six periods, winning the decision with but one dissenting voice, and that came from the loser's corner.

The sporting pages commented that Wade was indeed far gone when a cream-puff boxer like Mahoney could stand and fight with him, toe to toe, and mourned the downfall of a once great two-handed fighter. Billy Wade took violent issue with these statements.

"I wasn't in shape," said he. "I didn't half train."

He did not train for his next fight, either, and in this case the sponge was thrown into the ring.

"He fights like an apple woman," said the critics. "Two fast rounds and he blows up."

At the end of a year, Billy Wade was the joke of the lightweight division. He had honest friends who begged him to retire while he had a shred of reputation left, but Billy shook his head. He was too stubborn to make a public acknowledgment of failure, and conceited enough to believe that hé could win back his place as the idol of the lightweight brigade. Each time he was defeated he had a new excuse, and, though he promised faithfully to train for his next opponent, he never did it. Training was hard, dry work, and meant no cigars and no cocktails, and Billy Wade had reached the point where he leaned heavily upon stimulants.

He quarreled with Tacks McLowrie over a division of the spoils, and they parted, Tacks hitching his wagon to a rising star of the middleweight constellation, whereupon the loyal Reddy Burke remarked that he never did like that stiff McLowrie nohow, and expressed the opinion that badly made matches had been responsible for all of the trouble of the past year.

"I'll lick a few fellows, and then I'll get going," said Wade.

"Sure you will!" said Burke.

One morning, Doc Phelps, who had just finished treating a cauliflower ear, looked up to see Billy Wade in the doorway, with Reddy Burke close behind him. The ex-champion was heavier than a lightweight has any right to be, and he was puffing at a fat, oily cigar.

"Good morning, Doc," said he. "I think I met you once over to Doyle's. These pork-and-bean kids tell me you're a bear when it comes to fixing up bad hands. I want you to see if you can do anything with these. I've got a fight next month—only ten rounds—and I want you to patch me up for it."

"All right, Billy," said the doctor. "Come in, Burke. Now, then, let's have a look at 'em."

The ex-champion removed his overcoat, tossed his gold-headed cane into a corner, and extended his hands. Phelps examined them minutely, whistling between his teeth.

"Ouch!" said Wade, as the doctor pressed hard upon the back of his right hand.

"Tender, eh? How in the world do you fight with your hands bunged up like this?"

"Well," said Wade, "I have to pull a lot of punches to keep from hurting 'em, that's a fact."

"Yeh," said Reddy Burke, "that's why we didn't stop the dago last month."

Phelps released Wade's hands, and leaned back in his chair.

"I'm going to talk straight to you, Billy," said he. "You want the truth, I suppose?"

"Shoot!"

"All right. I'm going to ask you a question: Are you making these cheap matches because you need the money?"

"No!" said Billy shortly. "I can live the rest of my life if I never see a box-

ing glove. I got some dough laid away."

"Then what is your excuse for not quitting? Why are you fighting third-raters with your hands in this shape? Don't you know that any tramp lightweight in the country can lick you now unless you drop him inside of two rounds? Why don't you get out of the game?"

"Say!" exploded Reddy Burke. "We come here to get our hands fixed up, not to be interviewed, see?"

Phelps smiled, and lighted a cigarette, ignoring the satellite.

"That's one trouble with you, Billy," said he. "You've been letting people string you. You'd rather hear a lie than the truth because it's easier to listen to. Now I'm a doctor, and you've come to me for treatment. Part of a doctor's job is to tell people the truth, whether they like it or not. The carpenters left a hole over there for people who don't care to listen."

He paused and beamed upon Reddy.

"See what you get for horning in?" said Wade. "Go ahead, Doc. Get it all out of your system. Shut up, Reddy!"

"That's better," said Phelps. "Now, then, you won't train any more; you're full of poison, your hands are in terrible condition, and you're a wreck at twenty-three years of age. You've got every physical excuse for quitting, and you don't need the money. Why do you stay with it, Billy?"

The boy took his cigar from his mouth so that it would not interfere with a remarkable flow of profanity.

"I'll never quit until I get another wallop at that stiff of a Brady! There's a guy that I'll train for—I wouldn't care if it was a year! If I ever get him in the ring again——"

"Leave it to us what we'll do to 'm!" said Reddy Burke.

"Ah!" said the doctor softly. "So that's the bug under the chip, is it? Do you really mean what you said about training for a year?"

"Doc," said Wade earnestly, "there ain't anything I wouldn't do to get that fellow in the ring with me again. He ain't a champion of the world, and you know it. You can tell it by the way he picks the soft ones and side-steps the real fighters. I can lick him, I tell you!"

"Not the way you are now," said Phelps. "Peel off that coat and vest; I'm going to look you over."

"Yeh," said Reddy Burke. "Let him take a slant at you, boy. You're sound as a nut."

The physical examination was a long one, and when it was over the doctor announced himself as satisfied.

"There's nothing organically wrong with you," said he.

"What did I tell you?" cackled Reddy. "Sound as a nut!"

Phelps shook his head.

"Billy," said he, "you're about the worst wreck of a fine piece of fighting machinery that I ever saw—and I get to look at quite a few of 'em. You're twenty-three, and you've been fighting six years. By rights, you should be just beginning, but as a matter of fact you're nearer thirty than twenty—physically I mean—and you'll be forty in a couple of years if you keep on at the pace you're traveling. You're full of nicotine and alcohol, you've got a lot of rotten teeth in your mouth, you're clogged up with soft, unhealthy fat, and your hands aren't worth a damn as fighting tools. If you had deliberately gone about to destroy your physical efficiency, you couldn't have done a finer job. As you stand now, I wouldn't give a nickel for you."

Billy Wade rubbed his fingers over the back of his right hand, and there was silence in the room for perhaps fifteen seconds.

"If that's straight goods," said he, "there ain't much more to do but haul me to the boneyard."

"Rats!" said the doctor. "I've heard everything else about you, Billy, but nobody ever accused you of being a quitter. All the game fights in the world aren't pulled off in a ring. You need to be made over again from the ground up. It'll be the toughest battle of your life, old son, but the main point

is that you can win if you'll stay with it."

For the first time since the loss of the championship, Wade virtually admitted retrogression.

"Do you think I can come back, Doc?"

"I know it. Whether you do or not is a matter that is up to you. You'll have to be cleaned out from top to bottom—all the poison that you are loaded up with must be eliminated. Those hands must go into plaster casts, and stay there for a month or six weeks, and then we'll tackle the rebuilding process. It won't be any joke, but if you're as game as I think you are, I can send you back in shape to flail the everlasting daylights out of Frankie Brady —yes, even a better man than he is. I agree with you that he's not much of a champion. You can do this, or you can take the easy way, and go on being licked by every pork-and-beaner in the country. With your hands the way they are now, you won't last more than six months. Think it over, Billy. It's up to you."

The ex-champion studied the pattern of the carpet for some time, but at last his head went up, and he thrust out his hand.

"You've got a customer, Doc!" said he.

"Two of 'em," said Reddy Burke. "Because I'm with the old champ at every jump in the road."

"That's the right spirit," said the doctor. "We might as well begin eliminating poison now. Hand me that cigar case of yours. You won't have any further use for it."

"Aw, say!" pleaded Wade. "I've got to have my smoke after dinner, Doc!"

"Not after dinner or any other time. If you mean business, we'll chop the tobacco and booze right here. I want you to get your teeth fixed up first; you've got some rotten cavities there that would poison a dog. Everything that gets into your body has to go through your mouth, so we'll begin the cleaning-out process at the port of entry. When you get the tartar off your teeth, those spongy gums will harden, and they won't bleed so easy—— By the way, what do you drink, mostly?"

"Oh, anything that the gang is drinking," said Wade, reluctantly surrendering his cigar case.

"Conviviality is your trouble, eh?" mused Phelps. "In that case, the farther you can get from the bright lights the better. I know a man who's got a ranch about eighty miles from here and thirty miles from nowhere. He's been after me to pay him a visit and bring some friends along. It would be a great place for you because you wouldn't be tempted to sit up nights or fill yourself with booze. How does the idea strike you?"

"Fine!" said Reddy Burke. "Listen to me a minute, Billy. We'll call this ten-round fight off, see? Then we'll take to the woods without tipping it to a soul where we're going, or why. You can do all this work under cover."

"Why under cover?" asked Phelps.

"Because," said Reddy, "when we get this bird primed to fly again, the less people know about this rebuilding stunt the better. We can get two to one for every dollar we want to put up."

"By George!" said Phelps. "There's something in that!"

IV.

"Doc," said Fred Haynes, the proprietor of the Sundown Ranch, "now that our distinguished guests have retired, would you mind explaining this latest lunacy of yours? Why are you hooked up with a dead one like Billy Wade?"

The men were sitting on the veranda of the ranch house, overlooking a broad sweep of California hills, sepia and silver in the moonlight. Close at hand was the loom of giant sycamores, and the intervals of silence were filled with the whisper of running water.

"Great place you've got here, Fred," said the doctor.

"Don't stall, Doc! Answer the question. I know that you're a bug on fighters, but I always gave you credit for picking live ones. Why Billy Wade? He's been licked by everybody since

he lost the championship. I think I could clean him myself."

"That's why I brought him here." A touch of seriousness was in Phelps' usual bantering tone. "Fred, this fellow is one of the greatest fighting machines in the world, gone all to smash through ignorance and neglect. He's not fought out, and he's not burned out like so many of 'em; but his hands are in awful shape and he's full of poison. He thinks he can come back——"

"They all do," grunted Haynes.

"He thinks he can come back," repeated Phelps patiently, "and I'm going to help him. To-morrow I'm going to give him a light anæsthetic, reduce those dislocations, force the joints back into position, and put both hands in plaster casts. Then I'm going to start in to get rid of the poisons and the broken-down tissues by a general stimulation of the eliminative organs. I'll clean out his skin with protracted warm baths, and I'll flush him with good, clean drinking water. I'll reduce the unhealthy fat around the abdominal viscera and heart and then——"

"Rave on, little one, rave on," said Haynes soothingly.

"Light exercise will burn up that fat," repeated Phelps, "and he can be doing that while his hands are in the casts. I'll put him on a properly balanced diet—all energy-producing foods and no sugars or starches; he'll sleep in the open air and go to bed with the chickens——"

"I've got a tintype of him doing it," said Haynes. "Billy Wade won't stay here ten days. He's a city boy; I know the type. His feet will get to itching for sidewalks, and he'll miss the pink sporting extras. The simple life will bore him stiff, and he'll beat it. Bet you fifty dollars he doesn't last two weeks!"

"I'll take that bet," said Phelps.

"But what's the idea? What's it all for? Are you getting a chunk of money from him?"

"Come to think of it," said the doctor, "I *am* entitled to a fee for this. There isn't any arrangement about money, though."

"Well, then, what have you got up your sleeve?" persisted Haynes. "You're not doing this out of charity, or because you think you owe something to your profession."

"No-o," said Phelps. "You might say I'm taking it on purely as a sporting proposition. It's this way: Billy wants to get another crack at Frankie Brady. Frankie isn't a great lightweight by any manner of means, but he's the champion of the world just the same. He's such a poor fighter that I bet eight hundred on Wade when they met last year. I thought Billy's stamina would carry him through. You remember what a ripping, slashing little devil he used to be? He won all his fights because he could set a terrific pace and hold it. That's stamina—energy. That's what Billy has lost, and, without it, anybody can whip him. The general opinion is that when a man's stamina goes back on him, he's through for good. I believe that theory is wrong—in this case, at least. Billy is only a kid yet, and if I can get him cleaned out and trained and his hands in shape so that he can hit with 'em again, I'll guarantee that he'll lick all the Frankie Bradys that you can pile into a ten-acre lot!"

"Oho!" said Haynes. "I'm on, Doc. You're going to make a clean-up in the betting!"

Phelps' round face flushed slightly.

"Not that, either," said he, "though it can be done, Fred. I want to make this boy over again—physically. In a way, I've taken a liking to him. He's too fine a piece of machinery to be allowed to go to smash. I'm going to *reform* him—that's it! Laugh and show your ignorance! It can be done, as sure as you live."

"I wasn't laughing at that," chuckled Haynes; "only it strikes me that you're a beautiful specimen to be preaching physical regeneration to athletes—a cigarette-smoking, booze-fighting ball of butter like you are! 'Do as I say, but not as I do,' eh?"

"Huh!" snorted Phelps, slightly nettled, for the shot had gone home. "I don't have to depend upon my physical

condition to make a living, thank the Lord!"

"No," said Haynes, "and a mighty good thing for you. When you get to handing this boy a sermon on the evils of rum and tobacco, he's liable to come back at you with the line, 'Physician, heal thyself.' I would, if I were in his place. You're smoking too many of those rotten Turkish cigarettes, Doc. They'll get you."

"Oh, you go to the devil!" said Phelps. "Let's have one more high ball and go to bed."

It is no simple matter to uproot one habit overnight, but to alter the whole current of a life is really a serious undertaking, and one to be approached with extreme caution.

For several years, Billy Wade had done exactly as he pleased, with no one to offer advice or issue orders. Tacks McLowrie had endeavored to "handle" him, after the crude fashion of managers, but had retired after colliding with a will stronger than his own. Softened by indulgence and spoiled by an overdose of his own way in everything, Billy Wade entered upon the regenerating process with no appreciation of the hardships entailed.

At first the novelty of the thing interested him, but at the end of the third day the plaster casts upon his hands became irksome, the long days and the dark, quiet nights bore heavily upon his nerves, and he missed his cigars and cocktails more than he would have thought possible. At every turn, he was met by a fattish, good-natured taskmaster, who regulated his life to the last detail and would not compromise by so much as an inch.

"Nothing ever happens here but just morning and night," complained the victim, sure of one faithful ear into which he could pour his troubles. "The Doc won't let me eat anything but the things I don't want, and he's got my hands sewed up in a pair of stone gloves so that I can't even deal a deck of cards. If he don't loosen up on me a little bit, I'm going to beat it back to town."

"Aw, stick a while longer," advised Reddy Burke. "All the boys that got their hands fixed up had to wear them things. I ain't stuck on associating with cows and chickens myself, but I'd give the sawbones a chance if I was you."

"I think I was a sucker to pass up that Johansen for ten rounds," said Wade. "There's one guy I *can* lick."

"And what would it get you?" argued Reddy. "Johansen is only a pork-and-beaner. Brady is the bird we're after. You better stick, Billy. I think this sawbones knows what he's doing."

"I'll stay till Monday," said Wade. "This place has got my goat."

On Sunday, a neighboring Mexican brought the mail from the nearest town. The three visitors hurled themselves hungrily upon the packet of newspapers. The flaring headlines on the sporting pages, the baseball scores, the week-old news added the finishing touch to Billy Wade's feeling of isolation from the world.

"I've had enough of this," said he to Reddy. "I'm going to tell the Doc tonight. He'll be sore, but if I pay his bill that ought to satisfy him. I'd go off my nut if I had to stay in this place another week."

Doc Phelps saw more through his thick glasses than most people imagined. He had observed Wade's growing nervousness, his sudden flashes of irritation, and his long periods of sullen quiet, and when the fighter came to him after supper, plainly feeling for an opening, the doctor was prepared.

"There's a little article here that I want to read to you," said he. "Do you know Bill Horton?"

"Uncle Bill?" said Wade. "I should say I do! He's one of my best friends. There's one sporting writer that knows the game from top to bottom. When Uncle Bill says a thing is so, you can go put a bet on it."

"Can you?" asked the doctor. "Then listen to this," and he began to read aloud. This was the opening paragraph:

"Billy Wade has canceled his date with Johansen, and disappeared from his usual haunts, leaving no address behind him. He made no explanation or excuse and none

was necessary. In all probability, this marks the passing of one of the great figures of the Queensbury world. In the history of boxing, there has never been a more sudden or complete downfall of a champion. For nearly a year Wade's friends have been trying to persuade him to retire, but with the stubbornness which always characterized him, Billy refused to listen. It is another victory for wine, women, and song, but never has this dangerous combination wrought more havoc than in the case of the former lightweight champion of the world. His friends believe that he has at last come to a realization of his physical condition, and given up hope of regaining the stamina which won him a high place in the affections of the sporting population. His career should serve as a warning to all ambitious young men who are tempted to try their speed on the primrose path."

Doctor Phelps paused, and glanced at Wade.

"Did Uncle Bill say that—honest?" asked the fighter.

The doctor passed him the paper, and Wade glanced at the headlines and verified the signature.

"I thought he was my friend!" said he bitterly. "It just goes to show that they all take a kick at you when you're down!"

"Billy," said Phelps, "your real friends are the men who tell you the truth, every time. Uncle Bill has put your case in a nutshell. You've gone a long way down the wrong side of the hill, but if you're game and patient and willing to work, you can get back to the top again. You're tired of this place, and you want to go back to town. You want to smoke your head off, and take a drink once in a while. Your will power is just as weak as your body. Now it's up to you. Are you willing to stand the gaff and give me a chance to prove that this article is all wrong, or shall we pack up and go back to the bright lights and let everybody say, 'I told you so?' "

"It sounds easy," was the sulky response, "but I notice that you take a drink whenever you want one, and you've always got a cigarette in your mouth. You talk to me about being game and standing the gaff! Why, Doc, you don't know what it's like to want to take a drink or a smoke and not do it!"

There was a long silence, broken only by the rustling of the newspaper as Billy twisted it in his fingers. Somewhere near at hand, a rocking-chair ceased creaking.

"That may be true," said Phelps slowly, "but I'm not a fighter, and you are. You make a living by keeping yourself in good physical condition; I make mine by keeping other folks in shape."

"What difference does that make? Nicotine is a deadly poison; you told me so, but there's more nicotine in those coffin nails that you smoke than in cigars. Booze will play hell with my liver and kidneys, but you drink twice as much as I ever did. It's all a question of will power, you say, and easy if you make up your mind. Seems to me, if it's such a cinch, you'd quit, yourself!"

Silence followed this outburst, and after a time Phelps heard a low chuckle. It proceeded from an open window, making it plain that Fred Haynes was an invisible listener.

Shall we say that the words of an angry boy cut through the fat, and reached Arthur Phelps' soul? Shall we say that he was shamed into a desire to rid himself of two bad habits, in order that he might set a right example to a patient? No; this is not a Sunday-school tract. The truth is often nearly as good as a lie. It was Haynes' chuckle that did the work. It reminded Doc Phelps of the fifty-dollar bet, and he knew that if Billy Wade went back to town Haynes would laugh out loud. So he spoke up immediately.

"Look here, Billy," said the doctor, "you're a sport and I'm a sport, and we like to go through with things when we start 'em, don't we? All right. Now I want to see you a champion again, and I can make you one if you'll stick. You try it for two more weeks, and I'll agree to take this cleaning-out process with you, just to show you how easy it is. No cigarettes, and no booze. Are you with me?"

There was no answer.

"Of course," added Phelps shrewdly, "if you're willing to admit that Uncle

Bill's dope is correct and that you can't come back, and you're going to quit without making a fight, that's another matter. Some other fellow will lick Brady."

"Oh, rats!" said Billy Wade. "I'll stick for two weeks more, but I wish I had these things off my hands!"

Half an hour later, Fred Haynes came out on the porch, and found the doctor sitting there alone, puffing reflectively at a cigarette.

"Throw that thing away!" commanded Haynes sternly. "That's a nice way to swear off. You talked me out of winning a fifty-dollar bet, but I'm going to see to it that you live up to your side of the contract. Hand over the rest of those coffin nails."

"By George!" ejaculated Phelps. "I lit one without thinking. Force of habit."

"Your will power is just as weak as your body," quoted Haynes. "You've gone a long way down the wrong side of the hill, Doc, but if you're game and patient——"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Phelps.

"At that," said his host, "I think you'll find it worth while. And if you could get rid of some of that unhealthy fat—light exercise will burn it up, Doc—you wouldn't look so much like a Brownie. Not sore, are you? Well, good night."

V.

For the first three days of the second week, the ranch house was anything but a pleasant habitation. One of the long winter rains set in, and the "inmates," as Haynes persisted in calling his guests, were cooped up indoors with their unhappiness.

Billy Wade continued to fret about the plaster casts. He also complained bitterly of the food, and attributed his sleepless nights to the hardness of his bed—which was the best one in the house. He took a certain malicious satisfaction in the misery of Doc Phelps, who was suffering acutely from nerves and a physical craving for the things which he had so lightly renounced. Reddy Burke mooned about the premises with the air of a martyr, and even Haynes was affected by the atmosphere of gloom. There were times when a carelessly dropped remark produced an effect not unlike that which follows the tossing of a piece of raw meat into a bear pit.

"It's a swell little party, Doc," said Haynes, on the third night, after Wade and Burke had retired. "Did you hear what your patient said about the grub? Considering that this isn't a hotel, and that he isn't being charged anything for it——"

Doc Phelps, who was sitting by the open fire with his head in his hands, grunted, but made no other comment.

"Old man Job got too much credit," mused Haynes.

"Eh—what's that?"

"They say Job was a patient man," explained Haynes; "but in my opinion Noah had him skinned to death. Be a good fellow, Doc, and ask me why."

"I'll bite," said Phelps wearily. "What's the answer, Mister Bones?"

"Well, that time when it rained so long, wasn't Noah shut up in the water wagon with a lot of hyenas and things, and wasn't one of his sons a drinking man? I'm for the fellow who said that Ham never should have been let into the ark!"

The doctor grinned in spite of himself.

"I'm sorry, Fred," said he, "but this period of mental depression is part of the cure. I've started it, and I'm going through. It won't last much longer."

"Bully for you, old horse!" said Haynes. "I don't care a whole lot for this fighter of yours, Doc, but if this treatment straightens you up, I guess I can put up with the hyenas a few days more."

The next morning the sun came out, and the sufferers crept into the open. There is no tonic like clean California air, washed by a long rain. Reddy Burke pranced like a colt.

"Come on!" he challenged. "Let's take a hike over the hills!"

"Go on, Billy, it's what you need," said the doctor.

"I will if you'll go, too," said Wade.

It was a tired, sweaty trio which returned at noon, but peace had been declared somewhere on the road, and there was no squabbling over the lunch table. The doctor complained of being stiff and sore—and small wonder, for they had walked him ten miles at a brisk pace!—so Reddy Burke, who knew all the tricks of the training camp, gave him an alcohol rub, after which the doctor fell asleep in the hammock. That night Billy Wade slept ten hours without turning over in bed, and even Phelps awoke with a breakfast appetite—something which he had not known in years. The turning point had been reached.

"Now, Billy," said the doctor, "we'll begin taking off that fat. Road work in the morning, shadow boxing and rope skipping in the afternoon. I want you to get up a good sweat twice a day, and I think I'll do some sweating myself. I sleep better when I'm tired."

There ensued the regular routine of light training, and at the end of ten days Haynes had three clear-eyed, sunburned, and ravenous boarders, who ate everything in sight three times a day and yawned shamelessly over the supper table.

"Say, why can't you fellows keep awake?" he complained. "Doc, I hope I may choke if you haven't got a jawbone, after all! I thought it was only a jowl and a dewlap. The fat is melting off you in streams."

"Yes, and maybe I don't feel better for it!" crowed Phelps, passing his fingers along the angle of his jaw.

"Yeh," said Reddy, "keep following us on the road, Doc, and we'll make a featherweight of you. I'm feeling a little bit of all right myself these days. When we start the boxing, I'll give the old champ here an awful ride. Hey, Billy, do you remember that day at Sheehan's place when I dropped you with a right hook?"

"You bet!" said Wade.

"I always had a notion," continued Reddy, "that with just us two in a barn somewhere, I could lick you. Somehow I never could fight in public, but I'm a wolf in private. Why is that, Doc?"

"I don't know. Jack Jeffries couldn't fight in a ring, but he used to give Jim the toughest battles of his life."

"Maybe it comes from knowing a guy and not being afraid of him," said Reddy. "Hurry up and get those things off Billy's hands. I want to give him a trimming."

"We'll take the casts off when the soreness is all gone," said the doctor, "and you needn't worry about the fighting. You'll get enough of it, I promise you. We're not going to gamble on Billy's condition; we're going to *know* what he can do."

"What are you figuring on?" asked Haynes. "A real fight is the only test."

"We'll give him three real fights," said the doctor. "First, we'll train him for a six-round go, and then we'll let him rest for a few weeks. Then we'll shape him up for ten rounds, and the last time we'll send him to a finish."

"To a finish!" said Reddy. "With me?"

"With you," said the doctor.

Billy Wade rose and side-stepped about the room, swinging his bandaged hands in short, vicious circles and hooks.

"You'd better get ready, kid," chuckled the ex-champion, "because I'm going to make you think a grizzly bear is after you!"

"Huh!" sneered Burke. "You're the fellow that had better be in shape!"

VI.

Billy Wade's mysterious disappearance was a nine days' wonder in the athletic world, and whenever material ran short, the sporting writers fell back upon it as a topic, and all sorts of wild guesses and rumors found their way into print. Wade was in a sanitarium; Wade was married, and living upon a farm in Wisconsin; Wade was in Australia; Wade was dead.

Since everybody's guess is nobody's certainty, the real truth was not even suspected, much less revealed. Nobody hinted at his "coming back"; everybody took it for granted that the former champion had gone the way of all fight-

ing flesh. Billy Wade slipped into the past tense, and after six months he was no more than a memory. Tacks McLowrie's middleweight was slashing his way to a title, a new white hope had been discovered, and not yet exposed as hopeless, and attention was diverted from the lightweight division. Frankie Brady was on tour with a burlesque troupe, and, unless rumor wronged him, more interested in a certain strawberry-blond actress than in risking his crown against any worthy opponent.

Joseph Porsano, a shrewd young man who managed a "club" and promoted boxing contests, received a letter one day which caused him to rub his nose thoughtfully for the better part of half an hour, during which time he read the letter again. Then he closed his desk, packed his valise, and departed from the city. The end of Porsano's railroad journey was a small town in an interior county, where a trim, brown young man with eyeglasses was waiting on the depot platform.

"Hello, Doc!" said Porsano. "You're looking fine. I wouldn't have known you. Where's the front porch and the double chin?"

"Gone," said Phelps.

"You look as if you might be this mysterious lightweight you're trying to put over on me. Where do we go from here?"

"Jump in the runabout," said the doctor, "and I'll tell you all about it as we go along."

They were well into the open country before Porsano began to ask questions.

"In the first place," said the promoter, "who is this kid? Has he ever done any real fighting—with good ones, I mean?"

"Some," said Phelps. "I didn't tell you who he is because I know how strong you fellows are for publicity, and we're under cover with our man. It's Billy Wade."

"The devil you say!" ejaculated the astounded Porsano. "Billy Wade! Do you mean to tell me that he's been here all the time?"

"Ever since he dropped out of sight."

"The old stuff, eh? He's trying to come back?"

"Not trying, Joe. He's done it."

The promoter shook his head.

"Don't fool yourself, Doc. A beaten champion never comes back. The last time I saw Billy Wade fight, a bantamweight could have licked him. No, Doc; they never come back."

"They never went at it the right way," argued the doctor. "Joe, I've taken that boy all apart and put him together again. You remember how bad his hands were? I put 'em in plaster casts for five weeks, and now you can't tell that there was ever anything wrong with them. He hasn't had a drink in seven months—or a cigar. He's been working every day and going to bed at nine o'clock. If ever a fighter had a systematic and scientific renovating, Wade's the boy. They never come back, eh? Well, wait till you see him; that's all."

"You can't tell anything by looking at 'em," said Porsano. "I've seen forty of 'em. They look all right, and they train all right, but when you get these broken-down fighters into the ring they blow up. It's nerves as much as anything else. A battle shows 'em up."

"That's why you're here," said Phelps. "I'm not going to ask you to take my word for anything. Remember Reddy Burke?"

The promoter nodded.

"One tough little rat," said he. "If he'd fight in the ring like he fights Wade in the training quarters, he'd be a top-notcher."

"Well," said the doctor, "he fights Wade to a finish to-morrow. They've already gone six and ten rounds, and Billy trained for each go just the same as for a real battle. He wore eight-ounce gloves for the last one because we couldn't take a chance on hurting his hands; but to-morrow the gloves will be regulation size, and it will be the toughest fight you ever saw in your life. I'm not going to tell you any more; keep your eyes open and use your own judgment."

"It listens well," grinned Porsano. "Seeing is believing with me, and I'm

getting so now that I knock off about fifty per cent for eye trouble. What's your plan? Who do you want to spring him on?"

"Frankie Brady."

"You say it easy, Doc. There's a lot of good lightweights who want that four-flusher. Bo Brooks won't make a match unless he has all the best of it—money and every other way—and Frankie won't fight anybody but a dead one."

"That's the reason he'll jump at Billy," said the doctor. "So far as the money is concerned, we should worry? They can cut it any way they like or they can have the whole works. We'd be tickled to death to make it winner take all, but I suppose Brooks will insist on a long end, win, lose, or draw. If Billy Wade could go back four years and fight the way he did when he was licking such men as Buckskin Kelly, Lew Peters, and the Tonopah Kid, how long would Frankie Brady last with him?"

"About as long as a cigarette," said Porsano.

"You think you know something about a fighter, Joe? You can tell when a man's in shape? Fair enough. I'm going to put you in Reddy Burke's corner to-morrow afternoon, and he'll be under your orders. He'll fight to instructions, and I want you to make him lick this poor old has-been—if he can. You can hold Reddy back and make a long fight of it, or you can send him in to mix—use your own judgment. You've got a good little fighter in your corner; see what you can do to my man. To-morrow night, if you can't see a way to win a pot of money at two to one, I'll send you to an oculist. Tie on your hat, Joe, because I'm going to step on this old boat and find out if she can still do sixty miles an hour."

VII.

The final test had none of the earmarks of a festival; every man who was present was there on business. The only witnesses were Haynes, referee; Phelps, chief second and adviser in Wade's corner; Porsano, ditto in Burke's corner, and Don Felipe Ortega, present by special favor in the capacity of timekeeper.

"You know, Doc," confessed Porsano, as the quiet group moved from the house toward the ring, which was pitched behind the barn, "yesterday I thought this fight to a finish might be a hippodrome. I've been watching Wade and Burke, and they're both as nervous as cats. The way they act, you'd think they were going to fight a duel."

"Yes," said the doctor. "I didn't sleep much last night—thinking about it. We've all worked hard to make this boy over again. We feel certain that he's right, Joe, but you never know how much stamina is in a man until you pump it all out. At ten rounds, he fought like a wild cat; to-day he may have to go twenty or thirty, and he's against a tough game. Reddy has been with him four years, and Billy has never yet dropped him for the full count. If he passes this test, we can send him against anybody and feel certain of him."

"I see you haven't got any towel swingers," said Porsano.

"No," said Phelps. "Many a fighter is mauled and manhandled to death in his own corner by a lot of numskulls who won't give him a chance to breathe. A tired man wants air—all the air he can get. A minute of relaxation and deep breathing does him more good than all the rubbing and kneading and slapping that you can give him."

The customs of the ring were observed, even to the weighing in, and Joe Porsano, really an excellent judge of physical fitness, opened his eyes wide as the bath robe slipped from Wade's shoulders.

The slight roll of fat about the waist had disappeared, and the frontal overhang had given way to horizontal ridges of muscle. Between the neck and the knees Wade did not carry a spare ounce; to look at him was to get the impression of a machine built for speed and endurance and then stripped to the running gear. The greatest

change of all was in the boy's face. There was no sullenness in the clear eyes, nor about the mouth; every feature seemed sharpened and refined, leaving no trace of the puffy, pasty ex-champion of the year before.

"One thirty-one!" exclaimed Porsano, looking at the bar. "You've got him down too fine, haven't you?"

"Naw, we ain't!" said Reddy Burke. "That's his fightin' notch, see? Load him up with more weight than he needs, and he'd have to burn it off in a fight. It's them burned-up and broken-down tissues what clogs a guy's blood and makes him slow down. We ain't carryin' no excess fuel."

"Where do you get that stuff?" asked the promoter, smiling.

"From the Doc," said Reddy. "Believe me, that feller knows something about training. I always had a notion that the more weight the better. The Doc says that's bunk. He's got me down to where I'm six pounds lighter than a straw hat, but all of it is fighting weight, and I can go faster and last longer than I could before. You watch me root into the old champ; he'll know that he's been to a barbecue."

Fred Haynes, acting as referee, called the boys to the middle of the ring.

"Shake hands," said he. "No hard feelings?"

Billy Wade put his arm around Reddy's neck.

"I'm coming after you, old kid," said he.

"You won't have to get out no search warrant," grunted Reddy. "I'll meet you somewhere on the way."

"All set?" asked Haynes. "Go to your corners. Ring the bell, Ortega!"

Don Felipe, one eye glued to the doctor's stop watch, smote violently upon a small anvil and the battle began.

Billy Wade darted out of his corner, head down and hands low at his sides, ready to slam with either one the instant he got within range. Reddy Burke, looking like a freckled little cinnamon bear, trotted to close quarters without hesitation, and the gloves began to fly. For three minutes there was no sound but the scraping of shoes upon canvas, the thud of body blows, and the sympathetic groans of Don Felipe Ortega.

"How long can he stand that kind of going?" asked Porsano of his charge after the round was over.

"That's what we're going to find out," said Reddy. "I got in a couple of pippins to the slats."

"Keep right after him," said Joe. "That sort of pace will crack him if anything will."

"Right!" said Burke.

But Wade did not crack. He crowded a whole battle into each round, and Porsano, watching the other corner narrowly, saw no signs of distress. He fought in his old-time style, a headlong, crouching attack directed at the body, with an occasional vicious overhand chop to the head.

After the tenth round, Reddy began to weaken. His body from chest to belt was red and blotched, and his lower lip was split. Wade's right eye was slowly closing, in spite of all the doctor could do, and his nose was bleeding freely—evidence that the battle had not been entirely one-sided.

"Gee, but he's—got a lot—behind those short punches!" wheezed Reddy, at the end of the thirteenth round. "Some fighter yet—ain't he?"

"You bet," said Porsano. "I've seen enough to convince me, Reddy. You'd better quit."

"Who, me?" and the little fellow fairly bristled. "Why, the champ never knocked me out yet! If I can land a couple—on his chin——"

When Don Felipe struck the anvil at the beginning of the seventeenth round, Doc Phelps yelled across the ring to Porsano:

"Look out for your man, Joe! I've turned the wolf loose!"

"If he can fight any faster than he's been fighting," said Porsano, "he *is* a wolf!"

Billy Wade fell upon his tired sparring partner like a fury, battering down his guard and clubbing short, savage punches into the body. Reddy wavered, gave ground, and dropped his hands at

his sides. Like a flash, Wade switched the attack to the jaw—two hooks and a swing, and down went Reddy Burke, a tangle of arms and legs. Billy dropped on his knees beside him and took the red head into his lap.

"Old pal, you ain't hurt, are you? I didn't mean to wallop you so hard—on the level! Doc! Come and look at him! He's out yet!"

It was three minutes before Reddy opened his eyes.

"What come off?" he mumbled.

"He got you, my son," said the doctor, passing the smelling salts under Reddy's nose.

Billy Wade leaped into the air, cracked his heels together, and emitted a succession of piercing yells.

"I never flattened him before in my life!" he shouted. "Now bring on your Frankie Bradys!"

"Yes," said Reddy, sitting up, with a twisted grin, "if you'll stick one on Brady's chops like the one you just pinned on mine, there won't be much to it. Why, you old champ! I didn't think you had it in you!"

"Well, Joe, what do you think?" asked the doctor.

Supper was over, and the three older men were sitting upon the porch in the moonlight. The late antagonists were squabbling amiably over a game of seven-up in the dining room.

"You're managing him?" asked Porsano.

"No," said the doctor. "I've taught him how to manage himself. I can't appear in this thing; I'm only his physician."

"Well, you've done a mighty fine job. He fights exactly as he used to, except that he's got more zip than he ever had. Frankie Brady won't be much more than a light lunch for him now. The only trouble will be to make the match. I'll go back to town and sort of spill the news that I've heard from Billy and that he wants just one more match. No need to say why; they'll all figure that he's broke and needs the money. That'll be enough to start the sporting writers after him; those fellows have written themselves into the belief that Billy Wade can never come back; half of 'em have had him buried. It ought to look like a soft thing for Brooks and Brady; if it doesn't, we can make it worth their while. If I hook 'em for a battle, you ship Billy into town about ten days before the fight and let him do a little road work and some light boxing—just enough for a stall. No need to uncover him to any one; it would hurt the odds."

"You're thinking of betting on him?" asked Haynes.

"*Am* I? This is one place where I'd hock the crown jewels and mortgage the family plate!"

Later, when Haynes and Phelps were alone, the former asked a question.

"You'll make a clean-up on this fight, won't you, Doc?"

"I've made it already," said the doctor. "A clean-up mentally, morally, and physically. As to the betting, I don't believe I'll do any."

"What? You don't mean to say you'd pass up a cinch like this?"

"That's the idea. Do you know what they call me in town, Fred? 'The sporting doctor.' It's a bad combination. A man can't be a sport and a doctor at the same time; he's bound to neglect one practice for the other. I've been a sport, and it didn't get me anything; now I'm going to try being a doctor."

"Why this sudden change of heart?"

"I don't know as I can explain it to you," said Phelps, "because I hardly understand it myself. You know how I handled this boy Wade. First, I cleaned him out physically, but I knew that it wouldn't last unless I cleaned him out mentally and morally as well. I took that kid off by himself and preached to him; I showed him that clean living and manliness and decency were worth more than just a means to an end—such as licking Brady, for example. And I talked so much to him along those lines that I guess some of the sermons struck in on me. For the first time in a number of years, I'm fit physically, and it has had a certain effect upon my mental processes. It's a humiliating confession to make, Fred,

but I haven't been much of a success as a physician for the simple reason that I was too busy being a sport. That was another habit. I've gambled ever since I can remember; I pitched pennies when I was in short pants. I learned more poker in the high school than anything else. I supported half the tight players in my class at college, and it never got me a thing worth having. I'm through."

"But—this is a cinch. It's easy money."

Phelps yawned.

"I never did like cinches," he said. "It was always the excitement and the element of chance that hooked me. And easy money never did me any good."

"I think you're a chump," said Haynes.

"I think I have been," was the unruffled response, "but I'm going to be a regular nine-to-twelve and two-to-five doctor for a change."

"More power to you!" said Haynes.

VIII.

Frankie Brady, lightweight champion, sat in his corner, working the padding off his knuckles.

"He *looks* good," said Brady doubtfully.

"Didn't Jeff look good at Reno?" asked Bo Brooks. "Take it from me—they never come back. All you got to do is to stick a few good hard wallops into his pantry and leave him for the sweeper."

"Uh-huh," said Brady. "The poor sucker ain't even got a manager. And only one man in his corner. Reddy Burke! What does he know about handling a fighter?"

"Bob Fitzsimmons used to do that one-man-in-the-corner stunt," said Brooks. "Said they was in his way."

Billy Wade, introduced as the former lightweight champion of the world, drew a scattering volley of cheers, mixed with hoots and catcalls. The Roman populace with its ready thumb was no more cruel than the average crowd which attends a boxing match. Wade, the short-ender in the betting, had shown nothing in his brief period of training unless it was an inclination to avoid careful inspection. The concensus of opinion was that he was only a shell and that five rounds would see his finish.

Frankie Brady was received with vociferous applause, acknowledging the same with a curt nod of his tousled head. Just before the bell rang, a trim, bronzed young man with glasses, left Porsano's private box, and shook hands with Wade.

"Eat him alive, old boy!" said the doctor.

"Leave him to us!" said Reddy Burke. "We're going to take that guy apart a joint at a time. Look at him, Doc! He's got a lot of fat to burn up, eh?"

Billy Wade introduced himself to Frankie Brady with a whirlwind attack which made the champion dive into a clinch. The sensations he experienced may be duplicated at the cost of tackling a mule's hind legs or attempting to hug a thunderbolt. There was no holding those brown shoulders, no blocking those driving fists, and the champion extricated himself from the storm center and retreated, ducking and side-stepping. Wade clung to him like a shadow, driving Brady into corners, hammering him out of them, and mauling him along the ropes. The spectators, who had settled down to watch the feeling-out process, were startled into loud yells.

"Break him! Break him!" cried Brady to the referee, hanging on for dear life.

"Break yourself!" said the official. "You're holding; he ain't."

"Four-flusher!" said Wade, hammering his right fist under the champion's heart. "I'm going to make you jump out of the ring!"

At the end of the round, Brady hurried to his corner with a wild light in his eye.

"Stay right with him," said Brooks. "He's trying to win in a couple of rounds. It's his only chance. The

faster he fights, the sooner he'll blow up. Hang right to him!"

"*You* made this match!" said Frankie Brady. "I didn't want to fight till Thanksgiving."

History was repeating itself. This time it was Frankie Brady who had failed to train for a hard battle.

"Aw, can that!" growled Brooks. "Go in there and jab his head off. He can't last, I tell you!"

Brady tried to follow instructions, but no left jab could have held Billy Wade at arm's length. He was determined to come to close quarters, and, once there, he addressed himself to the champion's stomach with a resounding tattoo which sent that agitated young man flying from one angle of the ring to the other. Uncle Bill Horton, who had seen many things but who had never before witnessed the second coming of a champion, stroked his chin, dictating mechanically to the telegraph operator at his elbow.

"Wade puts in solid right to body, and follows with left to same place—Brady hanging on—Wade rushes champion to ropes, landing right, left, and right to body without a return—Brady clinches, and takes severe punishment—Wade's round."

"Don't let him get at you in the clinches," cautioned Brooks. "Block those short ones."

"I can't hold him," panted Brady. "He's strong as a bull."

"Box him, you fool! Stay away for a while. He can't last."

Brady tried all the wiles of the seasoned campaigner. He jabbed, and he ducked, and he tried to "stall," but he could not smother the headlong attack of the challenger. Wade shed stinging left jabs and right swings with an impatient jerk of his head, walking through them to close quarters. He would not be tricked into sparring at long range, but when he got inside Brady's guard he attacked with tigerish ferocity. Hitching his shoulders and dropping his knees together, he sent in short, crashing drives below the rib line, lifting every ounce of his weight and all the strength of his legs into each jolting blow.

Until the sixth, each round was a repetition of the first. Early in that period, Wade knew that Brady was weakening fast. He felt his body sag as he fell into a clinch. Immeditely Billy concentrated his attack upon the jaw, the first gun being a wicked overhand right, delivered from a crouch. It struck a trifle high, but it smashed Frankie Brady's nose as flat as a postage stamp and knocked him sprawling on his back. He was up at once, running desperately, but Wade chased him into a corner, feinted for the first time in the fight, and then crossed the right fairly upon the chin.

Before the referee had marked the passing of the first second, Uncle Bill Horton was dictating the following message which was to shake the sporting world from center to circumference:

"Wade by a knock-out in sixth."

IX.

Doctor Phelps sat in his office, cleaning out an inkwell for which he hoped to have use in the future. The door opened and in came Reddy Burke and the lightweight champion.

"You ought to stuck with us after the fight!" said Reddy. "Talk about champagne! You could have had a bath in it!"

The doctor looked at Billy Wade.

"Not a drop!" said the champion. "That's on the level. You know how it is after a fight—you got to cut into the grape to show you're a good fellow. The gang got me and took me out, that's all."

"And we got ten weeks on the P. & B. circuit—a thousand a week!" chortled Reddy. "We're going away to-night, so we want to see you and fix up that bill."

"Bill?" repeated the doctor. "Oh, never mind that. There isn't going to be any bill."

"Nothing doing with that kind of talk!" said the champion sternly. "Who was it fixed me up? Who was it made me win this fight?"

"That's all right," said Phelps. "Maybe I got as much out of it as you did."

"How much did you bet, Doc?" asked Reddy.

"Not a cent."

"I told you he wasn't going to bet!" said Billy. "And I had a hunch that you'd run out on the bill. You wouldn't refuse to take a little present, would you, Doc?"

"No," said the doctor, "I wouldn't refuse."

Billy Wade drew a small jeweler's box from his pocket, and opened it.

"You'll never find a better one than this, Doc," said he, "and I want you to wear it to remember me by. You made me win a tougher fight than was ever pulled off in a ring—yes, and a better one, too."

"I know, Billy," said the doctor. "I know, because I won the same fight myself."

Some people claim that a five-karat, blue-white diamond, set in platinum, is vulgar. Doctor Arthur Phelps, whose practice is increasing daily, says that the rays from such a stone dazzle the eyes of a patient and allow him to charge more than his services are really worth.

But he may be joking about that

A QUESTION OF NERVE

IN the chamber of the House of Representatives one afternoon last July the heat was like the hinges of a red-hot cooking stove. Members fanned themselves and knocked the weather. Everybody was in a bad humor. It's pretty tough stuff to have to attend to the affairs of a nation in warm weather. Everybody said it was.

"If the Democrats don't pass this bill within fifteen minutes," said Representative Mann, of Chicago, the militant leader of the Republicans, "I'll make the point of 'no quorum,' and have the House adjourn. It is now three-thirty."

Promptly at three-forty-five, the Democrats being still in a wrangle, he made good his threat, compelled the House to adjourn, and hurriedly left the chamber. Whereupon, Oswald F. Schuette, correspondent for a Chicago newspaper, rushed out of the press gallery, and intercepted Mann at the foot of the Capitol steps.

"What time does your train leave for Chicago?" he asked Mann innocently.

"Four-ten," answered the statesman unblushingly. "And there comes my car," he added, attempting a burst of speed, but handicapped by a heavy suit case.

Schuette sprinted to the car line, signaled to the motorman, put first one foot and then the other on the step of the car, and indulged in all kinds of antics to delay transportation until Mann should arrive.

"I wish I had your nerve!" panted the congressman as both of them climbed aboard and sank into a seat. "I wouldn't dare hold up a car that way."

"Yes," Schuette agreed calmly; "I guess it *is* harder than holding up Congress."

A MONUMENTAL ACHIEVEMENT

ALFRED HENRY LEWIS one day met a Westerner on the street in New York, and they drifted into a conversation about Texas.

"By the way, do you know old Bill Sterrett?" asked Lewis.

"Know him!" replied the Westerner. "I should say I do! Why, I got him so drunk one night it took three negro servants to put me to bed."

Ol' Man Martin

A CHRISTMAS STORY

By A. M. Chisholm

Author of "The Winning Game," "The Boss of the Bonnechere," Etc.

Not the least remarkable thing about Ol' Man Martin was his fondness for funeral sermons. He was a born orator when it came to the delivery of an address over the body of some unfortunate individual in camp. There were no encomiums in that address; rather the other way around. In fact when he got through telling what the deceased was like on earth you felt glad that the poor chap was dead. Still Ol' Man Martin was true blue, and the Christmas present the boys gave him proved their belief in his sincerity.

IN the early days of Yellow Horse, Luther Martin had the distinction of being its only Christian. That is to say, he was the camp's only professing Christian. There were a number of gentlemen whose parents had brought them a certain distance along life's path—say, to the age of sixteen or thereabouts—on strictly orthodox lines; but this early training was no longer manifest in their daily lives. If they retained any glimmer of spiritual light it was, figuratively speaking, hidden under a bushel. In its later days Yellow Horse suffered sporadic invasions from minor, traveling evangelists; but in the days of Luther Martin, which were coeval with the first gold rush, he was absolutely *sui generis* in a wide territory.

The father of Luther was Abner, a stanch Tennesseean and hard-shell Baptist; and he tagged his son "Luther," because the name possessed historic religious significance, and made a good combination, reversible or otherwise, with his surname. Abner desired Luther to become a preacher; but Luther's boyhood's ambition was to become a pirate, which was conceded by the friends of his youth to be an attractive and honorable profession. But openings for pirates being scarce in Tennessee, he was forced to abandon the idea.

Shortly after, Abner abandoned *his* idea, owing to certain misconduct of his offspring's. They effected a compromise. As a result of the compromise, young Luther learned the shoemaker's trade by day; the greater part of his nights he put in acquiring what may be charitably termed experience. When the Civil War broke out he became a soldier, and emerged at the end of the struggle with an assortment of Yankee bullets and rheumatism. Subsequently he acquired religion of the old-fashioned kind. When he came to Yellow Horse, limping on the heels of a wild rush of hardened frontiersmen, he was a little, old, lame man, sour, cross-grained, with a virulent tongue, and a rooted belief in the depravity of mankind.

Yellow Horse itself was a placer camp which "boomed" twice. At the end of the second boom—which was produced by means wholly artificial and shameless—it died so dishonorably that it was not even buried. Its carcass sun-dried, warped, and withered against the foothills, the home of mountain rats,

wolves, owls, and vermin. Finally fire wiped it from the landscape. It is now but a faint memory to old-timers; but in its prime it was a roaring, lawless, wide-open camp.

Luther Martin, then, limped into Yellow Horse and staked a claim which was absolutely worthless. Because he had to live he took up his trade. He built a shack and sat within, on his cobbler's bench, a Bible lying open in front of him continually, steel-bowed spectacles on nose, mending harness and footgear. Never did he condescend to take part in the frivolous life of the camp. When he awoke he went to work; and when he stopped working he went to bed.

But this very exclusiveness and his frank comments on the shortcomings of the camp gave him a certain celebrity. He became a "character," not exactly an influence for good, nor, indeed, an influence at all, but an individuality. And when occasionally an inhabitant departed for that bourne from whence no traveler returns—the departures being sometimes startlingly abrupt—a delegation was wont to wait on Luther Martin and secure his aid in giving the obsequies a religious flavor. Indeed, his graveside comments on the life of a certain deceased gentleman and his gloomy forecast of the future first brought him into prominence.

"Seems like ol' man Martin might 'a' let Dave down a leetle mite easier," observed Ed Tabor to old Zeb Bowerman, who combined in himself the functions if not the titles of mayor, judge, coroner, and general first citizen. "Course, we know Dave was plumb ornery and no 'count, and carelessness with a cold deck is the cause of his decease; but whatever is the sense of packin' a dead man's failin's onto him after he's made his trail-out? For if St. Peter keeps cases on our game, the way the Good Book says, and has it all down in black and white, what's the use? And if by any chance he's been sorter slack in makin' entries, why, then, a man'd orter get the benefit of it when he lines up for judgment."

"There's another way of looking at it," said Bowerman judicially. "If the books up yander don't call for a seat check, a man don't win one with a funeral oration. So, as you say, what's the use? It looks a heap squarer game to me to show the dead man's hand, card for card, and leave it to them on high to say what it's worth. That's ol' man Martin's system. Maybe he overplays it a little, but there's this about it: I noticed several sports that ain't none too particular how they fill their hands lookin' mighty thoughtful back beside that card sharp's grave."

And Yellow Horse as a whole agreed with Bowerman, especially as it became evident that Luther Martin played no favorites. He invariably gave the late lamented full credit for such good qualities as he might have, but he came down on his iniquities like a hen hawk on a pullet, and nobody could gainsay the truth of his remarks, however reprehensible their taste. Luther Martin had never heard the *de mortuis* maxim, and if he had he would have regarded it as a truckling to human weakness, and paid no attention thereto.

It was when Luther Martin's fame was well established that Mr. William Stevens came to Yellow Horse, and soon after shot into—or, rather, shot himself into prominence. Without entering into a detailed description of Mr. Stevens' person and characteristics, it is sufficient to say that he wore long hair and two guns, possessed unlimited cold nerve, was neither nice in his habits nor choice in his language, and brought with him the well-earned sobriquet of "Bad Bill."

As a fast, two-handed gun fighter, Mr. Stevens had few superiors; but as a citizen his conduct, especially when suffering from overstimulation, left much to be desired.

In due course he became the leading "bad man" of Yellow Horse, and was tolerated because he promptly squelched the aspirations of other hard citizens. Any gentleman looking for trouble could always secure accommodation from Mr. Stevens. His chief failing—which eventually combined with an error of judgment to eliminate him from

this world—was a desire, when inebriated, to be humorous.

Mr. Stevens, soon after his arrival, made the acquaintance of Luther Martin in a highly informal manner. Having acquired a slight edge, he was lounging in the Golden Light Saloon when he was suddenly struck by the condition of his footgear.

"Look-a-that, Joe!" he exclaimed to his friend, the bartender. "There's a pair of moccasins which cost me sixteen dollars less'n a month ago. They're plumb busted wide open all along the line. Less'n a month's wear, an' half of that time I'm doin' my walkin' on hossback!" And he expressed his opinion of the makers of the boots in question in terms which, though possibly justified under the circumstances, are quite unprintable.

"You want to get 'em fixed?" Joe commented. "You don't want to go prowlin' round this man's country in boots full of holes, or maybe a rattler gets you. Them ol' diamond backs savvies a hole in a moccasin like humans. Ol' man Martin will do the trick."

"I'm lookin' for him," said Mr. Stevens, rising. "Where's his layout?"

The bartender told him. "And you don't want to do no cussin' there," he added. "The ol' man's done got funny notions. Puts it up he's a Christian, and ordinary language like you and me uses offends his ears. So hobble your tongue some."

Mr. Stevens merely grunted and strode forth. Arriving at Luther Martin's shack, he entered, and, towering over the owner, pointed to his own feet.

"You fixes moccasins," he observed. "Make these yere plumb snake and water-tight."

"Take 'em off," said Luther Martin sourly.

Mr. Stevens sat down and tugged the boots off. They came hard, and he relieved his feelings by pregnant phrase.

"Stop that!" said Luther Martin.

"Stop what?" demanded Mr. Stevens, who had sworn principally to see what would happen.

"That cussin'," replied Luther Martin. "That language don't go here. It's sinful and foolish. You'd orter be ashamed of yourself." He picked up the boots and examined them. "Ain't wuth fixin'," he announced. "They ain't leather—just paper. They're plumb wore out."

Whereat Mr. Stevens, greatly disgusted, repeated his original views concerning the makers of the boots, and added a few lurid wishes for their future.

"I told you to stop that cussin'," said Luther Martin. "Here's your boots. I ain't goin' to bother with 'em."

"I wants them boots fixed," said Mr. Stevens. "You bet I don't pay no sixteen dollars for a month's foot leather. You fly at 'em, pap. Talk about cussin'! Why, them words I used is as the innocent lispin's of a child compared to what's talked steady back where I comes from." And in proof he embellished the statement with the very cream of an extensive vocabulary.

"Shet up your profane swearin', and take your boots and git!" snapped Luther Martin. "I got plenty to do without mendin' the sandals of blasphemers. You talk like you ain't got a soul, and the time will sure come when you'll wish you hadn't. It's a plumb wonder to me, likewise a pity, that the judgment of God ain't melted you down into them moccasins like you was a tallow candle in a mold."

Mr. Stevens, who was highly amused, simulated anger.

"If you ain't old enough to be my daddy," he observed fiercely, "do you know what I'd do? I'd take and jam you headfirst into one of these yere boots, and stomp my foot in afterward and walk away. You're a heap too free with criticisms. My remarks about the holdups that makes these boots was mild and temperate. You fix 'em, and be soon about it."

For answer, Luther Martin tossed the boots through the door. "You're fifty pounds heavier'n I be," he rasped; "but for all that if I was twenty years younger you'd have gone first. You get out of here. I won't soil my hands

on your sinful hide, but I'll surely smash in your head with a last."

Which struck Mr. Stevens as so excessively funny that he concluded to press the joke further. He grinned menacingly, and trifled with the ivory handle of a six-shooter along his thigh.

"Ol' man," he warned solemnly, "you sashay out through that door, and pick up them boots and crawl back and mend them. Otherwise, though I'm tryin' to hold my temper, I won't be answer'ble. I'd hate to lift that ol' gray scalp of your'n, so don't force my hand. Fix them boots!"

He glared ferociously, his hand on his gun. It was an excellent piece of acting, which he had often performed with a shivering tenderfoot as the other half of the sketch, to the infinite amusement of an appreciative crowd. But in this case the party of the second part was not impressed.

"I've seen bluffs like you before," snarled Luther Martin, and suddenly assailed the bulk of the bad man like a wild cat, hitting, kicking, and making manful attempts to gouge; and doing it all in a way that showed he had been there before.

A robust young grizzly suddenly attacked by an elderly and decrepit rabbit could have been no more surprised than was Mr. Stevens. The unexpectedness of the onslaught almost threw him off his feet. To his credit, he made no attempt to assume the offensive, but backed precipitately to the door, both hands engaged in shielding his face. On the threshold he tripped and fell backward, landing sprawling beside his boots.

From the doorway old Luther Martin, aquiver with rage and excitement, shook a withered fist, dived back for an instant, and reappeared with an ancient Sharps rifle.

"You foul-mouthed blasphemer!" he shouted. "I'll learn you to run blazers on a meek and lowly Christian that's seen more fightin' than you ever heard of. Talk of scalpin' me, would you? I'd have you know that before the savin' grace drug me out o' the slough of sin, I was bogged down in it clean up to my belly. There warn't a worse sinner nor a better shot in the whole of Tennessee, God forgive me for boastin' of it. And if it ain't for that same savin' grace it's kings full to a four-card flush that I'd send your soul up for judgment quicker'n a cat can spit. Keep your hands away from your guns, or, savin' grace or not, I'll plug you!"

Mr. Stevens, however, had not the least intention of resorting to his weapons. He was rather ashamed of himself, and he eyed the muzzle of the Sharps respectfully.

"Be plumb careful of that ol' buff'lo gun," he observed. "I'd have a heap more confidence in that savin' grace if you'd take your finger off'n the trigger. I've done surrendered, and I ain't hostile a mite. Be you-all from Tennessee, pap?"

"I be," Luther Martin replied more calmly.

"I was born in Tennessee," Mr. Stevens vouchsafed, "back along before war times."

"There was a right smart of wuthless children born about then," said Martin sourly.

"I reckon that's so," Mr. Stevens admitted frankly. "I was born 'bout ten miles from Clark's Notch."

Luther Martin's countenance brightened for an instant as sunlight shows momentarily through a rift in a cloud.

"What's your name?" he demanded. "Sho!" he cried, when told, "you ain't one of Pete Stevens' boys?"

"He was my daddy," Mr. Stevens acknowledged.

"Me and him fou't together in the war," said Martin. "Killed at the Ridge, he was, alongside me."

"Then you're a Hick'ry Bend Martin," exclaimed Mr. Stevens. "I'm sure ashamed of myself—and you old enough to be my daddy. I never meant no harm, though. It was just my fun."

"You ain't the first of the ongodly that's allowed he'll have some fun with the old man," said Luther Martin. "And if it ain't that I've seen all the blood and dead men I want to—and I've run over dead and wounded two hundred yards and never touched foot to

ground chargin' them Yanks—I'd sure have cut some of you off in the midst of your iniquities before this."

"From now on," Mr. Stevens announced, "these ongodly is my meat. You bet I'll learn 'em manners. They'll step soft and careful round your wiki-up, or I'll burn the moccasins off'n 'em with a gun."

"I don't need no gardeen," snapped Luther Martin ungraciously. "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon, backed up by a Sharps rifle, is good enough for me."

"I don't savvy swords none," said Mr. Stevens, "but Hick'ry Bend wins the beef from Clark's Notch 'most every shootin' match I remember."

"I win that beef three times hand runnin' myself before you was born," said Luther Martin proudly. "Fetch in them boots. If you don't go to cussin' and carryin' on, I'll do my best with 'em. You sure annoyed me, Bud. If it wasn't that I'm upheld by the savin' grace, I b'lieve I'd have backslid so far as to lose my temper with you."

II.

An hour later, Mr. Stevens stamped his way back to the Golden Light, and exhibited his boots to his friend, the bartender. And he asked a number of questions concerning Luther Martin.

"No," Joe replied, "he don't exhort what you'd call reg'lar. Reckon the camp ain't in shape to stand it. His long suit is buryin's. When he gets through tellin' what the deceased was like on earth you sorter feel glad he's dead. And so I s'pose it kills grief. At first the boys think the ol' man tables his cards too hard, but now they're used to it. You wait till you hear him."

Two days afterward, Mr. Stevens had that opportunity, the occasion being the last rites of an individual known as "Sockeye" Hawkins. Mr. Hawkins was regretted by none; and his life's history, so far as it was known to the camp, afforded Luther Martin an excellent opportunity for the exercise of his special talents. Mr. Stevens listened spellbound, with a slight creeping and prickling of the back hair such as he had not experienced since the days when, a child, he had attended a particularly fervid camp meeting with his parents. So vivid was the impression made upon him and others by Luther Martin, that they found it necessary to restore their wonted cheerfulness by artificial means.

"If the ol' man ever turned himself loose on a nigger camp meeting he'd drive them blacks plumb crazy," said Mr. Stevens. "They'd just naturally curl up and die."

"You bet!" said Tabor, who had overcome his earlier scruples. "He talks of the pit all familiar, like it was an old stamping ground of his. It wouldn't surprise me none to hear him call the devils by their front names."

"Don't he ever whirl in on this salvation racket?" asked Mr. Stevens.

"Never knowed him to," replied Mr. Tabor. "I s'pose he figgers all bets is down before the turn."

Mr. Stevens toyed with his glass thoughtfully. "Looks to me," he announced, "like the ol' man is sorter fretful at bein' turned loose on corpses and nothin' else. It's sure enough to depress any one. What for a game would it be to let him expound to us occasional—when there ain't nothin' else to do? It might cheer him up some, and it won't hurt us."

"I dunno 'bout that," Tabor objected. "I don't want him to take me for no text. If I'm dead I don't mind, 'cause then I can't hear. With them predictions of his ringin' in my ears, if they was meant personal I wouldn't sleep for a week."

"I'm out to take a chance," Mr. Stevens decided. "The ol' man's done herded by himself till he's powerful low in sperit, like one o' them ol' bulls that's been horned out by the younger critters. You wouldn't like it yourself, Ed. I figger if we lets him preach to us it helps him a lot. And if we puts it up that we'd ruther hear 'bout angels an' sech than 'bout fire and brimstone, why, maybe he lets us down easy."

This view of the matter went far to reconcile Mr. Tabor to the prospect of

religious services; and Mr. Stevens straightway set about securing the consent of enough gentlemen to form a respectable audience—at least in point of numbers. When this had been arranged, he approached Luther Martin.

"Preach to you-all!" snorted Martin grimly. "Ain't I been a-warnin' you over the dead bodies of your fellow men to turn aside from your evil courses, and gamblin' and drinkin' and blasphemy and killin's, and flee from the wrath to come? And hev you? Nary a turn. It wouldn't surprise me a mite if the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah lit onto this camp like a fox onto a settin' turkey, and wiped her out complete."

"There's ondoubted a heap of sin in the camp," said Mr. Stevens, "but it's to be expected. There ain't much else to do nights. But them words of yours over sports that's got the gaff various ways has done set the boys thinkin'. They figger they'd like to hear how to swing bully of torment. Maybe if you was to tell 'em about Heaven and how to trail up to it, it would help."

"I'll think about it," said Luther Martin ungraciously.

"You tells me once how you was bogged down in sin clear to your stifle joints," pursued Mr. Stevens craftily, "and that the savin' grace drug you out and landed you on sound bottom. If you was to tell the boys how come you to make that crossin' it would be regarded."

"How come me to shake free from that slough of sin ain't no mystery," said Luther Martin grimly. "It's the grace of Heaven actin' on me through the fear of hell. I was sunk so deep in wickedness that the flames scorched my toes, and it scared me so that I just naturally busted loose. Ain't that what I'm tellin' you? Ain't I been tryin' to scare this camp into a better life? And does she scare? Nary!"

But finally he consented to preach. He took his text—or, rather, texts—from Leviticus, the nineteenth chapter, with special reference to the twelfth and eighteenth verses, and a dozen of the hardest citizens in Yellow Horse listened with profound gravity and wondered what it was all about. The biblical language which he saw fit to employ mystified them; but they claimed to be highly edified, and requested more on the following Sunday. Gradually the weekly services—before each of which Mr. Stevens rounded up a more or less reluctant quorum—became a regular institution.

"I know you ain't got no more religion than a prairie dog, Ed," he said, when Mr. Tabor registered an objection to attendance, "and I ain't what you'd call strong on it myself. But these services is sorter necessary to the ol' man now. If the camp turned him down he'd be plumb sore. And he's failed a lot since the cold weather set in. Come on and cap his game. It's only for an hour."

Mr. Stevens himself could not be considered a shining example of religious instruction. His manner of life was not changed in the least. He emerged from the smoke of two gun fights in as many weeks, quite uninjured, and Luther Martin conducted funeral services over the bodies of two men who had rashly believed that they could beat Mr. Stevens to the draw. Luther Martin referred to him scathingly in public and tore him to tatters in private.

"It ain't my fault, I tell you," pleaded Mr. Stevens. "They both shoved it onto me. Don't this Webster go after his gun when I sorter suggests it's pore taste to deal to yourself from the bottom of the deck?"

"If you hadn't been gamblin' it wouldn't have happened," Luther Martin commented severely.

"I wasn't gamblin' then; I'd done dropped out that hand," protested Mr. Stevens in injured tones. "And as for this other feller, Rivers, accordin' to his dyin' statement it's all a mistake. He shoots at me, thinkin' I'm some one he don't like. Even if I am the party he mistakes me for, it's simply suicidal for him to miss under them circumstances."

An odd friendship had grown up between the two. The noted bad man made a practice of dropping into the old

cobbler's shack several nights a week. And Luther Martin, while lashing him mercilessly for his sins at times, so far unbent as to talk of old days in their native country, and, when their acquaintance had ripened, to spin yarns of his own wild youth. He told them in an outward spirit of repentance, but with an inward spirit closely akin to pride; and the telling of them lifted the gloom of years of silence so that on these evenings he was almost cheerful.

But with the advent of an early winter he was not well. He was languid, doing his tasks mechanically. For long intervals he would sit, a piece of work between his knees, his old eyes staring, unseeing, into space. The human clock, racked and worn in its mechanism, was beginning to run uncertainly. And no one knew it better than Luther Martin.

At this time, in the first days of December, the Yellow Horse stage, carrying a consignment of gold, was held up by one man who made a clean get-away. The amount, as it happened, was comparatively small; but the express company, with a praiseworthy desire to discourage such depredations at the outset, offered a reward for the apprehension of the culprit. With this inducement a posse set forth from Yellow Horse, and combed the surrounding country, only to return with played-out horses and frostbitten toes.

"And you don't catch this holdup none!" observed Mr. Stevens, with sarcasm. "I s'pose you figgered on findin' him standin' in the trail, wearin' a sign."

"Do I look as if I'd been ridin' trail?" retorted Mr. Tabor. "You can bet I don't feel like it, and neither does my Sammy hoss. That cayuse is saddle sore and ga'nted up till the cinch rings meet on top of the leather. He ain't got no more breadth than a razor-back hawg, and the last day I feel like I'm straddlin' a ghost. We surely combed the country clean, and rode them cayuses to a show-down. Go out yourself and round up this yere road agent, if you know so much about it."

"Maybe I will later," said Mr. Stevens; "and when I go I'll go alone. I don't aim to split that reward with no posse. And I'll tell you one thing, Ed: If I starts out to git that holdup, I gits him."

Ed Tabor's reply was considered by its author a masterly piece of sarcasm. But Bill Stevens paid no attention. The reward of five thousand dollars bulked large in his eyes. He was an old plainsman, skilled in reading signs, patient when necessary, tireless, almost impervious to extremes of temperature, and quite confident of his ability to bring in any man—if he were given the option of doing so dead or alive. Also he needed money badly; for he abhorred regular manual labor, and the games of chance from which he was accustomed to draw his means of subsistence had been running against him.

To Mr. Stevens the capture of one or more stage robbers was merely a cold business proposition. The risk he did not consider at all. Having a fair working knowledge of the methods of these knights of the road, he reasoned out the situation to himself.

"Bein' only one man," he reflected, "he must be either some scatter-witted and foolish, or plumb level-headed. In which last case he's bad. Course, there's a chance that he's satisfied with one whirl at the game; and havin' beat it that time don't go against it no more—hereabouts, anyway. But if he had that much sense he'd be runnin' some deadfall game where the percentages would win steady. And hist'ry shows that when a road agent's done took the trouble to size up a territory with a view to business he never quits with one clatter. He keeps repeatin' till something happens. This yere robber seems mighty businesslike. Only thing, then, is to make a good guess when he'll try again."

Having reached this conclusion, Mr. Stevens reserved his guess till he should obtain further information. But he had his best pony sharp-shod, and purchased roomy moccasins and heavy socks, for he had no mind to freeze his feet in leather boots.

The bitter, gloomy December days

slipped away. There was little snow. The earth lay frozen to iron hardness, bare, brown, and desolate. Only the higher hills were crowned with white. Bleak winds roared in their gulches, and whistled keenly through the dead grasses of the flatlands. Animals sought what shelter they might, and every man who was a free agent avoided the out-of-doors. The weather itself bred melancholy.

But as the days drew on, there arose, feebly at first, expressed in hardy, half-contemptuous references between man and man, a spirit which fought against the gloom—nothing less than the spirit of Christmas.

"What does this yere camp do, Christmas times?" asked Mr. Stevens.

"Do Christmas?" sneered Ed Tabor. "Why, it hangs up its stockin's, and gits up before daylight to find 'em full of little bags of candy and dollies and tin soldiers. Sure. What did you reckon it did?"

"I nachrally s'posed it got drunk," said Mr. Stevens, refusing to notice his friend's sarcasm.

"And you s'posed dead right," said the latter emphatically. "You bet. She's some drunk, too."

"Down home we used to have turkey shootin's and hoss races," said Mr. Stevens reminiscently.

"Them's good doin's," Mr. Tabor approved. "Cain't have 'em here. Usual we're all snowed up. Christmas don't seem like it used to. Course, it's diff'rent with fellers that's got homes and wives and kids and a reg'lar layout. I bet they have Christmas trees and Santa Clauses and all such durn foolishness still."

"Dunno 'bout it bein' foolishness," said Bad Bill. "Seems like it's the right thing this time of year. I 'lotted' on Christmas a heap when I was a kid. I ain't forgot them times yet."

"Nor me neither," Tabor confessed. "Sure, it's all right when you got the fix-in's, and the women, and the kids. But out in a bull camp like this yere, what's the use? Still, we do the best we can—sorter make a bluff at it. The s'loons is fixed up with flags and bresh and motters till they look like a Sunday school. Tom an' Jerry on every bar. It sorter marks a turn in the year."

"Sure," approved Mr. Stevens. "Funny how this Christmas sticks in a man's crop. I reckon 'tain't so much the Christmases we has now as them we used to have 'bout the time we was learnin' to draw a sight with a log for a rest."

"And that's a center shot," Tabor agreed. "The older a man gets the more he thinks 'bout them old Christmases."

Mr. Stevens pondered.

"Ol' man Martin cain't git drunk," he said at length. "She'll be a slow time for him. I reckon I'll give him a little present—so's he won't feel overlooked."

"I'm in on that play." Tabor declared promptly. "What'll I give him? Big-print Bible, with a picture of them old-timers packin' a bunch of grapes out o' Canaan on a sapling, same's we'd tote a buck if we're afoot. I 'member that picture fine. An' one of a sport makin' a quick get-away on a white mule, that gits his scalp lock tangled in a limb, and so is set afoot and captured by hostiles. He should 'a' kept his head right down on his critter's neck ridin' through bresh that-a-way, and slammed loose behind him with whatever he had to shoot with if he was bein' crowded. I reckon the ol' man would take a heap of solid comfort out'n them pictures."

"You git that Bible, Ed," said Bill. "I'm gittin' him a big chair to set in—she's bein' freighted in now—an' one o' them nickel lamps with a green shade for his ol' eyes. 'Tween you an' me, I'm afraid he's sorter ridin' down to his last ford. He ain't done no work for a week."

"He might be your ol' pap, the way you looks after him," Tabor commented. "Let's chase him down a medicine man."

"I done that when you was away," Mr. Stevens replied. "There's nothin' special wrong, 'cept that he's a leetle mite weak in the heart. It's jest a case of an ol' wagon. He may last for years, and then ag'in he may go down on the

first jolt. Needs cheerin' up, the doctor said. Thinkin' of ol' times too much. Needs con-genial company."

"I'd set with him by the hour," Tabor offered, "but I ain't congenial. Who would be?"

"There ain't no one in camp," said Stevens, "and he won't quit it. Says he aims to stick it out here, and it don't make no difference nohow."

"How's he fixed?" asked Tabor after an interval of silence.

"All right," replied Stevens, but he did not meet his friend's eye.

"See yere," cried Tabor, "are you staking him, Bill?"

"If I am I can stand it."

"Well, I can't," Tabor exclaimed. "It's a durn shame! He's been wrasslin' for our souls when he might 'a' been rustlin' for himself. He must think we've got as much heart as wolves."

"What I stakes him to I sorter hands in with the camp's compliments, and allows it some back salary for preachin'," Bad Bill acknowledged unwillingly.

"You ol' son of a gun!" cried Mr. Tabor in admiration. "But you bet you don't make good for the camp out'n your roll. Yeller Horse is plumb able to pay a top-notch price for salvation. She's in luck to have the chance. I'll do that collectin' myself."

He was as good as his word, and Yellow Horse responded nobly, even eagerly. It was ashamed of itself, was Yellow Horse, when it heard of Luther Martin's need, and it marked its shame by prodigal generosity. On behalf of the camp, Tabor made the presentation, and Luther Martin's hard eyes blurred with unaccustomed moisture.

"Boys," he said unsteadily, "I know Yeller Horse well enough to know you ain't looking for thanks. I'm much obliged. I'm an ol' man, and pore. What I've tried to do for you I've done free, with no thought of money. But I ain't so pizen proud and mean as to refuse what's given me in kindness of heart. G-God bless you, boys!"

The representatives of Yellow Horse fled, cursing above lumps in their own throats, feeling that somehow or other they had made a shocking hash of the whole business.

Mr. Stevens had been carefully absent from the presentation, but in the evening he made his way, with many misgivings, to Luther Martin's abode; and, as he had expected, was accused of responsibility.

"I ain't got a thing to do with it," he protested. "Ed Tabor spoke to me first. The idee sorter got goin' by itself."

"Well, it was mighty white of you boys," said Martin. "When a lonely man gits down toward the end of the trail there's times when he behaves like a woman. And yet I'm hard as a hick'ry knot up to a few months ago. Reckon I'm breakin' up."

"Pshaw! No, pap, you ain't breakin' none," Bad Bill cheered him. "It's this weather. Yere's a good seegyar. Come on an' tell me 'bout them ol' war times, when you an' my daddy an' the rest of the boys was chasin' he—er—thunder out'n them Yanks."

"Them Yanks done their fair share of chasin', too," said Luther Martin. "No, Billy"—they called each other "Billy" and "Pap" now—"I don't want to talk 'bout war times." He glanced at a flaring calendar on the wall. "December twenty-third," he said, "and tomorrer comes Christmas Eve. Christmas Eve! And it seems only last Christmas I was settin' by my mammy, lookin' at the candles an' spangles on the tree in the ol' meetin'house at Hick'ry Bend. I can see it yet—the folks in their best clo'es, an' the parson in his black, an' the schoolmaster playin' Santa Claus, an' ol' Squ'ar Peedee makin' his speech; the dogs an' niggers herdin' by the door an' the hosses a-stompin' outside on the hard ground. I got a toy pistol off'n that tree."

He paused, smoking slowly.

"Then there was Christmas Eves in the war. One the Yanks swarmed in on us 'bout midnight. Sho! I can see their tattered ol' blue unifawms an' hard faces swimmin' up out of the dark right now. Then, after the war, was Christmas Eves when I had a home of my own and a wife—an' children."

Bill stared at him. "I didn't know

you was ever married, pap. What become of them?"

"Dead," said Luther Martin slowly, "all dead, Billy, all but one—maybe."

"Well, where's that one?" demanded Bill.

"I dunno," Luther Martin replied. "My wife an' the two little girls died. The boy growed up. He was some wild. I—I reckon I was a leetle hard with him, Billy."

Bill Stevens made no comment. Luther Martin resumed:

"I can see now I was too hard. I'd been wild myself, and my folks had been easy with me. I said I wouldn't make the same mistake. After my wife—when we was left alone together, maybe I checked him up too tight. He quit me. I ain't never heard of him since."

"He'd orter looked you up," Bill decided.

"I dunno. I undertook to break him harder'n I would a colt or a pup. He—I don't blame him. I'd have done the same at his age, I s'pose. Anyway, he quit me. But there was Christmas Eves when he sat on my knee, a leetle boy with big, round eyes, and I told him 'bout b'ars and Injuns and the fightin' in the war. Billy, when a man is old an' lonely, an' gettin' mighty close to a show-down with his Creator, 'bout the only things that holds him to this world is mem'ries like them."

Bad Bill Stevens shifted uneasily.

"You cain't exactly know how I feel, Billy," said Luther Martin. "I don't expect you to. You ain't old enough, and you ain't married. But it's this way with me: If I could have just one more Christmas Eve with little Jack—I done called him Jackson, after ol' Stonewall—I b'lieve I'd be ready to go in peace to whatever place the good Lord has prepared for me."

III.

Early on the morning of the twenty-fourth of December, Mr. Stevens rode slowly out of Yellow Horse. The sky was a mass of dull-gray clouds, oppressive even in the cold. There was no wind. Smoke from the chimneys of the camp streamed straight up into the air.

Mr. Stevens shook his head at the sky, reading its portent doubtfully. It meant snow, but with what concomitants was uncertain. It might blow or it might not. A straight snowfall was no great matter. But snow, lashed and driven by a gale until the world is a blur of drifting white in which trails and even familiar landmarks vanish, is a serious thing in a lonely land where shelter is conspicuous by its absence.

Mr. Stevens was on the trail thus early because the stage was due some time that afternoon. He was taking a chance, although he did not know that it carried considerable currency to settle the monthly pay roll. He reasoned that the unknown holdup, having allowed a decent period to elapse, was due to try again. It was possible, and that was all. But five thousand dollars is a large sum, and worth some effort. And so Mr. Stevens had ridden forth without advertising his going.

He rode slowly, seldom lifting his horse from a walk. At noon he fed him grain which he carried behind his saddle, took a long hour's unneeded rest, and went on again. Then came the snow, spilling down in giant flakes through the still air.

The trail, which had led through a bare, open, flat country, now approached a different region. For some miles it wound through irregular, rocky hills, gulches, and patches of small timber. It was in this that the holdup had taken place. Here, if anywhere, Mr. Stevens was sure that it would occur again.

Out of the white blur that restricted clear vision to a hundred yards, moved a bulk at first shapeless. Then it resolved itself into the form of the stage-coach, drawn by six horses, its wheels heavy with the clinging snow.

"Durn the luck!" soliloquized Mr. Stevens, "they've made the riffle with nary stand-up." He turned out to allow the vehicle to pass. He would ride on and not return to camp till after

dark, for he did not intend to admit that he had been on a wild-goose chase.

But opposite him the driver suddenly pulled up and set his brakes, peering down through the snow.

"That you, Bill?" he said. "Why in thunder don't you happen along a half hour earlier?"

"Because I don't start sooner," Mr. Stevens replied.

"Held up again," said the driver.

"No?"

"Yep. Same single-handed party."

Mr. Stevens spat, eying a crestfallen guard who sat beside the driver.

"What's Hickey, thar, doin' all the time?"

"He has a double-bar'l ten-gauge on me before I can move," protested Hickey.

"And you ain't out to take a chance?"

"Chance!" snorted Hickey. "I takes a chance on a six-shooter too quick. But a shotgun at twenty feet ain't no chance; it's a cinch."

Mr. Stevens admitted the justice of this view. "Where was you stopped?" he asked casually. The driver told him, and added particulars. Mr. Stevens gathered up his reins. "I reckon I'll bring this outlaw in," he announced. "Leastwise if the sight of him won't scare Hickey too bad."

"Any outlaw you'd catch wouldn't scare a child," snapped Hickey. "Mebbe you'd like me to tell the boys to have a rope ready."

"The way I'll bring him in he probable won't need a rope," retorted Mr. Stevens grimly. "Speshully if he goes to fumblin' round with a shotgun like I was a paralytic stage guard."

Having implanted this barbed shaft, he suddenly jumped his pony past the rear wheel, and sailed down the whitening trail like a wraith of the storm, for snowing as it was there was no time to lose. On the other hand, the trail of the holdup, once found, would be easy to follow.

Twenty minutes, at the pace he rode, brought him to the scene of the robbery, and he regarded appreciatively the ripped sacks and scattered papers.

"Good nerve," he deduced. "Don't pack no more than he has to. Makes his hunt for plunder right plumb on the trail, selects out what he wants, and gits. Knows his business, you bet. All the same, he's my meat."

He found the trail of a single horse, as well as that of a single man. Following the latter a hundred yards, he came to where obviously a horse had been tethered. Thence the trail of the horse angled back to the road. There it was indistinguishable; but the point at which it rejoined the road was between the scene of the robbery and Yellow Horse, and the last hoofmarks were pointing toward the latter place. Which opened a wide vista for conjecture.

Bill Stevens, however, came to a speedy decision, and, wheeling his pony, headed him away from Yellow Horse.

"This yere outlaw is *too* plumb clever," he reasoned. "He figgers anybody findin' his trail will think he's rode a piece toward camp. But he ain't, 'cause he'd bump right into any party that'd happen to meet up with the stage. So he's gone the other way, and likely gone a-hellin'. If she don't snow so hard it'd be easy; way she is, it's an even break I never picks up his trail at all."

He swept along at a steady lope, his right hand bare for quicker action should occasion arise, his eyes straining for any sign which might mark the turn-off of his quarry. He covered one mile, two, and began to swear. The snow was falling heavily, obliterating all marks. But worse than that the wind was beginning to rise. It came sighing out of the north, in little, fitful gusts that bit and nipped the flesh, sure forerunner of what was to come.

"Norther, sure as shootin'," said Mr. Stevens, reverting to the terms of a district in which he had spent several eventful years.

Just then his eye was caught and held by a wisp of something dark waving from a bush, silhouetted against the snow. He pulled up with a jerk, turning his pony from the trail to investigate, and chuckled; for beside the bush

were hoofmarks already partially filled with snow.

"He buckjumps his cayuse clean out'n the trail," he exulted. "If it ain't that that little ol' bush snags a few hairs loose from his critter's tail he'd have fooled me plenty. I'm playin' in luck, and you bet I crowd her the limit."

The trail, although partially filled with snow, was easy to follow, and Mr. Stevens pressed on jubilantly.

"This yere snow makes things easy two ways," he said to himself. "No chance of overrunnin' the trail; and he'll figger that his tracks will be all filled up. Naturally he don't count on the stage meetin' up with me. That five thousand is just as good as in my warbags this minute. And I surely needs her."

Mr. Stevens did not reflect that he should have a gun ready, because his guns were always ready. He had even waked, on occasion, to find one cocked in his hand. He drew them when need arose, as readily and naturally as he drew his breath. But no swiftness of eye can match a charge of buckshot once started, and so he was very wary indeed when the trail led him around sharp turns. And at one of these, very much to his own surprise, he came full upon his quarry. It was, in fact, ridiculously easy, as if the situation had been made to order.

The outlaw was dismounted in the shelter of a steep upthrust of rock, bending over his horse's hoof, which he held between his knees.

"Durn me," thought Mr. Stevens, with great admiration, "if he don't pack hoss-shoe nails and a little hammer! That's *brains*. He's sure organized against accidents."

Warned by an indefinable something, for the snow had muffled the hoof-falls, the outlaw looked up from his occupation. Swiftly he dropped the hoof and sprang erect, his hand swooping to the butt of a six-shooter.

"Don't do it!" warned Mr. Stevens.

The road agent looked at the face of Mr. Stevens behind a formidable piece of artillery and decided not to do it. Instead, he tried a tentative bluff.

"You shouldn't run up on strangers that way, partner," he observed, with a strained laugh. "You sure startled me some. Reckon I'm a leetle bit on aidge. Too much town life, you savvy. You can put down that cannon. I just reached for my gun without thinkin'."

He was a younger man than Stevens, lean, shapely so far as could be told through his thick clothing, and his face, keen, hard, and reckless, was lit by a pair of equally keen, watchful eyes.

"I savvy plenty," replied Mr. Stevens, without moving. "You stay froze. Don't make no move to jump behind your hoss nor grab that shotgun. Onbuckle your belt and let her drop." The man hesitated. "You hear me," said Mr. Stevens. "Do it!"

The holdup obeyed slowly, his eyes never shifting from his captor's face.

"Put up your hands and turn your back and stay turned," commanded Mr. Stevens. As the other obeyed, he came out of his saddle with the quickness of a cat, and advanced. "Just remember," he added, "that I'm holdin' a gun about an inch from your ear." His unoccupied hand went over his captive deftly, and discovered a revolver with sling and holster neatly tucked beneath the left arm. Mr. Stevens drew it forth gingerly, stepped back, and ejected the cartridges. "You was sure plenty organized," he commented. "Take down your hands and put on some gloves. It's turnin' right cold."

His captive wheeled about. "What you doin' this on?" he demanded. "Mebbe I was a leetle mite soon, but you're goin' too durn far."

Mr. Stevens, grinning appreciatively, broke open the shotgun, and threw two loads of buckshot into the snow.

"I'm doin' it on the contents of these yere saddlebags of yourn and the gunny sack on the cantle," he replied. "You're playin' it well, partner, but it don't do a mite of good. Your bet's coppered. So we'll just jog along after that stage you stops. And don't make no more breaks. You're wuth five thousand to me either way, and ca'tridges is cheap."

The other considered coolly. "I'm

called," he admitted. "But, partner, I'm better'n five thousand strong."

"No use," said Mr. Stevens.

"Think it over."

"Five is good."

"I'll raise it."

"Not this hand."

"It's your say-so," the other admitted sorrowfully. "Goldurn my fool hide! If I'd seen you a minute sooner——"

"It's tough luck," Mr. Stevens agreed. "Still, you took the chances."

"I'm not kickin'. Well, lemme finish tightenin' on this shoe." He picked up the hammer from the snow, and rapped a nail home. Afterward he mounted, riding in front of his captor on their back track.

The wind had increased, and was blowing half a gale. Blinding snow wreaths eddied about them. It was piercingly cold. Finally they emerged on the road, and Mr. Stevens ranged up alongside.

"Some weather," he observed.

"I'm organized for it."

"So'm I."

They rode in silence. The outlaw broke it.

"What are you, partner—sheriff?"

"Nope."

"Dep'ty?"

"Nope."

"Well, then, how come you to round me up?"

Mr. Stevens told him, and he swore.

"That blasted bush. It's the little things that makes the trouble. 'The little foxes,' my ol' man used to say. 'Look out for the little foxes, an' the big uns'll take care of themselves.' Powerful religious, my ol' man was."

"It don't show in you none," said Mr. Stevens, beating his right hand against his thigh, for the cold was creeping through his heavy gloves.

"He had enough for both of us," grinned the other. "Pore ol' pap! I wasn't no credit to him—and I ain't now."

"Mighty few of us is," commented Mr. Stevens. "Cain't be helped, I reckon. What name do you want to go by?"

"Jackson'll do," replied the holdup. "My pap done named me after ol' Stonewall, anyhow."

Mr. Stevens stopped his horse abruptly, and the other did likewise.

"What you aimin' to do? Go through me again?"

"Look-a-here," said Mr. Stevens, "I don't go nosin' into no man's private business, holdup or not—but did you-all ever live in Tennessee?"

"Born there. What do you want to know for?"

"Ever know Luther Martin?"

The outlaw peered at him in the growing darkness. "That was my daddy's name," he admitted.

"You don't think he's dead, do you?"

"Dead? Sure. I s'pose so. I heard he was."

"Well, he ain't!" roared Mr. Stevens. "He's alive an' kickin' right yere in Yeller Hoss."

Jackson Martin swore into the storm.

"Ain't this hell?" he cried. "Partner, don't take me to Yeller Hoss. Let's turn and hit a few high spots for Antelope. I'm due to be strung up or handed over to a law court, and I don't care a durn which. But I wouldn't have my ol' man know it, not for a free pardon. It'd kill him dead."

"Cain't go to Antelope," said Mr. Stevens. "We'd freeze solid before we made her. It'll be all we can do to land in the camp."

"Partner," said Martin earnestly, "I got better'n twenty thousand gold and currency, part here and part cached. She's yours in a minute if you'll turn me loose."

"Cain't do it."

"Well, durn you, what *will* you do?" cried the other. "You don't get me into Yeller Hoss alive, and that's whatever. Sooner'n that I'll make a break, and you can plug me if you like; and it's a heap easier trail-out than hangin'." The darkness was already falling. He cast a glance at the gray dimness, and leaned forward toward Mr. Stevens. "Give me a chance, partner!" he pleaded. And with the words his hand shot out for the gun which peeped from his captor's left holster.

Quick as he was, Mr. Stevens was

quicker. His right hand brought a gun to bear, while his left clamped on the fingers that clutched the butt of his secondary battery.

"See yere, young feller," he observed sternly, "if you figger on beatin' the game that way, you lose. I won't down you, but I'll down your hoss and rope you up. You ride ahead quiet, now, while I think. You bein' ol' man Martin's boy mebbe makes a difference."

Indeed, Mr. Stevens was facing a problem such as the tangle of existence had never before presented to him for solution. On the one side was five thousand dollars, and on the other was Luther Martin. And then there was the holdup's twenty-thousand-dollar proposition. Mr. Stevens was sorely tempted and puzzled. He rode, head bent against the storm, but nevertheless keeping a watchful eye on his captive while he came to a decision. Finally he ranged up beside him.

"Now, yere," said he, "is how I got things lined up. First, that twenty-thousand bluff of yours don't go."

"I've got the money, I tell you."

"Mebbe—but it don't go. Next, you and me is going to ride into Yeller Hoss."

Jackson Martin swore.

"Cain't you keep quiet till I finish?" said Mr. Stevens irritably. "You and me is going to ride into camp like I've said, and you're goin' there as Jackson Martin, come to spend Christmas with your ol' daddy."

"What?" cried the outlaw.

"It's the only trail out," said Mr. Stevens. "The ol' man ain't well—sorter low-sperited and lonesome. He's been right good to me, and the camp thinks a heap of him. I'm meaner'n coyotes if I piles trouble on him now. And I cain't turn you loose, or maybe you ain't got the nerve to come in at all."

"My nerve's all right," said young Martin, "but you're plumb crazy. That Christmas business is no good, and I'll tell you why: While if I was strung up the ol' man's that proud he'd die of shame: yet if I showed up around his cabin he'd put every curse in the Bible onto me, and he sure knows them all backward. Seems like he took a notion against me 'bout the time I begun to grow up, and he ain't the kind to get over it."

"He's over it now. He's wore out and lonesome. He ain't studyin' 'bout what hell you raised when you was a colt."

Jackson Martin shook his head. "He was sure bad medicine when I quit him. Hostile ain't no name for it. Well, s'pose he don't curse me out or throw a gun on me—what happens next? S'pose I spend Christmas with him, what good does it do? You're keepin' cases on me all the time so I don't jump the game. After Christmas—what?"

"Nothin'," said Mr. Stevens. "I don't keep cases. You're your own nigger. Do what you like."

"Quit foolin'!"

"You're foot-loose," said Mr. Stevens. "I'll keep my mouth shet. Also your American judgment goes supreme as to the plunder you acquires in these yere holdups. If your conscience is plumb tender, I reckon you'll make a refund. But if it ain't—and a holdup and a express company has several points in common—why, then, I wouldn't blame you none if you spent some of it makin' the ol' man comfortable for the rest of his days some place where you're a stranger. Also, though I ain't handin' out no good advice, if it was me playin' the hand I'd sorter let on to the ol' man that I'd seen the error of some of my ways."

"You're sure a white man," said Martin slowly. "For me to go to Yeller Hoss right now is like stickin' your hand in a badger's hole to see if he's at home. But just to show you there ain't no cracks in my nerve I'll do it. And I'll make good other ways, like you suggest. All the same, there's one or two things it won't do to overlook. Them stage people know you was after the holdup. You done told them—made your brags you'd bring him in. What you goin' to say when you show up with me?"

"That's easy," Mr. Stevens replied

"I fixes you up with an alibi as good as a high-grade lawyer. I tells my story this way: I jumps the onknown holdup comin' on dark. He makes a runnin' long-range fight, in which I busts his gun arm. I'm sure of that, 'cause I sees it danglin' loose and helpless. This fight takes place along a sidehill; and it's just my cussed luck that my hoss slips and rolls clean to the bottom with me. When I get straightened out, the outlaw is plumb absent, and I lose the trail in the dark. I come on back to the wagon road, and meet up with you. Not havin' no busted arm, it ain't possible that you're this holdup. Of course, if questions is asked, you accounts for your movements in your own way."

Martin grinned appreciatively. "What color hoss was this holdup ridin'?"

"Buckskin," Mr. Stevens replied promptly, without even a glance at the dark bay bestriden by his companion. "Course, I wasn't near enough to tell nothin' 'bout brands, and was a heap busy otherwise."

It was late when, hungry and half frozen, they reached Yellow Horse and stabled their weary steeds. Because of the hour, Mr. Stevens did not delay for food or drink, but led the way to Luther Martin's shack. He was relieved when he saw by the lighted square of the window that its occupant was still awake.

"You're in time for Christmas Eve," he said. "Now stay out yere a minute. The ol' man's heart ain't strong, and I better prepare him some."

He knocked and entered. Luther Martin looked up from the ashes of a dying fire. At sight of his visitor he smiled wanly.

"Mighty good of you to drop in, Billy," he said. "Rest your hat and set. I was just thinkin'."

"Cain't stay," said Mr. Stevens. "I met up with a stranger on the trail that thinks he knows you."

"Who is he?"

"I disremember his name," said Mr. Stevens diplomatically. "Sorter young feller. Knows Hick'ry Bend. He's been knocking about a right smart. Shouldn't wonder if he's run onto this boy of your'n somewheres."

Luther Martin sat staring at him, gripping the arms of his chair so tightly that his fingers were bloodless.

"Come to think of it," blundered Mr. Stevens, "I b'lieve he *did* see him somewheres 'round this part of the country. Shouldn't be surprised if he come to Yeller Hoss. You don't want to be surprised, neither."

"Billy," quavered Luther Martin, "why don't you talk out plain? I can stand it."

"Bully for you, pap!" roared Mr. Stevens. "Good news never killed nobody. Your boy's comin' to spend Christmas with you, and he's hittin' only the plumb high spots doin' it. Hold on! Brace up, old-timer! You done told me you could stand it."

Luther Martin straightened, and his voice was suddenly strong. "You bet I can stand it," he cried. "I'm too busy thankin' the good Lord to faint. Why, Billy, it's life to me—new life!"

Mr. Stevens opened the door and stepped out. He gripped Jackson Martin by the arm.

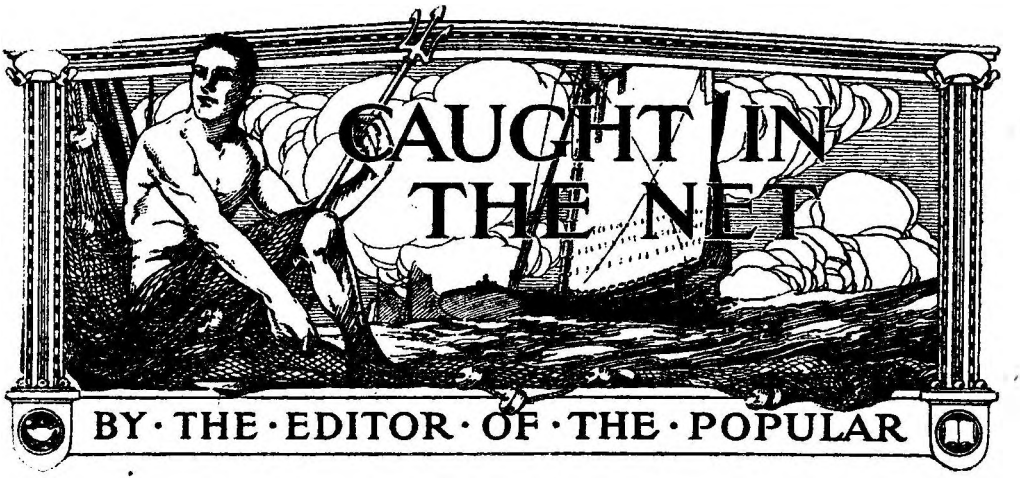
"The trail's blazed for you," he whispered. "Go on in and spend Christmas Eve with your ol' man." And then he shut the door hastily from the outside, so that no alien eyes, not even his own, should behold their meeting.

There will be another good story by Chisholm in the next POPULAR, on sale January 7th.

WHAT THEY USED TO DO

WHEN William R. Hearst, now the big publisher and politician, was a student at Harvard University, he won fame as an amateur actor.

Before Augustus P. Gardner, now one of the most influential Republican members of the House of Representatives, went into politics, he was a prize polo player, and was noted as being the best judge of polo ponies in this country.



THE ELDER BROTHER

THERE was love in the heart of Mary, the Mother. A love so pure and intense that it nourished the little heart throbbing close to hers, till its own power of loving reached across all alien races and divers tongues. All other loves of incompleteness lag under distance. They are partial, lacking that large self-sacrifice which can daily die to its own. More than many inventions and tunneled rivers, the people crave a comforter. And still the Christ comes. He answers our longing for one to forgive our waywardness and be kindly to our hurt. He takes this world of emptiness and gives it back to us full of friendly meanings. Sadness and failure were the familiar companions of His earthly days, so His words are tender and moving. Those who hear them say Here is one more who knows, who has gone the road of sorrow.

SELLING COST

THERE are comparatively few articles manufactured in the United States that do not cost from two to five times as much to sell as they do to make. In the last thirty years the cost of production of most of the great staple articles either has decreased, changed little, or advanced only a small amount, while the prices to the consumer has increased more than fifty per cent. In no other place in the world has machinery been improved to so high a degree as in this country, yet the public gets no benefits in the form of lower prices from all the inventions in manufacturing that bring about economy.

Why is it? The answer is that while we are clever, quick-witted, enterprising, and inventive, we are not logical or analytical in our business methods. In most of our business affairs we accept established forms, or follow leaders without exercising our reasoning power. Our present system of marketing is most extravagant, yet with every protest against high prices our effort is to reduce the cost of production rather than the cost of selling.

The United States government recently purchased twelve thousand typewriters at fourteen dollars each. The typewriter sells to the public at about one hundred dollars. The typewriter people told the fourth assistant postmaster general, who made the purchase, that there was a profit of one dollar on each of the twelve thousand machines. The thirteen dollars covers factory expenses and overhead charges. Another office device that sells for three hundred dollars and

is in worldwide use costs forty dollars shipped from the factory. The forty dollars includes overhead charges.

The work of many of the sales organizations in the various businesses is expended on efforts to induce people to buy things they do not need. The expense of all this effort must be included in the selling price. The waste is colossal.

We have less scientific knowledge regarding marketing of products economically and give less thought to the subject than its importance warrants. When we know how to reduce the cost of distribution we will have solved one of the real problems connected with the high cost of living.

FIGHTS

IT is often said a man's success depends upon his choice of friends. As much, and sometimes more, depends upon his selection of enemies.

Man is born to fight as grass is to grow. It is one of the primary means of development. He grows in strength and resourcefulness and character by the battles he fights. There was a crime and folly in the old custom of dueling; but there was logic in the code. By it no man was supposed to fight anybody but a gentleman. Translated into everyday living that means one ought always, to keep his own self-respect, pick an enemy worth fighting.

Some men pick for opponents the weak and unfortunate, and choose the easy passes and the sheltered retreats. They grow coarse and brutal and cowardly and go down at the first stinging blow from Fate. Others fight windmills and waste their strength on the wandering air. Still others fight buzzsaws and get cut into strings.

A wise and a brave man picks his enemy with caution—not to get one that is easy to whip, but one that is hard to whip, and above all one that it will do good to whip. There are many things vastly benefited by being whipped, and others that need to be annihilated. A good fighter is as much a philanthropist as a good giver. He goes into the fight, not with clubs or knives or guns, not with mad frothings or blind rage. More often than not he goes into the fray with a smile and a steady pulse, for whether the enemy be a mountain, a man, or a circumstance, he intends to whip not so much for punishment as to make it a friend to him and the world.

It may be a difficult pass in the mountains, a long stretch of unbroken woods, an unbridged stream, a state of poverty, a condition of disgrace, an unsolved problem in science, a human bully, a vulture, or a rascal; whatever it is a man pits himself against, he will, if he is wise, make careful preparation for the fight. Instead of shutting his eyes with wild frenzy, butting in headfirst, he will measure the thing to be conquered and train himself up to it; and when the final conflict comes he will go into battle with a clear head, a straight eye, and a quick arm. And no matter how grim and fierce the fight, it will be all the better for him, and every one else, if he keeps a humorous quirk at the corner of his mouth and an amiable grin upon his face.

SOUTH AMERICAN ENTERPRISE

SOUTH AMERICA is taking a leaf out of the book of Japan. Four hundred young men, selected with care in Chile, the Argentine, Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Colombia, Uruguay, and Paraguay are being sent to the United States and placed in steel and iron plants, agricultural implement manufactories, cotton mills, shoe factories, typewriter concerns, railroad shops, shipyards, and various other industries. While in this country the young men must support themselves, but the Pan-American States Association

will keep them under scrutiny. When they have a fair knowledge of the business they have been studying, it is expected they will return to the Southern Hemisphere as representatives of American industrial establishments, or with enough knowledge of American business to be of great service in promoting trade relations between the two Americas.

This is but one of the many moves being made by South America in anticipation of the opening of the Panama Canal. The people of the United States never have awakened to the importance of the canal in a trade sense. They appreciate that the canal is the greatest liberty man ever has taken with nature, but further than glorying in that fact they are doing little. With South Americans it is different. More money is being spent in South America to make full use of the canal than the United States is spending on the canal. In harbor building, harbor widening, bridges, railroad construction, steamship buying, hydro-electric enterprises, textile plants, and a hundred other developments great sums are being employed. There is almost as much activity on the east coast as on the west. Two new steamship lines between New York and west coast ports are announced. For one the South American Steamship Company is having six express steamships built in this country for service between New York and Valparaiso.

In Montevideo, twenty million dollars is being spent on harbor work, which will make that port one of the finest in the world.

Of railroad building, there has been more in South America in the last year than in the United States. In Chile, the work on the longitudinal road, which is being built by J. G. White & Co., of New York, entailed an expenditure of fourteen million nine hundred and ninety thousand dollars in nineteen-twelve.

In Maracaibo, the largest cotton mill in South America is to be built. General Mariano Perez placed the order for all the equipment in New York in June. The building is to be of cement, all the machinery is to be of the best, and the power is to be electricity.

The trade of South America is one of the richest prizes in the world. In nineteen-ten the imports were one billion one hundred and twenty-eight million dollars, and the exports one billion three hundred and eighteen million dollars. The canal will increase these totals immensely. South Americans know a thousand times more about North America than North Americans know about South America.

It would be well to throw fewer bouquets at ourselves for building the canal, and prepare to take advantage of the wonderful opportunities it offers. Our trade standing to our Southern neighbors to-day is discreditable to us. In the commerce of Bolivia we stand ninth, in Brazil third, Colombia second, Paraguay seventh, Argentine seventh, Peru second, and Uruguay fourth. Only in Panama do we stand first.

KNOWING THE REAL

JUDGING literature is like hunting ginseng. Boys hunt for ginseng along the bluffs. It is very scarce, but the root is very pleasant to the taste. It grows in little spots and ledges of exceedingly rich soil along the side of the bluff. The buckeye sprout looks very much like ginseng. There is another wild plant that looks even more like it. It has the five-pointed leaves, three large ones and two small ones. It has the three prongs and a little bunch of berries in the center. It has all the points of resemblance. The hunter could quickly take it up and find out, but he hates to be fooled, and so he will try his best to identify it before he digs. Sometimes he will conclude it is, and sometimes that it isn't, but it always isn't. Whenever he finds the real thing he never debates. There is not a minute's hesitancy, nor the slightest doubt. Instantly he knows this is ginseng.

It is that way in literature. Some stories have characters that, when you look at them and listen to them, you can hardly tell them from the real. The color in the girl's cheek is just right, and her hair fits, and she uses girl language. And yet you have to debate a long time whether or not you care for her. Sometimes the atmosphere of a story seems all right, you think possibly that it has really happened. You study about it, and criticize it, and compare it with your own experiences, trying to decide. That is all imitation literature. When you come to the right thing you know it in an instant. You don't analyze, don't take time to argue about its qualities. It is just there, real and alive. The people live, you can feel the atmosphere, and hear the sounds. It strikes the responsive chord in your own experiences, which makes you know without a moment's questioning that this is real. And that is the finest test of literature or people—to know instinctively this is the real thing.

"DERELICTS"

THE old view of human wreckage was the comic view. They were regarded as hoboes, grafters, gentlemen of leisure, to be ridiculed or arrested or driven along to another city. Just as fashionable men and women used to go to Bedlam to laugh at the insane, so the comfortable members of society used to deride the fag ends of the race, and treat them as a nuisance.

The new view finds that personal responsibility is in some of the cases only partly the cause of the downfall, and that bad housing, overwork in childhood, poor food, and disease had made the individual incapable of hard work, long before he came to the age of responsibility. Society has learned that the community itself is oftentimes the cause of such benchfuls of derelicts as we see in our public parks on every day of the twelvemonth.

THE JOB OF PROPHET

PERHAPS there is no other job so universally coveted as that of "prophet," and like the seventy-nine candidates for the Jim Town post office every man thinks he has it. One of the most frequent expressions overheard everywhere is: "Now, I told him six months ago just what was going to happen——" If a man fails, nine out of ten men will assure you that they knew it a year ahead and had told So-and-so just exactly how and when and why it would happen. It even gives some people such keen delight to have their prophecies fulfilled, that they are glad to have a fellow townsman die of apoplexy, go to Congress, or be hanged, according to prediction.

There is a natural instinct to try to look ahead; and it is in accordance with our rather superabundance of self-esteem, to want to be known as a seer; but it is very easy to overdo the prophet business. Very few of us, indeed, hit oftener than we miss; for frequently the most apparent coming event misses fire entirely, and in its place the unexpected explodes right under our feet.

While every man does well to cultivate his foresight and to use his keenest judgment in foretelling events that concern him, yet he should not take himself too seriously as a prophet; and never should he become so attached to his job as to go round trying to create suspicion against a fellow man merely to fulfill a prophecy made in a moment of pique. Such a prophecy is a dangerous thing, for sometimes they work out like election bets, when the better goes out and buys votes to make himself win.

Not unfrequently a man finds himself hoping that evil may happen, that the world may honor him as a seer. That sort of prophet has not any reason to be proud of his job, for he is merely a croaker, masquerading under a prophet's mantle.

The Fight on Standing Stone

By Francis Lynde

Author of "The Taming of Red Butte Western," "Scientific Sprague," Etc.

A battle of wits in the Standing Stone Cañon, where rival railroads were at each other's throat for a right of way. The story is not all about railroading; there is a girl interest that is just as absorbing. We commend this tale to readers who like to hear of men who *do* things; who never walk around obstacles but climb them; who move straight forward, and if a fight comes, make it a fight to the finish. A strong story, told by a practical railroad man.

CHAPTER I.

THE INVADERS.

THE sun, poising for its early autumn afternoon plunge behind the snow balds on high Buckskin, was doing its best to idealize in a golden glow of color the commissary, the bunk shanties, the long strings of material cars, and the other bare utilities of Travois, the end-of-track construction camp. Beyond the camp with its gridironing of railroad tracks the Standing Stone, clear, snow-clad, and sparkling, caught the suffusing tint in the spray flung up by the bowlders in its tortuous bed, and even the black smoke belching from the stacks of the two big "camelback" locomotives in the yard turned to a pearl gray with pink undertones as it rose to diffuse itself in the upper effulgences.

Over a great gash scoring the nearer bowlder of the Buckskin like a fresh wound, a dull, yellow mist hung in mid-air; and as Stannard came out of the camp telegraph shack with a tissue copy of a telegram crumpled viciously in his fist the rumbling grunt of the dynamite floated down from the jagged scar on Buckskin, to be passed back and forth in diminishing echoes between the Dog-tooth and Rock Face, twin bulkings inclosing the Travois Valley like the crooking fingers of a pair of hollowed hands.

Crossing the straggling camp street to come by the shortest path to the end-of-track yard, the stalwart, big-muscled young chief of construction fell afoul of Callahan and his car-repairing mate at work jacking up a steel flat to replace a broken drawbar. Because he was in the mood to snap at anything that came in his way, he stopped short, and wheeled upon the two men under the flat car.

"Who smashed that drawbar, Patsy?"

"Sure, I dunno, sorr," returned the car repairer. And then, loyal to his yard mates: "I'm thinking maybe 'twas done on the main line, before we'd be getting the cyar on the cut-off at all."

"No, it wasn't; it was done right here in this yard! Write out a report of it, and give the number of the shift that turned it over to you. I'm going to make an example of some of these clock watchers that are too lazy to ride a kick-off and set the brakes. Have you seen Mr. Roddy since he came down from the tunnel?"

"I did, sorr. 'Twas him I saw going across the thracks to the river wid his fishin' pole, not twinty minut's ago."

Stannard faced about, and strode

away in the direction indicated, still gripping the tissue telegram. Callahan winked slyly at his mate. "'Tis bad news the boss has been getting," he commented. "I'd not like to be Misther Jackson Roddy to be caught wid a fishin' pole in me hand before quittin' time."

"You're batty!" scoffed the helper. "Them things don't count with the bosses. And, anyway, Mr. Roddy is off his shift when he comes down from the tunnel."

"'Tis bad news, all the same," Callahan insisted. "Misther Stannard is a foine, upshtandin' young man when he's at himself, but whin his mad's up I'd sooner be findin' tin dollars on th' dump than to have the b'y hit out at me wid annything less than a feather bed between the two av us. 'Tis a twinty-horse-power mule kick he c'd put behind thim two fishtes av his, this minut'."

True to the Irishman's characterization, Stannard gave a very fair imitation of a young giant ferociously angry when he had crossed the tracks to come upon his assistant wading knee-deep in the icy waters of the Standing Stone, and skillfully playing a fine mountain trout in the boiling eddies.

"Get out of that mill tail and come and listen to this, Jackson!" he called from the bank, bellowing to make himself heard above the drumming of the torrent.

Roddy, a small man with baby-blue eyes and the jaw of a bulldog, waded ashore obediently, playing the fish as he came and deftly slipping the landing net under it when the fight ended in the shallows.

"What's eating you now?" he grumbled. At altitude five thousand feet in the short-grass hills, the distinctions of rank and file fall easily into the scrap heap with the other purely ornamental traditions.

"Get on to this from Yellow Medicine," rasped the chief; and t! eupon he smoothed the crumpled telegram and read it aloud:

"President Merriam's private car *Egeria*, with hunting party from New York, will run special, Brinker, conductor, Gaffney, engineman, Yellow Medicine to Travois, leaving here four-fifteen. Mr. Westervelt, in charge of party, wants you to arrange sidetrack accommodation for *Egeria* best place in Travois yard where ladies won't be annoyed. PENNOYER, Agent.

"Do you get that, Jackson? Wouldn't that make you let out a yell and break for the timber! 'Ladies'—that's what he says—'Ladies!' in this God-forsaken, howling wilderness of a man's camp. Wah!"

Roddy grinned. He had unjointed his fly rod, and was picking up the creel, which already held trout enough for the mess supper table.

"That reminds me of the story of the fellow who saw one of your brother Missourians at a bar and remarked that he'd give a thousand dollars for a thirst like that. Woman, lovely woman, doesn't appeal to me that way. I wish she did."

The athletic young chief of staff growled like a dog.

"Come down to earth, Jacksie, and look this thing in the eye for a minute. What in thunder are we going to do with a junketing picnic party right in the thick of this latest mix-up—with the hard-rock men threatening to strike on us, and the Overland Northern building three miles a day to cut us out of Standing Stone Cañon? Silas Westervelt is one of our directors, and he ought to have known better than to throw in a handicap like this."

"You know Mr. Westervelt then, do you?"

"I've met him," said Stannard shortly. "He was on the G. L. & P. Securities board last year when I went to New York to fight this cut-off scheme to a finish."

The assistant nodded. In common with the other members of the engineering staff, he knew the story of the cut-off scheme; how Stannard, serving his apprenticeship as a division engineer on the Yellow Medicine district of the main line, had evolved the great idea of the short cut across the Yellow Desert and the tunnel under Buckskin whereby eighty miles of distance and a

thousand feet in grade could be eliminated; how the young Missourian had fought his idea up through the various official threshings and winnowings and had finally been permitted to lay his plan before the board of directors in New York; and how, after many bucketings of cold water from an overcautious minority, the vote for a bond issue had carried, and Stannard, with his commission as chief engineer of the project in his pocket, had come back to the Standing Stone country to translate the great idea into steel-rail and hard-rock facts.

There had been difficulties from the outset. With an eager demand for labor on other and less isolated projects, the grade contractors had been able to secure only the sweepings of the market place. With orders booked far in advance at the mills, the deliveries of steel and other material had been exasperatingly delayed, and the newly promoted chief of construction had literally fought for every day's progress over the forty-five miles of sagebrush desert lying between Yellow Medicine and the Dogtooth Hills.

In the hills, and with the tunnel workings begun at both ends, a new obstacle had developed. In order to obtain the grade for the eastern tunnel approach, Stannard had carried his line in a great hairpin loop up one side of the cañon of the Standing Stone and back on the other; the cañon being a precipitous gulch intersecting the Travois basin at right angles from the south, and lying between the western cliffs of the Dogtooth and the eastern shoulders of the Buckskin range.

With the first shatterings of the dynamite on the ten-mile loop in the cañon, the new trouble began. An old survey of the Overland Northern, the Great Lakes & Pacific's chief competitor, ran through the Standing Stone Cañon, and a formal notice, which was in effect a mandatory warning to "keep off the grass," had been promptly served upon the G. L. & P.

Stannard, acting under advice which he had fairly bullied out of his own company's lawyers, had ignored the notice to quit; was still ignoring it, in spite of the fact that the Overland people were rushing a branch line across the desert from Lodge Butte with the avowed intention of occupying the cañon on the old survey, and of passing through it to a tapping of the rich mining district served by the G. L. & P. main line in the southern Buckskins. This rapid-fire advance of the enemy was the common gossip of the Travois camp, and Roddy's tone was gruffly sympathetic when he pushed his inquiry a little farther.

"Westervelt is also a heavy stockholder in Overland Northern, isn't he?" he queried.

"He is said to be, though nobody seems to know definitely," Stannard returned. "But there is one thing sure; he fought this cut-off scheme of mine from start to finish in the various meetings of the board, and gave up only when he was outvoted two to one. I don't like this hunting-party interference a little bit, Jackson. Coming at this particular minute——"

By this time, the two men had dodged between the shifting trains in the yard, and were crossing to the double log cabin which served as the staff headquarters.

"Meaning that we are likely to go up against a situation in which the innocent bystander might be in the way?" questioned Roddy.

"Just that. I don't know how far the O. N. people will carry their bluff for a right of way which doesn't belong to them any more than it does to the Grand Lama of Lhassa. Greer is their chief of construction, and they say he's a scrapper. I've been looking for their locating squad to come through here any day, and when that happens there'll be blood on the moon. Nice, pleasant prospect for Mr. Westervelt and his carload of 'ladies'!"

Roddy captured a water boy and sent him around to the cook house with the basket of fish before he followed his chief into the big working room of the headquarters cabin. He was perched on a high stool in front of one of the

mapping trestles when he began again on the sore subject.

"Four-fifteen out of Yellow Medicine; that will bring them here about supper time. You'd ought to 've let me catch another mess of trout, Claiborne."

"Not much! We'll give 'em track room because we've got to, but we don't feed 'em on delicacies. Tell you what I'd do, Jackson, if it wasn't for the women: I'd shove that blamed private car out on the Standing Stone spur at the mouth of the cañon where it would get a liberal dusting of rocks now and then from the blasting in the big cut. I've a good mind to do it, anyway. I haven't much use for Mr. Silas Westervelt, or any kind of a crowd he'd pick out to bring with him."

At this, the assistant with the baby-blue eyes and the bad jaw began to scent animosities other than those which had been advertised by the gossip of the camp.

"Merely because he opposed your scheme?" he suggested, with the subtlety of an elephant trying to pick up a pin.

"No; that part of it was straight business, and he didn't see the thing as I did. I don't know, as I've told you, but a number of the board meetings last summer were held in the library of Mr. Westervelt's country house out on the Sound shore. Mr. Westervelt went out of his way to rub it into me that I was only a paid servant of the railroad company."

"Oho!" said Roddy, with a leer which went better with the bad jaw than with the childlike eyes. "So there was a girl mixed up in it, eh?"

"How the devil did you know that?" growled the modest giant, tilting in the only chair the field office could boast.

"Guessed it," said the assistant shortly. "It's a safe bet. When it isn't business, it's just naturally bound to be a woman."

"You've hit it," admitted the giant morosely. "There was a house party going on at the Westervelt mansion, and one of the guests was Miss Anitra Westervelt—Banker Silas' niece. I didn't see that the fact of my being there on business barred me from saying good morning or good evening to Miss Anitra, but Mr. Westervelt seemed to think it did."

"Suffering Scott!" breathed Roddy. "Did he have the nerve to say that to a man of your size?"

"Oh, no; not in so many words, of course. But I got the gist of his meaning one morning after I had been down to the beach with the crowd to give Miss Anitra a swimming lesson. The members of the securities committee happened to come out on an earlier train that morning, and what Mr. Westervelt said about my not being on hand will keep until I have a chance to pass it back to him."

Roddy chuckled. "Any little, old, ordinary prophet could foretell that you're due to have the time of your life, Clay," he said. "I wouldn't be in your shoes for a deed of gift to the pick of the half dozen Ozark apple orchards you are said to own."

"Blame the apple orchards!" growled Stannard, with sour irrelevance. "That was the way Mr. Westervelt introduced me to Miss Anitra and a bunch of their friends—as 'the well-known young apple king of the Ozarks.' Wouldn't that jar your back teeth loose?"

"Well, you are, aren't you?" said Roddy maliciously; "or you were until you got the engineering bee in your bonnet, and came out here to wear the brass collar of a soulless corporation."

"The apples were dad's," said the Missourian half moodily. "He spent a few thousand barrels of them, more or less, to give me the kind of an education I wanted. Good old daddy! I wish he were alive now to enjoy the trees that he set out with his own hands when I was a barefooted young cub. God forgive me, Jackson, but for one little minute when Mr. Westervelt was rubbing them in, I was ashamed of the apple trees and of the old big-knuckled hands that had set them out! Then I felt like going away somewhere and kicking myself."

This time Jackson Roddy's chuckle

was completely sympathetic. "And the girl—how did she take it?"

Stannard was silent for a full minute, and when he spoke again it was to say: "Miss Anitra Westervelt is a law unto herself, Jacksie. She says—and does—the first thing that comes into the back part of her mighty pretty little head. Sometimes that first thing is conventional, but a heap of other times it's—well, let's call it original; original enough to make your blood run cold—or warm, as you happen to be constituted. No, I didn't fall in love with her, if that's what you're wriggling your ugly jaw about, but I guess the only reason was because I'm not enough of an acrobat to fall in seventeen different directions at once."

Roddy was stuffing his short pipe with a rubbed-up handful of cut plug. "We're dodging," he objected, feeling in his pocket for a match. "You're mighty whistling right about the awkwardness of this butt-in of the bear hunters, or whatever they are. It's coming at the wrong time, good and plenty. Do you know what I did last night after the hard-rock gophers gave me their ultimatum? I wired a good friend of mine in Denver to buy up a few cases of Remingtons quietly, and gave him shipping directions to Yellow Medicine. I have pretty good assurances that we can depend upon the Irish track layers if it comes to a free fight to keep the rock gophers from blowing up our tunnel, and I didn't want to be caught with my hands in the dough."

"And you did this thing on your own responsibility?" snapped the chief.

"I did. You couldn't afford to be mixed up in anything as brash as that, and I wanted you to be able to swear out a clean bill of health for yourself in case anything serious came of it."

Stannard shot a quick look at the stool pereher from beneath his heavy, black brows.

"As a dust thrower, you are not a very remarkable success, Jackson," he said quietly. "Do you suppose I am thick-headed enough to fall for anything as childlike as that story about the hard-rock men? I know very well what you want those guns for."

"Name it," said the assistant between gentle little puffs at the short pipe.

"Gallagher, that new steel foreman you imported from Arizona, named it for me this morning when I was coming down the cañon. I saw two of his men climbing up the back of the Stone, and I wanted to know what they were doing. He said they were wiring the flash-light signal as you had ordered them to. What do you know—more than I know—Jackson?"

"I know this: I worked under Judson Greer, your Overland Northern fighting man, for the better part of three years, and I savvy him up one side and down the other," said the blue-eyed assistant slowly. "As I said a minute ago, we're not going to be caught with our hands in the dough. As the big boss on this job, Clay, that's all you need to know; I guess maybe it's more than you ought to know."

CHAPTER II.

THE ENGINEERS' MESS.

Owing to the deep shadowing of the inclosing mountains, the dusk falls in the Travois while yet the peaks and shoulderings of the main range lie bathed in a pearly light shot through and through with the afterglow of the sunset. The locomotives in the yard had blown the shift-changing signal, and down the steep incline leading from the Buckskin gash and the tunnel's mouth a string of mine cars was descending, cable-lowered, and laden with the men of the off-shift. In the construction yard, the masthead electrics were twinkling out by twos and threes, as the cut-ins were made on the different circuits from the small power plant at the dam on the upper Standing Stone; and along the grade from the loop, Gallagher's day shift of steel men and shovelers were straggling into camp.

Stannard, returning from a brittle little conference with Bailey, his yardmaster, in the lower yard, heard the whistle of the bear hunters' special as

the train shrilled around the curve of approach. He had been giving Bailey the order for the placing of the private car, and directing with malice aforethought, that it be shunted in ahead of a half dozen empty steel flats on the siding farthest removed from the camp and his own headquarters.

Determined to regard the "picnic party," as he was still calling it, in the light of an interference, he did not go down the yard to welcome Mr. Westervelt and his guests when the one-car train halted at the "limits" switch to let Bailey climb to the engine cab. Nevertheless, he had a passing glimpse of the *Egeria* as it went rocketing up to the western switches whence it was to be kicked in on the river-bank siding. The car was a heavy hotel Pullman, with a deeply recessed observation platform at the rear. By the light of the nearest masthead, Stannard saw that the platform was well filled, and that there were women in the group—four or five of them. Also, through the lighted windows of the spacious central compartment, he saw two white-jacketed waiters laying the table for dinner.

The young engineer had a sharp return of the grouch when he faced about to climb to his headquarters office on the mesa bench above the camp. Bear hunting in a Pullman palace car was all very modern and luxurious—and incongruous; most incongruous with the hunting halt made in a railroad construction camp. The Broad Street money lord should have known better than to project a junketing party, with women in it, into a working camp where it could only be in the way and serve as a stumblingblock to discipline and the speeding up of the job. Stannard had the men of his own staff in mind when he swore that he would put the screws on and work them so hard that they wouldn't have time to kill time with any of the picnickers' young women; and, since Black Sam had not yet drubbed out the mess supper call on his Chinese gong, the young chief turned aside into the empty working room, and squared himself at his desk to plan for the disciplinary activities.

Under such conditions, and with the virus of acute ill humor working in his blood, the athletic young Missourian was not very good company for anybody when he took his place at the head of the engineers' mess table a little later. Roddy, having had his pointer, held his tongue; but Markley, the snappy, red-headed young man driver who had charge of the tunnel boring on the other side of the mountain, was of those who rush in blindly.

"They tell me you've invited a bunch of your New York friends out here to see us do the great act, Stannard," was the way the red-headed one broke in. "I want to get my picture in the kodaks, and I'm going to hit you for a transfer to this side of the Buckskin."

Bartley Pearson, big, black-whiskered, and as good-natured at heart as he was saturnine in appearance, grunted his appreciation. Driving the eastern drift of the great bore, Pearson had but one ambition in life, namely, to make two feet of advance to Markley's one; and anything which promised to make the red-headed little hustler careless of hard-rock results was to be welcomed.

Stannard, who had been conspicuously silent, took his face out of his plate long enough to read the riot act.

"You'll get a transfer to the location work on the Kicking Deer if you let that private-car party mix and mingle with your job, Markley," he said. Then he went on to clear the situation definitely and once for all: "Mr. Silas Westervelt, who is one of our directors, has seen fit to bring a party of his friends out here on a bear-hunting expedition. Why in the name of common sense he wanted to dump his bunch of play people down here in the middle of a hot construction fight is more than I know; but I want to say this: The job goes on just the same as if that private car wasn't here."

"Oho! Keep off the grass, eh?" murmured Markley, helping himself to another plateful of Roddy's trout. And Patterson, the purple-faced giant who was manhandling the grade and track men on the approach loop in Standing Stone Cañon, chuckled hoarsely; while

Eddie Brant, boyish, fair-haired, and cherubic—the staff's draftsman and map maker—looked up to inquire innocently: "Did I hear somebody say that there are ladies in the party?"

"Feed your face, Eddie-boy, and never mind what you heard," laughed Pearson. "Stannard says they're play people, so the ladies, if there are any, are only play ladies, you know."

A sense of humor is a precious gift, and Stannard smiled good-naturedly when he saw the grin spreading upon the faces of the five who, in any real need, would have gone through fire and water to prove their loyalty to him and to the job.

"You fellows can have your joke, if you'll only take it out on me," he told the five. "When Yellow Medicine wired this afternoon that this private-car crowd was coming here to camp down on us, I was hot. We don't need any distractions just now, with matters in their present shape, and you all know what I mean when I say that. Any day in the week we are liable to have to do something that wouldn't listen very well if Mr. Westervelt should get up in a directors' meeting in New York and tell about it—not to mention what he might try to say or do right here on the ground."

"That being the case——" cut in Patterson.

"That being the case, I shall do everything I can think of to discourage the bear hunters, and I am banking on you fellows to back me up. If anybody should ask you, you've never seen or heard of any bears in the Buckskin country. Are you with me?"

"Why not?" mumbled Pearson, with his mouth full. "Capital's business is to put up the money and then go away and let things alone. If it wasn't for the women, we could mighty soon run a bunch of New York dickie gentlemen out o' camp."

Stannard nodded. "If Mr. Westervelt had any special object in landing down on us with the intention of staying and getting himself well used while he does stay, you'd call it a pretty foxy move—bringing the women along. Just the same, I don't despair of discouraging him. He'll be sending for me pretty soon, I expect, and when I get a whack at him I'll tell him a few of the things he ought to know without the telling."

"Like fits you will!" Pearson chuckled, the retort showing how little Stannard's discipline hampered the pure man-to-man relations. And then: "Can't you ring us in some way? There ain't a man of us who wouldn't walk a mile in a blizzard to see you set a multi-millionaire back an inch or two."

"Clay'll give him his orders," snapped Markley; then, imitating and grossly exaggerating Stannard's tempered Missouri drawl: "Misto' Westervelt, yo' take yo' foot in yo' hand and pile out o' here! I think I can hear you saying it just like that—not!"

The young chief's grin was only half appreciative when he said: "That's all right. Go on and have your fun out of it, you bullies; but don't let me catch the first man of you giving that mob any encouragement to stay here—just salt that down and keep it to chew on."

"You hear that, Eddie?" said Patterson, turning upon the curly-haired map maker. "That means you. You're the only man in the gang that'd be likely to get a second look-in at the ladies."

Eddie Brant took his medicine patiently. It was the prescription that the outdoor men had been administering in liberal doses from the first. "I know," he returned, striking back in the only way that occurred to him; "it's a terrible handicap for a man to be as pretty as I am. I'm doing my level best to live it down, Jamie."

"Score one for Eddie-boy!" chanted Roddy, breaking into the joking give-and-take for the first time. Then he switched the talk abruptly. "Heard anything more from the hard-rock men, Pearson?"

"Same old song," grumbled the east-end tunnel boss.

"We'll work like min eight hours a day,
And all we want is a little more pay.

"There'll be nothing doing till the next pay-day drunk, and by that time

I'll have found the ringleaders, if I have to sift the lot of 'em through a wire sand screen."

"There's something curious about this kick," Stannard put in. "Our gophers are getting better pay and working under better conditions than have ever been given on a job like this, and they know it. Sometimes I've been tempted to wonder if the Overland Northern hasn't sent us a few trouble makers."

"There's more in that than might appear on the surface of the puddle," snapped Markley. "I've got my eye on two or three fellows over on my end of the job, and if I get a pinch on 'em, you'll hear something drop."

"Fire 'em!" said Stannard crisply. "And that applies to you, too, Pearson. I'm looking to you two fellows to spot the right men. When you find 'em, cut 'em out, and I'll see to it that they don't hang around very long in the Travois."

"You won't have any trouble with my contingent," Markley qualified, with a ferocious grin. "There's a good bit of tall timber over on my side of the range, and that's what they'll take to after I get through with 'em."

By this time, the mess-table squad was comfortably forgetting the private-car party marooned on the opposite side of the construction yard. But now a reminder, in the shape of a natty young negro in uniform with a gold-lettered *"Egeria"* on his cap, intruded itself.

"Take off that cap!" roared Stannard, before the negro was well within the open door of the mess shack, and the negro went a shade lighter in color and obeyed.

"Y-y-yas, suh," he stammered. "I—I's lookin' for de boss man. Misteh Weste'velt, he say——"

"We're all bosses here," said the chief gruffly. "Out with it; what do you want?"

"Misteh Weste'velt, he say fo' Misteh Stanna'd please come oveh to de cyah."

Because the message had the savor of a mandatory order from a superior to an underling, a grin went around the mess table; and in deference to the grin Stannard scowled at the messenger and said: "Tell Mr. Westervelt I'm busy now; I'll be over after a while." And, to make the small defiance good, he left the table and crossed to the working room to put in a full hour over the blue prints on his desk before he rose and struggled into his coat and went to obey the great man's summons.

CHAPTER III.

SPARKS ON THE ANVIL.

On the way across the electric-lighted railroad yard, Stannard was telling himself in sardonic humor that the delay in answering the banker-director's summons might be made to figure as something less than an open hostility, since it had doubtless given Mr. Westervelt time to finish his dinner. Reaching the river-bank spur track, he found that the private car had been pushed down to a coupling touch with the string of empty steel flats. The lights were turned low in the central compartment, and under the darkened balcony formed by the "umbrella roof" of the rear platform there were lounging figures; among them somebody with a musical ear and a rich baritone voice who was humming a song to the twanging time-beat of a banjo accompaniment.

Determined to dodge the social hazard effectively, Stannard went to the forward vestibule, was admitted by the coffee-colored porter, and had himself shown to the private compartment where a large-bodied gentleman, shrewd-eyed, with thin hair graying reluctantly at his temples, and wearing a metallic smile in permanence on a face which, in spite of the smile, figured as a dry desert of inscrutability, was working his way through the market record in a bundle of New York newspapers picked up from the passing Fast Mail at Yellow Medicine.

At the door opening the waiting magnate laid his newspapers aside, looking up in a way which gave the young engineer the impression that the cold eyes were taking in every detail of his working-clothes unpresentability, down to the missing button on the shapeless khaki coat.

"Ah, Mr. Stannard; you're here at last, are you?" was the colorless greeting. "Sit down, if you please. I didn't know but you had forgotten."

Stannard found a seat on the narrow single-berth divan, wishing heartily that he had been really able to carry the ignoring process to the actual point of forgetting the banker's summons.

"This is a pretty busy camp, Mr. Westervelt," he returned, clipping the words to make them fit his resentment. And then: "I'm here because you sent for me, but I hope you're not going to ask anything in the way of entertainment for your party in the Travois."

"Oh, no," rejoined the banker-director dryly; "we were not expecting to be entertained. All we thought of asking of you was a little common, ordinary hospitality."

Here was the opening which Stannard had determined that he would make for himself if it should not be offered by the chief invader, and he took instant advantage of it.

"Hospitality is a large word, when a man has neither time nor the means at hand to make it a workable possibility, Mr. Westervelt."

"Ah!" said the banker mildly. "Frankly, then, you don't want us here. Is that what you are trying to tell me?"

"I should have wired you yesterday that we had no room in the Travois yard for a pleasure party, if it hadn't been for the fact that you are in a certain sense my superior officer—a director in our company," retorted Stannard, taking his courage in both hands. "It is strictly a matter of business. As you must know, we are pushing the work on the cut-off practically night and day. If we don't get the grading and steel laying up to the tunnel before snow flies, we shall be unable to move material, and the tunnel driving will have to be held up until next spring, heavily increasing the cost."

"True; very true," was the toneless comment. "But what, if I may ask, has all this to do with the few feet of track space which we may occupy in your construction yard for a week or so?"

Stannard frowned and bit his lip, finding himself helplessly caught in the trap which is always set for the unwary one who takes refuge in the half truth. It was manifestly impossible to tell the whole truth; that the Travois camp might shortly become the scene of a fierce labor battle with the hard-rock men; or that he was living in daily anticipation of a clash with the oncoming Overland Northern construction force.

"It isn't the track room, altogether," he began; "it's the—well, it's the incongruity of dropping a junketing party down here in the midst of things. You'd have to be a workingman yourself to understand how much of a disturbing influence a carload of play people will exert, in the circumstances."

The metallic smile was broadening upon the banker's dry-desert face, but it did not rise to the level of the calculating eyes.

"I think you are always a little impractical on what you doubtless call your practical side, Mr. Stannard," he said, letting the smile soften the criticism as it might; "at least, I found you so last summer, under conditions which were much more favorable than the present. I can understand your impatience of any interruptions in your work, and I think I can promise that the interruptions shall be judiciously minimized. A little information to begin with, and later, perhaps, permission to replenish our kitchen stores from your commissary——"

Stannard threw up his hand in a quick gesture of surrender.

"I've said all I'm going to say, and it was perhaps more than any G. L. & P. hired man has a right to say to a member of his own board of directors. Let it go, and tell me what I can do for you."

Again the fine-grained smile reached its high-water mark just beneath the stony eyes. "You make me the victim of misplaced confidence, Mr. Stannard; you do, indeed. It was in my mind that a small and, so to speak, momentary admixture of the social element in your strenuous life out here at the end of track might serve as a pleasant relaxa-

tion for you and the young men of your staff. But if you insist upon regarding it as an intrusion——"

"When you talk that way, I'm not insisting upon anything," said Stannard, anxious now only to make his escape while the escaping was good.

"As I have said, we are not asking much beyond a little friendly tolerance and advice. To-morrow, at your leisure, we should like to be put in touch with some one who can furnish guides and horses for the bear hunt. And, by the way, while I think of it, are there any bears to be found in the Buckskin region?"

Stannard's suspicions, acutely alert on general principles, caught quickly at this tacit admission that the bear-hunting phase of the expedition was secondary to some other object.

"I saw a few last year, when I was out with the locating parties," he replied guardedly, adding: "Naturally, there wouldn't be much game to be found in the neighborhood of a camp as big as ours."

"No, I supposed not," said the banker quite coolly. And then, in the vein of subtle irony which fitted the permanent smile: "For your true city-bred New Yorker, Mr. Stannard, it is the hunting that counts, rather than the size of the game bag. I suppose we may assume that the hunting is good, even in the neighborhood of a camp as big as yours?"

Stannard's grin was a tribute to the audacity of the joke which this cold-blooded money lord was apparently playing upon his guests.

"Oh, yes; there will be good hunting —plenty of rough work and hard riding, if that's what you're looking for; and as for the guides and horses, I'll send word in the morning to Crumley, who has a cattle ranch in the valley on the other side of Rock Face. He'll give you the pick of his cow ponies, and a cow-puncher or two to make it look real, I guess."

"Good!" said the banker. "As for the rest, we shall get on well enough, I dare say. As I have intimated, we shan't ask much beyond the standing room for the *Egeria*. That, and a little neighborliness, perhaps, for those of us who may be minded to stay behind after the cow ponies have been paraded."

There was a stir in the other part of the car, advertising the return of the rear-platform loungers, or some of them, and presently the notes of a piano began to chord with the twanging of the banjo. Still sourly determined to dodge the social entanglement, Stannard got upon his feet.

"If there is nothing else, I'll go back to my job," he said shortly.

"Nothing more at present, I think—unless you would like to meet the other members of the party," was the suave rejoinder.

"Not to-night," Stannard refused, almost curtly; and a moment later he had left the presence and was groping his way through the narrow side corridor to the forward vestibule.

CHAPTER IV.

ENTERING WEDGES.

Not wishing to jump from the frying pan into the fire, Stannard took the precaution of reconnoitering before showing himself under the light of the mast-heads. The coast was clear, and, dropping to the ground, he crossed the gridironing of tracks quickly and climbed the slope to his log-built headquarters. Somewhere down among the bunk shacks a gang of Italian graders were singing around their night fire, carrying the note of incongruity which the arrival of the private-car party had struck to a still higher pitch in a measurably faultless rendering of a Verdi chorus, and the young chief, a music lover to his finger tips, stopped to listen for a moment. Then he turned shortly and entered the open door of the office workroom; rather, let us say, he took the entering step over the threshold, only to fall back as if he had seen a ghost in the lighted interior.

The ghost was not only quite substantial; it was an exceedingly charming ghost, and it was sitting at ease in the engineer's desk chair, quietly nibbling

the end of a pen staff. "Come in and make yourself at home, Mr. Stannard," it said, with cheerful hospitality; this while the young chief of construction was hanging to either jamb of the door and striving as he might to get his feet once more upon the solid earth.

"*You?*" he managed to say, after a time. "For Heaven's sake, how did you get here?"

"In my uncle's car, most of the way, and the rest of it on my two little feet. Won't you come in and sit down?"

Stannard got in far enough to be able to put his back against the wall. In his wildest imaginings it had never occurred to him that Miss Anitra Westervelt might be a member of the private-car party, and he was making a desperate effort to readjust the imaginings as he stood looking down upon her.

There was a year and more lying between this night of astoundment and the days when he had neglected the committee meetings to play tennis with her on the country-house lawn or to give her swimming lessons on the Sound shore, but the lapse of time had wrought no change save to make her more irresistibly attractive and alluring. Even the absurd little pot hat of the moment which covered her thick coils of copper-gold hair borrowed grace from her wearing of it; and the laughing brown eyes, the curve of the willful lips, and the upthrust of the pretty chin were the same.

"You don't seem to be so very effervescently glad to see me," she remarked, after he had been dumb long enough to warrant another pin prick. "I thought you would be, you know. That's why I made Eggie bring me over here. He has gone down to the Italians' camp with the others to hear the singing. I didn't want to hear it for fear it would make me homesick."

"Who is Eggie?" Stannard demanded.

"When he's at home, they call him the Honorable Egbert Adelbert Edward Montjoy, because he happens to be one of the several sons of Lord Earlingham. But over here we call him Eggie—just plain Eggie—and he rather likes it, I think. Why don't you sit down?"

Since she had the only chair in the room, he was obliged to perch himself upon Eddie Brant's high three-legged stool, and it put him at a gross disadvantage.

"I'm beginning to come to, a little," he laughed. "I hadn't the faintest idea that I was going to have you to reckon with in that private-car bunch over yonder."

"'To reckon with?'" she echoed. "Are we *Egerians* the kind of people who have to be reckoned with?"

"I am afraid you are in the present instance," he affirmed. "I've just been over to the car, having an interview with your honored and respected uncle. We didn't exactly come to blows, but——"

"I knew you wouldn't want us," she interrupted quite coolly. "I tried to get a bet out of 'Doc' Billy, but he didn't have the courage of his convictions."

"And who might Doc Billy be?"

"If you are going to say 'who' like an owl every time I mention anybody why——"

"That's because I haven't been introduced," he hastened to say. "How many of you are there?"

"Take us as we come, and I'll introduce you," was the prompt rejoinder. "First, there is Mrs. Grantham—Aunt Jeannette, we all call her, and she really is aunt to two of us. Mr. Vallory, who likes to say spiteful things, says she is fair, fat, and fifty; but she's a dear, just the same."

"We'll check off Mrs. Chaperon Grantham," said Stannard, doubling one little finger for the tally, and wondering in the back part of his mind where and how and why his grouch had vanished so suddenly.

"Then there are the two Wetmore girls, Mrs. Grantham's nieces, you know. Una admits twenty-two, but she's twenty-four if she's a day. If you like tall, willowy, graceful girls, with nice hair and perfectly lovely gray eyes, and can put up with a good bit of refined contempt for everything west of

the Allegheny Mountains, you'll fall in love with Una at first sight."

"Check," called Stannard, doubling another finger and adding: "I'm much too busy to fall in love with willowy people, just at present. Who's next?"

"Una's sister, Gladys. She says eighteen, but I happen to know to a certainty that it ought to be twenty-one. Did you ever see a real, sure-enough French bisque, Mr. Stannard? If you have, you'll know Gladys the moment you set eyes on her—china-blue eyes, hair like spun flax, peachy complexion, and all that, you know—just the kind of girl that most men at some time or other in their lives fancy they'd like to play at housekeeping with."

"Not for mine," chuckled the stool percher, reckless now of what the chaperon or Mr. Silas Westervelt or anybody else might think of this most unconventional tête-à-tête. Any more eligible young ladies?"

"Not a single, solitary one, unless you want to count me in. We're a little shy in that respect, being only a crowd of amateur bear hunters; but we have plenty of men."

"I'm interested in men," Stannard averred. "Do we get Doc Billy first?"

"Not if we pay any attention to the Noble Order of the Self-important," was the mocking reply. "Monty Carroll easily heads that kind of a list. He is a rising young impressionist, who does things in 'atmosphere' and has had two years in the Beaux Arts. If he could paint as well as he thinks he can, he'd be a second Corot."

"Say, I'm glad I'm not in your list!" Stannard laughed happily, turning down a forefinger for the artist. "Who is the next man?"

"Make Eggie the thumb. He is hopelessly British—big, handsome, and good-natured, and there isn't anybody in the world who enjoys a joke as he does—after it has been explained to him so that he can understand it. I suspect he's over here to marry money—Una's money, for example; or possibly mine, if he can't find any with a less formidable encumbrance."

Stannard winced a little at this. His acquaintance with Miss Anitra, while it had thriven like the weeds in a worn-our garden patch, had been all too brief. She had a level-eyed way of saying the most startling things, and he could never be quite sure of the point at which cool mockery ended and sober earnest began. Moreover, he had a feeling that, in the summer of committee meetings, she had suffered him to climb to the plane of familiarity chiefly for the reason that he was only an incident in her life, and that when he should move on and go about his legitimate business of building railroads there would be no awkward after meetings or anticlimaxes. He was trying to figure himself as merely incidental to her again when he said: "We'll pass up the hands-across-the-sea gentleman, and shift to the other set of fingers. Have we reached Doc Billy yet?"

"Not yet. Mr. Adam Vansutter Padgett, being a member of the Stock Exchange, has a long lead over the medical profession. Roly-poly, round-faced, good-natured, hair thinning a little over the place where he thinks out his coups and corners. Gives you the impression that he is the sort of person who would tell you, upon the slightest provocation, the complete story of his life. He wouldn't, though; that's only his pose. Down under the roly-poly bonhomie, there is an exceedingly capable man of business. Past that, he happens to be the only man in the party who has ever killed big game."

Stannard craned his neck to get a glimpse campward through the open door. The Italians were still singing, and he hoped they would keep it up indefinitely.

"Now I'm sure we must have reached Doc Billy," he suggested. "Let's see how near I can come to him on a chance shot: He is tall, thin, and sort of hungry looking; strokes his face, and ponders you professionally when you ask him a simple little thing like 'Why is a woman?' or something of that sort; wears his hair long, and——"

Her laugh, silvery, and almost boyish in its unrestraint, cut him short.

"How perfectly ridiculous!" she

gasped; and then: "That's the traditional doctor you're describing, and Doctor William Pangborn Kitts smashes all the traditions into little tiny shreds. He is as big and hard-muscled as you are; he played football on his college team, and is a man's man in every sense of the word—which is only another way of saying that most women fall in love with him at sight. He doesn't know what it is to be 'professional,' and when he laughs you'd think the roof was falling in."

"I've a hunch that I'm going to like Doc Billy," said Stannard. "Married or single?"

"Very much married, indeed. They're on their honeymoon—Doc Billy and his wife—and that brings us down to the one other young woman, who isn't eligible merely because Doc Billy saw her first. Dolly Kitts is little and brown-eyed and quiet, and she thinks the sun rises and sets in William Pangborn. She has lots of money of her own, and she makes a haloed hero out of Billy because he won't give up his profession and be an idler. She isn't a little bit in love with the bear-hunting phase of things, but she makes believe she is merely because her husband is such a raving maniac on the outdoor life."

"Check for number seven," said Stannard. "Anybody else?"

"Nobody," was the short reply.

"Aha, my memory is better than yours! Didn't you speak of a Mr. Vallory, who was fond of saying cynical things about nice old ladies? I used to know a man named Vallory once; he was in the class ahead of me at Illinois—a fellow who was capable enough to loaf through his college course and come out at the top, and still have time to mix up in more outside activities than you could count."

"If I made any mention of our Mr. Vallory, you may forget it, because I'm tired of cataloguing. Tell me about yourself. What have you been doing all these months and years?"

"It's only one year, and part of another," Stannard corrected. "And as for the doings, you rode over a good bit of them on the way here from Yellow Medicine. To-morrow, with the help of a little daylight, I can show you some of the others, if you care to see them."

"And the 'one altogether lovely'—has she been found yet?"

The young Missourian slid from his perch on the stool to stand with his back against the drawing table.

"Didn't I tell you a few minutes ago that I am too busy to fall in love?"

"You did, and it went in one ear and out the other. A man is never too busy to fall in love."

"You're quite sure of that, are you?"

"Perfectly sure. People tell us that sentiment is the whole of a woman's life, but only an incident in a man's. The part about a woman isn't necessarily true, but the other part is."

"Well, then, the one altogether lovely has been found and lost again. It was a sort of 'iridescent dream,' I guess. Anyhow, it wasn't even a possibility."

"So you woke up and rubbed your eyes and forgot it?"

"That's what I've been trying to make myself believe. It's the sensible thing, at least."

"There'll be a second choice some day," she asserted half mockingly. "Wait until you have met Gladys Wetmore. She is the most adaptable person you ever saw."

Stannard drew out his watch, and glanced at it surreptitiously under cover of his coat lapel. It was half past nine, and the singing in the graders' camp had stopped. Through the open door, he saw a straggling procession making its way across the tracks toward the private car. It was evident that Miss Anitra's companions had either forgotten her or had concluded that she had returned to the *Egeria* without them. There are times when the conventions, even for an Ozark mountaineer, die hard; and Stannard had a disquieting fear that Pearson or Patterson or somebody else might drift in and find them alone together.

"It's time you were going to bed," he announced abruptly. "Your people have all gone back to the car. I'll walk across the yard with you."

"So good of you, I'm sure," was the

demure rejoinder, and as she rose to go with him: "It's years and years since anybody has been brave enough to tell me to stop talking and go to bed."

The young man who fancied he was responsible grinned broadly.

"I'm the boss in this camp, and what I say goes as it lies. But I'm not quite as brave as I ought to be. If I were, I should promptly couple an engine to your uncle's hotel wagon over yonder, and toddle it out of the Travois and back to Yellow Medicine."

"Why?" she demanded shortly.

"The reason I gave your uncle a little while ago when he sent for me was good enough: I told him that a working camp was no place for a picnic party."

She turned upon him with a flash of the brown eyes and a lift of the willful chin. "That wasn't the real reason," she shot back smartly.

"Mr. Westervelt's reason for coming here and my reason for wishing him to go away may or may not be first cousins. Just the same, if I could think of any way to discourage him, I'd be glad."

"I like that," was the tart rejoinder. "Perhaps you imagine I am going to help you to think of the way."

The young man laughed good-naturedly.

"I don't imagine for a moment that you would do anything you didn't want to do."

"I never do; at least, not without knowing why I am supposed to be doing it."

They were out of the headquarters shack now, and walking together down the slope toward the railroad tracks. There was no moonlight, but electric arcs are not such a bad substitute when the sentimental soil has been judiciously prepared.

"I don't want you to go away, and I am afraid to have you stay; that's the long and the short of it," was the admission which the substitute moonlight finally wrung out of the young engineer.

The young woman at his side looked up quickly. "You are doing, or are going to do, something that you don't want Uncle Silas to find out?" she queried.

"Oh, no; it's hardly that! But there is trouble ahead—trouble of the kind that might make it very unpleasant for a—for a picnic party. We are working a pretty rough lot of laborers, grade men, and hard-rock 'gophers,' and any little jingle about pay, or hours, or anything of that sort in a railroad camp is likely to mean rioting and violence. You see what I mean. The man whose job it is to manhandle such things any old day in the week is apt to be impatient of handicaps."

"I see," she said, with a touch of the Westervelt detachment. "You want me to tell Uncle Silas that I'm sick of the wilderness, and get the others to tell him so."

"When I'm in my right mind, that is exactly what I want."

"Are you in your right mind now?" she asked innocently.

"No; I'm just foolish enough to feel like taking a chance and letting things rock along."

"I see," she nodded again. "You are discounting all the mean little things I've been saying about Gladys—or perhaps it's Una—and wondering if the time hasn't come for you to be thinking a little more pointedly about that second choice."

"Oh, am I?" he laughed; and then, the false moonlight getting in its work again: "There isn't going to be any second choice."

"Don't you believe it! There always is; and if the man would try half as hard the first time as he does the second—but never mind; do you really want me to work on Uncle Silas' sympathies?—he hasn't very many, you know." And then, breaking off suddenly: "Oh, look up there! What is that?"

They had crossed the gridironing of vacant tracks, and were standing at the steps of the *Egeria*. Stannard wheeled quickly, and saw that she was looking up at the sharply defined summit of the Standing Stone, the curiously detached and spirelike monolith in which the Dogtooth ended and which marked the entrance to the cañon and gave its name

to the river. On the summit of the Stone, a bright light was alternately flashing and disappearing.

Whatever explanation Stannard might have made was lost in a rather violent interruption. While they were still watching the mysterious signal flashings, a big, black-whiskered man, swearing under his breath and fiercely hurried, came tumbling out of the vestibule of the private car, and narrowly missed falling upon them. It was Pearson, and he began on Stannard with no apparent regard for Stannard's companion.

"Been hunting all over the lot for you!" he growled impatiently. "The tunnel roof's down again in the east heading, and this time we'll have a dead man for breakfast. The gophers are all out and swearing by all that's holy that they won't go back into the drift again with Truman as dynamite boss. Three or four of us had to fight like the devil to keep 'em from hanging Truman the first dash out o' the box!"

"Ring off, you fool!" gritted Stannard, out of the corner of his mouth. Then he turned and lifted the young woman, who had been listening, wide-eyed and shaken, to the vestibule step. "Don't let it tremble you up that way," he whispered. "It's only an accident, and they have to happen every once in so often on a job as big as this;" and, bidding her good night, he joined Pearson in a swift run across the yard to the engine which the tunnel driver had ordered out to rush them to the foot of the great mountain.

CHAPTER V.

FIRE IN THE ROCK.

As it came about, Stannard was destined to meet one other member of the private-car party sooner than he expected. After the potential riot at the tunnel mouth had been quelled, and the one man injured by the falling roof had been carried down to the valley level and rushed into camp on a hand car, Stannard found a frank-faced, square-shouldered young stranger waiting in the yard for the arrival of the make-shift ambulance.

"My name's Kitts, and I'm licensed to saw your leg off," was the way in which the stalwart one introduced himself, clinching the introduction by showing an ominous-looking black bag. "Miss Anitra was telling us you'd had an accident, and I didn't know how well fixed you might be for surgical help."

"We're not fixed at all," said Stannard. "I've been yelping for six months to get the company to send me a camp doctor. When a man gets half killed, we have to finish him by sending him down to the main line."

"Then I may take hold?" inquired the volunteer.

"Sure you may. I'm afraid it's a hopeless case, but the whole camp and everything in it is yours. Shoot out your orders, and we'll obey them."

At that, Stannard was given to see a thing which stirs keen joy in the heart of the skilled workman; namely, the way in which another workman and a master of his craft brings things to pass. Kitts snapped out directions to the ambulance crew, and in an incredibly short space of time the crushed tunnel driver was transferred to the shack which served as the camp emergency hospital. The young surgeon whipped out of his coat and went to work at once with Stannard for his assistant.

The Missourian had seen human repair jobs before, a gruesome number of them in the industrial field, but never anything to compare with the rapid master craft of the volunteer from the *Egeria*. The instant stripping of the injured man and the swift examination and diagnosis were like the dexterous passes in a sleight-of-hand trick.

"Broken bones until you can't rest," was the verdict; "but that seems to be the worst of it. We'll patch him up, all right. Put your knee right here and brace yourself—that's the ticket. Now hand me that roll of adhesive; and, say—couple of you fellows get busy whittling splints for this leg. J'ever see a careful mother gluing up the baby's broken doll, Stannard? This'll remind you of it."

Stannard was reminded of many things during the next few minutes, but chiefly of the strides which modern surgery has made in the hands of men like the adept who, with the corded muscles of a prize fighter and the gentle touch of a woman, was giving a manipulative clinic, with the crushed and broken hard-rock man for a subject. After the clinic was over, he took Kitts to his own room in the headquarters cabin to give him a chance to wash up; and when he tried to show his appreciation, he had the grateful experience of having his thanks cut short by the breezy young fellow who was scrubbing his hands in the wash bucket.

"Cut that out—cut it all out, Stannard, old man. It's all in the day's work. The fellows on the football squad used to say that I broke more bones than I'd ever have a chance to mend, if I lived to be a hundred years old, so I'm only trying to be fair about it and catch up with my record."

"The man would have died before we could have chased him across the desert to Yellow Medicine."

"Don't you believe it! That kind is pretty hard to kill," laughed the bone-mender, skillfully catching the towel that Stannard tossed to him. And then: "I feel like smoking a pipe, if it isn't too late, and you're not too sleepy——"

Stannard protested that neither objection obtained. Kitts had his own brier, but he filled it out of the engineer's buckskin pouch of cut plug; after which they went out to sit on the rough slab bench beside the workroom door with the black, star-punctured September night sky for a canopy, and the winking arc lights of the yard to outline the shanties and tents of the sleeping camp and to bulk in the somber backgrounds of the surrounding mountains.

Two men, as likely to find each other congenial as the young Missourian and the upstanding, outspoken young surgeon, easily alight upon the common ground of friendly confidence. For a time the talk was desultory and reminiscent, harking readily back to college days, which were but shallowly buried in the past for both. Farther along, it came down to the September night and to Stannard's problem, which —as he stated it to Kitts—was to get his railroad up to and through the mountain barrier before the snows came.

"You're going to make it, all right, aren't you?" said Kitts.

"Barring too much bad luck, we ought to make it, with a margin to spare," was the reply, which lacked confidence only in the tone.

"Accidents—like this one to-night, you mean?"

"Yes; accidents just like this one to-night," said Stannard gravely.

"I got the particulars only as Anitra Westervelt gave them," said the expert in human repairings. "It was a roof slump in the tunnel, wasn't it?"

"Yes. We've got a bad proposition on our hands in the tunnel. In the nature of things, we couldn't make many preliminary test borings to determine the geological make-up of the mountain. By all the surface indications we should have found porphyry and solid granite. Instead, we've got into a mixed mass of loose stuff which requires the carefullest kind of work and pretty constant timbering. That's why we are rushing the approach track so frantically up the cañon. We've got to have it to transport the concreting material; and every day's delay means just so many more hollow teeth to plug up with the concrete arching."

"Then your 'overhead' is unsafe?"

"Yes; it has been unsafe all the way along, and to-night Fitzgerald, the heading boss, was getting ready to blow this particular soft spot down before it became dangerous to the men working under it. The dynamite went off prematurely."

"Of course, it was accidental?"

"I wish I could be sure of that, Kitts. But I can't be sure of it. There have been too many similar 'accidents.'"

"Good Lord! But you don't mean to say that you're letting it go without investigation?"

"There isn't much left to investigate, after forty or fifty tons of rock have

fallen in to bury all the evidences. But I did pry around as well as I could while Pearson was driving the 'muckers' on the job of getting the poor devil you've just been patching up out of his ready-made grave. What happened to-night has happened at least twice before. The dynamite was placed, and the wire connections were made, ready for the firing of the shot. After the firing wires were cut in, the 'dynamite boss,' as he is called, is supposed to stand over his plunger machine until the heading boss notifies him in person that the men are out and the drills have been dragged back. I don't know that I'm making it very clear."

"Yes, you are. I know the mining stunt like a book; I put in part of my apprenticeship as company surgeon in the anthracite field. Go on with your story."

"To-night, as on two other occasions, Truman, the dynamite boss, was called away from his machine after the wires had been coupled in on the fuses. Somebody that he couldn't see or identify in the darkness yelled to him that his wires were crossed. He says he threw the safety switch and went to investigate. Before he had taken ten steps, the charge exploded."

"My heavens!" ejaculated the listener. "But why—why, in the name of conscience, would anybody want to do such a thing as that?"

Stannard pulled at his pipe in sober silence for a full minute before he replied. Being neither more nor less secretive than other young men of his temperament and training, he was given to talking loosely to comparative strangers. But the frank, open-eyed young surgeon was an exception, and his sympathy and interest were unmistakably sincere. Stannard began at the beginning, giving Kitts a brief outline of a situation which was likely to climax in a right-of-way war for the possession of Standing Stone Cañon.

"Now you know why we're rushing and why we are suspicious of anything that makes for delay," he ended. "Greer, the chief of construction on the Overland Northern, is an unscrupulous fighter, and he wouldn't hesitate to load us up with trouble makers from his own camps if he thought he could hold us back."

Kitts held his peace for a little while before he said: "I'm only an innocent bystander, and these matters are miles out of my line; but honestly, Stannard, the thing doesn't seem to hold together. You say that the Overland Northern people will fight you for a right of way up the Standing Stone. As you've explained it, the Overland Northern scheme is merely to parallel, or confiscate, your road through some four or five miles of your approach cañon. What's that got to do with your tunnel? How can they hope to further their scheme by holding you up on a part of your job that doesn't concern them?"

"Frankly, Kitts, I don't know. As I've said, Greer is an unscrupulous fighter. He'd hit out wherever he thought he could hit hardest. The Overland is our strongest competitor on transcontinental business, and, if this tunnel of mine should turn out to be a failure, it would cripple us badly in the money market, and make us just that much weaker in the business fight."

"I see; but still the motive seems rather indirect; too indirect to warrant this dynamite business in your tunnel." Kitts paused to relight his pipe, and when he went on he had taken the other necessary step which brought him into the field of frank partisanship. "If I were you, Stannard, I should dig a bit deeper, and ask myself if the fact that the *Egeria* is camping out over yonder on that sidetrack has any bearing upon the puzzle."

"We can hardly discuss that," said the Missourian. "You are Mr. Westervelt's guest."

"Not altogether," was the quick reply. "I am Mrs. Grantham's family physician. It pleases her to believe that she has fatty degeneration of the heart—which she hasn't—and she wouldn't come along unless Dolly and I could come, too—afraid of the altitude. It was all right; I have a staving good partner, and, though we've been married a couple of months, Dolly and I

hadn't had any wedding trip. So I turned the practice over to Bentley and told Mrs. Grantham we were It."

"In that case, I am taking all the pointers I can get. What's your notion?"

"I don't know that I have any. But we're a queerly assorted bunch for a pleasure party, and it strikes me that we've come to a mighty curious place to hunt bears. If you'll take it from me, there'll be more to follow. Some of us —the women, the Englishman, the painter man, and yours truly—are merely fill-ins. Cancel us out, and you have remaining a Wall Street money king, a mighty smooth stockbroker who has turned a dozen little bull-and-bear tricks for Mr. Westervelt, and a clubman hanger-on who has been known to fetch and carry for Mr. Westervelt in some of these same little quiet shearings of the woolly lambs. That's gossip, pure and simple, and now I've got it out of my system, I'll hike out and go to bed."

For a long half hour after the square-shouldered figure of Doctor Billy had disappeared among the yard shadows, Stannard kept his place on the bench, smoking in solitary silence and brooding thoughtfully over the possibilities which might be involved in the private-car invasion.

That Kitts should have been able to throw a new light on the situation was not singular. The bystander in any game can always see many moves that the players fail to see. But, granting the young surgeon's hint that bigger game than the hypothetical brown bears was afoot, what was Westervelt's object? If it were merely an interference in behalf of the Overland Northern, why was he taking such a roundabout way of interposing it, and why had he encumbered himself with a carload of noncombatants whose presence might easily obstruct the obstructionists?

The young Missourian was still puzzling over these answerless questions when he finally got up to go and turn in, the one clear conclusion arising out of the yeasty turmoil being a troubled conviction that he had been seriously underrating the resources of Judson Greer and his associates in the advancing Overland Northern army of dispossession.

At the door of the workroom he met Roddy. The assistant's clothes were dusty, and he looked hollow-eyed and weary.

"Hello!" said the young chief. "I thought you had turned in hours ago, Jacksie. Where have you been?"

"I've been taking a little hike for my health. Got a wireless, and had to go and answer it."

"A wireless? Was that your contrivance that I saw working on top of the Stone a couple of hours ago?"

"That's her," was the laconic reply. "I sent Stedman up there with a good glass this afternoon. What you saw was his wigwag report to me. He'd been seeing things."

"What did he see?"

"He saw what I've just seen—at a good bit closer range: Greer has moved up one step nearer. His new grade camp is now within five miles of the Travois, and he's working a night gang. I wanted to make sure, so I took a tramp in the dark. To-morrow, or the next day at farthest, we'll be hearing his dynamite. Now you see why I wanted those Remingtons. Good night; I'm dead on my feet, and I'm going to bunk in."

CHAPTER VI.

THE TIME KILLERS.

"Bully" Gallagher, despot of tracklayers, whose voice was as the grating of a rusty hinge, and whose scepter of authority was a pick handle, had been driving his gang to the tune of an Irish quickstep for two full hours of the matchless September morning; and the steel, clanging musically into place on the crossties to be spiked home under the showering blows of the maul men, was now within a short half mile of the big rock cutting on the lower leg of the loop of approach.

Looking down toward the cañon's mouth, where the uncertain and waver-

ing lines of the new track bent themselves around the base of the Standing Stone, Gallagher, contemplative for the moment, saw a sight to make him lift up his voice in imprecations in comparison with which his browbeatings of the gang were but as love whispers.

"Holy Tacks!" he rasped, when the volcanic eruption of objurgation had exhausted itself. And then to O'Hara, his understudy: "For the love o' Gawd, Patsy, look what's comin' to us—an' me without me dress suit and me eyeglasses!"

What Gallagher saw was sufficiently distressing to a man driving a track gang at speed, the more so since the gang boss was of those who are firmly convinced that industrial speed bestirs itself only for many bull bellowings and much profanity. Stannard, shortly after his morning's conference with Bailey and the material handlers in the Travois yard, had been set upon, just as he was leaving for the cañon battlefield, by eight-elevenths of the complement of the *Egeria,* the missing members of the party being only Mr. Westervelt, the chaperon, and the man who had been named to him as Vallory. The bear hunters, waiting perforce until the guides and horses could be procured from Crumley's ranch, were reduced to the necessity of killing time.. Wouldn't Mr. Stannard take them over the grade of the new line and show them the tunnel?

If any one save Anitra Westervelt had made the beseeching, Stannard's answer would have been a flat refusal. And how was he to know that Kitts, anticipating the refusal, had put Anitra forward to do the talking? With an inward groan and a wordless malediction broad enough to include at least seven of the would-be sight-seers, the Missourian dissembled his reluctance and fell in line, hoping that the newly laid cañon track, rough and hard to walk upon, would shortly discourage some one—the willowy Miss Wetmore, for example.

They had covered the half mile intervening between the camp and the spirelike mass of granite guarding the mouth of the cañon when Gallagher first caught sight of them. After making her plea, Miss Westervelt had dexterously attached herself to the big, boyish-looking Englishman, and the younger Miss Wetmore, whose mood of the moment was artistic, clung prettily to the arm of the landscape painter. Stannard saw teasing malice in this arrangement which made him responsible for the pleasure and entertainment of the rather chilling young woman with the gray eyes and nice hair, and he made sure that at least three members of the party—Anitra, Kitts, and the round-bodied, full-faced little broker who came stumbling on behind—were keenly enjoying his discomfiture.

"As I was saying, Mr. Stannard, everything out here seems so dreadfully crude and banal that I should think one would never get used to it," resumed the gray-eyed Miss Wetmore, after Padgett had broken in to ask the height of the cathedral-spired Standing Stone.

"Oh, but I say," interposed the Honorable Eggie, "you wouldn't expect to find all the comforts of home in such a magnificent wilderness as this, don't you know! Directly we come to those carriages on ahead, we can sit down and rest a bit."

Since the "carriages" referred to were the flats of the steel-laying train, Stannard swallowed his emotions with a gulp and tried to interest his unimpressionable companion in the torrent leaping and tossing its spray man-head high in its bowlder-strewn bed at the foot of the narrow embankment.

"Oh, yes," was the lackluster rejoinder; "of course, it is very fine and impressive—but it is also very noisy and very wet."

The young chief heard a sound behind him which, voicing itself from any throat less musical than Anitra Westervelt's, he would have compared to a chicken choking, and it prompted him to say: "Oh, no, Miss Wetmore, that is a mistaken idea that many Eastern people have. The water at this altitude is never what you might call really wet. If you will stay here long enough, you will see our men working in it for

days at a time without the slightest inconvenience."

Doc Billy's comment on this remarkable piece of information was an explosive chortling, and Miss Una's perfectly penciled eyebrows went up in austere inquiry.

"Was that a joke, Mr. Stannard?"

"Mr. Stannard's jokes are like the Cubists' pictures; you have to be able to feel them," put in the sprightly younger sister; and again Kitts exploded.

"Really, though," bubbled the Honorable Eggie, adjusting his monocle for a better appraisal of Stannard's job, "this is a dashedly clever bit of engineering, don't you know. Fancy tucking a railway into such a place as this!" And then: "I say, Mr. Padgett, could you figure this all out in dollars?"

"Mr. Padgett is busy walking the ties; please don't interrupt him," pleaded Anitra. Then to Kitts: "Why don't you and Dolly laugh at that, too?"

Doctor Billy did, and the brown-eyed young bride hanging on his arm smiled seraphically in harmony with her haloed hero. Padgett stopped to light a cigar, and then stumbled on to pass the fat and well-filled morocco leather case to the other men of the party.

"I'm game," he puffed. "So far, I've only turned my ankle twice and knocked the cap off one knee with the other. How much do we get of this, Stannard?"

"Ten miles—if we walk the grade to the tunnel mouth."

Miss Una shrieked decorously, and Carroll stopped to take out his handkerchief and flick the dust from his patent leathers.

"You don't mean to say that you're going to tramp us ten miles to get to your blooming hole in the ground, do you, Mr. Stannard?" he demanded.

"Sure," laughed the Missourian, equal now to anything. "After you've ridden one of Crumley's cow ponies over two or three counties, you'll enjoy a little hike like this. Besides, when we come to the 'carriages,' as Mr. Montjoy calls them, we can stop and rest."

Once more the stalwart young doctor snorted; and the Honorable Eggie, again adjusting his eyeglass, and nearly coming to grief over a misplaced crosstie in the process, looked Stannard over and said: "Haw! I believe you're kidding us, Mr. Stannard. Fancy trying to make us believe that we're going to ride cow ponies after the bears instead of horses!"

"You make me extremely tired, all of you," sighed the younger Miss Wetmore. "How any one can make wretched jokes and talk such vapid nonsense, with this glorious scenery making its silent appeal to all that is highest and best——"

Stannard excused himself abruptly, and tramped on ahead. It had suddenly occurred to him that Gallagher might not have noticed the coming invasion; in which case the big foreman might be helplessly surprised in the midst of one of his prayerful appeals to his men. The precautionary measure was not without its effect. When the lagging time killers came up, Gallagher was sweetly adjuring the track gang, as thus:

"Now, thin, gentlemin—aisy wid that bit av steel, lest ye'd be breakin' it. Shquint ut into pla-ace, Misther O'Hara, if ye plaze. Right ye are. Shpikes! But don't be hittin' thim too har-rd lest ye'd be hurtin' their poor little feelin's. 'Tis a foine day, Misther Stannard, an' 'twas a grand thing f'r ye to be bringin' yer friends up to see us puttin' the nate little pieces av steel to bed on the crossties. Misther Bannagher"—to the man who was spacing the rails—"that thrack gauge is ornamintal, to be sure, but 'tis also mint to be used. Tim Grogan, ye shouldn't shpit on yer hands in the prisence of ladies—'tis an onpleasant habit ye have."

"Isn't it the truth that there is no gentleman quite like the Irish gentleman wherever you find him," remarked the younger Miss Wetmore, in an aside to any who cared to hear.

Carroll had unlimbered his sketching kit, and was preparing to make a study of the strenuous activities, with the Standing Stone and the forested shoulderings of the Buckskin for a back-

ground. Stannard drew a little aside, hoping that the pause would not outlast Gallagher's ability to sit on the safety valve. Miss Westervelt joined him when the others had gathered around the impressionist's easel.

"Are you really going to punish us by making us walk ten dreadful miles around the grade?" she asked.

"Of course not," he returned. "The rock men are working in the cut just above here, and we couldn't very well pass them without climbing the Dog-tooth. We'll turn back when you're quite sure you have seen enough."

"You must punish Doc Billy," she said airily. "He dared me to ask you, and you said last night that you'd show me what you are doing. I know you're just too busy to breathe, and you're hating us all like poison for taking your time. If I say that I am sorry, will that make up for it?"

"Amply," said Stannard; and to show his magnanimity, he walked her on up the grade and over a climbing path among the red firs which brought them out upon the brink of the great rock cutting where they could look down into the gash which was growing slowly under the gnawings of the drills and the dynamite.

When they first looked down, the noise of the battering air drills was deafening. But a little later the clamor and fusillade stopped and there was a hurried placing of iron shields over the machinery and a scattering of the small army of rock men.

"They are getting ready to shoot," Stannard explained; and then: "Perhaps we'd better give them a little more distance."

"You mean that they are going to blast the rock?"

"Yes."

"That is something I've always wanted to see. Won't it be safe if we stay here?"

Stannard measured the hazard with a calculating eye. There was only one chance in a hundred that any of the fragments would be blown so far as their brink of observation. None the less, he was unwilling to take even the small risk.

"It will be safer farther back among the trees," he demurred.

Miss Westervelt put her back against the bole of a great fir, and the pretty lips took on the curve of willfulness. "But I want to stay right here, where I can see it," she insisted.

Since the risk was so small as to be all but negligible, Stannard yielded, and together they watched the men attaching the wires of the firing machine. The young engineer almost changed his mind when he counted the number of shots in the battery. There were eight of them, and the blast promised to be a miniature earthquake. Unhappily, there was no time for a reopening of the argument with his companion. The foreman was running back to give the signal to the firing boss, and the great gash in the river-fronting cliff was already emptied of every one else.

"Put your hands over your ears!" called Stannard sharply, and as he spoke the cutting below them was filled with a spurting eruption of dust and hurtling rocks, and the surrounding mountainsides echoed to a rumbling crash of mimic thunder.

Stannard could never explain to his own satisfaction afterward just how the untoward thing happened. Out of the spouting dust cloud they both saw a fragment of stone no larger than a man's fist rise in a curving trajectory to the level of their cliff edge to hurl itself among the trees. An instant later, Stannard heard the stone strike something, and the next instant he saw it bounding leisurely toward them with its force so nearly spent as to make it improbable that it would cover half the distance.

When it became evident that the leisurely boundings were deceptive, he took the alarm; but then it was too late. The small stone, rolling almost to its stop, changed its course again, to drop accurately at the butt of Miss Westervelt's tree, and with a cry of pain the girl collapsed in a stricken little heap.

"For Heaven's sake!" gasped Stannard, dropping down beside her. "Where did it hit you?"

"It's my ankle," she faltered, setting her pretty teeth against a groan.

In a twinkling, he had the dainty outing boot off, and was feeling for broken bones. "It's all my fault!" he protested, in keen self-reproach. "I should have taken you to a safer distance. Does it hurt much?"

"Yes, it hurts like everything! But if you'll put my shoe on again, I'll try to walk. We must get back to the others, some way."

Stannard replaced the small tan boot, awkwardly enough, to be sure, but very gently. She told him she couldn't stand it to have it laced, so he tied it loosely and lifted her to let her make the essay at walking. The attempt was a failure, even with the help of his supporting arm, and one glance at her face decided him. Gathering her up in his arms as if she had been a child, he stumbled back to the path and down the hillside, and it was thus that they made their reappearance on the track-laying scene.

Naturally, there was sympathy in abundance for the injured one, and Kitts took over the case and made a swift examination.

"It's only a bruise, but it's a pretty bad one," was his announcement; and then there arose the question of transportation to the Travois yard. Stannard solved that problem at once, to the crass delaying of the work and the speechless disgust of Bully Gallagher, by taking the construction engine and one of the steel flats for a special train. More than that, he took up a collection of coats from the tracklayers and made a couch of them on the flat car for Miss Westervelt.

A few minutes at the heels of the big locomotive sufficed for the making of the short journey to the camp yard, and Stannard, directing the movements of the emergency train from the engine cab, had the hospital car drawn in beside the *Egeria*. Yielding his place to no one, he put the Englishman aside at the stop, told Kitts gruffly that he didn't need any help, and once more taking Anitra in his arms, he carried her into the private car.

Here, while he was putting the victim of the catapulting stone on the lounge in the open compartment, he had a chance to get acquainted with a gray-haired, motherly-looking lady who was trying not to be too greatly flustered by the freshly added anxiety, but he scamped the chance, or so much of it as he could, hurrying out again to send the work engine back to Gallagher.

With this abrupt breaking up of the sight-seeing expedition, the harassed and still self-reproachful young chief of construction was free to go once more about his business of railroad building; and he did it, spending the greater portion of the day with Markley and Pearson in the tunnel driftings, and coming back to the Travois camp only when Pearson's day shift knocked off at late supper time.

Reaching the big yard on the engine of the laborers' train just as the masthead arc lights were fizzing and sputtering into being, he meant to make it his first duty to go over to the *Egeria* to inquire about the bruised ankle. But before he had crossed the first of the intervening tracks, Roddy overtook him.

"You're wanted at the office phone, Clay," rasped the small man with the baby-blue eyes and the bad jaw. "Markley's at the wire. Ten minutes after you left him to cross the mountain this afternoon, his gang—hard rocks and muckers to a man—walked out on him. Worse than that, they've taken possession of the works, and they're swearing that they'll burn the tunnel timbering before they'll let you send in a bunch of strike breakers to take their places."

CHAPTER VII.

JUDSON GREER.

Taking only time to snatch a hasty bite of supper at the cook-house door, and telephoning Markley that he and Roddy would cross the mountain at once to confer with the striking rock men, Stannard set out for the ten-mile tramp in the dark with Roddy at his heels.

An hour later, when the two mountain climbers were breasting the steep slopes of the trail connecting the east-

ern and western tunnel workings, and the younger members of the private-car party had gathered, with Carroll and his banjo for a nucleus, in an after-dinner grouping on the observation platform, Silas Westervelt, passing a word to the colored porter, retreated to the privacy of his office stateroom.

As on the previous evening, Mr. Westervelt found the financial pages of his New York newspapers sufficiently interesting as an after-dinner recreation; but he had scarcely begun on them before the catfooted porter tapped at the door and opened it to admit a small, dark-faced man, bearded and uniformed in neatly fitting working clothes of brown duck, with leggings and shoes to match. Between jobs, when Mr. Judson Greer haunted the engineering clubs in Chicago or New York, he was inclined to be slightly foppish in the matter of dress, and even in the field the tendency expressed itself in a certain jaunty fitness which went well with his snappy manner of speech and his unquestioned ability as a master railroad builder.

"Ah, Greer," said the money lord, laying his papers aside precisely as he had postponed them for Stannard's benefit twenty-four hours earlier. "I rather looked for you last night."

"I knew you were here, but we were moving up with the grading outfit, and I thought it wouldn't do any harm to let you get settled a bit," said the Overland Northern man, seating himself on the narrow divan and crossing his legs.

"Oh, no; there was no special hurry," was the magnate's rejoinder. "We didn't have the facts up to date."

"But you have them now?"

"Fairly well. Vallory has had the day, and he has improved it. Stannard is the key to the situation. It was he who bullied Merriam and the others into financiering this cut-off scheme, and the financial end of it is working out precisely as was to be expected. The bond issue was barely large enough to cover the actual cost of construction with no margin for bad luck. And there has already been considerable bad luck."

Greer's smile showed his mouthful of fine, even teeth under the closely cropped mustache.

"Stannard's young," he remarked, clipping the words to the highest point of efficiency. Then: "Has he any idea of what's in the wind?"

"Vallory thinks not. Of course, he's looking for trouble in the right-of-way matter in Standing Stone Cañon, and he is pushing the work vigorously to forestall you there."

"But he still thinks that we are intending to build on through the cañon to the Buckskin mining camps?"

"So far as Vallory has been able to find out by chumming with one or two of the members of Stannard's staff, that is the situation at present. Our young man takes it for granted that you are meaning to make trouble for him in the cañon and so delay his track building to the tunnel. Under existing conditions, those ten miles of approach track are vitally necessary, as you know. Without them, Stannard cannot transport the material for his tunnel arching, save at a prohibitive cost; and without the arching the tunnel will not stand through the winter. I understand it has been caving very badly."

Again Greer made the teeth-baring smile. "I've heard that, too," he cut in. "If it doesn't stand——"

"If for any reason Stannard should be unable to go on and finish this job before winter sets in, there would have to be another bond issue; in other words, our young man would have his battle to fight all over again with the securities committee."

"That's about the way I had it stacked up. The question is: Could he make the fight successfully?"

Mr. Westervelt's smile wrinkled like a miniature sand ripple on the dry-desert face. "Not without knocking the bottom out of the market on G. L. & P. stock, I'm afraid."

"I don't suppose our people on the Overland would shed many tears if that were to happen," said Greer.

"No, I suppose not," returned the banker-director dryly.

Greer moved uneasily on the divan,

uncrossed his legs, and crossed them the other way.

"I'll have to admit that I don't see just where you're coming in on this, Mr. Westervelt," he ventured.

The New Yorker fixed his cold eyes upon the engineer. "Perhaps it isn't altogether necessary that you should see, Mr. Greer. Your compensation is——"

"I know; I'm only a hired man, as you might say. Still, I like to work intelligently, when I can."

"You shall," was the even-toned reply. "There are a few of us in the G. L. & P. directory who believe that this cut-off scheme is ill-advised. I may go so far as to say that we should be glad to see it dropped right where it is, even at this late day."

"Of course," Greer asserted; "I understand that. What I don't understand is how you and your friends can stand for the loss. But that's none of my business. I'm here under instructions from our president to coöperate with you. Also, I have been given to understand that the building of our extension through the Standing Stone Cañon to the Southern Buckskin camps is a bluff. If you'll excuse the slang, what's the dope?"

Again the great captain of finance permitted the permanent smile to rise to its high-water mark beneath his eyes.

"We might put the case hypothetically, Mr. Greer. It is an axiom of trade that anything with a property value may be acquired by the buyer if the price is right. You are a man of intelligence and discretion; suppose I should tell you that we have found a prospective purchaser for the tunnel site and the uncompleted tunnel through the range—a property which we are already finding burdensome, even in its period of construction."

Greer winked twice, which was his only outward manifestation of the inward shock of instant understanding. He knew well enough that there is no such thing as sentiment in business. In some manner, as yet unexplained, Banker Westervelt and whatever interests he represented stood to make a profit on the killing of the G. L. & P. short-cut scheme, and a transfer of its rights to some other company—doubtless the Overland Northern.

Greer did not know how the profit was to be made, but that did not specially concern him. Neither did it surprise him to learn that Westervelt and his associates were on the "bear" side of the market in the field of their own securities. He had been in the railroad service long enough to know that there are two kinds of railroading—the real thing, which is the building and operating of a line for the possible profit there may be in the carrying business; and the Wall Street kind, which resembles more nearly the humble occupation of sheep shearing.

"I am beginning to see the hole through the millstone, Mr. Westervelt. President Guthrie has probably told you how much or how little I am to be trusted. You may go as far as you like."

The banker waved a deprecatory hand.

"Briefly, Mr. Greer, it has been thought advisable by a conservative minority of our stockholders to abandon this cut-off scheme entirely. This costly tunnel can never be profitable to us——"

"But it may be to somebody else," put in the engineer quickly.

"Exactly," said Mr. Westervelt, matching the tips of his fingers accurately and rocking gently in his pivot chair. "Unfortunately, we have been unable thus far to convince Mr. Merriam and his friends that the proper thing to do is to dispose of our white elephant before we are confronted with the necessity of another bond issue. As I remarked a few moments ago, Mr. Stannard is the key to that situation. If we could persuade him to go to Mr. Merriam with the frank admission that the tunnel costs were going to be very largely in excess of his original estimates, the difficulties would vanish."

"I don't know Stannard," Greer demurred shortly. "But if he's like most men in his profession he would sooner cut off an arm and hand it to

you. Am I to understand that you mean to give him his chance first—before we force the fighting?"

"It would be better on all accounts if Mr. Stannard could be made to see the futility of his undertaking. We have not abandoned the hope that he may yet be made to see it."

Greer's laugh was hidden; so well buried that it did not manifest itself even in the teeth-baring smile. He knew the hyperbole of business; knew that Stannard was to be either bought or bullied. But again he told himself that it was none of his affair; at least, that if he should be required to figure in it, his part would probably have to do only with the bullying.

Up to the present, he had had no belligerent instructions from his own superiors authorizing him to carry his point by force, if necessary, though Stannard's suspicions that the Overland Northern chief of construction had been supplying him with labor trouble makers were well founded. Greer had gone thus far on a hint from his own management to the effect that delay in the tunnel boring might be a point gained in the right-of-way fight. But this was a matter apart from the bigger deal, the existence of which he had been merely suspecting.

"As I have said, I have instructions to take orders from you," he went on, after the reflective pause. "We are less than five miles away with the grading force. Do I understand that we are to mark time until you give the word?"

"Not exactly that. If other means fail, it may be necessary to give Mr. Stannard an object lesson; in other words, to show him the entire impracticability of completing his tunnel approach, if you should dispute the right of way in the cañon with him."

"I see," was Greer's terse comment. "If it comes to the right-of-way scrap, we can put the brakes on hard enough to make the wheels skid. Our original location runs across the head of the Travois at an elevation which would put us at least a hundred feet higher than Stannard's line on the cañon slope. Unless your people should get out an injunction against us——"

"There will be no appeal to the courts," said the banker definitely.

"In that case, the spoil from our cutting a hundred feet higher up the slope in the cañon would be apt to give Stannard a good bit of trouble."

"Something of that sort was in my mind," was the magnate's half-absent rejoinder. "Of course, it need be nothing more than what the army people would call a 'reconnoissance in force'; a sort of last-resort argument to convince Mr. Merriam and his friends that they were wrong and we were right. I'm hoping it won't come to that, but it is only the part of prudence to be prepared. You say you are within five miles of the Travois now?"

"With the grading force—yes."

"Is there any heavy work yet to be done?"

"Very little of it. We are entering the hill country on an easy grade, and there are no rock cuttings. Our survey runs along the opposite side of the river at the foot of Rock Face Mountain, within a pistol shot of your car here, and it does not interfere with Stannard's construction yard at all; will not interfere until we begin making the fill to cross his tracks at the head of the valley."

"Then here is my suggestion: Push your work right along until you reach the base of operations here in the Travois. By that time, the negotiations to which I have referred may have progressed to a satisfactory point."

Greer nodded. The inference, so far as his own part in the deal was concerned, was quite plain. The Overland Northern construction force was to be held as an argument in reserve to be used only when diplomacy should fail. He had a natural curiosity to know what form the diplomacy would take; whether the battle was to be fought out in the financial arena of the Street, or whether the attack was to concentrate itself upon Stannard. Greer knew the young Missourian only by repute, and it was that repute which made him say:

"I'm afraid you're going to have to

show Stannard, Mr. Westervelt. He's from Missouri, you know."

The smile on the face of the host of the bear-hunting party was as expressionless as the stony calm of a Buddha.

"Human nature is much the same the world over, Mr. Greer. Some one has summed it up rather baldly in the saying that every man has his price. It would be more accurate to say that every man's success depends upon his willingness to yield to constraining influences."

"It sounds better, anyhow," was Greer's bitten-off comment, and the cynicism in the remark was thinly veiled. Then he added: "They say Stannard doesn't specially need money."

"Everybody needs money." Mr. Westervelt said it with the manner of one repeating an axiom. "If you have none, the need shouts itself from the housetop. If you have a little, the need for more may not be quite so apparent, but it is precisely as real."

The Overland Northern chief of construction got upon his feet and buttoned his coat.

"What Stannard is needing at the present moment is some argument that he can use upon a lot of discontented workmen," he ventured. "He has a strike on his hands. Did you know that?"

"No."

"It's a fact. It was pulled off at the shift-changing hour over at the west end of the tunnel this evening. Stannard and Roddy have gone over to see what there is to be done about it."

"Ah! that means more delay, I suppose?"

"That is what it is meant to mean."

The banker stood up to shake hands with his departing visitor. "You are a man of resources, Mr. Greer, and we are fortunate to have you with us. I hope there will be no violence."

"There won't be, unless Stannard brings it on by trying to fight the strikers with strike breakers. He will hardly be able to do that, however. The labor markets are pretty well skinned just now." And at this the engineer went his way, leaving the *Egeria* and the construction yard as he had come—with a due regard for secrecy.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LED CAPTAIN.

Stannard's victory over the striking rock men at the western-tunnel working was easier than he had any right to expect it would be. After holding out behind their barricades in the mouth of the tunnel for twenty-four hours, the strikers capitulated and consented to go back to work, the easy surrender being due chiefly to the fact that, owing to Markley's prompt precautions, there was no whisky to be had.

The labor trouble settled, for the time being, at least, Roddy remained with Markley at the west end, and Stannard crossed the mountain alone, reaching his Travois headquarters after the east-end night shifts had gone to work. Over in the yard, he could see the lights of the *Egeria,* and his thoughts reverted, as they had many times during the twenty-four-hour interval, to the young woman with the bruised ankle.

In justice to his job, not less than in deference to the eternal fitness of things, the level-headed young captain of industry had been trying for two days to keep the sentimental avalanche from getting the fatal start which might overwhelm him. In common with many young men of a generation which takes its romance vicariously out of a novel hastily skimmed through, or contents itself with the still more ephemeral substitute of the modern drama, Stannard esteemed himself a bachelor by force of circumstance. Now and then there had been daydreams of a future in which, having safely made his mark in his profession, he might be able to marry and settle down; but the desire to fill in the details of the picture had lain harmlessly dormant up to his first meeting with Anitra Westervelt.

That meeting had been productive of a fresh series of daydreams which, when he had been able to push them into some short perspective of time, became mere matter for ribald self-ridi-

cule. He had learned enough of Miss Westervelt to know that she was the spoiled darling of a social set which he had neither the opportunity nor the inclination to enter; that she was an only child and an orphan, independently wealthy in her own right, and the heiress presumptive of her banker uncle.

The young Ozark mountaineer had no false ideas about the classes and the masses, but he did have a keen sense of proportion, and was both sane enough and sensible enough to admit the social incongruities. Also, he owned sufficient poverty pride to make him fiercely intolerant of the distinctions which build themselves upon the figures of a bank account; and, as not infrequently happens, the intolerance took the form of a deeply rooted prejudice against the money marriers of either sex.

It was the recurring jolt of the incongruities that stopped him when he would have gone across the railroad yard to inquire about the stone bruise; that and a sudden weariness accenting itself in a huge reluctance at the thought that he might be required to stay and be talked to by the other members of the car party.

But he was not to escape the social infliction entirely. When he turned back, and had climbed the mesa slope to the headquarters cabin, he found a clean-shaven, carefully groomed man sitting on the door-flanking bench and smoking cigarettes. The man got up and held out his hand as Stannard approached. "They told me you'd be back sooner or later, and I thought I'd wait. I suppose you don't remember me, Claiborne? There isn't any especially good reason why you should."

Stannard took the proffered hand and gripped it mechanically, finding it cold and rather clammy in his grasp. Then recognition came with a little shock.

"Vallory!" he exclaimed. "Austin Vallory!" and then: "I'd heard your name mentioned—as the name of the only man of Mr. Westervelt's party that I hadn't met—and I thought it was only a coincidence."

"It was, and it wasn't," said Vallory, sitting down again and lighting a fresh cigarette. "I'm hardly the same Austin Vallory you used to know in college, Clay."

The light from the nearest masthead arc included the headquarters in its radius, and there was enough of it to show the Missourian a face deeply lined and almost haggard—the face of a man prematurely aged by the hastening process of burning the candle at both ends.

"You have changed a good bit, Austin; that's a fact," he commented, sitting down to fill his pipe. "I'm not sure that I should have known you if the identity of names hadn't paved the way. How do you happen to be out here, turning this trick with the bear hunters?"

"Ask the man," laughed Vallory, with acrid humor. "Perhaps he'll tell you that I'm along to represent the ultimate consumer. I believe I have a little G. L. & P. stock somewhere among the leavings."

Stannard recalled what he had known of Vallory in the college period, and found that it could be compressed into a few statements of fact and a little hearsay. Vallory had entered the Western university as a second-year man, having been "rusticated" for cause—so the campus gossip said—from the great Eastern university where he had spent his freshman year. Beyond this, it was known that he was a brilliant student when he chose to be, and that he was the son of a wealthy New York broker.

There were other items, but they were rather hazy in Stannard's mind. Vaguely he remembered hearing that Vallory's father had died shortly after the son's graduation. Also, now that he was trying to gather up the recollections, he recalled that some one had told him later that young Vallory, having come into his money too suddenly for his own good, was going all the gaits.

Their talk for a time was purely reminiscent because they had no other common ground. Stannard remembered that, together with a good many others in the big Western university, he had been boyishly dazzled by Vallory's brilliance. What had figured as brilliance in the youth, had become

sardonic egoism in the man. Quite early in the talk, it developed that Vallory had made ducks and drakes of the inherited fortune, or at least of the major portion of it, and by his own confession he had become a mere bookmaker in the life race, keeping in the social running for the sake of the tips he could pick up.

"Money talks, in this world, Claiborne, and everything else barely whispers," was his summing up of the philosophy of life. "And that brings us back to the original question. You asked me how I managed to get this far from New York; you can put it in four words: I had a hunch."

Stannard did not press for explanations. As a matter of fact, he was tired enough to hope that Vallory would presently go back to the *Egeria* and so give him a chance to go to bed. But the clubman made the explanation without encouragement.

"Westervelt has some sort of a deal on, and it occurred to me that I might grab hold of his coat tails and get myself pulled ashore on some little island of prosperity if I should come along," Vallory went on, adding: "Of course, I didn't take any stock in the bear hunt. That was too transparent to fool anybody except the bear hunters themselves."

"And they are——"

"Practically all the men in the party, save and excepting Uncle Silas and your humble servant. If you should ask me, I couldn't tell you why the women are along, unless it is because they are the victims of circumstances—or rather, of one circumstance."

"Yes?"

Vallory nodded, tossing away an empty cigarette box and opening another.

"Niece Anitra was the compelling circumstance. At the last moment, she decided to come along, and, to use a Western phrase, what Anitra Westervelt says goes as it lies. Of course, that made a chaperon necessary. In her turn, Mrs. Grantham accounts for the two Wetmore girls and for her family physician, and Kitts and his wife are too saccharinely one to be separated."

"But the women can't hunt bears," Stannard interposed.

"Oh, no; but they can go on a woodsy picnic into the foothills and make believe hunt bears as successfully as the men. Westervelt needed an excuse for making the Travois his headquarters, and he has it. That's all he wants."

"You're talking in riddles, and I guess I'm too sleepy to dig them out," was Stannard's rejoinder.

"Money's the keyword, Claiborne—big money and easy money," said Vallory; and then: "You're pretty well at the top in your trade, so they tell me. Have you ever figured out how many years it'll take to save up a stake out of your salary?"

A material train was pulling in from the desert, and for a time the night silence was torn and rent by strident noises and clamorings. When the train came to rest with a jangling of drawbars, and the locomotive had gone clattering down the yard to the coal chutes at the temporary repair shop, Stannard answered the question.

"To tell the truth, Austin, I've been too busy to think much about the stake. I've always been able to get the three square meals and a place to sleep."

"A common ordinary yellow dog can do that," was the half-cynical comment. "Don't you want more money than that asks for?"

Under normal conditions, Vallory—the Vallory of college memories, or this newer and even less likable egoist—was the last man in the world in whom Stannard would have chosen to confide. But the conditions are never wholly normal when an unattainable object of desire has been lately dangling itself before the eyes of longing.

"For just one reason, Vallory, I should like to have more—a good bit more," he admitted.

"Well, then, why don't you get it?" was the cool query.

Stannard laughed. "The means don't readily suggest themselves. I'm neither a trader nor a grafter."

"Everybody grafts, more or less,"

declared the clubman oracularly, adding: "but that's a piker's alternative in most cases. I suppose, for example, you might hold out ten thousand a year, or such a matter, in rake-offs on your supply and material bills on a job like this, and possibly another ten on your subcontracts. That's what a piker would do, not having the ability to see anything bigger." Then, without warning: "It occurs to me, Claiborne, that you are about to be handed the chance of your life. Are you man enough to grab it if it should come in your way?"

"As I told you a few minutes ago, Austin, I'm no good at the riddles tonight. You'll have to put it in words of one syllable."

"I can give you only a hint. Silas Westervelt is stringing the wires for a killing of some sort connected with this jerkwater railroad of yours. That much I'm sure of. I'm giving it out cold that I'm going to make him drag me in on the hand-out. Figuring solely on the probabilities, it's only fair to say that your chance in the game looks a thousand times better than mine."

"I don't see either the chance or the game," the Missourian thrust in obtusely.

"Neither do I, for that matter, at the present moment; I'm not far enough on the inside. But I've been wondering if —well, never mind that part of it; it'll probably say itself later." Vallory got up and yawned, stretching his arms over his head. "It's getting along into the shank of the evening, and you must be about all in. I oughtn't to have kept you up. If Westervelt hadn't said what he did——"

Stannard was thoroughly awake now, and the skillful spreading of the veil of mystery changed his indifference into quickened interest—as it was meant to.

"Come back here and sit down and tell me what you've got on your mind, Austin," he broke in. "You'll sleep better if you get it out of your system."

Vallory thrust his hands into his pockets and began to pace back and forth, three steps and a turn, as one hesitating. When he stopped and stood with one foot on the bench, his thin lips were parting in a mirthless smile.

"There isn't any reason in the world why I should butt into your game, Clay. The friendly mileposts have been passed so far and so long ago that I've forgotten what they look like. I'm on my own, as Montjoy would put it, and you can take it from me that I'd cut your throat in a minute if you stood in my way. I'm saying this so that you'll understand there's no personal end to be served."

"Go on," said Stannard.

"Let me begin by asking a question: How well do you know Mr. Silas Westervelt?"

"I know what the newspapers print about him—and possibly a little more."

"You scrapped with him a year ago when you were trying to fight this cut-off scheme through, didn't you?"

"Hardly that. He was on one side, and I was on the other. Sometimes I thought he went out of his way to land on me, but perhaps he didn't."

"Westervelt is a peculiar man in some respects," Vallory went on, speaking slowly. "They will tell you in New York that he is a man without friends, cold-blooded, a sort of first cousin to Shylock when he gets the other fellow into a corner where he can shave off the pound of flesh. Yet those who are nearest to him—Anitra, for example—might tell you that he has another side; that he is really capable of forming likings and dislikings."

"We're not getting anywhere, yet," Stannard suggested mildly. "Where do I come in?"

"At the front door, unless I am very greatly mistaken," Vallory asserted impressively. "Westervelt likes you, chiefly, I think, because you are one man in a thousand who has fought him to a finish. You did, you know; and you beat him—in a small way. That is the surest road to his favor."

"I'll have to take your word for the liking, Mallory," said Stannard shortly. "I should have put it the other way around."

"Because he tried to choke you off on this short-line scheme? You shouldn't

jump at conclusions, Clay. Possibly Westervelt had the longer look ahead and saw developments that you couldn't see. I know this much, anyway: He is willing to be your friend—at least to the extent of helping you to get something more than the piker's start you've got now."

Stannard shook his head. "You are taking me at a disadvantage, Austin; throwing a thing like that at me when I am too tired to be able to see straight. Why should Mr. Westervelt interest himself in me?"

The clubman laughed and took his foot from the bench.

"You are more than usually thick-headed to-night, Clay," he remarked. "There can be only one reason on top of earth why Silas Westervelt might wish to give you a boost—apart from the fact that he likes you a little for the way in which you did him up with the securities committee a year ago."

"You'll have to give it a name," said Stannard stubbornly.

"It has a name, and a very pretty one. See here, Clay; were you asleep a few minutes ago when I told you that Anitra Westervelt changed her mind at the last moment about going to Europe with the Van Pelts, and insisted on turning this bear-hunting party into a coed picnic?"

The young Missourian struggled to his feet, rather stiffly because the tired muscles had been given time to harden into knots.

"You've said too much, or too little, Austin. If you're talking through your hat——"

Vallory laughed again, and tossed the last of the series of cigarettes aside. It fell upon the path leading down to the railroad yard and lay like a tiny red eye looking up at the two men.

"No; you couldn't squeeze any more out of me if you should run me through a cheese press, Claiborne. But I can see as far into a millstone as the next fellow. You're in luck, old man—the biggest kind of luck; at least, that is how it would appeal to me if I were standing in your shoes. Now go to bed and sleep—if you can; I'm through with you for to-night."

Five minutes later, the clubman, admitted by the porter on guard in the forward vestibule of the *Egeria,* made his way through the corridor, tapped on the door of the banker-director's stateroom, and was admitted. Silas Westervelt was lying on the lounge, and he did not get up at the noiseless door opening and closing.

"Well?" he inquired.

"I've put the hook into him," was the crisp rejoinder. "It strikes me that you're going to find him pretty easy."

The man on the lounge made no comment, and when he spoke again it was about another matter.

"What have you heard about the horses and guides?"

"Crumley has been over from his ranch, and Padgett and Kitts have made a dicker with him. The ranchman has a round-up shack about ten miles back in the hills, and he will fit it up as a camp. The start is to be made early to-morrow morning. Crumley furnishes a camp cook, and there will be a buckboard for the women."

"Anitra can't go," said the banker. "Her ankle isn't well enough." Then he added: "Padgett mustn't get too far out of reach. I may need him at any moment. How about the telegraph operator?"

"He's fixed," said Vallory. "He'll take our messages and give them the right of way over everything. I had to do a little judicious lying there and tell the young man that, for business reasons, his chief didn't care to know anything about your use of the wire. Then I gave him Padgett's first batch of cipher copy with a ten-dollar bill rolled up in it."

"And the deliveries? How about those?"

"I have arranged for them. Messages for you or Padgett will be delivered here at the car by the operator in person."

The big-bodied man on the couch sat up and ran his hands through the thinning hair.

"How did you go at Stannard?" he asked.

Vallory laughed. "I gave him what

the prize fighters call the heart punch. For the purposes of this particular killing, he has been led to believe that a certain young woman in this party would not be sorry to see him come in for a piece of money."

Silas Westervelt looked up quickly.

"Vallory, you are playing with fire. Besides, you had no authority to involve Anitra, even by implication. Why couldn't you be man enough to put it on a business basis at once? We need Stannard's services, and we are willing to pay for them."

The thin lips of the led captain parted in a sardonic smile. "With all due respect to you, you don't know Stannard as well as I do," he retorted. "If I had gone at him with a straight money proposition it would have been a good bit like sticking a match into a barrel of gunpowder. More than that, we should have been missing our one best bet by not taking advantage of his principal weakness. He was batty about Anitra a year ago last summer. It was the joke of the season, though it probably wasn't passed on to you. You let me manage this thing in my own way, and I'll have the apple picker eating out of your hand—and without committing or involving anybody."

The banker frowned thoughtfully.

"I won't have Anitra involved—understand that; and I still think it is a blunder on your part to take that line," he said, with brittle emphasis. "With all her good, hard common sense, Anitra is more or less romantic—all girls are. If she should find out what you are doing, I wouldn't answer for anything she might say or do."

"She won't have time to find out," said the go-between, with his hand on the doorknob. "I'm counting on this hunting business to keep them apart until after we have made the turn."

"That is where you are making another blunder," cut in the great man, with a degree of testiness which was quite out of keeping with his usual attitude of bland impassivity. "She can't go with the others, as I have told you. The only thing to do now is to push the matter with Stannard, and push it quickly. Send George Washington in as you go out, and tell him I'm ready to go to bed."

CHAPTER IX.

WHOM THE GODS DESTROY.

With Vallory's parting words to banish all thoughts of sleep and weariness, Stannard filled his pipe again after the clubman had left him and tramped off aimlessly into the night, craving solitude and the chance to wrestle with the incredible thing to which Vallory's hint had pointed.

He was not quite fatuous enough to take the hint at its face value. He told himself that Anitra Westervelt had doubtless joined the bear-hunting party very pointedly because she wished to. None the less, it warmed him deliciously to believe that a thought for him had added its urgings.

But quite apart from this, Vallory must have had some basis for the hint. Stannard gave manly modesty a free hand and tried not to be a conceited ass. Yet the ecstatic possibility would not suffer itself to be entirely sat upon and extinguished. The athletic young chief of construction jammed his fists into the pockets of the working coat and went plodding on westward through the railroad yard, following the line of the recently laid track skirting the base of the Standing Stone. In the back part of his head there was a grim determination to walk the ecstatic possibility off if the thing could be done, and he did not realize where he was going.

By this time the masthead arc lights in the construction yard were left well behind, and his eyes had become accustomed to the darkness. Since the tracklayers were now able to keep up by working only the day shift, the cañon at his left was deserted, though he could see the reflection of the electric flares lighting the great rock cutting beyond the end of track, and could hear the rapid-fire volleying of the air drills.

Directly in front of him, the steep, wooded shoulder of the Buckskin cut off the view to the westward, and at his right the river, issuing from the cañon

on a line parallel with the foot of the Buckskin, cut straight across the head of the Travois before making its right-angled turn to the eastward along the mountain barrier of the Rock Face.

Finding himself no nearer a sane conclusion about Vallory's hint than he had been when he left the construction camp, he was turning to retrace his steps when a curiously recurring phenomenon brought him alertly awake to the time, place, and surroundings. On the right bank of the river, and apparently about halfway across from the cañon mouth to the elbow bend at the foot of Rock Face, two small bright lights were alternately appearing and disappearing like the winking lamps of a pair of evergreen fireflies.

Owing his nativity to a region in which there are swamps as well as mountains, Stannard's first thought was of the jack-o'-lanterns of his boyhood. But apart from the fact that there are no masses of decaying vegetation in the high altitudes, the lights were far too dazzling to owe their origin to marsh gas. Sober second thought named them as electric flash lamps in human hands, and, wondering what two members of his staff might be picking their way across the great valley at that time and place, Stannard stumbled down the yielding slope of the new embankment to the margin of the stream and began to stalk the curious phenomenon.

There was a thick growth of small aspens fringing the bank of the Standing Stone, and with the trees for cover and the noise of the river to drown his footsteps, he was able to make his approach without being discovered by the two men who were moving back and forth on a north and south line parallel with the river. For a little while their movements puzzled the engineer. One of them would stand statuelike, while the other paced off a short distance to the southward. Then the one in advance would stop, and at the pause both flash lights came into play. Following this, the rear man would close up and one of the lights would show again, glowing steadily for a few seconds as if one man were holding it to enable the other to read or write something in a small book.

Familiar as he was with the routine work of his own trade, Stannard did not realize what the men were doing until the starlight showed him an engineer's transit instrument dimly outlined on a slight elevation against the black background of the eastern sky. At that, however, the puzzle solved itself instantly. He knew that the old location of the cañon-threading Overland Northern survey ran across the head of the Travois paralleling the river, and the conclusion was obvious. The two men were engineers from Judson Greer's force, and they were secretly verifying the notes of the old preliminary.

The originality of the move appealed instantly to the craftsman in the young Missourian. Never before had he seen an attempt made to take instrument readings in the open at night with only the help of a pair of pocket flash lights. Drawing nearer in the shadow of the aspens, he saw how the thing was done. The rodman went ahead, placed his staff, and showed the light at the level of the target until the instrument man, flashing his own light so that it would enable him to see the crosshairs, had found it with his telescope.

Under other conditions, or rather, in some calmer frame of mind, Stannard might not have interfered. Legally, Greer was entirely within his rights in sending his men to verify the old survey. It would be only at the point of track crossing on the G. L. & P. right of way that the Overland Northern would become a trespasser. But Stannard had been too lately stirred up by the talk with Vallory to be able to weigh and measure the nicer distinctions.

Climbing the river bank to the high-water gravel bar where the two men were running their line, he broke in upon them with a challenging demand:

"Say—I'd like to know what you two fellows think you're doing here!"

Now Stannard was unarmed, but the smaller of the two men prudently made sure of the fact by running his flash light quickly over the figure of the intruder. Following the flash, Stannard

found himself looking into the muzzle of an army-service revolver in the hands of the bigger of the two, a loose-bodied giant half a head taller than he had any right to be.

"What we happen to be doing is none of your blank-dashed business!" grated the giant, strengthening the uncivil phrase in the retort with a grouping of adjectives which would have made Bully Gallagher turn green with envy.

"I'm making it some of my business!" Stannard snapped back. "Put up that gun, or I'll take it away from you and pitch it into the creek!"

The big man stepped from behind his instrument and made as if he would thrust the revolver into Stannard's face.

"You make your get-away right now, before I start a lead mine in you bigger than any you ever saw in Missouri, Mr. Claiborne Stannard!" he barked. And then: "Put up your hands!"

It was the small added fact that Stannard found himself recognized, and still defied, that dropped the spark into the tinder box of a temper which was ordinarily rather slow to ignite. Ducking cleverly to dodge the weapon, he closed with the transit man in a mad-bull rush, twisting the gun from the hand of threatenings, and throwing the loose-bodied giant with a skillful back lock and an open-handed push under the chin.

"Now get up and fight like a man!" he panted, and stepped back to give the fallen one a chance to rise.

The bit of decent fairness came near costing him his life. A shot from an automatic pocket pistol smacked upon the still night air, and the dodging ray of the flash lamp showed Stannard the smaller man with his weapon out and coolly taking pot shots at him by the help of the little spotlight.

After that, there was nothing for it but a fight to a finish, and the Missourian went about it systematically. Baseball had been his safety valve in college, and he had been known as the outfielder with the swiftest and most deadly "wing" of any man on the team. Catching up a smooth stone, he hurled it at the little man, who straightway doubled up, dropped his automatic and the flash light, and withdrew from the scene, rolling out of sight among the fringing aspens, and making strange noises as he disappeared.

By this time, the big-bodied one was up and gamely trying to hold his own against Stannard's rushes. Twice the Missourian closed for a moment of savage infighting, and both times the big man went down among the worn bowlders of the old high-water torrent wash. At the third knock-out, discretion got the better of the transit man's valor. Leaping up in the recovery, he hurdled away over the bowlder heaps, with Stannard in hot pursuit. The chase was not a long one, and it ended when the fugitive splashed through the shallows of the Standing Stone and gained the thick cover on the opposite bank.

Balked of his prey, the Missourian raced back to the battlefield and made hostile search for the second man. Failing to discover him, for the good and sufficient reason that he, too, had taken flight, Stannard found one of the flash lights, and by its help made spoils of war of the two weapons and the surveying instruments.

It was the unreasoning madness of the slow-to-anger type that made him deliberately smash the instruments and fling them, together with the pistols, into the river. After which he was content to tramp back to the bunk house at the headquarters, breathing rageful threatenings for the first half mile, and beyond that, when the reaction had set in, gibbeting himself satirically as a hot-tempered idiot who had gone a very considerable distance out of his way to get on the wrong side of an argument, and to make a pair of enemies who would doubtless bide their time to even the account.

TO BE CONTINUED.

The second part of this story will appear in the First February Popular, on sale two weeks hence, January 7th.

The Honorable Crime

By Rupert Hughes

Author of "The Old Nest," "Excuse Me," Etc.

It is not so easy to get into jail as you might at first suppose. Rupert Hughes tells of a man who wanted to spend a few months in prison—but he found the task of breaking in as difficult as breaking out. Curiously enough, the man who is obsessed by this odd purpose is a most honorable fellow; but he wanted a halo, and he felt he could reach it only through the penitentiary.

I MEAN just what I say. I want you to get me sentenced to the penitentiary."

The lawyer grinned. "Well, by the Lord Harry! You deserve it for that last story of yours about—what was it about?"

"I'm serious," said Marly. "I must get into State's prison, and get in quick!"

"Oh, I see! You've got an order for a series of articles on prison reforms, eh? 'How it Feels to Be a Convict,' or 'Ten Nights in a Soggy Cell at Sing Sing.' You want a letter of introduction to the warden. I could manage it, but—really, I think you ought to leave that sort of thing to the yellow women."

"I'm willing to," said Marly irritably. "I want to go for a long term—at least seven years."

Newman glared at him. "Great Scott! Is it as bad as all that? Take my advice, and marry her. It's the quickest way to get rid of 'em."

Marly frowned. "Do I look like the kind of man that women pursue?"

"Candidly, you don't. But—well, if it's a conundrum, I give up."

"It's no conundrum. I want to get into prison, I tell you."

"Nothing easier, my boy; the hard thing is to keep out."

"I don't agree with you. I've lain awake night after night trying to think up a way. You see, I want to go to the penitentiary like a gentleman."

"Like a gentleman? That's not so easy," said Newman. "There's a sort of stigma attached to wearing the State's livery, though it's coming into style a bit among the millionaires. Besides, the meals are bad, they say; and there are no vacations."

"I want to go to jail to save my life."

The puzzled lawyer demanded an explanation, and Marly gave it haltingly, angrily, with much scoffing interruption from Newman, who gave him little sympathy; for he had little understanding of the writer's passion for posthumous glory.

Every man has his own death, his special, peculiar fear. Marly's terror was upon and around him before he saw it, like the tide that crawls about a man sleeping on a sunny rock.

That July midnight had slid into yesterday before Marly had finished an article on "Yuletide Celebrations in all Lands." It was hot weather for Christmas stuff, but Marly was an author by trade, and magazine editors dwell in the future. The check in payment was already mortgaged to his landlord for the month's rent, then nearly three weeks overdue.

As Marly looked up from the last sentence, the clock stared with a face of surprise. But there was no sleep for the writer. He went to the window. The night waited for him, like a woman serenely beautiful and confident. On impulse, he picked up his hat, took a faithful old walking stick, and left the house. He turned, as he often turned, to Central Park. The clipped turf was pleasant to his city feet, and no policeman happened to pass his way to forbid his vagary. He lost himself in the night within night.

After a time, he came into an open space where, unhindered by the elms, there was a lagoon of starlit air, in which he seemed less to walk than to swim. He sank to the ground, and laid aside his hat. The wind toyed agreeably with his hair. Over the rim of the trees, he caught glimpses of the all-night lights of the town, streaming upward like a white aurora. He lay on his back, stretched out his arms, and opened his palms in welcome to the skies. He breathed deep. Something within him and through him, and yet beyond him—something that used to be called a soul—expanded to such magnificence that he felt able to hold a star in each hand as easily as a clod. He felt enfranchised of infinity, given the freedom of the universe. The sight of all those spaces, of all the planets, each in his own enormous satrapy, did not crush him with a sense of his own insignificance. He enlarged to meet their orbits.

Then his supine hands felt timid little blades of grass shyly huddled between his fingers. Thoughts older than Omar came to him, and subdued his majesty.

"Perhaps this grass," he thought, "was flesh once, too, and this black mold the heart of some poor fool that died and left no tomb, no book, no street to recall his name. I suppose that's what is going to happen to me. It's too bad, for I've ached with ambition, and have studied and thought till my very brain sweats. But I've got to quit some day, and then I'll be as anonymous as the grass. What a horrible thing—to be anonymous in death!"

An old stanza recurred to his memory:

Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
Hands that the rod of Empire might have swayed,
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre.

"Thomas Gray was seven years writing that poem," he mused, "and it will last as long as mankind. Nothing else he wrote has seized the world; but, to the end of time, men will love to watch his 'lowing herds wind slowly o'er the lea.' Seven years on one poem, but how well worth while!"

He remembered reading somewhere that an early version of the "Elegy" had been marred, like the rest of Gray's poems, with Latinity—with Jove and Parnassus, Phyllis and Corydon, and all the classical lumber of the eighteenth-century school. The "village Hampden" had been a humble "Tully"; the "mute inglorious Milton" had been "Vergil"; and "Cromwell" "Cæsar," till some inspired friend advised the poet to devote his text to his own people.

"His own people!" Marly exclaimed. "That's the thing that makes a man universal—being first true to himself, then true to his own town. If I could only do something as American as that is English! America is full of themes big enough for Shakespeare and Dante and Æschylus in collaboration. If only my genius were as great as my desire! If only I had the time!"

He knew that immortality is simply a matter of putting certain words on paper, of laying brush to canvas in such a manner, of driving a chisel through marble thus and so. Once this were done, a man might ram his fist through the Milky Way up to the elbow, scratch his name on the wall back of the stars, and scoff at eternity his *Exegi monumentum ære perennius* and his *Non omnis moriar.*

An access of resolve caught Marly to his feet; he hurried back to his room, spread before him a heap of paper, smooth and white with invitation, fitted a fresh pen to the holder, refilled the clotted inkstand, dipped in his pen, and

—sat making idle scratches, writing his own name over and over with foolish flourishes. He loafed irresolute, like an idle god wondering what next he could create.

Then sleep came to him, inopportunely importunate. He yawned in the face of his high resolve, spread his forearms for a pillow, and, bending his head in reverie, knew nothing till a knock on the door apprised him that it was time for breakfast.

II.

He woke with arms tingling, eyes heavy, and heart uncongenial to his day's work.

At the publishing house where he was engaged, he found a pile of manuscript awaiting him; novels in heaps, treatises profound and popular, unmarketable poems, collections of dubious short stories torn from prominent magazines.

He thought of the incessant floods of words raining on paper everywhere, an enormous waste of hope, a vast amount of education, a plenitude of talent, and —genius? Was there any at all? What is genius? And who can recognize it when he sees it? Is it anything more than an Irish bull concerning fame—to be alive when you are dead?

He saw himself already dead, and all his works with him. There would be a few lines in a few newspapers, a gathering of his manuscripts into a heap to furnish nests for mice, or to fade under the slow snow of dust. That would be the be-all and the end-all of him.

He could not bear the thought of giving his life, his hope, his toil, as only another coral insect on the reef of the world's dead bones. To join the eternal mob of nobodies going to nowhere —the bare thought of it hurt him till his soul seemed to shriek aloud. He swore a great oath that he would delay no longer with the epic that should be his pyramid in the blown sands of oblivion. Feeling the mood to write hot upon him, he made an excuse of sudden indisposition, and was readily permitted to leave his desk—urged to go, indeed, by his solicitous employer. He hurried to his rooms, drew his chair hastily to his desk, reached out for blank paper, and brought down from a bulging pigeonhole a little avalanche of —unreceipted bills!

His hopes came down with them. Who was he, to be tampering with immortality when he could not settle his shot on earth? He prayed for a halo, and had not paid for his hat! He had worked hard always; he had written and written, and never had clanged the great note—except once, perhaps, in one short story that made an unexpected and inexplicable success.

Was it really a success? Every editor wanted something just like it, and he had repeated the formula of the story in a dozen different disguises. But, though he could duplicate the skeleton, he never could catch the flesh and the careless grace of the first, his sole triumph. And so his triumph had become a thing to trip him with, his success a mockery.

His poverty had seemed to forbid him ever to marry, and prevented even that form of immortality which accrues to the father of sons. His very name would die with him.

Always the bills weltered ahead and behind, like waves about a drifting skiff. And now, with ambition breaking out in him like a fever, he was confronted on one hand with unpaid bills, on the other with unfilled orders for stories and articles and books that would only feed his creditors and bring himself no nearer the goal. But what could he do to be saved?

His writing had always been done in haste, sent to the printer almost while the ink was wet on the paper. It was not so that Gray's "Elegy" was perfected. That very "Elegy" had included these lines:

> Chill penury repressed their noble rage,
> And froze the genial current of the soul.

Marly forgot, if he ever had known, how many master works of the world had come from overdriven pens, how many tired or needy geniuses had flung off immortal things—immortal possibly because a large part of mankind is, and

always will be, tired and needy. If Gray spent seven years on his "Elegy," Doctor Johnson wrote the whole romance of "Rasselas" in seven days, to pay the undertaker for his mother's burial. The true miracle of the "Elegy" was that, having lingered incomplete for seven years, it ever was finished at all. Chill penury may repress a noble rage, but it is likely to repress also an ignoble tendency to postpone and to putter.

Marly felt that for himself he must have leisure. He had written enough in haste; he must have time—time! Meanwhile, his body must be fed and clothed. Pegasus must be unharnessed from the hack and allowed to preen his wings—and yet Pegasus must have his oats and his stall. Marly must get rich.

III.

The easiest way to get rich, of course, is to have rich relatives who die betimes. But Marly had neglected to provide for these in advance. Wall Street occurred to him next. He managed to borrow two hundred dollars in small sums from impecunious friends.

With the brave gesture of Cyrano flinging his purse, Marly tossed his wealth to a broker. For a few days, he found a wild poetry in stock-market columns. Everything was going up, smoothly and glowingly, and he might have——

If——

But——

He had lost his friends' two hundred dollars before he had learned just how it was done. He had not even gained enough information to write a story about it; and it was a poor incident that was not "copy" to Marly.

IV.

He turned from Wall Street with a new sense of the evils of gambling, and ransacked his invention for some other short cut to riches. He thought of the golden age of patrons. Where was the Mæcenas to pamper him? Where the Chesterfield to accept a prospective dedication in return for a modest annuity? What though the geniuses of that era had been made to play the lackies and lick-spittles of their patrons? They had, at least, bought leisure with their humility.

The papers were full of the zeal of plutocrats enriching institutions of every sort.

"But why do they always endow an institution?" growled Marly. "Why not endow a man?—make some individual an institution?"

On the spur of this thought, he wrote a long letter to Henry Goldmount, a notoriously rich and appallingly benevolent millionaire, who seemed to be sitting up nights pondering where next to fling a million. Marly began his letter with a finely turned eulogy of the man's unapproached liberality, and his interest in culture; he ended by describing his own ambitions, his passionate need of leisure, and his guarantee of producing something immortal if he were relieved of nagging details. He even promised to write a sonnet which should make Goldmount's name immortal, beyond the power of monuments or colleges or libraries.

With unnecessary promptness, he received this short reply from the first secretary of the second secretary of Goldmount:

Mr. Edgar Marly, New York.

DEAR SIR: Your favor of the 13th received and contents duly noted. As I am paid to protect my employer from useless annoyance. I have not shown him your amazing letter. Its egotism is only equaled by its impudence. I should diagnose your case as one of acute megalomania. It is needless to expect my employer to take care of you, since the State already provides tender care and indefinite support for your sort. Your obedient servant, WILLIAM FRANKLIN.

Marly was furious with shame and rage. Why must lofty ambition like his seem always to be egotism in the eyes of Philistines? Could they never understand that the work of genius is like the task of a bridge builder stretching an arch in air above a gulf, that millions may find a thoroughfare otherwise denied them?

Marly gave up in disgust his hope of

reviving the art patron in America. And then, from the dark sky of despair, fell a dove of inspiration.

V.

In an evening paper, Marly ran across this paragraph. To the make-up man it had simply been a "filler"; to Marly it was a Heaven-sent message:

Jail seems to be a good place to write books. Literary men surpass themselves there. Bunyan wrote "Pilgrim's Progress" in Bedford prison. Cervantes began "Don Quixote" in a cell; Defoe laid the plans for "Robinson Crusoe" during a term of confinement; Bœtius and Grotius plied busy quills in dungeons; Tasso and Silvio Pellico did their best work in jail; Voltaire penned most of "The Henriade" in the Bastile; Leigh Hunt wrote "Rimini," and Howell his "Familiar Letters," in Fleet prison; Tom Paine wrote his "Age of Reason" behind bars. Oscar Wilde and Zola found inspiration in durance vile.

At last he saw the way and the secret. He remembered a line from Æschylus, the grim joke of Prometheus chained to the rock forever: "I shall have plenty of leisure here." In jail there was leisure; in jail, food was furnished by a hospitable State; and if one could not break out, neither could creditors break in. To jail Marly must go, by hook or by crook.

It was then that he called up his friend the lawyer, Harrison Newman, lunched him, and posed him the problem: "How can I get into the penitentiary like a gentleman?"

But the lawyer gave him no hope. He could not stomach this reversal of his methods. Or, if he grew serious, he protested that it was against the law for him to teach a man to break the law —"compounding a felony," he called it. When Marly said that a lawyer's chief business was breaking the law, Newman grew angry, and left him to his own devices.

Marly became, by stress of circumstances, a criminologist. He did not turn to the theorists, the Lombrosos, and others, but to the practical code. For the first time, he learned that there are tables of criminal weight and measure, as well as linear and liquid, square and cubic. As surely as twelve inches make one foot, and four gills make one pint, so one breach of the peace—not less than one dollar; one misdemeanor —not less than ten dollars or thirty days.

He found that the multiplication table of punishment, beginning in dismissal from an indulgent court with a reprimand, ended in dismissal from a disgusted world by way of a hempen noose or a stroke of lightning. The path of the transgressor led through patrol wagons, station houses, houses of detention, reformatories, workhouses, city and county jails, to the State institutions, where one was lodged for periods of a month, a year, or even a lifetime.

The writer's tendency to see everything as through an ink bottle, darkly, tempted Marly to write a series of articles on its phases, but his impatience to be in and of it was greater than his concern about it.

He began to realize that, like all other social circles, the criminal world is exclusive. Entrance was not easy. He had read of tramps and others who had committed offenses for the sake of a night's lodging, or for a longer escape from the rigors of starvation and cold. But he sought leisure, and plenty of it.

Marly had written and read many heart-melting stories of criminals; but when he left fiction for fact, he found that in every penitentiary offense there was something reprehensible. It was easy to say: "I will do evil that good may come of it;" "I will offend somebody for the sake of everybody." But when it came to the actual details of the act, he saw that the laws were pretty sane and decent, after all.

There is something essentially selfish in taking another man's property away from him; the invasion of privacy is distinctly impolite; and assault and battery can give pleasure only to the unrefined.

VI.

Again and again Marly gave up his scheme. He had always been as nearly a gentleman as his trade permitted, and

there was something intolerable about the very thought of defiling his clean hands with anything blacker than ink —which lemon juice so easily removes. But then his longing for immortality would seize him again and shake him as if he were a rat and ambition a terrier.

One morning the papers were black with the feat of an embezzling cashier, who, after spending years in undiscovered retail pilfering, packed a hundred thousand dollars into a suit case, and strolled blandly out of the bank into space. He was captured a few days later, to his great disgust, but being caught was the main part of Marly's program.

There was no possibility of Marly's ever getting within embezzling distance of a hundred thousand dollars, but at the publishing house certain checks occasionally went through his hands. He proceeded to pocket them, take them home, and forge indorsements on them; then he deposited them in his own bank.

It was a weary two weeks before the first check was missed, and the first complaint made. The cashier referred the matter to Marly as a mere bit of office mechanism. To confess would be ridiculous; so he lied. It hurt him bitterly, and he did it badly. His confusion was taken as a proof of innocence. The cashier apologized, and a poor letter carrier was put under suspicion. Nothing came of this crime, except that Marly realized the awful inconvenience of a respectable past. It was an asset, when he wanted a liability.

One luncheon hour he slipped into the cashier's cage and slipped out with a pocketful of bills. The next day the cashier had a haggard look and yawned incessantly. He had been up all night going over and over and over his books to trace the missing sum. Marly certainly would have confessed it if he had known that the bookkeeper made up the shortage out of his own meager funds.

Up to now, Marly's thefts had accomplished nothing but besmirching the reputation of a mail carrier and the sleep of a bookkeeper. He grew more and more brazen, more carefully careless. But he had almost despaired of success when one day he was called into the office of the president of the company.

Mr. Huntingdon Evarts was a venerable man of venerable appearance. He gazed at Marly with sad, weary eyes.

"Marly, Marly, my dear old friend, why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you come to me? You needed money—doubtless for some worthy purpose. Why didn't you ask me! I'd have lent you anything rather than let you descend to such a depth."

"What do you mean?" Marly faltered, as his guilt swept over him with a new force.

"I won't call it stealing," the president protested weakly, as if he were himself the accused. "You are incapable of theft—but—oh, it's terrible! When they told me, I wouldn't believe them at first. But—well—I have ordered the few who know to keep absolute secrecy, and—we won't say anything about it. But I beg you, Marly, I beg you, if ever you need money again—or if you need money now—come to me. It breaks my heart to realize how cruelly necessity may press upon even the most upright men in this bitter world."

It was the president that was weeping! Marly sat staring at him more in dismay than in remorse. He had stumbled upon the springs of affection that deepen like a well in an employer's heart when an employee has served him loyally for years.

Marly went back to his desk, dazed. A new idea made him happy. The president was rich and had offered him his aid. Why not make him his patron?

Then, with a thud, Marly's hopes lost wing and came to ground. To go to this man and say: "I am a great genius. You don't think so, but I know so. Please give me a comfortable annuity and let me stay at home in leisurely attendance on my moods till I have finished an epic poem, which may never pay the cost of the book plates" —to go to a business man and say that

was to invite a polite rebuff more humiliating than the sad reproach for his crime. Of all crimes, egotism unjustified by the royalty accounts is the worst in a publisher's eyes. Marly resumed his defalcations. In time he was called again to the office of the president, in whose eyes compassion was less evident than a stern determination to be merciful.

"Marly, I can't make you out. I should have said you had gone mad, but I have watched you in vain for signs that would justify such a charitable conclusion. Some strange change has taken place in you. From a man of unsullied honor, you have mysteriously degenerated into a criminal of the lowest and most obstinate type. But I simply haven't the strength of character to prosecute you myself, though my duty to the house and my partners forbids me to keep you here any longer. Go your way, and in Heaven's name try to get your feet back on solid ground. But find some other livelihood, for I can't permit you to rob others as you have robbed me. I shall be compelled to put you on the publishers' black list. That is all. Good day, and God help you!"

Marly gathered a few private papers from his desk and left, feeling that the eyes of the whole force were on him in vague wonder, as when a herd of large-eyed cattle watches a coyote slink through its pasture.

Now he was farther from his goal than ever. He was no nearer the leisure of the prison, and he was without even a modest salary to furnish him his present necessities. Hunger and cold and barefootedness were waiting round the corner for Marly. Prison was no longer a luxury; it was become an only refuge.

VII.

He cast about for new roads to the penitentiary. He called on an old friend, and found him shaving. A bulging purse lay on the chiffonier. Marly watched his chance and took it. A few minutes later, he made his excuses to go. His friend said laughingly:

"My pocketbook, please!"

Marly pleaded innocence. His friend laughed: "I saw you in the mirror. It's a good joke, but coarse work."

Desperately Marly denied the evidence of the man's eyes. The answer was rather petulant:

"Keep it, then, and send it back when you've finished, though I think it is the poorest joke even you ever wrote. I'm in a hurry."

Marly, protesting his innocence, moved to the door, whereupon his friend laughed and said: "No, I'll be darned if I let you get away with it." Laughingly, he seized Marly, wrestled with him, and took the pocketbook away. Then he playfully spanked Marly and said: "You'll have to get a Fagin to give you lessons. As a pickpocket, you are simply punk!"

Then he laughed again, gave Marly a cigar, and, being ready to go out, carried him along in his taxicab and dropped him at his door.

Here Marly found in his mail a check from a fellow "hack." It was the balance of an old loan, nine dollars. Marly studied it. An idea formed in his brain. He added "ty" to the "nine," and "0" to the "9." But the man, authorlike, kept only a small and fluctuant account with the patient bank. Ninety dollars constituted an overdraft of fifty. The author was notified at once. He came direct to Marly, and when Marly admitted his guilt and defied the man to proceed, the poor fellow was crushed with the horror of the situation. He dumfounded Marly by an outburst of pitying forgiveness.

Marly was furious. Would nobody regard him as anything but a joke or a weakling? Could he never shake off that Old Man of the Sea, his respectable past? Again he found force in an angry determination to compel his tardy destiny.

He called on the hardest man he knew, a publisher who made his living by underground channels of the trade. The man was suspicious by nature. He was surprised and ironic about Marly's

call. Marly drove him almost frantic by wasting his valuable time, proposing that he publish a volume of his magazine verses, and pay him in advance on an epic poem yet to be written! While the publisher sputtered Marly found a chance to purloin his gold-embossed fountain pen and a ruby-knobbed cigarette case. The publisher, infuriated more by the proffer of poetry than by the theft, saw him do it, seized him, called in witnesses, and turned him over to the police.

At last, Marly had reached his first milepost. He spent a night in jail. The society that meets at such a rendezvous was abhorrent. Noisy and drunken men and women, thieves, and maltreaters of horses, wives, and children, made up the levee. The underworld of which he had read so much did not prove at all attractive. It nauseated him.

The next morning, he took his turn at the desk of the magistrate, who looked at him wonderingly, learned that it was his first offense, and set him free with an exhortation to reform. Marly could have cried aloud against such dilution of justice by the skim milk of human kindness. But he was hustled out into the open air.

Housebreaking occurred to him as the one sure doorway to the penitentiary. He would try that next.

VIII.

He read the papers to see whether he could learn a few tricks of the trade. In the day's budget of burglary, two accounts struck him most forcibly. In one case, the father of a family had thrown himself upon a burglar and had been stabbed to death after an appalling combat, which the staring family watched in the dim lamplight.

In the other case, a burglar had been shot dead as he ran for the fire escape.

Marly recoiled. It was not a pretty business, burglary. Yet it seemed to be the only way open to the plain public and to unskilled labor. Marly could not endure the thought of really harming anybody. He would rather be slain than to slay a fellow being. And as for letting himself be annihilated—that would nullify all his plans indeed. He resolved to select a peaceful household, give some honest people a few moments of fright, and then be haled away, leaving behind their property, which he would only pretend to have planned to take.

The selection of his victim required an enormous amount of research. At last he found a somewhat detached house where two old maids lived with one fat cook, and an obese and asthmatic pug dog. It appeared to be a safe investment.

Marly loitered about till he learned the intervals of the appearance of the patrolman and the private police who guarded that block. He wanted them near enough to apprehend him when the old maids gave the alarm.

He put woolen socks over his shoes, and carried a loaded revolver, a jimmy, a dark lantern, a bag for the swag, a cloth mask—the best equipment he could improvise according to the traditions. He wanted to look professionally correct. He was very much afraid of his revolver; but he felt that if it were not loaded it would lack the air of sincerity.

Thus caparisoned, he set out on his mad quest. At a chill, small hour he sauntered down the deserted street, where even the lamp-posts looked lonely, and climbed to a window on the main floor by means of a convenient fence. He was impressed by the ease with which window locks yield to the Archimedean lever of the jimmy. He raised the sash cautiously and crawled in.

The Rubicon was crossed. He had broken his first house. Meanwhile, his heart was beating in a childish terror of the dark. Guided by a smelly, greasy, and shadowy dark lantern, which gave more odor than light, he rifled the sideboard of its silver, not realizing that the plate was plated, and therefore beneath the attention of a self-respecting burglar.

Having filled his sack with this evidence of criminal intent, he proceeded to try to get himself caught. He began

to make noises, to rattle dishes, to cough, finally to sneeze.

Nothing happened.

He was amazed at the perverse soundness of human sleep. Little noises that resounded like volleys to him, seemed to have no carrying power. He knocked over a heavy chair. The house shook, but there was no sign of life abovestairs.

Plainly, he must climb to the next floor and raise an alarm outside the bedrooms. With quaking knees, he moved up the steps into the gulf of darkness above. He thought he heard a doorknob turn. Was that the creak of a step? He thrilled with a glad terror. His ears waited for the shrieks of the spinsters. Deathly silence. He moved forward clumsily.

Suddenly a huge shadow hurtled from the darkness, and smote him down with a terrific impact. He was sprawling on the floor under the onset of a powerful man. How was Marly to have known that the spinsters had a nephew who was a famous half back at Yale, or that he had come to town that evening to spend Sunday with his aunts? Before the mighty swoop of a practiced tackle, what chance was there for a pudgy literary gentleman?

IX.

The lantern was knocked over and put out at once. In his wild confusion, Marly could hear the spinsters shrieking from the window for the police. Then his own troubles absorbed him. In the utter darkness he was compelled to fight a shapeless thing that was simply weight and power and ferocity in the abstract. The grappling mystery made no sound except to breathe hard and curse in snarling gutturals. Marly was no match for this wrestler. He felt himself battered, contorted, wrenched, smothered. Then great, groping fingers of steel found his throat and he was throttled almost to suffocation, while his head was beaten and beaten against the floor.

In a whirlpool of chaotic thought, Marly realized that his captor was in a hysteria of fright and fury, and would probably pound and choke him to death before the police could come to the rescue. This seemed an inconceivably hideous reward for a man whose motives were as pure as his. Marly began to fight back, scratching, tearing, kicking, biting. He wrenched one hand loose, it touched the cold edge of the jimmy fallen from his pocket. Before he quite realized what he was doing, he seized it, raised it, brought it down on the head of his mortal enemy.

The long, matted hair deadened the thud, but he rained blows on the darkness above him till he felt the clutch on his throat relax. The knee that was crushing his chest slid off. Then the whole body that had been an engine of destruction went limp as a bolster and rolled over. The vise of his throat unclutched. He could breathe again.

For a moment he lay quiet in the rapture of mere air. Then a light was turned on, and he saw before him the two spinsters in their nightgowns, staring at him, aghast. He heard a bell ringing below and a pounding of clubs on the front door. Policemen blundered up the stairs, and, learning from the horrified women that Marly had beaten down and perhaps killed the unconscious youth, the policemen proceeded to bludgeon the unresisting Marly. They felt the universal loathing for a burglar, and they hurt him horribly with the loftiest motives. They hustled him to jail through a crowd that struck, scratched, and jeered him; and the police surgeon was no more merciful.

X.

There was no question of Marly's success at last. If he had bewailed his inability to become news as a man of literary achievement, he had no complaint of the attention paid to him now. The papers were full of "the literary porch climber," "the short-story, second-story man," "the bookworm burglar," et cetera. It was a curious morsel for the police reporters, and they made the most of it.

After the custom of the sensational

newspapers, he was called famous. Every woman under fifty who is arrested is "beautiful," every man who has had his name in print is "the well-known." Marly groaned to think how little he had deserved that epithet "famous," and how long it had been denied his legitimate work.

For days, while his victim hovered between life and death, Marly's legal status wavered between burglary and murder. Eventually, the question was settled, and he was hustled to the courtroom. He saw for the first time the young man whom he had nearly killed, and who had nearly killed him. It was an interesting encounter for both. They had looked so different in the dark. Marly marveled at the boy who had so nearly ended him. The boy felt ashamed of the frail man who had given him so fierce a tussle.

The lawyer assigned to Marly's defense advised him to plead guilty and throw himself on the mercy of the court. But Marly had learned to dislike the word "mercy," and he was determined to carry out his plan, now that at last it seemed to be fairly under way.

He pleaded "not guilty," and assumed a hangdog, surly, defiant manner that irritated the court and the jury. He was speedily found guilty of burglary with assault. In delivering the sentence, his honor saw fit to append an oration on the peculiar grossness of Marly's crime. It was an opportunity the judge could not forego to show people that he was something of a literary man himself. He gave Marly the full limit of the law, and signed the commitment papers with a pen that dug and spurted.

The wrath of the upright judge ended in a gulp of apoplectic rage as he saw how Marly took his philippic. Under the withering arraignment, Marly did not wither. He stood erect, and a sunbeam that came through a torn window shade blazed on his white face like a benediction. A smile was on his lips, and the prisoner's dock was a very Elijah's chariot of apotheosis to him. He was thinking of the great poem he was to write—or it might be a great novel, or a play. Whatever it was to be, it would be great, mature, ripe, the fruit of a solemn and undisturbed leisure.

Sing Sing should not make Marly infamous, but should be by him made famous. The gentle memory of his poem should wrap its hard walls like an ivy vine.

XI.

He fell from the clouds almost immediately. In the covered van that took him to the Grand Central Station, with other live-stock waybilled to Sing Sing, Marly was handcuffed to a wretch of the most unpleasant aroma and the least attractive conversation. He had read about Marly's crime, and looked down on him as a raw "amachoor."

Sing Sing, which he had pictured as a sort of respectable castle of crime, proved to be nothing but an ugly factory-looking place set at the foot of a hill, on a level with the river. The very sentry boxes on the wall suggested nothing more imposing than switch towers.

Marly was received without ceremony, and he was asked whether he had a trade. Authorship was not among the recognized crafts, but they told him he might work in the printing shop, and perhaps contribute to the periodical issued by the convicts. He declined as emphatically as he dared. He had had enough of the publishing business. They told him he might then become a cabinetmaker. He was sent at once to the bathhouse and informed that he should be compelled to bathe once a week!

And now he learned the truth about that life of the day laborer of which he had written with such literary illusion. His skin had been used to soft clothes, easy-chairs, and the wielding of no heavier tool than a pen. Here he accumulated blisters on every surface, misery in every muscle, and marrow pains in every bone. He pounded his fingers with the hammer and filled them with splinters till the thought of wielding a pen in his off hours was odious.

He always returned to his cell with a

body like a sack full of discomforts. He wished only to fling himself on his narrow bed and sleep. The morning came always hours too soon. The forenoons had once been a congenial time for writing, but his forenoons now were spent in composing park benches. The late night hours, when inspirations once visited him, found him a dead log of fatigue.

He never could get rest enough. He learned the reason why day laborers slump when they can, loaf when they are not watched, and feel a dull indifference to the higher flights of the soul.

The pleasant delights of the table, and of congenial table talk were his no more. He marched into the mess hall with an army of cattle, and gobbled plain food like a ditch digger. Conversation was surreptitious and uninspiring. The warden made every effort to encourage his charges to mental improvement; but Marly had previously read nearly all the books in the library, and those he had not read he was too weary to read. And he did not care to enter the classes in arithmetic, spelling, and geography.

The *Star of Hope,* published by the inmates, was to Marly an amateurish periodical, to which he felt no inclination to contribute. And when at last he wrote something which he tried to keep down to the level of that publication, it was returned to him with a note of polite regret!

The narrow confines of the prison grew narrower upon his soul, like the walls in Poe's story. He felt the need of viewing the outer world. He longed to move about among the real men. This world of his contained only the abnormal, the rejected, the incompetent. He was stifled at the bottom of a human wastebasket.

But at last he had an inspiration. He called for pen, ink, and paper. Now, at last, he wrote, and in a frenzy of enthusiasm, crossed out, rewrote with minute care in the choice of every word. Never had he composed with such ardor, or corrected with such anxiety.

And this was what he wrote; this was the literary fruit of his high endeavor and his leisure at the State's expense:

The Governor of New York, Albany, New York.

YOUR EXCELLENCY: As one of those who voted for your election, and who would be glad to contribute his vote to your triumphal advance to the presidential chair, in case his vote is restored to him, I beg to call your attention to a gross miscarriage of justice.

In civilized countries, the object of imprisonment is no longer revenge, but the reformation of those who are not hopeless, and the restraint of those who are. It is certainly not the intention of the State to ruin the minds of those who are capable of doing it great service.

In a long and large sense, no one can do this State of New York a better service than by writing something great to relieve its literary poverty. I have it in my mind and heart to complete a work which will undoubtedly be immortal, and will shed undying luster on the administration of the governor under whose administration it is achieved.

My presence here, under a grossly exaggerated sentence, is due to a chain of circumstances in which the most innocent of motives has been perverted into an appearance of crime. I can explain these in detail if your excellency will consent to an interview, or permit me to spread them before you in a longer document than I dare now indite.

If any lesson is to be learned by incarceration here, I have already learned it; and I will personally guarantee that I never will again appear in court. Further detention can only ruin a mind eager to contribute to the slender store of American classics a noble work which the State can ill afford to lose.

If, as you have always maintained, you have the best interests of the people at heart. you will let me out of here at once. Yours respectfully, EDGAR MARLY.

The governor's reply has not yet been received. His excellency's mind is doubtless hovering editorially over a manuscript that he can neither accept nor reject. But there is one mind in which there rests no doubt; it is that of the foreman of the shop where Marly works. He has put himself on record as follows:

"You have asked for a pardon, have you? Well, here's me that's hoping you get it. You tell me you're a great writer, and you ought to know. But the park benches you make are a disgrace to the institution. They bring the blush of shame to every decent convict in the place."

Perfect Ladybugs

By Robert Welles Ritchie

Author of "The Spirit Jerkers," "Guns and a Girl," Etc.

The college reporter makes a brave attempt to scale the heights of fame with the assistance of ladybugs—"the grandest little soldiers of righteousness in all the insect world"

STUART GALBRAITH was sure in his heart that some day he would ride between the humps of a white dromedary—or, maybe, it would be a plain camel—some sixty or eighty torturing miles over hot sands to an isolated telegraph office under a date palm, and there file three thousand words to beat the world.

Young Mr. Galbraith loved to project upon the fine screen of his imagination a neat half tone of himself doing this heroic thing. Somewhere in the Sotik—that would be the place, the Sotik—smoke of battle hanging low over the horizon behind him, with a descending sun blinking through like a cocktail cherry in gray wool—back there the story of the desperate resistance of a "thin, red line" against the overwhelming charge of the Something-or-others; incident of sublime bravery piled on incident—ahead the desert, and in the far beyond that isolated telegraph office which was to link the doggedly persevering correspondent with the world and his little old paper on the other side of the earth! Ah, speed, faithful dromedary—or, maybe, camel—speed! The desperate man between your humps, his middle swathed with tight bands of linen to preserve his alimentary tract from disruption, is singing the introductory paragraph to the great story he will file—singing as he lashes himself to the fore and aft bits of your anatomy. Now the objective date palm marking the location of the telegraph office lifts above the rim of the desert, and the slender filaments that soon are to hum with a saga of action spider-web themselves from the fronds of the palm across the red cheek of the sky. Now the panting dromedary sinks to his knees, and the man between his humps hurls himself through the door of the little shack; his eyes burn like chili peppers against the sickly white of his face; his lips are cracked with the heat.

"The wire!"—a hoarse gasp like that of a drowning man.—"A clear wire to London! Flash the *Record* three thousand coming on the fight at Omama from Galbraith!"

Good old Mrs. Lachesis, of the Fate Sisters, who turned the crank for this cinematograph of prophecy, did her job admirably. Stuart Galbraith, sitting in audience of himself at such moments, could almost smell the dromedary.

But it was always a sad moment when the reel of fate unwound to darkness and the entranced young man found himself snapped back to reality. Reality, for Stuart Galbraith, was the rather drab atmosphere of good old Berkeley—drink her down!—and the imminence of a crisp and incisive message over the telephone wire from an unfeeling city editor ten miles across the bay. For Stuart, you see, was college correspondent for the *Monarch*—a long, long way from camel riding in the Sotik and the Jovian achievements of the "special ambassadors" of the news. But he had imagination—a first-rate qualification for the infant in journalism. Julian Ralph, Jersey Chamberlain, and all the other lords of high ad-

venture from the ranks of the Fourth Estate who had fared forth to view history in the melting pot and sniff the spice of romance in strange lands were his gods; before their altars he burned a steady lamp of adulation.

To be sure, it was a far cry from writing three sticks on the production of a coed play to the reporting of the march of the Allies on Peking; the battle of the Yalu offered more chance for neat phrase making than the annual freshman-sophomore rush. The correspondent of the *Monarch* at Berkeley possessed, however, an absorbing faith in himself and the kindness of fate, and he had, as said before, imagination. Even that distant divinity of the capricious fiat, the city editor over in the big city across the bay, had grudgingly admitted to himself the discovery of this latter qualification when Galbraith sent over the story of the whiskers found growing on the death mask of Julius Cæsar in the college library. That little item of his about the discovery by Professor Buryum, the university's dean of geology, of a fossilized plug hat in the Shasta caves was not altogether bad; it had the spark, albeit a feeble and untried one.

"So far as you go, Galbraith," the city editor once purred sweetly over the wire, "you're no worse than any of the correspondents I've had to fire ahead of you. Most of the time when the news comes down the campus heralded by a brass band and transparencies you manage to get it. Some day, maybe, when you think there isn't any news, you'll go out and make it—make it, understand? I don't think very much of a reporter who can't build a story out of wind now and then—but don't let me catch you doing it. I'd have to let you go if I did."

From the date of its utterance, this cryptic advice always came to punctuate the high dreams of a dromedary post in the Sotik. Just as the pale rider would hurl himself from the humps and dash for the telegraph key out of the sun-baked rafters of that lone hut on the desert would come the icy-cold chirp:

"Build a story out of wind, now and then, you poor little scrub reporter!"

Vainly did Galbraith twine his grapevine fingers about the struts of his ancient typewriter in desperate thought; vainly searched his soul for inspiration. An elopement from the kitchen of the prexy? No; prexy's cook was a Chinaman. Gold found in the excavation for the new gymnasium? Nay, verily; nobody would stand for the story. A typhoid monkey escapes from the bacteriological laboratory, then? Piffle three times in the same place; they don't have typhoid in the curriculum. What then? The lathy youth conned once more the vivid pages of "Ordered to China"; in the college library he coiled himself about the racy memoirs of De Blowitz. Vain hope! If the nobles of the higher realm built stories out of wind, they carefully concealed that fact from an unsuspecting world.

Stuart Galbraith was constructed after the simple pattern of the carpenter's calipers; the motor of his vital forces was compacted under a six-and-three-fourths hat, and for the rest of him—mostly legs. These members, seemingly endowed with a most virulent and independent energy, carried the thinking apparatus of the college correspondent about the daily news "beat" of campus and town with maximum speed and efficiency. Each day the routine was searched and grubbed for news; the office of the president's secretary, where formal announcements of meetings of the Philological Society and reports of startling developments in the statistics of pedagogical research were handed out on neat typewritten slips; the gymnasium, home of trenchant "dope" on the true condition of a star punter's kneecap; the steps of old North Hall, dripping gossip of the student world, and—final cheerful station—the town morgue. Recitations fitted in somehow between the periods of this news pilgrimage; a fire in the Gem Laundry was sufficient excuse for cutting Chemistry Six, and the decision of the town attorney upon the closing of a local "speak-easy" took instant prece-

dence over the council of the barons of England at Runnymede.

One little bypath from the beaten road of news, where exploration occasionally was rewarded by a freak story for the *Monarch,* was the Cow College, irreverently so styled by the student body, but scheduled in the university catalogue as the College of Agriculture and State Experimental Station. There, in a ramshackle old building, grave scientists probed for the appendices of San Jose fruit scale, and put the cutting edge of potato bugs' probosces under the eye of the microscope. There issued from the Cow College illuminating bulletins for farmers upon the care and culture of the hog tick and the proper strangle hold upon the codlin moth. Dear old Professor Woodash, the entomologist—a quaint gentleman, who resembled the weeping poplar of the Wabash in his general arboreal contour, and who had the soul of a child—presided over a major part of the Cow College and threw his enthusiasm into delightful little experiments upon the lives of insect pests. Him young Mr. Galbraith had instantly spotted as an eligible at the time Professor Woodash found some innocent larvæ of the brown-tailed moth hived up in bark and, to force incubation under abnormal circumstances of heat, wore the little twigs to which the chrysalises were attached next to his skin for three days; the birth of the brown tails occurred while Professor Woodash was lecturing before his class in entomological ecology, and the newly released souls of an artificial spring winged their way to freedom via his collar. That story got on the front page of the *Monarch* under the snappy headline: "Incubation De Luxe for Brown Tails."

It was a wretched day in winter—real Californian winter—when all the campus was a quagmire and the rain came down like the shading lines on an engineering student's chart. Galbraith, his dominant legs propelling a flapping raincoat over the campus like a miniature circus tent gone *must,* stamped his way into the Cow College after the hour of lectures and circulated vaguely through the drafty corridors and musty experimental halls on the eternal hunt for news.

In the drought of that commodity he would have grasped at a grasshopper story or even found solace in a report that the cows of the San Joaquin were growing beards.

Good old Woodash he found alone in his office, tenderly twiddling the lever screw of a microscope with one hand and tucking his flowing beard out of harm's way with the other. A mess of dry twigs and leaves was all about him on the floor; the papier-mâché model of a bluebottle fly, as large as a Newfoundland dog, straddled a near-by table, and appeared to be on the point of launching to the attack; between the learned feet reposed a newspaper, upon which was spread the dried carcasses of several hundred wood beetles. Woodash was plainly at a revel.

He took his mild blue eye away from the microscope's peephole when Galbraith's hail, "What's doing in the bug line, professor?" broke his reverie, and with a vague smile he welcomed the reporter in.

"Ah—hum—ah, my dear boy, I cannot say I have any news that would be of interest to the laity, though I am on a most fascinating line of investigation into the productivity of the Santa Clara apricot scale. I have just determined that the ratio of reproduction is directly inverse to—ah—um——"

Again that fading eye groped for the microscope as if precious minutes were not to be wasted.

"Nothing about potato bugs assaulting the grangers of San Louis Obispo?"

Galbraith's upward inflection carried a note of yearning.

"Ah—no"—Woodash was dropping glycerin on a fresh slide with the tip of a glass rod—"the potato bug has been effectually exterminated by the Japanese saber bettles we imported last summer."

"How about your Burbanking the tomato with the summer squash?" Galbraith urged. "News is bad, professor, and I'll swallow anything you've got."

But the entomologist was absorbed

in getting the microscopic range on his newest slide, and merely shredded an unintelligible answer through his beard. Galbraith looked at the pugnacious bluebottle, screwed his quizzical eye into a side glance at the shelves, laden with bottles and trash; his survey was that of a drowning man a mile from the beach.

"Hullo, what's this, professor?"

The reporter stepped to the side of the room nearest the gray windows, and inspected a straddling glass case whose interior was spliced by rows of glass shelves closely speckled by myriads of red-black dots.

"Eh—what?" Woodash raised his head and followed Galbraith's pointing finger. "Oh, yes; that is my ladybug cold storage plant—quite a neat little arrangement."

A little bell rang under the reporter's six-and-three-quarters bonnet. "Story coming!"

"Tell us about it," he chirped.

Professor Woodash pushed back his chair, and walked over to the side of the glass case, the light of an inventor's fatherhood in his eyes.

"Well, you see, Mr. Galbraith, this is a little experiment of mine, this ladybug freezing. I expect that it will produce magnificent results in a few weeks. It is part of my eternal warfare against the insect world, and it is strategy—yes, strategy."

"Frozen ladybugs—warfare—strategy? Come again, professor."

Old Woodash fairly beamed as he stroked the glass sides of the case with caressing palms.

"Of course you do not understand. Here it is: Ladybugs, as you may not know, are the grandest little soldiers of righteousness in all the insect world; they are the Greeks at Thermopylæ who hold back the Persian hordes of fruit scale and boring beetles"—Woodash chuckled boyishly at the patness of his historical instance—"but heretofore the trouble has been that the ladybugs sometimes do not get to the pass in time to turn back the invasion; a backward season comes, and the scale begins to attack the fruit trees before the ladybugs come out of their winter hibernation.

"Now, what do we do to prevent this dilatoriness on the part of our little army of righteousness?" Woodash waved his hands in an enthusiastic flourish.

"I don't see that freezing them will help them along any," Galbraith ventured.

"Patience, my dear boy; I will explain. This is the month of February. All over California, the ladybugs are hibernating—particularly in the foothills of the Sierras where the fern brakes are. They do not come out of their stupor until about the first of May, whereas the fruit scale and the wood borers become active some two or three weeks earlier. Now, here is our plan: We collect the hibernating ladybugs up in the Sierra foothills in February, bring them down here, and keep them in the same temperature until the scale and other parasites begin to get active, then ship them to the infected districts, where they are released, and, instantly regaining their normal summer activity, they attack the scale three weks in advance of their natural period of invasion."

"And who plucks the succulent ladybug up in the foothills?" the inquisitive youth demanded.

"Ah, Chinamen—for a pittance—for a pittance. This cold-storage plant here is very simple. Glass case, you see, with pipe running up through the floor from the basement. Down there we have a tank of freezing mixture—chemical freezing mixture, you see—the cold air comes up and floods the interior of the case. Temperature kept at about thirty-five degrees Fahrenheit—here's the thermometer—which is from ten to twelve degrees lower than the temperature necessary to bring the bugs out of their sleep. Look!"

The scientist opened one of the doors of the storage case, and from a speckled shelf plucked a round, red, and black dot. Holding this tenderly in the palm of his hand, he breathed upon it for a minute or so. The inanimate mite began to unfold waving legs, as a camera tripod splays out; tiny antennæ uncurled and twitched nervously; the

bug heaved on the leverage of one thorny foot and was over on its proper bilge keel, lacquered wings trembling.

"You see? Ready for business!" Woodash beamed upon his orphan child as he cautiously opened the door of the case and set him among the ranks of the slumbering brotherhood.

"Back to bivouac, little soldier," he crooned.

"What's the strength of your army?" Galbraith asked.

"Oh, between sixty thousand and one hundred thousand," the entomologist answered, moving back to his precious microscope.

"And ten or fifteen more degrees of heat will get it started?"

"Um—ah—yes; that and strong light." Old Woodash was once more twiddling the screw shift of his magnifier, away back in the deadwood of the bug world.

"Thanks for the story, professor," Galbraith murmured, as he calipered the length of the room. Out into the slanting rain he went. With him was the germ of a glorious idea—a branching aurora borealis of an idea, all speckled red and black like a ladybug.

Ah, let the doughty correspondent in the Sotik ride between dromedarian humps; it would be from the back of a ladybug that he vaulted thither!

Galbraith hurried down to the Japanese notion store of Toyo Mazuma on Center Street, and made a preparatory purchase: Three of those economical Oriental contraptions called Japanese foot warmers—flat tin cases containing a heavy charcoal punk, which burns with caloric efficiency. Then back to the Diddle Dee Dee House, to abide in patience with his fraternity brethren until the hour of fate should strike.

That hour was midnight. The wet dark blanketed the campus like the curse of Moses. The college watchman was safely curled up in a secret inglenook out of the rain, secure in the belief that no prankish students would hang ruffles around the necks of the four evangelists on the library façade on a night of storm like that. Of course, therefore, he did not see the furtive shape that sneaked through the dark to a coal chute in the basement of the Cow College. Nor was he conscious of the prowlings and gropings of that midnight marauder among the coal piles, furnaces, and blank stairways in the nethermost regions of the agricultural citadel. No thief was it who trod with catlike step the stairs and corridors of the sacred precincts, felt a blind way past doors and around corners to the laboratory of old Woodash; no thief, but a bringer of freedom to imprisoned ladybugs. When the emancipator had done his work and gone, the comfortable fires in three Japanese foot warmers remained to loose the fetters of insect sleep, the doors of their prison house were open, and a near-by window, raised, gave promise of all the broad world with the coming of light.

The storm mercifully passed before dawn, and a glorious sun ushered in a day ordained to be one of the wonders for good old Berkeley.

For Stuart Galbraith English Twenty-B fell for recitation at eight o'clock, but there was no warmth for his seat in Professor Brayley's classroom. Nor, for that matter, was the class in English Twenty-B ever called for reason here set down.

Galbraith was on the campus at seven-forty-five; he had his place unobtrusively beneath a spreading live oak beyond the bridge at the Cow College, and with the eye of a connoisseur he watched the building of a story.

A hazy cloud projected from a certain window on the second floor of the Cow College, spreading out fanwise from the sash, and extending far out over the campus in a broadening arc. It was a cloud that was rolled and twisted in infinite microscopic turmoil; it wavered, turned upon itself, shredded out in trailing segments. A humming, as of a high-power dynamo in action, came from it. An occasional sunbeam glanced from it with a flash of tawny red.

Ladybugs! Ladybugs by the tens of thousands! Ladybugs waddling by platoon and regiment on the cement pavements; ladybugs bumbling about

the dripping leaves of the live oaks in predatory hordes; ladybugs tipping each blade of grass on the campus with a ruby jewel. And from the opened window in the Cow College the army of invasion was swelled by an ever-increasing geyser. An early-blooming coed wearing horn spectacles and a golf skirt essayed the passage between Strawberry Creek and South Hall. Ladybugs pounced upon her hair, clung to her shirt waist, blurred her spectacles —and she fled, shrieking. A midnight-oil burner of the genus "Grind" plodded up from the Telegraph Avenue entrance to his early class in North Hall, paused with popping eyes at sight of the swirling cloud of insects, and then lowered his head and made a run for it, as if dodging an avalanche.

As more students came up from the campus gates, the plot thickened like cold pea soup. Curiosity gave way to joy when sapient youths divined that something had busted loose in the Cow College, and here was a horse on the whole college. They gathered in cheering groups, encouraging the coeds to brave advance or deriding them in precipitate retreat. The nimble-footed professors, stepping as if the pavements were storage eggs, gained heartier approbation than ever they had enjoyed in classroom. And still the ladybugs streamed from the window of Professor Woodash's laboratory out into the burning sunlight.

Stuart Galbraith, reporter, looked upon his handiwork and, lo! it was very good.

Down across the meadow behind the buzzing Cow College, Galbraith caught a vision of a prancing faun—a satyr of the God-given morn. It was old Woodash. He touched the ground only occasionally. His long legs were working like piston rods on a donkey engine. He flew. And as he cleaved the air his abundant whiskers parted and streamed behind him like the bow wave of a trim cruiser on trial test. Around the corner of the college and up the steps sped this apparition; a minute later the open window of the laboratory was banged shut, and framed in the space was the faithful picture of an entomologist gone daft.

Prexy caught the word of disaster over the wire to his house and came boiling down to the campus, his dignity and his collar missing. He fought his way through the horde of ladybugs to the Cow College, fine little points of red polka-dotting the broadcloth on his back. As he drew near the infested building, Woodash threw open a window in the far end of the second story, and hallooed wildly to the president. His voice issued from a beard, dyed tawny red. His arms waved shockingly.

"Catch them, Mr. President!" Woodash burbled. "Catch my army of righteousness, and save the fruit trees of the State!"

"'Ray for Woodash's army of righteousness!" came the familiar voice of the official college humorist. The cheers drowned the hysterical clamor of the bug doctor.

"Now, 'ray for Woodash's ladybugs!"

"Woodash's ladybugs! 'Ray—'ray—'ray!"

Prexy mounted the steps of South Hall and held up his hand for silence; a dozen ladybugs clustered on each finger tip.

"Young men," he shouted, "a very serious mishap has occurred in the laboratory of the Agricultural College, as you can see for yourself. Through some accident which I have not yet been able to learn because of Professor Woodash's reasonable excitement, some sixty thousand insects which he had gathered to assist the farmers of the State in saving their fruit trees have become—ah!—dispersed. They may do great damage to the vegetation of the campus and the town in such great numbers. They are needed for the farmers in the fruit districts."

Notwithstanding the pervasive atmosphere of entomology about his person, prexy was slipping easily into his well-known forensic style. He picked a red-and-black bug from his mustache and continued impressively:

"We have all pledged ourselves,

young men, to the service of our Alma Mater—to do for her whatever she worthily demands. This is the moment for sacrifice—for service rendered in whole-hearted devotion. We must all unite to preserve this fair, green campus of ours from imminent destruction. It is good that we can do this service. However menial—even ridiculous—it may be, I know you will do it with a will—for good old Berkeley. Mr. Juggins, at the coöperative store, tells me he has a large stock of paper boxes on hand. Under the direction of Mr. Schwartz, your competent yell leader, you will form in line, march to the co-operative store, there arm yourself, each with a box, and—ah—collect ladybugs for the good of the university. Professor Woodash will be in his laboratory to receive offerings. Classes will be suspended for the rest of the day. Now, young gentlemen——"

Prexy's final benediction was drowned in a roar. Instantly line was formed behind the official yell leader, and a thousand clamoring youths started a serpentine march across the campus amid enfranchised ladybugs. "Hip—hip—hip!"

Stuart Galbraith, down in the bottom of his heart sensing in himself the attributes of the First Assassin in a fine old Elizabethan blood-weltering tragedy, cast an eye at the college clock. It was near ten; Sampson would be at his desk in the *Monarch* office. He streaked it for a telephone.

A little breathlessly Galbraith poured over the wire an outline of the prodigy transpiring on the Berkeley campus. Back came the terse interruption:

"You say the president has asked a thousand able-bodied students to go out with little paper boxes and pick ladybugs off the green grass?"

"Yes, Mr. Sampson; and they're doing it now—the whole student body is picking ladybugs."

"Um—that's a good story," came the comment; "a first-rate story."

"That's what I thought, Mr. Sampson. I'll go to it hard!" exulted Galbraith.

"You've got the whole story up to date—how they got out of the laboratory, and all that?"

"Oh, sure, Mr. Sampson; I was on the job early; got what prexy said, and what old Woodash said, and all that."

"Well"—the voice over the wire was as hard as hammered brass—"I'll send Mulgrew and a photographer over to handle the story. You turn over to him what you've got; he'll write it. And, Galbraith, you be down at the station to meet Mulgrew and pilot him around. That's all. Good-by."

Stuart Galbraith, the putative hero of the Sotik, hung up the receiver and walked out of the telephone booth very, very slowly. For once, his enterprising legs veered toward union domination and signaled a strike. Under protest and pending arbitration, they carried him across a busy campus to the co-operative store. The suave Juggins met him at the door.

"Some story for your paper, eh, Galbraith?" he hailed.

"Juggins, give me a little paper box, if you've got any left," the rising young newspaper man answered, in a voice lifted from his bulldog shoes. "I guess I'll go out and pick ladybugs."

HANDING IT TO TILLMAN

REPRESENTATIVE HARDWICK, of Georgia, and his little daughter were on a train going to Washington when they were joined by Senator Tillman, the grand old man from South Carolina. Little Miss Hardwick became bored by the political talk of her father and the senator. The best she could get was slight attention from Mr. Tillman, who mechanically stroked her hair.

"I haven't seen any bears yet, papa," she exclaimed impatiently.

"My dear," said the senator kindly, "you know there are no bears in a civilized country."

"I know," replied Miss Hardwick, "but ain't we in South Carolina?"

When the Red Hills Threaten

By Vingie E. Roe

SYNOPSIS OF OPENING CHAPTERS

One night McConnel, factor of the little Hudson's Bay post at Fort lu Cerne, discovers Lois le Moyne in his private room and, his account book missing, he accuses her of the theft and imprisons her in the guardhouse. She denies her guilt but refuses to explain her stealthy visit. Both factor and the girl are headstrong, stubborn characters. The handful of population at Lu Cerne rise up in rebellion and endeavor to rescue Lois, but the factor quells the angry mob. One of the native men, Pierre Vernaise, pays regular visits to the prisoner, bringing her gifts and words of comfort, and falls in love with her. Freedom does not come to her for many weeks, and only then when an emissary of Governor Stanton appears and interests himself in the fair Lois. He is one Richard Sylvester, empowered with all authority over the post. Lois released, he also falls in love with the willful beauty, and because of her humiliation attacks McConnel murderously. A fight ensues in which both men are badly beaten. Meanwhile Pierre Vernaise, jealous and fretful, betakes himself to the deep woods where he falls in with a tribe of Indians who are performing strange rites to their god so that the great sickness, boding over the red hills in uncanny haze, may be averted.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GREAT RESULT.

IN the days of his convalescence, Sylvester pondered much. His quick mind was forming a plan that delighted him in its completeness. Over and over he spread out the details of all that had happened, and all that was to happen, and studied their bearing on the situation. He kept clear of McConnel, nursed his broken arm, and pulled his silky beard, musing.

Lois had said, with that cool tone of finality which there was no gainsaying, that she could not marry him because of the uncleared shadow of her disgrace, and that the killing of her persecutor would not lift it. It must be a living expiation, that which freed her, but how to compass it?

Nothing in the world, he knew, would ever force her clearance from the Scotchman's lips, since in the heavy processes of his intelligence he had elected to punish her. Sylvester could well follow these processes. First, the factor, cast iron, slow, elemental in his passions, had looked with favor on this regal girl, whose like was not in all the places of Sylvester's travels.

True to his nature, he had decided to have her. So he told her of his intention. Sylvester could see and hear him as he did this, stolid, matter of course, without passion or tact or winsomeness, making of it as much a matter of everyday as the casting of his accounts. He could see, too, the cold eyes of the girl, the disdainful lift of the head, as she turned away, vouchsafing no word, silent in her scorn of him that needed no justification. So had, very probably, been the beginning, when McConnel had awakened to the realization that he had been disdained in the deepest feeling of his nature—he, the factor of Fort lu Cerne, a power in his small world. What had passed in that peculiar soul of his, Sylvester could picture; also, the slow rage that had fanned itself into a flame, feeding on the sight of her each day, brooding in the lonely nights, until the anger and the humiliation had devised a way of squaring a resentment that was unbearable. So McConnel had himself hidden the book, and laid the theft on Lois. Whether the girl had ever been in the room at headquarters, Sylvester even doubted. True, she had not denied it, but was not that strange pride of spirit which

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would not let her explain further than to assert her innocence, responsible for that also? Sylvester as fully believed in her innocence as in McConnel's guilt.

And so he planned a way of reparation for the one, and of punishment for the other. Which thing was not so much to his credit as he thought, for it was not wholly of his own devising.

He walked around the settlement, talking to one and another, making much of the shy children, placing himself on a frank, familiar footing that found favor in the eyes of the many, who liked the new feeling of equality with one in a high place, one even above the factor, for all knew that he bore the company's favor. The older men—Blanc Corlier, Henri Boef, and a grizzled voyageur or two—accepted him with a grain of salt, standing aloof from one who boasted self-importance, yet dissipated it by prodigal association with his inferiors. One there was who would have naught to do with him—Simple John—who shut the door of his cabin in his face, and peered timidly with frowning eyes through the latch-string hole.

McConnel kept to his accustomed ways, the hours of the morning spent at his desk, a solitary walk out toward, and sometimes beyond, the great gate that opened into the forest, and his pipe and his thoughts in the cool dusk before his house, and they two did not meet.

Sylvester was waiting to think out every detail of his plan. And when he had perfected it, even to what he would say to those yet beyond him in authority when he should return to the beaten paths of mankind, he sought Lois le Moyne.

He took her hands, and held them close in his uninjured one, and his pale eyes burned sleepily.

"Lois," he said, while the voice in his throat leaped with his feeling, "Lois, I have thought it all out at last! I have found a way, not from McConnel, but through and over him. Fort lu Cerne shall see where rests the real suspicion of a power greater than this factor, with his clumsy methods, his cheap presumption, and his small revenge. I shall clear you, my royal queen, and then—claim you!"

That was on a morning, and from the Le Moyne cabin Sylvester went, himself, on a tour of the post, blithe, exulting, filled with the spirit of success, swelling with authority, finding a huge joy in the dramatic possibilities of the situation which lay so wholly now within his hands. From cabin to cabin he strolled, leaving at each a mysterious word, a grave command that its legal head be at the door of headquarters an hour by sun that evening.

After his leisurely line of progress ran a whiffle of excitement, like fire in prairie grass. Eyes were wide, and tongues stumbled over themselves and each other in their eagerness. The women ran from house to house, surging with the joy of gossip, badgering the girl's name from lip to lip, and the men gathered in wondering knots and groups.

Marcel Roque lost more than her temper, and slapped the wife of Marc Baupre. "Jackals!" she cried in her anger. "Hyenas! Skulkers in that safety of numbers! Would to Heaven Father Tenau was here, that he might give all the penance of the evil tongue!"

But nothing could quell the tumult of excitement that Sylvester had stirred up. All through the sunny hours of the day they buzzed and gabbled, and watched for chance developments. Long before the appointed time the men began to gather in little groups within a careless distance of headquarters, all eyes keen for the appearance of either Sylvester or McConnel. It was the end of a golden day, that. The sun, which had glowed all day in its glory, dropped gently toward the west, where the rim of the mighty forest made a dusky couch of sable velvet to receive it, casting long lavender shadows shot through with gilt and crimson, athwart the peaceful settlement.

Out of the twilight darkness of the woods came the eerie cry of a night bird calling plaintively to its mate. An indefinable touch of pathos seemed to breathe in the calm air, and no one felt its timid presence. No one? There

was one whose vague soul quivered to the undertone. Simple John, who slipped about uneasily, peering wistfully into the faces of the men.

Promptly at the appointed hour, Sylvester came from the Corlier cabin, and approached the bare space before the factor's house. He was immaculate in his finery of soft garments, of white linen and of shining hair and beard.

He waved his free hand, white and well kept, in a commanding circle, and the curious groups closed in.

"My friends," he said, taking the center of the space thus inclosed, "my friends of Fort lu Cerne, as the representative of the H. B. Company, I am about to perform a grave and solemn office, one which fills me with distaste, but which I feel must be performed, not only for the good of Fort lu Cerne, but for the best interests of the company itself, whose welfare comes before all else in the minds and hearts of those who serve it. Monsieur le Roc, will you please to summon here Mr. McConnel, the factor?"

He said no more, but stood in the soft light, slim, commanding, a trifle theatrical, in a thoughtful pose, caressing his broken wrist, that still hung in a white sling from his neck.

Palo le Roc dropped out of the circle, which numbered every man in the post who could walk, and went over the step and in at the big door of headquarters standing open in the warm evening. McConnel was in his little room beyond, clearing away the remnants of his solitary meal, slow, methodical, neat as a woman in his woman's work, and to Palo there seemed suddenly something pathetic about this big, somber man, stubborn, blundering, his feet sounding hollowly on the bare boards as he went back and forth in the dusk.

He delivered his message with the nearest approach to liking he had ever felt for the factor of Fort lu Cerne, and the other straightened his stooping shoulders, put down a pan he held, and together they passed back through the big room and out into the open.

McConnel cast a look across the crowd, gathered so suddenly and in such force, and strode into its center. He stood facing Sylvester squarely, his leonine head lifted and his steely eyes boring into the complaisant countenance of the other.

"I'm here," he said simply.

Sylvester deigned him no notice. Instead, he faced the circle of men, and began to speak.

"People of Fort lu Cerne," he said clearly, "not one of you but knows of the mysterious disappearance some months ago of the great book of accounts from the factor's desk at headquarters. Not one of you but knows the painful circumstances that have followed that disappearance, the accusation of theft laid upon you all that you might hide the amount of your debts to the company because of the poor winter that has passed, the fastening upon a young girl of your number the crime itself at the instigation of all of you, the throwing into a gloomy guardhouse for many weeks of that young girl, the merciless shooting down before your eyes of another of your number in your right and manly attempt to liberate a woman from such ignominy, and the continued absence and lack of endeavor to find and produce the book. All of this you know. But you do not know what I have good and sufficient reason for believing and accepting as the truth —that all of this heart-rending trouble which has lain so heavily upon you, especially in those two homes made more than desolate, has been the outcome of such fiendish spite that only the great hand of the company itself can avail to right the wrong. I solemnly believe, and say to you, that this man standing here has been the instigator of it all. What evidence I have and my reasons for this belief are matters for those at Henriette. And this brings me before my time to a place I should have reached some months later—for I must tell you now that I was destined of my uncle, Governor Stanton, to be factor of Fort lu Cerne in the coming spring.

"Therefore, in view of my coming authority, and for the good of the post, knowing it would be the will of the gov-

ernors at Henriette, I propose to take command at once, deposing this man, Angus McConnel, branding him as thief and maltreater, and freeing you all from the taint of ill dealing. And I would have you know that above all else I do exonerate that one who has suffered most of all—Lois le Moyne. This may be irregular, but I have the backing of those in authority, and take the consequences upon myself. From this time forth you are to look upon me as your factor."

Sylvester ceased, and a silence like the silence of death itself fell upon the crowd gathered there in the twilight.

All eyes turned to McConnel.

He stood where he had first stayed foot, and the look on his grim face went home to many a heart, prejudiced against him though they were.

The light was behind his sandy head, and the pale reflection from the east fell upon his lifted features. It was as if a sacrilegious hand had profaned an idol before a pale-faced priest bound hand and foot in the holy heart of the temple. The lines around the mouth that made it so stern were sunk deep and downward, the lips themselves, narrow and firm, betrayed in their very steadiness the soul of the man cut to its quick. The blue-steel of the eyes, cold and sharp as points of light, held their stubborn dignity with an effort. So he stood before them, this factor who had not spared them in his indomitable justice and zeal for the company which was his god, and took his ruin from that company. In his heart, dumb and stupid in its sudden disaster, he was saying over and over that, after all, blood was thicker than good service and a life's devotion. Stanton had betrayed him.

A moment so, and then he said, and his voice was steady:

"If that is all?"

Some tiny inflection of the tone nettled Sylvester, some vague hint of that force within this man which had made him factor of the company now defied its power to crush him.

"Yes," said Sylvester sharply; "it is all—and enough."

McConnel turned and plodded slowly with his accustomed gait through the crowd which gave way before him, up the step, and in at headquarters, closing the door behind him.

The dusk seemed to fall quickly after that, with the circle shifting uneasily, and Sylvester standing for a moment in the center, strangely at a loss for once, slightly abashed as to what he should do next. Presently he broke the awkward pause with a little laugh, greatly at variance with the tone of that which had passed, and started to shoulder his way out toward the edge.

He did not go toward the Le Moyne cabin, walking away with Blanc Corlier to where the early candles guttered in the windows.

The crowd broke up in little groups that stood around in the dusk, and talked in half-awed whispers, wondering and still, and they did not know, these men, whether they were glad or not for their collective vindication.

But within the small inclosure in the big, hushed room, McConnel, the sometime factor of Fort lu Cerne, laid his heavy arms on the rude desk, and dropped his face upon them, and for the first time in his primitive life a few scant tears, scalding and bitter, forced their hard way from his unyielding eyes to drop, one by one, upon the badge of his ambition—that same desk of a factor of the company.

And presently a hand touched his knee, a fluttering hand, with a vague, uncertain touch, and up from the floor beside him there rose grotesquely the peering face of Simple John, dim and indistinct in the shadows.

The idiot leaned near and boldly, yet with a strange, gentle seeming of sympathy, put a hand on the man's shoulder.

"Master!" he whimpered. "Master!"

CHAPTER XII.

MEMORIES OF FORT LU CERNE.

Early on the following morning, Sylvester sent by the clerk, Henri, a written document to headquarters, wherein he commanded in legal terms McConnel

to abdicate, closing the blockhouse, all but the storeroom, the keys of which he should give to Palo le Roc, who would deliver them to him.

It was a heavy document, filled with impressive phrases, and Sylvester sat up half the night perfecting it painfully with his left hand. There was something in the back of his sensitive consciousness which made him put into it all the force of legality and power that he could muster, an uneasy feeling of uncertainty.

He dispatched it with a vague misgiving, and then sat in the cool morning shadow of the cabin while old Blanc's young wife prepared the breakfast.

They rose early, the people of Fort lu Cerne. The sun was yet invisible behind the dense wall of the sleeping forest, and the cool of the night hung softly over the world. The sky was a soft pale blue, with a flush of pink in the east like the rose in a bride's cheeks, and long streaks of gold shot widely up across the illimitable expanse of the deep, far heavens. Sylvester fell to thinking dreamily of the woman for whose sake he had tried to do so much, and for whose sake again he would do anything that a whimsical and perverse fate might set before him. He leaned comfortably against the wall of the Corlier cabin, fresh and well clad as always, his thin face somewhat pale from the long hours of the past night spent in thought and effort, and his eyes full of pleasant dreams.

Presently old Blanc came out and joined him.

"A hot day, m'sieu," he said, shaking his head; "a hot day again. Yesterday was too hot for an easy mind, the more so since a loon trailed its unholy laughter low across the post last night at dark."

Sylvester laughed.

"A very harmless bird, Corlier. The weather is growing very warm, I'll admit, but you must remember that the summer is full upon us. Isn't it always so at this time of year?"

Blanc picked up a sliver from the ground at his feet, and began to shape it into a fantastic toy with a huge knife that always hung at his belt.

He was a deliberate man, yet one ever ready with his tongue.

"No, m'sieu," he said presently, "not altogether. It is warm, hot even, yes, always at this time of year, but not as it is now. Not as it is now, when the Red Hills do not burn against the sky. Look you, m'sieu, to the north yonder. They have look' so only once since I can remember in the history of Fort lu Cerne. True, there have been times before, twice before, but that was when I was young, a venturesome youngster buying my life each day from the Indians at the gun mouth, an' long before there was aught on the site of Fort lu Cerne but the big woods. Since—'twas twenty full year back. You have not seen, m'sieu, the small pieces of a black habit hidden in the altar of the church yonder? True, the good father has not been to the post since you have been among us. 'Tis part of a habit of the Order of the Sacred Heart, an' 'twas worn by that small, fair saint, the little Sister Felice, whose spotless life was sacrifice' that Fort lu Cerne, scourged by the great sickness, might be spared in its misery.

"'Tis a tale sad in its telling.

"That year the Red Hills burn' in the north, an' the heat come down, quick, like it fall this time, swift, without grace of more than a week of growing, a sudden heat, an' the flowers dry up on the stalks an' the streams shrivel in their beds an' the people began to sicken in the post. You can see yet the row of mounds behin' the church. That was how they died. Eh, *mon Dieu!* 'Tis no pleasant thing to recall, m'sieu. The little ones, an' the young maids, an' the mothers—the youths strong in their red-cheeked health—they all went down like the ripe corn. How swift they died! There was pretty Aline Leoise, an' Marie Duboff, an' Petri Bordier—a harvest rich in its gain of youth. We sent a courier quick down the long trail by wood and water in the big streams, to Father Tenau, a young man then; an' from his convent an' his monastery, small log missions in the wilderness

beyond Henriette to the west, he brought his monks an' sisters to aid the stricken post. How they wept an' laughed an' reached their eager hands for help, those sick ones, when that line came marching into Fort lu Cerne! An' at the tail, m'sieu, *she* came, the little Sister Felice, meek an' small, an' with her eyes downcast an' her rosary at her side! Ah, such beauty! Even those far gone in the sickness looked on her with joy.

"They were indeed angels, those calm-faced ones, ministering to the ill, consoling the dying. An' then, m'sieu, came that black morning when the Crees an' the Blackfeet—it was before the Crees were friends of the post, an' were allied to that powerful and almost unknown tribe—dropped in a night, encircled the post, an' demanded a white sacrifice from those at Fort lu Cerne to appease the Great Spirit that had afflicted them. for they had died like sheep for a long time before the sickness reached us here."

The narrator stopped a moment, and inspected the toy which had neared completion. Sylvester was watching him, with his sleepy eyes wide. He was deeply interested in this tale of the past.

"The factor, McKilgore, an' a good man, swore to fight till the last log in the stockade was riddled. It was a good wall then—'tis not so good now." Blanc raised his white head and looked all around the peaceful scene, where the pale-blue light had turned to deepest rose and gold of day. His wife called from behind in the door that the early meal was ready, but the two men sat on.

"It was a hopeless chance, just the same. The Indians were there by thousands, an' it was of a uselessness, the holding out. They knew it, all. 'Twas but the waste of all the lives in the post, an' so, m'sieu, this little nun, this small Sister Felice, with the face of an angel, she rush' out the gate before any perceive' what she would do, an' throw herself into the hands of the fiends that wait an' howl without. The little gate, there toward the south, where a path went out to a spring beyond.

"It was enough. They took her, m'sieu, those spawn of hell, an' all within the post wait' an' cower, an' the women whimper, an' the faces of the men were white. I remember. I was young then, m'sieu, an' I cared only to die that moment with the horror. But the factor, he hold the gate, an' command no man to move. One in command must ever act for the good of the many, m'sieu—an' after—they raise' aloft a long pole, an' over the stockade look' the face, the lovely little face of Sister Felice. But the post was safe.

"They marched away, those Indians, an' we saw them no more. That was in the savage days. Now they have turn', most, to the religion, an' Father Tenau he hold them all in the hollow of his hand. But still there remain' within the church altar those pieces of the black habit which the factor picked up before the little gate. An' m'sieu, that year the copper mist hung, so, in the Red Hills. Yes, Maren, we come to the meal."

Sylvester lifted himself as from a long cramp, and looked incredulously toward the little church standing out with its face toward the light, and in its cool shadow he could perceive a row of graves.

He shook his head wonderingly, and turned to follow old Blanc into the cabin.

As he did so a boy handed him a missive. It was scrawled in McConnel's painful writing, and it said abruptly, without preface:

> I will not forsake my duties as factor of Fort lu Cerne until you or another is duly sworn and established with the sign of the company at Henriette to take my place.
>
> ANGUS MCCONNEL.

He read it and put it in a pocket, and for some reason he was not surprised at its contents. It seemed as if the uncertainty and the misgiving had crystallized in this defiance. He knew now that he had not expected McConnel to obey.

The anger that was always in him toward this crude, opposing force rose high, and he swore beneath his breath, though he was calmness itself as he sat at meat with these simple people. He

knew he had struck a master blow, that no punishment in this life or the next would ever flail the soul of McConnel as did this casting out from the place of factor. Yet in his humiliation, bitter, he knew, to this silent man as had ever been the ignominy of the guardhouse to Lois, he still stood out against him, holding the last card in this game of give-and-take.

Still, in the eyes of the populace, he had done what he had intended—disgraced McConnel, lifted the girl by the shifting of the load of suspicion, and he was, in a measure, satisfied. It only remained for him to take now the good the gods provided, and then the long journey down to civilization under the amorous sun by day and the stars by night, for he contemplated a trip to Henriette that he might gain at once the approbation of the governors for his deed. This Father Tenau was due before a great while, and he could marry them. Every nerve in Sylvester's body tingled with the joy of anticipation. So he left the cabin and went abroad in the languorous day. He wanted Lois, wanted her away by herself, that he might see in the broad light the full glory of his conquest on her wondrous face. Fate was kind to him, that fickle fate which plays at shuttlecock with a man's desires, his fears, his hopes, and his ambition.

At the well beside the entrance to the stockade he saw her filling her pails for the day, and he hurried to her.

"Put them down, Lois, the pails, and come with me out along the path to the forest," he cried, like a boy. "Come! I have much to say to you. Come, Lois."

The girl looked up and then down, and after a moment she obeyed. But as they two passed out the big gate she turned involuntarily, and cast a swift glance back across the post, a strange glance, indeed, that had the man observed, might have set him a-wondering, so full was it of confliction.

Sylvester did not talk as they passed along the broad trail out from the post, and finally entered into the heart of the woods, which pushed and crowded so close to the habitation of man. Then he turned abruptly and faced her.

"Is it enough?" he cried. "Oh, love of my heart, is it enough?" His free hand was on her shoulder. The girl straightened her young body, and raised her head. She was filled with emotions that surged like a sea, triumph that gloated in a secret joy, hatred that all through the hours of a sleepless night had sated itself on a picture of a man torn from the pinnacle of his life's pride, cast out from honor in the face of the people, branded, disgraced. humiliated—aye, even as she had been, pressed down by the higher hand to drink the bitter waters as he had pressed her down, stabbed to his deepest heart by the thing he worshiped even as she had been stabbed by——

She caught the breath on her parted lips, and shut them calmly.

"It is enough, m'sieu," she said.

Sylvester swept her into his embrace. She yielded her quiescent lips with readiness, but there was something in it, this willing surrender that yet held aloof, as if a young willow bent pliantly to a compelling hand only to spring back to its own place at the moment of release.

And thereby Lois. the lawless, bought and paid for her revenge.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE THREAT FULFILLED.

The night that followed these events was most remarkable. At the close of the day, when the burning sun went down behind the forest, and there should have been the springing up of the little evening breeze, there lay over the post a heavy, silent heat. The hours of darkness were almost as hot as had been the day.

All over Fort lu Cerne the doors and windows stood open, and from many a cabin came the fretful crying of the children. The restlessness pervaded the atmosphere. From a window near the northern wall there sputtered and shone a candle for a time; then it went out, and presently it was lighted again.

Some one there slept, and awoke, and did some homely task, to settle back to a sleep that would not come, and rose again, and again sought rest. It seemed as if the entire settlement shared an uneasiness, like cattle that stir and grumble and settle drowsily, to stir again all through the herd when there is danger somewhere near. At three of the clock, Palo le Roc stepped out of his house where Tessa tossed wearily. He could not sleep, and so he stood on the step in the dark and looked around.

It was very quiet. The dogs sniffled and curled themselves and got up and lay down, without lessening the sense of silence. Presently Palo discerned a figure standing like himself, silent, looking around, a dim shape in the opening. He stepped softly off the sill, and approached.

It was Marc Baupre.

"The rest, it will not come—eh, Marc?" said Palo.

"Not all the night," returned the other.

"It is some evil. The feeling is abroad."

They spoke in hushed voices that seemed to go with the night.

"Assuredly."

"Again last dusk the loon that is nesting late below the Wau-gash cried its infernal call above the palisade."

"I know. Netta is whimpering in the cabin now with the low spirits."

"And the blue heron circled three times over the inclosure two days ago. Beside, look you, Marc Baupre, to the Red Hills."

Palo le Roc, trapper in the Ragged Lands, hunter, voyageur, knew the signs of the evil things like an Indian.

The two men turned to the north.

Far up the reach of the dark sky there glowed a pale ghost of the deep-copper hue that hung steadily above the range of hills by day.

"Nom de Dieu!" said Marc, frowning. "Yes."

" 'Tis the sickness," said Palo quietly; "the great sickness, and it is near upon us."

"Of a truth, Palo, I believe it."

They stood some time looking at the uncanny light.

"There will be work for the priest, for it has all the omens of evil. I would that he was here, the good father. There will be many go without the shriving this time."

"And the women—they are more at ease when the hand of the church is stretch' out within reach. Look you, how still is the post, yet it is there, the unrest."

"Fort lu Cerne is indeed in the throes of trouble. How it will end this other, between the factor and Sylvester, we know not. Things are of a strain without the sickness."

A dog somewhere at the southern part of the settlement lifted its throat and howled long and dolorously.

" 'Tis the last touch, that warning," said Le Roc.

Marc Baupre shivered.

"But we get the old women," he said, with a short laugh. "We whimper before we are hit."

"Blanc Corlier has known it from the early spring. We have need to prepare ourselves. I have many bunches of herbs already drying in the chimney throat. But I wish we could get one of the old women of the Crees. They know more."

Palo was thinking of Tessa.

"If that young scapegrace, Pierre Vernaise, were but where one might lay the hand upon him it might be possible. He knows every medicine man among them."

"But where is he? He has been gone these many weeks."

"Of a surety—as he ever is when he is wanted."

Palo turned toward his cabin.

"We must send a courier. Aye, with the light, Baupre. I feel the need."

The two separated and went each back to his cabin, but the sleep that would not come was farther from the minds of both than before that meeting in the hushed darkness.

The hours dragged by, and the night was almost gone when that for which the post had been waiting came upon it. With the first pale light of day Marie

Mercier came hurrying bareheaded along the main way to the door of Palo le Roc, to whom all who knew him turned in time of trouble.

She struck the open lintel with her knuckles.

"M'sieu le Roc," she called excitedly. "Palo!"

The man, fully dressed, rose quietly, and went out to her.

"What is it, Marie?"

"Come to the house at the instant," she cried. "It is Jean!"

Palo closed the door carefully, that Tessa, fallen at last into a troubled slumber, might not wake and hear. Then he turned to Marie, and they set out swiftly.

"How is it with Jean?" he queried.

"Mercy of God, m'sieu, I fear it is the sickness! He woke but now with a troubled tongue, raving of other things than he has known these many days, and the eyes of him! The eyes of him! So blank, m'sieu, an' bright with fever." She broke her speech, and fell to sobbing a little as they hurried.

When they reached the cabin and entered, Palo le Roc, who had seen the sickness before, went straight to the bed in the corner, where Big Jean had lain these many weeks.

At the first glance he knew that the grip of the factor's bullet had given place to a greater foe, in the shadow of whose victory the wasted form on the bed was already entering.

"Marie, you return to the cabin, and tell Tessa to give you down the herbs drying in the chimney. Be swift," he said sharply.

Then he set to work on what he felt was a hopeless task, but while life lasted there was hope, and no one of this scant handful of human beings hemmed in by the wilderness should go out without an effort on the part of the rest to hold him back.

The hurrying steps in the hot, still dawn, and the low sobs of the woman, brought into the doors the tired inmates of the houses.

"Marie?" called Marcel Roque as she passed. "Is that you, Marie?"

"Yes, an' it has fallen, the sickness. Out of all the well ones it has touch' the first poor Jean!" and she fled along, sobbing still.

Marcel Roque caught her breath, and turned instinctively to where the wizened child lay on a pallet on the floor.

"Father in heaven!" she whispered; "not him!"

Then she stepped out, and bravely set forth to the cabin of the Merciers.

Whatever they were in Fort lu Cerne, they stood hard by in illness and in death.

In a few moments, while the light was broadening in the east, and the warm dusk was turning into hot day, the word had run like fire around the settlement, and they began to gather in the yard of the stricken home.

They spoke in awed whispers, standing in little groups, and the great fear was upon them. Within, old Blanc Corlier and Marc Baupre helped Palo to bathe the gaunt form with a warm lotion made of the sweet-smelling herbs, and into the hearts of them, so cast about between the warring factions of Fort lu Cerne, there fell a little more bitterness when they came upon, in Big Jean's side, the yet unhealed wound of the rifle ball, sucked in, black and sullen, between the outstanding ribs.

"Shame!" said Blanc Corlier openly.

"Aye, more than shame, Blanc," answered Baupre; "murder. Without this Jean would have his chance with the sickness. Now he has none."

"Hush!" said Le Roc softly. "Marie is there at the step."

And so began the fight in the settlement.

All through that day they hung over him, this babbling shadow of a strong man, and through the night, and the night that followed, the men standing turns, and the women taking care of Little Jean, that Marie might be free to hover round the bed where she had tended so long, gazing with mist-filled eyes and crossing herself at intervals, muttering prayers.

It could not of a surety be of long endurance, the battle, and at dusk of the fourth day Palo le Roc gravely

lighted four candles, and did what he could for the passing soul in the absence of the good father, with his tender counsel and his consolation.

All the populace went softly in and out in the twilight, taking a last look at Big Jean, quietly breathing his life away, Big Jean, who had been so strong, but who lay now as the sickness had caught him, without understanding, only now the restless babbling had departed, and the peace of the wearied soul nearing the Great Sleep lay upon him.

All the populace?

One there was who stayed far away, shivering in the Corlier cabin—Sylvester, nervous, biting his finger nails, and frowning, cursing whatever gods he served that he had not gone from Fort lu Cerne before this thing befell.

But he was the only one, for on that last night, when the candles burned in the gloom, and the trappers and the women stood around, silent, sympathetic, waiting, and Marie sobbed wearily by the white-sheeted bed, a square figure darkened the red light of the dying day in the doorway, and McConnel strode in among them.

He was the same man that he had ever seemed to the people—stern, heavy, forbidding; but in the hard face of him new lines had graven their difficult way, a subtle change showed dimly forth, as if the hand of pain had swept his features, leaving them bewildered, dazed, half stupid with its revelation. He had taken his hat off at the door, and as he stepped to the bed and looked down at the man lying there, the light of the candles picked out weirdly his square, frowning face, with its look of stubborn perplexity that was akin to that of some great animal struggling toward a light far off, yet beset and hampered and sore wounded in the dark swamp, his shock of sandy hair, and his mighty shoulders.

This was the man who had, in one sense, killed Jean Mercier, and now stood and looked upon him, and the sharp blue of his eyes flickered with changing lights. There was in that look no relenting for the deed he had done, yet many of those standing in the shadows, whose perceptions were sharp with the instinct of the lone places beheld in it a stern pity that would not break through the unbending reserve which made of his mixed blood a pure Scotchman.

He did not speak, this Angus McConnel, who had done his best for his conception of right, and in so doing had persecuted almost beyond enduring this simple people intrusted to his care—just stood and looked down at Big Jean in the heartbreaking light of the death candles, and his lips were tight. Within that little cabin was gathered the old set of trouble that has overthrown empires and shed blood since the world has stood—the authority of law, the helplessness of the law-abiding, and misunderstanding between the two.

It was a hard moment, yet that very sternness that had made the factor shoot Big Jean at the guardhouse door in the serving of right, now brought McConnel to pay the last tribute to him as he was about to depart.

It was near the end of many things, and a thousand emotions burned and surged within the dusky room.

Presently the Scotchman turned and strode out the door, silent as he had come. The breath of Big Jean took on suddenly its final struggle as the last light died out of the heavens.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GREAT SICKNESS.

They buried Big Jean the next morning, with Marie sobbing miserably, and Little Jean clinging, wide-eyed, to his mother's skirts. Palo le Roc read a service, the service that Father Tenau had given them to be said in case of death between his half-yearly trips, and little Jaqua Bleaurot, standing in the dry light of the early day, already breathless with heat, lifted her voice, a sweet, clear voice, like that of a bird in the cool depths of the woods, and sang a requiem, also taught by the priest. They bared their heads, the large circle of the populace, and lis-

tened, and only the girl, with her face lifted in her solemn song, looked toward heaven, for the fear of the uncanny blight that had fallen upon them held their eyes to the gaping earth.

At one side of the circle, with her back against the church, and a hand on old Jacques' shaking arm, stood Lois le Moyne, while directly across from her McConnel frowned at the slowly falling clods.

Sylvester was not there.

This was the beginning, and could that handful of people have seen into the future they would have beheld a strange sight, for it was destined that before many weeks had dragged their anguished length away, Fort lu Cerne would be an echoing desolation, whose people were scattered like chaff in the wind, whose doors stood open with none to enter, and whose dead lay unburied with naught between them and the pitiless sky but the slender hands of one young girl.

But it was well they could not see beyond the day.

As they separated and went back to the little tasks of the households and trivial things of everyday, Marcel Roque fell into step beside Lois, carrying little Solliere on her shoulder, where his soft curls brushed her cheek, and walked with the two down the main way.

"Of a verity it has come, *ma chérie,*" she sighed.

As she spoke, Lois saw her arms tighten involuntarily around the delicate limbs of the child.

This girl was not given to pity and the weaknesses of women, but deep within her peculiar soul she felt a thrill of something that was akin to fear.

This thing had not spared poor Jean in his helplessness—what if it should ask of Marcel, the sturdy, the strong, the charitable, the good Marcel, this wee and pitiable child, this one idol of her heart?

Lois' brows drew together in a scowl.

How much Marcel was to her self-sufficient spirit she herself did not know, but that lovely quality in the elder woman which had held her standing by in the face of all that had passed, had made her a thing apart, a woman above women, a friend that was worthy of the name.

Lois looked into her face.

"Fear not, Marcel," she said, "fear not."

Marcel caught the look and its understanding.

"Yes," she said simply, "there I am the coward, Lois; an' I am weak at the knees this minute. It could not be—it would not be permit of *le bon Dieu,* yet I am of the terror unspeakable."

With a motion infinite in its tenderness, she slipped her hand up the tiny body until it rested yearningly upon the misshapen shoulders.

She did not speak again, but walked on, lost in reverie.

At her door she nodded to Lois and Jacques, and passed in out of the sun, the beautiful face of the boy looking back across her shoulder.

Old Jacques cackled senilely as he tottered along.

"The big an' the strong an' the young, they go, an' here am I," he chuckled; "an' like to be here when the sickness abates."

Lois shuddered.

"Hush!" she said sharply.

That night at dusk, Sylvester came to the Le Moyne door. He had kept indoors all day, never showing his head while the sun was above the horizon. An insane desire for immediate flight had come over him, crowding to the wall his usual sharp reason.

He would leave this stricken post, he and Lois, at once. Once away in the forest and they would be safe. There the sun could not reach them in its ferocity, and the big streams were yet sweet and running. Ever since the news that the fever had come had spread over the settlement, he had battled with this desire, but now, with the first death, he had succumbed.

He would tell Lois that they must go at once.

He found her this evening sitting on the log that served as step to the cabin, her elbows on her knees, and her eyes frowning out across the post and the

dark rim of the forest across the lilac sky. Old Jacques had gone to sleep within, like a very young child that grows drowsy as night comes. It was still breathlessly warm, with no breeze, and the silence seemed dry.

Over in her cabin, Marie Mercier was crying drearily, the regular, long sound of her sobs sounding distinctly, and with an itinerant, hopeless sadness.

Sylvester felt as if his nerves were wound up tight.

He laughed a forced, thin laugh, that neither deceived the girl on the step nor himself, as he approached.

Lois rose to place him a chair, but he waved her back and sat down on the log beside her.

She resumed her position silently. They sat so, without speech, while the twilight deepened and the swift night fell. Over beyond the palisades the night bird had begun to call.

Presently the man laid his soft hand on Lois' arm.

She did not move, still gazing into the shadows.

"Lois," he said, "I have come to ask a great favor of you to-night. Will you grant it, my beloved?" He leaned nearer with that persuasive manner that he knew so well, only now he was unconscious of it, for once in his life when it concerned a woman, wholly and desperately in earnest.

He loved this girl with a passion that racked him—a passion of his own instilling had racked many a woman for his careless sake in days gone by.

"Will you?" he whispered.

"Yes, m'sieu," said Lois quietly, "if I can."

There was nothing in the words themselves, but they sent a chill through Sylvester's heart.

"What is it that I can grant, m'sieu?"

"This, beloved," the man's voice shook with a genuine affection as he spoke the beautiful and stately word which so well suited this maid of the wilderness, "this—come away with me at once from this stricken place. I know the priest is not here to marry us, but Le Roc can say a service over us, taking witness of our promise, and we can find the father at Henriette once we arrive. Or——" He hesitated a moment, and Lois caught the pause.

"Or what, m'sieu?"

"Or we can take your father with us as guard for the eyes of the world."

This last came hard from Sylvester. Old Jacques had been a question with him on that trip down the long trail. He had seen it stretch out before him, a glory of love, of unreal reality, a dream of an earthly heaven with the romance of the mighty forest behind and around and before when they two, together and alone, should go through the silent places, building their fires afar from human kind, dreaming their dreams under the stars, following the dim trails as if they were alone upon the earth with no eye upon them, and nothing to mar the perfect days.

The thought of the querulous old man had sickened him from the first.

The whole plan of his thoughts lay plain beneath his words.

He could not see in the dark the narrowing of her lids, nor the set of her lips. When she spoke, her voice had not changed.

"No, m'sieu; this that you ask I cannot grant."

"But why, Lois?" he cried, aghast. "In Heaven's name, why?"

"Why? For—many reasons," she answered, and was silent under the torrent of his words poured out of his heart, so filled with fears and pulling desires.

"I will marry you, m'sieu, yes, as I promised; but I will not run from the sickness in Fort lu Cerne—to save myself."

Far into the night this man sat on the log step of old Le Moyne's cabin, and pleaded with all the eloquence he could command, but he won no other answer than that he had received.

When at last he rose to go, he felt a weariness in all his being, a strange finality, as if this girl had put the seal of fate upon his life, for he knew that where she stayed, there he would remain, even though death lurked in the tarrying.

"Will you kiss me once, Lois, of your

own will?" he asked, standing before her with his feverish hand on her shoulder. Something of his accustomed arrogance was abated. It was with a new deference that he asked the question.

Lois had never kissed a man in her life.

When she was very little, crying in old Jacques' arms on a long foot journey from some place she did not remember, her father had petted her, coaxing the child to caress him in turn, but the baby lips had pulled away, and they had been inviolate ever since.

Now, in the dark, with the sound of poor Marie's grief for the man she had loved in her ears, the girl leaned forward, and kissed Sylvester on the lips.

He turned sharply away, and disappeared in the night, and the whole soul of him was shaken to its shallow depths with that calm, cool touch.

He dared not remain longer, nor speak a word of good night. He could not trust his trembling tongue.

As for Lois herself, when he had gone she again sat down upon the step, and, turning her head, rubbed her lips hard against her shoulder. The palms of her hands, too, she instinctively cleansed with the leaves of the poor little golden trailer, pitiable reminder of Pierre Vernaise, her good friend, whose slender length drooped wearily against the logs, its bravery of velvet bells withered and scorched by the heat.

For a long time Lois sat there, giving her mind to the thoughts that passed in a marching line across it, and dominant among them was ever that of McConnel.

She saw him the night before her imprisonment—strong, silent man—passing back and forth among his people, stern, unreadable as herself in his own way, self-reliant, just, a figure to arrest the notice, and of that time the memory did not sting.

She saw a picture, too, that none but herself in Fort lu Cerne had ever seen, and at its beholding the crimson flush rose dully to stain her face in the darkness.

Again she saw his face and the furious sparkle of his eyes as he caught her arm that night in the big room of headquarters, felt its brutal force as he dragged her out the door, across the open space, and down the main way of the road to where the group of men talked by the stockade wall; felt it again when he threw her into the guardhouse; and even now, after all the months that had passed from that early night in the young spring to this in the heart of the summer, there rose in her throat the choking sense of fury, the blind rage that held her that terrible night. The fingers lying loose in her lap curled again in its grip.

She felt once more the presence of the two men at the guardhouse window, heard the factor's voice, and the startled——

"Good Lord! A woman!" of Sylvester's ejaculation.

She saw the face of the new man, read its depth and character, and again she saw stretched out before her the quick-laid plan whose consummation sat this very night in the echoing hollowness of the blockhouse upon the face of McConnel—a haggard face, whose every line said failure as plainly as a written page, failure that bit so deep into the slow soul of him that its scars would stand out livid and sore so long as life lasted.

This picture it was which brought peace and healing to the heart of Lois le Moyne. In its contemplation she took pay for the unutterable abasement of the time.

She saw McConnel, no longer the factor of Fort lu Cerne save in his stubborn holding on until Sylvester should be duly authorized by other word than his own, publicly cast out from the post whose winning had been the acme of his life's ambition, suddenly shifted under the load that she had borne, branded, disgraced, sent out to his old life in the wilderness as a common trapper—and behind it all the thing in her own heart that he had awakened himself.

The rare smile played around the girl's lips, but in her frowning eyes there lay a shadow of weariness.

And lastly she saw one more picture —Sylvester, the man to whom she had given herself.

Presently she rose and went in, stopping by the bed where old Jacques lay, to listen if the old man breathed aright.

With a gentle touch, she slid the window yet wider open, that any breath of air there might be astir should give him of its cooling.

As Fort lu Cerne arose to another day it looked its neighbor in the face half fearfully, asking an unspoken question, and sighing with relief when the answer was a clear countenance.

No one knew where the thing, hovering like something alive in the golden sunlight above the settlement, would lay its finger next.

Mothers watched their children covertly, forbore to scold, and snatched them up for sudden caresses, young men sped the words of love upon their lips to the maids they chose, and old men touched the withered fingers of their wives with tenderness, for none knew who would answer next to the irresistible call.

"All well with you?" asked Palo le Roc of France Thebau.

"So far," was the answer, given in a guarded voice, as if he feared the Power might overhear.

"And you, Corlier?"

"Aye!"

"At your house, Marc?"

"May the good God receive praise—yet, m'sieu."

So the roll call went around.

That day was one of odd quiet above a strain of anxiety.

They talked in low voices, and visited back and forth among the cabins, the older people recalling that other time of the pestilence, and those who had gone out on the long journey then.

The women passed pityingly in and out of the lonely cabin of Marie, with its empty white bed in the corner, saying the tender, useless things that women say to each other in such a time. Little Jaqua huddled beside her friend with a show of sympathy that was new to her Of late a different look had been growing on the girl's piquant face, a seeming of awakening womanhood, with its sweet gravity, its wider view of the things of life, its capacity for suffering.

Love was making of the little maid a woman.

Before the sun went down a white-faced man came running from the southern side of the settlement, flinging up his hands, and shouting:

"My little ones! Two! Mary Mother! The two of them at once!"

The scourge was beginning its work.

The two children of the voyageur had fallen ill simultaneously. One, a fair-haired girl of four, already lay helpless in the stupor that portended the long fight; the other, a little fellow just big enough to crawl, was bright-eyed with the raging fever which would quickly wear the tiny body out.

Fort lu Cerne went to work at its apprenticeship to death.

In two days they laid the baby next to Big Jean in the shadow of the church, and before the little girl gave up the struggle the touch had fallen in three other homes.

Here and there it made its choice, without reason or uniformity, striking one down with a sudden blow, torturing the hard-fighting life out of another like slow fire.

Death and the shadow of death began to hang black and awful over the post.

Indefatigable in the struggle was Palo le Roc. Weak and ailing herself, Tessa bade him go each day among those who needed his calm strength and the support of his unfailing courage. Early he had sent a courier to the west in search of the camps of the Crees, that they might send a doctress, and every night he watched anxiously the big gate for sign of an arrival.

But day followed day, and no one came.

CHAPTER XV.

DEATH AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

Five new mounds blistered staringly beside those others which the pitying hand of time had smoothed and softened into mild sightliness.

The flowers in the few gardens of the fort begged timidly for rain from the hard blue sky, and, failing of an answer, hung their pretty heads, drooped helplessly a day or two, and died, hanging on their withered and dried stalks like bodies crucified.

The water in the well by the gate sank a foot from its accustomed line.

There was no breath of air, and the heat became unbearable, beating down upon the cabins from a brassy sky that seemed remote and inaccessible.

From all over Fort lu Cerne prayers thronged up to it like a flight of doves by night and day. Candles burned in every home beneath a crucifix or a picture of the Madonna, and the beads of the rosary clicked constantly in one hand or another.

Lips trembled and eyes fell into the sad habit of filling suddenly, to be lightened by a brave smile. Pitiful days they were that glowed and departed above the palisade.

One by one they dropped beneath the sickness, the people of Fort lu Cerne, until in every other house there was either a filled bed or a sadly empty one.

From cabin to cabin went tirelessly Marcel Roque, her hearty voice and sturdy kindliness easing the load on many a shoulder, and none knew, save only her husband, Eustace, and Lois le Moyne, that underneath her outside bravery her heart shook with terror.

The wizened little boy continued to play his quiet games on the doorstep or in the shade of the cabin as if no danger were anywhere in the world.

"It is the hand of *le bon Dieu,*" whispered the mother. "In no other manner would he be spared so long."

Palo le Roc, big, splendid man, clear-seeing, kindly, was a pillar of strength to his neighbors. By day and night he stood by death to ease the struggle, and leaned his shoulder under the burden of the bereft.

As if he had been the good father himself, they drew upon his resources, minding his words like children, feeling a greater safety if he was near.

Every hand was turned to the common good, those who had shut their own into the sun-baked earth turning from the new graves to lend a touch of help to the next stricken ones. To a man they worked as one, save those three whose lives had become so sadly mixed together—McConnel, shut into the lonely emptiness of headquarters, putting things into the finest order for the coming of his successor; Sylvester, watching himself jealously for symptoms; and Lois le Moyne, whose sullen heart yearned over the monkey-faced old creature hobbling happily around in his bright habiliments. She petted him with hand and voice and eye, caring for his comfort, making the things he liked to eat, filling the stifling days with all the pleasantness she could. A premonition clutched at her soul, chilling it with fear—she, who feared nothing upon the earth or under it. This aged man was her one known weakness. She understood perfectly the cowardice of Marcel.

The passing of those others was nothing to her. She only went to the daily buryings beneath the burning sun to please him. The solemn service was getting to be a hackneyed thing, the death song of Jaqua Bleaurot had fixed its incomprehensible Latin words in every heart, and fear had lost its potency by reason of its commonness.

"Lois, *ma chêrie,*" said Marcel one day, "come out among us an' lend of the help an' strength the good God have cause' you to have. See how young an' strong an' fine you are. They have need of you, those out there in those cabins—ah, such need!—an' of many more like you. There is need of the passing of cool water from the well every hour, an' there cannot be too many willing hands. Palo an' Marc an' old Blanc an' Henri an' France an' many others they move back and forth all day, an' still they call from the cabins. Will you come, Lois?"

Marcel put her hand on the girl's arm, and her kindly eyes, that saw so far into the reality of life, begged of this strange nature its best.

Lois shook her head.

"For you, Marcel," she said firmly,

"anything. For those others, nothing. An eye for an eye."

Marcel dropped her hand, sighed, and walked away to her work of mercy.

"Now what, Marcel Roque?" said one of the women she had scourged by the well that day, and who had witnessed this scene.

Her eyes were full of tears, and she raised her head, ready to fight.

"Still is Lois above you all," she cried, "even in her hardness!"

Lois, hearing the words of the raised voice, turned into the cabin.

"Rare Marcel!" she said gently.

Slowly, hotly, the days passed. Despair sat white-faced and grim at every turning, to be thrust aside by work that grew with the passing hours, grew in volume and difficulty, and in its unceasing demands. One by one they buried their dead, and presently it came to be by twos and threes, and twice in the day—those who had died in the night going to swell the account beside the church in the morning, and those of the day being laid to sleep in the dusk.

Palo le Roc had caused the church to be opened and the tall candles burned on the altar without ceasing. Jaqua Bleaurot tended them, and many tears fell on the rude rail of the chancel as the little maid prayed for the life and soul of one far away on the uncertain trails—one whose merry face was sad for love of another.

"Mother of Mercy!" whimpered Netta Baupre, her hands trembling and her young face full of the fear of death, "we shall all die, and there will be none to bury the last! We are forsaken of God!"

"Hush!" said Marcel, who was holding in her arms a little girl whose tiny life was ebbing. "If you cannot be of service, Netta, it is of a certainty that you shall hold that clacking tongue. Go out of the post if you mus' talk. The nerves here are drawn tight already."

Which rebuke was given to more than one out of the depth of Marcel's good sense.

"If only Father Tenau were come!" sighed Marie Mercier, whose grief was old, and laid away that she might serve with the rest.

"Aye," returned Marcel; "but since he is not, we must do the best. The good God knows our plight, an' the heart made clean of itself will be welcome in His sight."

"I know; but oh, the pity!"

"Aye! Do you think I cannot feel, Marie? My heart is sore, sore in the breast of me."

"The strong ones, it is hard to watch them die; but the weak ones, like—like—Jean——" Marie's voice broke, and she turned to dip a cloth in cooling water for the burning brow of the child. "And the little ones—the children! Oh, Marcel!" A sob finished the sentence.

Marcel raised her face, twitching in every muscle.

"Marie, you must stop the talk," she said quietly, "if we must we must, but now we are to work."

The words were spoken like herself, but the cowering fear was in her eyes.

She told herself savagely that the little Solliere was playing in the cabin's shade as she had left him, secure in his immunity from the common ill.

Marie dried her tears from her eyes, and started on her way to another cabin near the northern wall.

"Bring the rest of the black-herb tea, Marcel, when you come," she said, and her voice was once more steady, filled with the business of mercy.

By sundown the little girl needed Marcel no more.

She went at once from the dead to the dying, stopping on her way to snatch up her child for a hasty kiss and an injunction to Eustace as to the feeding and putting him to sleep.

She was hastening swiftly in the quick-falling dusk when Palo le Roc met her face to face.

He stopped her with a hand on her shoulder.

"Marcel," he said simply, with a tremor of feeling in his deep-throated voice, "you are my help. It is because you have the great regard, the love in your heart of humanity, that you are so strong. Without you it would be worse, how much I cannot say. It is of

the need, indeed—the strong soul. You an' I—we hol' them all from flying at loose ends. We stand in the place of Father Tenau. We must stan' together, Marcel."

The quick tears sprang to the woman's eyes. She caught his hand in both her own with the rush of feeling. Only Palo had seen the strain which underlay her calm strength.

"We will," she said bravely, and hastened on with new power surging in her tired body.

In this home she found a situation that tore at her heart again.

For five days death had taken toll from this one family.

First the trapper himself had gone, swiftly and quietly, then the wife, who had lingered for a week, being ill when her husband was in full strength, such was the whim of the terror riding its whooping way across the post, and one by one the four children had followed. This was the last day, and the last soul of the family—a boy of ten. He was beyond need, too.

Marcel felt of the little head, already cool and damp, and sadly shaded the candle from the darkened eyes. There was nothing to do but wait.

She sat down on the step of the door, and leaned her head against the jamb.

The relaxation was as a draft of water to one dying of thirst. Only herself knew how she was wearing her body out in this ceaseless service.

Yet she thanked her Creator that it was permitted for her hands to do so much to ease the pitiful going of those who went the long way.

It was the first quiet hour she had had for days wherein she might think undisturbed, and she gave herself up to her thoughts, but it was characteristic of the secret fear that mastered her that the child was not permitted to enter into them. Instead, they fastened themselves in a weary sadness around Lois le Moyne, and for the first time, deep in her heart Marcel felt a stab of pain because of her. She loved the girl with a loyal love, and her cold sternness, that would not forgive nor overlook in the shadow of death, was to this loving woman a terrible thing. She was weary and sad and fearful—though beneath it, in the good foundation of her nature, the new strength that had been borne with Palo le Roc's words sent its diffusing glow throughout her body—and the hot darkness of the stricken post weighed upon her soul like lead. She wondered about many things as she sat there, quiet, resting, waiting for the grim foe to finish its work in the dim cabin behind her.

Suddenly she started upright, gripping the door lintel.

Out upon the still night air a voice lifted itself, strong—so strong that its clear, electric cry reached every corner of the settlement—a voice charged with something that lifted her to her feet, drew her toward it, would have drawn her from the ends of the earth, it seemed to her, in that first moment.

"Marcel!" it pealed, loud and clear, like a startled bell. "Marcel! Marcel! Marcel!"

It was the voice of Lois le Moyne.

It penetrated every house in the post, reaching the farthest nook, searching every place. Marcel started, running.

"Lois!" she cried. "I'm coming, Lois!"

"Marcel! Marcel!" called the voice, compelling, pulling, urging. "Marcel!"

Down the main way flew the object of that lifting call. Something in its peculiar quality drew taut the strings of her heart, flashed before her a gleam of awful things, as when the earth breaks forth in fire and wrath and fury, to form, æons hence, new fields and fairer scenes.

"Marcel!"

On the step of the cabin stood the girl, her head thrown back like a baying hound's, her full throat swelling to the volume of her cry, the light from the candles behind her falling weirdly on her black head, and the long braid hanging to her knees.

In many a cabin the hearers shivered and crossed themselves. There was something so wild and savage, so alien and unknown, in that terrible call.

Marcel flung herself into the circle of light.

Lois caught her by the shoulders, and her fingers bit deep into the flesh. Her slow, black eyes were red with fire in the shadow.

"My father!" she cried. "My father, Marcel Roque! My father!"

Choking with the grip of reflected passion that keyed the very atmosphere to the sudden apex of some mighty thing about to happen, Marcel tore loose and pushed past the girl into the cabin.

She stopped, swiftly and still, in the center of the floor.

Half out of his bed, his wrinkled face twisted in the dim light, his thin old body contorted with a sudden great struggle, old Jacques faced them for the last time.

Here the touch had been of appalling swiftness. Marcel looked a moment, then she turned to Lois.

Her eyes wide and staring, her lips tight shut, her hands clenched at her sides, half crouching against the open door, Lois le Moyne looked past her friend at her father—the one thing she had ever loved with tenderness. The breath was stopped in her throat, an unutterable agony covered her pale features.

Marcel, ever wise in her simplicity, did not move or speak for many minutes. She, too, held her breath, and they stood so in the unearthly quiet, watching, one woman the unlovely thing on the side of the bed, the other her.

What passed in the heart of the girl in those awful moments, the woman could not guess. Mighty, appalling, it must have been, the upsurge, the rebellion, when this contained, sufficient, dominant nature felt the touch of that Omnipotent Power whose decrees are final, not to be questioned or resisted. Something of this shone forth across the speaking face, for once bereft of its hauteur, slipped free of its habitual calm.

Presently there was the soft slip of a step at the door. The neighbors had come to the new house of death.

Lois heard it, as did Marcel. With a sucking gurgle the arrested breath swept in over the shut lips, the eyelids flickered from their wide strain, and the girl straightened her body along the door. Her eyes turned at last to the bed. She put up a hand and pushed the hair back from her low brow. With the motion she returned from that place wherein her soul had crouched in its moment of bereavement—and a far place it had been, Marcel knew.

She turned to her friend.

"Keep them out, Marcel," she whispered; "keep them out."

And Marcel gently closed the door in the faces of those who had come to help.

Slowly, a step at a time, separated by long intervals of motionless silence, old Jacques' daughter approached him where he lay in his pitiful helplessness.

She covered the last stretch with a rush, and threw herself against his inanimate form, gathering it close in her young arms, as a mother might a child, and began speaking to it in a strange tongue, the liquid words of which were unfamiliar to Marcel. Back and forth Lois rocked her father's body, catching her breath in breaking sobs, but on her face there was no signs of tears.

Presently Marcel crept up and gently touched her shoulder.

"Come, Lois," she ventured softly.

The girl did not seem to hear.

"Lois!"

"Lois, dear!"

Only the dry sobs and the hot silence.

"Please, Lois!" There were tears on Marcel's cheeks and in her tender voice. She pulled loose one of the girl's arms in an attempt to lift the body to the bed.

Then, indeed, Lois heard and answered.

With a bound she leaped to her feet, caught Marcel, and threw her across the room. She settled back to her position by the bed.

Marcel turned to the door, laid her arm against it, and her face in her arm, and gave way to the grief of her tired body and her hurt soul.

It was the best thing she could have done.

The sound of her weeping penetrated the haze of passionate anguish which

encircled the girl, penetrated as with a sharp point through the mist that obscured her vision and her hearing, shaking her together and to a realization of things as nothing else could have done. She raised her haggard face, and looked back at Marcel, drooping against the door, across her shoulder.

"Marcel," she said dully, "forgive me, Marcel."

But the woman, worn to a thin edge of endurance, wept.

CHAPTER XVI.

"LIKE AS A FATHER."

How long Marcel wept with her face against the wall she did not know. She felt as if the world had fallen from beneath her feet, she who had hung so desperately to the things of life in the midst of all the death of the past days, and the terrible yearning for tears that had stuck in her throat throughout now mastered her. It was for everything of pity in the post, herself included, that the weary tears flowed and most of all for the wizened child that was not even sick as yet. The savage fling of this girl whom she had loved and fought for but served to break the last thread of self-control by its personal touch.

She cried in an abandon of misery, as only a strong woman, defeated by her own tenderness of soul, can cry. She gave herself up to it—wholly, unreservedly, making no effort to hold back, and her sore heart poured forth its pain.

After a while, a long, long while, when there was no sound in the cabin save her own sad wailing, there fell on her shoulder a touch infinitely gentle, strangely new. So new and unfamiliar that Marcel started and raised her swollen face.

Lois stood beside her, her features themselves again save for the eyes, which spoke a language of suffering such as even Marcel, accustomed to the grief of death, could not read.

"Come, Marcel," she said quietly, "help me."

On the bed old Jacques lay in peaceful length, his clawlike hands already folded on his silent breast.

"Candles from the shelves there; ten of them—in the long box. A white sheet from the chest in the corner." The words of direction fell with her old calmness as the girl took up a pail, filled a kettle on a crane, and built a fire beneath it.

Without comment, Marcel, good friend that she was, turned to the tasks before them, stifling the sobs to longer and longer intervals.

In the shut cabin, hot to suffocation by the fire, these two women performed the intimate service for the dead—laved the body, dressed it in the brightest and gayest of the clothing the little old man had loved, a buckskin shirt whose whole front was one beautiful plastron of beadwork, fashioned in the intricate and unique designs that only the fingers of his child could make, and which no one ever seeing could fail to know as the sign manual of Lois le Moyne, a gorgeous sash of rainbow silk, and lower garments of fringed buckskin as white and soft as a lady's hand.

The hard, hot light of the coming day saw the cabin in spotless order, a straight high bier made of the table and two boards draped in white sheets, whereon rested in imposing state the tiny form of the old trapper, and at its head and feet and sides tall candles burning steadily. On the resplendent breast lay the black iron crucifix, and glistening in the scant white hair the sprinkled drops of the blessed water from the vial that the good father had left on his last trip.

At the doorstep, Lois stood as Marcel made ready to leave.

With a sudden motion the girl took the woman's face between her hands, and looked deep into her eyes.

"I cannot speak, Marcel," she said; "but you know. Now I want to see none to-day. After dark this night I will—will put him away." There was a short catch in the voice. "You I would like to have near."

Tired and weary, yet beginning to feel a lift of something that was near to hope, Marcel Roque went home to her own cabin.

All day the house of the Le Moynes

stood shut and silent in the blistering sun. Hushed words passed among those who could yet think of other things than their own griefs, and many were the wandering glances that went its way.

By ten of the clock on that morning, Sylvester in his light clothes and shining with cleanliness made his way down the main way from the Corlier abode and tapped at the closed door. There was no sound from within, and his knock was not answered.

As he was turning away with an unmistakable relief in his heart, a stir of arrival came from the gate of the post.

Two objects of interest were entering Fort lu Cerne—a slim youth, whose handsome face had become refined by mental suffering, and at his side a bent and withered crone. She was a woman of the Crees. Across her breast hung uncounted rows of polished elk teeth, a fringed tunic of smoked buckskin draped her birdlike form, while on her feet sparkled small moccasins profusely ornamented with shining colored quills of the porcupine.

From the other end of the settlement, Palo le Roc, going from one task to another, saw them, and a prayer of thanksgiving burst audibly from his lips.

He hurried down to meet them.

"Hola, Pierre Vernaise," he called. "Did Pete Gabrielle find you?"

"Pete Gabrielle? No; I have seen no one from Fort lu Cerne since I am away, Palo."

They had met and stopped together, with the old woman standing silent, and those who had seen the coming gathering eagerly around, some already besetting Pierre for the skill of the wrinkled squaw.

"Be still!" commanded Le Roc.

"You did not? So? Then how did you know to bring the doctress of the Crees, Pierre?"

Pierre turned his eyes away, and looked up the hot road. They fell upon Sylvester just leaving the home of Lois.

"Something told me she was needed," he replied. "I knew the sickness had fallen by—by what I know not, yet I knew it had fallen."

Palo looked soberly into the young man's countenance, and what he read there was good, for he suddenly put out his hand.

"One more worker added to us, M'sieu Vernaise," he said simply; "an', gift of God, the doctress!"

As they turned back up the open lane between the habitations, Pierre touched Palo on the arm. His dark eyes begged eagerly.

"Lois?" he asked in a low voice.

"She sits alone in the cabin there. Old Jacques went out at dusk last night, yet she has not had him laid away, nor will she see any of the settlement save Marcel Roque. What she means to do is known only to *le bon Dieu.*" The speaker did not see the light of ineffable joy that flowed over the features of the youth.

He knew now that Lois had not as yet gone with Sylvester, but at its heels came the other thought—she was still within the stricken post.

What passed within that shut cabin all through the long hours of that hot day, none in Fort lu Cerne ever knew. The door was closed, the windows covered, and the strange girl alone with her dead.

Dusk fell, and the stars came brightly out on the dark sky, and Marcel Roque hovered uncertainly out in the warm darkness. There was no moon and no breath of air stirring. In three cabins death lay, and in five more it hung, waiting, and the weird light of the burning candles made tremulous earth stars of the small windows and the open doors.

At last, as Marcel waited patiently, the door of this cabin opened, and against the shadows of the unlighted interior the form of Lois loomed dim in the doorway.

She peered out in the night.

"I am here, Lois," said the older woman softly.

"Then wait."

She turned back, and Marcel stood wonderingly alone.

Presently there was a little sound

from the room, a swish and sigh of moving cloth and the creak of a board, and a long white wedge came end on out of the door, then the form of the girl beneath, and a smothered word escaped Marcel.

She was carrying in her arms the corpse of her father.

"Lois—Lois, what do you do?" whispered Marcel.

"Bring the pick and shovel from the corner there, Marcel, and follow," said Lois, across her burden.

"Yes, but—but how can you? Oh, Lois!" Marcel went for the tools, and fell in behind.

They turned slowly up the road toward the church, this strange procession, and their feet made no sound upon the dusty earth.

So went old Jacques, one-time trapper and adventurer in the strenuous ways of life, to his long rest, borne in the strong young arms of the child he had raised, as a big child is borne in the arms of its father.

It was no heavy task for Lois le Moyne. The little old body had long since lost its flesh and its weight of a man, toll of the extended years, and she carried it easily, one arm under the stiff shoulders, and one over the stiff knees, with the withered breast pressed savagely against her beating heart.

She spoke no word, nor did Marcel, as they passed up between the houses, and finally came to the row of graves, now pitifully long, alas! beside the church the ghostly radiance of whose altar candles glowed palely against the night.

Marcel hesitated at the end of the row.

"Not here," said Lois briefly.

She passed between the graves and the church, and went toward the back of the structure—between it and the stockade wall.

As they turned the corner, Lois, in the lead, swerved sharply, with a startled warning.

An open grave yawned at their feet —a freshly dug grave, alone behind the church.

The girl stopped with lifted head, ready for conflict, fierce as a mother panther whose young is threatened. That lone place, away from the common mass, she had meant for her own dead, her dead whom no alien hand had desecrated in the last rites, whose sleeping place should be as sacredly apart as she could make it.

As she stood so, alert, for a moment, a figure emerged from the deeper shadow of the church.

It was Pierre Vernaise.

"Ma'amselle," he said timidly, with a great catch in his voice, "ma'amselle, forgive! You are not offend' that I should dig your father's grave? I wished to do something."

Lois stooped, and gently, very gently, laid her burden upon the earth.

Then she went around the open hole, and took both the hands of the youth in hers.

"Offend'?" she said. "In my utter poverty I am rich, m'sieu. I have three possessions in the world—Marcel, this grave, and that friendship which could so read my wish. I thank you, M'sieu Vernaise."

She turned to the grave and the body, tightly wrapped and sewed from head to foot in strong, white sheets, for the rude coffins made of pine that were kept in store in the post had long since ceased to fill the demand, and, dropping upon her knees beside it, she lifted her face to the star-filled heavens. The two friends of this girl knelt softly where they stood, wondering, and presently, after a little silence, her voice lifted itself upon the air, low and clear, contained, calm, but filled with such unspeakable anguish as thrilled their hearts with its pain, and the words it spoke were the exalted periods of the Latin service for the dead that none but an ordained priest should utter.

The calm effrontery of it sent a shiver through the devout heart of Marcel, while the man bowed his head under the magnificent beauty of the solemn ritual.

Where she had learned that service they did not know, nor by what right she dared use it, yet Pierre remembered, there under the stars, that morn-

ing in the spring and his own words: "Lois le Moyne is beyond the law"

When she had finished, her voice dropping gently down to the close, she rose quietly and took from her belt a bundle that hung there. It was a brightly striped and heavy woolen blanket, inside of which was wrapped a small pillow.

In silence she put a hand on the grave edge, dropped down and carefully spread the blanket over the hard ground, folding it half back to one side and placing the little pillow at the head. Then she stood up.

"Now, Pierre, if you will lift my father down to me," she said.

Pierre Vernaise raised the little old form, slighter than ever in the stiffness of death, and laid it into her arms, upheld to receive it.

It was a wide grave that Pierre had dug, and Lois had room to kneel and fix the pillow under the old head, to fold over and tuck in carefully the heavy blanket, and to see that the tiny old man rested easily in his earthen bed. When this was done she stood up, reached a hand to Pierre on one side, Marcel on the other, and climbed out.

As Pierre took up the shovel, she crouched on the edge.

"Lightly, m'sieu, at the sides first," she said; "lightly—oh, fill it carefully, m'sieu!" The agony broke forth in the last word, but she was herself again in a moment. Without speech they stood, these three, in the hot silence, until the last shovelful had been heaped on the mound, the last clod laid. Then Lois turned away and passed out around the corner of the church without looking back. Two men with lanterns were busy at the farther end of the long row.

They walked in silence down the main way.

Presently, where the cabins began, the girl stopped.

"Marcel," she said, "I am ready. Give me half your tasks."

"Ready? What do you mean, Lois?"

The dark head raised itself with a swift motion.

"Send me to help," she said, "to work where it is the hardest."

Marcel touched her hand. It was stone cold, and tight shut.

"Good! We go at once to the Le Blancs. Pierre, if you would see to the need in the cabin by the small gate—— Come, Lois. Good night, m'sieu."

So, at last, Lois le Moyne surrendered up her strength and her pride to the people of Fort lu Cerne.

TO BE CONTINUED.

The next installment of this novel will appear two weeks hence, in the POPULAR, on sale January 7th.

THE WONDERFUL WORK OF NATURE

SOMEBODY is always writing something in the newspapers about James Hamilton Lewis, United States senator from Illinois. And this is only natural, for Mr. Lewis is famous for two distinct reasons. In the first place, he is the most picturesque and artisic dresser in Congress, being the only man who can handle lavender socks as if they really belonged. Secondly, he takes a most active part in national affairs.

But the limit was reached last July, when a newspaper correspondent wired out a story about a speech the Illinois senator had made regarding woman suffrage. Among other things, this dispatch stated:

Mr. Lewis had noted, he said, during his lifetime that in most instances, and as a very general rule, the maternal instinct was stronger in women than in men.

A Jonah of the Lakes

By Ray Wynn

Author of "The Drifter," Etc.

The tale of a hoodooed Laker and an optimistic skipper who was willing to take a chance on beating the Jonah business to a standstill. "Hard-luck" Bayles knew that with his fatal record he ought to have kept off the Lakes—but "Once a Laker always a Laker"

THE *Catawba*—big steam freighter belonging to the Collins line—lay at her dock in Blairsport, just about ready for her long trip up Lake Michigan and down Lake Huron to Detroit. Captain Ben Whittlesey, her commander, lounged upon the bridge rail, quite at his ease, idly scanning the forward deck, where a few members of the crew were still engaged in stowing cargo. Beside him lounged Larry Hawkins, his first mate, reputed to be one of the most capable and efficient first officers in the Lake service. He was also watching the man forward.

"That new deck hand is a hustler, all right," observed Captain Whittlesey, at length. "I've been watchin' him, off an' on, all day long. He's no shirker, an' he's strong as a bull. Look at that"—as the new hand, without calling upon any of his mates for assistance, moved a heavy packing case—"we haven't a man aboard the *Catawba* who can do that, let alone bein' willin' to try it."

"Ye-es," assented Hawkins. "He *seems* to be all right."

The doubtful accent in his tone did not pass unnoticed. Larry Hawkins usually did the hiring for the ship; and he rather prided himself upon his ability to pick out good men. In the present instance, Whittlesey had done the hiring, the new man having applied for a berth while Hawkins was up in the town. The captain fancied that Hawkins felt that he had usurped his prerogative, and that this accounted for his lukewarm attitude regarding the new man.

"What's the matter with him?" he asked sharply. "He does his work all right, doesn't he? An' he's no shirker? What more do you expect in a deck hand?"

"He's all right that way," admitted Hawkins. "But—I'm just tryin' to place him. I've seen him before, somewhere. As you know, I've sailed on all the Lakes in the last ten years, and I've met up with a good many men in that time. Somewhere or other, I've run foul of this jasper, but I can't say just where. All I know is that the sight of him gave me the creeps. What name did he give, when you hired him?"

"Jones," replied the captain laconically.

"Anybody's name," Hawkins sneered. "That's the name any fellow would give, if he didn't want to be known—that, or Green, or Brown, or Black, or, mebbe, Smith. Anyway, he looks like just plain bad luck to me."

Captain Ben Whittlesey laughed. "You're seein' things yellow, Larry," he remarked. "Better take some liver pills."

"There's nothin' the matter with my liver," snapped Hawkins. "I'm feelin' as well, right now, as I ever felt in my life. But, just you mark my words—the *Catawba* will have no good luck while that fellow is aboard her."

Captain Whittlesey laughed again. "He'll never hurt the old *Catawba,*" he asserted. "She's the luckiest boat on the Lakes, Larry. Old Captain Pease told me, when he turned her over to me, more'n four years back, that he'd

run her for ten years without trouble of any kind. An' I've had no trouble with her." Hawkins shrugged his shoulders. "You've been with me, goin' on two years, an' you never saw any, did you?"

"No, but that ain't sayin' that there won't be."

Captain Whittlesey snorted disgustedly at Hawkins' lack of faith. He opened his mouth to reply—then thought better of it. What was the use of arguing, anyhow? The coming trip would tell whether the *Catawba's* well-known good luck still hung by her. He looked forward again—the stowage of the deckload was finished. Then he looked up the wharf toward the company office—the big gates at the street end of the wharf were just closing, and the eye in the office semaphore, red a moment before, was now white. He turned to Larry Hawkins.

"Cast off and get under way," he ordered.

Larry nodded his understanding of the order, and began to bellow commands. A few minutes later, the *Catawba* moved away from the wharf, made a slow half turn in the center of the harbor, and headed for the channel which led out past the lighthouse at the end of the long breakwater. She rapidly gathered way, and when the lone lookout upon the gallery walk of the tower waved his hand to Larry Hawkins, she was going at full speed ahead, her high bow pointing nearly due north —her first stop, Clairton, sixty miles away.

Captain Ben Whittlesey had left the bridge and gone down upon the deck to make personal examination of the stowage of that portion of the cargo which had not gone below hatches. There was a something in the aspect of the sky ahead of the ship which he did not like —a certain haziness, which, to his long experience, bespoke the coming of a storm; also, the month—September—was the month of heavy gales upon the Lakes, and he did not care to have any of the deckload working loose to menace the lives of any of his men and the proper handling of the ship. Most of it was for Clairton, and that port should be reached in four or five hours of steady steaming; but the gales upon the Lakes arise quickly, and this one might strike within the hour. The stuff for Clairton would have gone below hatches had it not been that it had not far to go, and he wished to save the time and labor that would have been expended in breaking it out.

The captain found some changes necessary in order to adjust the pile to his complete satisfaction under existing conditions. The new hand was lounging near by, and Captain Whittlesey called upon him to make them. A strong man himself, it pleased him to see the easy way in which Jones handled heavy boxes, and bales, and barrels; also, he noted that he showed an instinctive aptitude for close and solid stowage.

"You've done a lot of this sort of work before, I take it?" remarked the captain.

"Worked at it ever since I was eighteen, sir—and I'm well past twenty-five, now," replied the man. He smiled a trifle sadly, the captain fancied. "Once a Laker, always a Laker, you know, captain. I've tried to get away from it several times, but I've always drifted back. It's not a bad sort of life —if one has any luck." He added the last words as though they were an afterthought, speaking them rather to himself than to the captain.

They reminded Captain Whittlesey of Larry Hawkins' remarks about the fellow looking like "plain bad luck" to him. He glanced keenly at Jones, noting for the first time that, while the man was fine looking—handsome, even, in a strong, animal sort of a way—his face wore a habitually hopeless expression.

"Then you've had bad luck, eh?" he inquired.

"More than my share of it, sir. It began the first month that I sailed the Lakes, and it's kept right after me ever since. I seem to carry it with me wherever I go. Just as sure as I ship aboard a boat, she has a run of bad luck as long as I stay aboard her. I'm

known from one end of the Great Lakes to the other as 'Hard Luck Harry.' There's plenty of captains who'd pay me good money just to stay away from their ships, rather than pay me less to work for 'em. I may as well tell you that Jones isn't my right name. I saw that you didn't appear to know me, so I gave that name, for I was out of money, and I've got to live, somehow. Then, when your mate came aboard, I saw that the jig was up. He knows me—we sailed together, aboard the old *Thunderer,* on Lake Erie, five or six years ago. It was for just one trip, sir; but you can ask him what happened to her. Unless I'm much mistaken, he'll tell you that he never came nearer to death than he did that trip. I don't think any of your other men know me; the deck hands are all young fellows, and the engine-room force I've never seen before."

"What's your right name?" inquired Captain Whittlesey.

"Bayles, sir."

"'Hard Luck Harry' Bayles! Well, I should say that I *have* heard of you. Why, you're the original Jonah of the Lakes."

"I guess I am, sir," replied Bayles dejectedly. "Well, you can put me ashore at Clairton—I understand that the ship is to make a stop there—and the little that is comin' to me will mebbe keep me till I can get aboard some other boat."

"I don't think I'll do anything of the sort," said Whittlesey. "The *Catawba* has the name of bein' the luckiest boat on the Lakes—you have the name of bein' the worst Jonah that ever shipped aboard a boat. I'm not superstitious, like some of 'em. I believe that a good deal of this so-called bad luck that overtakes boats is due to carelessness on the part of those that run 'em. I'm game to give this Jonah business a fair tryout. You'll stay right aboard. Just you stick to the name of Jones. My mate thinks he knows you, but he hasn't been able to place you, as yet. He thinks that you look like bad luck—but that's only thought on his part. If this storm, here in the north, happens to hit us, he'll be all ready to charge it up to you. He'll forget all about the fact that we left Blairsport long after the first signs of the storm showed, and that, by lying right in the harbor, we might have avoided it. You stick right where you are."

"I'll do it, since you wish it, sir," replied Bayles. "But I'm doubtful of the result. I've seen it tried too many times, and it always turns out the one way. Just the same, I'm obliged to you for givin' me the chance."

Captain Whittlesey nodded and walked aft, joining Hawkins upon the bridge.

"Well, what's he got to say for himself?" queried the mate. "I saw that you were havin' quite a talk with him."

"Oh, nothin' much," replied Whittlesey evasively. He turned his gaze forward to scan the northern horizon. "Thickenin' up a lot, isn't it?" he said a moment later. "It wouldn't surprise me if we got it, butt end foremost, before we were halfway to Clairton."

"We will if there's anything in bad-luck signs," rejoined Hawkins.

The captain turned until he squarely faced his subordinate.

"Look here, Hawkins," he remarked. "Didn't we know, before we left Blairsport, that this storm was brewin'? Didn't we go out of the harbor with that knowledge tucked away right inside of our heads? I know just what you're drivin' at. You think that, because we've shipped that new man, we'll get into trouble because of that storm. I don't see that he has anything to do with it—an' neither do you, if you'll stop long enough to think things over a little."

"I know bad luck when I see it," retorted Hawkins doggedly. "I've known it to threaten storm before now and no storm come. That might be the case, if we didn't have this new man aboard; but there's no danger of it now."

Conscious of the futility of argument, Whittlesey turned away from the mate and left the bridge. As he descended the ladder, he noticed that the *Catawba* was rising higher and pitching lower than she had done a few minutes before

—a sure sign of wind somewhere ahead of them, although there was no other sign of its presence. He made another trip up forward, to see that everything was secure in the bows, and then, coming aft, dove down the engine-room hatchway. Turner, the engineer, greeted him with a sooty grin as he stood beside him.

"Runnin' smooth as grease can make 'em," he said, in answer to the captain's question as to how the engines were working. "Anything out of the ordinary run, goin' on above decks? Hawkins called down to me, just a few minutes ago, to know how things were workin'. He seemed to think that we were in for a bad night."

"Blow to the northward of us," replied the captain tersely. "Every sign of storm there. We're beginnin' to feel the swell, now. But it may not amount to much; you can't tell, till you get its full force."

"It's the month to expect heavy storms, though," said Turner. "Well, things couldn't be goin' better here. We're all ready for it. And Danks says that the coal is better than that slush we had last trip—that's a blessin' in itself."

Captain Whittlesey left the engine room. As he set foot upon deck, he heard the first whistling of the wind through the *Catawba's* scanty top-hamper, and a blast of air, laden with the chill of the north, dashed against his face. The sea rose rapidly, and by the time that he reached the bridge the *Catawba* was pitching and tossing heavily, but plugging steadily along upon her course. The sun was still shining, as he reached the bridge; five minutes later a great, smoky pall, booming down from the north, had obscured it; spits of rain had begun to fall slantingly before the wind; and the gale was coming in a steady gust, which scuffled, and howled, and shrieked across the laboring ship.

"Go below an' get your slicker," the captain told Hawkins. "You'll need it. An' bring mine up, too. There'll be more rain, before long, or I miss my guess."

After Hawkins had gone upon his errand, the captain glanced forward. All of the deck hands had sought cover, save one. That one was the new man. He stood, well up toward the bow, near the pile of freight for Clairton, now watching the effect of the roll and heave of the ship upon it, now gazing straight ahead into the storm. It occurred to the captain, as he looked at the pile, that it had been built up a little too high—that it would have been better had it been made a tier lower, even at the expense of taking up more deck space; but he felt that it was too late now to alter its arrangement. Some of the boxes on top of the pile were working, and, even as the captain looked, the new man sprang up and shoved one back into its place, from which it had been driven by a sudden lurching roll of the ship.

The captain nodded approvingly. "A good man," he muttered. "Right on the job all the time." Then he turned to take his slicker from Hawkins, who had returned to the bridge.

II.

Darkness fell when the *Catawba* was still some fifteen miles from Clairton. In order to make the harbor it was necessary to alter the ship's course until she had the wind nearly abeam. Captain Whittlesey dreaded the giving of the order which would change her course. The gale had increased to such an extent that it had slowed her way by several knots an hour, and he was satisfied that, once she got into the trough of the sea, she would roll so heavily that there would be great danger of the deckload sliding to leeward. Such a mishap might cause the *Catawba* to turn turtle, for, like most freighters, her hold had been given over mainly to the stowage of cargo, leaving a great portion of the weight of her engines and boilers above the water line if she was not fully loaded. On this trip she had not more than half a load in her hold.

All this time the new man had remained at his post watching the pile of freight, although his clothing was drenched by the rain, and no offer of help was made by any of his fellows.

As the lights of Clairton came fairly into view, the captain heard him call to them to lend a hand. Surmising that something had gone wrong, he left the bridge and hurried forward.

"What's the trouble here?" he demanded of the new hand.

"Nothin' at present, sir," replied Bayles quietly. "But I thought that this deckload might get to working when you swung the ship for Clairton harbor, so I called to some of the men to help me shift it."

For a moment surprise held Whittlesey mute. Then he found his voice.

"Why, man alive," he bellowed. "It can't be done in this gale. It was all they could do to handle some of those boxes and cases while we were in harbor. It's sure death to try to handle 'em out here."

"I think not, sir, if they're handled right. If the men'll give me a hand, gettin' 'em off the pile, I'll handle 'em as they come down."

"The fellow is game, anyway," muttered the captain.

"All right," he shouted. "Lay forward," to the deck hands who had sought protection from the driving rain. They came running at the word—it was no desire to shirk work which had held them back—simply the failure to receive orders. "Help Jones—all of you," the captain ordered. "We've got to get this deckload shifted before we change our course to run in for Clairton. Get lanterns, some of you. You'll need light for the work."

A half hour of desperate work followed. At the end of that time the deckload had been reduced to one tier, stowed from rail to rail, so that any one wishing to go forward would have to pass over the pile instead of around it. The new man's labors had been herculean; he had seemed to be everywhere at once—now upon the deck, taking the lower end of a great case, as it came sliding off the pile, now upon the pile, aiding the other men in starting some refractory bale or box; ever shouting out orders and warnings in a voice which was clearly heard above the roaring of the gale and the dashing of the waters against the ship. Captain Whittlesey, himself, worked with his men, like them taking orders from one whom he instinctively felt to be his master in the art of handling heavy cargo. When at last the change had been effected, and he turned toward the bridge, waving his hand to Hawkins to alter the ship's course, Jones turned aft with the other men, making his way along the slippery deck with the ease of one who had hardly taxed his powers of endurance.

"He's a horse, not a man," muttered the captain as he followed. "What d'ye think of him now?" he bellowed in Hawkins' ear a minute later, as he stood beside the mate upon the bridge. "Still sorry I took him on, eh?"

The mate made no reply.

The *Catawba* rolled fearfully as she headed in for the harbor. From time to time great waves dashed over her; but she was stanch, and her engines kept well to their work. She was expected at Clairton, and, as her lights were seen from the shore, the watchman in the lighthouse at the end of the long breakwater turned on the searchlight, making the entrance to the harbor as light as day. A quarter hour sufficed to place her in safety in the lee of the breakwater. From there she nosed her way slowly into the harbor, and made fast to the company wharf.

Walton, the company manager at Clairton, came aboard the ship with the first of the stevedores, who were to aid in the unloading of the cargo for that place. Captain Whittlesey met him at the head of the gangplank.

"Tough night on the Lake, eh?" observed the manager.

"Pretty bad. I'd feel better if we had more cargo aboard. It would make the ship stiffer in this sea. Got anything here for us?"

"Not much. A few cases—maybe eight or ten tons of lead weight. But you'll hardly think of going out until this blow lets up, will you?"

"I suppose it would be best not to take any chances. There's no hurry stuff aboard. Here are the bills of lading for the stuff we're about to unload."

He shoved a bulky envelope into Walton's hand.

"The outgoing bills are up at the office," said Walton. "Come on up and have a nip of Scotch with me."

Nothing loath, Captain Whittlesey accompanied him. A nip of Scotch would go good that damp, raw night. He noticed, as they made their way up the wharf, that the gale was increasing in force, and he inwardly congratulated himself upon the *Catawba's* safe arrival in harbor.

An hour later he and Walton were still seated in the office talking over old times. They were former shipmates, and it was not often that they had the opportunity to indulge in extended conversation. Suddenly, Walton was interrupted by the ringing of the phone bell at his elbow.

He took down the receiver. "Hello! Yes, this is the Collins line. This is Walton at the phone. Yes, one of our boats is here—the *Catawba* came in about an hour ago. Who is this talking? Yes, I get it all right. Very well, put him on the line."

He turned toward Captain Whittlesey. "It's the Kaska Mining Company talking. I can't imagine what they want with us, when they have their own steamers for carrying their ore. McWilliams, the general manager, wants to talk with me—they're waiting to get him on the line now."

He turned again to the phone. "Yes, this is Walton. How are you, Mr. McWilliams, and what can I do for you?"

A long pause followed, during which the receiver gave forth sputtering and clucking sounds, quite unintelligible to Captain Whittlesey. At the first of them Walton started—then listened with a strained intensity which the observant captain noticed. At first he thought that one of the Collins line steamers had managed to get into trouble; but a moment's reflection convinced him that this could not be the case. The Kaska settlement was far away upon the western shore of the Lake, and over sixty miles out of the track of any of the line's boats. In order to get there with the gale that was blowing, a steamer would have to fight her way, almost broadside on to it. He looked up again as Walton began to reply:

"It's horrible. And you say that there's no other way of getting it there? I'd gladly help you out, but I don't care to take the responsibility without orders from my employers. You say you've talked to the head office? What did Carroll say? He left it to me? Well, Mr. McWilliams, it's a matter that's really one for the captain of the ship to decide. If he thinks it's safe to try it, and is willing to take the chance, all right. Hold the line while I talk to him—he's right here in the office."

He turned to the captain. "There's been a fall of rock at the Kaska Copper Mine," he said quietly. "There are between four hundred and fifty and five hundred men shut in. The air in the mine is bad, but they think it'll last twenty-four hours. If a rescuing party can get to them within that time, there's a good chance of saving them. The only way to reach them is to dynamite through the fall—that would only take a few hours. Any other way would take a week. They had just about fifty pounds of dynamite when the fall took place. That's gone, and what it's done in the way of opening up the fall is only a fleabite to what has to be done. The only way to get the dynamite there promptly is by boat—there's no railroad within fifty miles of the mine. They've arranged with Duncan & Co., here, to furnish 'em with two tons of the stuff, and they want you to bring it over to 'em. Will you do it?"

"I'm willin'," replied Captain Whittlesey promptly. "But there's difficulties in the way. This gale—the ship's light, an' she'll have to fight every inch of the way across the Lake—an' she's not a fast boat, either. I should think a big tug would do better."

"McWilliams says that they've tried everywhere, and couldn't get anybody to undertake the trip, neither for love nor money. They say it's too risky."

"Humph! Of course, it's risky; but it's worth a little risk to save the lives of those men in the mine. This blow's

bad, but it isn't the worst that I've ever seen by several. As I was sayin', there's difficulties. After we once get across, we've got to work our way through the Rocky Islands, to get into Kaska harbor. An' there's not a man aboard the ship, from me on down, that's ever been in there to my knowledge. Hold on a minute, though. Where's your wharf phone? This it? What do I do to get the ship? Just turn the crank an' ask for Ellis, eh?"

Walton nodded.

"That you, Ellis?" asked Whittlesey a moment later. "Say—there's a man aboard the *Catawba* by the name of Jones—a new deck hand. Ask him to come right up to the office, will you?" He hung up the receiver. "That man's my last chance aboard the ship," he remarked. "He's been Lakin' for years, an' mebbe he's been in there. Do you know of any one in the town, if he fails us?"

Walton shook his head. "I expect that there are a dozen men who have been in and out of there a score of times," he replied; "but I don't suppose that you could get one of 'em to go."

"Well, we'll try 'em later, if Jones fails us. A round of the saloons ought to dig up somebody that knows something about that channel through the islands."

He rose from his chair and began to pace up and down the office, his great shoulders hunched, the stubby fingers of his big hands interlocked behind his back. He had made several rounds when the sound of hurried footsteps was heard upon the stairs, and, a moment later, the new man stood before them.

"You sent for me, sir?" he inquired.

"Ever been into Kaska harbor?" asked Whittlesey abruptly.

"Yes, sir." The captain's face lightened at the reply.

"How many times?"

"Half a dozen, or more, sir. Five years ago I ran for nearly three months aboard one of the company's ore steamers."

"Know the channel through the Rocky Islands?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well enough to take a boat like the *Catawba* through it a night like this?"

"I think so, sir. I was helmsman's assistant aboard the *Kaska*."

"Good! How much did she draw?"

"Twenty-three feet aft, sir."

"Eight more than the *Catawba*," muttered the captain. "Any shoal places in the channel?"

"One, sir. It's narrow and crooked, but deep. The shoal spot carried over thirty feet of water when I sailed there, with a rock bottom. The chief trouble is from the islands themselves."

"How would a boat fare in this gale, in going through that channel? How would she have the wind?"

"Dead ahead most of the way, sir. There's one reach, where she'd have it on her port beam for a distance of over half a mile; but the channel is wider there than at other places."

"Then you think you could take the *Catawba* through?"

"Yes, sir."

Captain Whittlesey turned to Walton. "Tell McWilliams that I'll do it," he said curtly. "And that I'll start just as soon as I can get the stuff aboard."

He briefly explained the situation to the new hand. "You'll have to reload that cargo that's just come out of her," he told the manager; "and give me anything else that you may have on hand that'll weight her down. I'll stow the dynamite on top of it, amidships, where it'll get the least jolt and jar, and pack baggin' between the boxes. You'd better phone Duncan to have it here right away. I want to clear in an hour, at the latest."

Larry Hawkins, sitting in the cozy cabin of the *Catawba*, resting from his labors in unloading cargo, heard Captain Whittlesey's plan in open-mouthed amazement.

"And you'll take the trip, with that Jonah aboard, dependin' on him to pilot us through the Rocky Islands channel?" he demanded, as soon as he could recover his breath.

"Yes," snapped Whittlesey. "He's the only man aboard who knows it."

"I'd sooner trust to the lead than to him."

"On a dark night, in a gale of wind, and goin' through a strange channel?"

"Yes," doggedly. "Anything's better than havin' that Jonah aboard. I didn't know him at first, but I've got him logged now. He's the worst piece of bad luck that's driftin' around the Lakes. He's Hard Luck Harry Bayles."

"I know it," said Whittlesey calmly. "He told me himself, and offered to quit the ship, here at Clairton. But I couldn't see where that was a fair deal for him, and I told him to stick on."

Hawkins stared in sheer unbelief.

"He offered to leave the ship, and you told him to stay on?" he repeated slowly. "Then the bad luck is on your own head. You've asked it to stay with you."

"See here," said Captain Whittlesey sharply. "If I'd known that you were so blamed superstitious, I'd never have asked Carroll to give you to me for a mate. Brace up an' be a man. If any bad luck comes to the ship, it's because of our own doin's. We know what the weather is when we start; we know that we've a cargo of bottled hell aboard us; an' we know that the channel through the Rocky Islands is bad."

"I'm sorry that you ever asked Carroll for me," rejoined Hawkins.

Whittlesey did not wait to hear any more. He was angry enough to knock Hawkins' head from his shoulders; disgusted at the thought that the man whom he had picked out as the best mate, bar none, on the Lakes, should show the white feather at such a moment—and all because of a streak of superstition in his make-up. "I'll have to undress the little dear, and put him to bed, next," was his wrathful thought, as he charged up the cabin stairs to the deck.

Here he found the new hand superintending the work of striking in the cargo which had just been unloaded. Walton, after telephoning to several of the water-front saloons for additions to the stevedoring gang, was awaiting their arrival to put them to work upon some heavy freight, lying there awaiting the arrival of the southbound boat; down in the boiler room the firemen were busily engaged in getting up steam, while above them, in the engine room, Turner, unceremoniously hustled out of his bunk by the manager, was going around, half naked, looking over his engines. Everything was going forward as rapidly as could be expected. While Captain Whittlesey stood there, looking about him, the gates at the street end of the wharf opened, and the first wagonload of dynamite came down the wharf. It was closely followed by three others. Duncan & Co. were doing their best to help things along.

III.

At eleven o'clock, the *Catawba,* her head pulled around by one of the harbor tugs, headed slowly for the breakwater. A few minutes later, she had passed out of sight of all save the lookouts in the lighthouse; long before midnight they, too, had lost her in the storm.

Upon her bridge was Larry Hawkins. Summoned thither by the captain, he had not dared to disregard the order; but he obeyed it in fear and trembling, afraid, not of anything tangible, although there was enough in the voyage itself, and the nature of the cargo to excuse this in any man, not used, as the Lakers were, to carrying their lives in their hands; but of the presence aboard the ship of the man who was supposed to be the greatest Jonah upon the Lakes. This fear had come over him when he had finally recognized Bayles.

He had spoken no more than the truth when he told the captain that the sight of the new man gave him the creeps. It was a subconscious recognition of an actor in one of the greatest tragedies of the Lakes—the loss of the *Thunderer,* freighter. Five of the half dozen survivors, Hawkins among them, had united in placing the blame for the loss of the ship upon the fact that Bayles, even then avoided by all who knew him as a Jonah, had been aboard her. Their claim, which was based upon nothing more than superstition,

found ready credence among the Lakers, and Bayles, unable to get another berth, had disappeared. Since then there had been changes in the latter's appearance which had so altered him that at first Hawkins did not recognize him.

Now that he had done so, he was satisfied that the *Catawba* was speeding swiftly onward to her doom. Shortly before Captain Whittlesey had come into the cabin to tell him of his intention to make the run to Kaska, he had about made up his mind to quit the ship. Now he was sorry that he had not done so, and wondered, dully, what had ever caused him to stay. Weak-kneed and sick at heart, he clung to the bridge rail, mechanically attending to the duties of his position, and wondering at what moment disaster would overtake the ship.

Below, in the cabin, the captain and Bayles studied a chart of the Lake which Walton had brought aboard the ship just before she sailed. The course was clear enough before them, until they reached the Rocky Islands. It was only necessary to lay the ship's head in a west-northwest direction, allowing for the leeward set imparted by the gale, and keep a sharp lookout for ships coming down the Lake which might cross her path. If no accident happened, they should be off the Rocky Islands by daybreak.

"I'd rather be there in daytime, than at night," remarked Whittlesey. "If we make a quick run of it, and get there before daybreak, we'll lie to and wait for light."

"I've been in and out by night, as well as by day," said Bayles quietly. "Did you say that they were to show a light at the entrance to the harbor? That Walton had fixed it with McWilliams to have this done?"

"Yes, but there's no use in taking any chances beyond those that we have to take."

"Each minute that we lose may mean a human life," replied Bayles earnestly. "Surely, that makes it worth some little extra risk. Once we get through the islands the rest is easy. There's a deep bay, with the islands right across its mouth. Inside of the headlands there'll be no sea worth mentioning. It wouldn't surprise me if the mine people didn't have their fastest tug—the *Sea King*—waiting for us just inside of the islands anyway. It's over ten miles up the bay, and a narrow and crooked channel. She could take on part of the dynamite and beat us to the wharf by half an hour, by making a straight wake of it up the bay."

"We'll see about it when we get there," said Whittlesey, after a moment's pause. "I'll take risks with the next one to save life, but suppose that we make a mistake, and pile the *Catawba* up on the rocks? If that happens, all that we've done before is useless."

"You can trust me to take her in, captain. I know that channel as well as you know the streets of your home town." There was a quiet confidence in Bayles' tones which was reassuring.

"All right. You'd better get some sleep. Take my berth there. I'll call you when you're needed."

Bayles obeyed the order without demur. Five minutes later he was fast asleep. The burly captain paused to gaze at him before leaving the cabin.

"Poor devil," he muttered. "He's had a hard life of it. I wonder how much bad luck could fairly be charged up against him? Well, bad luck, or good luck, he's all that we have to depend on to save those fellows in the Kaska Mine."

IV.

Captain Whittlesey sent Hawkins to call Bayles just before dawn, by which time the *Catawba* had worked her way well across the Lake, although nothing like land could be seen ahead through the mistlike rain. She had made better weather of it than the captain expected, and he figured that they must be within a few miles of the islands.

Hawkins went unwillingly. The terror of the night before still possessed him. He even hesitated to touch Bayles, after he stood in the cabin at the sleep-

er's side. But after several calls had failed to arouse him, he ventured to lay a hand roughly on his shoulder.

The touch aroused Bayles instantly. Half sitting, half lying in the berth, his faculties confused, and his eyes still heavy with sleep, he blinked at the mate. Then, as he gradually pulled himself together and noticed the fierce light which gleamed in Hawkins' eyes, he shrank from him.

"The captain wants you on deck," gritted the mate. "So you're here, eh? And your bad luck with you? Wasn't it enough that you wrecked the *Thunderer,* without your tryin' to get a berth aboard a ship where one of the few that were saved sails?"

Bayles rose slowly to his feet and looked Hawkins full in the eye for a moment, before answering. When he did speak, his voice was quiet, but cold, incisive.

"If I'd known that you were mate aboard this ship, I wouldn't have tried for a berth in her. As for the *Thunderer,* you know what caused her loss as well as I do. You know that all the officers were drunk, and had lost their reckoning. You fellows that were saved saw fit to put the blame on me. I was one man against five, and you saw that the story was well spread around. But you needn't be afraid of me this trip, Hawkins. This time I'm a blessing to those I sail with—not a curse. I'm saving life—not losing it. This time I'll get through all right."

He did not wait for a reply, but left the cabin.

"I'd lie by till daylight, sir," he told the captain a few minutes later, after he had been told that no light had been sighted. "I'd like to go ahead, but I don't know just where we are. We may have made better weather of it than we expected, and the ship may be closer inshore than she ought to be; or, we may be several miles north or south of the islands."

Captain Whittlesey nodded his approval of the opinion, and ordered the *Catawba* brought around, with her head to the wind. The gale still blew so hard that he found it necessary to run the engines at three-quarters speed in order to hold his position. They had not long to wait. Half an hour brought daybreak, and, with it, a widening of the horizon about the ship, until objects at a distance of a mile or more could be faintly seen.

"We're not far from the coast," said Bayles, a little later. "It is high, rocky land all along here, and I can hear the sound of the breakers, off to starboard. I think that we are south of the islands, for the gale would set us off to leeward. The best thing to do is to steam ahead, up the coast, till we pick 'em up. The sound of the breakers will keep us from getting too near, and we can always sheer off, for the water is deep all along here."

Slowly the *Catawba* worked her way along, up the coast. It was quite evident to those upon the bridge that the ship was near a coast which made a lee for her, for the waves were not so high, nor the wind so hard. The ship was steered by the sound of the breakers. After a quarter hour of this blind navigation, Bayles glanced at the compass. The ship was headed almost due east.

"I have it," he shouted exultantly. "I know where we are now. If you're going south, after you pass the south headland of Kaska Bay, the coast falls away to the westward. The ship's running about east along it now. We'll know when we pass the headland, for we'll get the full force of the gale and the sea. The channel through the islands is about two miles north of the headland. Once we make the channel, I'll get her through all right."

Captain Whittlesey was about to reply, when the deep wail of a steamer's siren was heard. It seemed to be not far distant, but the forward lookout, when questioned, reported that he saw nothing.

"That's either a southbound steamer that has run away out of her course, or else an ore steamer, trying to get into the harbor," cried Bayles. "It's hardly likely that it's the first, with the wind in its present quarter, and it's not likely that they'd send a loaded steamer out of the harbor in this gale."

Again the wail of the siren was heard, closer than before, and again all strained their eyes vainly in the direction of the sound, but still nothing was to be seen.

"The wind and waves are stronger," called Bayles. "We're out past the headland. I'll get into the pilot house.

"Stand aside ready to help if you're needed," he told one of the men at the wheel, as he took his place. He turned the wheel over. "We'll head her due north," he told the other man.

Slowly the *Catawba's* head swung in the desired direction. "So. Hold her there." He paused in his conversation, to listen to the siren which sounded a third time. "Whoever that fellow is, he's moving fast. I hope that he knows his way."

From the void ahead of the *Catawba* a crashing sound issued, followed a moment later by a wail from the siren, which was suddenly choked off.

"She's hit the rocks," yelled Bayles to Captain Whittlesey. He leaned far out of the pilot-house window, trying to see ahead. The lookout in the bows of the *Catawba,* who had also heard the crash, threw up both hands to attract Captain Whittlesey's attention.

"Somethin' dark on the starboard bow," he yelled.

Aided by this direction, both the captain and Bayles made out a dark blur, perhaps half a mile ahead of the ship. Bayles threw the helm still farther over, and the *Catawba* headed for it. A few minutes sufficed to show the anxious watchers that a steamer lay before them, the fore part of her hull driven high upon the rocks, the after part already under the surface of the Lake.

As he clearly made out her position, a curse burst from Bayles' lips.

"She has us blocked off," he yelled to Captain Whittlesey. "She's settled right in the channel—here's the other island right astern of her."

He gave the "slow-down" signal to the engine room, and stood looking intently at the wreck. Upon the forward part of it was a cluster of dark objects, some of them moving aimlessly about. They were the crew, who had run forward as the after part of the steamer settled.

"One of the ore steamers," commented Bayles, as Captain Whittlesey joined him in the wheelhouse. "I think she must have been out of her reckoning, for it don't look as though she aimed for the channel at all. You see, she struck on the island south of it, and she lies right across it. Her captain must have figured out that he was fifteen or twenty miles offshore, the way he was running. She looks like the *Algonquin,* one of their newest and fastest boats. She's been running light, and piled herself up with all of fifteen knots' headway, and the drive of the gale behind her. The crew are safe enough where she lies, for she can't sink—there isn't water enough in the channel to cover her."

Captain Whittlesey swore disgustedly. "What's to be done next?" he inquired. "We've come all this way for nothin'. Now we might as well turn about an' run back to Clairton. Why couldn't she have waited till we got in, before she piled herself up on the rocks?"

For a moment Bayles gazed reflectively at the stranded steamer, growing dimmer and dimmer, as the *Catawba* set down to leeward under the influence of the gale. He gave the engine room the bell to "go ahead, full speed," before he replied.

"You've taken some chances already," he said. "Are you willing to take one more—bigger than any you've taken yet?"

"What is it?"

"Back of the island, north of the wreck, is another channel, which leads into the main channel, half a mile or so from the Lake. None of the ore steamers ever use it, for it's too shoal for them; but a boat of the *Catawba's* draft ought to be able to find water enough. I've been through it once or twice aboard one of the company's tugs, but I'll honestly admit that I'm none too sure of taking a ship of the *Catawba's* size through, for it's mighty narrow in one place. Still, if you're willing, I'll try it."

Captain Whittlesey pondered over the problem. If this effort were made, the responsibility would be his. While he knew that the company owning the *Catawba* would back him up in any attempt to get into Kaska harbor, by means of known and navigable channels, the channel mentioned by Bayles lay without the pale. To attempt to get in through it and ground his ship would probably cost him his captain's commission. Upon the other hand, if the *Catawba* did not get into the harbor, the lives of several hundred men would pay the forfeit of her failure. Just as he had about reached a decision, the voice of Larry Hawkins broke in upon his reflections. Unnoticed by either himself or Bayles, the mate had left the bridge and entered the wheelhouse, in time to hear the latter's proposition.

"Will you take a chance upon his say-so?" he cried harshly. "Hasn't he brought us enough of bad luck already, that you must listen to him now? You know, as well as I do, that he's the only——"

"Go back on the bridge, where you belong," Captain Whittlesey interrupted. "I'm master of this ship, an' I'll order what I want done. Go back, I say!" as Hawkins hesitated to leave the wheelhouse. Sullenly the mate obeyed. Captain Whittlesey turned to Bayles. "What you're suggestin' may cost me my ship an' my commission," he said calmly; "but when it's that against four or five hundred human lives, I'll take the chance."

"I'll do my best, captain," said Bayles simply.

He glanced at the wrecked steamer, now aft of the *Catawba's* beam, then at the shore of the island north of her. A few minutes later, another island showed, off the starboard bow, and he gave the wheel a turn, until the *Catawba's* nose pointed in between them. Upon the bridge Hawkins had taken a life preserver and bound it about his body. Bayles smiled bitterly as he noted this, and muttered something beneath his breath—then became once more intent upon the work before him.

V.

Work it was, indeed. Before the steamer lay two reefs, their location marked by long lines of curling foam. Between them, and seemingly not much wider than the ship, was a spot of darker water, for which Bayles headed her. Old Laker though he was, and used to risks, Captain Whittlesey held his breath, as the foam broke within a few fathoms of the *Catawba's* sides. But she passed in safety.

As soon as she was through the narrow pass, Bayles rang for "half speed." Here the water was comparatively calm and the force of the wind was much diminished, but the channel was narrow and tortuous, and it required the nicest steersmanship to negotiate some of the turns. But Bayles made them in safety, and Captain Whittlesey, grimly silent, but losing no move that was made, felt a strong hope that all might be well.

"We are in the main channel," he cried exultantly, as the *Catawba* rounded a turn, and a wide stretch of open water lay before her. But Bayles' shake of the head checked his exultation.

"We are in the last reach of the false channel," he said. "At the end of this reach is Bottleneck Pass, the narrowest part of the channel. If we can once get through that, I can guarantee to get you into Kaska harbor; but I don't know whether a ship of the *Catawba's* beam can get through. It's not more than half as wide as the pass where we entered from the Lake; but there is water enough for her, right up to the rocks on either side."

Again Captain Whittlesey fell silent. Bayles cut the engines down to "quarter speed," and jockeyed the ship for the narrow opening between the islands ahead of her. Aided by a sudden hard puff of wind, he managed to lay her bow right into the opening. Slowly she pressed onward, foot by foot, until the islands were abeam. Here her bow began to fall off, under the pressure of the wind, despite Bayles' desperate efforts to keep her headed straight. An ominous, scraping sound was heard.

As it came to his ears, Bayles' face, already tense, became hard as the rock of the islands about the ship, his lips formed a straight line, his dark eyes blazed with a smoldering fire. Calling to the engine room for "full speed astern," he pushed his assistant away from the wheel, and swiftly reversed it. Then, as the bow of the ship came slowly back to its former position, he stopped the engines; then signaled for "full speed ahead." The *Catawba* shot quickly forward, and, a moment later, was heading up the main channel, dead into the teeth of the gale.

"Good work," yelled Captain Whittlesey. "How much farther do we have to go, before we're clear of these rocks?"

"About two miles, sir; and none of it hard, compared to what we've come through. There's that reach I told you about, where we'll have the wind abeam for half a mile; but we can hug the north shore going through it, and get in the lee of the islands. Running at half speed, or even less, twenty minutes should see us in the bay."

"We might as well begin to blow for that tug," said Captain Whittlesey. "If she's comin' down to get some of the stuff, she can't start too soon." He laughed like a schoolboy on a holiday. "This has been some run, lad. Never talk to me about bad luck after this." His face darkened, as he glanced at Larry Hawkins, with the life preserver still about his body. "Hey, you, Hawkins," he called out sharply. "You can take that cork belt off now. We're just about in port."

Hawkins glared at the captain. Then, as he saw the grinning faces of the two men who were assisting Bayles, his pale face reddened with shame. With an oath, he untied the strings of the life preserver, and cast it upon the bridge.

The deep, bass steam whistle of the *Catawba* was sounded at intervals of a minute, as she made her way through the channel. When, in even less time than Bayles had named, she emerged into the bay, Captain Whittlesey was not long in picking out a black speck upon the waters, which grew momentarily larger and larger.

"The tug," he remarked. "They've heard us, and are in a hurry for the stuff. Break open that main hatch, boys, an' get ready to get it out; but don't try to move it till the tug's alongside."

Half an hour later, with the tug lying in the lee of the larger ship, a somewhat hazardous transfer of a score or more of boxes of the explosive was made. While this was being done, Captain Whittlesey told the tug's captain about the wreck at the entrance of the channel.

"We heard her whistle," said that young man; "but we thought it must be you, outside, and we didn't undertake to come down, for Mr. McWilliams knew that no transfer of cargo could be made with the sea that was running on the Lake. You say you came in by the back channel? Well, either you had your nerve right with you, or else you had a mighty good pilot."

"A new hand that shipped at Blairsport brought us in," replied Captain Whittlesey. He grinned broadly, and pointed at Bayles, who had descended from the pilot house to assist in transferring the cargo. "There he is. Ever see him before?"

The tugboat captain's jaw was slack, as he gazed at Bayles.

"Holy smoke!" he muttered. "Hard Luck Harry Bayles. It's a wonder that your crew stayed with you a minute, after they once learned that he was aboard the ship."

"No one but my mate an' myself knows who he is. The mate's had the shakes ever since he recognized him—seems he was with him, aboard the old *Thunderer*, when she was lost, some years ago."

"Mebbe his luck's changed," commented the tugboat captain. "He's all right as a fellow—nothin' whatever the matter with him—but he's the daddy of all bad luck." What more he might have said was cut off by the cry of "Cargo aboard" from the deck of the tug. "Got to get this stuff to McWilliams as soon as I can," he called, as

he went over the *Catawba's* side. "It's here just in time—they've just about finished drillin' the holes to take the first blast. See you up at the town." Then the tug steamed swiftly away, leaving the *Catawba* to follow as best she might.

VI.

At ten o'clock that night, Bayles sat in the *Catawba's* cabin. After the ship had tied up at the dock and the rest of her cargo of explosives had been unloaded, he had lounged about the rest of the morning. In the afternoon, he had accompanied Captain Whittlesey to the mines, there to witness the work of rescue, which was going swiftly forward. The dynamite had broken up the fall, and the company men, from McWilliams on down, had been loud in their praise of Captain Whittlesey and his crew. Most of the men in the mine escaped unscathed. There were a few injured, and three dead—caught under the fall, where they happened to be working at the time.

Across the table from Bayles sat Captain Whittlesey, holding in his stubby fingers a check for a thousand dollars—the Kaska Company's expression of its appreciation of the efforts of himself and his crew. The captain was speaking.

"By rights, the greater part of this check belongs to you," he said. "If it hadn't been for you, I wouldn't have undertaken the trip. An' after we got here, if it hadn't been for you, we'd have turned about an' run back to Clairton."

Bayles shook his head. "I'm satisfied with a deck hand's share," he said quietly. "I didn't do anything wonderful. Besides," he added, with a trace of bitterness in his voice, "if the boys find that my being aboard ship has brought 'em a little extra money, maybe they won't feel that I'm quite such a Jonah, after all."

"They know who you are, an' they've nothin' to say against you," replied the captain. "I'm not tryin' to say that if they'd known it before we started, they might not have been scared out of their wits, just as Larry Hawkins was, an' still is, for that matter. But they've had a good chance to see what you can do, an' they think that a good many of the stories that they've heard about you are either mistakes, or else just lies."

"A good many of 'em have been," said Bayles grimly. "Give a man a bad name, whether he deserves it or not, and there's always plenty of people ready and willing to give him a kick or a shove to send him down."

"Got anything special in view?" asked Captain Whittlesey. "Of course, you'll go back to Clairton with us, just as soon as we can get out of here. But after that?"

"No. I generally stick in a place as long as they'll have me," he added moodily. "Then, when they cast me adrift, I hunt another."

"Well, what's to hinder your takin' a mate's berth with me?" Bayles looked at the captain in surprise. "Larry Hawkins has quit cold. Came to me about an hour ago an' asked for his time. I gave it to him. I'd like to have you take his place."

For a long time Bayles was silent. When at last he spoke, his usually deep voice was husky, and his eyes were dim.

"I'll take it, captain," he said. "I can do the work, and the only thing that any man, livin' or dead, could say against me is that I'm unlucky. It means a whole lot more to me than you know, captain. It means a steady billet and steady pay; it means that I won't be kicked and cuffed around the Lakes like a criminal; it means that I'll be able to make a home for the girl that's been waitin' for me for years, eatin' out her very heart in the hope that my luck might change."

Captain Whittlesey nodded, his keen eyes also moist. Then he arose and went to a cupboard, from which he drew a fat, brown bottle and two glasses, which he placed upon the cabin table, and filled. Then he handed one of them to Bayles, and took the other himself.

"Here's hopin' that all those things you've mentioned come to pass," he said heartily.

The Scientific Gunman

AN ADVENTURE WITH CRAIG KENNEDY, SCIENTIFIC DETECTIVE

By Arthur B. Reeve

Author of "The Silent Bullet," "The Poisoned Pen," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF FIRST PART

Young Warrington, millionaire and a bit of a high flyer, has one of his finest automobiles stolen while it waited in a parking place until he returned from dinner at one of the flashy restaurants. Later it is traced to a gambling house from which an unconscious woman is taken and driven off by a short, thickset man. Still later the car is seen in New Jersey and at a spot along the route it has followed the dead body of a young woman is discovered hidden in thickets. There is a mysterious and ugly wound in her breast. Upon examining the body, Craig Kennedy the scientific detective, decides that she has been killed by a liquid bullet, at the hands of an extraordinary assassin. Follows an anonymous letter to Warrington's sweetheart, Violet Winslow, warning her against her lover, and insinuating that his estate controls the gambling house out of which the murdered woman was taken. Miss Winslow comes to Kennedy for advice and help. When Kennedy reveals the state of affairs to Warrington the young fellow is enraged, and together with the scientific detective and a few plain-clothes men they raid and close the gambling joint. And while there Kennedy obtains a clew to the automobile thief, who evidently has a rendezvous in an obscure part of the city. Next Warrington himself is shot at by a man in a racing motor car, and from the effect of the slight flesh wound Kennedy concludes that an anæsthetic bullet was used—another evidence of the clever scientific gunman. But Kennedy is at last on the outlaw's trail when he visits the rendezvous learned about in the gambling house. This is a disreputable garage. Installing a detectaphone (a highly developed dictograph), he overhears a conversation between this scientific criminal and his henchmen, the leader planning to break into Warrington's apartment and steal the anonymous letter sent to Violet Winslow. He fears that it may incriminate him, he having been foolish enough to write it himself by hand. Kennedy determines to be at the Warrington apartment to receive the gunman.

(In Two Parts—Part Two)

CHAPTER IX.

THE INCENDIARY.

"THE Warrington estate owns another large apartment on the next street," remarked Kennedy, half an hour later, after we had met the student from the laboratory. "I have arranged that we can get in there and wait in one of the empty suites."

Kennedy had secured two rather good-sized boxes from the student, and was carrying them very carefully, as if they contained some delicate mechanism.

Warrington occupied a suite in a large apartment on Seventy-second Street, and, as we entered, Kennedy stopped and whispered a few words to the hallboy.

In the apartment he unwrapped one of the packages, and laid it open on the table, while he busied himself opening the safe with the combination that Warrington had given him.

"Here's the letter, just as Warrington left it," he reported, with some satisfaction, banging the door shut and making the little safe look as though no one had touched it.

Meanwhile I had been looking curiously at the box. It did not seem to be like anything we had ever used before. One end was open, and the lid lifted up on a pair of hinges. I lifted it and looked in. About halfway down the box from the open end was a partition which looked almost as if some one had taken the end of the box and just shoved it in until it reached the middle. The open half was empty, but

in the other half I saw a sort of plate of some substance covering the outside of the shoved-in end. There was also a dry cell and several arrangements for adjustments which I did not understand. Back of the whole thing was a piece of mechanism, a clockwork interrupter, as I learned later. Wires led out from the closed end of the box.

Craig had shoved the letter into his pocket, and had placed the box in a corner, where it was hidden by a pile of books, with the open end facing the room in the direction of the antiquated safe. The wires from the box were quickly disposed of and dropped out of the window to the yard below, where we could pick them up later as we had done with the detectaphone.

"You see," he explained, "there is no way of knowing just how the apartment will be entered. They apparently have some way, which they wouldn't discuss over the telephone. But it is certain that as long as they know that any one is here they will put off the attempt. My scheme is for us now to leave the apartment ostentatiously. I think that is calculated to insure the burglary, for they must have some one watching by this time. Then we can get back to the empty apartment on the next street, and we shall be prepared for them."

Kennedy stopped to speak to the hall-boy again as we left, carrying the other box. After a turn down the street, a ride in a surface car for a few blocks and back again, he was satisfied that no one was following, and we made our way into the vacant apartment on Seventy-third Street without being observed.

Picking up the wires from Warrington's, and running them across the back fences and up to the vacant apartment was accomplished easily. In the darkness of the vacant room he uncovered and adjusted the other box, connected one set of wires to those we had led in and another set to an apparatus which looked precisely like the receiver of a wireless telegraph, fitting over the head with an earpiece. He placed the earpiece in position, and began regulating the mechanism.

"I didn't use the detectaphone," he explained, "because we haven't any assurance that they'll talk, or, if they do, that it will be worth while to listen. But they certainly can't work without light of some kind. This instrument literally makes light audible. It was invented to assist the blind, but I think I'll be able to show that it can be used to assist justice—which is blind sometimes, they say. It is the optophone."

He paused to adjust the thing more accurately.

"It was invented," he resumed, "by Professor Fournier d'Albe, a lecturer on physics at the University of Birmingham, England, and has been shown before many learned societies over there. It actually enables the blind to locate many things purely by the light reflected by them. Its action is based on the peculiar property of selenium, which you already know, of changing its electrical conductivity under the influence of light. Variations of light thus become variations of sound. That pushed-in end of the box which we hid over in Warrington's had, as you noticed, a selenium plate on the inside partition, facing the open end of the box.

"Now," he went on, "this property of selenium is used for producing an electric current which is interrupted by a special clockwork interrupter, and so is made audible in this wireless telephone receiver which I have here connected with this second box. The eye is replaced by the ear as a detector of light."

He continued to adjust the thing as he talked.

"The clockwork has been wound up by means of a small handle, and I moved a rod along a slit until I heard a purring sound. Then I moved it until the purring sound became as faint as possible. The instrument is now in its most sensitive state."

"What does it sound like?" I asked.

"Well, the passage of a hand or other object across the aperture is indicated by a sort of murmuring sound,

the loudest sound indicating the passage of the edges where the contrast is greatest. In a fairly bright light even the swiftest shadow is discoverable. Prolonged exposure, however, blinds the optophone just as it blinds the eye."

"Do you hear anything now?" I asked curiously.

"No; when I turned the current on at first I heard a ticking or rasping sound. I silenced that, but any change of the amount of light in that dark room over there would restore the sound, and its intensity would indicate the power of the light."

He continued to listen.

"When I first tried this I found that a glimpse out of the window in daylight sounded like a cinematograph reeling off a film. The ticking sank almost into silence as the receiving apparatus was held in the shadow of the laboratory table, and leaped into a lively rattle again when I brought it near an electric-light bulb. I blindfolded myself, and moved a piece of blotting paper between the receiver and the light, and I could hear the grating of the shadow. I heard a shadow pass. At night I found that it was even affected by the light of the stars."

He looked out of the window in the direction of Warrington's, which we could not see, however, since it was around another building.

"See," he went on; "the moon is rising, and in a few minutes it will shine right into that room. I could tell the moment it did. Try the thing yourself."

I did so. I could hear just the faintest sound.

Suddenly there came a weird noise. I looked at Kennedy in surprise.

"What is that?" I asked, describing it. "Are they there?"

"No," he laughed. "That was the moon shining in. I wanted you to hear it. When a ray of the sun, for instance, strikes that 'feeler' over there, a harmonious and majestic sound like the echo of a huge orchestra is heard. The light of the moon, on the other hand, produces a different sound—lamenting, almost like the groans of the wounded on a battlefield. Electric light, you would find if any one came in and switched it on over there, produces a most unpleasant sound, sometimes like two pieces of glass rubbed against each other, sometimes like the tittering laugh of ghosts, and I have heard it like the piercing cry of an animal. Gaslight is sobbing and whispering, grating and ticking, according to its intensity. By far the most melodious and pleasing sound is produced by an ordinary wax candle. It sounds just like an æolian harp on which the chords of a solemn tune are struck. I tried a glowworm, and it sounded like a bee buzzing. The light from a red-hot piece of iron gives the most lamenting and piercing cry imaginable."

He took the receiver back from me, and adjusted it to his own ear. "Yes," he said, "that was the moon. It's a peculiar sound. I must silence the machine to that."

We had waited patiently for a long time, and still there was no evidence that any one had entered the room.

"I'm afraid they decided not to come, after all," I said.

"No," he replied; "I took particular pains to make it seem that the coast was clear. I spoke to the hallboy twice, and we lingered about long enough when we went. It isn't much after midnight. I wonder how it was that they expected to get in. There goes the moon. I can hear it getting fainter all the time."

Suddenly Craig's face was all animation.

"What is it?" I asked breathlessly.

"Some one has entered the room. There is a light which sounds just like an electric flash light which is being moved about. They haven't switched on the electric light. If I were sufficiently expert I think I could tell by the varying sounds just at what that fellow was flashing the light. There, something walked directly between it and the box. So there must be two of them. Yes, that was the shadow of a human being, all right. They are over in the corner by the safe. The fellow with the flash light is bending down. I can tell because the other fellow walked be-

tween the light and the box, and I heard the shadow of both of his legs."

Craig was apparently waiting only until the intruders were busily engaged in their search before giving the alarm and hurrying over there after them.

"Walter," he cried, "call up the apartment house itself, and get the hallboy. Tell him he must not run that elevator up until we get there. Also no one must leave or enter. Tell him to lock the door and conceal himself in the door to the cellar. I will ring the night bell five times to let him know when to let us in."

I was telephoning excitedly Craig's instructions, and he was taking a last turn at the optophone before we made our dash on Warrington's, when a suppressed exclamation escaped him. I turned toward him quickly from the telephone and hung up the receiver.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Walter," he answered, stripping the receiver from his head and clapping it over my ears, "quick—tell me what you hear. I can't be mistaken."

I listened feverishly. From the receiver of the optophone came the most peculiar noise I had ever heard a mechanical instrument make. It was like a hoarse, rumbling cry, now soft and almost plaintive, again louder and like a shriek of a damned soul in the fires of the nether world. Then it died down, only to spring up again worse than before.

I described it as best I could. Indeed, the thing almost frightened me by its weird novelty.

"Yes, yes," agreed Craig, as the sensations I experienced seemed to coincide with his own. "Exactly what I heard myself. I thought I could not be mistaken. Quick, Walter, get central on that wire."

A moment later he had seized the telephone from me. I had expected him to summon the police to assist us in capturing two crooks who had devised some odd and scientific method of blowing an old safe.

"Hello, hello!" he shouted. "The fire department? This is forty-eight-fourteen Seventy-second—on the corner; yes, yes, northeast. I want to turn in an alarm. Yes. Quick. There is a fire—a bad one—incendiary—top floor. No, no, I'm not there. I can see it. Hurry!"

He had dropped the telephone, and was now dashing madly out and down the street.

The hallboy had done as I had ordered him. There was the elevator waiting as Craig gave the five short rings at the night bell and the outside door was unlocked. No one had discovered the fire which we knew was raging up on the top floor.

We were whirled up there swiftly, just as we heard echoing through the hall from some one who had an apartment on the same floor the frantic cry of: "Fire!"

Tenants all the way up were now beginning to open doors and run breathlessly about in various states of undress. The elevator bell was jangling insistently.

"Run your car up and down until all are out who want to go," ordered Craig. "Only tell them all there is no danger to any one except to the apartment that is on fire. You can leave us here."

We had reached the top floor and stepped out. I realized fully now what had happened. Either the robbers had found out too quickly that they had been duped or else that the letter had been hidden in a place which they had not time to hunt out in the apartment. It had probably been the latter idea which they had had. Instead of hunting farther they had taken a quicker and more unscrupulous method, had set the room on fire, and that had promptly and faithfully been reported to us over the optophone.

"At least we were able to turn in an alarm only a few seconds after they started the fire," panted Craig, as he strained to burst in the door.

Together we managed to push it in, and rushed into the stifle of Warrington's apartment. The whole thing was in flames, and it was impossible for us to remain there longer than to take in the situation.

We retreated before the fierce blaze, and one of the tenants came running with two fire extinguishers that were on the floor. As well try to drown a blast furnace. They made no impression.

I had expected anything but this. I had been prepared up to the time the optophone reported the fire to dash over and fight it out at close quarters with two as desperate and resourceful men as conditions in New York at that time had created. Instead we saw no one at all. They had evidently worked in seconds instead of minutes, realizing that they must take no risks in a showdown with Kennedy. Rooms that might perhaps have given some clew of their presence, perhaps finger prints, were now being destroyed. We had defeated them. We had the precious letter. But they had again slipped away.

Firemen were now arriving. A hose had been run up, and a solid stream of water was now hissing in on the fire. Smoke and steam were everywhere as the men hacked and cut their way at the very heart of the hungry red monster.

"We are only in the way here," remarked Kennedy, retreating. "They must have entered and escaped by the roof."

He had dashed up ahead of the firemen. I followed. Sure enough, the door out on the roof had been broken into. A rope tied around a chimney showed how they had pulled themselves up and later let themselves down to the roof of the next apartment some fifteen feet lower. We could see an open door leading to the roof there, which must have been broken open. That had evidently been the secret method of which the chief had spoken to the boss.

Pursuit was useless now. All was excitement. From the street we could hear the clang of engines and trucks arriving and taking their positions almost as if the fire department had laid out the campaign beforehand for this very fire. Any one who had waited a moment or so in the other apartment might have gone down without attracting any attention. Then he might have disappeared in or mingled with the very crowd on the street. Late as it was, the crowd seemed to spring from nowhere, and to grow momentarily.

What had been intended to be one of the worst fires and to injure a valuable property of the Warrington estate had, thanks to the prompt action of Kennedy, been quickly turned into only a minor affair at the most. The fire had eaten its way into two other rooms of Warrington's own suite, but there it had been stopped. The building itself was nearly fireproof, and each apartment was a unit.

Still, it was interesting to watch the skill and intuition of the smoke eaters as they took in the situation, and almost instantly seemed to be able to cope with it.

Sudden and well planned though the incendiary assault had been, it was not many minutes before it was completely under control. Men in rubber coats and boots were soon tramping through the water-soaked rooms of Warrington. Windows were cracked open and the air was clearing.

We followed in cautiously after one of the firemen. In the corner we could see the safe, still hot and steaming. It had stood the strain. But it was open.

"Somebody used a can opener," commented Craig, looking at it and then ruefully at the charred wreck of his optophone, that was tumbled in the ashes of the pile of books under which it had been hidden. "Yes, that was the scheme they probably evolved after their midnight conference, a robbery masked by a fire to cover the trail and perhaps destroy it altogether."

"Yes," I agreed, "if we had only known that we might have saved what little there was in that safe for Warrington. But I guess he didn't keep much there."

"No," answered Craig, "only some personal letters and a few things he liked to have around. All the really valuable stuff he has was in a safe-deposit vault downtown."

"I wonder who this fellow is that they call the chief," I ventured.

"He's the cleverest I have met yet," admitted Kennedy. "His pace is rapid,

but I think we are getting up with it. There's no use sticking around here any longer. The place for us is down getting an earful at the other end of that detectaphone."

The engines and other apparatus were rolling away from the fire when we regained the street.

We rode downtown on the subway, and I was surprised when Kennedy, instead of going all the way down to the crosstown line that would take us to the Old Tavern, got off at Forty-second Street.

"Do you think I'm going to travel around the city with that letter in my pocket?" he asked. "Not much, since they seem to set such a value on getting it back."

He had stopped at a hotel where he knew the night clerk. He made the letter into a little package, and deposited it in the safe.

"Why do you leave it here?" I asked.

"If I go near the laboratory they'll think I've left it there, and I certainly won't leave it in the apartment. They know I've got it. I'd hate to risk meeting them down in their own region, too. To-morrow I'll get this and deposit it in a really safe place. Wait a moment until I call up O'Connor. I think he ought to know what has happened."

"What did he say?" I asked, as Kennedy rejoined me from the booth.

"Why, he knew about it already," replied Craig. "Herman got back, he says, from his wild-goose chase over New Jersey, and saw the thing in the reports at police headquarters and telephoned him."

"Herman is one of the brightest detectives I ever met," I commented in disgust. "He always manages to get in just after everybody else. Has he any more news?"

"No," answered Craig, "except that he ran down the Pennsylvania report, and found there was nothing in it. Now he says that he thinks the car has returned to New York, perhaps by way of Staten Island."

"Clever," I ejaculated. "I suppose that occurred to him as soon as he read of the fire. I have to hand it to him for being a deducer."

Craig smiled.

"Well," he concluded, "this isn't getting back to business. Let's go down on a surface car. I think we ought to learn something now. If they've done nothing more, they'll think they have at least given an example of their resourcefulness, and succeeded in throwing another scare into Warrington. O'Connor says, there has been no report about Forbes yet. There's one thing that I'd like to be able to tell Mr. Chief, however. He can't throw any scare into me, if that's his game."

CHAPTER X.

THE NEWSPAPER FAKE.

We had been able to secure a key to the hotel entrance to the Old Tavern so that we felt free to come and go at any hour of the day and night. We let ourselves in and mounted the stairs cautiously to our room.

"At least they haven't discovered anything yet," Kennedy congratulated himself, picking up the detective receiver of the mechanical eavesdropper.

He listened a moment. "There is some one in there, all right," he said. "I can hear sounds as if he were moving around. It must be the garage keeper himself, the one they call the boss. I don't think our clever chief would have the temerity to show up here yet."

We waited some time, but not the sound of a voice came from the instrument.

"It would be just like them to discover one of these instruments," ruminated Kennedy at length. "This is a good opportunity. I believe I'll just let myself quietly down there in the yard, and separate those two wires. There's no use in risking all the eggs in one basket."

While I listened, Craig cautiously got out the rope ladder and descended. I could hear the noises of the man walking about in the garage, and was ready at the window to give the first alarm of

danger, but nothing happened, and Kennedy succeeded in accomplishing his purpose and returning safely. Then we resumed listening in relays.

It was perhaps an hour afterward that there came a telephone call to the garage, and the garage keeper answered it.

"Where did you go afterward?" he asked.

A voice which I recognized instantly as that of the man they called the chief replied: "Oh, I had a little business to attend to—you understand. Say, they got that fire out pretty quickly. They say that Kennedy showed up at the fire double quick. He must have been onto it. Do you know, I've been thinking about that since then. Ever hear of a little thing they call the dictograph? No? Well, it's a little arrangement that can be concealed almost anywhere. I've been wondering whether there might not be one hidden about the garage. He might have put one in that night, you know. I'm sure he knows more about us than he has any right to know. Hunt around, will you?"

"Hold the wire."

We could hear the boss poking around in corners, back of the piles of accessories, back of the gasoline tank, lifting things up and looking under them, apparently flashing the light everywhere.

A hasty exclamation was recorded over the detectaphone. "What the deuce is this?" growled a voice. Then over the telephone we could hear the boss talking. "There's a black, round thing back of a pile of tires, with wires connected to it. One side of it is full of little round holes. Is that one of those things?"

"No, it isn't a dictograph, but it may be worse. Smash it!" came back the voice. "And, wait; look and see where the wires from it run. I thought you'd find something."

Kennedy had quickly cut the wires from his receiving instrument, and, sticking his head cautiously out of the window, he swung the cut ends as far as he could in the direction of a big, iron-shuttered warehouse down the street.

Then he closed the window, and pulled down another switch on the other detectaphone connected with the fake telephone receiver.

He smiled. The thing worked. We still had one connection left with the garage. There was the noise of something being battered to bits. It was the black disk back of the pile of tires. We could hear the boss muttering to himself.

"Say," he reported back over the telephone, "I've smashed the thing, all right, and cut the wires. They ran out of the back window to that mercantile warehouse down the street. I'll look after that in the morning. It's so dark over there now I can't see a thing."

"Good!" exclaimed the other voice. "Now we can talk. That fellow isn't such a wise guy, after all. I tell you, boss, I'm going to throw a good scare into them this time—one that will stick."

"What is it?"

"You know we can't always be following that fellow Kennedy. He's too clever at dodging shadows. Warrington is out of it, for the present. I saw to that. Now, the thing is to fix up something to call them off altogether. How about Violet Winslow?"

"What do you mean—a robbery, up there?"

"No, no, no! What good will a robbery do? I mean to get her, to kidnap her. I guess Warrington would call the whole thing off to release her—eh?"

"Say, chief, that's going it pretty strong. I'd rather break in up there and leave a warning of some kind. I'm afraid——"

"Afraid—nothing. I tell you we've got to do it. We've either got to get Kennedy or do something that'll call him off for good. Why, the whole game is up if he keeps on, let alone our own risk of getting caught."

"When would you do it?" asked the boss, weakening.

"Not for a couple of days. I'm going up to our place where I left the car. I'll study the situation up there. I can run

over and look over the ground, see how she spends her time. I'll let you know. In the meantime, I want you to watch that place on Forty-seventh Street. Tell me if they make a move against it. Don't waste any time, either. I can't be out of touch with things the way I was the last time I went away. You see, they almost, they did put one across on you with that dictograph or whatever it was. Now, you can't let that happen again. Just keep me posted. See?"

They had finished talking, and that apparently was all that we were to get that night. It had been enough. If they would murder and burn, what would they stop at to strike at us through the innocent figure of Violet Winslow? It sent a shudder over me to think of the delicate slip of a girl in the power of such men.

"At least," rapped out Kennedy, "they can't do anything for a couple of days. Before that time we shall have rounded them up. The time has come for something desperate. I won't be trifled with any longer. That last proposal goes just over the limit."

It was very late, and we determined to sleep at the Old Tavern the rest of the night, which amounted only to a couple of hours. We were up early, and on our way to our apartment.

We had scarcely entered when the telephone boy called up to say that there was a Mr. Warrington on long distance trying to get us. Craig asked to have him put on the wire. Warrington had evidently been informed of the fire, and inquired anxiously for the details, especially about the letter. Craig quickly apologized for not calling him sooner, and assured him that the letter was safe.

"How are you?" he asked.

"Convalescing rapidly," Warrington laughed. "Thanks to a new tonic which the doctor has prescribed for me."

"I can guess what that is."

"I've been allowed to take short auto trips with Violet," said Warrington eagerly.

"Say," burst out Craig, "I hate to butt in, but if you'll take my advice you'll just cut that out for a few days. I don't want to alarm you, but after to-day I want Miss Winslow never to be out of the sight of friends—friends, I said; not one, but several. I can't explain it all over the telephone. But I'll see you before long, perhaps to-day. Don't forget. It's a matter of life or death—or perhaps worse. Don't alarm her, but just fix it up as quietly as you can. No, I can't explain now. But to-day is the last outing until I raise the ban."

They argued the matter for some minutes, but Craig of course prevailed, the more so because Warrington quickly realized that in his condition he was not much of a bodyguard for any one.

"I had a call the other day," Warrington reported to Kennedy. "It was from McBirney. He says one of his unofficial scouts has told him of seeing a car that might have been mine up this way lately."

"By the way," remarked Craig. "That reminds me. You will have to put at our disposal one of your cars down here. I'd like that racer, if it is in condition. Yes? We may have some sleuthing to do in it."

"Good heavens," I exclaimed, when the conversation was over and Craig told me of McBirney's report. "Are we going to have to extend operations over the whole State, after all?"

"We may," he replied, "if our scientific murderer gets busy with some of his smooth kidnaping tricks. It's possible," he added thoughtfully, "that McBirney may be right about the car being up there."

"And Herman wrong," I suggested. "Still, one such guess is as good as another."

It had been quite a relief to get back to our own rooms and live even for a few minutes like civilized beings, and I suggested that we might have a real breakfast once more.

I could tell, however, that Craig's mind was far away from the thought of eating, and that he realized that a keen test of his ability lay ahead of him if he was to come out successfully in the final battle with the scientific gunman. I did not interrupt him.

The end of the meal found him, however, with a plan of campaign all mapped out. It consisted, as he unfolded it to me over an untasted grapefruit, of as ingenious a "plant" as I could well imagine.

I was to go down to the *Star* office and write a long and circumstantial story of the discovery of new evidence against the ladies' pool room. I was to tell of a young gambler who was said to be in touch with the district attorney; in fact, to write up the whole gambling situation on lines that Kennedy suggested. Then a "fake" edition of the paper was to be run off, bearing my story on the front page. Only a few copies were to be printed, and they were to be delivered to us. The thing had been done before, I knew, and in this case Warrington was to foot the bill.

After I left Craig I spent the entire morning getting the thing pat down at the *Star*. It was a great story when I got through with it. "It is said," "It is rumored about the Criminal Courts Building," "An informant high in the police department," and the mythical "gambler who is operating quietly uptown," told some amazing facts. It began:

Since the raid by the police on the luxurious gambling house in Forty-eighth Street, a remarkable new phase of sporting life has been unfolded to the district attorney, who is quietly gathering evidence against another place situated in the same district. A former gambler who frequented the raided place has placed many incriminating facts about the second place in the hands of the authorities, who are contemplating an exposure that will stir even New York, accustomed as it is to such startling revelations. It involves one of the cleverest and most astute criminals who ever operated in the city.

This place which is under observation is one which has brought tragedy to many. Young women attracted by the treacherous lure of the spinning roulette wheel or the fascination of the shuffle of cards have squandered away their own and their husband's money with often tragic results, and many of them have gone even farther into the moral quagmire in the hope of earning enough money to pay their losses and keep from their families the knowledge of their gambling.

This situation, one of the high lights in this city of lights and shadows, has been evolved, according to the official informant, through the countless number of gambling resorts that have gained existence in the most fashionable parts of the city.

The record of crime of the clever and astute individual already mentioned is being minutely investigated, and, it is said, shows some of the most astounding facts. It runs even to murder, which was accomplished in getting rid of an informer recently in the pay of the police. Against those conducting the crusade every engine of the underworld has been used. The fight has been carried on bitterly, and within twenty-four hours arrests are promised as a result of confessions already in the hands of the authorities and being secretly and widely investigated by them before the final blow is delivered simultaneously both in the city and a town up State where the criminal believes himself unknown and secure.

There was more of the stuff, which I do not quote, describing the situation in general terms which could have only one meaning to a person acquainted with the particular case with which we were dealing. It threw a "scare" in type as hard as could be done.

"That will make some one sit up and take notice," remarked Craig late in the afternoon, when he joined me at the office, and the printed copies were delivered to us. "Now, to sow the seed, and watch it grow."

Kennedy had come downtown in the car which Warrington had placed at his disposal, and it was not long before we were again in the part of the city where the garage was located.

We stopped, and Kennedy beckoned to a boy a couple of blocks below the garage.

"Do you want to make a dollar?" he asked, jingling four quarters.

The boy's eyes never left the fist that held the tempting bait. "Betcher life!" he answered.

"Well," instructed Craig, "take these newspapers. I don't want you to sell any of them on the street. But when you come to that garage up there—see it?—I want you to yell: 'Extra, all about the gambling exposure. Warrants out!' Just go in there. They'll buy, all right. And if you say a word about any one giving you these papers to sell, there'll be some one to chase you and get back this dollar to the last cent—get me?"

The boy did, and after Kennedy had given him final instructions not to start with the papers for five minutes, we slipped quietly around the next street, and came out near the Old Tavern, but not in front of it.

Craig left the car—I had been riding almost on the mud guard—in charge of Warrington's man, who was to appear to be tinkering with the engine as an excuse for waiting there, and to keep an eye on anything that happened down the street.

We made our way into our room at the Tavern, with more than ordinary caution, for fear that something might have been discovered. Apparently the discovery of the one detectaphone had been enough to disarm further suspicion, and the garage keeper had not thought it necessary to examine the telephone wire to see whether that had been tampered with in any way. The wire leading to the warehouse had seemed quite sufficient.

In the room which we had used so much, we found the other detectaphone working splendidly. By the sound evidently some one in the garage was overhauling a car. It may have been that he was fixing one up so that its rightful owner would never recognize it, or he may have been getting ready to take it out. There was no way of determining. Some one was evidently helping him, one of the workmen we had heard when the instrument had first introduced us to the place. The second machine connected with the telephone did not transmit quite as clearly as the broken detective device had done, but it served, and besides we could both hear through this and confirm anything that might be indistinct.

"Listen," cautioned Craig. "What's that they are saying? Some one has told the boss—he's talking—that they can go over O'Connor's head and get the gambling paraphernalia back? Well, I've been there at the raided place today, and it doesn't look so. The stuff has all been taken down to headquarters. Ah, so that is the game that is in the wind? Get it back and open somewhere else. Here's our boy."

The newsboy had apparently stuck his head in the door, for we could hear them greet him with a growl, until he yelled lustily: "Extra, all about the gambling exposure—warrants out—extra."

"Hey, you, kid," came a voice from the detectaphone, "let's see that paper. What is it—the *Star?* Well, I'll be ——! Read that. Some one's snitched to the district attorney, I'll bet. That'll make the chief sore—and he's 'way up in the country, too. I don't dare wire it. No, some one'll have to take a copy of this paper up there to him and tip him off. He'll be sore if he doesn't know about it. Hurry up, finish up this car; I'll take it myself."

Kennedy laughed almost gleefully. "The plant has begun to work," he cried. "We'll wait here until just before he's ready to start. Three of us around our car on the street are too many. He must be getting ready for a long run."

"How much gas is there in this tank?" the gruff voice of the boss demanded. "You dummy—not two gallons! No, you finish. I'll fill it myself."

There was the sound of the drawing of gasoline.

"Any extra tires? What! Not a new shoe in the place? Give me a couple of the best of those old ones. Never mind, here are two over by the telephone. Say, what the devil is this wire back there attached to the telephone wire? Well, cut it! That's more of that fellow Kennedy's work—tapping the telephone. We got rid of one thing last night. Thank Heaven, I didn't have any telephone calls to-day."

"Confound it!" muttered Craig, as a pair of pliers made our second detectaphone die with an expiring gasp in the middle of a sentence of profanity.

There was no use now in remaining any longer in the room. Gathering up the receiving apparatus, Craig quickly carried it down and tossed it into the waiting car around the corner. Then he sent Warrington's man to hang around the corner and watch what was going on at the garage.

Kennedy was to drive the car himself, and we were going to leave Warrington's man behind. We could tell by the actions of the man on the corner that something was taking place at the garage.

We could hear a horn blow, and I knew that the doors had opened and a big car had been backed out slowly. Our own engine was running perfectly in spite of the seeming trouble with which we had masked our delay. Kennedy jumped in at the wheel, and I followed. The man on the corner was signaling that the car was going in the opposite direction. We leaped ahead.

As the big car ahead slid along eastward we followed at such a distance as not to attract attention. It was easy enough to do that, but not so easy not to get tied up among the trucks laden wih foodstuffs of every description which blocked the streets.

Where the car ahead was bound we did not know, but I could see that the driver was a stocky fellow, who slouched down into his seat, and handled his car almost as if it had been a mere toy. It was, I felt positive, the man whom McBirney had reported one night about the neighborhood of Longacre Square in the car which had been Warrington's. This at least was a different car, I knew. Now I realized the wisdom of allowing this man, whom they called the boss, to go free. Under the influence of Kennedy's "plant," he was to lead us to the right trail to the chief.

It was easier now to follow the car since it had worked its way into Fifth Avenue. On uptown it went. We hung on doggedly in the mass of traffic going north at this congested hour.

At last it turned into Forty-seventh Street. It was stopping at the ladies' gambling joint, apparently to spread the news. I had thought that the place was closed until the present trouble blew over, but it seemed that there must be some one there. The boss was evidently known, for he was immediately admitted.

Kennedy did not stop. He kept on around the corner to the raided pool room on the next block. O'Connor's man, who had been stationed there to watch the place, bowed and admitted him.

"I'm going to throw it into him good this time," remarked Kennedy, as he entered. "I'm not going to give them a chance even to plot that kidnaping of Miss Winslow."

CHAPTER XI.

THE SPEAKING ARC.

"Looks pretty deserted here," remarked Kennedy to O'Connor's man, who had accompanied us into the now-deserted gambling den.

"Yes," he grinned. "There's not much use in keeping me here since they took all the stuff down to headquarters. Now and then one of the old rounders who has been out of town and hasn't heard of the raid comes in. You should see his face change at the sight of my uniform. They never stop to ask questions."

I was wondering how the police regarded Kennedy's part in the matter, and while Craig was busy I asked: "Have you seen Herman lately?"

The man laughed.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Is he sore at having the raid pulled off over his head?"

"Sore?" he repeated. "Oh, not a bit, not a bit. He enjoyed it. It gave him so much credit," the man added sarcastically, "especially after he fell down in getting the evidence against that place around the corner."

"Was that his case, too?" I asked.

"Sure. Didn't you know that? That Rena Taylor was working under his orders when she was killed. They tell me at headquarters he's working overtime on the case. He hasn't said much, but there's some one he is after—I know. Herman is always most dangerous when he's quiet. The other day he was in here, said there was a man who used to be seen here a good deal in the palmy days, who had disappeared. I don't know who he was, but Herman asked me to keep a particular lookout to

see if he came back for any purpose. There's some one he suspects, all right."

I wondered why the man told me. He must have seen by the look on my face what I was thinking of. "I wouldn't tell everybody that," he added, "only most of us don't like Herman any too well. He's always trying to hog it all, gets all the credit if we picks up a clew, and—well, most of us wouldn't be exactly disappointed to see Mr. Kennedy succeed—that's all."

Kennedy was calling me from the back room, and I excused myself. The man went back to his post at the front door, and Kennedy closed the door into the room.

While I had been busy fixing up the faked edition of the *Star,* which had so alarmed the owner of the garage and set things moving rapidly, Kennedy had also been busy in another direction. He had explored not only the raided gambling den, but the little back yard which ran all the way to an extension on the back of the house in the next street, in which was situated the woman's pool room. He had explored the caved-in tunnel enough to make absolutely certain that his suspicions had been correct in the first place, and that it ran to this other joint, from which the gamblers had made their escape. That had satisfied him, however, and he had not unearthed the remains of the tunnel or taken any action in the matter yet. Something else appeared to interest him just now.

"I found," he said, "that the feed wire of the arc light that burns all the time in that main room over there in the place on Forty-seventh Street passes in through the back of the house."

He was examining two wires which, from his manner, I inferred were attached to this feed wire, leading to it from the room in which we now were. What the purpose of the connection was I had no idea. Perhaps, I thought, it was designed to get new evidence against the place. So far, except for what we had seen on our one visit, there had been no real evidence except that which had died with Rena Taylor.

"What's that?" I asked, as Kennedy produced a package from a closet where he had left it earlier in the day.

I saw after he had unwrapped it that it was a very powerful microphone and a couple of storage cells. He attached it to the wire leading out to the electric-light wire.

"I had provided it to be used in an emergency," he replied. "I think the time has come sooner than I anticipated."

I watched him curiously, wondering what would come next.

There followed a most amazing series of groanings and mutterings from Craig. I could not imagine what he was up to. The whole proceeding seemed so insane that for the moment I was speechless.

Kennedy caught the puzzled look on my face.

"What's the matter?" he laughed, cutting out the microphone momentarily, and seeming to enjoy the joke.

"Would you prefer to be sent to a State or a private institution?" I rasped testily. "What insanity is all this? It sounds like the fee-faw-fum and mummery of a faker."

"Come, now," he argued. "You know as well as I do what sort of people those gamblers are—superstitious as the deuce. I did this once before today. This is a good time to do it again before they persuade themselves that there is nothing in that story which we printed in the *Star.* That fellow is in there now, probably in that room where we were, and it is possible that they may settle his fears. Now, just suppose a murder had been committed in a room, and you knew it, and heard groanings and mutterings—from nowhere, just in the air, about you, overhead—what would you do, if you were superstitious?"

Before I could answer, he had resumed.

"Cut out and run, I suppose," I replied. "But what has that to do with it? The groanings are here, not there. You haven't been able to get in over there to attach anything. What do you mean?"

"No," he admitted. "But did you ever hear what you could do with a microphone, a rheostat, and a small transformer coil if you attached them properly to a direct-current electric-lighting circuit? No? Well, an amateur with a little knowledge of electricity could do it; the thing is easily constructed, and the result is a most complicated matter."

"Well?" I queried.

"The electric arc," he continued, "isn't always just a silent electric light. You know that. You've heard them make noises. Under the right conditions it can be made to speak—the 'speaking arc,' as Professor Duddell calls it. In other words, an arc light can be made to act as a telephone receiver."

I could hardly believe the thing possible, but Kennedy went on explaining: "You might call it the arcophone, I suppose. The scientific fact of the matter is that the arc is sensitive to very small variations of the current. These variations may run over a wide range of frequency. That suggested to Duddell that a direct-current arc might be used as a telephone receiver. All that you need is to add a microphone current to the main arc current. The arc reproduces sounds and speech distinctly, loud enough to be heard several feet away."

He had cut out the microphone while he was talking. He switched it in again now with the words: "Now, get ready, Walter. Just one more; then we must hurry around to that car of ours and watch the fun."

Again he was talking into the microphone. In a most solemn, sepulchral voice he repeated: "Let the slayer of Rena Taylor beware. She will be avenged. She will protect Violet Winslow. Beware—a life for a life!"

Three times he repeated it to make sure that it would carry. Then, grabbing up his hat and coat, he dashed out of the room, past the surprised policeman at the door, and took the steps in front of the house two at a time.

We hardly had time to enter our own car and reach the corner of Forty-seventh Street when the big black automobile which we had followed uptown shot by almost before the traffic man at the crossing could signal a clear road.

"We must hang onto him!" cried Craig, turning to follow. "Did you catch a glimpse of him? It's our man, the go-between, the keeper of the garage. He was pale as a ghost. I guess he thought he saw one. Between the newspaper fake and the speaking arc, I think we've got him going. There he is."

It was an exciting ride, for the man ahead was almost reckless, though he seemed to know just when to put on bursts of speed and when to slow down to escape being arrested for speeding. We hung on, managing to keep only a couple of blocks behind him. It was evident that he was making for the ferry uptown across the river to New Jersey, and, taking advantage of this knowledge, Kennedy was able to drop back a little, and approach the ferry by going down a different street so that there was no evidence that we were following him.

By judicious jockeying we succeeded in getting on the boat on the opposite side from the car we were following, and in such a way that we could get off about as soon as he could. We managed to cross the ferry, and, in the general scramble that attends the landing, to negotiate the hill on the other side of the river without attracting the attention of the man in the other car. His one idea seemed to be speed, and he had no suspicion yet that he was being followed.

As we bowled along, forced to take the fellow's dust, Craig would chuckle now and then to himself.

"Fancy what he must have thought," he chortled. "First the newspaper that sent him scurrying up to the gambling place for more news or to spread the alarm, and then, while they were sitting about, perhaps while some one was talking about the strange voices, suddenly the voice from nowhere with a warning from the grave."

The effect was all that Kennedy could have desired. Hour after hour we hung to that car ahead, leaving be-

hind the cities, and passing along the regular road through town after town. Sometimes the road was well oiled, and we would have to drop back to escape too close observation. Then we would strike a stretch where it was dry. The clouds of dust served to hide us. On we went, until it was apparent that the man was now headed toward Tuxedo.

We now passed the boundary between New York State and New Jersey, and came to the house of Doctor Mead, where Warrington was convalescing. There was no chance to stop there now. Kennedy scarcely looked, so intent was he in not missing for an instant the car that was leading us in this long chase. I saw a car standing in front of the house, and recognized it.

"Miss Winslow's car," I remarked. "Quite evidently that is the tonic that is doing Warrington so much good."

"I think this fellow noticed it," answered Kennedy. "He seemed to slow up a bit as he passed. I hope he didn't look back at us."

It made no difference if he did. We kept on, around the bend where Warrington had been held up. We turned, the forward car not a quarter of a mile ahead.

"We must close up on him," said Kennedy, throwing in the clutch. "He may turn off at a crossroad any time now."

Still he kept on, past the entrance to the park. We hung on doggedly.

Sure enough, at a crossroad the other car slowed up and swung around off the main road.

"What are you going to do?" I asked Kennedy quickly. "If we turn also, that will be too raw. He'll notice that."

"Stop," answered Kennedy, taking in the situation instantly. "Come on, Walter, get out. We'll fake up a little tire trouble, only I'll keep the engine running."

We went back, and stood by the rear wheel. Kennedy bent over it, keeping his eye fixed on the other car, now perhaps half a mile up the narrow crossroad.

It neared the top of a hill, then dipped down over the crest, and was lost on the other side. Kennedy leaped back into our car, and I followed. He turned the bend almost on two wheels, and let her out as we swept down a short hill and then took the incline, eating up the distance as though it had been inches instead of nearly a mile.

A few feet from the top of the hill, Craig put on the brake. "Let us walk up the rest of the way," he said, "and see what is on the other side, in the valley."

We did so cautiously. Far down below us we could see the car we had been trailing making its way along the country road. As we watched it, it turned out and up a sort of lane that led to what looked like a trim little country estate.

It stopped at an unpretentious house at the end of the lane. The driver got out and walked up to the back door, which seemed to be stealthily opened to admit him.

"Good!" exclaimed Craig. "At last we are on a hot trail."

CHAPTER XII.

THE SIEGE OF THE BANDITS.

As we watched from the top of the hill, I wondered what Kennedy's next move was to be. Surely he would not attempt to attack the place yet. There seemed to be nothing that could be done now, as long as it was daylight, for any movement in this half-open country would have been viewed with suspicion by the occupants of the little house in the valley, whoever they might be.

"So the one they call the boss has led us to the refuge of their chief, the scientific gunman, at last," Kennedy remarked, with some satisfaction, as we returned slowly to our car. "It is still early in the day. They suspect no trouble up here. Here they feel safe. No doubt they think we are still hunting for them fruitlessly in New York. I think we can leave them here for a few hours. We must return to the city, and I must see O'Connor, and then drop into the laboratory."

He had turned the car around, and we made our way back to the main road, and then southward again. We stopped for a few minutes to see Warrington, the first time since the morning after the attempt on his life. I was surprised to see him looking so well.

The car which we had seen on the way up was gone now, but it needed only the look on his face to tell sooner than his tongue could frame the words that we had been right in our guess as to his visitor, and that her faithful visits had cut days off his illness. He seemed positively gay. Any misunderstanding that there had been between the two had been patched up forever as the boy had threaded his way doggedly out of the valley of the shadow. There was only one cloud over his new happiness, and it did not take long for him to disclose it.

"What's this trouble you spoke of?" he asked Kennedy earnestly. "Why can't I see her after to-day? What is it? Is there anything that threatens her? Are they plotting against her?"

He saw that his guess was correct by the look on Kennedy's face, and his anxiety was so great that it was evident that it might have a serious effect on him. Kennedy hastened to reassure him. Quickly, as the time at our disposal demanded, he ran over the events of the last two days, leading up to the discovery of the little house in the valley.

"Nothing is going to happen to Violet," said Kennedy finally. "Before they have even planned anything we shall be upon them. They won't know what has struck them."

We left the impatient Warrington, and took up in earnest now the long return trip to the city, covering the distance in almost record time. Although it was late when we arrived we found O'Connor, and had a hasty conference with him. He was even more excited than we were when he learned how far we had gone in tracing out our clews.

Immediately the police deputy began to make arrangements to accompany us.

At the laboratory, Craig loaded the car with paraphernalia. There were three coats of a peculiar texture which he took from a wardrobe, a huge arrangement which looked like a reflector, a little thing that looked merely like the mouthpiece of a telephone transmitter, and a large, heavy package which might have been anything from a field gun to a battering-ram.

It was twilight when we arrived at the nearest railroad station to the little cottage in the valley after another run up in the country with the car. O'Connor, who had come up by train to meet us according to the arrangement with Craig, was already waiting, and with him was one of the most trustworthy and experienced of the department chauffeurs. Craig looked about at the few loungers curiously, but there did not seem to be any of them who took any suspicious interest in new arrivals. We four managed to pile into a car built only for two, and Craig started off.

A few minutes later we arrived at the top of the hill from which we had already viewed the mysterious house earlier in the day. It was now quite dark. We had met no one since turning into the crossroad, and could hear no sound except the continuous music of the night insects.

We halted, and Craig turned out all the lights on the car. He was risking nothing that might lead to discovery yet. With the engine muffled down, we coasted slowly down the other side of the hill into the valley. There was no moon yet, and we had only the light of the stars to guide us.

What was the secret of that unpretentious little house below us? Whoever it sheltered was still there, and we could locate the place by a single gleam that came from an upper window.

"We'll stop here," announced Craig, when we had reached a point on the road a few hundred yards from the house.

He ran the car carefully off the road, and into a little clearing in a clump of dark trees. We got out and pushed stealthily forward through the underbrush to the edge of the woods. There

on the slope, just a little way below us, stood the house of mystery.

Kennedy and O'Connor were busily conferring in an undertone, as I helped them bring the packages one after another from the car to the edge of the woods. Craig had slipped the little telephone mouthpiece into his pocket, and was carrying the huge reflector carefully, so that it might not be injured in the darkness. I had the heavy coats of a peculiar texture over my arm, while O'Connor and his man struggled along over the uncertain pathway, carrying between them the heavy, long, cylindrical package, which must have weighed some sixty pounds or so.

Kennedy had selected as the site of our operations a corner of the grove where a very large tree raised itself as a landmark, silhouetted in black against a dark sky. We deposited the stuff as he directed.

"Now, Jim," ordered O'Connor, walking back to the car with his man, "I want you to take the car and go back on the road until you reach the top of the hill."

I could not hear the rest of the order, but it seemed that he was to meet some one who had preceded us on foot from the railway station. I did not know who or what it might be, but even that made me feel better, for in so ticklish a piece of business as this, in dealing with a desperate pair such as we knew must be in the quiet little house, a second and even a third line of reënforcements was not, I felt, amiss.

Craig in the meantime had set to work putting into position the huge reflector. At first I thought it might be some method of throwing a powerful light on the house, but on closer examination I saw that it could not be a light. The reflector seemed to have been constructed so that in the focus was a peculiar coil of something, and to the ends of this coil Craig attached two wires which he fastened to an instrument, cylindrical, with a broadened end, like a telephone receiver.

O'Connor, who had returned by this time, after sending his chauffeur back on his errand, appeared very much interested in what Craig was doing.

"Now, Walter," asked Craig, "while I am fixing this thing, I wish you would help me by undoing that large package carefully."

While I was thus engaged, he continued talking with O'Connor in a low voice, evidently explaining to him the use to which he wished the large reflector to be put.

I was working quickly to undo the large package, and as the wrappings finally came off I could see that it was some bulky instrument that looked like a huge gun, or almost a mortar. It had a sort of barrel that might have been forty inches in length, and where the breechblock should have been on an ordinary gun was a great hemispherical cavity. There was also a peculiar arrangement of springs and wheels in the butt.

"The coats?" he asked, as he took from the wrappings of the package several rather fragile-looking tubes.

I had laid them down near us, and handed them over to him. They were quite heavy, and had a rough feel.

"So-called bullet-proof cloth," explained Craig. "At close range, quite powerful lunges of a dagger or knife recoil from it, and at a distance ordinary bullets rebound from it, flattened. We'll try it. It will do no harm, if it does no good. Now, are we ready, O'Connor?"

"Wait just a minute," cautioned O'Connor. "Let me see first whether that chauffeur has returned. He can run that engine so quietly that I myself can't hear it."

He disappeared into the darkness toward the road, where he had dispatched the car a few minutes before. Evidently the chauffeur had been successful in his mission, for O'Connor was back directly with a hasty: "Yes, all right. He's backing the car around so that he can run it out on the road instantly in either direction. He'll be here in a moment."

Craig had in the meantime been roughly sketching on the back of an old envelope from his pocket. Evidently

he had been estimating the distance of the house from the tree back of which he stood, and worked with the light of a shaded pocket flash light.

"Ready, then," he cried, jumping up and advancing to the peculiar instrument which I had unwrapped. He was in his element now. After all the weary hours of watching and preparation, here was action at last, and Craig went at it like a starved man at food.

First he elevated the clumsy-looking instrument, pointed in the general direction of the house. He had fixed the angle at approximately that which he had hastily figured out on the envelope. Then he took a cylinder about twelve inches long, and almost as much in diameter, a huge thing constructed, it seemed, of a substance that was almost as brittle as an eggshell. Into the large hemispherical cavity at the breech of the gun he shoved it. He took another quick look at the light gleaming from the house in darkness ahead of us.

"This is what is known as the Mathiot gun," he explained as he brought it into action, "invented by a French scientist for the express purpose of giving the police a weapon to use against the automobile bandits who entrench themselves in houses and garages, as they have done in the outskirts of the city, and as some anarchists did once in a house in London."

"What does it do?" asked O'Connor, who had taken a great interest in the thing.

"It throws a bomb which emits suffocating gases without risking the lives of the police," answered Kennedy. "In spite of the fragility of the bombs that I have here, it has been found that they will penetrate a wooden door or even a thin brick partition before the fuse explodes them. It will render a room three hundred feet off uninhabitable in thirty seconds. Now watch."

He had exploded the gun by hand, striking the flat head of a hammer against the fulminating cap. The gun gave a bark. A low, whistling noise and a crash followed.

"Too short," muttered Kennedy, elevating the angle of the gun a trifle.

Quite evidently some one was moving in the house. There was a shadow, as of some one passing between the light in the upper story and the window toward us.

Again the gun barked, and another bomb went hurtling through the air. This time it hit the house squarely. Another followed in rapid succession, and the crash of glass told that it had struck a window. Craig was sending them now as fast as he could. They had taken effect, too, for the light was out, whether extinguished by the gases or by the hand of some one who realized that it afforded an excellent mark to shoot at.

"The house must be full of the stifling gases," panted Kennedy, as he stopped to wipe the perspiration from his face after his rapid work, clad in the heavy coat. "No man could stand up against that. I wonder how our friend of the garage likes it, Walter? It is some of his own medicine—the chief, I mean. He tried to give it to us on a small scale in the garage that first night, with his stupefying gun."

"I hope one of them hit him," ground out O'Connor, who had no relish even for the recollection of that night. "What next? Do you have to wait until the thing clears away?"

Craig had anticipated this question. Already he was buttoning up his long coat. We did the same.

"No, O'Connor, you and Jim stay here," ordered Craig. "You will get the signal from us what to do next. Walter, come on."

He had already dashed ahead into the darkness, and I followed blindly, stumbling over a plowed field next to the clump of woods. We next encountered a field of wheat, then a fence over which we climbed quickly, and found ourselves in the inclosure where was the house. I had no idea what we were running up against, but a dog which had been chained in the rear broke away from his fastening at sight of us, and ran at us with a lusty and savage growl. Kennedy planted a shot squarely in his head.

Without wasting time on any for-

malities, such as ringing the bell, we kicked and battered in the back door. We paused a moment, not from fear, but because the odor inside was terrific. No one could have stayed in that house and retained his senses. One by one, Kennedy flung open the windows, and we were forced to stick our heads out every few minutes in order to keep our own breath.

From one room to another we proceeded, without finding any one, then we went to the second floor. The odor was worse here, but still we found no one. The light on the third floor had been extinguished, as I have said. We made our way toward the corner where it had been. Room after room we entered, but still found no one. At last we came to a door that was locked. Together we wrenched it open

There was surely nothing for us to fear in this room, for a bomb had penetrated it, and had filled it completely. As we rushed in, Kennedy saw a figure sprawled on the floor near the bed in the corner.

"Quick, Walter!" he shouted. "Open that other window. I'll attend to this man. He's groggy, anyhow."

Kennedy had dropped down on his knees, and had deftly slipped a pair of gleaming handcuffs on the unresisting wrists of the man. Then he staggered to my side at the open window for air.

"Heavens, this is awful!" he gasped and sputtered. "I wonder where they all went?"

"Who is this fellow?" I asked.

"I don't know yet. I couldn't see."

A moment later, together we had dragged the unconscious man to the window with us, while I fanned him with my hat, and Kennedy was wetting his face with water from a pitcher of ice on the table.

"Good Heaven!" Kennedy exclaimed suddenly, as in the fitful light he bent over him. "It's that young fellow Forbes."

Sure enough, it was the young gambler whom we had seen at the gambling joint before it was raided, the long-lost and long-sought Forbes who had disappeared after the raid, and from whom no one had yet heard a word. I did not know his story, but I surmised that he had been in love with Violet himself, and was sore at Warrington for closing the gambling joint where he hoped ultimately to recoup his losses, and for winning the favor of the girl whose fortune might have settled his debts if he could have had a free field to court her.

I felt that his presence here as a member of the gang explained many things. Who would have been more eager to "get" Warrington at any cost than he? I never had any love for the fellow, who had allowed his faults and his temptations so far to get the upper hand of him. I had felt a sort of pity at first, but now that was changed to a feeling of disgust.

These thoughts were coursing through my head, and Kennedy was working hard to bring him around, when a mocking voice came from the hall:

"Yes, it's Forbes, all right, and much good may it do you to have him."

The door to our room banged shut. The lock was broken, but there must have been two of them out in the hall, for we heard the noise and scraping of feet as they piled up heavy furniture against the door, dragging it from the next room before we could do anything. Piece after piece was wedged in between our door and the opposite wall.

We could hear them taunt us as they worked, and I thought I recognized at once the voice of the stocky keeper of the garage, which I had heard often before over the detectaphone. The other voice, which seemed disguised, I could not place. It must have been, I thought, of the man whom they referred to as the chief.

We could hear them laugh as they cursed us, and wished us luck with our capture. Evidently they had not much use for Forbes, and, indeed, at such a crisis I do not think he would have been much more than an additional piece of animated impedimenta.

With a parting volley of profanity, they stamped down the narrow stairs to the ground floor, and a few seconds

afterward we could hear them out in back of the house, working over the machine which we had seen arrive during the afternoon. Evidently there were several machines in the barn that served as a garage, but this was the handiest.

They had cranked it up, and were debating which way to go.

"The shots came from the direction of the main road," the boss said. "We had better go in the other direction. There may be more of them coming. Hurry up!"

At least there had been only three in this refuge which they had sought up in the hills and valleys of the Ramapos. Of that we could now be certain. One of them we had captured.

I stuck my head out of the window, only to feel myself dragged back by Kennedy.

"Walter," he expostulated, "what's the use of that? One shot from them and you would be a dead one."

They had not seen me, so intent were they on getting away. They had now seated themselves in the car, and, as Kennedy had suspected, delivered a parting shot at us. Craig was busy in the opposite side of the room, all thought of Forbes dropped for the present. With a hasty final imprecation, the car below started forward with a jerk, and was swallowed up in the darkness.

Kennedy said not a word, but continued at work in the corner by the other broken window.

"Either they must have succeeded in getting out after the first shot, and escaping the fumes," Craig muttered, "and then hid near by, or perhaps they were out in the stable at work. Anyhow, they must have seen us go in, followed us quietly, and then caught us here."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MAN HUNT.

Here we were, locked in a little room on the top floor of the mysterious house. I looked out of both windows. There was no way to climb down, and it was too far to jump, especially in the uncertain darkness. I threw myself at the door again and again. It was effectually braced.

Kennedy, in the meantime, had lighted the light again, and placed it by the window.

Forbes, now partly recovered, was rambling along, and Kennedy, with one eye on him and the other on something which he was working over in the light, was too busy to pay much attention to my futile efforts to find a means of escape.

"He kidnaped me—brought me here—three days—I've been shut up in this room," murmured Forbes.

"Who brought you here?" queried Kennedy sharply.

"I don't know his name—man at the gambling place—after the raid—took me in a car—from the other place—last I remember—woke up here."

"A prisoner?" I asked.

"Yes."

I looked questioningly at Craig. "A likely story," I remarked. "Craig, what are we going to do? We can't stay here and waste time over such talk as this while they are escaping. They must be almost to the road now, and turning down in the opposite direction from O'Connor."

Craig said nothing. Either he was too busy solving our present troubles, or he was, like myself, not impressed by Forbes' incoherent story. He continued to adjust the little instrument which I had seen him draw from his pocket, and now recognized as the thing which looked like a telephone transmitter. Only the back of it gleamed curiously under the light as he handled it.

"They have somehow contrived to escape the effect of the bombs," he was saying, "and have surprised us and locked us in the room on the top floor where the light is. We are up here with a young fellow named Forbes, whom we have captured. He's the young fellow that I saw several times at the gambling joint, and was at dinner with Warrington that night when the car was stolen. He was pretty badly overcome, but I've brought him around.

He either doesn't know much or won't tell. That doesn't make any difference now. They escaped in a car. They are leaving by the road. Wait; I'll see if they have reached it yet. No, I can't tell. It's too dark, and they have no light on the car; but they must have turned. They said they were going in the direction away from you."

"Well?" I asked. "What of it? I know all that."

"But O'Connor doesn't," replied Craig, in great excitement now. "I knew that we would have to have some way of communicating with him instantly if this fellow proved as resourceful as I believed him to be. So I thought of the radiophone, or photophone, of Doctor Alexander Graham Bell. I have been really telephoning on a beam of light."

"Telephoning on a beam of light?" I repeated incredulously.

"Yes. You see, I talk into this transmitter. The simplest transmitter for this purpose is a plane mirror of flexible material, silvered mica, or microscope glass. Against the back of this mirror my voice is directed. In the carbon transmitter of the telephone a variable electrical resistance is produced by the pressure on the diaphragm, based on the fact that carbon is not so good a conductor of electricity under pressure. Here the mouthpiece is just a shell supporting a thin metal diaphragm to which the mirror on the back is attached, an apparatus for transforming the air vibrations produced by the voice into light vibrations of the projected beam, which is reflected from this light here in the room. The light reflected is thus thrown into vibrations corresponding to those in the diaphragm."

"And then?" I asked impatiently.

"That varying beam of light shoots out of this room, and is caught by the huge reflector which you saw me set up at the foot of that huge tree which you can just see against the dark sky over there. That parabolic mirror gathers in the scattered rays, focuses them on the selenium cell which you saw in the middle of the reflector, and that causes the cell to vary the amount of electric current passing through it from a battery of storage cells. It is connected with a very good telephone receiver. Every change in the beam of light due to the vibrations of my voice is caught by that receiving mirror, and the result is that the diaphragm in the receiver over there which O'Connor is holding to his ear responds. The thing is good over several hundred yards, perhaps miles, sometimes. Only I wish it would work both ways. I would like to know that O'Connor gets me."

I looked at the simple little instrument with awe.

"You'll have to hurry," continued Craig, speaking into it. "Give them the signal. Get the car ready. Anything, so long as it is action. Use your own judgment."

There he was, flashing a message out of our prison by an invisible ray that shot across the Cimmerian darkness to the point where we knew that our friends were waiting. I could scarcely believe it. But Craig had the utmost faith.

"They must have started by this time," he remarked, craning his neck out of the window, and looking in every direction.

Forbes was still rambling along, but Kennedy was not paying much attention to him. He began rummaging the room for possible evidence while we were waiting anxiously for something to happen.

An exclamation from Craig brought me to his side. Tucked away in a bureau drawer under some soiled linen that plainly belonged to Forbes, he drew out what looked like a single blue steel tube about three inches long. At its base was a hard-rubber cap, which fitted snugly into the palm of the hand as he held it. His first and middle fingers encircled the barrel over a steel ring. A pull downward and the thing gave a click.

"Good that it wasn't loaded," he remarked. "I knew what the thing was all right, but I didn't think the spring was so delicate as that. It is a new and terrible weapon for the destruction of human life, one that can be carried by

the thug or the burglar and no one be the wiser unless he has occasion to use it. It is a gun that can be concealed in the hand. A pull downward on that spring discharges a thirty-two-caliber, center-fire cartridge. The most dangerous thing about it is that it can be carried in an upper vest pocket as a fountain pen, or in a trousers pocket as a penknife."

I looked with added suspicion, if not respect, on the young man who was now tossing, half conscious, on the bed.

Kennedy, keen though he had been over the discovery, was much more interested in the result of his radiophone message. Almost instantly after the second call there seemed to rise on all sides of us lights and the low baying of dogs.

"What's all that?" I asked Kennedy.

"O'Connor had a dozen or so police dogs shipped up here quietly," answered Craig, looking out eagerly. "He started them out each in charge of an officer as soon as they arrived. I hope they had time to get around in that other direction. That was what he sent the chauffeur back to see about, to make sure that they were placed."

"What kind are they?"

"Mostly Airedales, although there is one bloodhound, Cherry, in the pack."

"But," I objected, "what good will they be? Our men are in an automobile."

"We thought of that," replied Kennedy confidently. "Here they are," he cried, as a car swung up the lane from the road and stopped with a rush under our window. "O'Connor—up here—quick."

It was O'Connor and Jim. A moment later there was a tremendous shifting and pulling of heavy pieces of fruniture in the hall, and as the door swung open the honest face of the deputy appeared inquiring anxiously if we were all right.

"Yes, all right," assured Craig. "Come on, now. There isn't a minute to lose. Send Jim up here to take charge of Forbes. I'll drive the car myself."

Kennedy accomplished in seconds what it takes minutes to tell. The chauffeur had already turned the car around and it was ready to start. We jumped in, leaving him to go up to keep Forbes safely.

We gained the road and sped along, our lights now lighted and showing us plainly what was ahead. The dust-laden air told us that we were right as we turned into the narrow crossroad. I wondered how we were ever going to overtake them after they had such a start at night over roads presumably familiar to them.

"Drive carefully," shouted O'Connor. "It must be about along here, Kennedy."

A moment before we had been almost literally eating the dust of the car ahead. Craig slowed down as we approached a bend in the road. There almost right in our path stood a car, turned half across the road and jammed up into the fence. It was the bandit's car—deserted.

"Good!" exclaimed O'Connor, as Craig came to full stop with a jerk. "I thought it must be about here. We had the men place an obstruction in the road. They didn't run into it, but they had to turn out so sharply that they ran into the fence."

"They have taken to the open country," cried Craig, leaping up on the seat and looking about to catch some sign of them. All was still save here and there the sharp, distant bark of a dog. "I wonder which way they went?"

O'Connor pulled a whistle from his pocket and blew a short blast sharply. Far down the road came an answering bark.

"They're taught to obey a police whistle, and nothing else," remarked O'Connor, with satisfaction. "I wonder which one of the dogs that was. By the way, just keep out of sight as much as you can—get up in our car. They are trained to worry any one who hasn't a uniform. I'll take this dog in charge. I hope it's Cherry, the bloodhound. The others aren't keen on a scent even when it is fresh, but Cherry is a dandy, and I had the man bring her around here purposely."

We got back into our car and waited. Across the hills now and then we could catch the sounds of dogs scouting around here and there. It seemed as if every dog in the valley had been aroused. On the other slope of the hill from the main road we could see lights in the scattered houses.

"I doubt if they would have gone that way," commented Craig. "It looks less settled over here to the right of the road in the direction of New York."

The low baying of the dog which had answered O'Connor's call was growing nearer every moment. At last we could hear it quite close, at the deserted car ahead.

"Now, Cherry, nice dog," we heard O'Connor encouraging. "Here, up here. And here."

He was giving the dog the scent from the deserted car. His voice rang out in the night air: "Come on, Kennedy and Jameson. She's got it. I've got her on leash. Follow along just a few feet behind."

Cherry was on the trail, and it was a hot one. We could just see her magnificent head, narrow and domelike, between the huge, pendulous ears. She was a regular sleuthhound, working slowly, picking up the trail, and following it baying as she went. But she was now going without a halt or falter. Nose to the ground, she had leaped from the bandit's car, and made straight across a field in the direction that Kennedy had suspected, only a little to the west.

"This is a regular, old-fashioned man hunt," cried Kennedy, as we followed the dog and O'Connor as best we could. It was pitch dark, but we plunged ahead over fields and through little clumps of trees, around hedges, and over fences.

There was no stopping, nor cessation of the deep baying of the dog. Cherry was one of the best that the police had ever acquired. We came to the next crossroad, and the dog started up in the direction of the main road, questing carefully.

We had gone not a hundred feet when a dark object darted out of the bushes at the side of the road, and I felt myself unceremoniously tumbled off my feet.

Kennedy leaped aside, with a laugh.

"O'Connor," he shouted ahead at the top of his voice, "one of the Airedales has discovered Jameson. Come back here. Lie still, Walter. The dog is trained to run between the legs and trip up any one without a police uniform. By George, here's another after me."

O'Connor came back, laughing at our plight, and called off the dogs, who were now barking furiously. We let him get a little ahead, calling the Airedales to follow him. They were not much good on the scent, but keen and intelligent along the lines of their training, and perfectly willing to follow O'Connor, who was trusting to the keen sense of Cherry.

A little farther down, the fugitives had evidently left the road after getting their bearings.

"They must have heard the dogs," commented Kennedy. "They are doubling on their tracks now, and making for the Ramapo River in the hope of throwing the dogs off the scent. It's an old trick."

We came in a few minutes to the river. That had indeed been their objective point. Cherry was baffled. We stuck close to O'Connor, after our previous experience, as we talked hastily over what to do.

Had they gone up or down, or had they crossed? There was not much time that we could afford to lose on speculation.

Cherry was casting backward in an instinctive endeavor to pick up the trail. O'Connor had taken her across, and she had not succeeded in finding it on the opposite bank for several hundred yards on either side.

"They started out toward the southwest," reasoned Kennedy quickly. "Then they turned in this direction. The railroads are down there—yes, that is what they would make for. O'Connor," he called, "let us follow the right bank of the river down this way, and see if we can't pick them up again."

The river was shallow at this point,

but full of rocks which made it extremely hard if not dangerous to walk even close to the bank. "I don't think they'd stand for much of this sort of thing," remarked Kennedy. "A little of it would satisfy them, and they'd strike out again."

He was right. Perhaps five minutes later, after wading in the cold water, clinging as close to the bank as we could, we came to a sort of rapids. Cherry, who had been urged on by O'Connor, gave a jerk at her leash, as she sniffed along the bank.

"She has it," cried Craig, springing up the bank after O'Connor. I followed, and we three men and three dogs started out again in earnest across country.

We had struck a long stretch of woods, and the brambles and thick growth made the going exceedingly difficult. Still, if it was hard for us now, it must have been equally hard for them in the first place.

We had come to the end of the woods. The trail was now fresher than ever, and O'Connor had difficulty in holding Cherry back so that the rest of us could follow. As we emerged from the shadow of the trees into the open field, it seemed as if guns were blazing on all sides of us. We were almost up with them. They were not half a mile away, and separated, firing at random in our direction, as they heard the dogs. O'Connor drew back, Cherry tugging ahead. He turned to the Airedales. They had already taken in the situation, and were now darting ahead at what they could see, if not scent.

I felt a "ping" on my chest. I scarcely realized what it was until I heard something drop the next moment in the stubble at my feet, and felt the smarting sensation as if a sharp blow had struck me. I bent down, and from the stubble picked up a distorted bullet.

"These bullet-proof coats are some good, anyhow, at a distance," remarked Kennedy, close beside me, as he took the bullet from my fingers. "Duck! Back among the trees until we get our bearings."

A bullet had whizzed just past his arm as he spoke.

We dodged back among the trees, and slowly skirted the edge of the wood, where it bent around a little on the flank of the position from which the continuous firing was coming.

At the edge we stopped again. We could go no farther without coming out into the open, and the moon, just rising above the trees, made us an excellent mark under such conditions. Craig peered out to determine just what they were firing from.

"Lucky for us we had these coats," remarked Craig, "or they would have croaked us before we knew it. These are our old friends, the anæsthetic bullets. A little scratch from one of them, and we should be hors de combat for an hour or two."

"Shall we take a chance?" urged O'Connor.

"Just a minute," cautioned Craig, listening.

The barking of the Airedales had ceased suddenly. Cherry was straining to go. "They have winged the two dogs," remarked Kennedy. "Yes, we must try it now at any cost."

We broke from the cover, separating as much as we could, and pushing ahead rapidly, O'Connor under his breath keeping Cherry from baying as much as possible.

I had expected a sharp fusillade to greet us as we advanced. Instead, the firing had ceased altogether.

A quick dash, and we had crossed the stretch of open field that separated us from a dark object which now loomed up, and from behind which it seemed had come the firing. As we approached, I saw it was a shed beside the railroad, which was depressed at this point some twelve or fifteen feet.

"They kept us off just long enough," exclaimed Craig, glancing up at the lights of the block signals down the road. "They must be desperate, all right. Why, they must have jumped a freight as it slowed down for the curve, or perhaps one of them flagged it and held it up. See? The red signal shows

that a train has just gone through, toward New York. There's no chance to wire ahead from this Ducktown siding, either. Here's where they stood—look!"

Kennedy had picked up a handful of exploded cartridge shells while he was speaking. They told a mute story of the last desperate stand of the gunmen.

"I'll keep these," he said, shoving them into his pocket. "They may be of some use later on in connecting tonight's doings with what has gone before."

There was nothing more to do that night but to return to the now-deserted house.

Late as it was, Kennedy insisted on making a thorough examination of the captured house. It was a veritable arsenal. Here it seemed that all the new and deadly weapons of the scientific gunman had been made. The barn, turned into half garage and half workshop, was a mine of interest. There, on the first floor, near the door, stood Warrington's stolen car, at last.

"They won't plot anything against Violet Winslow for some time—at least, not up here," commented Kennedy.

In the house, we found Jim with Forbes, now completely recovered. In the possession of his senses, his tongue, which the anæsthetic gases had unloosened, had become suddenly silent again. He stuck doggedly to his story of kidnaping, but would not or could not add anything to it.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FRAME-UP.

Although I felt discouraged on our return to the city the morning following our exciting adventure at the mysterious house in the Ramapo Valley, Kennedy, who never let anything ruffle him, seemed quite cheerful.

"Cheer up, Walter," he encouraged. "We are on the home stretch now."

"Perhaps—if they don't beat us to the tape," I answered disconsolately. "What are you going to do next?"

"While you were snatching a little snooze, I rummaged around and found a number of letters in a table drawer. One was a note, evidently to the garage keeper, just signed 'Chief.' I'll wager that the handwriting is the same as that in the blackmailing letter."

"What of it?" I asked. "We haven't got him."

"No; but the note was just a line to tell the boss, who was up in the country at the time, to meet the chief at 'the joint' on Second Avenue. It didn't say any more, but I know the place. It is the old World Café, a regular hang-out for crooks, where they come to gamble away the proceeds of their crimes on stuss, the great game of the East Side now. We'll just drop into the place. We may not find them, but we'll have an interesting time, and get a half nelson on some one."

Forbes, still uncommunicatively protesting that he would say nothing until he had an opportunity to consult a lawyer, was taken down to New York by O'Connor during the morning, and lodged in a West Side prison under a technical charge which was sufficient to hold him until Kennedy could investigate his case and fix his real status.

We had taken a crosstown car, with the intention of looking over the dive where Kennedy believed the crooks might drop in. The ride was uninteresting, but not so the objective point of our journey.

Over on the East Side we found the World Café, and slouched into the back room. It was not the room devoted to stuss, but the entrance to it, which Kennedy informed me was through a heavy door concealed in a little hallway, so that its very existence would not be suspected. We made no immediate attempt to get into the hang-out proper, which was a room perhaps thirty feet wide and seventy feet deep. Instead, we sat down at one of the dirty, round tables, and ordered something from the waiter, a fat and oily Muscowitz in a Tuxedo coat.

It seemed that in the room where we were had gathered nearly every variety of the populous underworld. I studied

the men and women at the tables curiously, without seeming to do so. But there could be no concealment here. Whatever we might be, they knew we were not of them, and they greeted us with furtive scowls.

It was not long, however, before it became evident that in some way word had been passed that we were not mere sight-seers. Perhaps it was by a sort of wireless electric tension that seemed to pervade the air. At any rate, it was noticeable.

"There's no use staying here," remarked Kennedy to me under his breath, "unless we do something. Are you game for trying to get into the stuss joint?"

He said it with such a determination to go himself that I did not refuse. If he went, I would follow.

Kennedy rose, stretched himself, yawned as though bored, and together we lounged into the hall just as some one from the outside clamored for admission through the strong door. The door had already been opened, when Kennedy deftly inserted his shoulder. Through the crack in the door, I could see the startled roomful of players in the thick, curling tobacco smoke.

The man at the door shouted, and raised his arm. Kennedy caught his fist, and slowly with his powerful grip bent it back until the man writhed. As his wrist went back by fractions of an inch, his fingers were forced to relax. I knew the trick. It was the scientific way to open a clenched fist. As the tendons refused to stretch any farther, his fingers straightened, and a murderous-looking blackjack clattered to the floor. All was confusion Money which was on the various tables disappeared as if by magic. Cards were whisked away as if a ghost had taken them. In a moment there was no more evidence of gambling than is afforded by a roomful of men, so easy is it to hide the paraphernalia, or, rather, lack of paraphernalia of stuss.

There was a rush of feet in the room. I expected that we would be overwhelmed. Instead, as together we pushed on the now half-open door, the room emptied like a sieve. Whoever it might be who had taken refuge there had disappeared, probably among the first.

"It's a collar," had sounded through the room, and it was empty.

"Where have they gone?" I panted, as the door opened at last, and we found only one man left in the place, ready to be arrested, courting it if we could show the authority, since he knew that it was only a question of hours when he would be out and the game in full blast again. The man shook his head blankly.

"There must be a trap door," cried Kennedy. "It is no use to find it. They are all on the street by this time. Quick, before any one catches us in the rear."

We had been not a moment too soon in gaining the street. Though we had done nothing but attempt to get into the stuss room, ostensibly as players, the crowd in the café were pressing forward. On the street we saw men filing quickly from a cellar a few doors down. We mingled with the excited crowd to cover ourselves.

"That was where the trapdoor led," whispered Kennedy.

A familiar figure ducked out of the cellar, surrounded by others, and the crowd made for a couple of taxicabs standing on the opposite side of the street near another restaurant.

Another cab swung up to the stand just as the two pulled away. It's sign was up: "Vacant."

Quick as a flash, Kennedy was in it, dragging me. The driver must have thought that we, too, were escaping, for he needed only one order from Kennedy to leap ahead in the wake of the other two.

A moment later, and Kennedy's head was out of the window. He had drawn his revolver, and was pegging away at the tires of the cab ahead. An answering shot came back at us. A policeman at a corner leaped on a passing trolley, and urged the motorman to put on the full power in pursuit of us as we swept by.

Even the East Side was roused by such an outburst. The crack of re-

volver shots, the honking of horns, the clang of the trolley bell, and the shouts of men along the street brought hundreds to the windows as the cars lurched and swayed up the avenue. The cars ahead swerved to dodge a knot of pedestrians, but their pace never slackened. Then the rearmost of the two began to buck and almost leap off the roadway. There came a rattle and roar from the rear wheels, which told that the tires had ben punctured, and that the heavy wheels were riding on their rims. At a cross street the first car turned just in time to avoid a truck, and disappeared down a maze of streets, but the second ran squarely into the truck.

"The automobile is the most dangerous weapon ever used by criminals," muttered Craig, as the first car shot down through a mass of trucking which had backed up, making pursuit momentarily more impossible for us. "These people know how to use it, too. But we've got some one here," he cried, leaping out and pushing aside the crowd that had collected about the wrecked car.

In the bottom of it we found a man stunned and crumpled into a heap. Blood flowed from his arm where one of the bullets had struck him. It was the garage keeper. Several bullets had struck the back of the taxicab, and both tires were cut by them in several places.

In a few minutes the ambulance jangled up to our group, and we stood close to the young surgeon as he worked to bring around the captured gangster, and bind up his bleeding arm.

"Where's the chief?" he asked dazedly.

Craig motioned to us to be quiet.

The man rambled on with a few inconsequential remarks, then opened his eyes, caught sight of the white-coated surgeon working over him, of us standing behind, and of the crowd about him. Memory of what had happened flitted back to him. He was himself again with an effort.

"I'll see you this afternoon at the laboratory, Walter," said Kennedy, as the ambulance bore the boss away. "Meanwhile, I wish you'd just go over to headquarters, and give O'Connor our version of this affair. Tell him to hold to-night open, too. I have a little work to do this afternoon, and I'll call him up afterward."

O'Connor was overjoyed at our capture of at least one man whom we had failed to get the night before.

As I left, I met Herman in the hall, coming in. He nodded surlily. I did not ask him what progress he had made in the case, having had experience with professional jealousy before.

It was not until the middle of the afternoon that I rejoined Kennedy in the laboratory, after giving him what I thought ample time to complete what he was doing. I found him at work at a table, with a microscope and an arrangement which I knew was the apparatus for making microphotographs. Several cartridges, carefully labeled, were lying before him, as well as the peculiar pistol we had found with Forbes, the guns we had captured in the garage, and the one we found on the roof.

On the end of the table was a large number of photographs of a most peculiar nature. I picked up one. It looked like an enlarged photograph of an orange, or like some of the pictures that astronomers make of the nearer planets.

"That is a collection of microphotographs which I have gathered, as well as some that I have just made. I hope to use them in a little stereopticon entertainment which I am arranging to-night for those who have been interested in the case. I think you'll find it sufficiently novel to warrant your coming. I have already invited O'Connor and his man, Herman, over the telephone just before you came in. McBirney will be here, and Forbes, of course. I wish you would get in touch with Warrington, and see how he is. If the doctor thinks it all right, I'd like to have him come down to-night with Miss Winslow. We'll take good care of him. In the meantime, I'm going to find out how that garage keeper is getting on. He has to be here, at any cost, and I've put it off until quite late to make sure

that he'll be in fit condition. To-night at nine—remember," he added gayly. "In the meantime, not a word to anybody about what you have seen here this afternoon."

CHAPTER XV.

THE SCIENTIFIC GUNMAN.

Our little audience arrived one by one, and, as master of ceremonies, it fell to me to greet them and place them as much at ease as the natural tension of the occasion would permit. Craig spoke a word or two to each, but was still busy putting the finishing touches on the preparations for the "entertainment" which he had arranged.

"Before I put to the test a rather novel combination which I have arranged," began Craig, when they had all been seated, "I will say a few words about some of the discoveries I have already made in this remarkable case. There is, I believe, no crime that is ever without a clew. The slightest trace, even a drop of blood no larger than a pinhead, may suffice to convict a murderer, or a single hair found on the clothing of a suspect. In this case it is the impression made by the hammer of a pistol on the shell of a cartridge which leads unescapably to one conclusion.

"I have made a collection from time to time of the various exploded cartridges, the bullets, and the weapons left behind by the perpetrator of the dastardly series of crimes from the shooting of the stool pigeon of the police, Rena Taylor, and the stealing of Mr. Warrington's car down to the peculiar events of last night and the running fight through the streets of New York this morning.

"I have studied this evidence with the microscope and the microphotographic apparatus. I have secured excellent microphotographs of the marks made by various weapons on the cartridges and bullets. Taking those used in the commission of the greater crimes in this series I find that the marks are the same apparently, whether the gun shot off a bullet of wax or tallow which became liquid, whether it discharged a stupefying gas, or whether the deadly anæsthetic bullet was fired. I have obtained a gun"—he threw it on the table with a clang—"the marks from the hammer of which correspond with the marks made on all the cartridges I have mentioned. One person owned that gun and used it. That is proved. It remains only to connect that gun positively and definitely, as a last link, with that person."

As he concluded, Craig had begun fitting a curious little device to each of our forearms. It looked to me like an electrode consisting of large plates of German silver, covered with felt, and saturated with salt solution. From each electrode wires ran across the floor to some hidden apparatus.

"Back of this screen," he went on, "I have placed what is known as the string galvanometer, invented, or, perhaps better, perfected by Doctor Einthoven, of Leyden. It was designed primarily for the study of the beating of the heart in cases of disease, but it also may be used to record and study emotions as well—love and hate, fear, joy, anger, remorse, all are revealed by this uncanny, cold, ruthlessly scientific instrument.

"The machine is connected by wires to each of you, and will make what are called electrocardiographs, in which every emotion, every sentiment, every passion is recorded inevitably, inexorably. For the electric current that passes from each of you to the machine over these wires carrying the record of the secrets of your hearts is one of the feeblest currents known to science, yet can be caught and measured. The dynamo which generates this current is not a huge affair of steel castings and endless windings of copper wire. It is merely the heart of the sitter."

We sat spellbound as Kennedy unfolded the dreadful, awe-inspiring possibilities of the machine behind the screen. He walked slowly to the back of the room.

"Now, here I have one of the latest of the inventions of the wizard of West Orange—Edison," he resumed. "It is,

as you perhaps have already guessed, the latest product of this genius of sound and sight, the kinetophone, the machine that combines moving pictures with the talking machine."

A stranger stepped in from the hall. He was the skilled operator of the kinetophone. He explained in a few terse sentences that back of a curtain which he pulled down before us was a phonograph with a megaphone, that from his booth behind us he operated the picture films, and that the two were absolutely synchronized.

Then a picture began to move on the screen, and sounds and voices seemed to emerge as if from the very screen itself. There, before us, we saw a gambling joint in full blast. It was not the Forty-eighth Street resort. But it was strongly reminiscent of it. From the talking machine proceeded all the noises familiar to such a scene.

Craig had stepped behind the screen that cut off the galvanometer. One after another he was studying the emoitons of each of his audience.

Suddenly the scene changed. A door was burst in, cards and gambling paraphernalia were scattered about and hidden, men rushed to escape, and the sounds we heard were much like those on the night of the raid. Kennedy was still engrossed in the study of what the galvanometer was showing.

Suddenly the film stopped. The operator started another. It was a group of men and women, playing cards. A man entered and left the room with one of the players. They entered another room—there was the crack of a revolver—and the woman fell. People rushed in. Everything was done to hide the crime, and the girl was carried out into a waiting automobile, propped in as if overcome by alcohol, and whisked away. Then her body was thrown, with a muttered imprecation, by the roadside, and in the last picture the man was cleaning the exploded gun. One single still picture followed. It was a huge, enlarged cartridge.

I followed the thing with eager eyes and ears. From a long list of canned and reeled plays, Kennedy had selected such scenes and acts as, interspersed with a few single pictures of his own, would serve best to recapitulate the very case which we had been investigating.

Another moving and talking picture was under way. This time it seemed to be a race between two automobiles. They were tearing along, and the sound of the rapidly working cylinders was most real. The rearmost was rapidly overhauling that in front. Imagine my own surprise as it crept up on the other to see its driver rise, whip out a pistol, and fire point-blank at the other as he swept ahead, and the picture stopped.

Miss Winslow was plainly affected. It was too much like what had happened to Mortimer Warrington for her to repress the shudder that swept over her, and an involuntary movement toward him.

Still, Kennedy did not move from his post at the galvanometer. He was taking no chances. He had us thrilled, tense, and he meant to take advantage to the full in reading the truth in the dramatic situation.

Another picture started almost on the heels of the last. It was the robbery of a safe. Then came another, a firebug at work on starting a conflagration. We could hear the crackling of the flames, the shouts of the people, the clang of the bells, and the hasty tread of the firemen as they advanced and put out the blaze. The film was one of those which never fail to attract, where the makers had gone to the utmost extent of realism, and had actually set fire to a house to get the true effect.

The last of the series, which I knew was to be a climax, was not an American picture at all. It was quite evidently made in Paris, and yet I was startled myself when the title was announced by the voice and on the screen simultaneously: "The Siege of the Motor Bandits by the Paris Police."

It was terrific. It began with the shouts of the crowd urging on the police, the crack of revolvers and guns from a little house or garage in the suburbs, the advance and retreat of the

gendarmes on the stronghold. Back and forth the battle waged. One could hear the sharp orders to the police, the shrill taunts from the bandits.

Then at a point where the bandits seemed to have beaten off the attack successfully there came an automobile. From it I could see them take an object which I knew must be a Mathiot gun. It was set up and aimed. With a dull roar it was fired.

We could see the bomb hurtling through the air, see it strike with a cloud of smoke and dust, hear the report of the explosion, the shouts of the bandits—then silence. A cry went up from the crowd as the police now pressed forward in a mass and rushed into the house, disclosing the last scene —the bandits suffocated.

The film suddenly stopped, and the room, which had been ringing with firearms and shouts, was again silent, an impressive silence. The lights flashed up instantly, and before we realized that the thing was over, Kennedy was standing before us, holding in his hand a long sheet of paper. The look on his face told plainly that his experiment had succeeded.

"I may say," he began, still studying the paper, although I knew he must have arrived at his conclusion already, "that some time ago a letter was sent to Miss Winslow purporting to reveal some of Mr. Warrington's alleged escapades. It is needless to say that it was a pure fabrication. The sender was urged on to do it by some one else, who also had an interest in placing Mr. Warrington in a bad light. Now, the sender soon realized his mistake. The fact that he was willing to go to the length of a dangerous robbery accompanied by arson in order to get back or destroy the letter showed how afraid he was to have the letter in our hands. He blundered, but even he did not realize how much.

"In certain cases the handwriting shows a great deal more than would be recognized even by the ordinary handwriting expert. This letter showed that the writer was, as I have already explained to Mr. Jameson, the victim of a peculiar kind of paralysis which begins to show itself in nerve tremors for days before the attack and exhibits itself in the handwriting.

"Now, my string galvanometer shows not only the effects of these moving pictures on the emotions, but also, as it was really designed to do, the state of the heart with reference to normality. It shows the effect of disease on the heart, even if it is latent to the subject. While I have been using the psychological law of suggestion, and have been recapitulating the whole story of the crime briefly in talking and moving pictures, I have found in addition that the same heart which shows the emotion I expected, also shows the disease which I discovered in the writing of the blackmailing letter. There was surprise at the sight of the gambling den, rage at the raid, hatred at the arson scene, and fear at the siege of the bandits, as I showed I was getting closer and closer to the truth. And there was the same abnormality of the heart throughout."

Kennedy paused. I scarcely breathed, nor did I move my eyes, which were riveted on his face. What was he going to reveal next? Was he going to accuse some one in the room?

"Mr. Jameson," he resumed, with a smile toward me, "I am glad to say, is quite normal and innocent of all wrongdoing—in this instance. Deputy O'Connor is also normal. Mr. Warrington I shall come back to later."

Violet Winslow gave a little, startled gasp. But it was evident that not even science could shake her faith.

"Mr. Forbes," he continued, speaking rapidly, "incriminated himself quite sufficiently in connection with the letter, so that I should advise him when the case comes to trial to tell the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, about his use of a gunman in helping along a hopeless love affair on his part. Here is a little vest-pocket gun that was found under such circumstances as to connect Forbes with the shootings."

"My lawyer has my statement about that—I'll read——"

"No, Forbes," interrupted Craig. "You needn't read. Your lawyer may

be interested, however, to add this to the statement. A pistol that has been shot off has potassium sulphide from the powder in the barrel. Later it oxidizes and iron oxide is found. This weapon has neither the sulphide nor the oxide, as far as I can determine. It has never even been discharged. No, it was not the pistol found on Forbes that figured in this case. As far as that aspect of the case goes, it was a frame-up. Forbes was kidnaped by a man whom he thought his friend, was held at the house up in the valley. The man who wrote the letter for him thought ultimately to shift all the guilt on Forbes and himself go scot-free."

Forbes stared dumbly. I knew he knew what was coming, but had held back for fear of what had always happened to informers in his experience.

"McBirney," continued Craig, "your emotions, mostly astonishment, show that you have much to learn in this business of detection besides the recovery of stolen cars. The garage keeper whom they called the boss has simply pointed scientifically to what I already suspect——"

A dull thud startled us.

I turned. A man was lying face down on the floor. Before any of us could reach him, Craig concluded: "This is the man who framed up the case against Forbes, who stole Warrington's car to use to get rid of the body of the informer, Rena Taylor, who had interfered with his own gambling graft, who wrote the letter, committed the arson to cover himself, hid in the country where we ferreted him out and prevented the kidnaping of Miss Winslow, after the terrible attack on Mr. Warrington, who also had interfered with his gambling profits."

The paralysis had struck Inspector Herman sooner than even Kennedy had expected. When we had made him as comfortable as we could, Craig added to O'Connor: "The greatest grafter and scientific gunman that I ever knew. But I have the goods on him at last."

Herman had gained for himself the reputation of being one of the shrewdest men in the department. But he had begun to mix with doubtful characters, and had been one of the worst of the gangmen and gunmen himself who ever operated in the metropolis. Detailed to catch the gamblers and gunmen, he had enjoyed a fine holiday, and employed his leisure both for new crimes and in covering so successfully his tracks in the old ones while Kennedy was on his trail, hoodwinking O'Connor by his long, detailed reports, that sounded convincing, but netted nothing.

O'Connor was perhaps the most flabbergasted of us all.

"And to think," he exclaimed in disgust, "that I placed his own case in his own hands, with carte-blanche instructions to go ahead. No wonder he never produced a clew. Well, I'll be——"

He glared at the man in silence.

Craig released himself from the hearty grasp of congratulation of Warrington.

"Miss Winslow," he said, looking her earnestly and admiringly in the face, "it may interest you to know scientifically what you already know by something that is greater than science, a woman's intuition."

She blushed as he added: "Mr. Warrington has a good, strong, healthy heart. He wouldn't be alive to-day if he hadn't. But, more than that, I have observed throughout the evening that he has hardly taken his eyes off you. Even the 'movies' and 'talkies' failed to stir him. Here on this strip of paper his heart registers the current that only that consummate electrician, little Dan Cupid, can explain."

THE END.

The Cavalier of Flossy Row

A CHRISTMAS STORY OF THE BOWERY

By Joseph S. Jordan

FLOSSY ROW was sheathed in white. Snow crowned its casements and mantled its stoops and steps. The street below was a stream of drab; the sidewalks ghostly banks. The white coat gave to the Row an appearance of respectability. Once, the Row had been respectable. Then it was occupied by worthy German families, thrifty and honest. Now, it sheltered people who were thrifty enough, but didn't know honesty's meaning.

The Row started away from Second Avenue on Second Street, but didn't get any farther away than the Bowery. The Bowery was the business ground and pleasure ground of the denizens of the Row. The men and women of that block had a touch as light as the falling snowflakes. Their step was as soft. There were men behind the windows which seemed to leer down at the passers-by, men with arms of steel, with a blow as swift and sure as a lightning shaft. Flossy Row was the devil's hiding place after a frolic of crime on the Bowery.

The police knew Flossy Row and all its familiars. The police knew also the futility of pursuing any one of the tenants, or seeking information concerning a criminal refugee. Maybe on Wall Street, a man got a run for his money. On the Bowery, the bourse of the Row, a man didn't get a chance to run after his. The usual exchange for a wallet was a blow from a fist or a bludgeon. But this was a bad time for the denizens of the Row on the Bowery. The orders from headquarters were to "pick up" any thief or pickpocket seen mingling with the shopping crowds. And this was the day before Christmas.

"Squint" Conners peered through the panes of one of the leering windows in the disreputable Row. The chill appearance of the street below didn't bring much cheer to his heart or warmth to the cold room. He sighed as he thought of the rich "pickings" to be had in the shopping district in Fourteenth Street and Sixth Avenue. He knew that Inspector Steve O'Brien's men were swarming that district, intent upon doing some pickings themselves. And the central office men said that Squint was the cleverest and most dangerous "dip" on the Bowery.

The pickpocket had a burglar's sense of humor, but he could find no humor in the present situation. When luck rode with him, Squint was in high feather. Just now, his feathers were all wilted. On this Christmas Eve he was a marked man. He knew if he ventured forth the chances were three to one that O'Brien's men would force the hospitality of the city upon him for at least the rest of the holidays.

"I wonder if they pinched Min," he muttered, as he rolled the "makings," still keeping an eye on the street. "Gee, this room is cold! It's a bum Christmas!"

Not a thing in the house for Christmas. Nothing to eat, not a stick for the fire. Christmas meant nothing to Squint. Only it was a harvest time for men of his ilk. Men and women were more careless of their wallets and "rolls." It spent holiday time for the pickpocket. Bells were ringing and whistles were blowing. From Second Avenue and the Bowery came the sounds of Christmas welcome, the shouts and blaring of horns. It grew dusk and gray outside.

The sounds had a depressing effect

on Squint. His thoughts turned to the girl who had ventured forth to take a chance with O'Brien's men. Her yuletide mission was to win a wallet, the contents of which might bring a merry Christmas to them both. Soon he was cursing her for remaining away so long, leaving him there alone. There wasn't much sentiment in Squint's make-up. It had been a hard year for him, he reflected, and luck seemed loath to turn his way again. Just as the summer was dawning, he had been "picked up" on suspicion. He had had no hand in the job. Of course he knew who turned the trick, but that was no business of the police. He was sent to the workhouse for six months. "Railroaded," he declared he was.

Every pickpocket knows that the summer offers the best openings for his profession. Men and women are not overburdened with clothing, and the way to pocketbooks and purses is easier than at other times. The whole summer was lost to Squint. And, to make matters worse, while he was "away," Minnie had got busy on her own account. Her ambition led to her downfall. It was in McGurk's "Suicide Hall." She had got the gentleman's "roll," but the "spark" that she reached for was fastened inside his shirt. It was unfortunate that two plain-clothes men happened to be in the house at the time. Minnie slipped the "roll" to a lady friend, who, afterward, was good enough to apply a part of it to the employment of a lawyer. But the man who was robbed raised such a tumult that somebody had to be sacrified as a sop to the sanctity of "Suicide Hall." Minnie was given an outing for six months on Blackwell's Island. Also, her picture was hung in the Rogues' Salon.

It grew dark along Flossy Row. The gas lamps flickered and sputtered, and the shutters, the only green emblems in the block, creaked and slammed in the wind. From Second Avenue and the Bowery the lights reflected yellow and red. The red lent a fever to the chill of Flossy Row. Once in a while, a man or a woman passed along, breasting the wind and the snow; but there was no sign of the girl.

Squint cursed through his teeth. "If she hadn't got her picture in the rogues' gallery, she'd been safe to-night!" he muttered. "I'd choke her if I had her here!"

He stamped his feet and slapped his arms around his body, and it didn't improve his temper to learn that he hadn't a match to light the "makings."

"I might as well be in Dutch as to be locked up in this vault," he told himself. "There ain't nobody coming up here to have his pockets picked. I'm goin' ter take a chance."

Squint donned his overcoat, and pulled it up over his ears. He pulled his cap down over his left eye. Then he went out of the house. He looked down toward the Bowery, then, after a moment's hesitation, started for Second Avenue.

II.

Out of the darkness of Second Street, Squint stepped into the glare of the avenue. The windows flashed their beacon lights out on a sea of humanity. Green trees in the doors suggested the shore line where landing might be made with safety. The air was filled with the scent of the trees. No one could doubt that Christmas was coming. Women with baskets, men with packages, children weighted down with bundles ebbed and flowed in humanity's sea. Squint alone seemed like a rudderless ship. Horns were tooting, and they jarred on his nerves. The crowds elbowed him out of the way, and the snow beat him in the face. There was no place for him here.

The thought made him bitter. Here in his own native city he was an outcast. The lighted windows with their Christmas offerings were mockeries to him. He couldn't buy any presents if he had any one to buy them for. Yes, there was Minnie. If she had the price, she would buy him something for Christmas. If he had, he might; but where was the wretched girl? He would settle with her later on. He saw two kiddies—a boy of eleven and a girl of eight

—hand in hand, peering wistfully into a window. The sight of them made the pickpocket gulp. The sight brought back the "wishing" trips of himself and his own sister Nellie when they lived in the Gap in Hamilton Street, on Cherry Hill.

"Oh, rats!" he muttered. "What's the matter with me?"

A passing policeman brought him to his senses, and he was the alert pickpocket again. With an eye on the crowd, and the other wide open for central-office men, he beat his way up the avenue. Savory odors floated out from restaurants, but they only insulted his sense of smell. The white lights of the saloons looked inviting, but they didn't invite. Their welcome was for those only who might have the price.

Near Twelfth Street, Squint came upon a crowd of roisterers. They had begun the celebration of Christmas at an early hour. They were in front of a saloon, and the gayest of all of them insisted upon one more drink. Squint edged near. He was pushed and shoved by the crowd. A man stepped on his foot. The man turned, profuse in his apologies, laying both hands on Squint's shoulders. He insisted upon the pickpocket having a drink. A moment before and Squint would have welcomed a drink as the greatest of Christmas presents. Now, he politely but firmly declined. He was as gracious as a Second Avenue cop helping a pretty girl on a car. He dragged himself away, and disappeared into Twelfth Street. There was a wallet in his pocket.

It was so long since Squint had "lifted a leather" that he couldn't believe it was true. Involuntarily, he dodged when he saw a policeman at the corner. He was filled with nervous apprehension. Every moment he expected to feel a hand on his shoulder, and hear a familiar voice say:

"You're wanted, Squint. Got you this time with the goods."

He slipped into a doorway, and rapidly transferred the contents of the pocketbook into his pocket. Then out into the street again he went. He passed a letter box, and dropped the empty wallet into the opening. Then he breathed freely once more.

"Now, we'll have a drink," he said, "and see what we've got."

Entering a saloon where he was known by the gang, he had a drink and feasted on turkey as well. The "roll" contained two ten-dollar bills, a five, and a one, and a ten-dollar bill, around which was a piece of white paper with "Merry Christmas" written across its face.

"Many of them!" chuckled Squint, and he ordered another drink, when he had fought his way to the bar. An alcoholite alongside of him with several bills in his hand was fighting his way with him.

"Put them in your pocket, an' have this on me," said Squint kindly. "It's Christmas, old boy."

"Sure! Many happy 'turns. But I got two friends with me."

"Bring 'em along," said Squint, as his new-found friend put the "roll" back into his pocket.

"Who we drinkin' with?" asked one of the other two, a minute later.

"All paid for," said the bartender.

"This gemmen," responded the alcoholite. He turned, but Squint was gone. He didn't know it, but so was his "roll."

Out in the street, Squint hurried along in great glee. A turn of luck always put him into the highest spirits. Some men would have been satisfied with the success which had attended him. Not so Squint. It was his night, and he was bound for the big crowd.

Fourteenth Street and Sixth Avenue was the big shopping district in those days. He made directly for the avenue. His success had not left him without caution. He knew that he would find some of Steve O'Brien's men among the shoppers, and he didn't want them to find him. He kept a watchful eye for the plain-clothes men. He knew them all as well as they knew him. He had almost reached the corner of Fourteenth Street, when he stopped as if he had been hit by a club. Then, recovering himself, he jumped into a doorway.

Not twenty feet ahead of him, their heads partly turned in his direction,

were Bill Savage and Johnny Gray, of the central office. Notwithstanding that he had been on the lookout for just such a happening, the sight of O'Brien's men made his legs weak and wabbly. These two men were the most feared in New York by men of his stamp. While hiding, he saw Shorty Ferris in the crowd. He wanted to warn him of his danger, but didn't dare venture forth. He watched Shorty annex a purse from a bag hanging to a woman's arm.

"Gee, that's coarse work!" muttered Squint. The next moment there was an outcry, and a second later Shorty was struggling in the arms of the plain-clothes men. Squint slipped from his place of hiding and mingled with the crowd. He lost no time getting into Fourteenth Street. He sauntered along with the Christmas crowd in the shafts of bright light shot out from the windows. A crowd in front of one of the windows arrested his attention. A woman in front of him was gazing into the windows. On her arm hung a calico bag, caught at the neck by two pieces of string. Quick as a flash, Squint had his knife out and had cut the bag near the bottom. Without a jar, he put in his hand and grabbed the purse which lay within.

The next moment Squint was swallowed up by the crowd.

III.

The pickpocket was in a stream of perspiration when he reached a favorite all-night "joint" of his, where they sold coffee and food, and surreptitiously supplied whisky. He had too close a call with the detectives to be comfortable. The theft of the woman's purse had been discovered before he had got ten feet away. Savage and Gray were back on the job after landing Ferris. He was moving off as fast as he could through the crowd when the detectives reached the woman. Savage and Gray glanced quickly about the crowd; then made a quick start in his direction. He kept moving, getting behind as many people as possible. Quite close to him, they grabbed "Sleepy" Tim.

While the detectives made their way back to the woman, Squint beat it for Fourth Avenue as hard as he could. He had had enough of the big shopping district for one night. He knew that other plain-clothes men were in the neighborhood, and he ducked into Fourth Avenue and down to Twelfth Street. Then he felt easier. But he wanted no more chances that night. He had had the scare of his life. He went to the back of the coffee shop, and, sitting at a table, cried to the waiter:

"A hooker of hootch, Jim."

He rolled a cigarette and his courage arose with the "kick" of the "booze." Then he looked over his latest "find." The purse he had thrown away before he got out of Fourteenth Street. He pulled out a pay envelope, on which was written:

31 shirts @ 15c.	$4.65
312 buttonholes @ 2c.	6.24
Total	$10.89

Squint pulled out the money and tore the envelope into bits. He hadn't the slightest compunction at having robbed a woman who had worked so hard for the little hoard which he had ruthlessly grabbed. All money was good money that came his way. It had been a good night for Squint, and it was going to be some Christmas. He ordered another drink, and a cup of coffee. Then he gazed curiously at an unpaid rent receipt in the name of Mrs. Kate O'Connor, with the address of a tenement in Goerck Street. He turned the paper over and found this memorandum:

Rent	$4.00
Coal	1.50
Butcher	1.00
Groceries	1.00
Car fare	.30
	$7.80
For Johnny, drum, 25c.; blocks, 20c...	.45
For Katie, doll, 30c.; buggy, 40c.....	.70
For Mary, toys, 25c; gloves, 25c.....	.50
For Robbie, wagon, 50c; marbles, 10c..	.60
	$2.25
	7.80
Total	$10.05

"Presents for the kids," mused

Squint, sipping his coffee. But there was a mist in his eyes, and a salt taste to the coffee. He rolled a cigarette and lighted it. Then he tossed off his whisky and arose and shook himself.

"Dat's too bad about de kids," he said. "I wonder where that d——d kid of mine is. I must look her up."

And he paid his score and walked out into the snowy night.

IV.

In a little room on the third floor of a tenement house on Goerck Street, a woman rocked in her chair, her eyes, red from weeping, gazing into space. Everything was neat in the poorly furnished apartment. A lounge occupied one side of the room. A mantelpiece, with a grate, stood opposite. A table filled the center. There were two chairs besides the one in which the woman sat. The only ornament was a little clock on the mantel. Its hands pointed to eleven. The fire in the grate burned low, but made the room comfortable. The woman reflected that there was no more money in the house for coal, and that the days which were to follow Christmas must indeed be cold. Hers was a sweet face, bearing traces of refinement, little in keeping with her surroundings. She was a little over thirty years old.

"Oh, why did they take it from me on this night of all nights!" she moaned. "What—what shall I do?"

She fell to crying again, and in the abstraction of her grief did not hear the pat of a little foot behind her. She started in fear when nine-year-old Robbie laid a hand on her arm.

"Oh, Robbie!" she cried, clasping the boy to her heart. "You startled mother so!"

"What's the matter, Muzzie?" asked the boy, disengaging himself from her clasp, and looking up into her face.

"Run back to bed, Robbie," she answered, evading his question; "you'll catch cold."

"No, it's warm out here, Muzzie. Tell me what's the matter. You've been crying."

"Oh, Robbie," she sobbed, "what shall we do? They've taken all my money, and we can't pay the rent, nor the grocer, nor anybody."

"Who took it, Muzzie?"

"A thief, boy. When I was looking into a shop window, picking out presents for you all, a man stole my purse."

"Well, Santa Claus will bring us presents, Muzzie," said the boy, patting her cheek. "He knows what we want, for we all wrote him letters."

The widow sobbed afresh.

"I'm afraid Santa Claus doesn't know where to find the very poor people," she answered.

"Muzzie," said the boy, after an interval of silence, "I guess there ain't no Santa Claus. You're our Santa Claus, ain't you? I won't tell the kiddies."

She hugged the lad to her, but did not answer. A tear fell on the hand that rested on his head.

"Robbie," she said, "there is no money in the house to buy food or fuel."

"Wait a minute, Muzzie," cried Robbie. He disappeared into his room, and returned in a moment, with a hand behind his back.

"Open your hand and shut your eyes," he commanded, and the mother humored him, as she always did. She felt some change dropped into her hand, then two bills. The boy closed her hand and kissed her.

"I made it for your Christmas, Muzzie, selling papers," he whispered.

In the hand that she opened, as she unclosed her eyes, there were two one-dollar bills and sixty cents in change. She hugged the boy to her breast. He had brought her the first ray of light since she discovered the loss of her purse in Fourteenth Street. While she thus embraced him, her heart filled with gratitude for even such a slight return, there came a light tapping at the door. The boy was on his feet in a flash, staring, wide-eyed, toward the door.

"Who's there?" the widow cried, alarm in her voice.

"Does Mrs. O'Connor live here?" re-

sponded a voice softly, a voice she had never heard.

Before she could reply, Robbie ran to the door, and flung it wide open. A man stood on the threshold, his arms laden with bundles and packages. One glance at the mother and child told him that he was in the right apartment. He deposited his bundles on the floor and on the table. He threw down upon the table a new purse. Mrs. O'Connor had only time to observe that he wore a cap pulled down over the left eye, and that there was a squint in that eye, and that his overcoat was buttoned up to the throat. The next moment the door softly closed. He was gone.

The woman gazed at the packages he had left behind, in bewilderment. She looked at the purse, while the boy stared with wondering eyes. Mechanically, she opened the purse, and there was the memoranda of the presents for the kiddies, and there, too, was the money for the rent, for the coal, the butcher, and everything down to her car fare. In another pocket of the purse, she found a ten-dollar note. It was new, and about it was a sheath of paper, written on which was:

Merry Christmas.

"Muzzie," whispered Robbie, cuddling up to her, "was that Santa Claus?"

"Yes, darling," his mother hysterically responded. "That was Santa Claus, and may God be good to him."

Squint Connors went down the stairs of the tenement, three steps at a time, but made no more noise than a cat. He knew that the great risk he had run was not yet over. He knew the risk before he started, but a voice within him made him take the chance. The thought of those kiddies without their Christmas presents took him back to his childhood on Cherry Hill. It brought memories of his little sister—well, he just had to go to Grand Street and buy the presents and play Santa Claus.

He gained the street unseen. He took the shortest cut to the Bowery, and breathed freely again only when he was safe in the Alligator Saloon. He nodded familiarly to the bartender, who put a bottle and glass before him. Squint filled the glass above the "church windows," and tossed off the contents at a gulp. He rolled a cigarette and glanced down the line at the bar. He saw no one he knew.

"Give us another hooker, Jim," he called to the bartender.

"Gee! I'm glad I done that!" he murmured. "I wonder where Min has got to? I must go and find her."

There were few pedestrians abroad. Doubtless many were lined up before the bars in the saloons streaming their lights out across the pavements. The Bowery, but for the saloon lights, seemed asleep.

Out on the empty night rang the chimes of Grace Church. It was Christmas morning. Soft and sweet and low, then high and clear the silvery notes pealed forth, coming out of the sky. Squint knew, in a vague way, the story of the Savior's birth. It meant Christmas, he knew. Somehow, the chimes reminded him of the little home in the Goerck Street tenement he had seen that night.

Across the Bowery, in front of the Palm Saloon, he espied Minnie. The girl saw him at the same time, and tried to dodge into a hallway. The afternoon and the evening had brought no luck to the girl, and she shrank from the curse or the blow which would greet her. He hailed her. She stood trembling as he crossed over to her. The bells of Grace were rioting in their joyous anthem.

"Merry Christmas, Min!" he said, and he put an affectionate arm about her neck. There was something in his voice she had never noticed there before. She looked up quickly into his face, then laid her head against his shoulder, and cried softly. In this fashion, they walked along the Bowery, until the chimes ceased. Then he patted her on the shoulder, and said, in the voice which was still strange to her:

"Come on, Min, let's go up to Mac's and have the eats. It's Christmas, kid."

Getting His Man

By Robert V. Carr

Author of "The Court of the Bradley Brothers," "Tamed," Etc.

His duty was a difficult one, but he performed it without a moment's hesitation. Lin Sheere never ran for sheriff again, however, and lost all desire to wear the star after passing through the ordeal

I'M in a town that's the main shippin' point for a territory about twice the size of Rhode Island, or, maybe, larger. The burg is a county seat. Counties run fairly large in the West; and, I reckon, this one was a hundred miles either way. It was a right big slab of earth spread over with gumbo and slate hills, and now and then a big butte, with here and there stunted pines on it like dwarfed men who have never had much of a show in life. And there was wide stretches of sage; and, once in a while, a strip of green where some nester had built a dam, and was raisin' alfalfa. But it was mostly a cow country, and the man who run it officially was Lin Sheere; Lin was sheriff.

Now, in a Western cow county, a sheriff is a sheriff. Of course, the day of the bad man is past, but don't think that there hain't men in the West still who don't care a rap about the law when they get mad. The man who held down a job of sheriff in Lin's county couldn't be a man who was tender about the belt. Montana ain't all planted to wheat yet, and set out in lawns—no, not by a long shot.

It's a kind of a slow day—nothin' much doin'. I drift into a saloon or two, and find the barkeeps cleanin' house—fixin' up the back bars, a sure sign that trade is slack. I visit here and there with a shipper, but time drags. It is just a sleepy, hot day.

I've about made the rounds, and was figgerin' on goin' back to the hotel for a snooze, when I thinks of Lin Sheere. I throws aside the snooze idea, and drifts down toward the jail for a visit with Lin.

The sheriff is an old friend of mine, as well as his brother Joe, who has a ranch not a great ways from town. Both of the Sheere boys are my friends, and never have overlooked a chance to throw a load of steers my way.

Of course, anything that I could do in boostin' Lin Sheere and his brother Joe in my trips over the range country was done. I could do more for Lin than I could for Joe, on account of Lin bein' sheriff and needin' a political boost now and then. But it was about an even break; I tried to be a friend to both of them.

I'll give you a line on Lin and Joe Sheere for future reference. Lin was a little man, sandy-complected, and bald clear to the rind. He always looked to me like he'd been out in the sun so long that he'd got all warped and dried. His nose curved down and rested between a mustache that had been faded to a ropy yellow by the sun and wind. He was far from handsome, but he was a go-getter.

I said Lin wasn't handsome, but I forgot to mention his eyes. Them eyes of his were dark blue, like the blue of a new gun. They looked right on through you. Stranger or friend, you knew, when he looked at you, that he was sure and straight as the judgment day. He spoke in a low voice, and never laughed—except with his eyes.

Joe Sheere, the sheriff's brother, was a different brand entirely; you'd never know he was Lin's brother to look at

him. He was kind of tall and slim; and he was dark-complected, with small, black eyes. He had a kind of nervous, jerky way about him, and was hardly ever still. He run a cow ranch, and I guess Lin had an interest in the ranch and cattle. They were both bachelors.

I rambles into Lin's office, and finds him with his feet on a table, talkin' to one of his deputies.

Soon as he sees me, down come his feet, and he is up and pumpin' my hand.

"Glad to see you, Johnny. Just get in?"

"Yes," I tells him. "How's tricks?"

"Oh, so-so," he replies. "Same old thing. How's things with you?"

"Couldn't be better," I comes back, with the road man's jolly. "If things were comin' any better with me, I'd go crazy with good feelin'."

We set down, and the deputy leaves. I hands Lin a cigar.

He thanks me and says: "If you don't mind, I'll smoke this after dinner."

I nods, and he rolls a cigarette with me.

"What do you think, Lin; will stuff move early this season or not?"

He blows out a lungful of smoke and looks up at the ceilin'.

"I reckon," he says, in his slow way, "that they'll start shippin' fair to middlin' early. Joe told me the last time he was in from the ranch that he will ship early. Grass is beginnin' to cure right now; and what stuff I've seen is puttin' on hard fat in great shape. Joe's cattle won't be what they used to be, for his range has been cut up consid'able by nesters, but he'll have some right fair beef. Was you figgerin' on goin' out to see Joe?"

"Yes," I says. "I want to make a drive out his way, and sort of look the country over. I'll get out to your brother's place in a day or two."

"Brother Joe is a right——"

Just what Lin was goin' to say about his brother I never learned, for just then a cow-puncher busts in through the door lookin' like he had run a hundred mile without stoppin' for feed or water.

Lin looks at him without battin' an eye. For that matter, Lin's face never showed what he was thinkin' about. He didn't even move in his chair.

"Howdy, Hank," he greets the puncher. "What's up?"

The man, breathin' by jerks, looks at Lin quite a spell, as though he had something he hated to tell.

"What's up?" Lin repeats.

Then, a piece at a time, the cow-puncher tells him.

"Your brother," says the rider, not lookin' at Lin, "killed Ben Grace in a fight over a fence. We—four of us—come along when Joe was about halfway between his corrals and Ben's body. We take a look at Ben. He has a light shotgun by his side. We figgered that Joe killed him with a rifle. Joe goes on into the house, and, after a spell, we surrounds the place. Joe calls out that he'll kill the first man who tries to take him. We couldn't think of anything to do but to get you."

The puncher went over to the cooler and drank three glasses of water in succession. Then he sets down to gather himself.

The both of us, the puncher and me, sure feel sorry for Lin Sheere. But his face don't show a sign of how hard he is hit.

He gets up and looks at me and the puncher for a second, and then says more to himself than to us: "I've been expectin' some such thing ever since them hunny-yacks come in by Joe."

Then he goes to a door, opens it, and calls to a deputy. "Hey, Jim," we hear him say. "Tell Rocky to hitch up the roans to the top buggy, and put in a jug of water. Uh huh. Get ready yourself."

That part of the business done, Lin turns around and steps over to the corner back of the table, and picks up a rifle. Then he puts on his belt, and sets down, his rifle across his knees, and his eyes studyin' the toe of his boot.

Now, put yourself in my shoes, and tell me if there is anything that you could think of to say. I guess you would have done as I did—kept still.

"Joe always was high-strung," Lin

says, in that same talkin'-to-himself way.

No sign of sorrow, no sign of anything; just waitin' for his rig so as to go out and get a man.

Then to me direct: "Want to go 'long, Johnny? Might help to pass the time. Besides, you was sayin' you wanted to see Joe."

Somehow, I get it into my head that Lin wants me to go 'long to talk to him and sort of keep him company. Of course, he had his deputy, but there was nothin' between them except official business. I am a sort of sentimental fool, and took it that Lin was hard hit, and wanted a friend near him.

"It's about a two-hour drive, and Jim don't need to go," goes on Lin. "Still, there's plenty of room for three of us in the buggy. What say you?"

He looks at me innocent and kind.

What could I do, as a friend of his, but say: "Yes; I'll go with you."

You see, it wasn't that I wanted to make a grand-stand play, but because I felt so dangnation sorry for Lin. Think of a man havin' to go out and get his brother! If ever a man needs what comfort a friend can give him, it's at such times. And, besides, Lin had asked me.

The sheriff's buggy arrives, and Lin and me crawl in with the deputy. The cow-puncher who brought the word said that he'd 'bout run his hoss down, and would come later. I could see that that puncher hadn't lost any Joe Sheeres.

There is little or no talk on the way out.

We finds the body of Ben Grace, with the shotgun lyin' near it. We then ties the hosses and goes up a draw this side of the house—a two-room cabin made of cottonwood logs. There we find two punchers.

About that time a warnin' shot from the house rings over our heads, and we know that Joe Sheere means business.

The two cow-punchers, talkin' all at once, tell us that a third puncher has crawled up the draw and got to the haystacks on the other side of the house, and is watchin' from there.

Lin, his face devoid of expression, listens to what the punchers have to say, and then hands his deputy his rifle.

"I reckon, boys, I'll have to go up and have a little talk with brother Joe."

He said it quiet and ordinary, with no sign of bluff or blow.

We didn't say nothin'. I looked at the deputy, and saw that his mouth was open, and that he was gappin' at Lin like a rube catchin' flies.

The sheriff was already out of the gully and goin' toward the house, when I yelled: "Come back, Lin, come back! It ain't natural for a brother to down a brother!"

He glanced back at me over his shoulder. Didn't say nothin'—just looked back.

Some kind of a crazy streak come over me. I really felt kind of jealous of Lin for bein' so much a better man than me. And then I hated to see him shot down by his own brother. In some fool way I thinks that, if I go with him, Joe won't shoot to kill. At times I'm calm and reasonable, and other times ready to jump into anything. Maybe I was so badly scared I didn't know no better. 'Tenyrate I hops up out of that draw and am by Lin's side in a few jumps.

"Give me a match," he says, in everyday fashion, as I come up to him. "I'll smoke that cigar of yours now."

He actually lights that cigar and takes a puff now and then as we walk along.

I don't know what Lin was thinkin' of, but I was cussin' myself for nine kinds of a fool. Every second I expected to hear the crack of a rifle, and one of us hit the ground. I was wet as a spaniel dog with sweat.

There come a warnin' yell from the house.

"Stay back, Lin," yells Joe Sheere, "or I'll drop you!"

I looks at Lin, my mouth a-workin' like a rabbit's nose when he's eatin' cabbage. But the sheriff is as calm and casual as a rock in time of storm.

He keeps on a-walkin', and I drag with him, my feet weighin' two ton apiece—and two ton of ice at that.

"Come out and give yourself up,

Joe!" calls Lin, in the same kind of a voice that he asked me for a match.

"Stand back, Lin, stand back!" screams Joe. "Brother or no brother, you can't take me!"

About that time, if I had had a clear track, I could have made a mile in the time that would make old Maud S. look like she was tied to a post. I don't believe I would have run if I had got started; I'm thinkin' I would have spread out my arms and flew like one of them aëroplane things.

"Come out, Joe, and give yourself up," Lin calls again.

Then, slow and calm, he heads for the door.

"For God's sake, Lin, go back!" yells Joe. "Remember our boy days—mammy—go back, Lin, go back!"

My heart is dried up and rattlin' round in my chest. I realize that I am watchin' a show made up from raw, red life—a play ripped out of human hearts. My spirit then gets a good grip on itself. It is good to see things in the raw once in a while. Whether I was a fool or not to be there, I felt somehow glad that I saw a man with my own eyes stand the highest test that could be given an officer. Sheriff Lin Sheere was doin' his duty. A man had been killed. It was his duty to arrest the killer. The fact that the killer was his brother did not change that duty. A man elected by the people gives his word to do his duty, simply that and nothin' more and nothin' less.

On we go, and yet no flare of gun flame. Like a man in a dream I watch Lin rap on the door.

"Open up, Joe," he says in an ordinary voice.

Suddenly the door is throwed back, and Joe Sheere, his face workin' with the horror of it all, drops his gun muzzle within a foot of his brother's waist.

"You can't take me," he whimpers. "Brother or no brother, you can't take me."

His finger is shakin' and quiverin' on the trigger, but Lin never bats an eye.

"Joe," he says, quiet and kind, "put down your gun and come with me. You've killed one man already, and there is no use in killin' another. Put down your gun, Joe, and come with me."

About that time Joe's gun starts to wabblin', and I could feel it include me in its circlin'. I tried to keep from swallerin' my tongue.

Lin reaches out his hand, slow and easy. "Give me your gun, Joe." He looks at his quiverin' brother sadlike, as if he can't understand how Joe could refuse him so small a favor.

It is too much for Joe Sheere. Him and Lin are sons of the same woman, but Joe is a throwback. He can't quite come up to his brother's cold nerve.

Suddenly he wilts, and the rifle clangs on the limestone slab that does for a step. The next moment he has fell toward Lin, and is cryin' on his shoulder like a girl with the hysterics.

Lin soothes him the best way he can, and I walk back toward the draw.

I've had all the excitement that I want in one day, believe me.

As a wind-up Lin takes Joe to jail, and Joe gets sentenced a light term for manslaughter. But Lin Sheere never run for sheriff again. He could have had the office for another term, but somehow he had lost all desire to wear the star. And I can't say that I blame him much.

THE EXTREMES IN THE CABINET

EVERYBODY knows that William Jennings Bryan, the secretary of state, is the most talkative man in President Wilson's cabinet—all of which proves that conversation is a good advertising medium. For instance, comparatively few people know the chief characteristic of David F. Houston, the secretary of agriculture. He is famous in Washington for never uttering a word if he can avoid it. He is known as the "cordial silence."

A Chat With You

AT that time the tax that Augustus Cæsar had levied made even more trouble than the income tax does now. They had to go in out of the country to the town, and stay there to be counted and to pay the tax. This particular town had no hotel accommodations to speak of, and was badly overcrowded. On this night they say it was snowing, and the woman was tired and in urgent need of shelter. She found warmth and comfort of a sort in a shed with cattle, out of the cold and wet, and away from the hurrying crowds of disturbing people. A thousand legends have been woven about the event, a thousand poems written. One says:

"The ox hath opened wide the door,
from out the snows hath called her in,
And he hath seen her eyes, therefore—
Our Lady without sin."

But if something of divinity in the face had appealed to the dumb animals and a few people—the poorest and most despised—their homage was of little account and the event made little stir. When the child was born it was like other children, feeble, defenseless, innocent—just the tiniest spark of life, lovely to a few about it, perhaps, but no more to be noticed than a new addition to the swarm in any rabbit warren of a tenement house to-day. Yet if this spark of life had been snuffed out, how differently would our whole history have been written! This particular birthday has had a greater bearing on our past, means more to us in the future, than any other event recorded in all the chronicles of time.

WE set aside religious views and religious feeling. We need no theological instruction, no faith in the supernatural, no religious training—nothing but a sensible regard for the facts of history. Our ancient and eternal enemies are superstition, bigotry, narrowness, and selfishness. Their fruits are ignorance and cruelty. They are chains that cramp and bind the mind as well as spirit. To start and stimulate a new fashion of thinking that will ultimately free humanity of these shackles was the life work of the child born some nineteen hundred years ago in Bethlehem.

HEROISM is unselfishness in the highest degree. It is more appealing, convincing, finally more forceful than arms or eloquence, or ingenuity or beauty. When a word might have saved him, the founder of Christianity endured the pain and ignominy of death by crucifixion. What a lesson he taught we may realize when we remember that the cross which once stood fourteen feet above the rocky Golgotha, now casts its shadow across the world; that though once it signified what the gallows or the electric chair does to-day it is now the symbol of hope, of charity, of human kindness. When he freed the woman whom the custom of the country would have stoned to death, he showed in its naked ugliness the worst canker that attacks human discipline or government—injustice, the cowardly and hypocritical punishment of one weakling for a fault for which others stronger go free. When he overrode and disregarded the differences between Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, he struck a blow at class feeling, and class feeling is a more real and dangerous enemy than anarchy itself. When he disregarded the ceremonial observance of certain days he burst through the ancient shams of cant and superstition. The whole essence of his longest public utterance that has since become so famous, is that men should observe the spirit and pur-

pose of the law as well as the letter; and to-day finds our statesmen struggling in their several ways toward the same end. His most violent and harshest action, the driving of the money changers from the temple, was directed at those who satisfy their greed at the expense of the devotion and religious feeling of the ignorant and humble. There once were many such where there are few now. When he advised his followers to render unto Cæsar the things that were Cæsar's, he pointed out the fact that defiance to constituted authority is the wrong road toward spiritual freedom.

PERHAPS it is true that the human mind has not progressed upward on the ladder of evolution in the last two thousand years. All that physical science has brought us would be perfectly comprehensible to a mind like that of Socrates or Aristole. Napoleon and Cæsar, Rodin and Phidias, our latest playwright against Æschylus—how does the balance sway? What has happened is that our minds have been set free. That we know that we are all brothers saves us from the stupidities of narrowness and cruelty. At last we realize that the highest kindness and the highest efficiency may live together. Freedom of thought, freedom from superstition, from hypocrisy, from cant and dogma, from selfishness, is the soul of the religion that came into the world nineteen hundred years ago. Mighty forces have been unchained. Minds no better than those of the past now work together in freer, wider fields. Looking back toward that birthday at Bethlehem, we see a long procession, saints and heroes, thinkers and workers for humanity who could not have acted or developed without that loftier, clearer vision that the founder of Christianity made possible. Darwin and Huxley as well as Luther and Knox, plowman Burns, and Joan of Arc in her gleaming mail, gaunt Lincoln and Saxon Alfred, Washington, Shakespeare—all the names we have learned to love and venerate are of those who realized in themselves some portion of the mental and spiritual freedom that Christ foreshadowed for the first time.

THE Christmas carol says:

"His palace was a lowly stall,
His royal bed a manger."

In the least considered hovel of a mean and crowded town he first received kindness from those who had least to give. In his thirty-odd years of life he knew little but hard ways, scorn, and hatred. What friends he had, what followers, were the most unfortunate and the most despised. If ever a being lived who needed courage and fortitude, it was he. His eloquence, his thought, might well have given him "all the kingdoms of the earth" they say he was tempted with, but his thought was of the spirit, and his conception grander than any temporal sway. If his entry into the world was pathetic in the poverty and humbleness of its surrounding, so was his departure from it most terrible in the blackness and cruelty of its tragedy. And yet the carol goes on to say:

"The babe that lies in David's town
Will turn your tears to gladness."

He gave his race so much of light and gladness, and his self-sacrifice was so terrible and so complete! Surely of all romances, of all hero tales, his is the first and noblest. Surely this world-wide birthday celebration has a deep and vital meaning. Surely he has taught us that unselfishness, humility, and tolerance are the true weapons of the world conqueror.

That's the Kind

HOW often have you looked from your desk to the desk of your employer and said to yourself, *"That's the kind of a job I want"?*

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Mechanical Draftsman	Teacher
Refrigeration Engineer	English Branches
Civil Engineer	Good English for Every One
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Mine Superintendent	Poultry Farming
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