THE BIG NATIONAL FICTION MAGAZINE
TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

APRIL 20, 1927
25 cts.

BLACK MARSH

BY

WILL McMORROW

Robert H. Rohde, who ranks high in the list of favorite POPULAR writers, leads off the next issue of this magazine with a full-length novel called "Ten Dollars a Minute." This captivating story is characterized by that dramatic suspense which the readers of Mr. Rohde have come to look for in his work. "Ten Dollars a Minute" is sure to get your vote.

Volume LXXXIV Number 1

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

CONTENTS FOR APRIL 20, 1927

COVER DESIGN — JEROME ROZEN

BLACK MARSH — WILL McMORROW — 3
A Complete Book
A small-town realtor encounters a first-class mystery.

BURIED ALIVE — FITZHUGH GREEN — 50
A Short Story
A gob in an odd predicament.

POINTS WEST — B. M. BOWER — 58
A Four-part Story—Part II
A young outcast discovers a friendly door.

SPECIAL DELIVERY — ROY HINDS — 84
A Short Story
Two pals who took different routes to their goals.

PIRACIES — ELINOR MORDAUNT — 95
A Short Story
The truth of a tropic piracy.

THAT BLASTED IDIOT — ALLISON W. IND — 105
A Short Story
A railroad crisis demands swift thinking.

MANUS QUITS — CLAY PERRY — 119
A Short Story
Marooned by a moose.

AS SHAKESPEARE SAYS — GEORGE PARSONS BRADFORD — 129
A Short Story
The classics attract an illiterate convict.

THE BROADENING TRAIL — DON McGREW — 140
A Five-part Story—Part III
Caravans and railroads creeping Westward.

THE SPY — THEODORE GOODRIDGE ROBERTS — 162
A Short Story
Not all is fair in war.

THE GAME WARDEN INTERVENES — ROBERT J. PEARSALL — 169
A Short Story
A hypothetical murder.

THE BAD LOT — FREDERICK NIVEN — 176
A Short Story
An evil reputation makes for good.

THE PACKETEERS — SAMUEL ALEXANDER WHITE — 185
Verse

THE WOLF DOG — AIMÉE D. LINTON — 186
A Short Story
It is not wise to be a dog's enemy.

A CHAT WITH YOU — 191

Twice-a-month publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Copyright, 1927, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1927, by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 20, 1909, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $4.72. Foreign, $5.44.

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION, $4.00 SINGLE COPY, 25 CENTS

THE POPULAR

VOL. LXXXIV APRIL 20, 1927 No. 1

Black Marsh

By Will McMorrow

Author of "Battle Honors," "The Honor of the Regiment," Etc.

He was a realtor, not by choice but necessity. He sat at his desk fighting off his creditors and the telephone bills, waiting for Business, but Business neglected to look in on him. His landlady had given him notice. He was down, and soon to be out. Then Miss Opportunity made her appearance, and — Well, that's the story.

CHAPTER I.

DISCONTINUED.

"WAIT a minute, please!"

Stanley Moore turned from the hall hatrack, removed the hat which he had just placed on his auburn head, and smiled a trifle uncertainly. Ordinarily he had an ingratiating smile, revealing a perfect set of teeth and wrinkling an imperfect, but capable, nose—a disarming grin that went well with honest blue eyes and a clean line of jaw. But it takes an exceptionally good actor or a first-class faker to look a landlady in the eye when he owes two weeks' room rent. Stanley was neither.

"Oh—er—good morning, Mrs. Grubble. I expect to fix you up this week."

"You'd better," she said grimly. "I never like to ask my gentlemen for the rent. Usually I don't have to. But I have a chance to rent your room to a very good party—and—well, you understand, Mr. Moore!"

"Perfectly! I'm not exactly a good party, and that's a fact. But don't worry. I wouldn't be surprised if I could pay you some in advance."

"I'd be very much surprised," she suggested acidly. "I should think you'd give up this business, Mr. Moore, you're in and get a job at something else. Goodness knows, you're big and husky enough and young enough and you've got eddication——"

"But," Stanley protested, "I've invested all I have in the office—furniture and records and rent. I can't afford to quit. You know my father didn't leave me much except a college education and expensive tastes. Business is liable to pick up any minute. I've only been in it six months."

"I hope," she eyed him meaningly, "it does before the end of the week."

She stalked off. Stanley picked up his brief case, closed the front door softly behind him, like a boy playing "hooky" from school, and heaved a thankful breath of fresh, morning air. It was good, brisk air, fresh from the Sound near by, but, in spite of the hint of spring, it held the chill of winter. Stanley regretted the light overcoat he had pawned the day before. Connecticut is not the north pole, and the city of New Manchester was justly famed for its summer attractions, but still April was April.

He walked briskly along the street, swinging his brief case, jingling the coins in his trouser pocket, the picture of a thoughtful young man of affairs figuring out an intricate business deal, involving the expenditure of large sums.

In front of a solid block of stores he stopped, shook his head as a taxi slowed down along the curb, and frowned at the imposing façade of the biggest office building in town. Then, as if arriving at a momentous decision, he stepped quickly inside a lunch room on the corner.

"Two eggs, scrambled, rolls and coffee."

HE would eat and let to-morrow care for itself. The debate was decided, and the ayes, in the shape of one hundred and seventy pounds of healthy appetite, had it. He fished out a crumpled five-dollar bill, received his change, and carried his breakfast tray off to a corner.

It was not a meal for a man to loiter over. A glance through the real-estate columns of the local newspaper, a stop at the cigar counter to light a cigarette, and Stanley was on his way to the little office on the water front.

"Hello, Stan! Where you rushin' to?"

Stanley stopped and grinned at the young man in the sport roadster, who was blocking traffic in the middle of the main street.

"Goin' to work. I'm not one of you spenders with your swell cars. I've got to walk."

Dick Furlong swung the door of the car open.

"No, you don't. Jump in before these fellows in back lynch me. I'm going your way. Throw the golf bag in the back. Well, how's the real-estate shark?"

"Not so good," Stanley confessed. "I'm beginning to think I'm more of a weakfish than a shark in this game. But it'll pick up."

Dick shook his head disparagingly.

"You're in the wrong game, Stan. What you ought to be doing is something altogether different—leading forlorn hopes, or sailing a pearl schooner in the South Seas, or something adventurous. You're not cut out to show little homes to fussy old women all day long."

"I'd be perfectly satisfied right now," Stanley declared, "to have a few fussy old ladies on my list for houses. No, I'm in the position of a fellow with the bull by the tail. I can't let go right now. I owe rent for the office, and there are other expenses I've got to meet. I figure things will break better from now on, with the summer coming."

"Say," said Dick, twisting around in his seat to look at Stanley, "if I thought you needed dough and didn't call on me, I'd be sore. Seems to me you ought to know me well enough, after rooming with me for two years—and the Argonne and everything. How about a little loan from your Uncle Richard?"

Stanley shook his head decidedly.

"Thanks. I've got a little money left. I'll call on you, maybe."

The roadster slid to the side of the road and stopped beside a white-painted, single-room real-estate office of the suburban type. The gold lettering on the win-

dow and door, twinkling in the sunlight, as if amused at their message to the world, bore the name of Stanley Moore and "Real Estate, Houses For Rent and For Sale, Appraisals, Insurance, Mortgages."

Dick reached out his hand to Stanley.

"Any old time, you know. I've got plenty. Don't be stuck up about it. When you want it let me know."

"Sure." Stanley waved his hand at the disappearing car and unlocked the door of the office. There was only one letter on the floor, and Stanley knew the man it was from—the owner of the shack. A month's rent had been due two days previous. Stanley did not even bother opening it.

He sat behind the desk, elevated his feet to the top of it, and then studied a map of a subdivision pinned to the opposite wall. There was just a possibility that he had a customer for a lot there. He thumbed over a file of cards—names of people who had stopped in at different times to ask for rentals of summer homes—and had not rented. He picked out one and reached for the telephone.

"This is the business office," a prim voice informed him. "Sorry, sir, but your phone is temporarily discontinued."

"What? Discontinued! But this is my office! I've got to——"

"Sorry, sir, but your phone is temporarily——"

"Look here!" Stanley exploded, "you'll get your money, but I must——"

"Sorry, sir, but your phone is temporarily dis——"

STANLEY slammed the instrument with a force that threatened to discontinue permanently that particular telephone. He strode to the open door and looked gloomily out at the road and the rows of new bungalows springing up along the Sound front. He felt a cold lump in his throat.

Dick Furlong had been right. The real-estate business was a flivver, as far as he was concerned. He wasn't cut out to be a successful broker. It looked easy enough to a beginner. Get a list of homes for sale, advertise for buyers and collect the commissions. Somehow the buyers hadn't shown up, and when they had, it had been to buy through some more wide-awake salesman. He would stick it out for the remainder of the week and let the office landlord and Mrs. Grubble fight over the pieces. He'd be through.

Still he wasn't used to losing. At college he had been a winner, and his army record showed he could get what he went after—machine-gun nests, for one thing. Twenty-seven years old, and no job or means of support in sight.

A long, black, racy car rolled to a stop outside the office. Its single occupant stepped out, read Stanley's gold-lettered sign, and walked toward the shack.

He was a thin man, middle-aged, with a round-shouldered stoop and two sloe-black eyes set deeply in a sallow face, and he walked between the puddles on the broken pavement, like a man treading carefully among pitfalls.

Stanley did not wait at the door to notice more than that this was a possible customer. He seated himself quickly behind the flat desk and grabbed the telephone. There was one maxim Stanley had learned in the real-estate business—that nothing succeeds like apparent success.

As the stranger reached the doorway Stanley was speaking into the receiver in authoritative tones.

"Not a bit more than sixty thousand dollars, my good fellow. That's my bid. It's take it or leave it. My man will pay sixty thousand."

"Sorry, sir, but your phone is temporarily discontinued."

"Not a cent more than sixty thousand," Stanley snapped back. "I'll draw the contract in the morning. I am buying the whole plant!"

What the telephone operator thought of this astounding proposal, Stanley did not wait to hear. He jerked the transmitter back to the hook and looked up, in pretended surprise, at the visitor.

"Walk in, sir. Have a chair. No, not that one. That is temporarily dis—— I mean the leg is broken. Here!"

The stranger smiled smoothly, without showing his teeth, and sat down as carefully as he had walked up the path.

"You are busy, perhaps?" he suggested.

Stanley waved his hand affably. "I can spare some minutes. That was a rather pressing deal. Very annoying, too, to deal with people who don't know their own minds."

The stranger smiled again and shrugged his narrow shoulders.

"What can you expect? The world is full of people who can't say 'Yes' or 'No.' I am glad you are not like that. You must be a fast worker, indeed, for I thought I saw you at the door when I left my car."

Stanley reddened and shot a searching look at the stranger. But if there was sarcasm in the modulated voice, there was no trace of it in the sallow face. The black eyes were inscrutable.

"You suggested giving me a few minutes of your time," the visitor continued. "I should like to bargain with you for several days of your time. I will pay you, of course. What are your charges for appraisals?"

Stanley leaned back in his chair and chewed the end of a pencil. This all sounded too good to be true. He had never made an appraisal in his short career as a real-estate broker, and he hadn't the faintest conception of the fee charged.

"I would rather pay a flat rate—so much a day," the stranger said. "While you are working on it, of course. I realize these things are not cheaply had."

"Oh, no," Stanley hastened to assure him. "Rather—er—expensive. Time away from my business here and all that—looking up records, tax rates——"

He wondered whether he should not make it by the week. The man drove an expensive make of car. No doubt he could afford to pay well to have property appraised. Better make it large enough to allow for bargaining. Hundred a week, perhaps, though that sounded outrageous to Stanley.

"Oh, well," he said carelessly, "let's say a—a hundred dollars——"

"A hundred a day," the stranger nodded. "Very well. That is settled. It will not take many days. What's the trouble?"

Stanley leaned over and coughed explosively, waving his hand apologetically at the same time.

"It's all right," he sputtered. "Started to swallow my pencil. Must have slipped. Stupid thing to do. What were you saying?"

CHAPTER II.

MR. PEMBERTON KAY.

I WAS saying this appraisal would not take up much of your time. I want you to do two things—find out if a piece of property is for sale and appraise it at its proper value."

It was on the tip of Stanley's tongue to ask why this customer had come to Stanley instead of another, better-known broker, whose appraisals would have the benefit of experience and standing; but he wisely refrained. It would be bad business policy to look this gift horse too closely in the mouth.

Stanley consulted a desk calendar which was absolutely innocent of engagements of any kind.

"I think I can spare the time, Mister—er——"

"Kay," the stranger supplied—"Pemberton Kay. By the way, would you mind? The draft catches me."

He closed the open door with an apologetic gesture and seated himself as cautiously as before, but closer to Stanley.

"The thing is this, Mr. Moore. I am associated with a large development concern, and we have had our eyes on a certain parcel ripe for improvement not far from here—ten miles, to be exact. Of course, it would be quite inadvisable for us to appear personally in the matter. As soon as the owner—I understand him to be an eccentric old gentleman, but businesslike—discovered we were angling for this particular property, the price would jump to a ridiculous figure. He must be approached carefully. Neither he nor any one else must suspect that a New York syndicate is interested. So you see your work for us is rather confidential."

"How did you happen to hear of me?" Stanley asked.

Kay caressed his blue-shaven chin with thin fingers.

"I have been in town several days, Mr. Moore, and I am an observant person. You are obviously—er—a man in moderate circumstances and not likely to float this development yourself, and I think you can be trusted not to try."

"I don't double cross my clients," Stanley said abruptly, "nor any one else, if that's what you mean. We'll get that straight before——"

"Of course not," Kay interrupted hastily. "I mentioned that in passing, as one would say. One must be careful in these large matters. Some real-estate firms wouldn't hesitate to grab a good thing like this and exploit it themselves. There are dishonest men everywhere, Mr. Moore. Have you a map of Connecticut handy?"

Stanley drew the required diagram from a drawer and smoothed it out on the desk. Pemberton Kay walked to the door, swung it open quickly, and looked out. He pulled his head in immediately and came softly back to the desk.

"I'm always forgetting to lock my car," he explained. "I like to keep a watch on it occasionally."

"Oh, don't worry," Stanley laughed. "We have no crooks in New Manchester."

"I wouldn't bank on that," Kay said, shaking his head reprovingly. "The world is full of rascals. However——"

He leaned over the map and traced a path along the Sound with a bony forefinger.

"Here," he whispered, "we have the little village of Wacantuck—ten miles east of here, you see. It is right on the Sound. You notice several small islands just offshore, about four miles east of Wacantuck? They are mostly uninhabitable stretches of swamp and rocks not worth any one's time except for duck shooting. Now here—right there, lying close to shore, really connected with the mainland by a marsh—is the property we are interested in. It contains some ten acres of high land, the only islet there that is worth developing."

"What good would it be?" asked Stanley, puzzled. "It's way off from the railroad."

Kay raised his heavy eyebrows. "I am surprised at a real-estate man asking such a question. The place is ideal for an amusement park. You see the Sound is about eighteen miles wide at that point—quite a large stretch of water. We contemplate a bridge across the marsh and a bus line from here—and other things. It would be quite an American Venice. The present house would do admirably for a clubhouse, with our bungalows around it, and our boathouse right there, on the south side of the island."

STANLEY nodded. It didn't look very promising to him, but if Mr. Pemberton Kay and company wanted to spend their money, that was their lookout.

"You say there's a house on the property?"

"Yes. I have made a few inquiries—without revealing myself, of course—and I find there is a large, ramshackle place that could be renovated. A very old place built many years ago, I believe. It is known as Black Marsh, and whether it takes its name from the owners, the Marsh family, or from the swamp that surrounds it, I cannot say. But that is neither here nor there. The main thing is we want to purchase the place at a reasonable figure."

"If he is willing to sell," Stanley said. "Suppose he isn't?"

Kay shrugged his shoulders. "In that case we will forget it and try elsewhere. But, with a possible commission in sight, your job will be to persuade him to sell. In the first place, we must know all about the property. You are retained to find out what you can. See the local people, get a line on your man, and approach him from a friendly angle—possibly pretend you were passing by—fishing trip or something of the kind—and see what he says about selling."

"Sounds like detective work," Stanley demurred.

"My dear Mr. Moore, business deals of this kind are not usually shouted from the housetops. It is perfectly ethical, and we are prepared, as I said, to pay well for your time."

Stanley pocketed his pencil and rolled up the map.

"All right," he agreed, shoving out his hand, "I'll take you up."

Kay intrusted his hand to the younger man's grasp with evident reluctance and snatched it back, as if he were rescuing it from a lion's mouth. Pemberton Kay was evidently a man wary of personal contacts.

"Don't forget, Mr. Moore," he insisted, "this is not a matter to be talked of. My name is not to be mentioned at all, nor the fact that you are appearing for a third party. I shall phone you here in a day or two in order to find out what you have learned. If you are successful in this, you will be retained as the broker in this deal, involving a large sum."

He looked over his shoulder and fished out a well-stuffed wallet from an inside pocket. He counted out ten-dollar bills on the desk.

"An advance," he said, "and a proof of our intentions. We do not do things in a small way in our syndicate."

He stood up, rubbed his chin thoughtfully, as if undecided whether to add to this statement or not, and turned to the door.

"I'll phone you the day after to-morrow. Good day, Mr. Moore."

Stanley looked at the ten new, uncreased gold certificates on the desk and then at the narrow back of Mr. Pemberton Kay, climbing into his car. Then the newly appointed appraiser gathered up the bills and the map of Connecticut, shoved them both in the same pocket, and reached for pen and ink.

"This office," he wrote, "will be closed till further notice."

He grabbed his hat, pasted the memorandum on the door, and locked it.

It was not until he was halfway to Mrs. Grubble's that he remembered that Mr. Pemberton Kay had left no address or telephone number. Like a cautious shadow, he had pussy-footed his way into the picture and faded silently away, leaving ten fairly large bills behind him on the desk.

Stanley felt their crinkly bulk in his pocket. They were more substantial than shadows, anyway. He displayed two to Mrs. Grubble for the two weeks' room rent, and it is a sad commentary on Stanley's late financial condition that she appeared overwhelmed.

"Why, Mr. Moore," she purred, "there was really no hurry. Where in the world did you get all that money?"

"I took your advice and changed my business. I'm robbing banks now. Do you happen to have a New Haven timetable around? And, by the way, I'd like to have you take this other ten-spot and pay my phone bill for the office. I'm going to need the service in the next couple of days."

CHAPTER III.

BLACK MARSH.

"BLACK MARSH?" The tax collector of the village of Wacantuck screwed up his eyes in a contemplative smile and cocked his head on the side. "Black Marsh!" exclaimed the little old gentleman of the black broadcloth, early-Victorian school.

The business of tax collecting in Wacantuck never gave him too much to do, and he enjoyed talking—particularly to young men who were respectfully attentive.

"Curious thing," he said, accepting Stanley's offer of a cigarette, "but there have been three people within a week asking about Black Marsh. You're the third."

"Oh, I only asked because I saw the name on the map here. I was looking for another piece. Who were the other two?"

"Why, there was a thin, nervous type of person in last week searching around the old maps. I didn't get his name. Can't afford to be offensively curious, you know. We invite home seekers here. They help pay the tax collector, you see."

He laughed at his own joke appreciatively.

"The other fellow was a different type. Do you place any store in phrenology?"

Stanley grinned and shook his head. "Sounds deadly, I admit."

"I rather take an interest in that sort of thing," the tax collector rambled on. "Fascinating study, when allied to its sisters, ethnology and history. I would have liked to have studied this person more fully. Most peculiar skull formation—beetle-browed is no name for it.

Receding forehead, with the reddest hair I ever saw—fiery—and a red beard and a scar bisecting ear and cheek, that looked as if some one tried to cut him in two at one time. I wager, if you put a pair of gold earrings on him and a pair of pistols in his belt, he could pass for the toughest rollicking scoundrel that ever scuttled a peaceful merchantman."

"Born two centuries too late for Captain Kidd or Blackbeard," Stanley suggested, humoring the loquacious old gentleman. "And too many miles north of the Spanish Main."

The tax collector frowned on this disregard of his hobby.

"Not a bit of it. You city men might find our country around here of distinct historic interest. Look here."

He sprang nimbly to his feet and led the way to the window. The silver waters of Long Island Sound twinkled brightly in the noonday sun.

"This was the inland route to Boston in the old days. Right out there on Gardiner's Island, only a few miles away toward Montauk Point, William Kidd, the master pirate, buried the gold and silver that he looted from the Mocca Fleet. He sailed by here, black flag flying and crew roaring drunk, when he came home loaded down with the treasure of the *Quedagh Merchant*, the richest ship a pirate ever jumped aboard. Spanish Main, indeed! They sunk the galleons there, but here is where they came to spend it. Bill Kidd, John Quelch, Henry Avery, John Gow—probably every one of them sooner or later roamed these waters."

"Well, your friend was not connected with any of those gentleman," Stanley laughed.

"No," the old gentleman sighed, almost regretfully, "those bold days are gone. No! He simply wanted to know the way there to apply for a job—some wandering tramp laborer, I guess. I warned him he was wasting his time."

Stanley, who had displayed only a half-hearted interest in the historical lecture, brightened up.

"That reminds me," he said, "you were going to tell me something about the place."

The tax collector pointed to an open book on a side desk.

"There's most everything we know about Black Marsh right there," he said. "It's assessed at ten thousand dollars, I don't mind telling you, and the taxes are paid every year—a matter of a hundred dollars or so—right on the date, and it lies ten acres above, and probably twenty acres below, the high-water line. That's about all I know of the property. It ain't much," he continued hopefully. "If you really want to invest, I have a much better proposition right in town."

"Water front," Stanley insisted, "is what I'm after. You say this place is worth ten thousand?"

"That's only our assessed valuation for tax purposes," the old gentleman corrected. "I don't pretend to evaluate it. It may be worth nothing or a whole lot. Zeke Marsh is the man could tell you that better."

"Is that the owner?"

"Yes. And I've been here forty years, and I don't know much more about him or his place than you do."

"Kind of retiring, is he?"

"Well, he never shows himself. He sends his chink cook to pay taxes and attend to any business in town. He wasn't born there, like all the rest of the Marsh family for the last couple of hundred years. He showed up a few years ago in time to save the place from a tax sale. He's some sort of cousin. Spent his time traveling, I guess. Seems to have lots of money. Kind of a miser, they say. The folks around here haven't got much use for him since he ran the local minister off the place with a gun, when the clergyman came to ask for a subscription. Better steer clear of Black Marsh, young fellow."

"I'm a good runner," Stanley grinned. "What do you suppose he's up to? Making hooch by his lonesome, or does he just hate the whole world?"

The tax collector frowned. "Pious folks hereabouts would tell you old Zeke Marsh must have sold himself to the devil and is waiting for the call. There have been whispers of mysterious doings——"

He broke off and eyed Stanley suspiciously.

"You seem very curious about Black Marsh and its hermit. You're not a Sunday-magazine reporter, are you? We don't want publicity of that kind in Wacantuck."

"Oh, by no means," Stanley reassured him. "I'm a broker—I—it was just an interesting name, that's all. I'm looking for something altogether different—a water-front factory site. Here is my card."

"I see. What kind of a factory, Mr. Moore?"

"Why—er—a kind of women's wear, my client said. Corset factory, I believe. But I see Wacantuck sites are not exactly what they want."

"Nor corsets, either," the old gentleman snapped. "You might just as well start a factory to make buttons. Well, it's your business, not mine. Drop in and see me any time."

"Thanks." Stanley nodded and escaped gladly. He had a feeling that he had not been a particularly clever investigator. As a prevaricator he lacked experience, and he felt that Mr. Pemberton Kay would not approve of leaving a card behind with the tax collector.

HE had a fair idea of the location of Black Marsh from the county map. It was not more than three miles, and that distance was not a formidable walk to a young man in sound trim, with a clear sky overhead and a good, hard road underfoot.

Wacantuck, in spite of its new public library and newer square, with the war monument and painted enemy cannon, was a small place. The neat rows of Cape Cod cottages and Spanish bungalows and English manor houses, stopped abruptly at the first turn in the street, and Stanley found himself on a white-shell road, off the main line of traffic, with the Sound on one side and an occasional closed summer home on the other.

A light delivery truck passed him, the driver leaning out for another look at the well-dressed traveler on foot, who was following a patch that was seldom used, but otherwise Stanley met no one going or coming.

The shell road twisted along the shore, with a brown, evil-smelling swamp taking the place of the clean sands nearer the village. Occasionally there were clumps of dwarfed and twisted pines, bent by the sea wind. Here and there, near shore, were rocky islets covered with coarse eel grass. Stanley began to wonder how Pemberton Kay's syndicate would transform such a desolate waste into a summer resort.

Three miles from town a disused driveway branched off from the shell road toward the water. Stanley followed it to the top of a small hill and looked around.

Lying close to the shore and separated from it by a winding creek, was an irregular tract of high land, about a thousand feet long and perhaps half as wide. The western end, near the rotting bridge that crossed the stream, was a kind of morass, rocks and clumps of reeds sticking up from the black mud. The eastern end was a bare plateau, with one tall, dead oak starkly gray against the blue sky and shining water. Close to the edge of the Sound was a boathouse with the roof caved in, and a tiny burying ground, with half a dozen headstones askew in the ground. The center of the island showed signs that some one had once tried to cultivate a few barren acres, now sprung up into weeds. Near by, fronting on the water and half hidden by a clump of trees tinged with green buds, was a weather-beaten barn and an old-fashioned house, with a cupola stuck on top like a conning tower.

It had been, apparently, a place of some pretensions at one time. The roof, although now patched with tin, had been slate. The columns of the wide veranda were solid stone, untouched by the neglect of years. The shingled sides of the house, at one time painted a forbidding black, were scaling off in places. A thin wisp of smoke leaked forlornly from one of four chimney pots.

Beyond the bridge were two stone gateposts, with two stone lions atop.

Stanley looked in either direction along the shore. The clear view of a mile or more on both sides showed no other houses. Obviously, this was Black Marsh.

"Some clubhouse for Friend Pemberton," Stanley muttered to himself. "He

can organize a suicide club here, and he'll be right."

He stepped onto the rotting boards of the bridge, walking carefully on the beams where the gaps occurred and the chill-looking dark water of the creek showed. It looked a dangerous structure to cross at night.

"Go 'way!"

Stanley turned quickly in the direction of the voice. From a tangle of brush and pine trees a yellow face, unmistakably Chinese, stared unwinkingly at the intruder.

"No clome here! Go 'way fast!"

"Nothing doing," declared Stanley stoutly. "Go away yourself. Where's your boss, Charley?"

A tawny claw waved toward the bridge. There was no change of inflection in the Celestial's voice.

"Go 'way fast!" he chirped. "Go 'way fast!"

STANLEY shrugged and started toward the house. The Chinese followed, dodging between the trees beside the path, and repeating the same three words in monotonous singsong. Stanley stopped with an annoyed laugh.

"If you don't dry up, Charley, I'll knock you for a row of Chinese freight cars. On your way!"

He pretended to be about to spring at the slant-eyed one, and the latter darted quickly up the path and disappeared into the house by the rear way. On the grass-grown walk Stanley's feet fell noiselessly —so noiselessly that a man bending over a tree stump some distance away did not hear the visitor's approach until Stanley was right behind him.

Stanley reached out his hand and touched the bent back.

"Excuse me! Are you Zeke Marsh by any——"

The man seemed to shrink for a fraction of a second beneath Stanley's hand, as if it had been the touch of doom. But it was only for an instant. He whirled around in a flash, exposing a haggard, gray face, under a thatch of dirty-gray hair, and eyes that were glassy with terror.

He sprang several feet away, with an agility surprising for a man of his age. His mouth worked painfully, but no sound emerged. Stanley had never seen any one in such a state of absolute panic.

"Good Lord, you're a nervous lot here!" he soothed. "I didn't mean to frighten you to death."

The elderly man swallowed convulsively, as if his fright had stuck in his skinny throat, his hands fluttering about his collar.

"My name is Moore," Stanley said. "I happened to be passing and wondered if this place was for sale. Are you Zeke Marsh?"

The other nodded, smiled a green and sickly smile, and rubbed his hands.

"Happened to be passing," he repeated slowly. "I see. You startled me. We're rather lonely here. Rather lonely —single blessedness, as it were. We don't see many strangers. I believe you though——"

He edged his way toward the house, as he spoke, keeping his face toward Stanley and keeping up a flow of words like a man who was talking against time.

"You don't think I believe what you say, but I do—I do. There are lots of people come here about buying the place. Oh, yes! You look honest, and I believe you when you say——"

"All right," Stanley interrupted impatiently. "It's settled that you believe me. What I want to get at, though——"

"To buy the house." Marsh whined— "that's what you wanted. I see. Dear me, you did take me up sharp. As if I doubted you when you said you came to talk about buying. Nothing farther from my thoughts—nothing farther, I assure you."

They were standing on the veranda by this time, near a heavy door of weathered oak, slightly open. Marsh stumbled over a stick of wood that had fallen from a pile along the rail.

"Old place," he wheezed, his eyes darting about nervously. "Been in the family for years. Quite delightful. Wonderful view from here, for instance. Quite nice—quite nice—quite——"

Stanley, his head turned toward the panorama of shore front, heard nothing of the movement from Marsh. It might

have been the trailing off of that cajoling voice into icy stillness, or it might have been the instinct of danger that guards the men of action that warned him.

He swung around just in time to dodge the heavy billet of wood that Marsh, eyes blazing, poised in the air. It missed Stanley's head by a hair and crashed against the open door.

Stanley jumped aside, and, as he did, Marsh recovered his wits and jumped inside the house, slamming the door shut.

CHAPTER IV.

NOCKER OF WACANTUCK.

THE attack had been so utterly unexpected and coldly deliberate in its execution that Stanley was too bewildered to give chase. The next moment he heard the sound of bars falling into place behind the door.

"I'll be darned!" he muttered. Then his jaw squared angrily, and he planted his foot in the center of the door with a force that shook the oak on its hinges.

"Go peacefully," Marsh's voice quavered through the door. "I'll shoot through the door. You didn't fool me any. I'm ready for you any time. Tell the rest that! I'm ready for them. I'll kill any man that comes near me."

The voice was almost a shriek. Stanley frowned thoughtfully at the ground. The man was plainly a lunatic and a dangerous one, at that. The sudden, murderous attack and the wild threats were sufficient indication. It was clear that Pemberton Kay's syndicate was out of luck.

Stanley walked slowly down the path between the tall trees. Something buzzed by his head, and there was a sharp report from the house. Stanley had heard both sounds too often in France to question their meaning. He was being sniped at.

He slipped behind a tree and looked around to see a yellow face at an upstairs window. It disappeared, and Stanley decided he had better disappear also before he acted as a target again. He kept in the protection of the trees until he reached the bridge.

On his way back to Wacantuck he tried to puzzle out the various meanings of his unexpected reception at Black Marsh. Real estate brokers were sometimes unpopular, but never to the extent of trying to kill them—north of Florida, at least. Marsh was, without doubt, as crazy as a March hare. That accounted for his peculiar manner of living.

It would be useless to complain to the townfolk. They knew Marsh was mad, or they should, after his running the clergyman off the land. Their answer would be to let Marsh alone in his peaceful seclusion. Moreover, Stanley considered woefully, he had other troubles—mainly the fact that his work as an appraiser was done, as far as Black Marsh was concerned, and there would be no further hundred-dollar days for him.

He boarded a local train for New Manchester and reached there after dark.

Next day he was at his tiny office, bright and early, waiting for the telephone call from Pemberton Kay. It came in the afternoon.

"What happened, Mr. Moore?"

"No luck there," Stanley reported. He related the incidents of the day before. Kay questioned him closely about Marsh and his manner of living.

"Not very promising," the smooth voice agreed. "Well, let's forget it. I had no idea I was sending you into a pitched battle. As you say, the man must be crazy. Seems to live in a state of fear, eh?"

"Looks that way."

"And he seemed to think you had designs on his life. Most decidedly queer. Did there appear to be any sign of building going on? Excavation of any kind?"

"No. I had a good view of the whole place. By the way, the tax collector assesses the place at ten thousand, Mr. Pemberton."

There was irony in the tones of Pemberton Kay's voice.

"Really? He—er—undervaluates it greatly, I think. But how does this Marsh person get his supplies if he never leaves the house? I'm curious."

"His Chinese cook attends to that. But about the location——"

"In the morning?" Kay's voice interrupted. "I mean the buying of supplies.

You see there are other places about there, and anything to do with the living conditions of the section are of interest to us."

Stanley confessed he had not inquired as closely as that.

"Well," Kay said, "it's unimportant. Our syndicate will look elsewhere. In the meantime, I am quite satisfied with your work. I may have something further later on."

He rung off before Stanley could ask the address of the syndicate, in case there were further developments. Stanley disliked losing sight of this single customer, the evasive but valuable goose that laid the fourteen-carat eggs.

Feeling more prosperous than he had for a long time, Stanley dropped around to the American Legion post that evening. He met Dick Furlong there, but did not tell him about the trip to Black Marsh. Kay had not absolved Stanley from the vow to secrecy yet.

Dick, on his way home, after a pleasant evening, dropped Stanley off at Mrs. Grubble's and went his carefree way, promising to look the broker up at his office the following day.

Stanley waited around the shack all morning, dodged out for a bite of lunch and took up his post again in the afternoon. But Pemberton Kay's voice did not come over the wire again. The office of "Stanley Moore, Real Estate—Houses For Rent and For Sale, Appraisals, Insurance, Mortgages"—was as innocent of any of those activities as it had been for six solid months.

Stanley yawned, read the real-estate columns of the newspapers, went over his card files carefully for any possible property suitable to Kay's syndicate, and yawned again. It promised to be a very uneventful day.

He was studying the map of the Connecticut shore for the fourth time, when a shadow darkened the doorway. Stanley looked up to find a large and lumpy individual, with a large and lumpy nose, over a ragged-brown mustache. He was regarding Stanley and the interior of the office with a shrewd and searching gaze and had the general appearance of a bill collector.

"Good afternoon," Stanley greeted him, with forced cordiality.

The visitor paid no attention to the conventionality. He lifted his hand to his mustache, then pointed the same gnarled hand at the broker. The other hand was in the sagging pocket of a well-worn overcoat.

"You Mister Stanley Moore?"

"That's right. What can I do——"

"Real-estate business?" The brown mustache bristled. Apparently this was not a man to be hurried under any circumstances.

"Guilty," Stanley confessed. "Insurance, too, and appraisals."

The stranger produced a card and shoved it across the desk. Stanley reached for it and read it, expecting to find the name of a dunning concern. There was still the installment on the furniture to be paid.

"Why, this is my card!" he exclaimed.

"Thought so," the visitor grunted. "That settles it."

"Settles what? You're rather a peculiar——"

"We'll come to that, young feller," he declared rather grimly. "You do appraisals for real-estate people—travel around, maybe?"

"I do," Stanley said with an impatient laugh. "What can I do for you?"

"You can keep yer hands on the desk fer one thing!"

He jerked the hand inside the sagging pocket meaningly.

"I've got ye covered all the time, so don't start nothing, young feller."

Stanley's eyes opened wide.

"Say, are you kidding me—or what? You are the second nut I've run into in two days!"

"The other one was Zeke Marsh, eh?"

"That's right. But what the dev——"

"You're under arrest!" He pushed the coat aside to show a metal badge. "I'm Deputy Sheriff Nocker of Wacantuck County. Sit right still now!"

Stanley pushed back his chair.

"What for?"

"Fer the murder of Zeke Marsh! Reckon you slick fellers ain't so smart after all—leavin' callin' cards behind you!"

"Marsh murdered!" Stanley blurted. "What in—how did it happen?"

"Reckon as somebody strangled him down by the swamp last night. He was found there, anyway—dead as a door nail, this mornin'. Better come along peaceful and tell yer story to the coroner."

CHAPTER V.

ALEXA MARSH.

"NONSENSE!" Stanley protested. "I don't know any more about it than you do. Wherever did you get that wild idea?"

The deputy chuckled. Evidently he was pleased with himself.

"I didn't expect you to admit it right off. You went to see Simms, our tax collector, and asked him a lot of questions about Marsh's habits. You was seen goin' to Black Marsh. You weren't seen leavin' there, so you——"

"I went there to see about buying the place."

"For yourself?"

"No. A party asked me to get information about it."

"Where is that party?" the deputy asked skeptically.

Stanley's jaw snapped. His fist crashed down on the desk.

"By Jiminy! That's just it! Where is he?"

"Who—where is who?" Nocker's eyes brightened. He was not the man to give odds to his opponent by warning him against speaking. "You had an accomplish, eh?"

"Accomplice nothing, you poor sap! That's the bird you want! Pemberton Kay! I begin to see the light! He sent me down there to get the lay of the land—made me the goat!"

"Pemberton Kay," the deputy nodded and produced a dog-eared notebook. "Pemberton K. what? What's his full name?"

"His name will be Pemberton K. Mudd if I get my hands on him," Stanley said savagely. "That's why he was so curious about the chink goin' to town."

"'Chinese Joe's' disappeared, too," the deputy sheriff offered. "Know anything about that?"

Stanley shook his head. He reached for his hat, the man of law keeping a careful eye on him all the time. Deputy Sheriff Nocker of Wacantuck County had read a lot about criminals, and he knew this one immediately for a desperate character.

"Let's go," Stanley said. He stepped outside, Nocker following, and locked the door. The note was still on the glass panel that the office was closed until further notice.

"See you expected me," Nocker smirked and made an entry in his book. "Gave up in despair, I reckon."

"Don't be an ass," Stanley said. "Here! I'd almost forgotten him!"

The sporting roadster, with Dick Furlong behind the wheel, eased up to the curb, and the driver jumped out.

"'Lo, Stan! Busy, are you?"

"Kinda," Stanley admitted. "Got to go to jail for murder."

"You'll have to call it off. Do your murdering in business hours. I've got a fishing party all arranged."

"Can't be done," Stanley grinned. "I'm in the hands of the law. Meet Sheriff Nocker, the sleuth of Wacantuck."

"This ain't no jokin' matter, young feller," Nocker snarled.

"What's the idea?" Dick blinked his eyes from one to the other.

Stanley explained in detail, while Nocker stood by placidly, as if he had all the time in the world—as no doubt he had.

"Knock the manacles off the poor wretch," Dick laughed. "He's only a real-estate broker, and there's no punishment for that yet—unfortunately. He has an alibi that even a Nocker of Wacantuck will admit. He was at the American Legion post last night with me and a crowd of others until midnight."

"Got witnesses?"

"You don't expect me to stage a parade of veterans down Main Street, do you? I'll vouch for him. Furlong's my name."

Deputy Sheriff Nocker looked at the roadster.

"That your car, mister?"

"Yes."

"Well, I guess maybe you can drive

us over and tell your story, too. It ain't fur from here."

"Sure." Dick hesitated and looked at Stanley. "I suppose you can object if you want. I don't know the law, but this isn't Wacantuck County——"

"Lord, no!" Stanley led the way to the car. "Let's have it over with."

THE drive to Wacantuck took only about twenty minutes, but it was dark by the time they rolled along the main street.

"Which way?" Dick queried.

Nocker pointed to a low, stone building on the outskirts of town. It had a green light outside.

"Looks like a police station," Dick demurred.

"We don't need police in Wacantuck —ordinarily," Nocker said, "except for traffic. This is a law-abidin' community. We'll stop here a while."

They climbed out. Behind a desk a man in uniform lolled sleepily.

"Howdy, chief," Nocker greeted him. "Jest book these two gents fer the night."

"What?" Dick exclaimed. "I thought you were taking us——"

"Too late to-night," Nocker said calmly, "fer the justice of the peace, an' I ain't takin' no chances. Maybe you won't be so smart now. He's held fer court as a suspected indeevidual, and you as a witness."

"This is outrageous!" Dick fumed. "You're all wrong about the law of it, Nocker. I have a right to call friends up and arrange bail."

Nocker shook his head decidedly.

"I don't pertend to be a lawyer. Here's where you'll stay put until I find out more about you. I don't know you from Adam, young feller!"

"You can find out easily enough! Ever hear of the Furlong Lock Company?"

Nocker motioned Dick and Stanley toward a dimly lit passage.

"Locks, eh? There's a lock down there that'll keep a bright feller like you busy all night, tryin' to figure out. I'll show it to you. You can give the chief your pedigrees through the bars. I ain't takin' no chances with you loose."

Dick looked at Stanley and then around the neat cell Nocker left them in. It was not an ornamental place, but still not as unpleasant as it might have been. Prisoners in the town of Wacantuck were a rarity.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" Dick exclaimed disgustedly. Stanley looked at his friend's face and forgot his own troubles in the heartiest laugh that ever startled the midnight stillness of Wacantuck's nine o'clock.

"'Strike the manacles off the poor wretch!'" he quoted, wiping his eyes. "After all, he's only a poor real-estate broker. Dick, old boy, Nocker of Wacantuck has tracked you down at last. Well, I always figured you'd come to this, but it took 'Old Kink' Brady, the sleuth of Wac——"

"Laugh, darn it! But I've got a date to-night at the country club. Wait until you're engaged and see how you like breaking dates!"

"It'll keep. Dates are common enough. Murders are a great deal more exciting. You're a suspected criminal now."

Stanley looked seriously at his friend and then told him something of the events which led to his arrest.

"All kidding aside, Dick, this is a pretty sober affair. There's a man been killed out there at Black Marsh, and this fellow Kay had something to do with it. The real-estate syndicate was just a blind. I think he wanted to get some dope on Marsh and was afraid to go there himself, so he made me his cat's-paw. That looks as if Marsh knew him. I wonder what's at the bottom of it?"

"Ask Friend Nocker," Dick growled, throwing himself on the cot. "He knows all about it, I suppose. He'll get an earful from me in the morning."

Nocker did get an earful, but it was from the justice of the peace and not from Dick Furlong.

When Dick and Stanley were marched to the home of the justice, they both needed shaves and breakfasts and revenge for a night spent sleeping in their clothes. But the justice of the peace took the matter out of their hands.

He proved to be a solid business man of Wacantuck and seemed to know more law than Deputy Sheriff Nocker, besides

having a wholesome respect for the Furlong Lock Company.

"I think your references are unquestionable," he said, as he smiled shrewdly at Dick. "Your father and I do quite a lot of business together. Mr. Moore has a perfect alibi. I fail to see how he could be connected with this matter just because he had a conversation with Zeke Marsh on business that afternoon, though, of course, he should hold himself in readiness to testify at the inquest, if he should be called, and later, if the grand jury should wish to question him, in case there is an arrest, with a shadow of legality about it."

"You will note, Mr. Nocker," he continued dryly, "my use of the word 'legality.' So far, I think, you have been overstepping yourself. The kind of thing you have been getting away with is what tends to make our small communities and their officials ridiculous in the eyes of city people."

Nocker reddened uncomfortably.

"I wasn't takin' no chances with them —specially when they got so fresh."

"I think you've given these two gentlemen a lot of unnecessary trouble and, I'm afraid, cause for action against the county."

"Lord, no!" Dick protested. "I'm not going to sue anybody—least of all a county. I wouldn't know where to begin."

THEY shook hands with the justice. Meeting Nocker two minutes later, Dick frowned and then grinned and shoved out his hand. He was not disposed to harbor grudges.

"You'll have to look elsewhere for the criminal," he said. "Better luck next time."

Nocker accepted the hand limply.

"Simms, the tax collector, started me on that wild-goose chase," he confessed gloomily, "with his talk about bumps on heads. He studies thet. I'll be dogged if I don't give him one to study on his own head some day."

"Cheer up!" Stanley encouraged the drooping deputy. "You'll get your man yet. They'll be saying about you what they say about the Northwest Mounted."

"I heard one of Marsh's relations had come to town," Nocker said, "an' I went to see her this mornin', but she's just a grandniece or somethin', an' I don't expect to learn about nothin' from her."

Dick climbed aboard his car.

"You might learn about women from her," he suggested. "What's she look like?"

Deputy Sheriff Nocker rubbed his chin with a knuckly hand.

"Well, I dunno. Some folks might call her a looker. I'm a married man, myself, so I didn't notice much. Kind of a little girl with big eyes. Say, if you fellers are goin' my way, I gotta drap around there again."

"Jump in." Dick invited. "I'm almost married myself. Where is it?"

Nocker heaved his lumpy frame between the two young men and pointed ahead. "She's stoppin' at the Wacantuck Arms. Right around the corner. Wait a second! That's her comin' out now."

Nocker's powers of description were decidedly limited, but, whatever a "looker" might be, the girl in the blue tailor-made suit and little, close-fitting felt hat, was it—from the top of her blond, "boyish" bob to the tips of her suede, unboyish shoes. Women might resent her charm, but the lowest form of subway male would relinquish his seat to her, hopeful of a glance—and get just a glance and no more.

"She's a 'looker' all right," Dick agreed readily.

Nocker reached over and honked the horn.

"What do you think you're doing?" Stanley growled. "Calling the cows home? You're a sacrilegious bird."

The girl turned her head, recognized the deputy sheriff, and waited by the curb until the car drew up alongside.

"I thought I'd tell you, miss," Nocker said, "that we located a kind of a will left in the library at Black Marsh by your uncle."

"Great-uncle," she corrected coldly. "He was my father's uncle."

"Well, anyway, Black Marsh is left to Miss Alexa Marsh as his only living relation."

"Left it to me?" she exclaimed, in evident dismay. "But what would I do with the place? I am employed in New York, and I can't be bothered with a farm and all that!"

Nocker scratched his chin thoughtfully.

"I dunno. It's wuth somethin', I guess. That's out of my line. I had the chief wire you to come here to see if you could shed some light on this here mystery, bein' as you are a blood relation. Maybe this gent can tell you somethin' about the value of the place. He's a real estater."

She turned to look at Stanley. Under the calm regard of troubled brown eyes, he reddened, as if he had been accused of being a deep-dyed scoundrel—mostly due to the fact that he was acutely conscious of the need of a shave. He dropped his hat, which he had forgotten to replace on his head, picked it up again, and fished out a card.

She received it without apparent enthusiasm.

"It's rather soon to think of those things," she murmured. "I really don't know what to do. This whole thing—that terrible affair at Black Marsh—I hardly knew Granduncle Zeke. I suppose I should see a lawyer."

"Do you know any attorneys?" Stanley asked. "There are so many things—er—funeral arrangements and so forth that——"

"Oh, that part is arranged for. The firm that employs me has given me a week's leave, and their attorney would probably advise me. I'm going back to New York to-morrow and I'll see him then."

"If I can do anything——" Stanley ventured.

"Thanks. I'm sure it's kind of you. I can't tell now." The glimpse of a smile curving the full lips rewarded Stanley. He felt unaccountably willing to be very helpful to Alexa Marsh.

Which might have prompted Dick's sly grin on the way home to New Manchester. He whiled the time away chanting extemporaneous verses to the well-known army tune of "Mademoiselle From Armentières."

"Mademoiselle has a gorgeous smile *parlez vous.*
Stanley Moore kinda likes her style, *parlez vous.*
Mademoiselle has big brown eyes, Stanley falls like a——"

"Aw, shut up!" Stanley growled. "A man can't even offer to help a girl!"

CHAPTER VI.

STANLEY GETS A WARNING.

DURING the ensuing week, the business of real estate and insurance, as practiced by Stanley Moore, relapsed into its original state of coma. Pemberton Kay had disappeared so completely that Stanley wondered sometimes whether the soft-footed man of syndicates had ever existed outside of the imagination. But that mysterious figure did not occupy Stanley's thought half as much as did a much more attractive one in blue tailor-made suit and little felt hat.

On the two trips to Wacantuck which Stanley had made—once to testify for the coroner's jury and again to tell his tale of Pemberton Kay to a skeptical county detective—he had inquired for Alexa Marsh. Nocker, busy with a handful of will-o'-the-wisp clews, had no idea of her whereabouts nor any evident curiosity. He reckoned he had seen her once going toward Black Marsh in a hired flivver and guessed she had been busy putting through the probate of her granduncle's will. The general consensus of town opinion was that Chinese Joe had made away with Zeke Marsh and left—perhaps for his native China.

Black Marsh, after its novelty wore off as a front-page news item, was forgotten, even by the curious auto tourists within a few days—by everybody, it seemed, but Deputy Sheriff Nocker, keen for glory, and Stanley Moore, confident that he would run across Alexa Marsh again.

Therefore he was not as surprised as he was flustered to see her walk up the broken path leading to his office, on a rare spring morning—a lazy spring morning, with the hot sunlight baking the sandy shore and flashing from the flat

surface of the Sound—a morning that seemed to him to be immediately more rarely beautiful and thrillingly romantic when he caught sight of her blond, bobbed hair, which shows how "hipped" the best of men might be by a single glance from large, darkish-brown eyes. Weather forecasters could have argued with him scientifically that the effect of the prettiest girl on the atmospheric conditions of New Manchester would be negligible, but weather forecasters are notoriously wrong.

She paused in the doorway and smiled, and Stanley got to his feet, feeling taller than his six feet and decidedly clumsier than he had ever felt with other women. She had an effect of daintiness.

"May I come in?" she asked. "You're not busy?"

"No, not at all," he hastened to assure her. "Let me get that other chair. That one is rather—one-sided."

She took the chair he assigned her and looked gravely at him, as if debating with herself how to begin. Stanley towered over her.

"You suggested my coming to see you if I needed help," she began hesitantly. "I—you see, I have no one else I know even slightly around here. Mr. Nocker is not exactly helpful, though I suppose he means well. I—I seem to know you better. There is only my attorney in New York I can turn to, and I hardly know him. He is the lawyer for the firm I work for there."

Stanley nodded soberly.

"You went to see my granduncle the day he was killed," she went on. "Did you notice anything peculiar about him and about Black Marsh?"

"Decidedly," Stanley said grimly. "He tried to knock me cold, and he seemed to be in mortal fear I was after him for some reason."

She twisted her hands nervously.

"I'm afraid of that place, Mr. Moore. There's something uncanny about it. Funny things have happened to me since I took it over."

"Suppose you tell me all about it." Stanley suggested.

"Well, first of all, I never met Granduncle Zeke while he was alive. He was a peculiar man—a kind of wanderer. Father always said there was something shady about Uncle Zeke's past life. He spent some years in South America and was mixed up in an affair that landed him in prison there. He and father weren't friendly, I know."

"Was your father born at Black Marsh?"

"Oh, no. We belong to another branch of the family. I'm all that's left of it now. My father never saw the place during his lifetime, and I don't think he even laid eyes on Zeke Marsh. You see, he was supposed to be wealthy, and we were poor. But I often heard about Black Marsh. It's been in the family for two hundred years. I don't know how Granduncle Zeke heard of me, or why he should have left my father and mother die poor and then leave me the place. I'm sure I don't want it, nor anything else of his. I can make a living of my own accord. I always have."

"Not very long," Stanley smiled.

"For three years since father died," she asserted proudly. "I'm nineteen now. But I didn't intend to talk so much of myself."

STANLEY was about to remark that the subject was intensely interesting to him, at least, but caught himself.

"You say Zeke Marsh was supposed to be rich?"

She nodded. "We always thought he had returned from South America rich. But there are no signs of it around Black Marsh. In fact, I paid the funeral expenses out of a little I had saved. I didn't want to, but, after all, he was a Marsh, and I suppose it was my duty."

"Not a bit of it," Stanley blurted out. "It's a darned shame you had to do it. Still, the place must be worth something—six or seven thousand."

"That's what I wanted to ask you. I had a visitor last night who wanted to rent it. He dropped around at the Y. W. C. A., where I live in New York."

"Tell me about him," Stanley said. "Does he want it for a summer place?"

"I don't know." She laughed nervously. "He was an odd man. He wouldn't talk to me at all until he had

examined the room carefully. He acted like a person afraid of listeners—in fact, he seemed to be afraid of his own shadow. He offered an outrageous price, I thought —six hundred a month—provided I would spend the money traveling in Europe until the lease was up."

Stanley frowned.

"Certainly an odd proposition. Wanted to get you out of the way."

"Here's the funniest part. I left him with the idea I would consider it, and then I came down here to look over the house again."

She shuddered a little.

"It's a spooky place now. The horror of that business on the marsh seems to hang over it. But I made myself walk up to the door. As I did so, I caught sight of a movement inside the house. I called out, and for an instant I caught sight of a man's face at an upstairs window. I recognized my visitor of the night before!"

"What on earth was he doing, prowling around?" Stanley asked.

She smiled ruefully. "I didn't wait to find out. I'm afraid I was an awful coward, but the sight of that putty-colored face in the window took my breath away. I ran down the hill to the taxi and took the next train here."

"Putty-colored face," Stanley murmured, a suspicion forming in his mind. "What did he say his name was?"

"He muttered something when he met me, but I didn't catch it."

"It wouldn't have made any difference. He has a million names, no doubt. Is he a long, sneaky, black-eyed fellow—looks like he had a touch of red or black blood, maybe, and walks pussy-footed?"

"Yes." She smiled again at the description. Already the troubled look had vanished from her eyes, replaced by the serene confidence of womankind in the ability of masculine brain and brawn to fight the powers of darkness.

"What do you think of the whole thing?" she asked.

"It's our friend Pemberton Kay come back again. Whatever his game is he wants to be left alone at Black Marsh, and that's just what we won't do. I've got a bone to pick with that gentleman. He got me in a mess, and now he's annoying you. I think——"

He picked up the telephone instrument.

"I think I'll take a trip to Black Marsh and wait around for Mr. Kay! Do you mind if I spend a few nights there?"

"I'm afraid," she faltered. "From what you've said this man Kay may be the one that killed Zeke Marsh. You'd be in great danger——"

"I'd enjoy getting a crack at him," Stanley assured her and jiggled the receiver of the instrument. "He's up to some game there, and I'm going to get to the bottom of it. Don't worry about me. I'll have a friend—— Hello! Manchester 0005! Hello, Dick! Busy for the next few days? . . . Good! Drop around at the office ready for a trip. . . . That's right—a hunting trip. Bring an automatic, too. Never mind details. I'll tell you all about it later!"

He replaced the telephone on the desk.

"That's settled," he said, as he grinned in anticipation of the hunting trip. "Now, Mr. Pemberton K., half-breed, watch your step!"

"I really think," Alexa said accusingly, "you enjoy risking yourself at that place. I would never forgive myself if anything should happen."

She avoided his eyes and looked out the window at the Sound.

"Oh, that's all right. This is a—a special case. I'm not an adventurous bird usually."

"Please be careful," she urged. "I'm a selfish girl to let you——"

The telephone bell cut her off, with insistent clamor. Stanley picked it up impatiently.

"Yes. She's here. Who the——" His jaw tightened threateningly, as he listened to the message buzzed in his ear. "Wait a minute! Hello! He's rung off!"

"Who?" she breathed, leaning forward in her chair.

"Pemberton Kay! He knows you came here and gives me almost the same advice you did—to be careful. He warns me to stay away from Black Marsh. He's beginning to show his teeth at last! Let's arrange our campaign."

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE LIBRARY.

"NOT so bad," Dick exclaimed approvingly, looking around the library. "Old Zeke Marsh made himself pretty comfortable for an anchorite in the desert. Chinese Joe wasn't such a bad housekeeper."

"Nothing miserly about this," Stanley agreed.

They had been in Black Marsh for the past couple of hours and had gone through the rambling old house, from stem to stern—with the possible exception of odd corners of dark attics and cupboards in the disused bedrooms above stairs.

The library was quite a spacious room—probably twenty feet wide and thirty long—lined with bookshelves between the high, leaded-glass windows, and, in spite of some atrocious haircloth-covered furniture, held enough antiques in maple and mahogany to gladden the heart of a collector.

Dick ticked the items off on his fingers like an auctioneer.

"Sheraton table, mahogany—in good condition; teakwood ditto, not so bad; maple bookcases, hand carved; French walnut side chairs; first-class fur rugs, species unknown to North America; pine-paneled walls, stained, guaranteed to be at least two centuries old. What the deuce is all that?"

Stanley followed with his eyes Dick's pointing finger.

"The ceiling? Looks as if some one was imitating an ancient temple."

Painted on a blue background, intended to imitate the sky, probably, were the figures of the signs of the zodiac, ranged in proper order in an oval around the borders of the stained ceiling—all the allegoric figures which to the ancients represented the twelve quarters of the heavens, ranging from capricorn, the goat, to cancer, the crab.

"Some menagerie," Dick commented. "Maybe the old boy was an astronomer, who knows?"

"No. It was probably here long before he arrived," Stanley said. "It used to be the style in interior decoration a good many years ago. Let's see if this works. It's getting dark outside."

He pressed an electric button on the wall, and the sconces set in the panels flashed into light, showing up every nook and cranny of the big room.

"Good! That solves the question of light. I wish there were a telephone, too. But I guess the old boy hadn't any use for outside communication."

"It's too bad," Dick sympathized. "You're cut off from Wacantuck—and Alexa Marsh."

Stanley paid no attention to this gibe. He was frowning at the pile of baggage in the corner—provisions for several days, hunting rifles and two revolver holsters, dumped in a heap by Dick when they started investigating the old Marsh house.

"You know," Stanley pondered, "I'm wondering whether we shouldn't make this our headquarters. I mean instead of the bedrooms. It's right next to the kitchen, where we can cook a snack occasionally, and it's right on the ground floor, where we can watch the grounds. And I'd suggest we start packing one of those guns each from now on. The windows are all fastened, and the three doors have locks on the inside, but it's well to be ready."

"You don't suppose we're going to have a siege on our hands, do you?"

"Hanged if I know," Stanley confessed, "what we'll have. But there will be some action from this fellow Kay, I know. Whatever he wants around here he's made up his mind to get, and I've got a hunch he doesn't stop at homicide to get it."

Dick lit a cigarette and flipped the match into the grate.

"What do you suppose he wants, Stan? Do you suppose old Zeke left any money behind him?"

"He was supposed to have some, but he watched it pretty closely. He trusted nobody. The will he left here, leaving the place to Alexa, said only in so many words that he knew of her existence and that, if she wanted the place, she could have it and a lot of good it would do her—or words to that effect. Likable character, Uncle Zeke! If he had any

money he's managed to keep it under cover. By George——"

HE stopped on the exclamation and stared at the old-fashioned grate in the fireplace, into which Dick had tossed a burned match a few moments before. It was littered with ashes, half-burned sticks of wood and burned paper. Stanley moved quickly across the room and stirred the charred litter with a stick. A thin wisp of smoke crept up the chimney.

Stanley looked gravely at Dick.

"What's up?" inquired the latter, spreading comfortably in an easy-chair.

"These papers are still smoldering! Somebody was burning them here no longer ago than this morning. That some one was Pemberton Kay. He was interrupted by Alexa's coming here. Do you get the point now?"

Dick blinked energetically.

"Darned if I do! Quit playin' the Nocker of Wacantuck and let's have the dope. Pemberton Kay was burning papers here. Well, maybe he's a firebug. Why should he amuse himself lightin' fires in empty houses?"

Stanley squatted before the grate and dragged some charred paper to the light.

"In order, my dumb friend, that he might destroy some documents that he preferred others should not see. And, since he was so careful about that, I'm going to see if I can read what's left of them. I've got a hunch the whole dope on Pemberton Kay's activities was in this bundle of Zeke Marsh's."

Carefully he sorted out the blackened and scorched sheets from the powdery, gray ashes. The fragile particles of incinerated paper scattered at his touch, rose in the air to cling to his clothes, and sailed up the chimney like somber ghosts carrying their secrets with them. Three fragments of sheets remained.

He carried them to the center table, under the crystal chandelier, and slowly straightened them out, Dick peering over his shoulder.

They bent over the first, written in a cramped, old-fashioned hand in faded ink. It started and ended abruptly at blackened corners:

—cklace of Oriental pearls. 24 in all.
3 diamond rings set in gold, blue white, 2 K. 4 K. 4½ K.
7 unset rubies, 1 K. to 8 K.
emerald 20 K.
crucifix set with 5 diamonds, 10 K. each, white.
brooch, 1 ruby 5 K. and nine half-karat diamonds.

On the second sheet they read:

200 lbs. of gold coin—about $50,000.
2 boxes silver pesos—$2,000.
1 necklace Oriental pearls.

The third sheet yielded the following:

50 lbs. gold coin—Spanish—$12,500.
poniard, 4 sapphires in hilt.

And on the last sheet they found:

gold snuffbox.
3 silk shawls.
4 ivory stat——

"Short but sweet," Dick commented. "And it sounds good whether it's true or not—especially the second sheet which mentions the ready cash. What is it—a pawnbroker's list?"

Stanley frowned thoughtfully at the list.

"Does sound like a jeweler's catalogue —or a pirate's nightmare. I wonder if this is what Pemberton Kay was after?"

"What would he destroy it for?" asked Dick scornfully.

"Because it only tells him what he already knows, and he doesn't want the whole world in on it. The four separate lists show that there are four caches where this stuff is hidden. What Kay is looking for is something to show where these hiding places are—not a catalogue to make his mouth water."

Dick's eyes popped open in mild amazement.

"What are you driving at, Stan? You don't suppose this wealthy pipe dream means anything!"

Stanley nodded with compressed lips.

"I think," he said slowly, "that this is a record made by old Zeke Marsh for his own information, and that the treasure it details is hidden in several places right here on Black Marsh. Laugh that one off!"

"Listen," pleaded Dick. "Be sane!

This is the twentieth century. Men don't bury their money in the ground nowadays – they put it in safe-deposit vaults."

"Not men like Zeke Marsh. If I get that fellow right, he wouldn't trust his own father not to pick his pocket. He hated the whole world. He grabbed this stuff somewhere, beat it back to the old place and stuck it in the ground—over twenty acres, and perhaps twenty more half under water. Fat chance of anybody finding it without a steam shovel. Then, in case he should die, he leaves a will giving the house to a young grandniece, whom he never helped in his life, and no word where the money was hidden, thereby keeping the last laugh for himself."

Dick reached out for the second charred sheet of paper, a yellow fragment of foolscap.

"Let's see what this has to——"

His voice died suddenly. Both men whirled about, eyes set in the direction of the painted ceiling, ears straining to catch a repetition of the sound that had startled them—a stealthy footfall on the creaking floor over their heads.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SAPPHIRE DAGGER.

QUICK!" Stanley whispered, pointing to the baggage. "Flash light!"

Dick, nearest to the equipment, shoved the paper he was about to read to his pocket and grabbed the nickeled cylinder from the top of the pile with one hand, while he jerked a revolver from its holster with the other. Like most constitutionally indolent men he was extraordinarily swift in action. He passed the light to Stanley and reached for the second pistol.

"Never mind," Stanley motioned. "The switch!"

He reached the wall in two strides, and the room clicked into darkness. He stole back to Dick's side.

"Keep arm's length away," he directed, "and have the gun ready when I flash the light. Let's go!"

They moved slowly to the door leading to the hall, Dick's fingers just touching Stanley's sleeve. The latter swung the heavy door open. It moved on its well-oiled hinges without a sound, and they groped their way cautiously through the opening.

Out in the wide entrance hall the air was damp and musty with the odor associated with closed and uninhabited dwellings. No particle of light showed in the absolute darkness, and no sound came from the floor above. Stanley listened, mouth open, head on the side, and could hear nothing but the steady, strong throbbing of the pulse in his ears. Whoever it was on the floor above knew that he was being listened for—knew that he was being trailed—might at that moment be creeping down the stairs toward them. Stanley resisted an impulse to send a stream of revealing light up the curving steps.

He squeezed Dick's arm to follow and felt his way along the wall to the newel post. Cautiously he placed his foot on the treacherous tread of the stairs, near the wall to avoid the creak that he feared. It did not come, and Stanley, reassured, mounted a step higher.

As he did so, he heard the faintest grating creak of laboring floor boards, and it did not come from beneath his feet, but from the landing halfway up. Crouching down, Stanley held the flash light above his head and snapped the metal button forward.

A pencil of light leaped from the torch and splashed a yellow circle of radiance on the wall alongside the stairs. In the center of the circle, caught in that blinding flood, appeared the head and shoulders of a man.

It was only for a fraction of a second —the time it takes for a man to blink his eyes once—that the head appeared, fiery-red hair and beard glistening in the light, mouth open in a yellow-toothed snarl, nostrils quivering, like those of a frightened animal. Then, with a guttural shout, he had lunged.

Dick's revolver crashed beside Stanley's ear, and an impact, like a mountain falling, carried Stanley off his feet. Stanley had just time to bring the electric torch smashing down on the red head in a shower of glass, before he found himself on the floor with the breath knocked

completely out of him and the darkness full of thrashing arms and legs.

Stanley felt a bearded face brush his hand, heard Dick shouting above him, and then a patter of running feet down the hall.

"Got away, darn him!" Dick yelled. "This way—out in back!"

Stanley tossed aside the now useless flash light and scrambled to his feet. Bumping against the kitchen table and the chairs that seemed to appear in the blackness with exasperating promiscuity, the two young men reached the open back door.

A shadow, darting between the shadows of the trees, brought Dick's revolver in line again.

"Don't waste shots!" Stanley said, starting in pursuit. "You can't hit him."

THEY raced down the path toward the oak, stopped to catch the sound of the running feet of the fugitive, went ahead another fifty yards, and listened again without result.

"No use," Stanley muttered. "He's got away clean, and we can't look twenty acres over to-night."

"Nice boy, by his looks," declared Dick, pocketing his weapon, as he followed Stanley back toward the house. "If he's a sample of our friends around here, we've got our work cut out for us, Wonder where he was all the time? He couldn't have sneaked in that front door. It's nailed up, and to come through the kitchen he'd have to pass by the library."

"Very likely he was hiding out upstairs the whole time."

"What for? Lookin' for your famous treasure?" Dick chuckled.

"Looking for a chance to go through the books and papers in the library, I imagine. That's good news to me, since it shows Mr. Kay and his merry men haven't laid hands on the paper they want—the map, or diagram, or description, or whatever it is, that will show them where Zeke Marsh hid his pile."

Dick's silence was eloquent of disbelief. They approached the house, a low-lying patch of blackness, spread out like a crouching animal.

"That being the case," Stanley went on, lowering his voice, "we'll do a little searching ourselves in the library to-morrow morning and try to find what Kay and our red-whiskered friend were after there."

"Sure," Dick agreed, with sarcastic readiness. "Old Zeke Marsh was so anxious to let the world know where it was that he left a large-scale map with full directions lying around, with a cross marking the spot, and 'Dig Here for Buried Gold' in large letters."

"Not necessarily. He might find it useful to have some kind of a map, though, reminding him just where he left the windfalls, especially as there were at least four different spots, as the list shows. But that same map will be pretty carefully camouflaged, you can bet your hat."

"There never was any such treasure," Dick retorted. "Just an old miser's daydream. You got yourself all worked up over Pemberton Kay, who, I don't doubt, is a careful business man trying to grab a cheap piece of property."

"How about the killing of Zeke Marsh?"

"Easy," Dick chortled. "Chinese Joe did the trick and beat it with whatever few dollars the old fellow had. Anybody can see that!"

"And what about this last fellow—described by Simms, the tax collector, by the way, some time ago?"

"A poor bum trying to get a free lodging for the night. We scared the lights out of him. I'll bet he's running. What's the matter?"

Stanley had grabbed his arm and pulled him into the shadow of the porch.

"I could have sworn I saw some one dodge behind the house."

"Say," protested Dick, "lay off that stuff! You'll be getting me that way, first thing. What you need is a shot out of that flask I have inside. You're beginning to imagine things."

"Quite possible," Stanley laughed. "Have it your way. I couldn't swear to it. It was only a flash I caught out of the corner of my eye. Let's call it a night. We've had enough excitement."

He stepped inside the library by way of the door that opened on the broad

veranda and groped for the electric-light switch.

"We'd better make it watch and watch to-night," he suggested, feeling along the wall. "You may be right, and I may be wrong, but, as Nocker would say, 'I ain't taking no chances.' I hope you brought some sandwiches along, so we won't have to fuss aound the kit——"

He stopped and stared at the table, revealed in the light of the chandelier. Right in the center, driven into the hard wood to the depth of an inch or more, stood a dagger.

The two men looked at the weapon, gleaming in the light, and then at each other.

"By George!" Dick breathed. "Some one's been here! How many people are there hanging around Black Marsh, anyway? Look!"

He pointed to the table top.

"The papers are gone—the list that was here! I grabbed one, but left the others behind!"

Stanley nodded gloomily and worked the blade loose from the wood.

"We're a fine pair of dumb-bells, Dick. They could have burned down the house while we were chattering down there."

He turned the dagger over in his hands. It was twelve or fifteen inches long, with an antique hilt of hard wood, inlaid with silver and set with a cluster of bright stones on the top. Stanley's brow cleared suddenly.

"Ever study criminology, Dick?"

"Only out of the newspapers. Why?"

Stanley weighted the slender weapon in his hand, like a lecturer.

"Here we have an example of the commonest weakness of the criminal. This is where he usually oversteps himself, however clever he thinks he is. He can't avoid telling the world what a smart fellow he is. Leaving this dagger here was a piece of pure bravado. It's too bad Pemberton Kay and company couldn't resist the impulse to show off, because they've tipped us off to an important piece of information—two pieces of information."

Dick opened a canvas duffel bag and pulled out a package of sandwiches and a bottle of near beer. His round, good-natured face expressed only casual interest.

"Shoot!" he ordered, biting off a goodly mouthful. "I'll bite. What's the answer?"

"This proves that the treasure of Zeke Marsh wasn't just imagination on my part, as you thought. Do you remember that one of the items on the third list was a poniard with four sapphires in the hilt? There they are! Read 'em and weep!"

Dick stopped chewing and gazed at the flashing stones.

"Darned if you're not right, Stan! I remember it said——"

"The next point of information," Stanley went on triumphantly, "is that part of the stuff—maybe all of it—has been located by Kay and his crowd."

CHAPTER IX.

YOU WILL NEVER FIND IT!

"NOT so good," Dick commented gloomily. "Just as you've got me converted to the idea of a real, honest-to-goodness treasure lying around, it disappears again. I guess Miss Marsh is out of luck in the end."

His face cleared suddenly.

"Wait a minute! By George, they haven't got it all, either! If they had, they wouldn't be hangin' around here now, would they?"

"Something in that," Stanley conceded. "They might have accidentally stumbled on part of it and are looking for the key to the rest. The third cache on the list is probably the least valuable of all, as I remember it. The answer is hidden around this library somewhere. I wish I knew what those other two papers said. Kay and his red-haired boy friend caught a clew from them, I think."

Dick grinned and reached into his coat pocket.

"Here's one we almost forgot about—badly bent, but still readable. Let's see."

He spread the brittle sheet out on the table. It was blank at the lower end and contained only a few lines, closely written, at the upper end near the blackened edge, where the flames had caught it.

Stanley looked toward the veranda door.

"One second, Dick. I don't like the idea of being interrupted by a bullet."

He walked over to the door, the same one through which Zeke Marsh had disappeared after trying to brain Stanley on that first visit. A heavy wooden bar stood against the wall. Stanley dropped it into place in the iron brackets set into the door frame and examined the four tall windows. They were of opaque glass, small panes firmly leaded into the frame, and they were all locked securely. Judging by the accumulation of dust on the sills, they had been kept shut for a long time. He shot the bolts home that guarded the other two doors, leading into the hall and kitchen, and returned to the table.

"Sooner or later they'll try to give us the bum's rush out of here, and I don't want to be jumped without warning."

"Right!" Dick agreed. "Whoever they are, they're nothing if not persistent. With all that dough in sight—almost—I can't blame them."

He frowned over the paper. "Can't make much out of this, Stan. The main part of it was burned. Doesn't make sense to me. Listen:

"—through years of hell to get it, and no one else shall have it. Ten years of San Pedro Prison, and they could not make me tell—and all the time the secret right before them. It is safe now, and no one will find it. Fernandez tried to get it from me, and he is dead. José Guerra tried to cheat me, and he is dead——there is blood on it——ask Red Blazes——This is for you, Tiger Ponce. This will draw your teeth. This is my bequest to you, if you should get to kill me. Here it is with my curse—as long as Black Marsh stands you cannot find the treasure of the *Teresa*, and if you destroy Black Marsh you will never find it!"

Dick turned the paper over. The other side was blank. He lit a cigarette and looked at Stanley.

"Well," he asked, "what do you figure out from that cross-word puzzle? Old Zeke must have expected some of his pleasant friends to visit him and left a kind of defiance to make them feel good if they got him. Evidently they did get him. Now, what's the answer?"

"Hanged if I know, Dick. It sounds like six of one and half a dozen of the other. You can't locate the treasure of the *Teresa,* whatever that was, as long as the house stands, and if you tear it down, you're out of luck. I guess Zeke gets the last laugh."

"'Red Blazes' must be our red-headed visitor we found to-night," he went on, with a trace of awe in his voice. "I wonder what kind of a bloody history lies in back of that collection of jewels and gold, that cost old Zeke Marsh his life, and Lord knows how many other men. What kind of a dark business have we got mixed up with, Dick? It sounds more like the old days on the Caribbean than present-day Connecticut, with radios and automobiles."

Dick considered the glowing tip of his cigarette philosophically.

"I don't know. I guess we have as tough a bunch of bimbos nowadays as there ever were. You're not thinking of quitting here, are you?"

"Of course not!" Stanley's voice was indignant. "I'll see that whole bloodthirsty gang where they belong—first! Wherever the money came from, it doesn't belong to them. I'm interested in seeing justice——"

"When do you see Alexa Marsh, by the way?" inquired Dick innocently.

Stanley reddened. "To-morrow, but that's got nothing to do with seeing that a girl gets a square deal. I'm getting sore at these yeggs."

Dick looked at his wrist watch and whistled.

"It's getting late. How about turning in? We can give this place a thorough once-over to-morrow. Meanwhile I'm for the sheets."

"Blankets, you mean." Stanley untied a bundle and tossed a couple of army blankets to Dick. "Here you are. I'll take the first watch and wake you up about two or three in the morning—maybe sooner, if anything happens."

"Suits me," Dick agreed, and he flopped some chair cushions on the floor.

He wrapped himself in the blankets, and Stanley switched off the light.

Within five minutes Dick was snoring peacefully, as if Pemberton Kay and Red Blazes and all the rest of it, treasure included, were a thousand miles away.

Stanley quietly carried his chair beside one of the windows, opened the window a few inches and posted himself behind it.

IT was almost as dark outside on the veranda and lawn as it was inside the library. There were only a few stars out, and no moon to throw the black shadows of the trees and the white ribbon of the path into prominence. The view from the window was toward the east side of the property, toward the dead oak and cemetery, the bridge and mainland being on the north side of the house, and so invisible to Stanley from his position.

Except for the far-away hum of a motor boat, now and then, away off on the Sound, nothing happened to disturb the absolute quiet of the place. The stillness and darkness combined seemed to blanket the world, lulling Stanley to sleep, acting like a subtle soporific on healthy nerves and the sound physique of twenty-seven.

He found himself nodding and pulled himself sharply on the alert.

This wouldn't do. He would be playing "shut-eye sentry" for fair, in a minute. He gripped Dick's revolver firmly and set his mind deliberately to consideration of the problems they faced.

Somewhere on Black Marsh was hidden a fortune—a large fortune even, as those things go even in these days of big income-tax returns—a fortune which old Zeke Marsh had grabbed and run away with to hide in this lonely, barren chunk of land. The secret to the hiding place was within reach of Stanley's hand—right here in the library—and Zeke Marsh, in his last taunting message to the world in general and the ruthless enemies he had made in particular, dared them to find it.

"Destroy Black Marsh, and you will never find it!" Where was it? Hidden in the walls built a century ago? Lodged in some cryptic message in some unopened book among the hundreds that lined the walls? Where would Zeke Marsh, crazed with the thought of death stalking at his heels, determined to carry the secret to the grave with him, and at the same time maintain a reference plan ready at hand to find the hiding places himself on the marsh, in high or low water and under all conditions—where would such a man conceal his secret? He had to have some kind of map, and he would hardly trust Chinese Joe, so there must have been continual changes of location.

These other men—the man called Red Blazes and Pemberton Kay, and perhaps others—they wanted a chance to look for themselves. Whether or not they had a hand in the death of Marsh and the disappearance of Chinese Joe, they were a hard-bitten gang when it came to finding a rank outsider standing in their way. Stanley scowled into the darkness of the veranda.

Alexa Marsh was the legal heiress to whatever Zeke left behind. No one had a clearer title, unless the stuff had been stolen years ago, and there were established heirs at law to claim it, which was doubtful. Zeke Marsh's message intimated that the hoard had been concealed for years when he found it.

No, it belonged to Alexa, and it would go to her, in spite of all the Pemberton Kays—even though the possession of so much wealth would place her out of reach of a poor real-estate broker.

Alexa Marsh—Alexa Moore—change the name and not the letter. What nonsense!

That was an old fairy tale about changing for worse and not for better—a fairy tale like the story of the treasure of the *Teresa*.

Stanley came awake with a rush and jumped to his feet. How long had he been asleep?

He peered out through the open window, searching for signs of danger that had developed while he had been dozing. He felt disgusted with himself.

Then he stiffened like a pointer who has sighted the quarry. He tiptoed over to the snoring Dick and shook him by the arm. The sleeper turned over, grumbling. Stanley shook the limp arm again, and Dick sat up.

"Hey!" he mumbled. "Wha's up?" Then he was fully awake.

"Get the other gun," Stanley whispered, "and keep mum. We'll do a little scouting. There is some one down at the dead oak, flashing a light."

"Good! We'll get some action. How long has he been there?"

"I don't know," Stanley acknowledged. "I fell asleep. He's down at the edge of the island, I think, near the old cemetery."

"Cheerful business," Dick growled, "for three o'clock in the morning. Maybe it's old Zeke come back to look over his hoard. If it is, I'll show you how to do the half mile in nothing flat!"

CHAPTER X.

CHINESE JOE COMES—AND GOES.

STANLEY removed the bar from the door carefully, and they stepped out onto the veranda. Dick shivered in the damp, cold air that blew in from the Sound.

"This way," Stanley directed. "Keep in the shadow of the trees as much as you can. Look out for stumbling over anything. I wish I hadn't broken our only light."

He led the way through the pines, at right angles to the direction of the light, and made a wide detour across the abandoned farm land. The moon, trying its best to make a job of it against the broken ranks of cloud, showed a vague, interrupted outline of black pines and gray bushes. As they approached the neglected cemetery, the moon disappeared altogether, and Dick apostrophized the queen of the night in muttered words that would have surprised a nature lover.

Stanley bent down and, motioning Dick to stay where he was, advanced cautiously through a screen of underbrush that lined the top of a bluff, overlooking the water and a thin strip of sandy shore. The light flashed again, as he got closer. He looked over the edge.

Almost directly beneath him the blurred outline of a man crouched over something below him. His back was turned, so that he hid the object from Stanley's sight. It was a broad and powerful-looking back, but, against the light of the electric torch, it made an admirable target.

Stanley moved his revolver forward, so that it almost touched the other man's coat.

"Stand still!" he said sharply. "Stand still, Mr. Red Blazes!"

The man twisted around quickly, without lifting the light, and revealed by the movement the thing he had been looking at—the yellow, distorted face of Chinese Joe, glistening wet in the light of the torch and set in the unmistakable lines of death.

Stanley stared, let his revolver waver, and regretted it the next second. With one movement the other man dropped his flash light and had Stanley's wrist in an iron grip.

The position he was caught in was unfortunate for the latter. Lying on his stomach, Stanley could make only feeble efforts to free himself, and he found himself hauled bodily over the edge of the bluff. With his free hand he reached for his enemy's throat and fastened on his coat collar, and together they rolled over on the sand.

Stanley found himself underneath a crushing weight, with a large hand trying to throttle him. But it was only for a moment. The other man had the weight to spare, but one hundred and seventy pounds of muscle and the knowledge how to use it counted for something. Stanley, using an old wrestling trick, brought his palms to bear on his opponent's chin and broke the hold. At the same time, Stanley discovered that if the big man were Red Blazes, he was remarkably clean shaven. The man on top grunted, let go his grip, and tried to get a hold on Stanley's neck. Dick came stumbling through the bushes.

"What's the racket? Where are you, Stan?"

Stanley was too busy to answer. He rolled over, found himself on top, with his burly opponent's arm pinned to the ground and his legs thrashing wildly against Stanley's back.

"Get the light, Dick!" Stanley called. "It's lying right here somewhere."

Dick groped in the sand and touched Chinese Joe's face.

"Ugh!" Dick's exclamation was indignant repugnance itself. "What the—— Here it is!"

He fumbled with the switch of the flash light and pointed it in the direction of the struggling pair. Stanley took a look at the familiar, lumpy physiognomy beneath him and released his hold.

"Well, I'll be damned! Nocker of Wacantuck!"

NOCKER got to his feet and felt his outraged neck. He wasn't sure that his head was on straight, but he was certainly mad clear through.

"I'll put you in jail, young feller! What's the idear of attackin' me?"

"Sorry, old man," Stanley apologized. "I mistook you for some one else—Red Blazes. But what in the world are you doing around here, this time of night?"

"An' what business is that of yourn?" retorted Nocker. "I'm deputy sheriff of this county, I'll have you understand. I kin investigate without your permission, I guess! Gimme my flash light."

"Sure thing," Stanley pacified him. "I see. A private investigation of your own. But I didn't know that, you see. I'm glad you've found something. You've located Chinese Joe, and that's more than we've done."

"I been studyin' the case, that's why," Nocker said, apparently mollified by this conciliatory attitude. "I got the whole thing figured out. I been a-spyin' around here for a couple of days, an' when I seen this body floatin' in this afternoon, I figgered I'd hide out in them bushes and see what happened. That justice of the peace ain't so smart when he made me out a darned fool. I got it all doped out now."

He flashed the light on the inanimate face of Chinese Joe. Stanley stooped down to examine the skinny form, overcoming his natural antipathy enough to pull the shirt open at the neck.

"Hands off, young feller," Nocker ordered. "Thet corp belongs to the law now. It's a coroner's job.

"Though I don't need no coroner's jury to tell me what's what," he added complacently. "I kin see farther than the nose on my face."

Stanley straightened up.

"How do you figure it out, Mr. Nocker?" he asked respectfully.

"Well," Nocker declared, "they ain't no two ways about it. This is the man that murdered old Zeke Marsh. He robbed him fust—motive, robbery. See that?"

His hand came out of his pocket, and he held it open with the light shining on it. Reposing in the broad palm was an irregular chunk of yellow metal, fused and knobby and about half the size of Nocker's thumb.

"Melted gold," Nocker informed the staring young men. "I found it on the ground back there near the boathouse."

"Where?" the two men inquired with one voice.

Nocker chuckled. "It ain't no use lookin' fer more. The place is clean. Jest a hole in the ground an' a piece of board. You kin see fer yourself, any time—right this side of the shanty. I dunno what Chinese Joe did with the rest, but I guess it helped to drown him."

Stanley opened his eyes. "You think he's drowned, then?"

"Of course. Didn't die no other way. What was he doin' in the water? I got the whole thing straight now. He killed Zeke Marsh, filled his pockets with the gold—silver, too, like as not—an' tried to make his get-away, an' the weight of the gold drowned him."

Stanley kicked Dick, who seemed inclined to laugh, and pursued the inquiry.

"He was swimming, then?"

"Sure. How else could he get drowned?"

"There's something in that, Mr. Nocker," Stanley conceded doubtfully.

"Where was he swimming to?" Dick asked. "Back to China? If he was, he didn't use his head, I'd say—not exactly a master mind, eh?"

Nocker disdained to break a resentful silence for a while.

"Anybody can poke fun," he complained. "A theory is a theory. Maybe he tried to get away in a rowboat, an' it sunk——"

"But there weren't any rowboats

around," Stanley objected—"only a broken one rotting near the marsh. He would hardly sit down and make a rowboat when he could get away so easily by the railroad at Wacantuck. I'm not criticizing your theory, but I have another idea altogether, and Furlong will vouch for it. Since we've been at Black Marsh we discovered several——"

"Can't waste time here with meanderings," Nocker interrupted. "I guess I know what I'm doin'. As far as I'm concerned, this here mystery is solved, an', if you gentlemen don't mind, I'm startin' fer town right now to notify the authorities about this."

"Well," Stanley urged. "I think you're on the wrong track."

"I'll keep my ideas, an' you keep yourn," snapped Nocker. "It's gettin' toward daylight now, an' I gotta be startin'. See you later, gents."

He moved off in the direction of the bridge.

"Kind of tart, isn't he?" Dick laughed. "Let's get back to the house and start the kitchen fire. I'm dying for a cup of coffee to warm me up."

HALFWAY there Stanley stopped and looked back through the growing gray light of dawn.

"I suppose I ought to take another look at him and make sure," he muttered. "Nocker's out of the way now."

Dick shuddered at the unpleasant reminder.

"Don't take my breakfast appetite away, Stan. Let the chink stay where he is until after breakfast. He'll keep. What do you want to make sure of?"

"Didn't you notice? I guess I covered him up quickly. I didn't want that blundering ass, Nocker, to start any more of his funny-paper detective work. He was all wrong about Chinese Joe being drowned."

"Really?"

"He had been stabbed in the throat! If Nocker had stopped patting himself on the back long enough to look, he'd have found it out, too."

"Why didn't you put him wise?"

"What's the use?" Stanley pointed out. "He wasn't listening to any one, and he'd start some clumsy-footed investigation around the house here and probably spoil our chances of getting anything done. As long as he thinks the mystery is settled, he'll stay away."

"I suppose so," Dick replied. "But he'll be back in a couple of hours. Meanwhile, we can eat and later on look over the library and that hole he says is near the boathouse. How about it?"

He made quite a presentable pot of coffee in the spacious, brick-floored kitchen, and they finished the remains of the sandwiches. Alexa Marsh was to replenish the food supply on her morning visit.

It was quite light when they concluded the indifferent meal. Stanley suggested they look over the vicinity of the boathouse.

At one time it had had a wide ditch leading into it from the water, but the log retaining walls had rotted away, and the muddy banks had filled the cut. The house itself, about twenty feet by thirty, had been built two or three feet above ground, with room underneath for the boats to float, but the sides and roof had fallen in. Stanley peered beneath the gray timbers, but there was no sign that the soggy ground had been disturbed.

Dick located the hole, with its heap of upturned earth beside it, some few yards away, underneath a scrawny pine tree. A handful of marsh grass had been scattered over the fresh gravel, in a hasty attempt to cover the evidence of digging. A broken board about eighteen inches square, with clay sticking to it, lay several feet away, and beyond the board the handle of a spade stuck out of the bushes.

"Hiding place No. 3," Stanley announced. "Zeke Marsh was not so clever here, anyway."

"Probably caught him at it," Dick surmised, "though he wasn't found dead here."

"Not likely that they'd leave him here, for the same reason they made a quick attempt to cover the hole up. Red Blazes and his pals aren't crazy about publishing the fact of a buried fortune. Say, Dick, am I seeing things?"

He pointed toward the water. From where they stood the blue Long Island shore was visible and the stretch of

Sound, miles of easily rolling water, with only a distant river liner and an occasional rocky islet to break its surface. Nearer at hand the whole south shore of Black Marsh was in sight—a sandy strip glistening wetly in the soft lapping of the waves—and the strip was empty.

The body of Chinese Joe had disappeared!

They looked all around them, as if expecting to find it on the high ground, then looked at each other blankly, and Dick laughed nervously.

"Say! Wait until Nocker comes back and finds his theory gone! He'll be fit to be tied. I'm beginning to think this is a weird dump we're in."

"'Beginning?'" Stanley echoed. "I've been thinking that for some time. We might as well get back and dig into the library. Nocker'll be along soon enough."

CHAPTER XI.

MR. NOCKER AGAIN.

BUT the local "Sherlock Holmes" failed to materialize during the forenoon, though Dick kept a sharp lookout for him—or for anything else that might develop, for that matter—while Stanley caught up with some much-needed sleep.

Two solid hours spent in the library, opening and riffling the pages of every book, searching the sides of the fireplace, tapping the paneled walls, examining the floor boards and behind the furniture. had failed to bring forth more than a cloud of dust and a coating of soot for both investigators. There was no evidence anywhere of a possible hiding place in the floor or walls or ceiling for the smallest document. The joints of the floor boards and the panels showed no signs of ever having been tampered with. Before lying down, Stanley even went so far as to get a stepladder from the kitchen and examine the painted ceiling, stained in places and renovated, to see if the mythological figures concealed any kind of spring or trapdoor.

"Not a chance," he sighed resignedly.

Dick dragged a chair out to the veranda in the sun, where he could watch the bridge and the hill beyond, which hid the shell road. Two hours of this palled on Dick Furlong. He was not constitutionally adapted to watchful waiting.

He walked around the house to the kitchen door, so as not to disturb Stanley, and, going through the hallway mounted the stairs to the second floor. The bedrooms that he and Stanley had searched carefully the day before, were as Zeke Marsh had left them, one in disorder, with bed unmade and worn clothing scattered about, the other two almost empty of furniture, dusty and disused. Dick climbed up the narrow stairs to the attic.

It was a cobweb place, with two dormer windows shedding a dim light on low-lying rafters and a litter of old trunks and boxes, that had been hurriedly dumped on the broad expanse of rough-pine flooring. It looked as if a cyclone had struck the place. Dick guessed the name of the particular cyclone to be Pemberton Kay and company. Near one window was the meager furniture of an old iron bed and a three-legged chair that had constituted all the lares and penates of the unfortunate Chinese Joe.

Dick climbed a wooden ladder, pushed open a trapdoor, and stepped out through a window of the cupola to the broad, flat roof.

Through the green haze of the budding branches that almost swept the roof, he could see the length and breadth of the island and a good part of the shell road to the north. East, south and west there was no sign of life or movement on the Sound, except for the black dots of boats miles away and the flash of an occasional fish in an old pond near shore—a relic, perhaps, of the piscatorial activities of a bygone Marsh generation.

Along the shell road, half a mile away, Dick caught sight of a moving object—a flivver—that stopped beyond the hill opposite the bridge. A girl stepped out, reached inside for a package, and tucked it under her arm. She turned to speak to the driver, disappeared among the trees, and came in sight again, as she stepped gingerly across the broken flooring of the bridge. Even at that little distance, Dick could recognize the lissom figure and easy stride of Alexa Marsh.

Nearer the house, she caught sight of

the lookout on the roof and waved her hand.

"Anything happen yet?" she called. "You must be awfully bored with Black Marsh by this time."

Dick shook his head decidedly.

"No. I wouldn't say we were bored exactly. Have you seen Nocker in town? Hasn't he spread the news yet?"

"Why, no. I haven't seen Mr. Nocker at all. His wife was inquiring at the hotel for him this morning."

"That's funny. He left here in an all-fired hurry this——"

Dick heard Stanley's voice on the veranda and immediately lost a listener. He grinned and returned to his post.

"Knowing women as I do, I think you'll get more kick out of it, if Stan tells you," he muttered. "Well, I was young myself—— Now, I wonder who that bird is?"

"That bird" was a smallish individual, tightly buttoned inside of a blue chinchilla coat with a fur collar, and if Dick had been closer he would have noted the yellow, pointed shoes, and a silver bracelet on one wrist, and a dark face —very dark, pitted with the shell holes that meant a battle with smallpox in the past—obviously a strange bird for the latitude of Wacantuck and one that had flown far from his nest.

Dick had not noticed him coming down the shell road. Now, as he watched, the man in the fur-collared coat vanished, as the road dipped into a hollow. Dick waited for him to reappear at a high point almost opposite the entrance to Black Marsh, but the white road remained blank except for the taxi flivver standing by the side. Evidently the strange bird had left the highway for reasons of his own, and Dick considered it high time to investigate.

HE hurried down the ladder to the attic, gray and dismal in the late afternoon, and thence to the ground floor. Stanley and Alexa Marsh were standing in the library near the dismantled bookshelves, and her eyes were larger and darker than ever.

She turned to Dick, as he hurried in.

"Please, Mr. Furlong," she pleaded, "I do want you and Stan—Mr. Moore to come back with me to Wacantuck. I can't have you risk your lives here another night. I had no idea when I let you do it that it would be as he tells me, and I know he hasn't told me all that happened!"

"Why," Dick demurred, "we'd spoil it all if we beat it now. I haven't had so much excitement since the war ended. And there's a pile of jack lying around loose, too! You don't want to give that up to a bunch of highbinders, do you?"

"I most certainly do. I don't want it —not at the chances you are both taking here. Let these horrid men have it!"

"Not if I can help it," Stanley said stubbornly. "It belongs to you!"

She spread her hands despairingly.

"I thought at least *you* would listen to me," she reproached Dick. "Don't you see how impossible it is to find it now? Those terrible people will come back again to-night, I know. At least, you must get police protection."

Stanley nodded. "I figured on doing that in the end. We thought Nocker would show up this afternoon, even if he did bring a horde of heavy-footed constables with him. But so far he hasn't. He must have got lost."

"I think she is dead right," Dick suggested. "With the crowd we've got against us, it's just nonsense not to use legal protection. Kay and his boys don't want the police around, but we do."

"Meanwhile," Stanley pointed out, "while we're arranging that, we can't leave the place alone. Our friends may know more about where to locate the map than we do. We'll have to hurry. It's getting toward sundown. Suppose we take Miss Marsh to her taxi out near the road and then wait here until she notifies——"

"By George!" Dick exclaimed. "I almost forgot what I came down here for until you said taxi! There's a stranger hanging around—— Wait a second!"

He was out the door and halfway upstairs in almost the minimum time he asked for. It took not much longer for him to scramble up the ladder to the roof.

He looked at the shell road, blinked,

and looked again. Then he climbed soberly down the ladder and returned to the library.

"The flivver is gone!" he announced.

Alexa bit her lip in vexation. "But I told him to wait!"

"He's gone, all right," Dick sympathized. "I guess we'll all have to make it on foot. There isn't a house within a couple of miles of this place, and no phone either. We can't stay here, of course—not now!"

"Of course not." She flushed. "But I don't understand it."

"I do," Dick informed her grimly. "The fellow in the fur collar——"

Something between a muffled sneeze and a groan beneath his feet cut him off. He looked at Stanley and Alexa for confirmation.

"I thought I heard something in the cellar. Didn't you?"

Stanley motioned him to stand beside Alexa.

"Stay here with Miss Marsh, Dick. I'll take a look below. It was probably a rat or something."

She laid a hand softly on his arm. "No! You mustn't go alone. We'll all go together. I'm not afraid, really."

The combination of sneeze and snort sounded again.

"Doesn't sound particularly dangerous," Dick said lightly. "I'd say it was somebody with hay fever."

They went through the kitchen, Stanley leading the way and found the cellar stairs. He switched on the cellar light, bent down, and cautiously descended the steps. Dick and Alexa crowded behind him, peeping over his shoulder.

It was an ordinary, cement-floored cellar, extraordinary only in its contents, which consisted mainly of Mr. Nocker of Wacantuck, lying bound securely with a clothesline, on a pile of old newspapers, and gagged with his own cap.

CHAPTER XII.

TIGER PONCE.

STANLEY was the first to recover from this fresh surprise in their short acquaintance with the deputy sheriff of Wacantuck, and he hurried to cut him loose from his bonds. Dick was the first to recover his tongue.

"Well, I'll go to——" He remembered Alexa's presence in time. "I've heard fellows offer to eat their hats, but this is the first time—— Say, how in the world did you get here?"

"Didn't carry myself here, that's certain," exclaimed Nocker tartly. "Seemed to me you folks would never hear me a-snortin' down here, tryin' to attract attention."

He climbed stiffly to his feet and rubbed his arms and knees without deigning to answer the volley of questions fired at him.

"What I want now," he said, "is meat and drink. Ain't had nothin' to chaw on but my cap all day."

"Oh, that's shameful!" Alexa cried indignantly. "To treat you that——"

"It sure be, miss," agreed Nocker, shaking his head. "And I'm here to state right now I've had enough of Black Marsh and everything connected with it. So far as I'm concerned, I'm through now."

"Let me give you a hand," Stanley offered, as Nocker stamped stiff-legged to the steps. "There's a snack upstairs, and Dick will get a cup of coffee ready. You can tell us all about it while you feed up."

With a sandwich in his knuckly fist, Nocker became communicative.

"I don't know who it was thet grabbed me. Jest after I left you I passed by the corner of the house. I was thinkin' kind of deep, you understand, and not lookin' around fer danger right then. If I had, I'd been a match fer the best of them. I don't know how many there was, but I felt a bunch of whiskers when I fit around. But they had me wrapped up so durned quick it was a caution. I was shoved through a window of the cellar before I had a chance to say, 'Billy be damned.' "

"Under the circumstances," Dick proffered smoothly, "I can't imagine any one saying, 'Billy be damned,' and I doubt if it would have frightened them off, if you had said it."

"Quit kidding, Dick," Stanley warned. "We ought to hear this. Who do you

suppose is responsible, Mr. Nocker? You say you didn't see their faces."

Nocker wiped his mouth with the back of his hairy hand and reached into his pocket for tobacco.

"Well, I'll tell you. It wasn't robbery —that's certain. I've got a theory it was opium smugglers."

"Good Lord!" Dick groaned.

"You see," continued Nocker, not heeding the interruption, "I've had time to bring my mind to bear on the whole thing. Remembering Chinese Joe's nationality, there ain't no doubt but he was mixed up——"

"By the way," Stanley said, "Chinese Joe disappeared again. The body was gone at daylight. I think you ought to know what you're up against here, Mr. Nocker. I would have told you last night if you had let me. The man who attacked you was no doubt the same man we discovered hiding upstairs last evening, and he belonged to the same gang that killed Zeke Marsh and Chinese Joe. Old Zeke left some money concealed around here, and they are after it. From what we've seen of their methods, they'd stick a knife into you as quickly and with no more compunction than you'd carve a roast turkey. They've got us marooned here, so to speak, and, for reasons of their own, they don't want to kill us just yet—not until they lay hands on certain information."

Nocker chewed this over thoughtfully.

"Why don't you give it to them—play them along?" he asked.

"Because we haven't got it ourselves, in the first place; secondly, I'll see them in a warmer place than Wacantuck before I help them. I'll stay and fight them, but we've got to see Miss Marsh clear. One of us must take her as far as the road and stop a passing car or walk to Wacantuck with her; the other two must stay here and do the best we can until help comes."

Nocker looked into the fireplace. "I don't believe them crooks is around yet. It ain't everybody would stick around after committin' felonious assault on a deputy. I'll take Miss Marsh to town and get the law on those fellers."

"No, you will not!" Alexa exclaimed determinedly, looking at Stanley. "If any one stays here, I shall stay, too. We must all go together, or none."

"But look here, Alexa——" Stanley began.

"I won't!" she insisted, stamping her foot. "Let Mr. Nocker go alone. If you stay, I'm not going to run away."

"Well," said Nocker, lurching to his feet, "that settles it. We ain't got the whole night to argue. It's near to dark now——"

"Good evening, my frien's!"

BUSY with discussing their exodus, none of the four in the library noticed the approach of the smallish man in the fur-collared overcoat. He stood in the open doorway leading to the veranda, a flash of white teeth showing for an instant on his dark face and his eyes, heavy-lidded, but alert, taking in everybody at a glance. He bowed in Alexa's direction, with the easy grace of the Latin, waving one hand, ostentatiously adorned with a silver bracelet, and keeping the other hand as unostentatiously behind his back.

"I frighten by my sudden appearance. If the señorita excuse——"

"By George! This is the fellow I saw on the road," Dick burst out. "He's got his nerve coming here——"

Stanley's arm restrained the impetuous rush.

"Wait a second, Dick. Let's hear what he wants, and who he is."

The man in the doorway did not venture to come closer. The silver bracelet described another curve, as he pointed to himself.

"Ponce"—he pronounced the name with pure Castilian *th* sound on the fourth letter—"I am Ponce—Tiger Ponce, my ver' good frien's call it some time—I tak' the libartee of dismiss your cab, because you must not leave here until we are finish weeth Black Marsh—and with you."

"You're in Pemberton Kay's gang, I suppose," Stanley declared calmly.

Ponce shrugged and lifted one eyebrow quizzically.

"Señor Kay, which may not be his name, is assistant. We have not leaders. We are caballeros of fortune on a little

visit to our old frien' Marsh, who was foolish man to forget his frien's who help heem escape San Pedro——"

"You killed him! Chinese Joe, too! Fine bunch of friends!" Dick cried.

"Unfortunate," Ponce waved his exposed hand, "we find them with shovels and digging up much money from the ground. But after they die, we learn there is much other money hidden which we must have."

He smiled smoothly, regretfully.

"Perhaps Red Blazes—he kill them too soon. Perhaps they commit suicide. I do not know. Your frien's, the intelligent police, maybe will find out—after we have depart a long time."

"That's enough of this talk. You're under arrest," Nocker blustered, as he started for Ponce, with knuckly hand outstretched.

The little man did not move except to bring his right hand into view, but the hint of a shiny, steel barrel was sufficient.

"Stand still, big calf of a man!" he murmured. "I am not finish yet!"

Nocker stood still, with a promptness that almost toppled him over. Alexa crept closer to Stanley, as if in protection from the menace of that glittering revolver barrel.

"You must not play with us," Ponce warned. "We are *desperado*. We will —— We are brave mans—strong mans —we kill queeck peoples who interfere with——"

"You can only frighten women with that talk, Ponce," Stanley interrupted. "I don't suppose you took the trouble to come here to tell us what a brave bunch of cutthroats you are. Spit it out! What do you want here?"

PONCE'S eyes gleamed dangerously at the suggestion of contempt in Stanley's voice, but he gave no other outward sign.

"Ver-ry good! You know what it is we want? The treasure of the old sheep, the *Teresa*, that Señor Marsh ran away with."

"What right have you to it?" countered Stanley.

Ponce waved the silver bracelet again. "What rights have any one to it? It is old—ver-ry old treasure—and it belong to whoever takes first. But I do not waste time talking of that. We know it is here, and we have come long ways to get it!"

Stanley grinned and pointed out the door.

"Go ahead and find it. You've only got to hire a half dozen steam shovels and a couple hundred men. Hop to it!"

"You joke, Señor Moore. Some time you do not joke. My frien's wish to be finish here to-night, before police come. You waste time. We want the diagram you have that show where is the money. You will give to us that, and we will take the money and let you go. We have search for the map, and it is not here. You must have it."

"I'd like to know where——" Dick started and stopped, as he caught a glance from Stanley. The latter looked at Ponce again.

"Assuming that we want to keep that information to ourselves," he said, "what will you do about it?"

Ponce's pock-marked cheek turned darker than ever.

"I would advise not," he grated. "We have ways for make peoples talk. We learned many things in San Pedro Prison. Maybe you will give it to us, eh?"

"We'll think it over," Stanley announced.

"No. We must know to-night. Already we waste too much time. You are hoping for some peoples to come from Wacantuck, eh? I want answer now—yes or no. If you will give what we want, we let you go, otherwise we kill you all and——"

His heavy-lidded eyes sought out Alexa.

"My frien's sometime get excite over good-looking girl. Señor Red Blazes already he speak of——"

He stepped back quickly and brought the revolver in view again, as Stanley, chin dangerously prominent, stepped toward him.

"Get out of here, you yellow rat!" Stanley snapped. "I'll promise one thing for you and your dirty bunch of yeggs!

If I catch sight of one of you, I'll do the electric chair out of a job! Beat it!"

Dick jumped for Ponce, but just too late. The blast of the revolver and the bang of the door in Dick's face came at almost the same instant. Dick looked at his friend fearful of the effect of that hasty shot.

"Missed by a mile!" Stanley assured him and swung the door open. Ponce was among the trees, dodging to cover. A whistle sounded toward the bridge.

Dick darted inside and came out with a revolver, ready to follow Ponce. Alexa and Nocker crowded behind him. At the same time a bullet whistled by Dick's head and plopped against the stone pillar nearest him. A wisp of smoke rose from a near-by clump of bushes; then two more reports sounded sharply from the gloom under the trees at the left.

Stanley pushed every one inside quickly.

"Looks like it's going to be a regular siege, Dick. Where are your rifles? We're going to have to fight for it now!"

CHAPTER XIII.

BESIEGED.

HE slammed the door closed and dropped the wooden bar in place. Dick tugged at the straps of the gun cases he had brought along for the proposed "hunting trip" and disclosed to view a lean, tapering .30-30 Savage rifle and the shiny barrel of a Winchester repeating shotgun.

Stanley lit a reading lamp over the table in the corner and arranged chair cushions around it, so that its light would not show through the leaded glass of the windows. He turned the horsehair padded sofa over and dragged it alongside the table.

"You'll have to get behind here, Alexa!" he called. "You'll be out of danger here. There'll be some lead flying around pretty soon."

As if to accentuate his words, one of the small panes of glass high up in a window shattered into flying particles, and a flake of plaster dropped from the painted ceiling. She obeyed him meekly.

"I can use a rifle, too," she ventured, her eyes dark against the whiteness of her face. "Isn't there anything I can do to help?"

Stanley smiled reassuringly.

"Not just yet—except to unpack the ammunition. We're really not in very serious danger yet. I had an object in letting Ponce think we had the information he's after. He will hesitate to risk killing anybody. They'd want to take us alive first."

He did not pursue the subject further, but went ahead grimly with his preparations.

"Can you use a gun, Nocker?"

The deputy sheriff bobbed his head and spat forcibly on his hands.

"Reckon as I can as well as anybody. Jest gimme that shotgun."

Dick passed over the weapon and a handful of shells.

"You keep the rifle, Dick," Stanley directed. "I'll hold on to one of the revolvers. You can give Alexa yours and all the pistol ammunition. I'm afraid we've got a lot of territory to defend, if we try to hold the whole house against them. There are too many windows and doors. Now, here's my idea. This is the main place they want to get to—the library. But we know it won't do them much good, as far as the plan to the buried money is concerned. We'll let them have it after putting up a fight to stall them off and gain more time. There are two other doors—the one from the kitchen and the door leading outside from the main hall. You watch the main-hall door, Dick. It's important that they don't break through until we're ready. Nocker, you take charge of the kitchen door. When we can't hold them any longer, we will retreat upstairs and hold the stairs as long as we can."

"Suppose they set fire to the house and smoke us out?" Dick objected.

"They won't do that unless it's a question of pure revenge on us. They're probably a mixture of Tiger Ponce's old crowd and some New York yeggs he recruited on the way—Pemberton Kay, for instance—and they're too wise to lose out on the treasure by being hasty. You remember what Zeke Marsh wrote. If they destroy Black Marsh they're through!"

"That's right, too," Dick agreed. "They'll try to rush us first."

THE crash of glass came from the direction of the kitchen, and Nocker bounded out the door, with surprising agility. A moment later his shotgun went off with a deafening roar. A scattered volley came from the trees in front, and half a dozen new holes appeared in the leaded-glass windows.

"Get him?" shouted Stanley.

"Didn't do much harm, I guess," the deputy answered. "Peppered him, anyway, with bird shot. It was the red-whisker feller a-climbing in!"

Stanley poked the long barrel of the revolver through a broken pane and fired at random toward the trees.

"Let them know we're on the job," he muttered. "Scared, Alexa?"

She shook her head proudly.

"I like to think that a Marsh isn't afraid of anything. Father often told me of the times when the old house, that used to be here, held out against an Indian attack for days, and another time when Blackbeard's pirate crew landed off Wacantuck and tried to capture——"

A pistol was shoved through a shattered pane and fired, the explosion sounding in the confined space like a thunder clap. Before the trigger could be pulled again or the weapon withdrawn, Stanley had pounced on it and wrenched it away. Something between a yell and a snarl sounded from outside.

"Guess I cut his wrist some on the glass that time," Stanley declared. "Isn't there a light we can throw on the veranda?"

"Yes. The switch is in the hall."

Before he could stop her, Alexa was on her feet and across the room. The next instant the veranda was bright with the glare of a dozen bulbs set in the wooden ceiling. Stanley's eyes and gun were at the nearest opening immediately—just in time to see two men disappear over the veranda railing. He caught sight of a blue chinchilla overcoat with a fur collar, as they vanished.

A third man, a bulky individual in gray sweater and cap, hesitated, blinking at the lights and the broken windows. He caught sight of Stanley, dropped the end of the heavy plank he was holding, and grabbed for his hip pocket. He was just a shade too late. Stanley's hand closed on the butt of his gun, and it jerked viciously, as it went off.

The man in the sweater threw his head sharply back, so that the unshaven chin almost pointed to the betraying lights, and he fell over, sideways, to the veranda floor.

"Dey got 'Big Louie!'" an excited voice yelled. "I seen him flop!"

"He has swallowed his pill," Ponce's calm tones announced from the shelter of the veranda wall. "He is finish—that Señor Louie. Keep down!"

There was a whispered conversation and a movement behind the wall. Stanley waited, nursing his revolver and avoiding the sight of the gray sweater on the porch floor. He did not relish the idea of having killed the bandit, even though it had been a case of the man's life or Stanley's.

The whole thing seemed unreal to him. It was like a page out of the days of old. Five miles away people were sitting down to their radios, crowds were passing through the doors of movie houses, motor cars were humming along the roads. Here, in this lonely spot, three men and a woman were beleaguered in this old house by a gang of cutthroats that, except for quality of weapons and style of clothing, might have stepped out of a volume of Cooper or Stevenson. Nor were they any the less dangerous because the class they represented carried automatics instead of cutlasses and figured in cold news print day by day, instead of in royal proclamations. The lust for gold and the will to wickedness did not die out with the discovery of electricity and steam. Rather, it gave rise to meaner rascals, with more opportunities and less courage.

It was a breed new to Stanley Moore.

"Señor Moore!" Ponce's voice came smoothly from beyond the railing.

"What is it?"

"Maybe you no shoot eef I come out to look at my frien' Louie. Maybe he is not yet dead. You would not have heem suffer?"

Stanley turned the matter over in his mind. He rather hoped Big Louie was not dead. He could hardly refuse to comply with the humane request.

"All right!" he called out. "Remember I'm watching you all the time!"

"Ver-ry good! Your frien's—maybe they no shoot, too?"

"They won't bother you." Stanley poked the muzzle of his gun out the six-inch opening at which he crouched. "No monkey business, Ponce."

THE other showed himself above the rail, came to the steps which were beyond Stanley's range of vision, and appeared beside Big Louie. Ponce held his hands palm outward, to show they were empty, and smiled disarmingly.

"You see I am quite harmless, Señor Moore. But I theenk you are foolish man to fight always with us. Let us arrange. You have keell my frien', but is all right. Now you give me the paper, and we let you go."

"Fat chance," muttered Stanley, "of your letting us go. Go ahead and look over your accomplice there."

Ponce shrugged his narrow shoulders regretfully and stooped over the big man.

"I theenk he live yet," he announced, feeling under the sweater. "I lift heem up, eh?"

He walked close to the window, as if to get a purchase on the recumbent Big Louie, and by the action blocked the window for a couple of seconds.

"Out of the way," Stanley snapped. "Get around to the other——"

Ponce did get out of the way, leaping aside with the rapid bound of one of his native jaguars, and uncovering to view the face of Red Blazes and the barrel of an automatic, poked through the railing of the veranda in the few moments that had been gained. Red Blazes was ready and in position, and Stanley was caught by surprise.

He flung himself to the floor, keeping his revolver in the opening, and fired blindly, again and again, while the stream of steel-clad lead from Red's pistol ripped through the window casing, sending a shower of glass and splintered wood over Stanley and tearing the revolver from his grasp, with a force that tingled every nerve in his wrist and arm.

He rolled across the floor to where Alexa crouched behind the sofa.

"You're hurt!" she gasped, pointing to the blood that covered his right hand, where a bullet had sped across the backs of his fingers, barely breaking the skin, but looking quite sanguinary.

"Just skinned my knuckles," he assured her. "It won't bother me a bit. I'll need that other gun though, now. You mustn't stay here any more. That little stroke of treachery shows they're getting desperate. They are giving up hope of taking us alive now. Join Dick in the hall and be ready to make a run for it up the stairs."

"How are you gettin' on, Stan?" Dick called. "They're quiet here!"

"All right at this end," Stanley shouted. "Just a little diversion! By the way, what's Nocker doing with himself? Hey, Nocker!"

There was no answer. Stanley hurried into the gloom of the kitchen. The door was still securely locked, a chair was jammed into the broken window, securing it also, but there was no sign of the deputy sheriff. Stanley turned to the open door leading to the cellar, and, as he did so, the house and veranda were plunged into pitch darkness.

He stumbled against Dick in the hallway.

"They've cut the light wire somewhere. Watch out, now!"

As if the sudden darkness had been a signal, there was a scuffle of feet on the veranda, and a heavy object crashed against the door of the library, shaking the old house to its rooftree.

"That's what the plank was for!" Stanley slammed the door shut that led from the library to the hall. "Get Alexa upstairs and make a barricade!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FIGHT ON THE STAIRS.

HE waited behind a few moments in the utter darkness of the hall. The shouts of the besiegers died down, there was another scuffling of feet on the veranda and the door shook again with a

splintering sound. At the same time a gun barked in rapid succession, as some one emptied it into the library through the window. Upstairs he could hear Dick dragging furniture along the hall and tumbling it on the landing.

In the lull that followed the second crash in the library, Stanley could hear somebody stealthily trying the lock of the hall door beside him. Evidently Tiger Ponce was taking no chances of any one escaping from Black Marsh.

"Better come up, Stan," Dick called down. "It's pretty near blocked."

Stanley climbed over a chiffonier, jammed across the stairs, skinning his knees in the dark, and helped shove a couple of mattresses and half a dozen chairs into the barricade. He groped around and felt the cold surface of several old-fashioned water pitchers and bedroom basins.

"What's the idea of the crockery, Dick?" he questioned.

"Might come in useful. Do you think they'll rush us again?"

"Not for a while—until they're through searching the library. Alexa!"

She crept closer to him, and he found a little, smooth hand resting in his. He could feel her trembling ever so slightly.

"You must go farther upstairs," he said seriously—"up into the attic. If anything should happen that they would—er—you know, get to us, you could hide out. There are lots of dark corners there."

"I'm responsible for this," she whispered. "I brought you boys here——"

"Hell's bells!" Dick grunted. "This isn't anything. The Argonne was worse than this, and we didn't get much money, either—not as much as old Zeke Marsh has saved out for us."

Another shout in unison from the gang on the veranda, and the library door gave way, with a tearing sound of splintered wood and wrenched old iron bolts. There was a quick rush of heavy shoes, and light showed under the bottom of the door leading to the hall.

"Around the house! Queeck! Queeck! You, Blazes! Look inside!" Ponce's voice shrilled. "Sam! Tony! Don't wait, fool! Look everywhere!"

"There's more of them than I thought," Dick muttered, pushing his rifle to the front.

Stanley watched the line of light beneath the library door and took a firmer grip on the butt of the revolver.

"Five or six of them, I guess, not counting Big Louie. There'll be one less if I can get another crack at them. Where's Alexa?"

"Up here." Her voice sounded from above. "I promised to keep out of the way. I'll run when you tell me——"

The door from the library swung open with a rush, and a flash light swept across the hall, turned upward quickly, and shone on the barricade. Stanley leaned across the balustrade and fired at the glimmer of red hair above the light. The light was jerked back into the library.

"They're on the stairs, Ponce! What do you say we burn 'em out?"

"Later, animal! Now we must look here. Keep watch carefully."

"When is Tony goin' to get them lights fixed?" another voice broke in. "We can't work in the dark! The cops will be here before we get the dough!"

But Tony was evidently on the job. The lights came on again, suddenly flooding the veranda and illuminating the library corner.

Pemberton Kay's suave tones offered a suggestion.

"There's a switch in the hall near the kitchen, Ponce. Let one man stay there to control the lights later on. Just now, perhaps, it would be advisable to throw on the ceiling hall light. Our friends upstairs are in the shadow, you know."

Electric bulbs blazed all over the lower floor in a moment. The group behind the barricade, which was now in full view of any one standing at the front entrance, could hear the bandits roaming over the ground floor, pulling out drawers, wrenching off wall panels, tumbling down the bookcases. Ponce's high-keyed voice directed these energies, in a running fire of advice and reproof. Stanley and Dick could only guess by the sounds of splintering wood and tearing upholstery what was happening to the antiques of Black Marsh.

Once Ponce's impatience got the better of him, and he released a weird combination of English and Spanish oaths, and immediately he was answered by a snarl from one of the workers.

"Hey, you grease ball! Keep that dirty map of yours closed, or I'll——"

There was a shuffle of feet, and Pemberton Kay's whine intervened.

"Lay off, gentlemen! Come on! Put up the knife, Tiger! We're wasting time. Remember we have a job waiting upstairs!"

"Meaning us." Stanley nudged Dick.

"Let's get busy on it now, gents!" Red Blazes bellowed from the doorway. "They ain't nothin' here, that's a cinch. They know where the jack is hid. My fingers is itchin' to get at the guy that peppered me. How about it, chief?"

"Patience, my friend!" Ponce said soothingly. "Your fingers shall be satisfied shortly. I have something for your strong back now. Come!"

There was a pause. Only a rumble of undertones came to the pair waiting at the top of the stairs. Dick caressed his rifle stock and fidgeted.

"They're cooking up something now," he muttered. "Wonder if we couldn't make a break for it."

Stanley shook his head. "Not with Alexa. We'd never make it. My idea is to hold on here while we can and then beat it for the attic steps. We'll make them chase us from room to room, if we have to. Remember, if they get one of us, the other mustn't stop. We've got her to think of. Agreeable?"

"Well," Dick said reluctantly, "it won't come to that, I know—but, if it does, I'm on. Wonder what's keeping them?"

HE didn't have long to wait. Without preliminary warning the front door crashed in and left a square of black that instantly was pierced with tongues of red flame. Slivers of varnished wood flew from the chairs and chiffonier in the barricade, and dark holes appeared in the plastered wall behind.

Fortunately, it had not been Stanley's intention to hide close to the defensive barrier. It was meant to block the stairway from attackers, not bullets. He had too clear an idea of the penetrating power of modern firearms. The curve of the stairs hid him and Dick from the direct fire through the door, and, at the risk of having a hole drilled in his forearm, permitted him to retaliate in some part.

He did so, emptying his revolver at the patch of darkness and reaching into his pocket for another handful of cartridges. He realized his mistake right away, when the door emptied into the hall several men, Red Blazes in the lead.

The stairs they had to climb consisted of barely a dozen steps, and they took them three at a time. The bound that Red Blazes took from the shelter of the darkness carried him well across the landing, and another jump brought his tousled red hair above the top of the barrier. Dick, firing at such close range that he singed the flaming beard, missed entirely.

Stanley wasted no time trying to reload. Already the huge hand of the foremost attacker was swinging the automatic into line. Stanley swept one of the heavy china pitchers from the floor and with the same movement described an arc with his arm that ended in a burst of smashed crockery on the mat of hair.

Red Blazes disappeared from above the barrier as suddenly as if some one had jerked both feet from under him.

"Save your shot, Dick!" Stanley shouted and hurled another pitcher and its accompanying basin into the mass of heads and legs that struggled on the narrow stairs.

The basin struck one man on the shoulder, glanced off, and went to pieces against the wall near the door, just missing Ponce by a hair. He showed a white line of teeth and sent a shot up the stairs.

"Queeck! The lights!"

They went out instantly, covering with a protective darkness the discomfited bandits on the stairs. Pemberton Kay's excited voice came from a safe distance in urgent entreaty.

"Don't give up, gents! We've got them now! Get them! Get them!"

"Come ahead, you yaller mutt, an' give us a hand," one of the attacking party growled. "Wot the hell are you hangin'

back for? Red Blazes is knocked cuckoo."

Ponce's gun flared again.

"There are only two, *amigo!* Should we stop now? Throw the red animal out of the way. Kay is attend to other things. Come!"

The last word was spoken from the foot of the stairs. Stanley, slipping the second cartridge into the cylinder of his revolver, heard the stumbling rush of feet against the stair risers and the breaking of wood, as eager hands tore at the barricade.

The little jet of fire that darted from Dick's rifle barrel showed a flashing picture of Ponce squeezing past the chiffonier and the arms of another bandit tossing aside a mattress. To Stanley it showed something else—the sallow face of Pemberton Kay at a window above the stairs, and, nearer at hand—almost touching Stanley—the crouching figure of another bandit.

Stanley whirled around, with a cry of warning to Dick, and found himself struggling in a grasp that threatened to strangle him. His revolver arm, pinned to his side, was helpless. His free hand tore at the fingers on his throat.

The other man was not as strong nor as capable a wrestler, but the advantage he had gained by his unexpected attack was sufficient. By the time Stanley had broken that hold and rolled to the floor on top of his enemy, he could hear the rest of the gang making the last few steps to the top.

"Upstairs, Dick!" he called and tried to wrench his wrists free. "Take Alexa! Quick!"

Behind him a light flashed in the hand of Pemberton Kay—a light that showed Tiger Ponce where to bring down the butt of his automatic.

Stanley fell over onto the man beneath him.

CHAPTER XV.

EXIT TIGER PONCE—WITHOUT FLOURISHES.

WHEN he groped his way back to consciousness again, he was lying on the floor of the library, with the burning taste of raw liquor in his mouth and a head that seemed to be one throbbing ache. He lay watching the incredible antics of the signs of the zodiac on the ceiling. They seemed to be doing a Marathon along the cornice, with the base drum inside his head beating time to their merry dance.

Gradually the ram stopped chasing the lion and the bull and crab and scorpion and sea goat, and the rest returned to their appointed places, and Stanley tried to lift his hand to feel the sore spot on his head.

The hand refused to lift. He squirmed around, and the urbane smile of Tiger Ponce hovered above him.

"Ver-ry good! You come back to us. I try always to strike easy, but some time I go too far. My *compañeros,* they have enthusiasm—they wish to put the little knife in you and finish. But I theenk you will tell us where is the plan for the gold now."

"Where is Dick—and Alexa?" Stanley asked.

"Safe—now," Ponce answered pleasantly. "Maybe later—who can tell—not so safe. They are also tied like you into neat packages. My frien's wish to go soon, so perhaps we waste no more time. Our little boat must not be discover by the ver-ry intelligent coast guards."

"You have a boat out there?"

"Naturally. The rivers of your great country are broad and leave no track behind. We are not foolish peoples to go in automobiles when is so many nice quiet place near the water. Señor Kay has oblige me with a boat. They go now to carry my poor Red Blazes and Big Louie and Sam, that your friend shoot, there. By and by, they come back——"

He shook his head regretfully.

"I hope you will remember then where is the map, so——"

"You go to hell!" Stanley snapped.

The little man's eyes glowed redly.

"Señor Moore, I have never care more to kill a man than a rat! Remember that! I have come long distances for this money and diamonds, and I have spent much money, too. Your gunmans from New York are not cheap."

"Suppose I haven't got the map?"

The change that came over Ponce's

face was startling. The chill urbanity twisted into a mask of malignant fury.

"No?" he screamed, bending over the man on the floor. "You have not? You will tell me that now? You theenk I wait one second to stick that knife in your bull neck?"

He returned the glittering blade to its sheath under his arm and seemed to recover his chilly smile with an effort.

"But no, Señor Moore. My good frien' Kay has suggest a way to make you say interesting things. He thinks maybe we tie up the lady—it is to be shameful thing, but necessary—with ropes by the thumbs—so! Maybe you will not wait too long to find the——"

"You try any such dirty greaser tricks," Stanley exclaimed, "and I'll make you wish you never were——"

"Let us not become excited," Ponce soothed. "You talk wild, and we have no time for theatrical talk. I am a business man, just like you. I have invest money for results. Señor Kay has promise me results, so I will let him work his way. Tony!"

The swarthy, long-nosed individual who had crept up on Stanley on the stair landing, came in from the hall. Ponce pointed to Stanley.

"Keep your eyes on him. I recommend to you, Señor Moore, the study of ancient astronomy which you will find convenient from your position until I return —also the study of other things very important to you."

He waved his silver-adorned wrist toward the painted ceiling in a mocking gesture and walked softly away. Stanley heard the door close and Kay's whining voice in the kitchen.

THE ruffian who had charge of Stanley sat down and glared silently at him for a while, fingering an automatic threateningly.

"I wish I was runnin' things here," he snarled. "I'd make you or that dame talk up pretty quick. I'd give you what I gave the old guy down on the swamp an' the chink—on'y I'd do it slower."

Stanley frowned at the ceiling without reply. He had enough to occupy his mind without listening to the venomous talk of the man with the long nose. The latter reached for a half-empty whisky bottle. A muffled shot came from the regions above.

"Yer playmate," Tony informed Stanley. "I guess they got him out of his corner now. That finishes him. Here's the bunch comin' back. Now the fun begins for you an' the dame!"

Stanley could feel as well as hear the tramping of feet along the hall. Then followed the rumble of voices from the next room, with Pemberton Kay's sibilant tones predominating.

Tony set the bottle down and lurched to the door, throwing it open. By twisting his head around, Stanley could glimpse the faces of Kay, Ponce, and another man—a heavy, dull face, with colorless, blond eyebrows. Kay's two-day need of a shave seemed to accentuate the pallor of his unhealthy skin.

"You must let me handle this," Kay wheedled. "Be sensible, Ponce. Go outside like a good fellow, if your conscience bothers you. I promise you will not be disturbed by screams."

Ponce pointed to the latest arrival.

"Outside, eh? It seems that some one is needed outside. Why you no mind the gate as I told you?"

"Nothin' doin', buddy," the blond man growled. "You guys has been here a coupla hours now, an' I'm gettin' tired watchin' the gate. Kay is right. Make the girl squawk, an' that guy in there'll kick in. If he don't, let's bump both of 'em off and beat it!"

Tony edged slightly toward Ponce.

"That's the dope. I'm wid Kay and 'Happy' on that. How about it?"

"Ah!" Ponce's long fingers crept inside the breast of his tightly buttoned chinchilla coat. "We have the congress here, eh? Perhaps we should call our other voter down from above—our good Pedro, who is watching that Señor Moore's foolish friend does not escape us. Our Pedro is fighting, not talking."

Kay fingered his blue-black stubble of beard nervously.

"I don't understand why you are so squeamish about this, Ponce. You had no objections to having Zeke Marsh killed."

"Naturally, my frien'. I have kill many men and seen many killed. As for the *chino* eet was of no importance. You do not understan' why I no weesh that the señorita should hang by the thumbs. Maybe eet is the soft heart of me. Maybe you have not the disadvantage of being gentleman yourself, some time a long while ago."

Stanley began to see a ray of light ahead. There was evidently discord in the gang. But his hopes of escaping unscathed on that account were immediately wiped out.

"But I promise you," Ponce continued evenly, "that we will have answer from Señor Moore in five minutes. It is something ver-ry interesting you will see. Just a little piece of rope now and a stick—a little stick——"

Tony's eyes gleamed eagerly. "Yeah! That's the stuff!"

Ponce smiled and turned his face toward the black oblong of the kitchen window, and the smile froze in place. He looked at Stanley stretched helplessly on the floor beyond the door, and the long fingers tightened on the weapon inside the tightly buttoned coat; he looked at the menacing faces of Kay and Tony and Happy, and made the slightest movement of the thin shoulders—a shrug that might have meant profound distaste or a profounder contempt for both his companions and the vagaries of chance.

He said quietly:

"I know where is that little stick, my frien's. Wait patiently here."

He stepped lightly to the door that led outside.

"Ah! It will be something quite surprising you will see, Señor Kay—something ver-ry startling!"

He slipped out the door, and it swung silently behind him.

"He's kiddin' us, damn him!" Tony made a movement to follow. "If I thought he was gyppin' us on this deal I'd——"

"How can he?" Kay's mouth twitched, exposing a discolored line of teeth. "We have everything in our hands. I'm tired of Mr. Ponce. We'll do things our way from now on. We'll get rid of him now!"

"Bump him off?"

Kay nodded, swallowing spasmodically.

"Quick, Tony! Before he gets back!" He grabbed the gunman's arm. "Get ready for him! You know how to do it better than I do. My—my hand will shake, I know, and there'll be a bigger split. Do it just as he comes in the door—let him have it—don't give him a chance to draw his——"

Tony threw the hand off his arm and grinned sourly, as he inspected his automatic. In a career that included many killings he had never given the other man a fighting chance, so Kay's advice was superfluous. The gunman stepped behind the door, so that it would hide him when it opened, and waited. Kay retreated to a position against the wall, leaving Happy standing—a dull lump of a man—in the center.

There was a scrape of feet outside the door on the little porch.

Stanley afterward never could analyze the impulse that prompted him. Perhaps it was the remembrance that Tiger Ponce had stepped in to save Alexa Marsh—perhaps it was an innate love of fair play.

"Look out, Ponce!" he called.

Tony wheeled about, dirty forefinger tightened on the trigger, and brought the weapon in line with Stanley's head. At the same moment the kitchen door flew widely open.

The man who filled the doorway was not Tiger Ponce at all; neither was the gentle-looking elderly man in the derby hat Tiger Ponce, though both men were armed.

"Shove 'em up!" a throaty voice commanded from the library doorway.

For the first time since he had known him, Stanley was glad to see Deputy Sheriff Nocker.

CHAPTER XVI.

STANLEY PROPOUNDS A THEORY.

SO that's what happened to you all the time," Stanley nodded understandingly. "I thought the gang had surely got to you when I heard that last shot up in the attic."

Dick shook his head. "No. They tried to, but the fellow they left in charge kept under cover. After we got separated in the hall, I dodged upstairs, thinking Alexa was in front. When I discovered she stayed behind, I was blockaded in the end of that garret and had to stay put. I didn't have a very heroic part in the business."

"Neither did I," Stanley agreed readily. "Nocker there was the hero of the hour."

They were comfortably located in the only remaining easy-chairs that the library boasted, after the destructive events of the night before. Deputy Sheriff Nocker, left in charge, as the representative of law and order, after the posse had taken Kay and his merry men off to the Wacantuck jail, snored peacefully on a sofa, from which part of the insides had been torn. Though the morning was well advanced, and the bright sunlight streamed through the broken windows and wrecked door, Nocker seemed to be good for the rest of the day.

Alexa's voice came from the kitchen in disdainful comment, above the rattle of dishes in the sink.

"I don't see how Mr. Nocker was so wonderful. He left, and you stayed and fought those horrid men."

"He had his troubles, too," Stanley grinned. "I wouldn't have liked to crawl through a cellar window and two hundred yards of narrow trench. It was a good job that old Zeke Marsh started to lay out the sewer system, all the same. We'd have been out of luck if Nocker hadn't made that three-mile dash to Wacantuck—talk about Paul Revere's ride—that must have been worth seeing!"

"I'd rather see that pile of gold we've been doin' all the battling for," Dick grunted. "I guess that's one pipe dream exploded."

"Well," Stanley ventured, "I have a theory about that I might try to work out later on. But I don't want to get you all excited yet. I have a certain plan in mind. By the way, part of the treasure is sunk out of sight—and I mean sunk. Tiger Ponce had one cache safely stored on the boat, and from what you tell me Ponce and the gold and everything else went down."

"It did. I was watching from the cupola with Simms, the tax collector, while you were—er—busy trying to bring Alexa out of a faint. Why women should wait until it's all over and then faint conveniently to a big, strong, sympathetic guy——"

"What did you see?" interrupted Stanley, reddening quickly and smoothing his hair over a neat patch of court plaster.

"You mean in the library here? I saw a guy all broken up over——"

"No. Darn it! I mean from the cupola!"

"Oh! Ponce must have tried to make the other side. The rum chaser that tried to head him off must have had other ideas—with a posse blazing away from the shore here. Anyway, the second shot finished Señor Ponce. They didn't find a sign of him in the water, and it ain't likely he walked along the bottom. So the mystery of Black Marsh is still a mystery."

"Not altogether," Stanley denied. "I had a good look at some papers they found on Kay this morning. I couldn't keep them, since they'll be needed at Kay's trial for the murder of old Zeke and Chinese Joe—and some other shady business he was in before he met up with Ponce in New York. But what I saw sheds a light on the hectic past of Zeke Marsh.

"You see, this treasure he was guarding didn't belong to any one in particular—least of all to Kay who was only an outsider brought in for this deal here. Ponce had some license to kick when Zeke blew away with it, for Ponce and Red Blazes were both inmates of the same jail—San Pedro—way down where the apples stop growing and the coconut palms begin. What Zeke was there for I don't know—some tricky business, I suppose. Ponce was a kind of political prisoner—cried *'Viva!'* at the wrong man or something. Red Blazes was just an ordinary wandering holdup man."

Dick removed his cigarette and blew a wavering gray ring of smoke out the door.

"Quite a combination," he offered. "Where did they locate the jack?"

"Zeke located it alone—that is, he found the plan to it. San Pedro was an old place dating back a long time, probably to the time of the old boys that sacked cities and pirated ships in those parts. A good many men had been in the hoosegow there, and one of them left a record behind him and then, probably with the help of Mr. John Law, left this world and was forgotten. Then some few hundred years later Zeke Marsh spends his time in the same cell and locates the map.

"Ponce knew about it, and so did Red Blazes, and I think they helped Zeke make his get-away to get rich quick. Which he did. They followed him to make him disgorge."

Stanley leaned back in his chair, and surveyed Dick triumphantly.

"Is that all?" Dick asked in a disappointed growl. "You look kind of set on yourself for a guy that's got only a fairy tale in his kick."

"No. I have more than that. I have a theory. What's more, I have a hunch I'm right. I spent some time upstairs this morning, you'll remember."

"Shoot! We've got to get back to town as soon as Nocker of Wacantuck comes out of the ether. You'll have to give a fast demonstration."

Stanley beckoned to Dick to follow him and led the way into the kitchen.

"Exhibit A," he said, pointing to the stepladder. "Note the paint and whitewash smears on it. Now come upstairs."

DICK followed up the bullet-torn steps, wonderingly. Stanley indicated the floor of a room at the right. It was one of the unfurnished bedrooms, and the dust lay thickly on the hardwood floor. Stanley indicated a cluster of used paint pots, yellow and blue and black, in a corner.

"Exhibit B. We're getting along nicely."

"The heck we are! What's this all about?"

"The treasure." Stanley replied, exasperatingly calm, "of the good ship *Teresa*, sunk many a year ago. We will now descend to the library."

"You talk like a tourist guide," Dick muttered. "Quit kiddin'. What's the idea of all this?"

They met Alexa in the hall. Her brown eyes, shadowed by a sleepless night, lighted up at Stanley's announcement.

"Do you really think you can find it?" she asked, but it was a purely rhetorical question. She had no share in Dick's misgivings—not where Stanley's ability was concerned. "It's awfully exciting to think all that money is waiting for us to pick it up."

"Waiting for you to pick it up," Stanley corrected. "We have no share in it."

She shook her head.

"Decidedly not. You must promise to take your share of it. You must."

"Promise, Stan," Dick interposed. "You're safe. From what I can see of your theory, there's no danger you'll have to make good. What's the next move? If you can find the whitewash brush, I'd say your case was complete."

"Maybe you're right." Stanley laughed good-naturedly. "Do you remember the advice of Zeke Marsh—if you tear down Black Marsh you lose the treasure forever? I'm beginning to get his point. I didn't even suspect his game until I had time to lie here last night with nothing to do but look at the ceiling. Ever study ancient astronomy, Dick?"

"No, neither did you."

"Tiger Ponce suggested it to me last night—one of his little jokes. He would have bitten his tongue out if he knew what he was really putting me wise to. But I couldn't do anything else but follow his advice, and I did. Then I was hep to everything in a flash. Believe me, lying on your back, staring at the ceiling is the greatest help to thought."

"What are you gettin' at, Stan?" Dick was smiling broadly.

Stanley pointed to the painted ceiling.

"There it is! Spread out for the whole world to see—the map of Zeke Marsh's treasure!"

CHAPTER XVII.

COLD TRAILS.

DICK looked blankly at the discolored ceiling, with its poorly drawn, but distinctive, figures of the constellations—painted on the white surface, in

blue and yellow and black, each figure about twelve inches long.

"The signs of the soda cracker?"

"Exactly! The signs of the zodiac—what they used to call the 'mansions of the sun.' I 'minored' in astronomy at college."

"I'm glad you hid that secret vice from me," Dick observed.

"I didn't get far," Stanley explained, "so don't condemn me unheard. But I do know the signs of the zodiac should be twelve, and here we have only eight. That occurred to me as being odd, first of all."

"He didn't have room for any more," Dick suggested. "They're crowded in now, all around the room."

Stanley shook his head. "He didn't need any more. These are his pointers. He has them all in the wrong order, by the way, which is suspicious in itself, and each represents a point on the island. Reading from left to right, starting at the end of the oval, there near the kitchen—they are Taurus, the bull——"

"Right!" Dick interjected. "The bull! Only it looks more like a goat to me."

"You're not fair," protested Alexa. "Let Stanley explain."

"Then we have a crude drawing of a crab, known as Cancer by the ancients; then Aquarius, the water bearer; Pisces, the fishes——"

"Who are the two Siamese twins in the corner?" Dick asked, pointing.

"That's what they're called, the twins—the constellation of Gemini. Then we have Libra, the scales, that doglike creature supposed to represent Leo, the lion, and over the doorway there is an arrow—Sagittarius, the archer. Each of these points—Aries, Virgo, Capricornus, and Scorpius are left out—each of these eight points is an established marker on the island, which is also oval in shape. There's Zeke's map right in plain view, where he could look up and consult it at any time. Pretty smart, eh?"

"I can't see it," Dick objected. "Anybody coming in could look up and see it without bothering to tear the house down for a hidden map."

"Just what Zeke warned them not to do—tear the house down. It was one of his little jests, and not a bad idea, either. It's an old trick to hide something by leaving it in plain sight all the time. No secret panels and mysterious papers for old Zeke. He drew his map right on the ceiling and let Kay and Ponce and the rest of us tear the place apart, while, all the time, it was staring us in the face."

Dick scratched his chin and studied the figures skeptically.

"Maybe they mean more to you than they do to me," he muttered, "but I don't remember seeing any lions and archers and twins and fishes around here. I'm converted to the idea that there's a mean pile of jack hidden somewhere, but I don't see how you locate these markers."

Stanley was busy with pencil and paper, copying, as nearly as possible to scale, the positions of the figures on the ceiling.

"It approximates roughly the shape of the island," he said, as he waved the pencil in an oval; "and if I didn't see fishes, I saw a fishpond and, in the same relative location as the twins, there are two solitary pines down at the edge of the marsh. Sounds far-fetched, but where he shows the water bearer, is exactly the location of the old well, right in front of the house. And, by George!—do you notice where he locates the figure of Leo?"

Dick nodded soberly. The idea was sinking home gradually.

"The stone lions at the entrance," he murmured and looked at Stanley. "You've got something here. Wait! Let me give you a hand. I saw a six-foot rule in the desk the other day and a pair of calipers. We'll reduce Zeke's map to a small scale and have it exact."

"The calipers and rule were probably used by Zeke Marsh in arranging his map in the first place," Stanley pointed out. "Let's see. The island is about a thousand feet long. Put a rule on the room and get your mathematical brain to work in finding out the scale he used there."

DICK, enthusiastic now as he had been scornful before, measured off the floor and announced the length as thirty feet, then, carrying in the stepladder, he

called off the measurements between the figures.

They bent over the center table together and figured out the proper distances on the reduced map, Alexa nodding admiring approval of the work.

"I think it's wonderful!" she cried, her eyes sparkling. "How did you ever do it?"

"With the help of Tiger Ponce. We owe him two debts of gratitude which we can't pay now—one was when he interfered on your account and the other was purely unintentional on his part."

"I can't thank him," she exclaimed indignantly. "He would have done worse to you if he hadn't seen the posse coming up the drive! Thank him, indeed!"

"Which goes to show," Dick muttered, "that Schopenhauer was right about women. But that's neither here nor there. Now we've got the map, where do we start? Which shell is the pea under? Eight points, and only four caches to be found."

"There might have been more than four," Stanley said. "The paper was torn, you know. I move we start with the lions at the gate."

"Right," Dick agreed and hurried off to search in the basement of the old barn for tools. He found a pick and two shovels, one showing signs of recent usage.

Armed with these weapons of agriculture, the expectant trio made fast time to the gateway beyond the bridge. They had forgotten altogether the fatigues and nerve shocks of a sleepless night. The prospect of wealth—stores of gleaming yellow metal within grasp almost—was a tonic even better than the warm sunlight and the salt breeze from the Sound.

The stone lions, set on cement posts on either side of the grass-grown roadway had sunk at the corners and leaned over slightly. The figures themselves were limestone and worn by wind and rain and weather to a blurred outline of the king of beasts, couchant.

"Which one?" queried Dick, setting his pick under the nearest.

"We'll try both," Stanley advised. "But wait a second! No need to throw them over. They've been here a long time—too long for Zeke Marsh to have put them here. Better dig all around them. The stuff is probably hidden at the foot. Here goes!"

He swung the pick over his head and drove it into the soft ground.

They worked silently, while Alexa hovered about both excavations, peering with delightful anticipation into the deepening holes. Presently Dick shed his coat, and Stanley followed suit. Even the expectation of riches hardly lightened the labor of moving several square yards of soggy earth.

At the end of an hour, both shovels were going more slowly, and nothing had shown up to encourage the perspiring diggers. Dick threw out a shovelful of gravel, stepped out of the wide trench he had made around the pillar, and leaned disgustedly on the shovel.

"This ground doesn't look to me that it was ever disturbed."

Stanley rocked the concrete pillar that threatened to fall into the excavation and let it topple over. There was nothing underneath it but hard, gravel bottom.

"We're on the wrong track," he admitted. "Signals crossed somewhere."

Dick looked at his blistered fingers and said nothing. There are times when the best of friendships become strained.

"What price Aquarium, the fish?" he murmured. "I'm going to take a look around from the top of the hill. Let's borrow your map."

"He seems a little sore." Stanley looked at Alexa dejectedly. "I can't blame him. I started this wild-goose chase."

She smiled confidently, encouragingly. "I'm sure you're right, Stanley. Dick is always impatient, and he's always making a joke of things. You mustn't mind him. I heard him this morning——"

"You mean about——"

"The library. You thought I had fainted dead away. He shouldn't laugh at you for worrying about me."

SHE leaned over to look in the excavation and her bobbed, shining hair brushed her cheek, hiding it from view.

Stanley reached for her hand and pulled it gently toward him. Forgotten was the treasure of the *Teresa* and the

disappointment of the search. There are occasionally in this harsh world things more precious than yellow metal and brilliant stones, and a man needs no plan nor map to find them, unless it be the reflection of himself that he reads in the eyes of one certain woman—and Schopenhauer and all the rest of the dusty philosophers have nothing to do with the case. Let them swallow their own dust. Stanley Moore had never read them, anyway.

"Alexa," he said hoarsely. "Alex——"

They jumped apart like conspirators at the sound of Dick's voice from the top of the hill.

"Come up a minute. I want to show you something!"

"Oh! It's the treasure, he means," Alexa said, like one who had stumbled on a novel and startling thought.

They stepped quickly across the broken bridge and joined Dick. He pointed to the map and to the shell road below the hill.

"See there along the edge of the property? There's your arrow. Look for yourself."

Stanley looked. There was an arrow sure enough on the place called for by the map, and it was nailed to a tree beside the road. It said: "Wacantuck Gas Station—three miles."

"Now what are we supposed to do? Dig up the road?" Dick asked sarcastically. "We've got a map, all right, but the money isn't buried at these reference points. What's that over there—that white thing?"

They retraced their steps across the bridge and along the northern edge of the island bordering the creek. The object Dick spoke of showed up like two sharp twigs in the underbrush—the horns and part of the skull of a bull, thrown with apparent carelessness into a clump of bushes.

"Not an unusual sight on a farm," Stanley said, reaching for the map in Dick's hand, "but interesting to us, all the same. This is a marker put here by Zeke himself—represented by Taurus, the bull."

Dick slapped his forehead disgustedly.

"Say! Aren't we a great pair of dumbbells! Of course the caches aren't at these places exactly! What would he need a map for in that case? If he kept a map at all, it shows he must have shifted the stuff around for safety now and then, and it's a cinch he couldn't carry the two pines and the stone lions and the fishpond around on his back. He wasn't so dumb that he needed a map to show him where the front gate was."

Alexa shook her head wearily. "Perhaps we'd better give it up."

"Not yet," Stanley insisted stubbornly. "There's a key somewhere. We have one place located—the one that Ponce looted."

They walked across the intervening ground and gazed mournfully into the empty hole. Dick frowned out at the Sound and the fishpond and turned, still scowling thoughtfully, toward the well. Then, magically, his frown disappeared and the very freckles on his snub nose seemed to beam.

"By Jiminy—and Gemini and all the rest! I betcha——"

He whipped out the folding rule and spaced off the distance from the hole to the well, hurried back to the staring pair, and measured off the distance to the skull.

He passed Stanley on the run, only stopping long enough to snatch the map from his hands. He only shook his head in answer to Stanley's startled question and disappeared through the trees toward the house.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TREASURE.

"WELL, I'll be hanged!" Stanley looked after his friend. "Took him kind of sudden, didn't it? What's up, I wonder?"

There came a sudden startled bellow from the library, a door slammed, then the sound of running feet on the stairs, and Dick darted out of the kitchen door waving the map excitedly.

"It's all right!" he called out as he came up to Stanley and Alexa. "I just fell off the ladder onto Nocker. He was surprised, but I had plenty of reason. My hunch was right! The cache that Ponce got coincides exactly. I knew there were no leaks in the roof!"

He consulted the paper in his hand, marked off a dozen yards from the skull, in direct line with the well, and stuck the rule upright in the soft loam.

"Here you are!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "Try here! There's the shovel over there stuck in the bushes! You started this, but I'm finishing it! I'm not so rotten, either, when it comes to detective work. There's no leaks in my roof, if that's what you're going to say."

"Well," Stanley admitted, catching the shovel Dick tossed to him, and narrowly missing catching the handle on his nose, "there was something like that in my mind. What's the big idea?"

"You'll see." said Dick. "If I'm wrong this shot, I'll eat my hat, your hat and Nocker's whole wardrobe, overalls and everything. Just bend on that shovel and see what's below."

"I hope you're right," Stanley grunted, as he turned over the first shovelful. "I've got plenty of blisters and sore back now. You might tell us all about it though, while I'm doing the heavy part."

"Sure," Dick said. "It was the whitewash on the stepladder and the stains on the ceiling that put me wise."

"Stains on the ceiling!" Stanley stopped digging. "If that's all you have to go by, it doesn't sound like much. Most of these old houses have stained ceilings. But I'll give you a chance to make good. I won't stop yet."

Dick pointed to a cross he had made on the map.

"One of them is right there—here where we're digging."

"Purely accidental. Water might leak through anywhere."

"Not in this case," Dick insisted. "For the simple reason that the room above has a spotless ceiling, and the floor—you remember the floor—is covered with dust. The stains didn't come through from above. They're faked!"

It was Stanley's turn now to open his eyes.

"You mean Zeke——"

"I mean Zeke Marsh put them there himself, as he wanted them from below! There are four now—and four newly whitewashed over—just ordinary-lookin' stains no one would notice. One is over there near the boathouse, and the other one right here—twelve yards off the skull, in line with——"

His excited voice stopped at a sound—the merest hint of metal against metal, brought about by Stanley's shovel. Dick forgot his dignified air of superiority and dropped down on his knees. In their hurry to uncover the source of that significant sound the hands of the two men fumbled over each other, and where there was so much haste there was little speed; but, in the end, the thing was uncovered.

It was the top of a tin box, about eighteen inches square, slightly specked with rust, but otherwise new, and the only dent in it was the one made by Stanley's shovel.

There was not a word spoken by either one, as they cleared away the earth at one side and strained to lift the smooth container out of the hole. It took their combined strength to raise it the necessary few inches. Stanley shoved the point of the shovel under the wire that bound the top in place and snapped it in two. The lid fell off.

IT was there in front of them at last—layer upon layer of soft, yellow metal, melted down into slabs and oblongs and rugged hunks, looking for all the world like some peculiar auriferous plumber's solder, but with that unmistakable dull, tawny gleam to it that quickens the pulses of men, reflects its sinister gleam in the eyes and hearts of men—gold! Warm, glowing, desirable, glimmering, beautiful, deadly! Gold in bars! Gold in soft, dented cubes! Gold in rich, heavy, satisfying chunks—solid, precious, inviting! The tumbled mass seemed to wink sleepily in the sunlight, as if sardonically conscious of its power.

Stanley bent over the open treasure case frowningly. Dick's eyes sparkled. Alexa bit her lip and turned startled, wondering eyes to Stanley.

"I can't believe it," she murmured. "We found it! We're rich!"

Stanley nodded soberly. He stooped down and felt the golden layer.

"The treasure of the *Teresa!* Lord knows how much blood is on it—how

many men have been jerked out of life by——"

"There's more here than we expected," Dick cried joyfully, tumbling the box over and spreading the contents on the ground. "What's this?"

He unwrapped a dirty cotton rag that lay at the bottom and held up a circlet that seemed composed of lustrous, frozen beams of moonlight, each as large as a small marble.

"Pearls!" Alexa clasped her hands in ecstasy. "Aren't they beautiful!"

"Worth more than the 'gelt' too," Dick surmised. "I can't blame Ponce altogether. This is real jack. That string is worth fifty grand any day."

He tossed the necklace to Alexa and lifted a bar of the metal.

"Feel the weight of that—couple of thousand right there in one hunk! Boy, oh, boy! Alexa, you'll never have to park yourself in a Ford again!"

She smiled uncertainly. "I'm so happy I feel like crying—but I won't! I'm going to get mad, instead! You promised me you would both take your shares of this. If you don't I'll—I'll donate it to something. So there!"

"Lord! I don't need it!" Dick grinned. "My dad gives me plenty. But I'll stick along. I'll grab one of those big rocks in the other cache if that'll satisfy you. I can't talk for Stan. You'll have to fight it out yourself."

He stood up, picked up the map that had been almost forgotten, and started for the house.

"I'll dig out the rest of the stuff," he called back, "from the map. We'll divide the work. You get the shovels from the gate, Stan."

Half an hour later Deputy Sheriff Nocker of Wacantuck came out of an uneasy slumber with the impression that he had been walked on more than once. He meandered—to use his favorite expression—down the brick walk leading to the gate and found a young man and a young lady seated unconventionally, but comfortably, on the ground, with their feet in a hole and an open tin box beside them.

"What's on?" Nocker mumbled peevishly. "I never seed such goings on. That darned fool came in there an' fell on me twice, an' the last time he jest ran away an' left that durned stepladder on my neck. Like to have killed me! What all the hurry is, I can't——"

"Want a diamond, Nocker—a nice big ten-carat diamond?" Dick called out from the direction of the twin pines.

"What's the darn fool talkin' about now?" growled Nocker. "I'll give him a diamond——"

"Try him with a ruby, Stan!" Dick chuckled. "Gosh! But he's hard to please. There's an emerald there as big as a hen's egg. He can use it for an Adam's apple when his wears out talking——"

"See here, young feller——" Nocker began, as his eyes fell on the open tin container at his feet. "Gosh!"

The emerald might not have been as big as Nocker's Adam's apple but, seen with its collection of sister jewels, sparkling, light dancing from every polished, flashing facet, it took Nocker's real Adam's apple for a gallop before he got it under control. He stared, gulped, and stared again.

"Gosh!"

"Part of it we've decided belongs to you," Stanley declared—"for running the race last night."

"Do you mean it?" Nocker's knuckly hand stretched out to touch a brilliant blue-white set in an old-fashioned ring. It was the smallest diamond in the box. "I kin have one of them? This beats all. I didn't expect no share."

Stanley reached out and picked up the blue-white stone.

"Any one but this," he said. "We're sharing three ways and keeping you in mind, too. Miss Marsh and I are pooling our shares—indefinitely."

He slipped the ring on the third finger of her left hand.

"Is that the one you wanted, dear?"

The complete novel in the next issue of THE POPULAR *is called "Ten Dollars a Minute." The author is Robert H. Rohde, whose work is well known to the regular readers of our magazine. This story has the characteristic* ***Rohde touch.***

Buried Alive

By Fitzhugh Green

Author of "Open Fire!" Etc.

It is about the worst thing a seaman can experience—and Ed Grogan, of course, was about the only man unfortunate enough to have it happen to him. But, strangest of all, no one would believe the poor devil!

PROUDLY Ed Grogan, first-class seaman of the United States navy, pointed through the window of the little shack, which he had taken for his wife during the fleet's stay in the seaport of San Pedro, California, before sailing for a long cruise to Hawaii and the Southern islands. In the sparkling morning air the majestic ships seemed scarcely a stone's throw across the harbor.

"Can't you see, Miranda," he wailed, "that it's past six thirty already? First thing I know, I won't be able to slip in to-night and tell you good-by."

Miranda Grogan, sitting up in bed, glanced over the blue water to where the huge, gray-sided dreadnaught, *Colorado*, lay at anchor at the end of the column of mighty battleships. She shrugged disdainfully. At Ed she threw a single sharp sentence:

"You get that coffee boiling, and you can go—but not a minute sooner!"

Ed sighed. Life was hard at sea. It was harder ashore. That he was a huge, two-fisted mariner of ruddy countenance and wiry, black hair, which grew nearly as profusely on his chest as on his head, helped in minor troubles, such as the water-front brawls in Frisco and Seattle. But against bluff old Captain Cameron of the *Colorado* and dictatorial Mistress Grogan of his home, Ed's physical prowess went for naught.

"Aye, aye, Miranda, and may your soul scorch in Hades," he muttered, dragging his blue overshirt down his back.

"What's that?" snapped Miranda, making as if to rise and act.

Ed seized the pot and poured out a cup of steaming coffee in a jiffy. "I said your Java's done," he added hurriedly. He gulped a mugful himself, gave his wife a swift, rough smack somewhere among the disheveled locks that streamed around her ear, and was off.

He missed the early boat. This was bad.

Boatswain O'Callahan met him at the gangway. The boatswain secretly liked Grogan, because he admitted the big fellow's capacity for sheer cart-horse labor; but he also rode him unmercifully for his stupidity.

"What's the big idea," he rasped, "coming aboard here at this time of the day?" It was past seven a. m., and turn-to had gone at five thirty. "Think you're an admiral or sumpin'?"

Ed raised a beefy hand and touched his flat hat. "The old woman——" he began.

"That's right, you big donkey, lay it on the ladies. Shows what kind of softy you are. Don't you know we're sailing at ten? Rigging in the boat booms now. Snap out of it, you log-eyed loafer and get down there with your division! They're in the bottoms cleaning up for the cruise. Now *get!*"

ED "got." Down the nearest hatch he hustled; his heart was heavy within him. He hadn't told Miranda good-by properly. He had thought the ship wouldn't sail until late that night. He had planned to go ashore again and see her.

Now he was in a proper mess. He had missed breakfast, which had been held early on account of the sailing. He had failed to show up with his division in the double bottoms. That meant trouble with the division officer, Lieutenant Sparkes, as well as with his messmates, the other seamen. He had been late coming aboard. That meant being on the report.

Ed shook his head dolefully. It was a hard life, anyway you took it.

He went to his bag and hastily shifted to an old work suit. Labor in the bottoms was dirty and wet. He would have to spend several hours bailing out water from them and wiping off painted work.

The bottoms were immensely important. They found the steel-ribbed honeycomb between the inner bottom and the outer bottom of the huge ship. Vertical bulkheads running in both directions divided them into hundreds of small compartments, all empty and unlighted, save when working parties crawled around among them, wiping paint and bailing bilge water. These compartments were dark and clammy and often ill-smelling. They were steel dungeons. Some men could not stand the reek of turpentine in them. Others shuddered to enter the labyrinth of stiffeners and plating that sprang from the darkness at the flash of a portable electric light.

Even the officers hated double bottoms. Yet they knew how essential such bottoms were to the safety of the ship. And they inspected them frequently at sea, to be sure that the spaces were never opened. It was the captain's never-ceasing anxiety on this point that kept the entire ship's company alert lest any manhole leading to a bottom be left ajar.

Why such rigidity? Because if ever the outer "skin" of the battleship were punctured by a hole, it would be the inner bottom that would save her. And the space between the two skins, known as the double bottoms, would be her insurance against annihilation by the merciless sea.

Ed Grogan disliked the bottoms as cordially as any other man. They made him stoop as he worked, and he never went into them without skinning a shin or barking his knuckles. But this morning he was particularly annoyed at the thought of joining his division in them, because the task added just one more miserable burden to his already unhappy day.

He used a port forward hatch, so he could pass the galley. He was hungry. Billy McGill, ship's cook, fourth class, saw him coming. Billy and he were pals. So Ed needed to make no request to have a split quarter loaf, with inserted pork chop, thrust into his hands. This emergency ration he pushed into the pocket of his dungaree jumper, as he skated down the ladder.

Ed's division was assigned the bottoms outboard and aft of Frame 135. This meant one entry through a manhole in the navigator's storeroom, a tiny space filled with odd supplies, such as almanacs, azimuth tables, horizon glasses, and other

miscellaneous "spares," rarely needed by the commander who navigated the ship.

ED painfully inserted himself in the elliptical aperture opening downward from this storeroom to the double bottom. A flicker of light told him a shipmate was already at work. He crawled down along a sloping plate, wormed through several ribs of steel plating, and presently squatted, panting before a small ordinary seaman named Mitten, hardly more than a third Grogan's size, and by his manner palpably servile to the latter's physical superiority.

"Hi 'Mitt,'" growled Grogan.

"Morning, Ed. How's tricks?"

"Rotten. I'm about through with this outfit. Lot of slaves, that's all we are. I'm about ready to quit."

"But we're sailing to-day for Honolulu, Ed. They tell me the cafés there are 'lulus.'" Small Mitten cocked his eye at the big fellow to see if his effort at pleasantry struck its mark.

But Grogan appeared not to notice it. He asked: "Mr. Sparkes been down yet?" This was the division officer.

"'Bout an hour ago. I told him you was just on deck for a breath of air. He took a sniff of this hole and allowed as how he didn't blame you."

"Good little Mitt," said Grogan generously. He drew the quarter loaf and its porcine contents from his pocket. "After that I'll share this bit of a mug-up with you, kid."

Little Mitten laid down his swab and grinned happily.

Suddenly the amiable look on Grogan's ruddy countenance faded. He began searching in his pockets. "Gurry me, kid, and I've left the pipe in my blues. How's it to shake it up to the bag alley and fetch it?"

The small sailor before him showed no great signs of enthusiasm at this suggestion. But he knew better than to argue with Ed Grogan. So he only pleaded for the light. "Just lemme take the portable to the manhole, Ed, and I'll run all the rest of the way. If I don't have it, I'll take double the time in the darkness."

This sounded reasonable, and Grogan was not afraid of the dark. He settled himself comfortably against the bulkhead behind him and nodded assent.

Mitten scurried upward and across, sliding like a small black cat through openings that had taxed Grogan's bodily elasticity to its utmost. He dragged the portable light with him, as Grogan had agreed. When he emerged he laid it on the lip of the manhole coaming and trotted out of the storeroom to the nearest ladder leading upward.

While Mitten was fumbling in his friend's bag for the pipe, two things of vital importance to Grogan's life occurred: the first was that Grogan drifted off to sleep; the second was the admiral signaled the *Colorado* to get under way at once and take station outside the breakwater.

As Mitten reached the berth deck, he heard the boatswain's shrill pipe, followed by the word: "Station all the sea details!"

"Golly!" said the little seaman. "Guess Ed'll have to wait." He hurried toward the bridge, where he took his post as lookout.

Lieutenant Sparkes, a man of conscience, hastened to his part of the ship. He knew his men had been working on the bottoms this morning. He must inspect and report all secure for getting under way. This meant every bottom must be closed and bolted. He checked them one by one and noted with satisfaction the tightness of the fastenings. But when he came to the navigator's storeroom and discovered that not only its water-tight door was open, but the manhole leading to the bottom uncovered, he gave an exclamation of irritation.

He knelt and called into the gloom: "Below there?"

Ed Grogan, sleeping in the steel catacombs, did not stir.

"Imbeciles!" snapped Mr. Sparkes. It was plain the men were out. The portable light was on the deck at his feet. Yet they had carelessly left the bottom open. He must speak to O'Callahan about this. Why, the whole ship, with its thousand human souls aboard, might be lost through just such criminal neglect.

With quick and practiced hand he swung the manhole cover into place and used the wrench hanging above it to bolt it down for a full due. He yanked the portable from its socket, snapped off the storeroom light, and slammed the water-tight door, dogging it down with all his force.

Ed Grogan was buried alive.

THE fleet wound out of the roadstead, a fine sight to those ashore watching the long gray column of war dogs slipping into the soft Pacific haze toward Honolulu.

"What do you make it, commander?" asked Captain Cameron. "When shall we arrive?"

The navigator consulted his chart, then replied: "Eighteen days at this speed, sir. I'd add at least three more to allow for maneuvers."

"Yes, and a fortnight on that, if we keep straight to Manila," observed the skipper. "I'm not sure yet what the admiral has up his sleeve."

An hour later Grogan came to. He lay for a moment in the darkness, dangling on the borderland of unconsciousness. "Miranda," he whispered. "Heard the clock strike, have you, dear?"

No answer. Sleepily he put a hand out. It struck a cold, damp, hard surface. He sat up. "*Wow!*" His head struck a steel beam. He saw stars. Instinctively he reached to his pocket and encountered the half loaf and its now cold pork chop. Instantly, like a cold shower, realization swept over him.

"That danged little whelp!" he blurted. "Where's he gone? No pipe, no light, no nothing! I'll lambast him when he gets back!"

For a few minutes Grogan sat nursing this new grudge in the darkness. Then a sound came to him that struck fear to the very roots of his heart. Literally he gasped. Had there been light, his face would have shown a deathly pallor. Perspiration stood out on his forehead. Though he could see nothing in the impenetrable darkness, his eyes bulged from their sockets.

What Ed Grogan heard was the distant muffled thump of the propellers. Yes, and beneath him the deck heaved slightly. The *Colorado* must be under way!

Feverishly he felt his way along the plate against which he had been leaning. When he had worked past three frames, he crawled at right angles through a circular hole in the stiffener plate and wormed his way along the trough between it and the outer bottom. When he got to the spot where he thought the manhole ought to be, he reached up. His hand encountered smooth plating, here and there undulating with the nubbled heads of rivets drowned in paint. Horror swept him.

Not only was he buried alive, but Ed Grogan was lost!

For an indeterminable period he crawled about his subterranean dungeon. Fear drove him to frantic speed. He pounded his head, his elbows, and his knees against the cruel metal. When he cut his scalp and felt a warm trickle running down his bruised cheek and dripping upon his trembling hand, he fell sobbing upon his face and, in a hopeless despair, lay there beaten.

Morning quarters were held at nine a. m. It pleased the executive officer to have one division officer after another come forward and report his men all present or accounted for. The *Colorado* was known as a happy ship. This proved it. Apparently not a single man had overstayed his leave or decided to desert. The full ship's company was aboard the fine old bucket, bound for the fabled islands of the South Seas.

Then came Lieutenant Sparkes. "One absentee, sir. Grogan, seaman, first class."

The executive officer's face fell. "Not that fine big Irishman?"

"Yes, sir, Ed Grogan. And he'd have made the coxswain rate this month."

"Any reason for his absence?"

"Not that I can think of, sir. I haven't had time to investigate yet."

Captain Cameron was equally concerned. "Why, of course I remember the fellow. He was my orderly when the marines were away last fall. Big bruiser, too, but gentle as a lamb. A little stupid, but the makings of a regular sailorman."

The commander shook his head. "It is a shame, sir. And Mr. Sparkes tells me he was to go up for his rate soon."

"Very well. Make an investigation aboard and see if it had anything to do with food or living conditions that might affect the others. Be sure his name is broadcast back to the district commandant, so that he can be apprehended as a deserter."

"Aye, aye, sir."

AT this moment the subject of conversation was feeling in his pocket. Ed had remembered the bread and meat. He took it out hungrily and forced a large hunk into his mouth. But, at the very instant his teeth were about to shut down on the food, he had a thought.

He knew the *Colorado* was bound for Honolulu. He tried to recall how far that was from San Pedro. He remembered in his geography, years ago at school, that the Pacific Ocean was a mighty big place. Honolulu was somewhere over on the China side of it. He made a rapid calculation. It took seven days of hard steaming to reach Panama from San Pedro.

"Seven days!" he murmured. "Seven —fifteen—thirty—— Why, it might take a month to get there!"

He lowered the bread and meat. He fondled it with both hands. Suddenly it had become very precious. It might have to keep him alive for a month. Even then he couldn't be sure the bottoms would be opened on arrival in port. He decided to eat nothing that day.

He sat and thought a lot of other dismal things. How was he going to count the days? There would be no light down in this black hole. Was there any possibility of his being found? He doubted it. In his two years in the division the navigator's after storeroom had not been opened half a dozen times. Even if it were, he couldn't hear people coming in, on account of the wooden decking built above the plates. Sooner or later he would find the manhole and be able to bang on it. But it was quarter-inch steel plating, and he had nothing but his bare fist with which to bang. And he would have to be banging just when people came in, and not be asleep. Yet he would have to sleep some of the time.

"And I'll probably get all twisted around and be sleeping in the daytime and awake at night!" he cried aloud.

Was there air enough to last? Was the little smelly pool of seepage down in one corner enough for him to drink? Could his body stand confinement in such cramped quarters? Wouldn't he get rheumatism and lumbago and all kinds of things after a week or two? Wouldn't he go crazy, just lying there and waiting, slowly starving to death or dying of thirst or suffocation? These and other maddening speculations raced through his brain.

He thought of Mitten. "Damned little runt!" he swore savagely. Was there a chance Mitten might think of having him hunted for in the bottoms? His heart leaped at the thought. But he groaned, as he recalled the creature's stupidity, as well as how he had told Mitten of his being about ready to desert the navy at the first opportunity.

Indeed, Mitten at that moment stood before Lieutenant Sparkes and admitted as much.

"You say Grogan was dissatisfied?" asked the officer.

Mitten spread grimy hands and shrugged his thin shoulders. "Hated it, sir. Told me only this morning that he'd decided to chuck it, sir. I guess he got off on one of those bumboats."

"When did you see him last?"

Mitten scratched his head. The boatswain behind him nudged him with a knee. "Stand at attention," directed the chief in a hoarse whisper.

"Why—why, I think I saw him below, sir. Oh, yes, we was going to work, and he asks me to get his pipe. He was allus ordering me about, sir. Why, he was worse than any officer—I mean, sir——"

"Fool!" rasped the boatswain in his ear.

Mr. Sparkes smiled. "But you don't think he was maltreated aboard, do you, Mitten?"

"Oh, no, sir. Why, with the likes of yourself as division officer, he was lucky, sir. I remember on the *Utah*——"

Before the seaman could divulge his

past, the boatswain stepped in front of him. "I think that's all this man can tell you, sir. As for myself, I'd like to add that Grogan was a good man, but I think he was having trouble with his wife. Seemed to have her on his mind a lot, sir. Maybe she encouraged him to run away. Couldn't face his being out cruising for two months."

"Oh, she loved him," observed the lieutenant sympathetically.

The boatswain glanced reflectively out over the blue ocean. "No, sir, I wouldn't say exactly that. She was pretty rough on Grogan sometimes. Blacked his eye only last week with a potato masher. But she found him useful around the house and that sort of thing."

Lieutenant Sparkes made his report direct to Captain Cameron.

"I think Grogan has deserted, sir. He and his wife were very much in love. She couldn't bear to see him go off on a long cruise. She seems to have persuaded him to jump ship and stay ashore with her. Grogan has spoken to some of his shipmates of his intention to desert at the first opportunity. He liked the ship, all right, but he was dissatisfied with having to go to sea."

THE skipper listened in silence to the officer's recital of the alleged facts. His sun-tanned face was a mask. If he had his doubts, he did not show them. But when Sparkes had saluted smartly and left the bridge, the old captain leaned comfortably on the rail, his eyes fixed on the flagship's yardarm ahead, where fluttered a signal. A smile played about the corners of his mouth. "I wonder," he said softly to himself, "just what kind of mess that fellow's got himself into, anyway."

The flagship's signal shot downward. "Execute!" yelped the *Colorado's* quartermaster.

"Hard right!" commanded the officer of the watch. To Captain Cameron he added: "Signal for 'ship's right' just hauled down, sir."

"Very well, sir. Get her on bearing at once."

But a strange thing happened to the great ship, as she swung on her heel, with her sisters in squadron. When her nose lined up on the new course she did not stop swinging. Right on around she kept circling.

"Breakdown!" screamed the quartermaster.

The officer of the watch stiffened. "Break your flag!" he shouted. "She's jammed hard right, sir!" he flung at the captain.

"Damn that electric steering gear!" ground the skipper through his teeth. He sprang to the engine telegraphs and with his own hands yanked the port one full astern, in an effort to straighten out the runaway ship.

The officer of the watch threw down the whistle lever. Long raucous blasts roared a warning to the U. S. S. *Tennessee* next astern.

But not one atom of the tumult and excitement reached Ed Grogan, hunched in the darkness of his prison, far down in the belly of the ship. Feebly for the thousandth time he was going over and over in his mind the utter hopelessness of his situation. Try as he would, he could see no way out—nothing that he could do, no course of rationing that would keep life in his body on one lump of bread and a few pints of dirty water, if the bottoms were not opened far sooner than natural routine demanded.

On the third day of his agony—which seemed to poor Ed at least the hundredth of his imprisonment—a strange feeling came over him. His first thought was that at last he was losing his mind. He felt peculiarly placid. His flesh and bones did not ache quite so much. In some mysterious way he felt cheered. He was terribly hungry and agonizingly thirsty, but even those pangs were temporarily lightened.

For some time he pondered this strange sensation. Then abruptly he knew what it was; the ship was not rolling any more. For a single glorious moment he thought she had returned to port—Heaven only knew why—when she had been headed for the Far East. This would mean that the chance of the bottom being opened would be increased a thousandfold! Anyway, the storeroom might be visited. And, since he had finally located the

manhole, he could possibly draw attention to his presence by pounding up against it.

Then grim despair came flooding back. He recalled that the south Pacific was visited with calms that lasted for days. The *Colorado* had no doubt just run into a calm. When the propeller ceased to beat some time later, he guessed that a target was being put over the side for subcaliber practice. This diagnosis was confirmed a little later when the thump of the propellers began again.

But a battleship's double bottom is no place from which to ascertain her movements on the high seas. Ed Grogan could picture none of the narrow escape the *Colorado* had had from ramming the *Tennessee;* nor the consternation on both ships when only a few hours later she repeated her wild behavior. Having no supernatural powers at his command, he could not know that the admiral at once ordered the *Colorado* to drop out of formation and go to San Francisco for repairs to her faulty steering gear, and to rejoin the fleet at Honolulu.

INDEED, Grogan had not the slightest inkling that the massive ship was two days later eased into the Mare Island drydock and dropped neatly on its blocks, when the water was pumped out. There she was, one of the largest battleships in the world, high and dry on land, while far down in her hold huddled a wretched human being, who pictured her drifting in the south Pacific doldrums, a thousand miles away.

It was both humorous and pathetic, though there was none to weep and none to smile for poor Ed Grogan.

Miranda Grogan read the news in the paper about the *Colorado's* return. Whereupon she lifted the mantel clock, took out five ten-dollar bills, and bought a ticket to Frisco. She was little pleased at the thought of seeing Ed again. But the idea of "takin' it out o' him" for not having come ashore at San Pedro and told her a proper good-by, was like a tonic to her whole system.

She was on the dock when the ship came in. She went aboard and got the news of Grogan's desertion from O'Callahan. She was stricken, but not defeated. She determined not to rest until she had caught the cowardly dog who had run away.

Ed lay on his side, a full ninety feet and eight decks below where stood his infuriated wife. He dozed in his weakness. He did not hear a strange tapping sound beneath him. He was awakened by a flood of blinding light. Instinctively he slapped his hand over his eyes. Using the crannies between his fingers he peeped out. He found himself looking through a circular aperture big enough to admit a man. He did not know that navy-yard workmen had just removed an outboard valve which opened from this bottom to the sea.

Feebly he crawled to the hole and glanced out. Some distance away the workmen were quietly lighting their pipes. A wisp of the fragrant smoke was wafted Ed's way. He inhaled it gratefully.

He gently lowered himself to the floor of the dock. No one saw him. He walked toward the steps leading to the ground level. He staggered slightly, as he picked his way among the blocks and floats. He had to rest several times, as he climbed painfully upward. He was no longer the powerful, well-set-up mariner. He was an aged man, pale and faltering, mentally as well as physically.

He did not know all hands were at dinner, which explained why none met him, as he came slowly over the after brow.

The officer of the deck thought the hatless wreck was an elderly navy-yard workman, and so he paid no heed to Grogan. But O'Callahan chanced to be aft. He took one look at the missing man and gave vent to a loud exclamation. Grogan stopped and turned to the boatswain. But his dry tongue did not move. He just stood there on the quarter-deck, swaying in his tracks.

Lieutenant Sparkes stepped out of the wardroom hatch. And as fate would have it, Captain Cameron and the executive officer came strolling toward the gangway.

O'Callahan, with a sense of the dramatic, waited until all three were within sight and hearing of the deserter. Then

he loudly said: "Sir?" All three officers looked up, not knowing which was addressed. The boatswain glanced in the skipper's direction to make sure he heard. Then to Mr. Sparkes he reported: "Yonder is Ed Grogan, and it's a fine wreck they've made of him ashore!"

The eyes of the officers traveled incredulously to the ill and wretched sailor.

"What on earth has happened to him?" queried the lieutenant.

"Been drunk, sir—drunk for a week, sir, or I'm a misguided man, sir. And it's the poison in these ports that wrecks 'em that way. Something ought to be done about it, sir."

"Very well, O'Callahan. He'll have a summary court, of course." To Grogan the division officer added: "Go below and shift into clean clothes. Are you sober?"

"Yes, sir," said Ed, risen from the dead. His voice was very thick.

"I doubt it, sir," said O'Callahan.

At this moment the skipper stepped forward. "Just a moment, Mr. Sparkes. Isn't this Grogan's wife coming?"

The meeting was not noisy, but it was dynamic. Miranda, undeterred by the gold lace with which she was surrounded, spoke her mind to Ed. She made clear how abominable she thought he was, how contemptible his forbears, and how regrettable the fact that she was compelled legally to bear his name. Once or twice Grogan essayed to speak, as if in explanation. But with a violent gesture she halted him each time. Weakly he leaned upon a stanchion, as she talked.

Behind his hand, O'Callahan whispered anathema to a shipmate, reviling such liquor as would so ruin a man as Grogan now was ruined.

When Miranda seemed to have exhausted her vocabulary and her breath, Captain Cameron stepped up. "Mrs. Grogan," he said, "there are some things in life which plain law and regulation cannot handle. One of these things is the bond between man and wife. If you will take your husband home and deliver him here to-morrow, clean and sober, I will consider that this experience has been a lesson to him."

Miranda's eyes flashed gratitude. "Now you're a Christian gentleman for that, captain. And sure I will have him here bright and early."

AND she did. But Ed was still a shade off color, as his lagging step and lusterless eye showed.

O'Callahan spoke a word of cheer to Miranda. "Too bad what they give 'em, Mrs. Grogan. Do keep him home for a while."

"That I will," said Miranda with asperity. "He'll be having D. Ts. the next thing. Why, I wish you'd have heard his alibi, Mr. O'Callahan. Said he's been locked up in the ship's bottoms ever since he left San Pedro! Now what do you think of that?"

The boatswain's rumbling laughter joined Miranda's soprana screech. Ed Grogan, hearing all, turned and walked sadly forward.

"Oh, what's the use," he muttered, picking a squilgee from the rack.

A small dark shadow dodged behind a ventilator, as he passed. This shadow was one Mitten, seaman, U. S. N.

A REAL MIRAGE

THE recent report that the Suez Canal is to be widened and deepened to accommodate the bulk of modern ships, recalls an odd story about that important link between the Occident and the Orient. An American, traveling in the desert, stopped and rubbed his eyes at the sight of an ocean liner steaming serenely through the sand. There were people on the decks: cabins, funnels, lifeboats all had their proper places. The traveler stared. Was he batty? Was this a mirage? Then his guide explained. They were approaching the Suez Canal which could not be seen from that part of the desert. Many other strangers in the land had been fooled in the same way.

By

B. M. BOWER

Author of

"For the Good of the Service,"

Etc.

IN FOUR PARTS—
PART II.

Points

THE STORY

On a Western ranch a tragedy had occurred. Cole Lawson, Sr., a cattleman, had lost money in the market and had been found dead, a gun by his side. Cole, Jr., facing so stark a reality, was at a loss what to do. Miserable, he refused offers to join up with local outfits, deciding that his only path to happiness lay far away from his tragic home. With his two pack horses and a colt following his saddle pony, he rode off, having no special objective other than the long trail. He rode out of the Black Rim country, through Thunder Pass and down into Burroback Valley. The first place he reached was the Muleshoe, a secluded ranch, where he applied for a job. But bad news travels fast in the open, and Cole was refused any consideration. He realized now that to escape the past he would have to mark out the brands on his horses, in that way avoiding recognition. This he did, making camp in a hollow until the burns healed. As he was about to resume his journey, two men appeared. They were affable, but suspicious characters, inordinately interested in Cole's horses. One of the men, Roper, offered Cole a job rounding up strays. Packing up, Cole went off with them, out of Burroback Valley toward a forbidding place called the Sinks. This was a rocky pass hemmed in by mountains and difficult passages. When night came on, Cole became separated from his companions—fortunately, since he discovered that the two were members of a horse-rustling gang who meant to kill him that they might steal his horses. It was necessary now for the boy to plan an escape, for the horses were hungry and thirsty. That night, therefore, he rode out, back along the trail. His escape was blocked by the rustlers, but he charged them and fought his way through, suffering only a slight wound. After a long ride, he made camp again, exhausted. He awoke to find that he had slept in the doorway of a deserted cabin, the sole occupant of which was a mongrel dog. Cole adopted the pup, dubbing him The Mutt. He remained in this place for some time, nursing his wound and that of one of his horses. While there, The Mutt discovered somewhere a lame donkey, and brought him to Cole. The latter took this beast under his wing also, calling him The Wop. One day a rider, herding horses, dashed past the cabin, sweeping up Cole's animals in the stampede. Cole fired a shot at the stranger, missed, and then was surprised to find that it was a girl, and a spirited girl, too. Their encounter was a contest of sharp tongues, each side cordially disliking the other. Angry, disgusted, and humiliated, Cole started out, followed by the taunting girl, to recover his horses. Even Johnny, his saddle horse, had gone in the rush, and Cole, his temper getting worse by the minute, was forced to walk in the dust—a trying situation for a born rider.

We think you'll like this story, even if you are starting it in this second installment. Those who read the first do not need to be reminded that it's a crackajack. It's all about a manly, lovable Western lad who tries to outride his memories. Every bit strikes home—rings true.

West

CHAPTER IX.

BULLET HOLES.

FARTHER down the creek, where the butte thrust out a rocky toe, as if to wall in the valley and permit only the little willow-fringed stream to go creeping past, the girl reined in sharply behind the steeply sloping barrier and dismounted, leading her horse behind a high rock out of sight and anchoring the reins by the simple method of laying a loose rock upon the ends. Then, picking her way back to the end of the bold projection, she settled herself to watch Cole approach.

Not more than a long rifle shot away down the creek, the little herd, that had with its clattering rush stampeded Cole's horses, was now taking time from its homeward journey to make squealing acquaintance with the three strangers in their midst. Where the butte had again drawn back and left a small, sage-covered flat beside the creek, the horses were circling and playing, lifting heels in pretended dislike, nipping necks, tossing heads, and uttering shrill, hypocritical squeals, as they touched noses with the newcomers in momentary greetings.

Glancing that way to make sure that there was no real trouble brewing, and that the horses were only playing like unmannerly children, the girl turned back to her real object in stopping there. She was watching Cole through a pair of field glasses, much the worse for hard usage on horseback. Certain nicks in the lenses did not add much to their efficiency, but the girl was used to making allowances for what she saw. At any rate, she could see that Cole's stride was still truculent, and his face still scowling, and that he looked as if he were on the trail of his worst enemy and fully intended to commit murder when he got his hands on the victim. There was nothing in Cole's look or manner to excite mirth, yet the girl giggled, as she watched him. Perhaps she was laughing at Mutt, trotting alongside Cole, with that high, prancing gait and an arrogant tilt to his head; or at Wop, trailing dismally along in the rear, the picture of shaggy, pot-bellied woe, that could only manifest itself by the dejected droop of the great, limp ears and the melancholy sag of the lower lip.

When Cole drew near to the rocky point where she was hidden, the girl lowered the glasses and feasted her impish

eyes on the picture of throttled rage which he made. Then he spied the sportive herd not far beyond, and his face lighted eloquently in anticipation of getting back his own. The girl's hand went over her mouth to suppress her laughter when she saw how eagerly he took down his rope and widened a loop, how meticulously he arranged the coil, so that it would cast out freely with no hitch or tangle.

"You, Johnny! Take your ornery hide outa that bunch before I bounce a rock off your back, you black devil!"

Cole's voice would have carried farther than a bullet had he shot while he spoke, for all his pent wrath was in the words.

The girl gave a gasp of surprised delight and ducked back to where her horse was hidden. Another rod, and Cole must have discovered her hiding there; but, as it was, she jumped her horse out before his astonished eyes and galloped away to the herd, yelling and swinging her rope end with a *whooing* sound that sent the horses wheeling into full flight, with a great kicking of dust and a tossing of heads, as they scampered toward home; Johnny of the blackened reputation, Hawk, and Mick galloping rapturously in their midst.

Once more Cole bitterly regretted her sex that held him absolutely helpless, his gun standing uselessly in its holster, even his fluent speech paralyzed upon his tongue. In utter silence he recoiled his rope and went on doggedly, tramping through the thin dust haze which floated like a gray veil behind the vanishing herd.

BY the way that gray veil hung suspended over the creek bank, a mile farther on, Cole knew that the herd had halted again, perhaps to drink and splash water in the ford, while the girl held back and waited for him to come up. He hated the thought of playing up to her expectations, but there was no way out for him. If he must follow her forty miles, he must follow her forty miles; that was all there was to be said about it, for he meant to have his horses back. A man who was not a thief might have relented and let him catch his own horses out of the herd. That was the unwritten law of the range, and the willful breaking of it was merely an invitation to fight. But with a girl like this one, all rules were suspended, and there was no law. She would do as she pleased, and it looked very much as if she pleased to tantalize Cole with that herd and force him to walk as far as possible for his horses.

Which is exactly what she did do.

She was an expert hand at driving a herd, as Cole was forced to admit to himself. She knew just when to loiter along and let the horses settle down to graze and play, so that Cole would have time to come up almost near enough to have some hope of getting back his own—maddeningly near, but never quite so close that Johnny would feel the necessity of obeying the note of authority in Cole's voice. She knew just how and when to start them moving onward. Cole would never believe that her whirlwind descent into the hollow and the carrying off of his own horses in the rush was the accident she had proclaimed it to be. She had planned to stampede them; he would always think that, no matter what she said.

With her skill in driving she managed to arrive at the ranch corral, with Cole and Mutt so close behind her that they seemed one friendly party, man and dog walking, while the young lady rode horseback.

"A damnable lie to put upon the appearance of things," Cole stormily declared, as he came up.

A little, plump woman, of middle age and a lovable, sweet face, set down two full milk buckets and hurried to open the corral gate, and the horses trooped in as the girl dismounted beside the stable and started to unsaddle. The older woman closed the gate upon the milling herd and turned an inquiring gaze upon Cole.

"Good evening," she greeted him, with a pleasant little note of welcome which overrode her surprise. "You haven't had an accident, I hope? Did your horse throw you?"

"His stock got mixed with my bunch, mom, so he came along after them," the girl informed her mother equably, as if

it were the most commonplace incident in the world.

"Your saddle horse and all? Too bad! But now you're here, you must have supper with us, Mr.——"

"Cole. Not Mister anything—just Cole."

He did not know why he said that. The words had come out of their own accord. Later, he thought he must have wanted her to call him Cole from the beginning, because her voice and her ways reminded him so much of his mother.

"Well, Cole, come right on up to the house and have supper with us before you bother about your horses. They're safe in the corral, and I just put hay in the mangers so they won't go hungry. Dorthy, I wish you'd bring the eggs out of the loft when you come in. I haven't had time to gather them. You won't object to bacon and eggs for supper, will you—Cole?"

"I—thank you, but I can't stop. I must——"

"Oh, yes you can. You wouldn't insult an old lady who thinks well of her cooking! Besides, we must do what we can to make amends for getting our horses mixed with yours and putting you to all this trouble of coming after them afoot. Of course you'll have supper with us."

WITH that gentle ultimatum she turned and picked up the buckets of milk. The act, unconscious as it was from long custom, jarred Cole out of his angry aloofness. A little woman like that packing two heavy buckets of milk? Not while he was around!

"Oh, no!—never mind. I'm used to it. I don't think anything of it," she protested, flushing a little with a pretty flutter of confusion when Cole would have taken them from her.

"My mother never had to do the milking—nor pack two buckets of anything!" Cole blurted almost roughly, his own tanned cheeks flushing oddly, as he looked into her eyes.

"Your mother missed something, then." But she released her hold on the handles and walked beside Cole up the path to the house. "I really don't mind doing the milking; it has to be done, and I'm glad I've got the health and strength to do it. Dorthy has enough to do without having the chores on her shoulders."

Cole had nothing to say to that.

"Did you have to walk far? You look pretty hot and tired. A cowboy does hate to be set afoot! I should think Dorthy could have ridden into the bunch and roped out your saddle horse. Why didn't she?"

"I didn't know she could rope," Cole said lamely. Inwardly he was furious because he must defend the girl to save the mother's feelings. She would be terribly shocked to know how her precious "Dorthy" had acted, he thought.

"You didn't? Why, Dorthy is one of the best hands with a rope there is in this country! Even if you didn't know it, I don't see why she didn't catch out your horse for you. She shouldn't have let you walk all this—— How far did you walk?"

"About—not very far. It was easier to come on to the corral. I didn't mind the hike." But the lie was for her, not for the girl, he wanted to add.

"Well, that's all right, then. She wanted you to come for supper, I guess. Dorthy does get pretty lonesome. Young folks need some one to talk to more than older folks do. When you get along toward sundown you have plenty to think about, and you don't feel there's so much to say."

"*You* aren't anywhere near sundown!" Cole warmly protested, setting down the milk buckets inside the spring house where she had led him. He turned now and smiled down into her eyes, pushing back his hat with the boyish gesture his mother had loved, and certain girls of the Black Rim had loved it, too, if the truth were known.

She laughed happily and with the adorable shyness which made Cole want to hug her. Funny, he thought, how she could be the mother of an impossible creature like Dorothy. Maybe she was only a stepmother. Surely there couldn't be any blood relationship between those two.

"Just for that you shall have a cup of new milk," she chuckled. "I'd like to know your mother and tell her what a

nice boy she has. Do you live anywhere near——"

"She's dead," Cole said bluntly, to head off inconvenient questions. "No, I'm a stranger here. Just riding through."

"Too bad." Her voice was instantly remorseful. "Seems to me you're pretty young to be off among strangers, but boys grow up before we know it, and they want to go riding off to see the world for themselves. You can't be much older than my Dorthy. She's twenty."

"That so?" Then, in spite of himself: "I'm twenty-one. Let me strain the milk. Those buckets are heavy. Say, you've got a wonderful milk house here, haven't you? You must milk lots of cows."

SHE told him how the stone milk house had grown from a primitive brush shelter over the spring, and how her husband—"Dorthy's father," she called him, thus unconsciously answering one of Cole's mental questions—had built the house and the milk house and the whole ranch, bit by bit, in the hours he had been able to snatch from his work for their richer neighbors.

"Just like the coral builders, I used to tell him," she laughed, as if it were all a joke. "We came here with nothing but a couple of cows and one work team and a saddle horse; yes, and an old hen with thirteen chicks that my mother gave me when I was married. At first we lived in a tent, right where this house stands. Then Dorthy's father managed to get this kitchen part built, for us to winter in. Dorthy was born right in this room! We cooked and lived and slept right here for two years before we got another room built on. By that time the tent was all but whipped into ribbons, so we just had to have more shelter. Young folks to-day don't know what it's like to rough it.

"Our two sons are buried back up here on the hill. Dorthy's father had a boy by his first marriage, and when we got the big room built on, my husband went and got him from his wife's folks—she died when the boy was born—and we raised him from then on. His father thought he'd be a help on the place as he got older."

A faint inflection of regret in her voice gave Cole the impression that she did not consider her stepson such a help as they had hoped he would be, but the shadow passed, and she was smiling again and taking a hatful of eggs from the girl who came into the kitchen at that moment and stooped to give her mother a kiss.

"Steve didn't get back yet, mom?"

The girl paused in the doorway of another room, completely ignoring Cole's presence.

"No, Dorthy. Didn't you see anything of him?" Her mother's glance and tone were anxious.

"I was back in the hills, toward Black Butte. I didn't see anybody at all."

"Nobody at all? Where did you meet this young man, then?"

"Oh, he was camped at Looey's cabin. I brought the horses down through there. What you got for supper, mommy? I'm half starved."

"Looey's cabin? Why, that must be nine miles! Why in the world——"

There was no use in finishing the question, for Dorothy had gone in and closed the door behind her. Cole was surprised that she did not slam it.

Mrs. Harris—Cole learned the name later that evening—looked at Cole in shocked enlightenment, but it spoke well for her absolute loyalty to her own that she made no comment upon the fact that he had walked nine miles simply because her daughter would not rope his horse out of the loose bunch. She seemed to realize, too, that there had been trouble of some sort; that relations were strained between this well-mannered young man and her daughter. She looked at him keenly, saw nothing there to arouse distrust—though he did seem rather sullen—and hurried her preparations for supper.

It was when she went to set the chairs to the table that she caught sight of the bullet hole in her daughter's hat, which Dorothy had flung down, as she came in. Mrs. Harris picked up the hat and twirled it slowly upon her finger, while she examined the telltale marks. Having

lived in that rough country all those years, she must know a good deal about bullet holes, Cole thought. She did not say anything, but her eyes went to Cole's face and remained there, holding his glance with remorseless questioning.

"I did that—by mistake. I thought she was a man stealing my horses, and I took a shot at her before I saw. Her hair came down before I—before I took the second shot. So——"

"So *that's* why you walked in!"

A lurking gleam, somewhat like the devil in her daughter's eyes, lighted her glance for an instant and was gone. Her breath hissed gently out between her teeth, as she turned and hung the hat on a nail beside a window.

"Well, supper's ready," she announced briskly, dismissing the matter as if with the sweep of invisible hands. "Dorthy, are you ready for your supper?" Then, quite unexpectedly, she came over and dropped a hand lightly upon Cole's shoulder.

"Son, you're a good shot," she said softly. "It's a dangerous accomplishment sometimes, if you shoot before you're sure."

CHAPTER X.

BLOTCHED BRANDS.

WHEN Dorothy came out of the other room, she was so changed that Cole would not have recognized her if she had kept that devilish gleam from her eyes, when she flicked a sidelong glance in his direction. She was dressed in soft, dull blue, with a white-lace collar, which even Cole could see was handmade. She was slim and straight and not very tall, and her hair was done low and parted on the left side and waved down in nature's own original idea of a marcel.

But Cole did not think she was pretty, for all that. He hated her and scorned to see any good in her whatever. Only the sweetness of her mother—yes, and the delectable odor of bacon and eggs and coffee—prevented him from stalking out of the house when she entered the room. He did rise and stand beside his chair until she was seated; but he set his teeth together while he did so, and he would not look at her.

"I know you must both be starved, so start right in, while I pour your coffee. Cole, do you take cream and sugar?"

"No, thank you, Mrs Harris. I prefer mine black, if you please." Cole smiled his best social smile at her, while his eyes turned for a venomous glance at the girl who, he felt, was watching him.

"You're wasting a chance at this thick cream," sighed Mrs. Harris, as she handed Cole his cup. "I forgot to ask you how you liked your eggs, Cole, so just help yourself to the ones you prefer. There are hard and soft, both.

"Dorthy, I didn't get any wood cut for the bathtub. I thought maybe Steve would be back, and I could get him to drag up some brush from the creek. I didn't like to use that good wood. I wanted to save that for baking, and brush heats the bathtub just as well."

Cole's swift, under-the-eyebrows glance caught a flush of embarrassment on Dorothy's cheeks, but her voice remained matter of fact.

"I'll drag up some brush after supper, mom."

"I'll be glad to get you some wood, Mrs. Harris. My horse Johnny will haul as much as a team."

Dorothy choked on a hastily swallowed bit of bread and had to leave the table. A cold perspiration appeared on the brow of the young man, who abruptly recalled certain blistering phrases shouted at Johnny. She did hear, then! A red tide of shame swept from Cole's collar up to his thick brown hair and receded, leaving his face slightly pale and set. Well, damn it, it served her right for caching herself where she could eavesdrop! But the defiant thought held scant comfort, since Cole's memory of that particular anathema was excellent. Full-flavored round-up talk is not for the ears of women.

"Dorthy's father fixed us a bathhouse down below the spring, just the summer before he died," Mrs. Harris explained to cover the confusion of her daughter's hurried retreat. "He always tried to save us steps, and packing water in here and heating it in the wash boiler made a lot of work. The water can't be piped into the house, because it's higher than the

spring, and we never have been able to afford a pump and tank. We put the house here on account of the shade. We couldn't move the spring, and we couldn't move the grove, so we just had to take our choice and make the best of it.

"But, since we've got the bathhouse fixed, it's real handy; only we haven't any way of heating the water yet, except building a fire under the tub. And we try and keep brush dragged up from the creek for it, but Dorthy has so *much* to do, riding and keeping up the fences and looking after the stock and delivering butter to the ranches where we've got steady customers, that sometimes it's nip and tuck, whether we have wood for our bathtub, or whether we don't."

"I thought—— Haven't you a man, Mrs. Harris? This Steve——"

"Steve," she told him constrainedly, "is my stepson—Dorthy's father's boy by his first marriage. He don't seem to take after his father a bit. He ain't much help——"

"Mother, why don't you tell the truth and be done with it?" Dorothy had returned, watery-eyed and with a huskiness in her voice, but with her disposition unimpaired, it seemed. "Steve's worse than nobody at all. If he didn't hang around we'd hire somebody and be done with it. As it is, we're always kidding ourselves along with the hope that Steve will come home sober and do a day's work, maybe, before he leaves again. He went off two weeks ago to get some part for the mower, so he could cut the oats, and he isn't back yet and won't be back. I've got the team up, and I'll start in to-morrow on the oats if I can make the mower work at all. They can't stand any longer, or they'll be too ripe for hay. If it was wheat," she added rather plaintively, "we could let it ripen, and the chickens would have scratch feed all winter. But oats—and we need that hay. Steve knows all that just as well as we do."

"You can't stack the oats, Dorthy."

"I can, too, if you'll drive the team and load."

Cole lifted his cup, took a swallow of coffee too hot for him, and blinked, as he set down the cup.

"I'll help you with the oats, Mrs. Harris, for I'm not doing anything. I was going to look for a job just as soon as my horse gets well; that's why I was staying at that camp. One of my horses got hurt and couldn't travel. I—I'll be glad to help you out."

HE did not look toward Dorothy; he did not want to think about her if he could help it. It was for the mother he was doing it—because she was sweet and reminded him of his own mother. In spite of the girl, he would help the mother, and he hoped she would never know the effort it had cost him to make the offer.

"We couldn't pay any kind of wages, son." Impulsively Mrs. Harris reached out and laid her hand over Cole's fingers where they rested beside his coffee cup. "We'd have had a man hired long ago if we could afford it. But——"

"If Steve would let a man stay on the place, you mean," Dorothy interrupted her mother, with angry impatience. "You know why we can't have a man, mom. Steve would come home and raise Cain about it and fire him and storm and bully you about the expense, and then saddle his horse and go again. A man can't stay on the ranch—that is why we don't have one."

"But we couldn't pay wages, Dorthy—you know we couldn't. With cattle so low this year, we can't sell any, and we couldn't pay a man wages out of the butter money, and that's about all we'll have to run on. I know Steve is real mean about our having any one around, but there are other reasons. So we thank you just the same, Cole, but we couldn't let you work here."

"I don't want wages, Mrs. Harris. I've been camping on your land——" Cole gulped down his pride.

"Why, that's all right. We don't care the least bit how long you stay. If Looey's camp is any use to you——"

"Well, the time drags terribly with nothing to do. While my horse is getting well enough to travel, I could ride over mornings and help get the oats up. I'd like to do it, just for—just for pastime and—and to help you out." Cole looked

at her shyly now, but he carefully refrained from looking at Dorothy.

"I appreciate your offer, but I don't believe we could let you do it, Cole. It's fine of you to want to, and Dorthy and I are just as grateful as we can be. But you see, Steve may be home any minute, and he expects to put up the hay. He wouldn't like it; he'd take it as a hint we don't want him here, if he should come home and find we'd got somebody in his place. We'll try and get the oats cut ourselves, if the mower will run. I don't believe it will till Steve brings back whatever he took to get fixed."

"Steve took the sickle bar," Dorothy informed her mother, with a savage quality of calm. Evidently a savage mood lay just beneath the calm. "I saw him ride off with it. I know why, too, but I didn't like to say anything to worry you, mom. There wasn't anything wrong with the sickle, except that it needed sharpening. He took it so the oats would spoil on the ground. I know it, now that he has stayed this long away. Before, I just suspected it, but now I know. Mommie, Steve wants to make us give up the ranch; you know that. He has been after you to leave him in charge, ever since poppy died."

"I can't give up this place," Mrs. Harris said firmly. "Your father and I took it up as a homestead when we were first married. It's my home. I helped him clear it, burning the brush while he grubbed out the sage roots. I've seen it come out of wilderness, foot by foot, almost. You were born in this room, Dorthy. Your father died in there in the bedroom. I—why, I've heard every hammer blow that has ever been struck on this ranch, building one thing after another! Give it up? Indeed not!"

"He'll starve us out if he can, mom. He wants the ranch, and he doesn't want us here, and if we won't go he'll try and force us out. I'll cut those darned oats," she added fiercely, "if I have to do it with the shears! I'll show Steve!"

SHE would, too, Cole told himself, as he remembered her inflexible temper where he himself was concerned. A girl that would made a fellow walk nine miles just because he had mistaken her for a horse thief, and would devil him all the way into the bargain, would certainly be capable of starting in on a field of oats with a pair of shears. Cole was human enough to grin, in spite of his intense dislike of her.

"Well, I would!" she reiterated, looking at him for the first time since their arrival.

"I bet you would," he assured her as briefly.

"Try some of this cream on your gingerbread, Cole," Mrs. Harris interposed, as if she feared an argument. "I want you to have some, because I know you don't get it in camp, and I never saw the boy that didn't like cream. I'll let you drag up some brush, after supper, if you will, but I don't feel as if I ought to ask you to help put up the hay. We can manage. Steve isn't quite as bad as Dorthy thinks. They don't get along together at all, and you can't expect her to see his virtues——"

"His what, mom?"

"There, now, Dorthy, we won't argue about it. He's your own father's boy, and as such he's got a home here as long as he wants it. Your father would do as much for mine, if I had a son and left him behind. I do draw the line at giving up the place to him entirely. Your father would rise up in his grave if I should think of such a thing as giving up our home that we made together and lived on all these years. But we won't aggravate Steve any more than we can help, and I'm sure he's welcome whenever he rides in. It's his home as well as ours. We mustn't overlook that, Dorthy."

Dorothy did not reply to that, and a little silence ensued, which Mrs. Harris finally broke with innocently unwelcome questions concerning Cole's family and home—questions which he parried as well as he could, though he did talk a little of his mother because that subject seemed to bring him closer to the sweet woman who was so like her.

After supper Cole borrowed a saddle—it had belonged to Dorothy's father, Mrs. Harris told him with pathetic earnestness—and dragged dead wood up from

the thicket along the creek. The much-prized bathhouse, he discovered, was a patched affair of board ends and canvas, which looked as if it might be the frazzled remnant of the original tent in which Mrs. Harris had spent her honeymoon. Water from the spring was piped to what seemed suspiciously to resemble a six-foot galvanized iron watering trough, with an outlet hole in one corner, now plugged with a whittled block of wood. The place smelled of smoke, and the piece of canvas laid down for a rug was littered with ashes that had blown out from under the tub since the last firing.

COLE shook the canvas strip and spread it smoothly upon the dirt floor, laid the wood ready for a match blaze, and went out, futilely wishing that this sweet-faced mother might have the deserted bathroom at the C Bar L. As to Dorothy, he considered that this crude makeshift was good enough for her. Serves her right, was his silent comment on the primitive arrangement, as far as it concerned her.

"I'll come over in the morning and bring the saddle back, Mrs. Harris. And thank you for the supper," Cole said, looking down at her, as she stood by the corral gate, her face shining palely in the dusk.

He did not say good night to Dorothy, who was walking away to the house, as if the closing of the corral gate after his horses finished whatever business she had with him, and she had no further interest in his existence.

Nevertheless, the girl stopped inside the yard fence and watched him go, Johnny setting the pace at a swift gallop, Mick and Hawk and Mutt loping along behind him, and The Wop trailing disgustedly after the party, his shaggy paunch swaying, as he walked.

"He's a real nice boy, Dorthy," said Mrs. Harris, coming up to where the girl stood staring into the dusk. "Why in the world you wanted to make him walk all the way over here, beats me! But I'm real glad he came. It done him good to have a regular meal of victuals. He misses his mother, I guess."

"His horses have all got blotched brands," Dorothy pointed out with pitiless meaning. "And you notice he didn't tell you where he's from. I wouldn't put myself out too much for him, mom, if I were you. He's on the dodge, I'll bet on that."

"I don't care if he is," her mother retorted spiritedly. "He's been real well brought up—you can see that. And he spoke so nice about his mother."

"For Heaven's sake, mom! Jesse James had a mother, I suppose—and the chances are he loved her, too. Did you notice his clothes, mommy! *He's* no forty-dollar-a-month man, wearing those simple expensive things. You want to look out, I tell you. I know more about him than you do. If I'd been a man he'd have killed me in cold blood! He's bad."

"I know better. No boy of his age with eyes like that and the upbringing he's had, can be so awful bad. He's no killer, if that's what you mean, nor a horse thief, either. He's as nice and well behaved a boy as I ever saw—nice inside, too. You can't fool me, Dorthy. I looked right down into his eyes and saw what's behind them. I know."

"And I," said Dorothy flippantly, as she moved toward the house, "looked right down into his six-shooter and heard the bullet go through my hat. And I also heard words come out of that sweet boyish mouth that would shock you to death. You're so good yourself, mom, anybody can fool you." She threw her arm around her mother's shoulders, and the two walked slowly up the path together.

"He's got Looey's cabin neat as wax," she added irrelevantly, "and his bed was made as smooth as a woman could do it, with the blankets all tucked in at the edges and the pillow plumped up—a white pillow slip, mom—and *clean*. And he's got a guitar and some books. 'The Lays of Ancient Rome' was open on the bed, where he'd been reading it, and he had a Bible and 'Two Years Before the Mast' and 'Robinson Crusoe' and 'Little Men' and 'Ivanhoe.' And he's got blotched brands, and he's ready to shoot on sight."

"It all goes to prove that he comes from a good home," Mrs. Harris con-

tended. "He's a nice boy, and I always will say so."

"It all goes to prove," said Dorothy, "that you can't most always tell. Bullets and blotched brands—they speak louder than books. You can think what you please, mom, but I'm going to keep an eye on this new pet of yours. I wouldn't trust him out of my sight."

All of which proves that Cole was nearly right—that you never can count on women, because they make their own laws.

CHAPTER XI.

COLE CLOSES THE GATE.

MOM'S new pet spent a restless night, but he was up at the first hint of dawn. With his breakfast behind him and his horse saddled, Cole was ready to fill a sack with grass gleaned down along the creek, where it flowed out across the flat. He worked fast, pulling up everything that looked eatable for a horse, and so he had the sack stuffed full and was galloping back to the corral before the upper rind of the sun had crept up into the warm blush of clouds over the hills to the east. He carried water and filled the zinc tub splashily, and he carried his more treasured belongings in the leather bag and hid them among the rocks above the spring, just in case some one else came meddling around the place while he was gone.

He was on his way to the Harris homestead before the sun had quite lost its deep-orange glow. He had to return that saddle, remember; furthermore, he was worried about those oats. Steve, he had long ago decided, was a skunk—worse than the girl, who was plain ornery. But, at least, she did treat her mother fairly well and seemed willing to do what she could to hold things together.

"A woman like Mrs. Harris has got no business working in a hayfield," Cole told himself more than once to justify his interest in the work. "She'd have it to do, too. That darned girl couldn't fix a mower if she tried."

Riding as if fiends were after him, Cole covered the nine miles before the freshness was gone from the morning breeze. Mutt, galloping his best, with the glare of determination in his eyes and his tongue hanging dry over his grininng teeth, was all of a mile behind when Cole swung off the sweating Johnny at the corral gate and began uncinching the borrowed saddle on Mick.

As he carried it to its place on a peg at the far end of the stable, he saw that the work team was harnessed. Either Steve was back and ready to start work with the mower, or Dorothy was now hopeful of making repairs. Cole stopped outside the stable and looked around, trying to discover some clew to the motive behind that stabled team eating grain for their breakfast. Nothing was changed; no new saddle hung anywhere in sight to show that the stepson had arrived. Cole guessed it was hope, and he went over to the mower that stood, with up-ended tongue, beside the blacksmith shop.

It must be admitted that Cole's knowledge of farm machinery was sketchy and gleaned mostly from watching the ranch hands at work; but boys have a knack for picking up information even at play. Cole had spent a good deal of time around the blacksmith shop at home, and he knew pretty well what he wanted now; and that was a sickle bar with all its teeth sharpened ready to bite into the oat field. He did not really expect to find one, but he started in hunting as if he did; and such was his luck that, in the blacksmith shop, standing in a corner behind the bench, he found an old sickle. Some of the teeth were gone, however, and what remained were dull and rusty. It did not look very promising, but it was the best in sight, and he laid it out on the workbench and went rummaging among the clutter of bolts, old clevises, nuts, and all the odds and ends that any ranch may be expected to accumulate in twenty years of pinching economy. When he found a box with a dozen new sickle teeth and rivets, he was as pleased as a boy over a nest of young mice—so pleased that he began to whistle, as he laid them out on the bench and undertook the task of fitting them into place on the bar.

"Well! I thought mom told you she didn't want any hired man!" Dorothy,

attracted by the whistling, was standing in the doorway.

"She hasn't got any hired man," Cole declared, interrupting his whistling long enough to retort, and then he went on with his work.

DOROTHY looked at him, glanced back at the mower, looked again at Cole, and walked away to the house.

"Mom, your new friend is here and has staked himself to the job of toggling up a sickle bar to mow the oats," she announced without preface. "That being the case, I may as well take the butter over to Miller's ranch—that is, if you're going to be chicken-hearted and let him go to work when he knows we can't afford him."

"Why, he's just doing it as a favor, Dorthy! It's real kind of him. I wonder if he's had breakfast. Did you ask him?"

"Mom, do you realize what will happen if Steve comes and catches that fellow here?"

A sparkle came into the kindly eyes that sometimes looked a bit faded. Now they darkened until they were almost the color of Dorothy's, and hers were a deep, greenish-hazel color.

"What will happen will be that Steve will behave himself and mind his own business," her mother said tartly. "If this young man is a mind to help get the hay up, that lays between him and me, and it's *nobody's* business. I'm running this ranch yet—at least, I think I am!"

"All right, but you better keep the shot gun handy to enforce your authority when Steve comes home," Dorothy grimly advised her.

"I thought you said Steve intends to spoil the hay crop," her mother reminded her shrewdly. "He ain't likely to come boiling back in time to do the work, if that's the game. You go right on and take the butter over, and I'll attend to Steve's case, Dorthy."

Dorothy looked as if she had some doubt of that, but she saddled her horse and presently rode away with ten pounds of butter nicely packed in white cloths wrung out of cold, spring water, the whole tied in a sack behind the cantle. And Cole, watching her departure from under his hat brim, heaved a sigh of relief and went off to the house for more explicit information regarding the oat field he had undertaken to harvest.

Mutt arrived and drank wearily from the spring creek, where a flock of tame ducks waddled and quacked, and afterward he flopped down in the shade, where he could keep an eye on his master while he rested. There were no yelps or prancing left in Mutt this morning. He did not even get up to bark at the team and mower when Cole drove past him, but cocked one eyebrow in sardonic questioning and let them go. Cole, he observed in offended silence, did not even seem to know or care that he had come.

For the first time since the tragedy that had sent him drifting out into a world he distrusted, Cole Lawson was close to contentment. With his hat on the back of his head and his fine riding boots braced against the iron foot rest, he drove a rattly old mower round and round that five-acre field of oats and forgot the past from which he had fled. If the swaths he cut were scallopy at first and left thin strips of grain stalks standing, that was a blemish soon erased from his driving. Somehow, he knew that the song of the old sickle made pleasant music for the sweet little old lady who hummed old-fashioned tunes, as she worked in the house. Somehow he felt that here was effort worth while—work he would never regret doing.

In midforenoon, when the mown grain lay drying in the sun and sending up a fragrance of harvest time, the little lady for whom he toiled came bringing him fresh buttermilk and gingerbread. Cole's grin was the kind the C Bar L had known.

"And I'm going to have fried chicken and doughnuts for dinner and custard pie for supper," she told him smilingly. "You're making a real good job of it, Cole, and you don't know how thankful I am."

Cole swallowed the last of the gingerbread and brushed crumbs off his smile.

"It's fun, mowing. Beats setting around camp doing nothing. I wish there was more of this stuff to cut. I'm get-

ting through too quick. That's all I don't like about it."

"That sickle's pretty dull," she remarked. "Better bring it in with you at noon, and we'll grind it. You know how, don't you?"

"Y-yes—or at least I can learn. I've watched 'em ground, anyway. But I never hung around dad's hay crew much. I was always out with the boys, riding." It slipped out unguardedly. He bit his lip, hoping she would not notice.

IF she did she gave no sign, and soon she went away and left him to his work. But now the sickle sang of long, hot afternoons at the C Bar L, when four mowers went steadily round and round the great Lawson meadows, one behind the other, making a strident chorus, while farther afield the patent stacker lifted great loads of timothy and clover high in air and tilted down upon the stack, where men with forks plunged at the fragrant mass, shaping it, working furiously to be ready for the next load. Wagons lumbering up, drawn by sleek giants of horses with arched necks and big, soft eyes. Trooping groups of "hay diggers" coming up to dinner; strangers, who drifted in to the ranch for work when haying began, toiled in the hayfields, straggled up to Cole Lawson's office at the house to get their pay, shouldered their strapped blanket rolls and caught a ride to town, drifting out again to no one knows where, until the next haying season.

He raised haunted eyes from the nodding grain that seemed to march up and trip suddenly upon the shuttling sickle knives to lie prone and wilting in the sun. Here was no great, level expanse of hay to be garnered in long, loaf-shaped stacks, food for hundreds of hungry mouths. Here was a small, uneven patch of half-ripened grain, hemmed in by sage-grown hills; on one side the field sloped down to the deep-green of alfalfa in the flat, where the creek could spread and water it. Twenty years in the growing, and the ranch no bigger now than the main-line camp of the C Bar L. A few horses, a few cattle, a few acres of uneven land, and two women to care for it and call it home! If his father, with hundreds of acres of hay and thousands of cattle, had failed and lost heart, so that he could not face life any longer, what chance had these two women?

Cole turned back when he reached the edge of the field and drove an erratic course over the morning's mowing, gleaning the thin strips of grain he had missed between the swaths. After that he was careful to drive straighter, to cut the last oat stalk that stood on the edge of the sown ground, anxious that not one grain should be wasted. As he thought of the long, cold winter that would come, he wondered how many head of stock must be fed, and he tried to estimate how many tons of hay the crop would yield. If it were only a matter of riding or roping or trail drives, he would better know how to judge. He wished now that he had paid more attention to the ranch work. He could have learned a lot from Nels Peters, the ranch foreman. Instead of that, he had looked upon Billy Parrish as the walking encyclopedia, and Billy Parrish had never tried to conceal his scorn for anything that required manual labor. Cole had not even known the names of the "hay diggers;" his interest in the work had consisted of riding down to watch the stacking crew now and then, or galloping somewhere to deliver a message to some one.

"I'll bet you've turned grindstone times enough," Mrs. Harris bantered him, when, after a most satisfying chicken dinner, she led him down toward the spring, where the grindstone stood spraddled in the shade of a great cottonwood.

"Why, no. I guess the men did that with their feet. Yes, I know now they did. I've watched them, but not often." Cole was too full fed and contented now to be on his guard.

"Your father had quite a large ranch, I s'pose."

"Why—pretty large, I guess."

"Oh, don't you remember?" She was looking at him now, but Cole busied himself with the sickle, avoiding her gaze.

"No. Too small. Kids forget."

Silence lay between them after that. Cole had lied to her, and she knew it and was hurt. At first he resented the

uneasy consciousness that he need not have lied; after a while he remembered he had told her that morning how he had spent most of his time out on the range, riding. She would remember that, of course. She knew he had lied—that he was covering up his past from her friendly interest.

He had an impulse to tell her what it was he was hiding, but the stubborn streak that had sent him away from his friends held his tongue in leash. No! He had started out to bury the past, and he would not dig it up now—not even for her. She would be just as kind if she knew, even kinder, perhaps. But he did not want to see in her eyes that she was thinking of it.

Somehow they got the sickle ground, and Cole watered the horses and went back to work, and all through the rest of the cutting the sickle told him he lied, he lied, he lied.

Oh, well, it didn't amount to anything, anyway. She was an awfully nice woman, but she didn't have to know all his past life. Old ladies had no business to be so inquisitive, he told himself over and over. What difference did it make, how big his father's ranch was? But in his heart he knew that the difference lay in the fact that he had lied, and that was all the difference in the world.

He did not stay for supper, but saddled Mick and went racing back to camp, Johnny and Hawk galloping like wild horses behind him, and Mutt straining every muscle to keep up. The reason he gave to himself for not staying for supper was because the girl was home, and he did not want to see her or have anything to do with her. But that was not the real reason, and he knew it just as well as Mrs. Harris knew why he would not stay.

The next day he did not go over there, but he watched the weather, afraid that it would rain on the hay. On the day after that he rode over, found Dorothy in the field raking, and after an undecided five minutes, while he sat on his horse and watched, unseen from the house because of the grove, he turned and rode back again. He was not needed, he said. But his spirits were heavy, and he did not play the guitar that day or romp with Mutt, who watched him solicitously with wise, sad eyes and his head cocked sidewise.

Once more Cole Lawson felt himself exiled from all he cared for in the world—an outcast who had himself closed the gate and could not go back. Once more he had no friends, save his horses and the dog. The hand of fate was raised against him.

A morbid mood, probably born of indigestion caused by eating too many warm doughnuts at a sitting—for Cole had managed to devour four that day of the mowing. But whatever caused the mood, it was just as real to Cole as if the Harris door had been slammed in his face.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FINAL HEAVE.

"IT'S going to storm, mommie, and we'll have to get that hay in, whether your friend, 'Billy, The Kid,' ever shows up again or not—or Steve, either. Never mind the dishes, mom, but get into some overalls and come drive the wagon for me. The churning will have to wait, too. I wouldn't trust this weather overnight." Dorothy in her bib overalls reached for her bullet-scarred hat while she spoke.

"I'm afraid Cole must be sick," her mother said worriedly, getting up from the table and reaching for the butter and cream which must be carried into the milk house whether anything else were done or not. "I can't think what else would have kept him from coming to finish the hay."

"Sick nothing! Had to beat it out of the country, most likely, with some sheriff on his trail. I do wish you wouldn't try to mother everybody that comes within a mile of you, mom. That's just what ails Steve; you've been so darned good to him, he thinks he owns you body and soul. You never get any thanks for spreading your wings over everything you see. You know half the time you're hovering over door knobs. Concentrate on your loving daughter, mom. I sure will need a lot of hovering, if I pitch all that hay onto the wagon before it storms."

"I don't know as there's a pair of overalls that I can get into, Dorthy." Mrs. Harris plainly was accustomed to being lectured for her kindness of heart; at any rate, she paid no attention to it now. "Steve wore that pair I bought for myself. They were hanging up in the stairway, and I guess he thought they belonged to him."

"As if he cared whom they belonged to! Well, scare up something to put on. I don't want to worry about you tangled up in skirts on a load of hay, mom. I'll go hitch up. And do leave the dishes alone—and get ready! The house'll wait, but the hay won't."

That final admonition had the desired effect. Mrs. Harris went to the door and looked out at the brassy sky, fringed on the western sky line with puffy white clouds, and she decided that the hay was more important than the breakfast dishes, that day. She was ready when Dorothy hooked the last tug and gathered up the lines.

"Good glory, mom! Don't stoop over quick, or you'll pop your seams!" was her respectful greeting when her mother came up and stood trying to decide which would be the easiest place to mount the hayrack. "Don't go in behind old Joe, mom! He tried to lam me in the stable, just now. He's on the peck about something or other. Here, put that box down behind the rack, and I'll pull you up. Glory, mom, but you're getting fat! You sure are!"

"Shut up and mind your own business!" snapped her mother. "I guess I've got a right to what few pounds I own. There won't nobody try to steal 'em off me, anyway! I could just about skin Steve for taking them overalls! He must look like the Old Harry in 'em. I got them overalls to fit *me*."

"Those overalls, mom! Glory, but you're getting careless. Fat and lazy! Shame on you, old lady!"

"Shut up and give me them lines, before I slap you!"

"Say, you can't bully me, mom—not in that outfit. You look exactly like a gingerbread man, mommie. Where did you pick 'em?"

"None of your business. Give me them lines. If I'm going to drive, I'm going to *drive*."

"Joe's got one of his mean spells, mom. Better let me drive till he settles down, anyway. You can't trust a pinto when he rolls his eyes like that."

"Teach your grandmother to skim milk! I drove horses—*pinto* horses, my lady—before you were born!" And mommie, roused to that pitch of defiance which only a woman can attain who knows that she looks ridiculous, seized the lines and gave her daughter an elbow jab which set that young lady violently down upon the cracked plank, which was built up over a rear wheel.

THE plank creaked, and the pitchfork bounced and rang its tines, as Mrs. Harris gathered up the slack in the lines and clucked to the team. Old Joe, the temperamental pinto with one "glass" eye and the tricky white eyelashes that went with it, reared straight up and gave a lunge forward. The driver gritted her teeth and thrust out her jaw to a fighting angle.

"You, Joe! Behave yourself, now!" She swung the rein ends smartly down upon Joe's rump. "You'll get a good dressing down if you aren't careful! Joe! You mind what I tell you, now!"

Joe minded so much that he ducked to one side and forward, smashing a corner of the hayrack into the post, as the team went tearing through the gate. Braced with her feet far apart and her eyes glittering, Mrs. Harris swung the lines again and sawed against the bits. Team and wagon went larruping up past the house, the wheels bouncing over rocks and hummocks in a way that set the pitchforks dancing on the rack.

"Ma! You're ripping!" screamed Dorothy, hanging on grimly with both hands.

"I don't care if I am! I'll take the starch out of this da-mned—old——"

Something shot by her, halting the unseasonable epithet at her clenched teeth. The pinto swung away, forcing old Bonny into a grassy ditch that tilted the wagon perilously. Then Cole's right hand had grasped Joe's bridle, and he pulled them back. The wagon lurched

back to level, Johnny galloping alongside the recalcitrant pinto horse. A remorseless drag at his head, a stiff-legged jump or two, and the team stopped.

"Good morning! Old Joe's feeling his oats to-day, I guess. We thought we'd get the hay hauled in before the weather changes. It looks like rain, don't you think, Cole?"

"Liable to storm, all right. I rode over to help. I'll be ready soon as I pull the saddle and shut these horses in the corral." Not for a thousand dollars would Cole have betrayed any doubt of her ability to handle old Joe. He turned and rode back toward the corral, and Mrs. Harris never suspected that he withdrew out of sight to watch her further progress toward the hayfield without embarrassment to her.

"Now, I call that manners!" she declared triumphantly to Dorothy, as she drove on, Joe contenting himself with little prancing steps and an occasional baring of teeth to old Bonny. "Wasn't that nice?"

"Good thing you didn't turn your back to him, mom. You better let me drive and load, now your pet outlaw is here to do the pitching. You'll have to cook dinner for him, I suppose. And, mom, you're all ripped up the back."

"I'm going to stay till he comes," her mother stubbornly decided. "I guess it won't be the first time he's seen torn overalls. I ain't going to trust you with this team while Joe's acting up. He'd run away with you and smash the wagon, like as not, and the hay would spoil while it was being fixed."

Dorothy laughed, and that settled it. The little old lady stuck to the job until dinner time, salving her pride though her vanity suffered.

But Cole saw only her courage and patience—her gameness, he called it to himself—and it never occurred to him that she made a ludicrous figure, as she drove the wagon from haycock to haycock, expertly giving him the advantage of what little wind there was and never stopping too close or too far away. Cole needed all the advantages she could give him; he had never pitched hay before in his life.

LOAD by load, the field was swept bare to the stubble. The breeze died to infrequent puffs of heated air, as if a furnace door was suddenly thrown open. On the ground, Cole lifted great forkfuls of crisp oat hay, poised the heavy mass, heaved it up on the load where the girl caught it deftly with a fork, pushed it back with a spreading motion and waited, leaning on the pitchfork handle, while Cole raked the scattered wisps together into a pile and thrust in the fork. The load complete, Cole handed up his fork to Mrs. Harris who knelt to reach the handle, then climbed up at the front of the rack—stepping behind Bonny to do so—and lay panting and fanning himself with his big sombrero, while she drove to the stack in the hay corral.

During these short trips Dorothy remained out of sight at the rear of the load, where she need not speak to Cole, nor he to her; tacit acknowledgment that the feud still flourished. When Mrs. Harris pulled in close alongside the stack, Dorothy would rise and throw her fork lancelike into the loose hay, following it with a sliding jump. Then Cole would pitch the hay off to her, it being supposed that this was harder work than stacking; but secretly he suspected that she was perhaps better qualified to shape a stack than he.

They lunched hastily off bread and milk and returned to the work, low mutterings in the west speeding their efforts to save the hay from a premature wetting. No one talked much, for the labor was too arduous, their muscles too little accustomed to the strain put upon them. Intervals of rest became shorter, for, along toward the last, the horses were urged into a straight-backed trot between field and hay corral.

The stack grew higher than the load of hay, and Mrs. Harris advised topping it off, even though some hay was left in the field. Dorothy did not think it was necessary, but the mother's judgment dominated after brief argument.

"You don't know weather like I do, Dorthy," she added to the decision, for good measure. "What hay is left over we can put in a pile and feed it out before it spoils; but I ain't going to have

the whole stack soaked, and it will be, if we fool around much longer."

Cole was glad. It seemed as though his back would snap in two if he had to pitch the hay an inch higher to meet Dorothy's poised and waiting fork, and to miss it, to fall short, would be an admission of failure he could not bear the thought of facing. No wonder patent stackers had been invented! He wished he had one now, and he felt a new and belated respect for the hay diggers he had passed by so casually at home. Nels Peters would have told him how awkwardly he pitched and would have shown him how much easier it could be done; but the women did not know he was doubling his labor, and Cole went on lifting and heaving, while the blisters broke on his palms and wore the flesh raw against his riding gloves, and the muttering grew louder and nearer and more ominous, as the thunder heads rolled up from the west.

Under the older woman's direction the stack drew in at the top, tapering to a peak from both sides. She had miscalculated, it seemed, both the amount of hay left in the field and the imminence of the storm, for the peak went higher and higher, until Dorothy had scant room to work, and Cole stood on his toes and jumped to send each forkful farther, and still the thunder held itself down to an aloof grumbling.

They were working to get the last load on the stack and put the weighted pole in place to hold it down. Cole was doing his weary best, savagely determined that the taunting look on Dorothy's face, when she glanced down at him, should have no reason to express itself in words. So far he had sent every forkful within her reach; she would have to admit that much, at least.

There was one more, and she was waiting for it, crouched on one knee, the sarcastic smile he hated on her lips. Cole raked the hay together on the floor of the rack, thrust his fork deep, braced himself and lifted, the cords standing out red on his neck with the exertion. He wondered if he could make it, and his back stiffened at the doubt. Higher and higher he elevated it, gathered all his strength for the final heave, and went up on his toes, just as a blast of wind caught the hay and twisted it, fork and all, from his grasp.

Cole had been caught off his balance, with his muscles straining for that final heaving motion. He went down with the hay. When he got up it was slowly, by painful degrees, with his head tilted sidewise, because it was excruciatingly painful to move it.

CHAPTER XIII.

A WOUNDED WOLF.

COLE could not remember how he came to be in the house, lying on a bed, with the pungent odor of liniment pervading the air. He heard the patter of rain against the window—the steady beat of a storm that has passed its first fury and was now calmly drenching the land. This was strange, because he had a clear recollection of the sudden gust of wind that caught the forkful of hay, and he recalled the twisting pain when he went down with his burden. But he also remembered getting up—or starting to get up. There seemed to be a distinct break in events from there on. It was like a dream which fails to preserve the continuity of events; he crawled to his knees on the hayrack—and found himself lying on a bed in the house, with rain and twilight and the smell of liniment all over the place.

He tried to get up and discovered that he could not move; a burning sensation in his shoulder and the excruciating pain of wrenched muscles brought beads of moisture to his forehead when he made the attempt. He was aware of some one in the room, and Mrs. Harris bent over him solicitously.

"Now, you lay right still," she commanded him. "It isn't anything but a wrenched back—or, maybe, it's up in the cords of your neck and shoulder. The same thing happened to Dorthy's father once, and it laid him up for a few days, so I knew right away what had happened to you. I'll fix a poultice of hops and vinegar, and that will take out the soreness right away. And after a while, when you feel a little more like being mauled around, I'll massage it for you. Maybe

I can hit the spot that's kinked, and straighten it out all right."

Cole bit his lip, ashamed of the mishap. He did not want her waiting on him, and he was sure that in a little while he could get up and saddle his horse and ride to camp. He couldn't leave Eagle shut up in the corral over there without water or feed; he'd go, if he had to crawl. Of course, women liked to fuss over a fellow —his mother had always been like that; but he was a man now, and he wasn't going to be babied.

For the present, however, he let her fuss, since she insisted upon it. She brought him toast and tea to begin with. then hops and vinegar in a poultice so hot she could scarcely hold it, and finally, when the poultice had subsided a bit, so that he could bear the heat of it without wanting to yell, she helped him turn over on his side and set to work massaging, in the hope of hitting the spot where lay the mischief. Cole gritted his teeth and endured it silently. Later he was advised to sleep if he could.

Perhaps he did sleep, though he had intended to make another attempt to get up and go home. At any rate, he roused himself after another hazy period of time and saw that the room was dark, and that the rain had subsided to an intermittent drip—a drip which lulled his senses to a drowsy quiescence bordering on dreams.

Now he was aware of a man's voice in the next room—the kitchen, he guessed it to be, since the smell of coffee seeped in through the space under the closed door, where lamplight glowed yellow on the floor. Steve had come home, then. There would be a row, he supposed, when Steve discovered a strange man in the house. Then, without wanting to listen, he heard Mrs. Harris speaking in a sharp, worried tone.

"I don't see how in the world Steve expects me to raise any fifty dollars for him. If he don't want it bad enough to come after it—— Anyway, I haven't got that much."

The other replied:

"As I said, Steve can't come himself, or he would. He's laid up in the hospital, and he sure needs the money bad, Mis' Harris. When a man's shot through and through——"

"Shot? You didn't tell me he was shot! What was it? Some drunken brawl or other, I suppose."

THERE was a slight rasping sound—the clearing of a man's throat. Cole's nerves tingled with recognition. This was Roper, beyond a doubt, here in the house of this sweet old lady—apparently on friendly terms with her, at that.

"No, no! Steve wasn't drinking at all, Mis' Harris. It happened on the trail—in the dark—the trail over to Catrock. Him and a couple of the boys was ridin' along, and they met a fellow that started in shootin' the minute he seen 'em. No provocation. He just shot on sight, b'fore they suspicioned what he was up to."

"For pity's sake! They must have known who he was. It must have been some old trouble Steve's been into."

"No, nothin' like that at all. Course, it was dark, and they couldn't see his face, but from the description it was a feller that has been hidin' out somewheres in the country. Wanted for somethin' on the outside and come up in here on the dodge. Saw 'im m'self, couple of days before he got Steve. Travelin' with four horses—four good-lookin' bays. Every one of 'em has got blotched brands. Stole 'em somewhere, of course.

"So, Steve bein' shot and in the hospital, he thought mebby you might strain a point and let 'im have a little money till he gits on his feet again. I let 'im have all I could spare, but, with cattle a drug on the market, and horses worth just nothin' at all, I got about all I can do to keep my head above water, m'self. *Ahem-m.* He thought he could git by with fifty dollars, mebby. Bein' flat on his back is purty tough this time of year. Shuts 'im outa gittin' a job on round-up, and Steve's been plannin' on a job to help you folks out."

"If he'd been helping us out at home here, where he's needed," spoke up Dorothy's clear, uncompromising voice, "he wouldn't have been shot."

"Now, now, there ain't no tellin'. With a feller like that loose in the country, a man ain't safe in his own yard. Steve

never brought it on 'imself, and I don't see how anybody can blame 'im."

"It don't sound logical to me," Mrs. Harris objected. "Steve must have done something."

"Not a thing more'n to be ridin' along the trail. A feller that's wanted for murder, say, ain't goin' to ask no questions. He thought it was a posse, most likely. Three men together like that made him think they was closin' in on 'im. Started right in shootin' first thing. The boys was goin' to take in after him, but Steve fell off his horse, and they had to look after him first, so the outlaw got away. You folks want to be on the lookout and don't take no chances. Now, about that money. Steve sure needs help right now, and he needs it bad. Hospitals cost money, and the boys 'ave chipped in all they can stand right now."

"I've got to buy hay to winter on," Mrs. Harris worriedly explained. "We couldn't get in enough last spring to see us through, and Steve hasn't been any help at all. I'm sorry he's hurt, and I'd be glad to do anything I could. But if you can't, you can't, and that's all there is to it. I've got to go in debt for hay to feed my milch cows through till grass grows in the spring. I depend on my cows for a living, while stock is so low. You tell Steve I've let him have all the money I can, and from now on he'll have to look after himself. I'm sorry, but Dorthy and I have got pretty hard scratching for ourselves."

Apparently that was the final word, though Cole's turbulent thoughts effectually closed his ears to comprehension of what followed. He wanted to go out there and tell Roper to his face what he thought of him—to denounce the man to these women, who spoke to him as to a friend, even though his plea for Steve must prove a failure. Certainly they did not question the truth of Roper's statements. They accepted the fact of Steve's injury and the circumstances under which he had received it, even though they could not fail to recognize Roper's description of the man who did it. But he was physically unable to defend himself from Roper, and common sense bade him hold his tongue for the present. He had no proof to bring forward to substantiate his accusations; whereas Roper could point to Cole's horses and say that here was evidence that he told the truth.

WELL, the brands were blotched. Cole could not deny that fact, even if he would. They were his horses, and he had a right to blotch their brands if he wanted to, though now he was forced to admit to himself that it was an unusual thing to do, and that his right might be questioned. But, above the spirit of self-justification which rose up in his defense, cold rage against this Judas of the range flowed strong and with a driving urge toward action of some sort. He did not know what kind of action; all he knew was that he couldn't and wouldn't let Roper get away with the lie.

For the time being, at least, mind dominated matter, and Cole rose up from the bed and stood in the dark of the room, trying to decide what would be the better course—to walk in there and call Roper the liar and thief he was, or wait for him outside. At first his impulse was to walk into the kitchen and have the thing over with, but then he thought of the two women and the scene which must follow his appearance. It would be too theatrical—also, it might lead to a fight before they were through with each other, and he was in no condition for a fight just now.

He reached up a hand and felt of his neck, which still had a kink in it that prevented the straightening of his head. The breath-taking pain between his shoulders had subsided to a soreness, however, and he felt that he could walk well enough if he were careful not to bend or thrust his arms forward suddenly. No, he certainly was in no condition for a fight, but he could not stay cooped in that room doing nothing. He would get outside and wait for Roper. He did not know what he would do then, but he made sure of his gun, which he had tucked inside his waistband that morning when he prepared to pitch hay. At any rate, it was his left shoulder that was sprained, and the left side of his neck that was drawn and stiff.

All this he thought, while he was feel-

ing his way carefully along the foot of the bed toward the window. He remembered a door in that corner of the room, and now he wondered if it had squeaky hinges. He hoped not, and in another minute he had put his hope to the test and had it fulfilled. Of course the women would not tolerate a squeaky hinge, he reflected, as he turned the knob slowly and pulled the door open.

Outside, the night air was fresh and cool, with a breeze that rustled the damp leaves of the cottonwoods and flung cold drops of water into his face. They fell gratefully on his hot skin and the refreshing shock of their impact helped to clear his mind of fevered impulses toward unconsidered action. He made his way slowly down the path to the milk house, since he had emerged from the side of the house, and the path led that way. He thought he would wait there until Roper came out. Then he would confront him and make him admit he lied—force him to go back to tell Mrs. Harris so. He might better have walked out into the kitchen, if that were his intention.

No, he did not know what he meant to do, nor what he *could* do. Cole was not the stuff of which killers are made, and he had no thought of shooting Roper, as some men might have done.

As it happened, the restrictions of his sprained shoulder saved him from headlong action that would have been foolish in the extreme. The kitchen door opened, and John Roper stepped out to stand on the doorstep for a last word or two with Mrs. Harris framed in the yellow light which shone from the room behind her. The light shone full on Roper's face, showing the long upper lip and the humorous pucker of his lips. And, while her face was in the shadow, Cole got the impression of worry beyond anything he had seen her yield to before; perhaps it was her voice that held it.

"Well, you tell Steve I'm sorry, but I can't do a thing. I haven't got that much money to my name, right now. The county will take care of him till he's out of the hospital, I suppose. I don't know of any other way. I hate to think it's come to that, but there isn't anything I can do." Her hand was on the door, slowly pushing it shut, as if she were anxious to terminate an unpleasant conversation.

"Well, I'll tell him what you said, Mis' Harris. He'll be more worried about you than about himself, I guess. Well, good evening." Roper stepped down and walked away.

THE door closed with a definite bang, as Roper went past the milk house, clearing his throat with that slight rasping sound which Cole had come to know so well.

Cole stepped forward, his mouth open to call Roper's name, but the careless movement of his body brought instant and painful reminder of his hurt. A man with a stiff neck tilted sidewise, like a meditative crow, cannot take issue with his enemy without giving all the odds to his foe, as Cole was forced to realize while he waited for the pain to subside. When he was finally able to go on, walking slowly to lessen the jar that went stabbing along his nerves, Roper was mounting his horse. Cole reached the gate just in time to see him ride off, a blurred figure that presently merged with the shadows behind the stable. Suffering, almost desperate, he could only watch in silence, hiding there because of his hurt.

Even a man with long years of experience behind him would have found the situation intolerable; to Cole it was unthinkable that Roper should ride away and leave those lies behind him to rankle in the minds of the women; to go back and accept the further shelter and kindness of those who thought him a thief and a murderer was even worse, and Cole set his teeth and started for the corral. In spite of the pain, he meant to ride back to camp that night. He would not explain nor argue nor apologize. He would let them think what they pleased about him. The world was big, and there was a lot of it he had yet to see; too much to make it necessary for him to stay here where they had listened to Roper and had spoken no word in his defense.

That to speak in his favor would have

been an acknowledgment of the fact that he had been there at the ranch, and would, perhaps, furnish a clew to Roper, did not occur to Cole in his frenzy of outraged pride at the slander. He did not feel the need of protection from Roper, except that he had not thought it wise to challenge the man openly, while he himself was helpless to wreak the vengeance Roper deserved. And the fact that he had shot Steve Harris that night did not weigh very heavily upon his conscience, though he now saw that the three men had probably known nothing whatever of Roper's sinister purpose. They had tried to stop him, and he had been one against three. As he saw it then, his mistake had been natural and justifiable. He was sorry he had shot Steve, but he did not see how any reasonable person could blame him.

Like a wounded wolf, he wanted now to crawl off to his own camp and lie there until he was able to hold his own against Roper and his gang. Eagle, too, must be watered and fed; he could not be left shut up in that small corral. He would manage somehow to get to camp, and folks had better leave him alone until he was on his feet again. Then he would fight it out with them. If they were bound to give him the name of an outlaw, maybe he would take the game, too. He surely wouldn't back down from anybody, from now on.

He was fumbling with the gate, trying to lift it free of the ground and swing it open, when quick, determined footsteps came down the path from the house.

CHAPTER XIV.

DOUBTING DOROTHY.

"HERE! I thought you were laid out and couldn't walk!" Dorothy exclaimed petulantly, as she came up and, reaching past him, calmly pushed the gate shut again and fastened it. "Mom is boss of this ranch, and she says you are not going anywhere to-night except to bed. What in the world ails you, anyway?"

"What do you suppose?" Cole was not breathing evenly because of the pain, and the words had a jerky, desperate sound. "You folks can believe all that devil tells you, if you like. He lied, and I could have proved it if you had come a little sooner. Your precious Steve was waiting down here for him to bring the money."

"You're crazy!" exclaimed Dorothy, which meant merely that she was much surprised.

"Oh, all right. Get away from that gate! I'm going to camp."

"You're going to bed. How are you going to throw a saddle on your horse?"

"I'll right bareback—walk—crawl or——"

Any one who has ever suffered from a sprained shoulder will understand why Cole broke off suddenly in his declaration of independence. He had forgotten his condition and made the wrong kind of movement, one awakened the devil of pain again. A groan slipped out between his clenched teeth before he could stop it. He stood with eyes tightly shut, waiting until the paroxysm passed, and so he did not realize that the girl had left him until he heard her coming back with her mother, the two talking together in hurried, disjointed sentences. And he had wanted to slip away quietly without any wordy explanations—any attempt to justify himself in their eyes. They would not have it so.

"For pity's sake, Cole, don't be silly! You can't ride, with that crick in your back, and you know it as well as I do. You couldn't get on your horse, let alone stand the jolting. You come right back to bed, young man. John's gone, and there won't anybody come looking for you—to-night, anyway. Why, I wouldn't think of letting you go back to camp to-night! I wouldn't treat a lame dog that way."

An unfortunate speech, which she realized too late. Cole turned—not quickly, nor easily, but with a stiff, mechanical movement of body and head together, like a wooden doll. His words poured forth in a torrent of resentment:

"That's why I won't stay here. You'd doctor me like a sick dog. You think I'm dodging the sheriff, just because that old horse thief told you so. You take his word for everything, without even waiting to find out whether it's true or not.

You think, because I marked out the brand on my horses, I must have stole them. You seem to think I'm going because I'm scared! If I was able to take the trail, I'd be after that horse thief and murderer of a John Roper and have it out with him."

"Why, Cole, John Roper ain't any horse thief; he's got a ranch over beyond Catrock. He's related by marriage——"

"I don't care who he's related to!" Cole hotly interrupted her. "He hired me to work for him and then schemed to kill me, so he could get my horses and outfit. If that don't make him out a horse thief and murderer, what does? He didn't get away with it, but that sure wasn't his fault. And then I heard him tell you——"

"There, now, never mind what he told me. You come right on back to the house where you belong." Mother Harris laid a hand on his arm, gently impelling him toward the gate of the yard.

"No, I can say all I've got to say right here. You may think he's an honest rancher, but I happen to know——"

"Listen!" Dorothy flung up a hand for silence.

Down in the pasture below the corral there sounded the trampling of hoofs, as of horses running in sudden alarm. The noise grew louder and nearer, receded, and for a moment ceased altogether. Then came a splashing in the creek and muffled thuds, as the horses struck the sand on the farther bank. Afterward there was silence.

"Stole your horses, I'll bet," Cole grimly declared.

"Pshaw! John Roper has been here plenty of times, and nothing was lost," Mrs. Harris tartly rebuked him. "Something scared 'em, I guess; a coyote, maybe. You come on up to the house, Cole. In the morning, if you're well enough to ride, you can go; but not tonight. I wouldn't think of letting you tackle it. Anyway, you don't want to go off without your hat and coat, I guess. They're in the kitchen, and nobody's going to pack 'em down here to you."

Reluctant, a bit sullen over her tacit acceptance of his guilt and the humiliation of being unable to disprove Roper's story, Cole walked slowly up the path with the two women. After all, she was right in one respect, at least—he was in no condition to attempt the nine-mile journey to camp that night.

"Now," Mrs. Harris began with gentle firmness, when she had helped him ease down into a chair in the kitchen, "let's get the straight of this thing and have it over with. Cole, did you shoot Steve?" She saw him hesitate and a shadow passed over her face. "We might just as well have a thorough understanding of how things are," she added gravely. "You needn't be afraid of us, Cole. Dorthy and I appreciate your kindness about the hay, and we'll do whatever we can to help you, short of breaking the law, ourselves. I wish you'd just tell me all about it."

BAFFLED and defiant, Cole looked up at her obliquely, because he could not move his head.

"What's the use? You take it for granted I'm all John Roper says I am. You think I'm hiding out from the law, so——"

"I don't care so much about that, Cole. But John described you and your horses, and he says you shot Steve over on the trail to Catrock. Did you do that?"

Cole stared down at the floor, hesitating over his reply. A guilty man might have looked as he did, and he felt it and added that detail to the sum total of his resentment against the situation Roper had placed him in.

"I don't know. I was coming out of the Sinks, getting away from Roper. I knew he was after me and had his men out looking for me, and when I thought I was about safe, three fellows came riding down the ridge, and they tried to stop me. I wasn't to be stopped, that's all. I fired a few shots, and so did they, but I didn't know I hit anybody till I heard Roper telling you about it. They shot my horse, Eagle, in the shoulder. That's why I had to lay up at that deserted camp—because Eagle couldn't travel. They got me in the wrist, too, but it didn't amount to much—just went through the edge and never hit a bone." Awkwardly, because of his restricted

movements, he turned back the cuff of his sleeve and showed her the new scar.

"So you think maybe you did shoot Steve." Mother Harris sat down in an old cane rocker and began to rock gently, watching Cole with the commiserating interest of one who learns of the wrongdoing of a friend and is sorry.

"Yes; but I thought he was one of the Roper gang and was trying to get me." In spite of himself, Cole found that he was making excuses and trying to explain, which he had firmly decided he would not do.

"John Roper hasn't any gang," she gently corrected him. "I can't understand your saying he's a horse thief and wanted to kill you. There's some mistake about that, Cole. John Roper's all right, far as I ever heard, and I've been in the country longer than he has. I don't believe you could get any one to agree with you, so I wouldn't tell that, if I were you, Cole."

"It's the truth, whether anybody believes it or not," Cole stubbornly replied. "Some day you'll find it out for yourself—maybe in the morning, from the sounds down in the pasture. If I could ride, I'd go see if your horses are all right. I *know* Roper's a horse thief. He was after my horses, but he lost out that time." He glanced sidelong at Dorothy. "She better saddle up and go see if the horses are all right," he added gruffly. "She can use my horse, Johnny—the one I ride most of the time. He's gentle."

"Does he think I can't ride anything but crow baits?" Dorothy demanded, ignoring Cole as pointedly as he had avoided speaking directly to her. "John Roper would know better than to run our horses off, even if he wanted to and was that kind of a man. I'm surely not going to blunder around in the dark on any wild-goose chase."

"If you knew Roper as well as I know him, you wouldn't take a chance," Cole retorted, looking toward Mrs. Harris. "It's none of my business, but I hate to see anybody swallow the smooth kind of talk that guy hands out. He's sure a Judas if there ever was one."

"He wouldn't steal from us, even if he was that kind of a man, as Dorthy says. Cole, I want to know the truth. Are you on the dodge for something you've done or are accused of doing? I ain't asking to be inquisitive; it's best to know the truth, so we'll be prepared in case somebody comes here looking for you."

"That ain't likely to happen," Cole replied. "Anyway, I won't be here. I don't stay where my word is doubted."

Mrs. Harris made a little clucking sound, as if she felt her helplessness before his evasions.

"I wish you'd tell me where you're from, and what made you leave home, Cole."

COLE could not shake his head, but he closed his mouth in silence. Tell why he left home, and have Dorothy's sharp tongue make a bitter mock of his trouble? Not if his life depended on it! He much preferred to let her believe him a dangerous outlaw; at least, she would fear to crowd his temper too far, he thought. She would know that he was not to be trifled with; the way he had sent that bullet through her hat would prove that he was a man who could and would make war on any one who showed himself an enemy; and, though she might hate him, she could not despise him, as she would be sure to do if she knew the sordid facts.

And, as if she had read a part of the thoughts shuttling through his mind, Dorothy straightway demonstrated how little she feared him.

"Of course he won't tell you why he left home. You shouldn't expect that, mom. I suppose he thinks we're afraid of him, with that murderous scowl on his face. But nobody cares how many notches he has on his gun, or whom he's planning to bump off next."

"Dorthy! Shame on you, deviling the boy when he's hurt and can't fight back!"

"Oh, I can fight back, any time I want to," Cole glowered. "I haven't so many notches on my gun but what there's room for one more, anyway."

"Meaning me?" Dorothy looked straight at him, and the imp of mischief was in her eyes. "I thought you said once you couldn't shoot a woman."

"A fellow can always change his mind,"

Cole retorted. "But it happens that I meant Roper."

"My conscience! I wish you two would stop wrangling! Cole, you better go to bed and let me rub your shoulder again with that liniment. You can't expect to do anything very bloodthirsty while you're going around with a kinked neck, so the sooner you get over it the quicker you can start in being bad."

Cole sent her a suspicious, sidelong glance. The ironical note in her voice seemed to imply that she did not, after all, consider him altogether inimical to the peace and well-being of his fellow men, but her eyes met his innocently enough. Then she laughed a little, and Cole's mouth relaxed to a sheepish grin.

"I'm not bloodthirsty, and I'm not bad when I'm left alone," he blurted impulsively, instantly disarmed by her silent acceptance of his sincerity. "I marked out the brands on my horses because I wanted to, but they're mine just the same. If I shot anybody, I sure didn't know it, but I wasn't going to let Roper get hold of me if I could help it, and I don't see what I could do but fight back. I don't back down an inch from Roper or anybody else, but, as you say, a fellow with a kinked neck hasn't any business to go on the warpath."

"Well, we'll let things stand that way," Mother Harris agreed, with a sigh of relief. "I can't hardly believe you're an outlaw!"

"With that dimple in his chin? Well, hardly!"

"Dorthy, you stop pestering him! No matter who you are, or what you've done or ain't done, Cole, you're going right straight to bed, and let me give that neck and shoulder another good rubbing with liniment."

And Cole, because she had a look and a way that reminded him of his mother, did as he was told.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TRUCE.

FOR days the kitchen and little side bedroom were odorous of liniment, and Cole Lawson of the tarnished reputation moved as if he were strapped to a board. His eyeballs were sore from rolling unnaturally, so that he could look up under his brows or obliquely to one side or the other, and his face wore a permanent scowl. Had he broken a leg or been shot through the middle, he could not have been more uncomfortable, and he would have felt that at least his injury was one to command respect; but a crick in the neck merely gave him the ludicrous appearance of a wise old crow perched somewhere, with a speculative eye upon a cornfield.

He tried to dismiss the ailment as a matter of no moment, but it would not be ignored; and, though he reeked of liniment and hops steeped in vinegar, the strained tendons remained obdurate, protesting against movement with agonizing, white-hot streaks of pain that gave him long moments of nausea. As for riding, that was simply out of the question.

"Never mind, Cole, it'll quit just as sudden as it started in," Mother Harris reiterated comfortingly; but she neglected to set any time for the miracle of recovery, and Cole was not cheered.

"We had a horse with a kinked neck, once," Dorothy volunteered for his information. "Glory! He was like a comic valentine! Don't you remember, mom? We turned him out to pasture, and he was that way all summer. He had to kneel down to eat grass, and, just as the kink began to ease up so he could move his head a little, he up and died of starvation or something. He was so skinny the coyotes wouldn't look at him. They thought he was a last year's carcass."

"Dorthy! What makes you act so? You know better than that. Old Jerry died of something else."

"Well, Billy, The Kid isn't likely to starve, at any rate—not unless he gets a crick in his elbow."

She called him that to his face now, and wordy wars waged fiercely over Mother Harris' head, in spite of her expostulations that were more than half amused.

"You don't want to take Dorthy at her word, Cole," she told him, after three days of mental and physical torment. "She just does it to tease, more'n anything else. You been worrying about

your sick horse over at Looey's camp, and she'd die, I expect, before she'd tell you she's been riding over there every day and packing hay to him. She says he's picking up real fast, too, on them oats, and to-day she's going to try and get him over here for a su'prise, when you're able to ride. But don't let on I told you, Cole. Just let her think you don't suspicion a thing about it. She'd be awful mad if she found out I'd put you next. Girls don't realize how a young fellow feels about his horses. Like a cat with a mouse, they don't mean nothing. But it hurts just the same."

Naturally, that helped Cole considerably in his feelings toward Dorothy, but his manner did not change, and her bullying continued without respite. Cole used to sit, with the hop poultices bound on the back of his neck and the vinegar trickling down his spine, and ponder over Dorothy's briery manner toward him. Not that it mattered in the least; but no girl had ever treated him like that, and he wondered why she held the grudge so inflexibly against him. Surely, he thought again and again, she had paid him off that first day for the mistake he had made in trying to shoot her. She knew he thought she was trying to steal his horses, and she must know he had every reason for thinking so.

Did she treat him so because she believed him an outlaw—because he had inadvertently wounded her stepbrother? Cole did not quite believe that. Dorothy had not shown any love for Steve, and she did not betray any great sympathy for him now. She had remarked to her mother, in Cole's hearing, that Steve had it coming to him; but whether she referred to the shooting or to the financial embarrassment, Cole did not know. And why, if she really felt a deep and lasting contempt for Cole as an outlaw, did she openly gibe at him and call him Billy, The Kid? Outlaws weren't bantered in that way. At least, Cole had never heard of one that was.

HE was sitting in the kitchen staring down at a knot in the floor, while Mother Harris varied her poultice treatment with a liniment massage, when the door opened, and a man walked in without ceremony. Cole could not lift his head, but he saw the fellow's runover boots and the big-roweled spurs, with worn straps, stamped with a horse's head. The rowels were clotted with blood and hair, and Cole's gorge rose at the telltale sign. No cow-puncher on the C Bar L would have lasted long on the pay roll after spurs in that condition were seen on his heels. They reminded Cole of a certain rider who had been given his time and a thrashing, for good measure, for showing spurs much less stained than these.

"Why—hello, Steve!" Mother Harris' fingers tightened unconsciously on Cole's neck in a way that brought a grunt of pain. She never noticed it. That, to Cole, meant more than tears.

"I—I thought you was sick in the hospital," she wavered, after a two-second silence. "John Roper——"

"Yeah, and a hell of a lot you cared whether I died or not! I could have rotted, for all of you. I was broke and sick, and you——"

"You got well mighty fast, seems to me," Mother Harris said pointedly, gathering her courage together. "There, I guess that'll do now, Cole. You better go back and lie down a while and let the liniment soak in before I put on another poultice."

Cole knew he was dismissed from what promised to be a family row. He went, because he was useless as a protector—granted she needed protection from her own stepson—and his presence could only mean embarrassment.

"Who the devil's that?" Steve demanded, before Cole had the bedroom door closed. "Cole, eh? Fellow that put a bullet through me, I'll bet! And you're harborin' him, eh? And you wouldn't send me a red cent when I needed it, you——"

"Now, Steve, look here! Don't you go callin' names, or I'll tell you a few things you won't like to hear. You sent word out here you wanted fifty dollars, and you had to have it, and I sent word back that I didn't have it. You know I didn't, and *you know why*. I didn't have it because you took every cent I had in the

house when you went off with the sickle bar."

"I never took what you got buried! You think I ain't wise to you——"

"What I've got buried!" Her voice rose with the bitterness welling up within her at the charge. "What I've got buried is a husband and a son, Steve Harris, that would kick you off this ranch for the way you've acted since your father died. What I've got buried! I wish to God I *could* call them back!"

"Yeah—you can ying-yang about the son that's dead, and let the one that's livin' lay and starve for all you care! You can harbor that damn skunk that shot me——"

"He couldn't have shot you very bad, Steve, the way you hit for home the minute you found out you wouldn't get any money out of me. John said you was flat on your back in the hospital and was going to have an operation. That was four days ago, and here you are, looking just as hearty and strong as if you'd never been sick. I don't believe you was so much as scratched! You just put up a pitiful story to try and get more money outa me."

"There! What do yuh call that, then?" Steve twitched his neckerchief loose and showed a purplish red scar on the fleshy side of his neck.

"H'm! Laid you out, did it? Maybe it did for a minute or two, but it never put you in the hospital overnight. You can't pull the wool over my eyes that way, Steve Harris. I knew there was a false ring to John Roper's talk, and I'm su'prised that he should come here and lie for you."

"He didn't lie. I need fifty dollars, and I'm goin' to have it, too."

"I'd like to know how you're going to get it, Steve, after robbing me of what I had saved up to buy hay for winter. You went off with over seventy-five dollars of my money. I ain't told Dorthy yet——"

"Well, why don't you? It was my money, same as this ranch is mine. I got the same right here that you have. You claim the hull works—the ranch and everything on it. I'm here to tell you I ain't goin' to stand for much more. I'm goin' to get mad some of these days, and then you'll see the fur fly!"

"Something else is goin' to fly before then, Steve Harris, and that's you. I never thought the day would come when I'd turn against one of Dorthy's father's flesh and blood, but, if he was standin' here in this kitchen right this minute, he'd say it for me and back up his words with a gun, if necessary. You leave this house and this ranch, Steve Harris, and don't come back!"

"Aw, to hell with you and the ranch!" Before her righteous wrath Steve quailed, and went out and slammed the door with savage violence.

SHE stood at the window and watched him, her eyes blurred with tears at the tragedy of having to drive from the house her beloved mate's own son, for whom he had planned and worked in the full hope that Steve would be a comfort in their old age. A comfort! She wiped her eyes and turned away to fix the poultice for Cole's neck, and she saw him standing in the doorway looking at her with big, somber eyes that at last had lost their veil of aloofness and distrust.

"Don't you worry about the money nor Steve, either," Cole said, as he shuffled over to lay a comforting arm across her shoulder. "I've got some you can use to buy hay with. I wanted to do it anyway, for the way you've doctored me and fussed over me. And I'll help you with the work, just as soon as this darn kink gets straightened out of my neck. Let Steve go and forget about him. We'll make out all right, and you needn't worry about the wages, either. I haven't got a soul in the world but myself and my horses to look after—and Mutt, if he sticks with me—and I'd be tickled to death to help you get ready for winter."

Mother Harris looked up at him, blinked and tried to smile. Then, all at once, she found herself crying, with her face against Cole's well shoulder, and Cole's hand patting her on the back.

They were standing so when Dorothy walked into the kitchen with her quirt dangling on her wrist and her big sombrero swinging by its rubber band. Dorothy stopped and stared.

"Well! Shoot the daughter and make love to the old lady!" she commented dryly, after her first gasp of astonishment. "Billy, The Kid, you sure do go some. What's the matter, mom? Is it Steve again? I saw him riding off as I came up."

"It's Steve—never no more," Cole answered her, because Mother Harris could not speak. "I'm adopted, and I'm going to call her 'mother' after this, and you better stop calling me Billy, The Kid. Mother wants me treated with all due respect and some little kindness, if possible."

"Oh, is that so!" A weak retort which proved a whirling brain.

"I've forbid Steve—the house," Mother Harris explained between sobs.

"Well, it's about time." Dorothy made brief comment.

"It was the last show—the way he talked to me. Your father would have turned in his grave to hear it. And Cole has offered to stay and help out with the——"

"I hope you never start in trying to trade horses for a living, mom," Dorothy observed with seeming irrelevance. "Well, I guess you fixed Steve aplenty. He went off talking to himself, and he wouldn't speak to me when I met him in the trail. Better hide Billy, The Kid's six-gun, mom, and hobble him to the table leg, mealtimes, so I'll dare stay on the same ranch with him."

Cole astonished himself by laughing aloud, and, after a surprised look at him, Dorothy laughed, also, with a little, impudent grimace to which Cole retaliated with one lowered eyelid. So a truce was silently declared over mom's shoulder that had borne the brunt of their bickerings, and Cole began to think that maybe the world was not so sordid and unfriendly a place, after all.

To be continued in the next issue of THE POPULAR, *on the news stands May 7th.*

THE WINDJAMMER HOLDS ITS OWN

IT is a generally accepted opinion that the days of the sailing merchant ship are past, but if you were to cruise the harbor waters of New York, you could not so readily subscribe to this glib judgment. Windjammers still carry more than a million tons of cargo a year. From a report recently made public by the department of commerce, it is evident that the windjammers still carry American merchandise to the four corners of the globe, and not only up and down the coast service.

In the Golden Day of the American merchant marine, which began to wane in the late '60s, the American flag was flown by more ships, it is true, than to-day. It is said some 18,273 vessels under our flag were then afloat. Only a little more than half this number of vessels, steamships and sailing ships, 9,636, fly the American flag to-day. But the steamships of our day are able to carry a great many more passengers and many more tons of freight than the sailing vessels ever could.

The windjammer, however, has persisted in spite of steam. Wind and sail are still the most economical means of transportation when speed is not a primary desideratum. Last year American ships transported 17,311,147 tons of cargo, and of this total tonnage the windjammers carried 1,091,453. This is a creditable showing for the sailing vessel in the face of modern conditions which usually demand speed. It is safe to say, perhaps, now that the windjammer has held on over into the period of steam and speed, that the days of the sailing vessel are far from numbered.

Special Delivery

By Roy Hinds

Author of "In One Corner," "Painted in Gold," Etc.

Cale Grenn and Ted Waring had been close friends; but when Cale took to drink, they drifted apart. Ted worked hard in the woods; Cale loafed and got into debt. When both men courted pretty Annie Sanford, an even wider breach separated them; and Cale's drunken jealousy begat tragedy.

BETWEEN the cultivated ridges of the Waring homestead and the Grenn homestead, lay a cedar swamp. There were no fences on either place; the property line ran through the gloomy swale, filled thickly with cedars. These trees constituted salable timber, but neither of the homesteaders intended to take much of it out until more of their ridge land was cleared and stumped. Each had taken up one hundred and sixty acres during the same month, four years previously, but Ted Waring had cleared more land than Cale Grenn.

It was October, late, and their crops were harvested. There were ways of making money on the homesteads in fall and winter. There were rock maples and beeches which went straight into the air for upward of sixty feet, and heavy cedars grew along the edges of the swamp, trees comparatively easy to get out and to sled to the Tittabaw River, which flowed past the west boundaries of the two places. As long as the river was open, a man could handle a raft of cedars, alone, and such an offering brought a good price at the Wellington mill, fourteen miles down the Tittabaw. On several occasions Ted Waring and Cale Grenn had tied their rafts of maples and beeches together and floated them fifty-two miles down the river to Sackinee, to the big mills. Both Waring and Grenn had worked in the woods when pine was being cut in the region, and they had worked on the big drives. They knew the business and both were big, strong men; between them they could handle a big raft—a small drive, in fact—and these trips brought handsome profits.

But each man had his own way of handling the profits. Ted Waring usually reached the homestead the second day after the logs were sold in Sackinee.

Cale Grenn remained in Sackinee sometimes a week. There were numerous unlawful drinking places there; also, a clique of gamblers who liked to see men like Cale Grenn come to town. Ted Waring, now about thirty-five, had had his fling at that sort of thing in his days as a lumberjack, but he had taken up his homestead with serious intentions. He meant to have a farm and a home. Cale Grenn often announced the same intentions, but he was somewhat slower in carrying them out. He, too, was about thirty-five, and he seemed to think he had plenty of time.

Neither man had married, but at Bradley's store, four miles down the river, there was talk in which the names of both Ted and Cale were linked with that of Annie Sanford, who lived on her father's farm over on the Chippewa. It was the opinion at Bradley's store that it was nip and tuck between Ted Waring and Cale Grenn. Annie had heightened interest in the affair by keeping her preference strictly to herself. In a region so sparsely settled and so woefully shy of marriageable women, the situation assumed extraordinary importance.

Cale Grenn studied the frosted panes of his windows, rubbed off a patch of hoar, and looked out, shivering. His iron stove was cold, despite the fact that the morning was far advanced. He looked across the bleak clearing, toward the river, and saw nothing to engage his attention. Then he scowled darkly at an empty whisky bottle and set about building a fire with trembling hands. He grumbled considerably, thinking thick-headedly of his troubles. The fire, starting off with a crackling roar, warmed his body, but did not dispel the chill of his spirit. The depression induced by alcoholic excesses, and bad alcohol, at that, was heightened by the grim knowledge that the pressure of his debts was approaching the insupportable stage.

Time and again he went back to the empty bottle, and once he tilted it to his lips, as though he hoped to inveigle a last lingering drop of the fiery liquor out of the liquorless flask. But no drop remained. His greedy thirst of the night before had precluded that possibility. He more than once cursed "Buck" Dryfoot, the overdue half-breed bootlegger who used the Tittabaw River as an avenue of trade. Buck, according to their previous arrangement, should have put in an appearance the evening before, and here it was morning, melancholy morning, and nothing to drink and no Buck Dryfoot in sight. Cale mumbled maledictions on the head of the Indian. As the warmth from the stove dispelled the frost, he peered out the front windows almost incessantly. That Buck would eventually come, there was small doubt. He would come not only for fresh trade, but also to collect a considerable amount due him from previous sales.

That is to say, he would come with the intention of collecting, but he would get nothing, except another notation of debt to jot down in his greasy little memorandum book. Cale had arrived home the previous noon, drunk and "broke," from Sackinee. He had promised Buck payment out of the money he meant to fetch with him, the proceeds from his last raft of maples in Sackinee. Maples were bringing big money just now; furniture factories were taking all the logs they could get. Cale had got a big sum of money for the raft, but the bootleggers and the gamblers of Sackinee had got theirs before Cale could get away.

YET Cale did not worry much about his indebtedness to Dryfoot. He would make his excuses to Buck and talk him out of another bottle. Buck would not refuse; at least, he had never refused under similar circumstances. Cale assured himself that he wanted only one more bottle; he simply had to get sober somehow, and the best way to accomplish that job, he guessed, was to stop drinking. Yet he hadn't the strength to quit at this identical moment. He deluded himself into the belief that it would be much easier after just one more bottle. He wouldn't make such a pig of himself with the next bottle. That was to be the last. He would stretch it out, drink it sparingly, taper off, as it were. Then he would be thoroughly sober, with a head clear enough to face the troubles

that confronted him. Those troubles he chose to brush aside at the moment. He did brush them aside, thinking almost altogether of Buck Dryfoot.

He had slept with most of his clothes on. He postponed breakfast, craving a drink first. He wandered back and forth between the shack and the river. The sun was bright, and the woods were filled with the fading browns and reds of leaves withering to a fall. It wasn't so very cold in the sun, but the water of the river looked icy and bleak. He studied the turn up the river and the turn down the river, but the stream was unbroken as yet by Buck Dryfoot's boat. He often looked, too, toward the shack of Ted Waring, but he understood the absence of smoke around Ted's stovepipe and the general air of lifelessness about the Waring place. Ted was down the river with a raft. But, unlike himself, Ted would put his profits in the bank in Sackinee. He would come back with an additional notation in his bank book, come back sober and with a zest for further labor. Buck Dryfoot did not number Ted Waring among his customers. The gamblers of Sackinee never got their fingers on Ted's money.

Cale's face was forbiddingly dark and scowling. Why was it that he couldn't seem to get going as Ted had done? He knew, yet he shunned the truth. It seemed that he was always falling in with roisterous companions in Sackinee. With every raft, he went down the river with the best intentions, only to succumb to the old lures. Well, he had to quit it—had to quit it all, after just one more bottle. He would straighten up and scrape together money to pay his debts—the debts that threatened to engulf him. He would work like a beaver to get his land in order. If he frittered away much more time, Ted Waring would be marrying Annie Sanford. But there was time yet, if he stopped drinking—after one more bottle, of course. He'd get thoroughly sober, all shaved, and cleaned up; then he'd call at the Sanford farm over on the Chippewa. Annie would not marry him unless he did.

Well, he still had his oaks—five oak trees, straight as a pike pole, every one of them, as clean a set of trees as there was to be found in all that region. The five of them, logged, were worth five hundred dollars in Sackinee. They were fine trees. Oak was fetching big money.

The year previously they were worth eighty dollars apiece. They were worth a hundred apiece now. Next year they would be worth at least ten dollars more apiece, but Cale Grenn did not see how he could wait, how he could spare them. Yes, he would have to log the oaks, raft them and float them down to Sackinee. He studied them.

Not only studied his own oaks, but took a look at Ted Waring's oaks, five trees in a clump, too, close to the river, easy to fell in such a way that they would tumble down to the river. Why, one man could cut the ten trees, trim and log them, dog them into a raft, and drive the whole lot to Sackinee. If he owned the ten trees—one thousand dollars, easy. Quick money, for the two clumps of oaks stood handiest of all to the river. The fall of the bank, if the trees were brought down just so, would carry them right down to the water, and, once in the water, they would be easy to handle. A job for one man.

BUT of those ten trees, Cale Grenn owned five. Five hundred dollars, a mere drop in the bucket. A thousand dollars was money worth thinking about. It would not pull Cale out of the hole, but at least it would substantially placate his creditors, get them into a frame of mind out of which would come leniency, further credit. Sober and industrious, with one thousand dollars in hand, he could pull out in time, get himself in shape to tie, if not beat, Ted Waring in a financial way, and offer as much in worldly inducements to Annie Sanford. Cale had a sneaking idea that Annie preferred him to Ted; but, of course, Annie wasn't a fool. Indeed, she was a remarkably bright young woman, and no girl in her right senses would marry a man who had let his homestead go to wrack and ruin, while he was off carousing.

Well, he had Ted's stock to feed, and he had better be about it. He could

hear Ted's cow bawling now. Ted had cared for Cale's stock and chickens, while Cale was down the river, and he expected the same of Cale. It was an arrangement long in force between the two. Ted, his raft in the river, had left a half hour after Cale got home.

Cale went over to the Waring place, fed and watered the cow, the horse and the chickens, took a befuddled look around, to see that everything was all right. Ted's dog was there, and Cale fed him with scraps of meat brought from his own place. Cale's head was heavy, and his thoughts were addled. If only he had a drink, if Buck Dryfoot——

A movement on the road below caught his eye—a road that ran past the far limit of the Waring place. It was a horse and buggy. The road was a spur off the main highway two miles away, and it led only to the two homesteads. Visitors coming down that road could be bound only for Cale's place or Ted's. The buggy stopped, near the corner formed by the road and the river. There was a gleam of a bright-colored cloak in the road, later on the hillside. Annie Sanford? Yes, sure enough, it was Annie Sanford.

Well, that was a new one—Annie Sanford calling on Ted Waring. Had she been bound for Cale's place, she would have driven around the corner of Ted's homestead and along the river road. There was some one in the buggy, a man —Annie's father. He waited there for the girl to perform whatever errand brought her.

Cale got under cover, expecting that Annie would come straight on to Ted's shack. He certainly did not want her to see him. He needed a shave—had needed one for two or three days, in fact —and he had the generally rumpled look of a man who had been drinking heavily, red faced, bleary-eyed. He hid behind Ted's stable, yet peered out, his heart thumping. Jealousy was filling him with rage, and the knowledge of his own disreputable appearance and his slim chances with pretty Annie Sanford was throwing him into the utmost gloom. Ted Waring had been making hay while Cale was off carousing. Cale had not imagined that Ted had progressed far enough with Annie to have her call at his place. They must be engaged—must, at least, have an understanding in which her father had a part, if the old man would consent to drive off the main road long enough to enable Annie to drop into Ted's place to say hello. Despair and jealousy filled Cale's heart, as he peered out with blazing eyes from behind the stable.

But Annie Sanford did not come to Ted's shack. Instead, she disappeared among the clump of oak trees near the bank of the river—Ted's oaks. She remained among them for only a few seconds, then reappeared, running down the hillside, toward the buggy.

"Looked up here," Cale growled. "Didn't see no smoke from the stovepipe, and knows he's away."

That idea did not soothe his jealousy nor abate his rage. He continued to watch until the buggy, bearing the girl and her father, disappeared in the direction of the main highway. Then he walked with leaden feet back to his own place. An hour or so later, the grinning face of Buck Dryfoot appeared above the sharp bank of the river.

CALE was in a savage frame of mind by that time, roaming about his place, striking at weeds and trees with a stick. But he advanced on the bootlegger, with a grin on his face—a grin of hope. Whisky was the balm he sought, and he sent Buck Dryfoot back down the bank to his boat.

"A quart," he commanded. "Double-quick time!"

Buck complied, grinning—always grinning in his sly, mousy way. He came back with the quart. Cale seized it and strode into his shack. In just a jiffy he had the cork out, and a tremendous drink went down his throat.

"That's the stuff," he said, with a long sigh of satisfaction; but his brow grew dark again. "I ain't got no money for you to-day, Buck," he added. He thoughtfully intruded his big form between the bootlegger and the bottle. He certainly would not stand for a seizure of the unpaid-for goods. "I'm broke."

Buck's grin performed an unusually sly variation.

"No got money?" the half-breed rejoined. "How you go then for to buy wedding present for your friend?"

Cale Grenn emitted a startled cry of rage, a growl, which he strangled in his throat.

"Wedding present?" he demanded, though he had a premonitory feeling of the import of Buck's words. "What d'you mean by that—you kettle-faced baboon?"

Buck backed up a step or two. Cale had the manner of a man who might be befuddled enough by drink to blame the Indian himself for the forthcoming nuptials which caused him such agony of spirit.

But the grin still wreathed itself on Buck's fleshy countenance. He rubbed his paunch nervously.

"Ted Waring," he pursued, "is going for to marry the big-eyed Sanford girl. A fella down by Bradley's store, he say that to me this morning."

Cale Grenn's brow broke into a perspiration.

"This morning?" he repeated stupidly, groping for the bottle and finding it. He took his drink and continued to glare at the bearer of bad tidings. "What d'you mean, coming here with your gossip?"

Cale hardly knew what he was saying. Buck Dryfoot was tolerant and inexpressibly sly, moving soft-footedly about the shack until Cale had absorbed still another drink.

"I just go for to happen along," Buck proceeded, "down there by Bradley's store, and it come up just so-so—like that. That fella he just mentioned it, like he wanted for me to be around for the wedding. Maybe so somebody will want to celebrate? Whisky—eh? Well, that fella he say maybe so I can do some business around the wedding."

Cale's addled head moved up and down, with slow understanding. A wedding in that backwoods country meant a celebration, always had, always would. The bootlegger was as necessary as the saloon had once been, if a wedding were to be celebrated properly.

"When is the wedding?" the homesteader finally inquired.

"Maybe so Thanksgiving—maybe so Christmas—I dunno. Some time soon, unless——"

He paused, averted his eyes from the penetrating scrutiny of Cale Grenn, and looked out the window toward Ted Waring's shack.

"Unless what?" Cale demanded thickly.

Buck grinned and shrugged his shoulders.

"Let's you and me go for to take a walk, eh?" he suggested.

CALE shoved the bottle into a pocket of his Mackinaw jacket. They went outdoors, wandered quietly over to the Waring place, and looked around without saying much. The neatness of Ted's place, as compared to his own, again impressed Cale Grenn. Everything was shipshape there—the home and property of a man who attended to business. The shack, inside and out, was tidy and well fortified against the weather. The stable was a real stable—snug. Ted's dog followed closely at Cale's heels, friendly, nosing around for a pat on the head, which he occasionally got. Yet the dog eyed the Indian askance and could not be coaxed up to him.

But Buck Dryfoot heeded the dog only incidentally. He was thinking of more important matters. Cale had to silence the dog with an admonishing command when Buck entered the shack.

"It's all right, Prince," he said. "He's with me."

Inside Ted's shack, Cale took another drink. They looked around.

"Nice place, eh?" Buck commented.

"Yeh. He's got things fixed all right."

"Maybe so you like um, eh?"

Cale stared at the half-breed—stared and swallowed dryly, feeling a constriction in the throat at the thoughts which filled his mind. His gaze wandered through the window at the front and across the clearing to Ted's oaks. Buck caught the look. They went outside, sizing up the big stretches of cleared land—soil ready for cultivation in the spring. The cleared acres of Ted's place dwarfed

Cale's into insignificance; everything by comparison swelled his jealousy of his neighbor, a jealousy swiftly growing to hate. The last straw was the thought that Ted would presently lead into this snug little home, as a wife, pretty Annie Sanford. Cale stared at the oaks among which, that very forenoon, he had seen Annie.

"Them oaks," Buck suggested; "maybe you like um, too, eh?"

Cale Grenn nodded, meditated, nodded again with firmer decision.

"Yeh," he admitted presently. "I could use 'em."

One of Buck Dryfoot's pudgy hands described a comprehensive gesture.

"And this place, eh?" he supplemented. "You like um, too, eh?"

Cale's brow wore a puzzled frown.

"What d'you mean?" he demanded of the grinning Indian.

"I fix it so you get um," Buck replied. "Oaks, farm, everything—maybe so Annie Sanford, too—if you like um."

Cale hauled forth the bottle and tilted it to his lips with shaking hands. Despite the crispness of the air, he again felt moisture on his brow. It was a terrible thing to put up to a man—an awful temptation. The drink seemed to steady him a little, as liquor does when one is too agitated to get drunk. It filled him with inflated strength and tore down what little moral resistance he had left; yet he did not at this moment appear intoxicated. His eyes sparkled with extraordinary brightness at the inducements suggested by the scheming half-breed.

"What 'a' you got on your mind, Buck?" he asked.

They were talking earnestly when they got back to Cale Grenn's shack across the cedar swale.

THREE days later Cale Grenn again crossed the swale on a visit to Ted Waring's place. Ted was at home now, eating his midday meal at the moment. He was a man fully as big as Cale Grenn, but in much better shape physically. His eyes were clear, and he had the rugged look of a man who worked hard, ate wholesomely and regularly, and slept the usual quota of hours, undisturbed by nerves torn with liquor. He sized Cale up and frowned.

"Cale," he said, "when are you going to get sober?"

So far as Ted Waring knew, they were friends. Ted had arrived home the previous evening. He found Cale under the influence of liquor, but could offer no complaint, as Cale had taken care of his stock in good shape. They had not mentioned Annie Sanford.

"Sober?" Cale repeated airily, at the moment about three sheets in the wind. "Oh, some day, maybe."

"Had your dinner?"

"Yeh."

Cale stroked Ted's dog. He sat unsteadily in the chair across Ted's table, watching the other eat.

"Listen here, Ted," he said after a while; "I'm gonna cut my oaks."

Ted nodded and buttered a slice of bread.

"Thought you'd be coming to that, Cale," he rejoined, "hitting the booze like you be. Longer you hold them oaks, more money they'll fetch."

"I know, but I need money now."

"Why don't you get to work—get out some more maples or cedars?"

"It's too long a job," Cale replied, "getting out five hundred dollars' worth of maples or cedars. I need money quick—five hundred dollars."

"Well, I guess the oaks'll fetch that much."

"That's what I say. I can cut and log them oaks in two days, and have the money for 'em inside a week. Five hundred dollars inside a week—not so bad, eh?"

"Not so bad, no; if you get drunk in Sackinee and blow in the five hundred dollars——"

"I ain't going to Sackinee," Cale told his neighbor. "I was fixing to ask you to sell 'em for me—take 'em to Sackinee and fetch me back the money. I'll pay you sumpin——"

Ted Waring tilted his chair backward, reached for his pipe, and smiled at Cale in a friendly way.

"Cale," he said, "you won't pay me a cent. I wouldn't take no pay. If you're trying to get straightened out, guess I can

do that much. Good idea, Cale, for you to keep away from Sackinee. Now, I'll be glad to float your oaks to Sackinee, sell 'em, and bank the money for you, and——"

"No; don't bank it. Fetch it back in cash. I'll take the cash down to Bradley's store, where I'm to meet some of the folks I owe, next Wednesday. And, listen here, Ted—don't say nothing in Sackinee about the oaks being mine. Understand?"

Ted nodded thoughtfully. He understood.

"'Fraid some of the other fellows you owe will demand it, eh?"

"That's it, Ted. Just sell the oaks and fetch me back the money. I'll appreciate it."

"Yeh, sure—I know you will; but, Cale, you ain't forgot I've got a raft of my own to get down, have you—maples?"

"No; I ain't forgot that, Ted. But what I was thinking, you aim to get started with your maples on Friday morning. That'll let you get clear at the mill Saturday noon, all paid off and ready to start back. All right. If it ain't asking too much, couldn't I meet you along the river some place, with my oaks, turn the raft over to you, and let you take it on down? That way, you'd get 'em to the mill Monday morning, and be back here Tuesday evening. That'd give me the cash to show up with at Bradley's store Wednesday."

Ted meditated. His head moved up and down slowly in assent.

"That could be done," he agreed, "if you don't get drunk and neglect my stock, and yourn, too, while I'm away. Way you got it schemed out, I'll be away from Friday morning till Tuesday night and——"

"I'll be sober to-morrow morning, Ted. I aim to begin on the oaks to-morrow morning. I only got a little booze left."

"All right. That's a bargain, then. Now you'll time it, eh, so you won't be away only from morning to night the day I met you with the raft down the river?"

"Only from morning to night. Say, Sunday noon I'll meet you."

"All right. Where?"

"I was thinking of Turkey Bend as handiest for you, since you'll be coming up from Sackinee on the river road."

"That suits me. It'll be handy—Turkey Bend. I'll look for you Sunday noon at Turkey Bend, with your raft."

"I'll be there, Ted."

IN one respect, at least, Cale Glenn kept his word. He did start to cut his oaks next morning, but he worked in a listless manner, as Ted could see from the ridge on which he was trimming maples into logs. But Ted was too busy with his own affairs to pay much attention to Cale. He meant to have his drive of maples in the water, rafted, by nightfall, so that he could start down the river early next morning. As he saw it, Cale had until Sunday noon to cut his oaks, raft them, and get them down to Turkey Bend. Plenty of time—loads of time—so it wasn't important that Cale work hard this day. Ted foresaw that Cale would be "doggy." A man could not set to work with a vim after a prolonged bout with whisky. He saw Cale resting often, but what he did not know was that Cale still had a plentiful supply of liquor, left with him by the conniving Buck Dryfoot. Neither did he know that Cale took a nip occasionally; that it was impossible for him to stop drinking in face of the things he had in mind.

The contrast between the operations of the two men was an open record of their manner of life and their hopes. Ted Waring knew what liquor was, for he had taken his share of it in his days as a lumberjack. He had roistered with the wildest of them; even now he had a slightly flattened nose which had come to him out of a rough-and-tumble encounter in a river saloon. But he had a body as straight and sturdy as the trees among which he labored. His face was good-humored; his eyes clear and full of the vigor of life. He was looking ahead, and the prospect he saw was rosy enough to keep a man straight, as he often told himself. He saw a face among the trees, in the sky, everywhere he looked—one face, and it was pretty, too. He knew the time was not far distant when that

face would assume reality on this very homestead; when Annie Sanford, from over on the Chippewa, would be there as his wife.

At least, he had every reason to believe it—that is to say, every reason except the girl's "Yes." All the indications pointed that way. He believed strongly, and he was sure that when he returned from his next trip down the river he would get the desired answer. He had received word since he returned the last time, and that message was sufficient to bolster up his hope to the topmost. He had sent a message in reply, asking a positive answer. This answer would be his when he got back from Sackinee.

A man does not always need the "Yes" of a woman to assure him that all is well. He comes to read signs, and the signs were favorable to Ted Waring. He meant to get over to the Sanford farm, on the Chippewa, just as quickly as possible—perhaps a week from the next Sunday. He needed money now, lots of it; for, after Annie Sanford said the word, he would want a speedy marriage. That meant to get over to the Sanford farm, and new furniture for the house. This expectation accounts for Ted Waring's industry in getting his raft in shape this day, as well as for the fact that his personal visits to the Sanford farm had become less frequent. He worked with the zeal of two men.

On the other homestead, Cale Grenn labored doggedly, resting often, short of breath. Yet his brain worked incessantly, nervously—the brain that had been soothed only by fitful sleep for many nights. Thoughts—thoughts—thoughts! Furtive glances toward the ridge on which Ted Waring worked—a drink out of a flask. By noon Cale Grenn had only one oak felled and partly trimmed, but he had succeeded in dropping it in such fashion that, with a peavey, he could easily roll the trimmed log down to the water.

CALE had not been off his place since Dryfoot departed. Neither had he had a visitor other than Ted Waring. He had received no confirmation of Buck's announcement that it was commonly known that Ted and Annie Sanford were engaged. Yet Cale believed what the half-breed had told him. Whatever qualms he might have had were silenced by the thoughts of the impending wedding. They strengthened the hatred he had developed for Ted Waring and kept him straight to his purpose.

Cale drank sparingly, or, at least, he drank as little as possible, that day, for he knew that he would have to hold further talk with Ted; perhaps that evening. Ted did come over to Cale's shack, and they talked over their little deal in greater detail. Ted seemed to be satisfied that Cale was getting "off the booze." He wasn't exactly sober, but his condition did show an improvement over the night before. When Ted left, it was with the understanding that they would meet at Turkey Bend Sunday noon. Ted was to start at daylight with his raft of maples, and each understood the meeting place and the time.

Next morning Cale Grenn took a look at the river and saw that the raft of maples had disappeared. Well, the coast was clear. Ted Waring had gone. Cale stood on his own ridge. His eyes wandered up from the river to the clump of oaks on Ted's homestead and gazed with greediness, reflected in their depths. He had slept late, and the morning was very cold. He looked up and down the river again. Buck Dryfoot should be showing up almost any minute now, and one never knew from which direction he would come, plying his liquor traffic from his boat. The tightening up of the weather was a good omen. All the less likelihood of stray visitors in the bitter cold.

Yet, as Cale's eyes wandered again to Ted Waring's oaks, he realized with amazement that a visitor was on hand—amazement, then a blaze of renewed rage. For the form in motion among the oaks was none other than Annie Sanford, betrothed, as Cale believed, to Ted Waring, and back to his place for another call. Jealousy of Ted and his love for Annie struck Cale at that moment with redoubled force and clinched his purpose. Absolutely there was no turning back now.

From the spot at which he now lurked, Cale could not see the road below the hillside, on the other edge of the Waring homestead; but he had no doubt that the Sanford horse and buggy were down there, waiting as before, with old man Sanford holding the reins. It was a little early in the morning, Cale thought, for such a visit, but Sanford often took his daughter with him on business trips throughout the region. It seemed that Annie had formed the habit of dropping in on Ted Waring every time they found themselves in that vicinity. Cale never doubted that they were engaged to wed, perhaps had already set the date, though Ted had not mentioned it to him. Ted —well, he might find it embarrrassing to mention such a thing to a man whom he knew had courted Annie. Cale ground his teeth, then grinned a horrible grin. He watched the girl as closely as he could from that distance.

She would never know. She would be grief-stricken and horrified no doubt, but would presently find comfort in the arms of Cale Grenn—a new Cale Grenn—a Cale who had straightened up, as Ted Waring had straightened up. His purpose seemed justified to Cale at that moment, for he had been at his bottle again. Life to him just then seemed to be wrapped up in the girl among the oaks. With her and Ted's homestead in his possession—well, it would be easy to stay sober then—sober and industrious. Without Annie Sanford—— He could not endure the thought.

"I'll have her!" he muttered and stood there, clasping and unclasping his big hands. "Have her—everything!"

She had vanished, without making a single move to approach Ted's shack, which stood on a rise of ground a considerable distance back of the oaks. It seemed that Annie, noticing the absence of smoke from Ted's stovepipe, had again decided that he was not at home, and had returned to the buggy without climbing all the way up the hill. They probably had a secret sign by which Annie would know, getting as far as the oaks, whether Ted was at home or not—something hung in a window.

At any rate, she had been there, and that was enough to clinch Cale Grenn's compact with the half-breed bootlegger. Jealousy is a painter which presents innumerable pictures to the eyes of a tortured man, and Cale Grenn suffered miserably. He went back to his shack, with his head down. But his head came up quickly and his lips drew into a grim line.

He hastened to the labors of the day, this time among the oaks on Ted Waring's place. His own oaks he left as they were, two felled and trimmed, near the water's edge. Under the spur of his purpose, he worked at a furious pace, breathless at times, then sinking down to rest out of sheer exhaustion; but he never lost sight now of the end he had in mind. His thoughts no longer wandered to the possibility of his turning back. He meant to go through with it now.

Buck Dryfoot, his fat, grinning face peeping out of a woolen frame formed by his cap and muffler, found Cale Grenn working like a man possessed.

"Hi! Hi, there, Buck!" Cale cried when he espied the half-breed. "We've got him. He swallowed the whole thing —hook, line and sinker—and down the river he's gone!"

Buck chortled with delight. The Indian blood in his veins kept him from making any great outward display of his exuberance, merely a series of throaty clucks and gurgles; his white blood convinced him of the necessity of grinning, if he were to hold his confederate straight to the line—grinning, as though the thing he contemplated were not so terrible after all. He produced a fresh bottle of moonshine and offered it to Cale.

ON Sunday night the moon came up, full and strong. Ted Waring, riding the raft of oaks which had been turned over to him at Turkey Bend by Cale Grenn, was very tired, and he was riverman enough and sufficiently acacquainted with that stream to be enabled to catch naps of considerable duration. Many a raft had he floated down the Tittabaw, and he knew that these heavy oaks, headed straight on and dogged tightly together, would follow the

channel with little variation. So, bundled up in heavy clothing, he slept for several minutes at a time, rousing himself for brief intervals, then falling asleep again.

He was glad to do this favor for Cale Grenn. In the past Cale had done innumerable favors for him. If it meant that Cale was to get five hundred dollars delivered to him on his homestead, far from the bootleggers and gamblers of Sackinee, and if Cale would apply the money on his debts, to keep his creditors from selling him out, the trouble was worth it to Ted Waring. He would have the satisfaction of having performed a neighborly deed for a man he liked ever since they were camp buddies in the lumber woods. And he had rigidly kept Cale's injunction not to say a word about the deal, to sell the logs as his own, in order to keep Cale's creditors from seizing the money before Cale could pay it out where it would do the most good. Ted Waring was not thoroughly aware of Buck Dryfoot's rum-selling business. Somehow, he felt that Cale, if he could be kept on his place, would be out of temptation. The river would soon freeze, and no one would be coming down with more rafts. Cale, given this lift, might straighten up and by spring be in a mood to keep sober permanently. Yes, it was good all around.

The logs, being dogged side by side, did not roll. The top sides of them were dry. Ted slept with his head pillowed on his arm, cap hauled down over his ears, mittens on his hands. His pike pole was speared into one of the oaks and stood upright like a mast.

He dreamed of Annie Sanford—dreamed asleep and awake. He smiled often to himself.

"Tuesday evening I'll be home," he said. "I ought to know by then—sure. Tuesday evening!"

Perhaps if he were home now he would have his answer. That thought made him nervous, impatient—gave him an impulse to go ashore and make for the homestead. But, no; he had a friendly favor to perform. Tuesday wasn't so far away, he kept telling himself; yet, when he thought of the answer due him from Annie Sanford, it seemed an eternity.

In one of his waking intervals, sitting up on the raft, studying the banks of the river and the floating logs, his gaze was attracted by something white gleaming in the moonlight, down toward the butt end of one of the oaks. For a long time he watched the white thing, mildly interested; then it occurred to him that it might be a paper he had dropped out of his pocket. He got up and moved toward it.

It was a piece of paper, folded, and so soggy with water that it clung to the log even in the light breeze. He picked it up, started with sudden interest, and bent down. Finally, he got down on his knees and conducted a close examination of the log.

The clean fiber of the oak shone where a section of the thick bark had been peeled off. Ted's heel might have peeled the bark off, if a piece of it had been loose at that point; but—but——

"Why—why," he found himself saying aloud, "it's——"

He studied the log very carefully, taking off his mittens, and treasuring that folded piece of paper in one trembling hand.

"It's—it's our post-office tree, Annie!" he said aloud, as though the girl stood at his side. "He's cut our post-office tree! Cale's cut——"

He sat down, shaking—shaking, because somehow he felt that in his hand he had his answer from Annie Sanford. Very carefully he unfolded the paper. Then he lit some matches and searched it. The water had done its work. Match after match he lit. Some of them burned out, some were puffed out by the wind. The words ran together. Finally he picked out a few of them, one of which he thought was "Yes."

But he could not be sure—not sure enough to be contented. Instead, he was thrown into great excitement. So nerve-racking was it, with a message in hand, he could not read, that he poled the raft to the bank of the river, tied it up, and struck out across country for the Chippewa, to get the answer from Annie Sanford herself. On that tramp of fourteen

miles he exhausted all his matches in several attempts to read the note, all without avail, but, face to face with Annie, just at daylight, it did not take her long—indeed, she did it with a look—to convince Ted Waring that her note had contained a three-letter word meaning, "I will."

YET Mrs. Ted Waring, née Sanford, was not taken wholly into the confidence of her husband. Cale Grenn's memory in those parts was spared that humility. Facing Cale—a sober Cale, who had just returned from down the river, where he had sent Buck Dryfoot on his way with a series of kicks designed to lend impetus to a man in the act of running off—Ted got the miserable truth.

"Yes," he said, "it's that booze, Cale. Nothing but that booze would make a man like you think of such a thing. Course you didn't think of it. Buck Dryfoot thought of it, and, you being drunk, it listened good. Now let me get this straight, Cale. Buck Dryfoot was to lay for me when I come back with the five hundred dollars—lay for me down below my place, before I could see you'd cut my oaks. He was to finish me, take the five hundred, and get away. I was supposed to sell them oaks like they was mine, only I didn't know they was mine. That would leave you your oaks, and nobody could say I thought I was selling yours. Me having no kin, and no will made out, my place would be put up for sale—place and everything on it. Buck Dryfoot was to bid it in. Later on you and him was to trade places. You'd get my place, and he'd get yours for a moonshine joint, him wanting a place to run some stills. He was to pull you out of debt, slow, so's no one would suspect you of having got hold of much money at one time. It was all leading up for you to get my place, and, I suppose——"

"Don't mention her name," Cale begged. "I'm fixing to go away now—clean out of the country. I could never live here, side by side, with you folks. Don't talk to me about staying, Ted. Only if you'd just keep it to yourself about——"

"I will, Cale."

"Thanks, Ted. The only excuse I can make—— No, I can't make no excuse. It just happened. But I did kinda come to, and I went down the river to keep Buck from carrying out his end of it. I didn't beat him up—just gave him a couple of swift kicks. I don't think he'll infest this country much more. He's scared and don't know how much I'll tell. Well, I'm going, too. I'm going to leave the whole thing and let the creditors whack up among themselves. It's all I can do. I can't hang on here. New country for me; some place. It makes me shiver, Ted, to think what would 'a' happened if—— I don't know if I could 'a' stopped Buck Dryfoot if you'd 'a' come his way. I might not 'a' seen him in time, if you'd come up the river on schedule."

"I didn't do nothing on schedule," Ted Waring rejoined, "after I got that note. Not being able to read it, I had to hunt up the lady that wrote it. That put me out of Buck Dryfoot's hands, Cale. Just in time."

"And I'm sure glad you got that note, Ted."

MR. PICKWICK'S CENTENNIAL

AN interesting British centennial will be celebrated in May of the current year. It was in May, 1827, that Mr. Pickwick began the voyage of exploration which has immortalized him. Mr. Pickwick is now generally reputed to be a distant member of that famous picaresque family to which belongs "Gil Blas." Mr. Pickwick, no doubt, would object to being classed with that great line of wandering rogues whose quest of knowledge and experience constitutes one of the brilliant chapters in Continental literature. His attitude toward life was strikingly different from that, say, of Gargantua, or Lazarillo de Tormes. But Mr. Pickwick's ancestry can be traced with little difficulty through Smollett, Fielding, and Defoe to France and Spain.

Piracies

By Elinor Mordaunt

That sensational tropical affair, in which an estimable merchant captain was held for ransom by a notorious pirate, could perhaps be traced to a subtler source than that bruited by colonial and home newspapers.

THE main room of the Laboean Roemamaken — Harbor Eating House—was crammed to suffocation, though the last meal of the day was practically over; the greater number of tables were occupied by men playing cards.

In the smaller room, leading out of the large room, a thick posse of Chinese gathered round a fan-tan table; while at another and smaller table a half-caste, with oblique eyes sliding down his long nose, twirled a small roulette wheel, set round with little horses, to the loud delight of a group of Dutch sailors; and a half Malay, half Portuguese, thrummed a guitar and sang a love song with the haunting refrain:

"Oh, to be happy,
To be happy,
To be happy.
Neither with thee nor without thee have I—
have I any peace——"

to an almost unbelievably gross main theme.

The sea—that pellucid, pale-gold sea of moonlit Makassar—was by now as smooth as glass, dotted with its thousand praus, its many islands. Filson, the English skipper, who had run across in the teeth of a gale from Timor, was worn by the storms hanging about that port of storms—Koepang. He still wore his long sea boots, sitting with his legs stretched out in front of him, so that the three other men with whom he played poker, a Dutch skipper and a couple of traders, whose mothers had undoubtedly drunk too much coffee, were forced to keep theirs tucked up under their chairs. Not that they complained. For, though no one could be more good-natured and jovial than Filson—a magnanimous winner, a laughing loser—other men were afraid of angering him. No one in his senses was prepared to court the indignity of

being lifted up by the seat of his pants and flung out of the door into the gutter—a Makassar gutter, at that!

The two half-castes drank little. But the voices of the Dutch and English skippers were continually raised:

"Djongos—djongos—satoe bier—satoe bier! Kom hier—mari sini! Damn your eyes! Bier—bier—bier!"

These demands were keeping the unfortunate Malays ceaselessly on the run.

Such a crowd! One would have imagined that any sort of space was out of the question, and it was a miracle to see how quickly the center of the large room was cleared—with men still crowding into it from the other—when Almira Silva appeared on the scenes. But Filson's great boots helped here. For this was what he had been waiting for—thinking of all the way up from Timor. And it was partly to fill in the time that he had played as he had done, lost more money than he could afford, drunk more beer than was good for him. Moreover, he had an inflated idea as to what it would cost to keep a wife—such a wife as Almira would be—so pretty, so smart.

The crowd packed closer and closer against the walls, as she danced, flying round, driving it outward, like a whirlpool, her full-skirted, black-silk frock swirling out like the fringed petals of a black poppy. Red shoes and white stockings; a foam of short, white-lace petticoats; red lips and coal-black hair, smooth as satin, round a tiny head; black eyes as bright as diamonds. The twang of the guitar and the frenzied rattle of the ancient piano were racing against her feet. Pomegranate blossom and the cream-white of Stephanotis—fire and snow—the black of the night and the brightness of the day, thought Filson, his mind flowing in similes as it had never done before.

During the first pause in the dance she chose to perch herself on his knee, while she sipped her *angor merah*—sweet sirup and soda. "To bring you luck," was what she said.

Never before had she distinguished any man in the Laboean Roemamaken with such marks of favor, and the others stared jealously. The touch of the soft arm about his neck stirred the English captain to madness.

He must have her—he must! He'd blow out his brains if any other fellow got her! To have her and keep her forever, like a jewel in a box. His own home fire next to his own heart.

His play grew wilder and wilder. At first Almira egged him on, excited as he was, delighting in risks, bidding Affan Ling—in that easy Malay which is the common tongue of the place—to be off.

"Apa kwee giela (are you mad?) To dare to touch me, you swine, you! *Pigi, pigi!"*—as though he were a dog, when he touched her shoulder and asked her to go on dancing. Asking, mind you—no ordering about it—though he paid her by the evening.

At last, however, even she grew scared. She tweaked at Filson's sleeve, put her hand under his chin, tried to turn his eyes to hers, away from the cards:

"Enough, enough! Stop it, you great stupid, you!"

WHEN she found it impossible to divert his mind that way—for, though he turned his head sidewise and kissed her lips, his eyes and mind still swung upon the cards—she started to dance again. She was pathetically certain this must draw him, for she had never yet met any man who could keep his attention upon anything else, while she chose to dance, like thistledown before the wind. But every dominating woman meets at last with that exception which dominates her. And Almira's heart was heavy—though full of sweetness and a queer sort of pride in her own failure—as she realized that the long-faced Englishman, bending over the table, with his long legs thrust out in front of him—perfectly indifferent to the fact that the legs of the others were forced up like frogs beneath them—did not so much as turn an eye in her direction.

Just as she reached the end of her dance, however, and stood swaying a little, with her hand upon her heart, feeling oddly lost and vague, Filson rose with a strange loud laugh, devoid of all merriment, and fanned out his remaining cards upon the table.

"Well, that's that!" he cried hoarsely. Then laughed again and stood swaying, as she had swayed—with a queer dazed look upon his sunburned face, as though some one had struck him a heavy blow upon the head.

And a blow it was, indeed, the realization that he had lost every penny he was worth, or ever stood to be worth—all the private part of the cargo of sandalwood and coffee that he had brought up from Timor with him, fruit of that hard voyage; every stick he had aboard the schooner, rifles and all; the schooner herself, his altogether best beloved, up to that first day when he had run across Almira in the Laboean Roemamaken. The one thing, indeed, still remaining to him—and what thread of sanity had led him to hold on to this?—being the right of taking one more voyage in her—a voyage lasting no more than three months at the most.

One of the half-castes had pulled back his chair, and turned it sidewise, so that he also could thrust out his feet. He leaned back in it, with his head sunk upon his chest, his shoulders above his ears, his hands deep in his empty pockets, his narrow face the color of moldy cheese. This half-caste, too, had lost.

But Filson, as he sat pressed up against the Dutch captain, whispering, penciling figures upon a dirty scrap of paper, threw a bright, challenging, sidelong glance, more than half a wink, toward Almira Silva; while the Dutchman, raising his great red face for a moment, fixed her with his slow gaze, wondering how far she had belonged to the fool Englishman—whether there was any chance of taking her over with the rest. To this gaze the dancer responded with a stare of slow disdain, the one word, "*Kortoe*," flung across the table, right in his face.

"Well, what about another drink?" roared Filson. "Look here! What's wrong with another little drink? And if Ling likes ter come down to hell to dun me for it, he's welcome."

"No, no, my friend, this to me," broke in Almira, slipping her arm through his, pressing her cheek—bright carnation now—against his shoulder. "We will not drink like common people—you three gentlemen an' me an' the *kepala jang-prenta* (the commander)—Filson, but like ladies and gentlemen, in port *wijn* for our betrothal."

It was out without a thought—bred from a decision as swift as her movements. For she had scarcely realized she cared a quarter guilder for the English skipper. But the sight of his misery and his indifference to her dancing had set a passionate flame of love alight in her heart. What if the man was ruined? she would have asked you, with fine irony—was there not all the more need of her love?

Half an hour later, and—apart from a couple of white-coated Chinamen, who sat whispering upon one of the benches—they were alone together at the end of the tiny pier.

THE calm was complete, the moon full—an immense, pale, silver-green plate in a pale, blue-green sky; the water black and silver and green, with the green of willow catkins. Save for the whispering of the Chinese—like the soft gurgling of water being poured out of a bottle—and the gentle *pat—pat—pat* of water against the supports of the pier, it was absolutely silent. Here and there, the glow of a small fire showed aboard one of the many praus, apparently untended, for not a soul stirred. If an occasional canoe slid past, with a fisherman and his seine, there was no rattle of ruddocks—nothing more than the small suck of water around a paddle soundlessly dipped, soundlessly raised. The air was like the scented touch of a dew-drenched flower against Filson's cheek—that cheek which was not pressed against the smooth, black head lying so quietly against his breast.

To have her there like that, and yet to feel himself soaked through and through, worn out and weakened with despair. Fool—fool that he was! He had wished to give her the most beautiful house—carved beds and suites of furniture in crimson brocade—the finest in the whole of the Dutch Indies—silver coffee sets, inlaid tables—while all she wanted, all the while, was a quiet life in a little house set in a nutmeg grove at the edge

of the sea in Ternate, that dark pearl among islands.

"A pretty fix I've got myself into—a pretty sort of a fix, darling—darling! An' when I love you as I do, an' not a thing to offer you—you with your beauty, you with every man in Makassar to choose from. God only knows what made you fix on me! It's beyond me. How satin smooth your lips are—warm and fresh and smooth as a geranium flower. Darling one, lovely one! God! But it just breaks my heart, loving you as I do, having you love me the way you do—and me the fool I am to have lost everything, the way I have done, to those —those——"

"The fat *koetoe* and the lean *koetoe,*" put in Almira.

"Lord! It drives me wild to think of it! There's nothing for me but to blow out my brains and clear myself out o' your way. That's clear, heart's delight. I'll scuttle the schooner and go down with her, or else join up with Fanaldo—good old Fanaldo! Lord, but there's no one like him. It beats me, sweetheart, that it does, why you can never find an honest man unless he's a scoundrel—but it's truth for all that."

"Fanaldo!"

Filson felt Almira stiffen within his arms, as though an electric wire had been run through her at the name. She put him a little away from her and pressed both hands against his broad chest. Then she raised one hand and tweaked at the lock of dark hair which hung across his forehead, moist with the damp heat of the Laboean Roemamaken.

"No, I don't want to be kissed—not now, anyway. This is business. See here, you are good friends with Fanaldo?"

"By God, yes. There's a man for you, and no mistake about it, either. If there ever was a gentleman——" burst out Filson.

"But, of course!" put in the dancer primly, awe and respect in her voice. "Is 'e not of the family of the Rajahs of Tidore—the oldest, proudest family, the swiftest, surest pirates, the noblest men in all these seas? Beside, 'e like you! 'E speak to me of you; close upon a year back we speak together—'e and me. It is that which first led me to observe you, love of my life. Believe me, there is nothing that 'e would not do for you. As for me—see 'ere, great stupid it is like this with Fanaldo——"

She held up one small finger in the moonlight—a finger as white as if there were no single drop of Javanese blood in her veins—and gave a quick, twirling gesture, as though she were twisting a hair around it.

"Oh, well, he's a damned good-looking old chap," said Filson rather ruefully. "Almira, you don't——"

"No, I don't," said Almira, kissing him full on the lips and then drawing back. She gazed at him seriously and spoke lingeringly: "You will not run yourself into any danger, will you, my best beloved?"

"What do you mean?"

"Fanaldo—where do you now think that 'e may be?"

"Let me see. Pearlin's started, hasn't it? Oh, somewhere up about Batjan way, likely enough. If I was to run across him——"

HE broke off suddenly, as Almira pressed herself closer against him with a shrill cry:

"Take care, my dear one, take care! One time Fanaldo 'e like me verri—oh, verri much. Maybe 'e be jealous now. Think of the so big ransom which 'e demand for those whom 'e takes prisoner. Who would pay that—come now, who would pay that if anything happened to you?"

She must have shot a glance upward at this; for, though she did not raise her small face, close pressed against Filson's breast, there was a gleam of white, as though from a glancing eye; while the skipper himself gave a harsh, none-too-pleasant laugh.

"Come to that, I reckon my precious country 'u'd do that much for me. Clean forget about a man, so long as he's trying his damnedest to be a credit ter it an' himself. That's the way o' them—spend all their time an' money puttin' blacks inter pants an' draggin' all sorts o' rapscallion—business missionaries an' such-

like—outer the holes they've gone an' got 'emselves into—more particular if they stands ter aggrivate any other nation by kicking up the deuce o' a dust.

"But that's the way of the English government—that's what pleases 'em! 'The Crying Scandal o' Piracy in the Moluccas'—'The Pirates o' the Malabar!' Lord, don't I know their squarkin', supposin' a gallant sea captain like me—'Our Heroic Merchant Service'—haven't I heard it all before?—went missin' that sorter way. Supposin' Fanaldo—that good old cock Fanaldo—took me prisoner! You ask me what they'd do? Kick up one hell o' a row—pay up like gents—that's what they'd do."

Filson had by now pretty well forgotten his troubles, and his dark eyes were glowing, his sallow Cornish cheek flushed.

"A hell o' a row—a hell o' a great ransom. Make an infernal ass o' yourself, an' your country will stand by you, right enough."

"To be the wife of an English *kepala jangprenta*! Ah, verri good *that!* But ter be 'is widow—pouf! Any sorter a man, black or yellow, would do for being the widow of," remarked Almira darkly, with tight lips. "All same—might be?"

"Widow! You mean ter marry me afore I go?" Filson caught her to him, and it was long before she could draw herself a trifle apart and find any other use than that which he chose for her lips. Now she plumed herself, patting her hair delicately, her eyes brighter than ever in the moonlight.

"It may be better, supposing anything should—should 'appen—and one never knows—that I should have what it is you call that ticket, which is the right of all women who are married by your priest—ticket of leave? No, eh? A certificate, you say. Ah, well, it is all the same to me." She shrugged her white shoulders and then gave him a quick warm hug, as one gives a sweet to keep a child quiet.

"So long as we love each other, is not that enough? An' if we cease to love, where, after all, is the sense of remaining married, seeing it is all for love? Life and love, are they not, indeed, both alike short?" She went on sapiently: "And is there not, in both, much to make a girl—what are the funny words that you Engleesh 'ave to that?—put 'er tongue in 'er cheek—no, between her teeth?

"But now, 'arken you 'ere, my angel one," she continued, driving home her word with a tap of her finger upon Filson's cheek. Then she spoke to him seriously and long—and not altogether of love, either. For, though to be left a widow might or might not be bad—it all depended—to be left a widow without any sort of means was sheer stupid waste of time, and no other words for it.

YOU must remember it, that affair of Captain Filson, of the schooner, *Maid of Fowey,* held to ransom by one of the most notorious and powerful rajah pirates of the Molucca. The real excitement began in a small way in Makassar, with a stricken wife weeping, weeping, weeping upon the long flight of not very clean stairs leading to the offices of the British consul—weeping and wringing slim hands up and down the cool wide verandas of the Dutch Residency. Then the affair went on to a cyclone of furious letters in the local papers from Dutch residents trading with England, asking what they were taxed for, if it were not that their interest might be protected, the honor of their country upheld. More furious letters followed from those who received no benefit from the English, urging that these universal adventurers should be forced to cure themselves of their habit of poking their noses in where they were not wanted.

The storm boiled up and up and up in Makassar: in the clubs, where there is surely more loud talking than in any other clubs in the world; in the papers, Dutch, Chinese, Malay. There was something about Almira Filson, née Silva, which rather specially appealed to the spectacular tastes of young reporters and editors. For even Almira's marriage, secret and hasty, held in it that element of excitement and suspense which goes to the blowing of any bubble—so frail and charming, so easily broken. Supposing Fanaldo resorted to extreme measures with his prisoner, supposing the English government really did refuse to pay the

ransom—what a widow—what a peach of a widow!

The whole affair began by being very exciting, almost joyous. But when the English papers started to put their backs into it, it took on a more lowering aspect. The most serious weekly declared the very possibility of the capture of "one of our most distinguished merchant captains by pirates, in the open sea in broad daylight"—queer how they all insisted upon this, as though the moonlight of the Moluccas was not bright enough for any one—to be "a blot upon civilization." And the most serious of all the dailies spoke of the perilous strain cast upon international good will by such an untoward event. A less serious, but a more fervid, daily inquired as to whether we were meekly to submit to so prehistoric a state of affairs; pointing out that, after all, the English are, all boasting apart, the only nation with any real knowledge of how to govern savage or semicivilized peoples.

Then came a Sunday paper with a heading: "Heroic British Skipper. Cruel Indifference of the British government. Gallant Merchant Captain, Hero of the Great War, Left to Languish in Dark Hold of a Pirate Hulk."

It might have been funny, if any one had thought of it that way. For there was a fancy drawing of Filson, with a long beard, his hair falling into his eyes, bent double in a sort of rabbit hutch; another fancy drawing of the pirate ship looking like a Thames barge; a photo of Filson's mother and grandmother; of Filson himself as a little boy of four, in very long drawers.

"Is it no one's business to make any sort of move? Can it be that we are indeed so completely hardened?" was what all the papers asked; went on asking, until the whole affair was swollen to a matter of international importance by Fanaldo, apparently out of all patience, sending in his absolute ultimatum: "One more week." At the end of that time, unless the five thousand pounds demanded were forthcoming, it would be too late. Captain Filson would cease to exist, and the honor of two nations would remain indelibly smirched.

EVERY cable and wireless station in the world hummed with Filson's name; an American millionaire was racing to the scene of the tragedy in his yacht; or, at least, as near as may be. For the strange wild creatures who brought the insistent, the monotonous demands from Fanaldo—creeping up to the quay or pier at nightfall, in catamaran or canoe, materializing miraculously from out the east or west, north or south—spoke no specified language, knew, or apparently knew, nothing whatever, beyond the fact that they carried closely wrapped within the folds of their loin cloths, certain letters, already worn by innumerable hands, for the tuan governor, the British consul, or the chief of police.

"What about Filson?" In England the members of Parliament shouted each other down, asking the same question, over and over again. The wraith of a famous capitalist-journalist appeared to the wife of the prime minister, criticizing and condemning such fatal inertia; and Ireland took it up, contending that the Irish and the Cornish were of the same blood.

But it was the people of the Welsh Church who at last tipped the scale, with more than one by-election in sight. And in a sudden panic the authorities gave orders for the dispatch of a wireless out to Makassar: "Get in touch with pirates. His majesty's government guarantees payment for instant release of James Filson." In an amazingly short time—so short that there were people who declared that half the more adventurous souls in the Maluccas must have known of the English skipper's whereabouts—signed papers and agreements which might almost have been counted as deeds of gift passed between Fanaldo and the authorities, and the captain was free, but exactly from what or from where, no one ever quite knew.

The schooner was, of course, lost forever, sunk to the bottom of a peculiarly uncharted sea. The skipper himself, however, made his way back to Makassar by a long series of strange craft, staggering up the steps of the little pier—where he and Almira had sat together so happily three months earlier—almost in rags,

with the long hair and beard so aptly guessed at in the illustrated papers and common to castaways. Here he found almost every soul in Makassar gathered to meet him, in the blazing sun of a blazing midday—brilliant blue and white and sheer glare—with the town band to play him up the pier, along the wide quarter of a mile of dusty road, and into the white dining room of the Oranji Hotel, hung with British and Dutch flags, where he sat, feasted and fêted, with Almira at his side; Almira waving away the overready boys with the bottles; Almira with that jewel of a parrot, green and scarlet and royal blue—brought to her by one of Fanaldo's minions and dramatically tutored by her imprisoned spouse to the one English word "Help"—upon her shoulder.

DO you know the island of Ternate, with its outpost of volcanic islands, its own volcanic mountain—so wonderfully and deeply blue—its ancient forts, its many thatch-roofed houses, its palm-shaded road, its odorous nutmeg groves?

No? Well, you have missed the one place on earth in which to make a home with a beloved and loving woman. Ten acres of nutmeg trees and a long, low cottage close upon the white sands; what more could be left for Filson to wish for, to lament? Unless it might be the loss of his schooner, and to take your true seaman's ship away from him is as good as taking the heart out of his body.

Almira felt this and made other people feel it, too, bringing all possible pressure to bear upon the governor of Ternate, so that he might fill this need. Then, as he could do nothing, she made her way back to Makassar, flowing in upon the stream of her own tears upon the governor, at the very moment when he had some of the most important men in the country about him. She drew such a heartbreaking picture of her husband's despair and misery, with so artful a use of this constant fear that the English might be led to imagine no one could possibly run any colony but themselves—"An' what shame would that make for me, a Dutch lady!" said Almira—that the people of Makassar raised a sum sufficiently substantial to purchase a new schooner for the unfortunate captain.

The money was put into Filson's own hands, and he himself made the purchase. The old boat had been a simple, three-masted fore-and-aft schooner, painted brown and white, with a flush deck. The new vessel had a small poop deck and fo'c's'le head, as is the way with many island schooners; she carried yards on her foremast, with an auxiliary motor; she was painted white and deep red, and named the *Poeti Poetri,* which means *The White Princess*—the fancy of that Yankee skipper for whom, it was understood, she had been purchased, somewhere up among the Yapen Isles.

Filson was as pleased as a child with his new possession, showing every one over her, breaking many a bottle upon her. Among his visitors there happened to be a beach comber of mixed nationalities, who had once in many years held a job, having been shipped as a deck hand aboard the *Maid of Fowey,* when he was in no state to know what was being done with him.

As it happened, this man, still cherishing a sentimental feeling for those few rare weeks of toil, took it into his head to wander over the new boat for no other reason than to draw odious comparison between her and her predecessors. He took particular exception to the fo'c's'le head, for no other reason than that it covered the heel of that bowsprit upon which, lying in the sun upon the open deck of the *Maid of Fowey,* he had once cut his own name.

"As might be there," he said and pointed. Then he drew back his hand with a sharp, indrawn breath, while one of the other two men with him ejaculated "Lordy!" in a hoarse whisper.

"So it's that, is it?"

No single one of them would, of set intention, have said anything. But the fact remains that they toasted Filson, "An' this darnation fine new boat o' yours," too often and too knowingly, with too many digs in the ribs—"You sly dog, you!" People began to sit up and take notice.

Some weeks later Filson himself made a bad slip. He was playing poker with

four other men, Dutchmen, when the supply of beer ran out.

"I will say this for old Fanaldo, the beer flowed; it did that, iced an' all. Though it didn't never do him no harm —never knew any man play a better game—keep a cooler head."

Filson was dealing as he spoke, and the words came out in short jerks, without thought.

"So you played cards with Fanaldo, *hein?*" drawled one of his companions, so meaningly that Filson, roused from his dreams, swung round upon him and asked what the devil it mattered to him.

"Little enough to me, my friend," the Dutchman said and shrugged his great shoulders. "A good deal to that fool government of yours, which wasted so many thousand in getting you back from your holiday; and a good deal to the poor fools in Makassar, who raised up so great a sum for you to spend in putting steam into your own——"

He was unable to finish what he had to say, at least coherently, with Filson's fist taking up the greater part of his face space; but, for all that, the whisper got about. Filson and his wife knew it and talked of it in their veranda at nights, Filson in a long-sleeved planter's chair, his coat off, his feet up, gin and seltzer at one elbow, the plaint of a deeply misunderstood man in his voice, Almira upon his knee, her smooth little head tucked in under his chin.

"The darnation cheek of the swine to think as how I'd go an' do the likes o' that," was what he said. "I only hope ter God the authorities don't start on kickin' up a row about what's over an' done with, an' us so snug an' all."

"If they not nice, they find it this way," said Almira, raising her small hand up against the clear moonlight sky, the first finger and thumb closely pressed, "that I, Almira Filson, wife of the English *kepala jangprenta*"—she rolled the words with pride upon her palate—" 'old them 'ere—'ere."

A MONTH later Filson's wife—alone, save for her maid, for the skipper was off on his first voyage with his beautiful boat—was swinging to and fro in her rocking-chair, hemming the one small square garment that the heir of all the Filsons would be expected to wear, when the governor of Ternate, a stout man to be about in the heat of the day, came puffing along the deep soft sands, with a taller, leaner man by his side. The two men stopped in front of the veranda, blue with morning-glories, to inquire whether a man named Filson lived there.

Without rising, Almira folded her infinitesimal piece of sewing in her lap, took her feet off the rail of the opposite chair, and gazed at the two men coldly.

"This is the 'ouse of the Kepala Jangprenta Filson, Breetish subject, if that is what you want to know," she said: then she added mildly: "An' if you've got any 'air on your 'ead, you'll take off your 'at when yer speaking ter an Engleesh lady. If you ain't got no 'air, no more said. I'll 'scuse you."

Under the influence of those fixed and bright eyes, the governor took off his hat, and his companion did likewise.

"This," said the governor, "is the secretary of the governor of Celebes, who has come up from Makassar to question your husband in regard to that Fanaldo affair."

"My 'usband knows but one language, and that verri bad," said Almira, with a dimpling smile. "Me—I know four languages—German, Engleesh, Malay, Dutch. I talk to you better than my 'usband. Much to say, me, if you will be so good both sit down." She indicated the chair upon which she had been resting her feet and another, both low.

"What we want to know," began the governor, a little flustered by her beauty and her coolness—"I mean what I want to know—what we want to know is——"

"But it is what *I* want to know, Tuan Panglima-perang Darat and Tuan Controlleer—what I want to know is what matters. And it is this, this"—Almira bent forward and, raising her forefinger, tapped it gently against the pellucid air, just as close upon a year ago she had tapped it against Filson's lean brown cheek—"What is it you will geeve to me not to tell the Engleesh government, all the Engleesh sea captains and Engleesh consuls who love 'im so—an' love me,

also—the young man of the newspaper in Makassar with whom I can do this"—once again she made that gesture of twisting something so pliable as a hair round her finger—"and who so delights in writing laugh news to the so funny Engleesh papers, all that so great fool my 'usband make of you? What now? Should 'e write so that all the great Engleesh nation do at you laugh—you Dutch, so admi-ra-a-ble and so 'onest, though so stu-u-t-pide, if you will 'scuse me—stu-u-u-pide—stu-u-u-pide, but good, oh, yes, good."

It was in the full heat of the afternoon that the two dignities had made their way through the heavy sands to the little house which stood by the sea. It was in the blaze of a purple-and-gold sunset that they left it, with Almira waving and smiling, even going so far as to kiss her little hand, as they glanced back, sheepishly and unwillingly smiling. And it was nothing more nor less than the difference in national temperaments which made the interview of the next day, when the English consul paid his call, shorter, in the mere matter of time.

A couple of months later when Captain Filson pushed on shore in his dinghy, leaner and browner than ever, fresh from his first trip with his new boat, he held in his hand a parcel wrapped in peeled, yellow-orchid leaves. This parcel he took straight into his wife's room and laid upon her bed, by the side of his first-born, as he stooped to kiss her. Then, the first transports of reunion past, he stretched his long limbs out in a low chair at her side, taking his glass of gin and lime juice from the hand of her serving maid, as he watched her open the parcel, with soft coos of delight, laying bare a white dress of the finest silk, flounced to the waist, embroidered over with trails and posies of fine, small flowers.

"From Fanaldo," remarked Filson. Then he stared and pointed his finger at two other silk dresses, a rose pink and pale green, which had just caught his attention, hanging in shimmering folds over two separate chairs at the foot of the bed.

"What the devil——" he began and stopped, with his mouth a little open, like a man entirely at a loss; while his wife's eyes rested lovingly, first upon one, then upon the other shimmering beauty; and at last returning to that which lay across her knees. A small, tight, and secret smile was upon her red lips.

"The pink, beloved one, from the Dutch tuan controller-er; the green from the Engleesh consul, who said: 'An' 'ow much?'—like that, no more, just like that—' 'Ow much?' "

"An' that ain't all, either, not with me," said Filson boastingly, as he pulled from his pocket a long chain of magnificent, but unevenly matched, pearls. "From Fanaldo, with his love," he added, while a slow grin grew upon his long face, as he released Almira's hand beneath her pillow and watched her draw out two more strings of pearls. She held them up.

"They will look well round my neck—the three. That of the Dutchman the thickest." She handled them delicately. "That of the Engleeshman, the best matched; but that of the—what is it you call 'em?—the scoo-oundrel—worth many hundred more guilder than the two of them put together. It is a pity, but is it not ever so, my best beloved?" she added. Then she laid the three strings out upon the embroidered silk and fell to counting upon her fingers.

"Two thousand five 'undred Engleesh for the 'alf of the ransom; two thousand five 'undred for you, an' two thousand five 'undred for our good Fanaldo; and is it not like 'im to have sent me these so beautiful presents, also—'e who 'as nothing to fear. Then the so beau-u-u-tiful fitting up of your so beau-u-u-tiful ship, and some five hundred guilder over from that out of the money given to you by the kind people of Makassar. Three new silk dresses, such as befit the wife of a *pnanglima-perang laot*"—without so much as a thought she had raised his title to admiral—"and three pearl necklaces of great price!

"Without doubt, love of my life, your God is well pleased that I have made marriage with you according to your faith. But 'E also is good," she added, with smiling condescension, "and to-morrow I myself will offer to 'Im one great

candle. Not too great, for 'ave we not our family to think of?"

Filson nodded, his eyes dreamy, as he drew luxuriously at his pipe, leaning back in his chair, and gazing out into the lagoon, where the milk-white *Poeti-Poetri* swung at anchor, backed by those deep-blue peaks of Tidore—the breeding place of pirates.

"Lord," he said at last, dragging out his words with slow relish, "ter think o' the years an' years as I waited for a chance o' clapping an engine into her! She's as fine a boat as you'd ever see, though no finer nor Fanaldo's, with its white deck, smooth and fine as silk, where he and I laid out upon mattresses covered with that patterned silk stuff. What do you call it? Brocade? Yep, that's it. There we used to play poker and drink fizz and iced beer from morning ter night. Did me proud did old Fanaldo; but, then, he could afford it. Wasn't it me as put the whole thing in his way?" he boasted largely, as Almira smiled—her small secret smile.

WHERE WOLVES ATTACK

DURING the past winter, wolves in the Caucasus became so numerous that the military authorities there sent an airplane to the infested regions. The League of Nations reported that the aviators dropped gas bombs on the wolf packs and killed no less than two hundred of the invaders.

The same report declares that wolves have become a menace to peasants in the remote regions of Russia, Poland, and some other countries of East Central Europe. Driven by hunger, the ferocious beasts have frequently attacked villages, and in some instances killed a number of the peasant inhabitants. Austria reported that one farmer kept twelve wolves at bay with an ax. Most of the beasts were wounded in the attack, and the man's life was eventually saved by the timely arrival of the villagers.

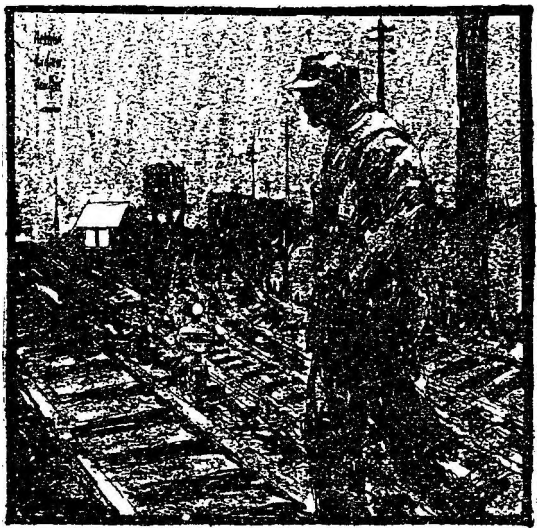
In Poland several regiments were mobilized to carry on a concentrated attack against the hungry invaders, whose aggressions extended to a general attack on an entire village. In Russia they have proved even a greater menace to human life. Literally, the beasts in packs of several hundred have swept down on an isolated settlement, and their depredations have been carried on in full daylight. Hunger and cold, it is said, have made them desperate.

KING CAME HOME

NOT all lovers of dogs share the high opinion of the collie entertained by his champion, Albert Payson Terhune. But all dog fanciers are ready to admit that the collie knows his way home better than most dogs. A gentleman from Ashland, Kentucky, recently revealed a story of how his collie, King, lost two and a half years ago, crossed two States, traversed hundreds of miles, and eventually reached his home in that city.

In the late summer of 1924, King, then a puppy six months old, was taken on a motor trip by his master, who was accompanied by his family. On the way to Michigan, the master of King stopped for the night at Indianapolis, Indiana. In order to avoid a controversy at the hotel about the dog, King's master left him in charge of the owner of a garage, where he parked his car for the night. The collie puppy was placed on the rear seat, and tied to the machine. The next morning, when King's owner returned to the garage for his car, the dog was missing. After spending several days in a fruitless search to recover the dog, the family went on their way, convinced that the dog had been stolen or killed.

Some weeks ago King suddenly appeared at his home in Ashland, travel-stained and leg-weary, but overjoyed to be among his own family, each member of which he recognized and greeted in ecstatic joy.



That Blasted Idiot

By Allison W. Ind

The railroad, with all its mysterious tangle of lights and rails and switches, was the very breath of life to the little dispatcher, Coyer. Therefore, what Coyer did that foggy night was admirable, but what he did later, when lives depended on action, was surely doubly admirable.

IT was only five o'clock, and yet it was dark. The street lights behind him cast a sickly yellow reflection into the cold, wet air above the black bulk of the warehouses. It was dark enough in town, but here only a weak incandescent at irregular intervals, over warehouse doors, helped him, as he neared the confusion of familiar noises that proved the west yard was somewhere in the murk ahead.

A great pile of black smoke drove south, with the mist blotting out the last traces of day. Coyer walked stiffly on, his muscles tensed to prevent his skin from touching his clothing in unwarmed places, and careful to avoid the line of big, cold drops that fell from the eaves and burst on the sodden planking below.

The exhausts, from usually pugnacious "switch hogs," sounded discouraged and sneezed about the yard with subdued persistence. A long, incoming train from the West whistled impatiently to be allowed to run into the terminal and home, while an overburdened safety spat tons of steam into the already saturated air. The steam was snatched by the wind and carried down across the town, with a cutting sweep.

Powerful headlights showed in fitful yellow flashes and were gone. Signal aspects glared dully and defied the dirty ring of lighter gray that marked the flood lights on top of their shining, steel poles.

Somewhere a locked wheel shrieked dismally, causing an angry locomotive to sputter, like an old man, in an attempt to force it loose.

Coyer shivered. Head down, he mumbled to himself:

"We ought to read of some poor fellow taking the shortest route to the Big Terminal, in to-morrow's paper. I'll bet there isn't a dry, warm place left in the world."

But he was wrong. At the head of the stairs in the station building, the dispatcher's office was dry and warm. The door of the big-bellied stove was flung open to the glowing coals, and a water heater simmered at the base of the pipe.

COYER stood near the stove and warmed himself. Then he began to sing in a high voice from sheer relief.

"You won't be feeling so gloriously happy if this fog doesn't ease up pretty soon, young man," declared Southern, the division superintendent. He jerked his head sidewise and screwed up one eye. "The visibility is down to a few feet where the main line hits the river courses. You'll have a lot of fun bringing them all in to-night."

Coyer continued to warm his hands in front of the stove.

"Well, it's either sing or sob, and I'll try the singing. You'll find it about as bad right here in the yards as in any other place; and I'm telling you right now, there will be a story to tell of a freight train, if it gets much thicker, but I won't be singing it."

A line between the little night-trick man's eyes deepened.

"By the way, just how much territory does this storm cover?" he asked, as Southern tugged at his rubbers.

The superintendent pointed to a yellow paper hanging from a spindle under the clock.

"There's the dope. It came in from the west end. He reports storm warnings clear out to the coast. There was a call from the roundhouse about an hour ago —said it was really bad stuff on the other side of the Gap; clears up for a minute and then comes down thicker than ever. A man never knows where he is."

Southern buttoned up his slicker and cinched the neck strap.

"Well, good night and—'stay on the track.'" With that the door slammed behind him.

Fog!

Coyer's fingers drummed on the table top. A heavy, wet blanket hid landmarks from the eyes of engine men and made a headlight's rays good for only a fifth of the distance they ought to have carried. And trains all over the division were like a crowd of men running full tilt over rough ground in the dark. Sometimes, above the rattle of the instruments, he could hear the sharp double-noted warning of engine whistles, "to be sounded at intervals during stormy or foggy weather," according to the rules in the book that hung from a nail within reach. He raised in his seat and attempted to get a view of the yards, east and west, through the glistening windows.

Yes; it was thicker than when he first came up. To the east only a few scattered, yellow blotches showed where hundreds of strong lights were usually in sight. He looked in the other direction. The signal lights on the gantry were so uncertain that Coyer had to consult the yard diagram above his head to see how they were set. He shook his head and sat down again. When it was that bad up here in the dry country, it must a solid wall down at the bottom of the cañons, where the line ran alongside water. He turned to his train sheet.

It wasn't a long one to-night, but a bit troublesome, because so much of the traffic was feeling its way along, anywhere from five minutes to two hours late. First he drew the lines that represented the fast trains—trains that had the preference over anything else in the mountains. Here was the silk train. Coyer didn't have to look on the time-table to see when the silk train was due—just as quick as he could get it here. And then there was the Crusader, a two-sectioned extra from some big convention in the Northwest, full to the sills and anxious to tie up in Chicago. Carefully the little dispatcher extended the Crusader's line till it crossed another line at Indian Bend. The westbound Sioux Flyer could pass there, all right. Here was a still tougher one. No. 8 was nearly forty minutes behind time, and that would bring her right on the eastbound-mail train's running time.

No; that would never do. He scratched his head. If the mail train was held up for even five minutes, it would mean another delay in Omaha and still another in Chicago, not to mention the long letter of explanation he would

have to write. He would use that old spur at Harley Creek. It would be a long wait, but No. 8's passengers ought to be in bed by that time, anyway.

And so it went. Some time later, after he had checked and rechecked, he slipped the telephone head set over his ears and commenced giving his orders. A few stations on the line were equipped with telephones, but only a few. In a distinct monotone he spoke into the transmitter and waited for the repeats from the other end of the line. Then he opened his telegraph key and, with long fingers over the black button, sent a fine, purring call flying over the dripping wires to the west.

THAT was where Coyer scored. A bundle of nerves, coupled to thin hands, made him a whirlwind at the brass key. No one that was in the office at the time will forget how Coyer jammed the wire the night the Pacific Limited was saved from going to glory in the Gap. When Coyer's general-attention call went out on the line, every man whose job it was to listen, hoped that the dispatcher wasn't feeling the need for haste, as he only sent the faster when they cut in for a repeat. To-night he sent easily, almost mechanically. The same, smooth progression marked his messages, like a track runner striding along the cinders, just to keep fit, but capable of tightening up to a terrific pace. His work over for a few moments, he cocked his feet on their usual resting place during these rare, free intervals—the table.

Traffic on the wires was light. There was Flag Rock on the far side of the Gap. Coyer wouldn't forget Henderson's touch on the key for many a day. The dispatcher didn't have to wait for the "Fo" at the end of the message to tell him who was sending. The sounder's nervous, staccato chatter—interrupted where a man wouldn't expect a space and racing where an interval was usual—couldn't be any one else but Henderson.

Then a hoarse, crashing din—too fast and yet controlled, after a fashion—like a big Pacific type on the Gold Run grade, with a dozen Pullmans behind her, clipping off the fishplates with a high safety and with just enough Westinghouse on the rims to heat them up. That could be no other than the new Easterner over at Scott's Cut. Coyer smiled. There was old "Grouchy Dan" up in the Sundance country. A persistent drone; deliberate, heavy and downright cussedly definite. Funny how a man's character went out on the line when he pounded the brass. Within a few seconds of each other, the three men closed their keys with a final click, like the last slap of a caboose wheel over a facing-point switch.

The old Seth Thomas on the wall counted off the seconds with steady exactness. Outside black switch hogs snorted up and down, making up glistening trains in the invisible yards. A mikado pulled past on the slow tracks, with a series of banging jars, rattling the windows with every exhaust from her stubby stack. There was enough light from the station lamps for Coyer to see the little black fountains of water squirt up from between the track planking, as the heavy wheels of the freight passed over. He could almost tell the weight of the car passing by the height of the fountains—six inches for a loaded sixty-thousand-pound car—about eight inches for an eighty-thousand pounder and maybe a foot for a loaded hopper or an automobile car. He speculated on the probable shoot for the caboose. Maybe——

Suddenly Coyer stiffened.

"CN—CN—CN—SD—CN——"

His feet came to the floor with a bang. "SD"—that was Grouchy Dan up in the Sundance country. But Coyer had never heard Dan send like that. In the time it took to plug in and acknowledge, he had mentally reviewed his train sheet and could find nothing to cause trouble. But there was trouble—plenty of it.

No. 10 rammed rear end of 42. Not in clear. Rush wreckers and doctors.

For a moment Coyer remained motionless. No. 10—that was the eastbound Eagle, pulled by Fred Galt—went into No. 42's rear. Why, No. 42 should have been in the clear almost twenty minutes before No. 10 was due to hit the Sundance yard limits. He jammed the plug into Southern's home wire and called

rapidly. He was scared. His eyes were dilated, and a cold feeling pulled at his ribs.

Southern needed no prod. He was taking the stairs three at a time before the wrecker and the hospital coaches drew up with the 1313 at the head end.

"A yard smash." Coyer's voice snapped like the sounder bars on the table before him. "Galt's scattered 42's rear end all over the west throat of Sundance yard."

He thrust a paper into the super's hand. Dan had been shooting in the details as fast as he could get them.

Southern's brow was pulled tight by a deep line between his eyes. He put the message on the table and, as he read, crammed tobacco into his short, black pipe.

"I'm going out with the wrecker," he announced shortly.

At the door he suddenly turned around.

"Who the devil balled things up like this?"

"My sheets check to a dot," Coyer said earnestly. "I'm afraid you'll have to ask 10's crew. It wasn't an office slip this time, so far as I can see."

And the little dispatcher meant it. There was no slip-up on his part, if his train sheet was worth anything. No. 42 should have hit the yard at seven five. No. 10 wasn't due till seven twenty-one. That gave sixteen minutes for 42 to get into the clear. And, anyway, if the freight train wasn't in the clear, what was the reason for the Eagle failing to act on passing signal No. 480? That signal was against Fred. Yes, somebody out on the line had slipped up this time, and Coyer figured the men in No. 10's cab could tell about it, if they still lived.

And they still lived. Dan was himself again. Slowly, evenly, and with machinelike precision the story came in from Sundance.

It was bad enough. That was to be expected. Any wreck, right in the throat of a yard, is bad.

By the time the 1313 poked her nose into the east end of Sundance yards, an overworked switch engine and No. 42's road puller had managed to shunt into sidings what was still left of the eastbound freight. It was no easy thing to do, with stalled trains blowing off steam wherever they went. Yes; throat wrecks are bad things.

WITH the big hook ahead, the 1313 felt along the uncertain track until her way was beautifully and completely blocked by an eighty-thousand gondola that squatted across the line like a setting hen, her trucks and the rest of her running gear nowhere in sight. They tried to put chains under her, but chains slipped and came off. Then they tried to push her, but she wouldn't budge. Valentine had seen them like her before. He'd been a wrecking boss back in the days when everything, from the hand cars to the finest brass-railed, private sleepers, was made of wood—before steel cars were even mentioned. So Valentine had them swing the derrick around, with a slap that ripped the car roof off from one end clear to the center. Then they lowered the hook down through the hole, and, by wagging the crane arm like an elephant's trunk, they battered the outsides, and crushed the end. When Valentine figured that she was light enough, he butted what was left of her into the ditch. The next car was a flat, loaded with logs. It didn't take long to hoist up one end, while a new truck was set under, and then let her down on an adjacent track. It was easy as long as they had track alongside, but when they finally worked through to Fred's engine, it wasn't so nice, right up there in the throat, with nothing but the main line to turn a wheel on.

Just as Southern was preparing to climb over the side of the overturned Pacific, in order to drop down into the cab, Fred came running through the mist from the direction of the dressing station in the hospital cars. He had been cut by flying glass, as his cab glass went; but, aside from that, he was only a bit dazed for a while. It hadn't gone so well with Carl Macy, though, who'd fired for Fred on many a trip across the division. He was caught between the tender and a gangway stanchion, as he tried to jump. They released him with a torch and half

a dozen hack saws, three hours later—crying like an idiot and clean out of his head. It was twenty-three weeks before the hospital folks up at Lone Pine gave him clearance for a wheel chair down a long corridor, with shining brown linoleum.

The conductor of 42 was almost cut to pieces. He was the only man in the caboose when the great, black bulk of Fred's engine suddenly exploded upon him, as he sat at his little drop table, built into the side of the wall.

Then there were two mail cars; one standing just as natural as could be and not a scratch on her, except where her roof was caved in a bit. That happened when the second car overshot her and then slid off to one side, with its nose deep in the gravel.

All told, it was just seven hours and thirty-seven minutes from the time Coyer got Dan's first call before another train order went out from the Cascade Junction office.

Seven hours and a half—not so bad. But that wasn't the end of it by a long shot. Already the investigations were under way. Coyer breathed a prayer of thanks. He wasn't afraid of an investigation; he had done his work right. He could tell them how——

But Coyer didn't tell them any such thing, although he expected to, right up to the time when they called him to testify.

Fred was the first up. He said he had lost time getting out of Denver and again at Galeston. A heavy freight had pulled out an air hose up ahead of him and held him up nearly twenty minutes. He didn't have to say that no grass had grown under him after he left Galeston. The train sheet showed that Fred must have had the throttle pushed clear to the corner, all the way in, despite the fog. He had made up two thirds of his lost time when he checked in and out of Elmore; he was going like a scared deer, so the night man said. He whistled for Sundance yard just four minutes late and checked her just enough at the throat of the yard. There was a blur of yellow light in the mist, and he banged past a straining mikado on the slow tracks to his right. That was No. 107. He nodded. No. 107 at west yard—correct.

AND he checked her a bit more, as the drivers took the points of a cut-over too nervously. Fred said he was just noticing the fact that 107 was a bit long to-night, when he heard a scared yelp from Macy's side of the cab; but, before he could look, he saw a red light stream back in the murk. Quicker than thought he slammed the throttle shut and twisted the air to emergency. The big engine plunged and shuddered, as the bronze brake shoes bit into the speeding steel and showered white-hot fire from every rim. Then, ahead, Fred saw two red lights that were 42's rear markers. At first they were small and close together; but suddenly they seemed to leap apart and swell up to giant red glaring eyes that filled the whole world. Then followed a sickening crash of splintered and flying wood. The big engine heeled to the left, like a fighter taken under his right ear, staggered along for a few feet and went over, buried deep in the third car ahead of the demolished caboose. That's as far as she went, though, and the best part of it was that the wreck didn't catch fire, even if Fred's ditched puller, with a white fire over her grates, was cradled in one grand kindling pile.

Time and again the tears came into the old engineer's eyes during the telling of it. Twice he stopped and passed his hand over a wan face, then shook his head like a man that bites in a raw lemon, and went on. Through it all he maintained that signal 480 was clear, as he went past it, a mile out of the yards. Green as grass, was what he told them. "Yes, sir, green as grass." Well, then, why hadn't he seen the flagman of 42 until No. 10 was right on top of him? Was he sick—or asleep? No. Fred said it was the mist and the smoke from 107's engine.

After another hour of questioning, they let Fred go back and sit down, but he looked so bad that Southern took him over to a window, where the air was better.

Then they called on 42's engineman. He'd lost time, too. His engine had

been steaming badly ever since he'd got up into the Limestone country. And on top of that, his headlight had been jarring itself into such a state of focus that he wasn't able to see the steel half a dozen lengths ahead in the fog. Yes, he was late, but so was the Eagle, and for that reason he was sure he had time to get into the clear before No. 10 was due, or anywhere near due.

That let Coyer in with a bang. Why wasn't the Eagle warned at signal 480, if there was such a close connection with 42? He knew the rules: All trains had to clear No. 10 by at least ten minutes.

The commission was there to fix the blame, and fix it they would. Just the same, it was beginning to look like they were in for some real work and a longer hotel bill before things sifted down to the fine points. They seized upon Coyer as a last possibility, like a man clinches the rear handrail of the last car on a train he's got to catch. With considerable satisfaction, they ordered Coyer to answer as to why he allowed trains to operate on such an inadequate margin of time. He had neither arranged for an earlier meeting with 42 nor warned 10 at 480—had he? He hadn't observed the rules, had he?

Grouchy Dan, sitting in one of the super's chairs at the back of the room, suddenly became aware of the fact that Coyer wasn't saying anything. Dan's half-shut eyes popped open, and he jerked straight up in his chair. A hundred fine wrinkles in the leatherlike skin of his face deepened into amazement. What the devil was the matter with Coyer? Why *wasn't* he saying something? Why, of course, he'd warned 10! Hadn't Dan received the order to put the board against 10, himself—right from Coyer? By God, he'd tell them. He half rose in his chair and then slid back into it, more perplexed than ever. Coyer's eyes had met his, and —well, there was no wire between the two men, but Dan received the order from the little dispatcher across the room just as sure as if there had been. So he was to keep quiet about that order, was he? And Dan did keep quiet about it—then and forever.

Coyer stared stonily before him and said not a word. Inside of him there was a fight going on that threatened again and again to force him to blurt out the whole thing and lay the blame where it belonged. And each time he just bit his lip a little harder until the tears came into his eyes, and something in his ears kept humming louder and louder, like the whine of the big turbines in the Junction power house.

YES, Coyer knew the rules, but he also knew rules that weren't on the company's books; rules that took precedent over any others on the right of way of life. Coyer remembered looking out of the windows the night of the wreck and finding the west gantry signals so obscured that he had to look on the yard diagram to confirm them. But Fred didn't have a diagram to refer to, if he missed a signal. The little night-trick man wasn't sure whether Fred missed his signal completely and decided to risk high speed until he got into Sundance yards, or whether he saw it, as Coyer was sure it was displayed—not green, not yet red, but *yellow*—caution—and ignored it on the chance that 42 would be in the clear by the time he hit the throat. No; Fred wasn't that kind; he just plain missed it. And Coyer had it figured out why Fred wasn't saying anything, too.

Fred was getting old. He had only eight more months to serve before he would be retired on a pension, a happy, honorable old man. Then he and Mrs. Galt could fix up the little place on the hill and go into the last long run together, as they had so many times planned. Only eight more months; and now, if he even hinted that he had missed that one signal out of all he had seen and properly acted upon, he was lost. And, anyway, had any one said that it *wasn't* green? No, not yet; and there wasn't going to be. Macy hadn't seen any signals from his side of the cab that night; the visibility had been too poor.

And so Coyer's very silence condemned him. He was perfectly aware that his last chance had gone. He and Southern left the room together. As they were walking along the platform, Southern looked keenly at Coyer and said:

"Coyer, old man, I don't believe a word of it—not your word, but theirs. Lord knows, if you'd said something on your own hook, things'd been different. But you've got your own reasons, I suppose. I don't know 'em and don't expect to, but—— Well, it takes a good man to do a thing like that."

"I'm glad you think that way." Coyer spoke in a low momotone. "It doesn't seem that way to me right now, somehow—more like a damn fool, instead."

"You're only human. It's bound to seem that way for a while, anyway. But listen here." The super stopped in his tracks and faced Coyer. "It's plain as the nose on your face that you're holding your tongue to shield somebody. Go home and think it over. If you still figure it's worth the grade—why, do as you want. But if you change your mind, come to me, and we'll get to the bottom of this thing, and, by Heaven, they'll listen to me. Understand?"

The little dispatcher understood, but said nothing; he just nodded his head and walked away.

As he passed a loaded mail truck standing on the platform, he felt a hand laid on his shoulder. Coyer turned, and for a moment an insane anger swept through him, as he faced Fred Galt. His arm went up to throw off Fred's detaining hand, but he didn't do it. His rage melted away like engine steam on a clear day; the stinging words on the end of his tongue were suddenly checked.

"Why—why, Fred—it's all right, old man. Just go home and forget it. I can find something else to do, easy enough, you know. Why, sure——"

Coyer's voice was hoarse for some reason.

The old bent figure remained motionless before him. It wasn't the same Fred that Coyer had known only a few short days ago. There were tears in Fred's eyes—tired eyes from which the snap had gone. The lids closed tightly over them, and the head nodded slowly a couple of times. Coyer watched the old engine driver disappear in the darkness, with something like peace in his heart.

It helped him when he sat on the edge of his bed up in his rooms over Mrs. Cunning's café and thought the thing over. He had read stories and seen movies where the hero was up against a problem, but the hero always got out somehow and married the banker's daughter as a reward. It seemed improbable that such problems existed any place else and, above all, that one should involve him. He forced a smile; there wasn't much doubt but that this one existed, and that he was caught in it.

He had no intention of deceiving the commission when he went down there to tell them what he knew. He fully expected to tell them how signal 480 had been set at caution, and how he, therefore, considered his duty done to the best of his ability. That would have been all there was to it, and he would have had his job yet. But, somehow, the sight of old Fred Galt sitting over there by the window, drooped and bent, deep lines over his gray face—well, it got him, that was all. The argument went through his mind in a flash, even as they were firing the last questions at him. Fred was old, too old to get a fresh start and too old to try any other work. Coyer hadn't flagged thirty so long ago. Fred had given a whole lifetime of useful service and his record was as clean as the top of a main-line rail. He deserved a reward. Coyer had many years of service yet to give. And, anyway—the thing kept going through his head—anyway, it was going to come out all right.

Up here in his cold room it was all different. The bottom had dropped out of everything. He felt sick. The muscles in his throat kept trying to cut off his wind, and he wanted to run to some place—any place. He tried to realize that the "No Admittance" sign at the bottom of the stairway at the station building was meant for him to read now, just like any other outsider. Somehow, it didn't seem quite possible——

THE next day he was in the office packing up his belongings when the wire came in from Omaha telling Southern who would take Coyer's place. That Coyer was to be let out, no one in the office doubted, but the thing that gave them a left-handed jolt was the informa-

tion in that wire. Coyer's successor was to be Ed Johnson, the new Easterner, up at Scott's Cut.

Southern read the message and handed the yellow paper to Coyer.

"Johnson—*Johnson,*" the super repeated incredulously. "Good glory! I begin to see through it now. He must be the black sheep of some big gun down on the east end, and they're dumping him off on us to give him another chance."

Southern turned away disgustedly.

As a matter of fact, Johnson had been considerably of a mystery ever since he dropped off the smoker of No. 15 and asked when the next local went west. And Scott's Cut wasn't exactly the kind of a place where a man could find out anything about any one else, because Johnson was Scott's Cut's leading, and, in fact, only citizen. He had taken Harry Barnes' place after the time when a freight crew whistled in vain for signals at the tunnel mouth and, upon investigation, found the old man sitting at his table, just as if he had put down a cup half full of black coffee—dead. Coyer's fingers had hardly cooled on the key telling about Harry Barnes when the answer came out from Omaha. Just said the new man would be out on No. 15 the following afternoon; didn't say what his name was or anything else. Funny how tongue-tied those big wheels in the East could be when they wanted to.

Johnson had been up there in Scott's Cut ever since, and no one knew any more about him than they did after the Ohama wire came in, except that his name was Ed Johnson. They weren't sure what the Ed stood for—maybe Edward or Edwin.

Johnson was short—unusually short and quite stocky. There was something about his face that made a man think that the Cut was the best place on the division for him. It was blotched—his face—and his eyes were too blue, with pupils that never were small, even in bright daylight.

Well, there wasn't much to say about him, so it was only a short time before he was quite forgotten. His name was seldom mentioned in the locker rooms. He had a sort of dare-me-to attitude that folks didn't like. The men got used to seeing him up there on the west end during the summer, but they never made friends with him. So far as the dispatcher's office went, Johnson might still be at the end of the road, for all he bothered them, except for his wire and written reports to Coyer. And so it went, and by the time the wind commenced to whistle through the Gap, with a sting that made the men close the cupola windows in the caboose cars, Harry Barnes was still mentioned more than Johnson, despite Harry's pretty heavy drawback.

And here they'd gone and assigned him to one of the busiest jobs in the mountain country. Why, Southern didn't even know he'd been in a dispatcher's office, much less a busy one.

But, after Johnson had been in the chair for some time, there was no room for doubt but that he'd handled the job some place else and had done it well, too. Just the same, something was loose.

"He's a booze fighter, then," Southern declared about a week later. "They shot him up at the Cut to keep him away from firewater, and they think by this time he's cured. Well——"

Akerman, the big Scotch master mechanic, shook his head and looked dour.

"You hit the derailer that time. It's plain that you don't need any one to tell you to keep a sharp eye on the man, or I'd tell you m'self. I don't like him, and that's flat."

Akerman wasn't alone in his opinion, but that didn't help Coyer a bit. It looked like his railroad days were over. It would be useless to try another road; they'd have him blacklisted wherever he went. He knew the folks in Cascade Junction, and it was plain to see that they didn't criticize him for some reason. Maybe they had their own ideas as to why No. 10 crowded 42 that night, and about caution signals that same night. Several offered him something to do. He accepted a job with Todd, the electrical contractor, for two reasons; he was working with something not so far from telegraph and batteries, and Todd's place was on Depot Street, facing the yards. It was as far as he could get away from the railroad.

He met Johnson frequently, but the new man never seemed to notice him. Maybe it was that, and maybe it was the natural way for a man to feel toward another man who held a job—his job—and something he wanted back more than anything else in the world. Anyway, Coyer didn't like the man. Johnson might have been civil, but Ed Johnson didn't notice any one he didn't have to notice.

Coyer wasn't hankering for sympathy; he wasn't that kind. Many were the miserable nights he spent in his rooms. For it surely pulled the drawbars out of a fellow to know he could never have back something that was bread and life to him.

Railroading was a passion with Coyer. He clenched his fists, and his eyes filled, despite himself, when the wind blew from the direction of the yards, and all the familiar sounds filled his ears.

COYER identified each train by its whistle or by its running time in the yards. His watch before him, he would listen for each arrival and departure. He thought of moving to the other side of town, where he couldn't hear the traffic; but somehow he could not bring himself to do it. Thinking about it was as far as he got.

Contented? Well, you wouldn't know he was *not* contented. Southern knew it, and Akerman knew it; no one else. But time was passing.

Fall gave way to winter, and Coyer could see that traffic was heavier than it had ever been before. The train sheets became longer, with double sections.

In the office it was no easy problem to keep the long refrigerator trains from the coast on a passenger-train schedule and maintain uninterrupted service for the westbound tourist travel. Then there were long trains of lumber, grain and cattle that disputed the way with mail trains and even the most petted merchandise train on the whole line—the silk train from Seattle to the Atlantic.

Sidings were bare, and storage tracks empty, for each day the demand for cars became more and more insistent. Locomotives coupled onto a dozen or so at a time and pulled them onto the main line, squealing and protesting from disuse, with every turn of their wheels. There was no taking a car out of a train for minor repairs; it was cheaper to hold the entire train for a few minutes until the chattering repair gang forced crude remedies to do big things.

Akerman had every boiler that would hold enough steam to turn a wheel doing service some place. Few were the pullers that found rest over the pits. At least one foreman and half a dozen men descended on the helpless machine before she'd hardly come to a stop, and before her plates were cool the blowers would be roaring under her grates again, and she would be chased out to a string of sulky cars, with orders to move and stay moving. It wasn't at all pleasant for Akerman to have to explain why class-one repairs had to be done on an engine during such times. The slack summer period should have disposed of all such work.

The car-repair outfit did most of their work on foreign cars, with but few of the company's symbols appearing on the list. Yes; everything seemed to be going along beautifully without Coyer; but appearances are sometimes deceiving.

While no one ever caught him in the act, it seemed most probable that Johnson was hitting the bottle. Southern spoke to Woods, the company surgeon, about how much a man could stand and never show it. Woods snorted. Some men could drink enough in a week to kill half a dozen decent fellows and still never give the least sign, unless you knew where to look for them. Yes, he figured it wouldn't be so hard to find them on that particular member of the office force. Southern was worried. Here they'd go and let a man like Coyer out on a tissue-paper pretense and not only retain, but actually push, a man like Johnson. The super made up his mind to one thing: If there was any way of overcoming the force that held Johnson in service, Southern intended to do some overcoming before a slip at the office caused a few hundred thousand dollars' worth of wreck on the line, some place. He wrote to the general superintendent; he wrote to the chief dispatcher; but the bad part of it

was that he couldn't say definitely what the trouble was, and so Omaha merely asked for details and let the matter drop.

BUT Ed Johnson, nevertheless, was running into an open switch. It happened when Southern came back to the office for a bunch of keys, one night after supper—one of those nights when the north wind was filled with tiny ice particles that stung the men's faces and blinded their eyes. Maybe it was lack of backbone, but chances are it was only because Southern was human, like the rest of men in the mountains, that made him unlock the baggage-storehouse door and take an inside, although roundabout, route to the office, after one look at the storm-swept platform. But this decision did more than to protect him from the weather; it confirmed his suspicions of Johnson and led to some pretty sharp words.

As Southern passed through one of the upstairs offices, he caught a glimpse of Johnson through the windows of the dispatcher's office. The super stopped short. The figure framed in the window was drinking from an upturned bottle which he stowed away in a desk locker. Then he saw Johnson turn and stare out of the window in his direction. The super bethought himself of the lighted flash light in his hand and snapped the switch at once. But the chances were that the dispatcher saw it before it went out; it was the only explanation Southern could offer for what followed.

Johnson's face was more blotched than ever when the super confronted him. He had a mint in his mouth, and, to save his life, the division boss could not detect the smell of liquor.

"Having a drink of water, I suppose." The super's voice cut like the wind outside. "More convenient for you to keep it in the desk than to trot over to the cooler."

Johnson removed the telephone head set from his ears and looked up, with an expression of pained surprise on his face. It was too much for Southern.

"Look here, Johnson. I'm not in the habit of playing word games with the likes of you. I saw you take a drink a minute ago, and right here I'm saying to you that your job isn't worth a tin nickel. Where's that bottle?"

The dispatcher didn't say a word, just opened the desk locker and took out a whisky flask. He handed it to Southern, with a look of half-sneering amusement. The super jerked open the cork and sniffed. Then he looked at the bottle and sniffed again. Water!

Southern was an even-tempered man, but the sight of the individual before him, undoubtedly an alcoholic, coupled with the fact that he was covering his tracks in such a way that the super couldn't make a move, made him see red for an instant. Southern was no small man, and he whirled Johnson to his feet with a force that brought a look of fear into the dispatcher's eyes. The super's lips twitched with emotion, and his eyes were hard as the end of a facing-point switch.

"You sulky dog! You've never gone out of your way to be decent around here"—Southern's voice was even and cold—"but you've hit a higher joint than you figured on for the pace you're traveling, and it's going to ditch you. I know just as well as you do that it wasn't water you took a minute ago. I'm not fool enough to get my head under a wheel by firing you right now, like the mean dog you are. Whoever's held you on the track this long can hold you on still longer, if they wanted to; but"—the super's grip tightened until it must have cut into Johnson's flesh—"I'm out after you, and you're going to travel one straight track after this, or I'll make these hills so uncomfortable for you that you'd still be too close to 'em if you camped in Africa. Do you get me?"

The dispatcher didn't say anything. He hunched his shoulders around to settle his coat back into place and sullenly glared out of the window. Abruptly Southern turned and left the room.

It was two days later the division super was called to Omaha on company business—a week before Christmas.

JUST a week before Christmas, and there wasn't a man on the line, from the super to the lowest foreigner in the gangs, that didn't know it. All previous

records went under by the middle of December. Ton miles, car miles, tons per car mile, revenue per hundred passenger car, engine miles, and all the rest of the figures on the new reports expanded over all previous figures.

Fred Galt pulled the first section of the Eagle coming east, but Fred's string of steel sleepers was followed by two, three, and sometimes by four more strings of succeeding sections of the Denver train. The Resorter always ran in two sections and called for more. Fast fruit trains from the West rattled the windows on one side of No. 2 tower, while high-revenue freights, three quarters of a mile long, spun their engine drivers furiously in an attempt to gain momentum before entering the Gap over tracks on the other side of the tower. It was a continuous procession. The glaring tail lights of one westbound outfit would hardly disappear between the giant stone lips of the Gap when the tower man would drop the board, and a series of exploding exhausts announced the next in line getting under way.

Solid refrigerator trains came to a jolting stop just long enough to hook on a fresh puller and new crew before burning their brakes on the long Gold Run grade down the Fire River Valley. It was late in the season, but still the noisy cattle trains drew up with their double-deck loads and were hustled by important transfer engines to the cattle tracks, where tons of feed were stacked on the platforms. Instead of growing less, the shipments of grain to Chicago threatened to choke the line. Cars long ago pronounced unfit were relined and sent out lonely elevators to carry a beam-cracking load to the hungry giants in the city.

At night, the unnatural, blood-red glare of a warning fuse dimmed the unwinking come-on of green signal aspects. Detonating torpedoes flashed sharp and sudden under rushing engine pilot trucks.

To Coyer there was nothing more mysterious than a railroad yard at night, when darkness made lights move slowly and irresistibly, supported by unseen conveyors. Cars pushed by invisible forces felt their heavy way along the dull steel paths and shuddered to the blows that rattled quickly through the dark train, as the slack was taken up.

And lights—the bobbing circle of a trainman's lantern, or the inquisitive beam of the car inspector's bull's-eye. Then, latticed between the spokes of a giant driving wheel, the bright flicker of an engineer's torch; flattened in the wind and pouring back a waving ribbon of black smoke that smelled of half-burned oil. Carefully shaded lights made each meter and gauge show like a dull blob against the blackness inside of engine cabs. Little green eyes, high up on the engines, made the locomotives look like giant frogs. Over on this track the head end of an extra showed a triangle of one bright-yellow light, flanked higher up by two small white points. And on the next set of rails another triangle of red disks told of a regular passenger train counting off the rail joints in quick succession.

Nearly every night Coyer went over and lost himself in the bustling activity of the yard. He was always welcome wherever he went, from the crossing man's shanty to the super's office in the headquarters building. It was two nights before Christmas, and the little ex-dispatcher was sitting in the sheet-iron office of Akerman, when the brass in the shop gongs rang loudly, and the master mechanic took down the telephone receiver. Coyer saw Akerman's hand clench the instrument. A loud voice was speaking at the other end of the wire.

"What's th . . . Yes! . . . He's here." He looked quickly at his engine chart. "The 1313's under a head of steam. Yell if you want her."

Coyer's hair tingled. Something was loose. He began to whistle, as the big man banged the telephone down on the table and jumped to his feet.

"Quick, man! That fool over at the office has filled himself with rotten liquor, and he's sent a lap order. Southern's just come in, and he's wild!"

Coyer didn't stop whistling, but bolted through the door, jumped across a vacant engine pit, and was running along the cinder path before Akerman was fairly out of the office.

Lap order! Drunken dispatcher! Christmas travel at its height—with the heaviest traffic ever pulled in the mountains.

AHEAD he saw the tail lights of a freight moving toward the station building. By sprinting he caught the lower handrail on the caboose, only to be almost thrown from his hold by a sudden application of the brakes. Looking up, he saw every signal aspect on the bridge showing red—square-ended interlocking blades at horizontal—a positive-stop order. For a moment he stared without understanding. Then he dropped to the ties and cut diagonally across the fast tracks. Things must really be in a bad way when Southern felt obliged to cancel all yard movements.

Coyer burst through the doorway and almost went down, as his feet caught in something on the floor. It was Southern's overcoat. Already he could hear the kind of chatter the wires were racing with, and it wasn't pleasant. But Southern wasn't listening. Head on clenched fist, he was bending over the dispatcher's table, checking a train sheet against a time-table. Half sitting, half standing, Ed Johnson was being held in a chair by a car clerk. The latter had been in the office when he saw Johnson pass his hand over his face and fall back, with a low moan. He called Southern at the railroad Y. M. C. A. Then, knowing that the super would need plenty of help, he had called the most likely place to find Coyer.

Johnson's eyes were all pupils. He was moaning in a croaking monotone:

"They'll meet. Don't know where—can't help it. They'll meet."

"Take that blasted idiot out of here!" Southern ordered.

The clerk pulled Johnson from the chair and half pulled, half pushed him into an adjoining room.

"They'll meet—can't help it——" The door slammed.

"Oh, what a mess!" The super pointed to the charts before him. "Look here, Coyer."

"Why—he's using last night's train sheet for to-night's orders." The little man's eyes dilated with the recognition of inevitable catastrophe.

"Yes; but, so far as I can see, he's only got hold of it on his last few orders. Release yard traffic and clear the westbound tracks."

"What's he talking about—'they'll meet?'" Coyer demanded, his eye tracing the long lines of the train sheet.

Suddenly his head jerked.

"Look here! Oh, Lord! Look at that! He's given the Resorter clearance against the Northern States Limited!"

Southern sank down in the chair vacated by Johnson, and his hand trembled, as he passed it over a white forehead. "Where'll they come together?"

But Coyer didn't hear him. He was thinking faster than he had ever thought before. Flag Rock, to the west, had a night man; and, going on up the line, Mystic, no; Gardner's Forks, yes; Elk Creek, no; Englewood, yes. Now, where'd they meet? He ran his finger along the time-table, then glanced at the clock. No; the Resorter had checked out of Gardner's Forks over ten minutes ago. The Northern States—— He snatched the plug and drummed a scorching fast call on the wire, as he yelled to Southern:

"There's just a ghost of a chance that the Limited isn't out of Englewood yet. They may be late."

His hand never ceased for an instant on the key. Why didn't they answer? A single second might mean everything. His sounder stopped, but his key went on. There was Englewood breaking in. Coyer's key spoke again: "Hold Northern States. Quick." The little man's fingers worked like a fine machine, every letter crisp and distinct.

Englewood cut back: "Northern States out at eight forty-six."

Johnson was right. They would meet, and nothing but a miracle could prevent it. Dimly Coyer heard Southern call the roundhouse and order the wrecker out for a fast run to the west.

It seemed his head would burst. Automatically he began calling Elk Creek, with a forlorn hope that the agent might have returned to the little station at the brink of the rocky gulch of the Elk, for

some reason or other. They'd meet this side of the Elk Creek station—in the cutting at the base of Bald Mountain, most likely. There wasn't a hundred feet of straight track for miles, so the chances were a hundred to one against them seeing a warning headlight and stopping in time. The Northern States Limited would be clipping off the fishplates as fast as safety in that section would permit, because the Northern States was one of the company's crack, extra-fare trains from Seattle to Chicago and back. And the Resorter? Well, the Resorter never loafed any place at any time, so far as any one knew. Their combined speed would be enough to rip open the first few Pullmans, even if they were all steel.

Coyer looked at the clock. Eight fifty-eight. In ten minutes it would be all over, except the grim business of separating the living from the dead. Nothing could stop it. If he could only change the signal at Elk Creek! Just think—if he could only cause the blade to change position ten inches, it would be enough to move the red aspect over the signal lamp, and the Northern States would stop.

Suddenly his hand ceased pressing the key. He wouldn't have to change the aspect. He'd only have to put out the light. He'd *burn it out!* After the smash at Sundance, no engineer in his right mind would run past an uncertain signal.

Changing the connections on the board, he beat a new tattoo on the key. This time it was "GD"—Gardner's Forks. The man at the Forks had heard his frantic calls to Englewood and was ready. He acknowledged, and Coyer cut back at him: "Disconnect telegraph circuit and attach it to signal-light circuit for one minute. Then hook back and report."

"O. K.," came back.

"Thank Heaven—he got it." Coyer brushed past Southern, as he kicked open the battery-room door. It would take the man at the Forks about three minutes to make the change. Coyer wrenched loose the main feed wires from the batteries with savage ferocity.

Southern watched, but didn't understand. The super knew better than to ask at such a time. He saw Coyer place a heavy wire over two posts on the main-battery bank. Then the super understood. Coyer had stopped up the delivered voltage from the batteries and had run a current into the signal lamps, ten times stronger than they were designed to carry. Coyer undid his work and replaced the leads; but the man at the Forks was quicker. The sounder was already chattering:

"Signal lights out. Instruct——"

COYER yelled like a man insane. Nine four! It was just an even chance that the Northern States hadn't passed the Elk Creek station signal before the high voltage burned the lamp out.

On the platform below doctors and nurses drew out of range, as the 1313 blowing under a full head of steam drew up, with her gaunt derrick, material cars, and hospital coaches. The minutes dragged like ages.

"Give them a clear track and tell them to forget they've got brakes, Coyer." Southern's voice sounded suddenly tired and old.

The next instant the whole building shook and trembled, as the 1313's drivers spun under the crowded thrust of the piston. Quickly they gathered speed, and the tail lights lost themselves in the sweep of the curve west of No. 2 tower, with a suddenness that showed how the 1313 was being pushed.

Coyer whistled. He didn't whistle anything in particular—just whistled. Southern sat, white-lipped, his mouth sagging. Such were the inhuman moments that sapped a lifetime of strength from a dispatcher and left him old when he should have been in his prime.

The sounder was tapping—slowly and with funny little stops: "CN—CN—CN."

But it got no farther. Coyer snapped in and acknowledged:

"Signal out Elk C. Orders. Fey."

Fey! That was the Northern States' conductor. Thank Heaven he had learned to handle a key some time in his life. Coyer sent as slowly as his edged nerves would permit. Fey must understand: "Lap order. Take siding."

Fey did understand, and Fey wasn't slow. He got the first word and the first letter of the next one. It was enough. He jammed himself through the window he had pried open and ran for all he was worth up the track to the head end.

The Northern States pulled slowly past the switch; reversed and backed down onto the empty siding. The wheels were still revolving when a chime whistle echoed sharply between the steep, rocky walls of the gorge—and it wasn't the Northern States' whistle.

The Resorter's headlight played for a moment on the snow-covered slopes on the far side of the Elk, as she took a curve, eighty feet or so, to the east. There was a blinding light, a rattle of cracking exhausts, and a stream of sparkling flashes in a hurricane of smoke and steam. The Resorter, pounding the joints with a high staccato, had come and gone.

COYER wasn't sure whether he fainted or not. Anyway, after the dope came in from Fey that the Northern States was all right, he didn't seem to remember anything except that things began to whirl around, and that he had bumped his head on the table top. That woke him up, and he turned to Southern, but the super was laughing at something Johnson's guardian clerk was saying, as he handed back a piece of telegraph paper.

"Here's something that might interest you. Coyer, old man. Ted, here, found it sticking out of Johnson's pocket. Must have been the cause of his final toot."

Coyer took the paper. It was a message from the superintendent's office at Omaha: "Relieve Johnson from service at once. Letter follows."

"Well, Mr. Johnson has removed the necessity of our performing that little duty, fortunately," Southern said quietly.

The clerk was looking through the doorway of the adjoining office where he had taken the helpless man.

"Dunno," he said, shaking his head solemnly. "If you'd ask me, I'd say there was still a lot of relievin' to do. But it'll take a good stomach pump to do it."

TO MAP A VIRGIN REGION

NORTH of the Yukon River in Alaska, east of the East Fork of the Chandalar, and west of the Canadian border, lies a tract of country which Uncle Sam has not yet explored. Approximately it is said to be the size of Massachusetts, and supposedly it contains gold, oil and other valuable natural resources. This summer the Geological Survey will undertake to map this country, which extends to the coast of the Arctic Ocean.

To reach this region the government explorers travel by rail to Fairbanks, then by rail and dog team to Fort Yukon, and from there they proceed to the mining settlements on the East Fork. By the middle of May the streams are expected to be free of ice, and from the East Fork the geological party expects to penetrate rapidly this virgin territory.

As far as the records show, no one has ever entered this region, and what lies before the explorers is a matter of much speculation. There are reasons to suppose that gold will be found in paying quantities, and tests of the shale from Christian River indicate a rich oil content. Oil seepage has been observed at the juncture of the Porcupine and Salmontrout Rivers.

This is the fifth year of explorative surveys conducted by the Geological Survey in northern Alaska. Last year a party of government explorers worked in the region of the Canadian border, near the Porcupine River; another party explored the region north of Nenana, and a third confined itself to the region about Mount McKinley. An airplane expedition charted coastal regions, and reported the discovery of more than three hundred and twenty-four unrecorded lakes and an unknown pass across Revillogigedo Island.

Manus Quits

By Clay Perry

Author of "Fluid of the Sun," "The Two Reds of Travoy," Etc.

Manus, the cook of Camp No. 5, had what might be called a dual nature. He was Scotch-Irish. The lamentable manner in which these two sides conflicted was graphically shown in that weird encounter with the bull moose, when Scotch caution locked horns with Irish daring.

MANUS was a Scotch-Irish citizen of Canada. By virtue of his coated and capped authority as chief cook at Camp No. 5, he was president of the "League of Nations," the camp doctor's name for the polyglot crew of the cook shanty. Manus got along with his crew famously until the dishwasher, a Finn, sickened and was sent out, leaving him only his cockney second cook, the two bull cooks, a Dutchman and a Swede, as aids in feeding fifty bohunks and norskies, who made up the logging crew.

Manus sent down for a new dishwasher, and one fine day in March a new dishwasher arrived, brand-new, in store clothes, a bright wool muffler, yellow shoes, brown derby cocked on the back of his head, and with a new imitation-leather suit case for a "turkey." He walked into the cook shanty, surveyed with a glance the heap of dirty dishes in the huge wooden sink by the door, uttered, "Hello!" from one corner of his mouth, then turned on his rubber heels, and ejaculated, "Good-by!"

He was gone, and no one ever knew his nationality. Manus resolved to get along without another dishwasher. The commissary department of Camp No. 5 was run without expense to the Border Lumber Company, by virtue of its piecework boarders, the Swedes, who logged on their own at fourteen cents a log and paid a dollar a day for food and lodging at Camp 5. Since it cost only fifty-three cents a day to feed the whole crew, under Manus' economical régime, the profit on the Swedes paid for the rest of the crew, who were boarded free, in addition to their wages of sixty-five dollars a month. Minus a dishwasher, Manus could see a tiny profit for himself.

The last straw came when the cockney flung his apron in a corner, one morning, swore a blimy oath, and walked out. He was through. Manus sent down for a new man, but he never arrived. The "Hello—Good-by" man must have spread bad news about Camp No. 5. Things went from bad to worse. Manus quit his job. Oh, he did not quit entirely! The Irish part of him quit, having furnished him with the impulse; the Scotch part of him stuck. He had been drawing the magnificent salary of one hundred and ten dollars a month. It was seventy-five crooked miles to town. Manus figured it would be better to work his way down. He joined the drive at sixty-five dollars and went to work as an ordinary peavey hand. The trouble was, Manus was not even an ordinary peavey hand. He was extraordinarily big, but so clumsy that it was said of him he would jam a drift of logs in an open lake.

The walking boss put Manus on shore duty. Manus found that this meant he was really going to earn his way to town. The drive proceeded at a maddeningly leisurely pace toward Sand Bay. Manus walked, while the walking boss rode. The wanigan, with the new cook aboard, drifted leisurely down; the steamer and the "alligator," which towed logs, proceeded, in their strident fashion, to float down. The logs floated free, now and then, too; but Manus walked the shore. He walked probably three times as many miles as the logs drifted, for the shore line of the Trout River route is more crooked than the waterway itself. He walked for five months and was only halfway to town.

It takes two seasons to drive a boom of logs from Camp No. 5 to Sand Bay. Steamer, 'gator, men and patience drive wind and wave and what little current there is. The 'gator is one of those amphibian woods animals which really exist and do not keep alive merely in the imagination of the timberjack, with the whirling whimpus and the hodag, and the splinter cat and the wallawampus. It is a steam-propelled, seagoing land crab. It wanders where it will, plowing waves with its blunt nose, when the donkey engine is geared to its clumsy stern paddle, hauling itself bodily over portages, on logs laid for rollers to its flat bottom, winding up its cable on a winch, the anchor snubbed ahead. It tows log booms, drags felled timber offshore, runs its snub snout into high banks at high water, anchors to trees, and gives standing room for cutters to chop down the trees. It drags itself over bars and through shallow rapids like an animated stone boat. It is the North Woods equivalent of the war-time caterpillar tank.

This has nothing to do with Manus except that he wished he were engineer of the 'gator and could earn a ride down and be paid for earning it. He knew nothing of engineering, so he kept on walking on the shore. They never even offered him the job of chef on the wanigan. Bitterly he repented the Irish in him that had given him the impulse to quit as cook of Camp No. 5. It is hard to be a Scotch-Irishman. The Irishman does things, and the Scotchman has to pay—and pay—and pay—and that hurts.

IT was the middle of October when the boom of logs, upward of three million feet of Norway pine, jack pine, spruce, tamarack and a little white pine, approached the narrows known as Stony Strait. By virtue of a favorable wind—to the logs, that is, for it was an ill-favored wind for the men, with its icy breath of the North—the boom load was being speeded up, in an effort to crowd it through the narrows before the ice caught it and held it up for the winter.

This speeding-up process consisted in attaching both steamer and 'gator to the boom, which inclosed the logs and herded them along, one at either end. It also consisted in working the shore patrol, day and night, to fend off the boom from the jagged rocks which lined the shore. All efforts were bent upon jamming that boom load through the strait before the freeze-up came.

The combined efforts of wind, wave, steamer, 'gator and men had accelerated the great float from its very best usual pace, of about two miles a day, to one mile an hour, perhaps. You could see

the huge raft, with the smoke-coughing water beetles tugging at each end of the boom, actually move. The heavy booms, made up of twenty-foot lengths of big timber, their ends attached to each other by powerful steel cables or chains, stapled right through the diameter of the timbers, were bent in a great arc. The log field lay in the shape of a great pear, with two stems at its narrow end. The tow cables were the stems. The tension was terrific, not only in tow cable and boom sticks and chains and on donkey engine and paddle wheels and firemen and engineers, but on the shore patrol, as well.

Not only must the men ashore fend off the ends of the boom sticks from catching on the rocks; they must help to bend that taut arc narrower and narrower, so that when the two stems were pulled through the narrows, the skin of the pear would follow and take its meat with it, spilling none of it through an opening in the boom. This was an arduous process.

Manus was stationed on the east side of Stony Strait, on a shore of solid rock, the end of a narrow peninsula which faced a rock island, two hundred feet away. This island rose in solid cliffs from the water and formed the west wall of the strait. The whole shore line of the Trout River route is like that solid rock. Timberjacks at sixty-five dollars a month and found, in this neck of the North Woods, must qualify as steeplejacks, too, as well as possess some of the qualities of muskrats and polar bears. Timber is getting scarce, even here, and it is not an uncommon sight to see an ax-wielding bohunk strapped to a tree which hangs right over the edge of a cliff, some forty to fifty feet above a depth of water just as great, chopping down another tree beside him. When the first tree is down, he will shift his strap to its stump and chop the other down.

Manus was too clumsy to be trusted to fend off on the steep, slippery shore of the island. The peninsula offered comparatively better footing. Manus could not swim. He was no great exception to the rule in his lack of amphibian attainment. Not one out of six rivermen can swim; they don't want to swim; the water is too cold. They prefer to stay on top of the logs and booms and on the stony shore. When one does go in, he scrambles out immediately. Manus, unable to swim, could dive like the proverbial stone. Up in Bending Lake he had fallen from a boom at the same moment with another man, and the story was told that the two of them walked ashore on bottom, Manus below, the other man on his shoulders, starting to walk where the water was fifteen feet deep. It sounds like a seagoing tale. At any rate, Manus got ashore and could not swim. On patrol at the strait, Manus did not fall into the water. It was colder now.

The boom was started through at four o'clock one afternoon. The sunset gave the north wind a better grip for a time; then the wind died, and its icy breath began to congeal. Ice formed on the rocks where the waves rolled up; ice scaled the boom sticks with slippery crust and helped a little to allow the boom to slip through. It was a matter of hauling, first on one end of the boom, then on the other, until some few logs were ejected from the crushed pear and gave room for a few more to be crammed and crushed through the narrow opening, by a pull at the other end of the boom.

MANUS labored, peavey in hand, edging the boom along, an inch or a foot, sometimes a whole yard at a time. The logs ground and shuddered against the rocks and strove to be lifted right out of the water onto the shore. Darkness came. A lantern was sent ashore from the wanigan, with some lunch and a can of hot coffee. Manus knew he was in for a long, cold night. They were going to keep pulling and shoving and edging those logs until they were all through the neck of the bottle and out in the widening waters which make up the beginning of Redgut Bay. Stony Strait was the last narrows on the trip. If the logs were caught here, all navigation would be blocked until next summer. There were gas boats still running up and down the waterway. The government concession

to the Border Lumber Company provided that the narrows be kept clear.

Manus held the lantern and ate his lunch with one hand, while he pried with his peavey in the other hand, and heaved and rolled and pried and heaved again. The boom was grinding hard upon the shore. At times Manus stood to his ankles in the freezing water, at times to his knees; at other times he stood in water halfway between ankles and knees. He took it as part of his job. He was no longer a cook; he was shore patrol. He wished, more ardently than ever, that he was chef on the warm wanigan or engineer on the 'gator, whose fire flare he could see, far down the bay, as it dug in its amphibian toes and hauled at the boom. Farther down, still, was the steamer, coughing, grunting, heaving, slacking, whistling now and then, to signal to the hard-working shore men that they had got to free a jammed boom end, find it in the dark, pry it loose, let it go. The 'gator screamed at Manus, on his side. He gulped his lunch, burned his lips and chin, as he swallowed the last of the quart of coffee out of the can, then attacked his job with both hands and loosened the boom.

It was midnight when the pear was squeezed through at its widest portion. The two steam-driven towing machines began to puff steadily together. The cry of "All on!" went up. Opposite Manus, on the island, the patrolmen who had played against Manus, hopped the raft and began making their way in little zigzag runs, their lanterns bobbing, toward the haven of the steamer, wanigan, and 'gator, to bunk for the rest of the night. Manus had worked his way some distance from the spot where he left the coffee can, and his lantern stood on a flat rock in the other direction.

Because Manus had been cook and valued utensils sent out with lunches, as only a cook can, and because he was Scotch as well as Irish, Manus did not jump the boom at once; he went back to retrieve his coffee can and lantern. When he got back to the point, the boom was just a little way from shore. It was moving only by inches, but it was moving away. Manus had his peavey in one hand, can and lantern in the other. To lose or discard a peavey is the crowning sin of the woods. It would never do to throw that down. Manus, in an agony of indecision, tried to drop the coffee can and keep the lantern. He dropped both, and the lantern went out. Manus muttered a good Scotch damn and fumbled for the lantern. He got it. The chimney was intact. He lighted it, being Irish and able to kindle a pipe in a forty-mile gale. He prepared to leap aboard the boom. When first he had looked at the receding boom he could have made it easily in one jump. Now he could have made it easily in two. He did not make it at all. He had been unable to leap that hyphen in his nationality, at first; now the deep, icy water kept him back.

MANUS was marooned. He didn't believe it, at first. He had the popular delusion that, for a man to be marooned, he must be left upon a desert island. He had never looked the word up in a dictionary, or he would have known he was as completely marooned on this desolate coast of a peninsula as on an island. Later, he needed no dictionary to understand.

Manus yelled. His voice was drowned and mocked by the "All-on" whistle of the steamer, hoarsely echoed by the "All-on" bellow of the 'gator. Manus waved his lantern round and round. It was not a brakeman's lantern—only an old-fashioned barn lantern—and it went out. Manus uttered another Scottish idiom and fumbled for matches with his fingers, stiff as match sticks themselves. He found one match. It was all he had.

Manus was canny, thrifty and brave. He saved the match, not entirely because of the thrift of one half of him, but because he was canny enough to know that if he tried to light the lantern now, he might waste that match and be left in complete darkness, without means of signaling or of lighting his pipe or of building a fire for warmth and as a beacon of distress.

The log boom had widened out into its natural shape and was moving slowly away, farther and farther. Had Manus been able to swim, he might still have

been able to make it. He could not, and probably would not swim, anyway. It had grown so cold that his baggy pants, above his rubber shoes, were stiff with ice. His feet were bitterly cold. Manus yelled once or twice, then gave it up, for the fire glow of the 'gator had disappeared about Tub Point, on the western shore. The bay curved west there. Manus stood, a lonely, Scotch-Irish shore patrolman, left upon a bleak and rock-bound coast, halfway between woods and town.

Manus could walk, of course. He had trained. He could walk and would walk, and, before the sun rose, he ought to be able to overtake the slow-going 'gator and steamer and arrive at the wanigan, made fast to the steamer's side, in time for breakfast. But they would be on the west side of the bay. The eastern shore of the waterway bulged far inland, just below Stony Strait, in a deep, dead-end bay. There was no sort of trail. By the time he got opposite the log boom he might be three miles from them, with open water between.

Manus climbed from the shore onto the rocks of the higher mainland. Here he stood his peavey up against a tree, set his lantern and his coffee can down, and whipped his arms about his chest, stamping his feet to get some circulation in his fingers and toes. After a time he unbuttoned his Mackinaw, raised the lantern chimney, drew from his shirt pocket his solitary match, after filling his pipe with tobacco, and, by virtue of being Scotch-Irish, got the lantern and pipe lighted, both from the same tiny flame.

Manus intended to do some investigating. He found that the rocky peninsula had once been well wooded. Brush heaps, brush rows, and stumps told the tale. From its high promontory on the strait the peninsula sloped gently back into a poplar bush. The poplar bush ran into an alder swamp, which Manus did not know, and he started inland. He passed a giant brush heap, topped with branches of Norway pine, the harsh, stiff needles clinging to them still. He marked it as a good place to build up a big, roaring fire. He was half a mile back from the point when he passed the pile. For warmth and to shield the flickering lantern flame, he carried his light between the flaps of his Mackinaw, just a glimmer showing, shooting a beam ahead to guide his way. For reasons, he carried the empty coffee can and the peavey.

HE saw what looked to be an opening, a trail in the bush. He started in. Very soon, straight ahead, loomed thick, dead branches, crooked, knobbed, oddly like a twisted cedar, yet unlike. A gleam, as if from fox fire, showed amid these branches. Then they moved, as if the stub had fallen down in the wind; but there was no wind! The branches rose again. Manus believed them shadows of something in the lantern light; but they moved right toward him, surprisingly fast, and Manus' hair stood on end. He was not superstitious, save behind the hyphen; for he had read enough of Shakespeare's Scottish tragedy to admire the camouflage of a moving forest to disguise a besieging army; but he had never seen a dead cedar stub move so swiftly when all else was still. He halted. Then he made a mistake. Instead of darkening his light, he flung his coat aside and tried to light up the phenomenon. He heard a muffled snort, the stamp of moving hoofs on muck, and in a flash he knew what he had done and what he had to do—and he did it.

Manus had "shone a moose"—or, as Manus himself would have put it, with equal correctness, he had "shined a moose," and the moose was making straight for the lure.

Manus swiftly turned and fled. He ran straight for the brush pile he had marked, with a nimbleness and sure-footedness remarkable for one so notoriously big and slow and clumsy. He managed, also, to get himself right on top of the pile.

Manus knew, by the memory of the "branches," which were antlers, that it was a big bull moose. All bull moose are big, of course, but this was bigger. It loomed up like a barn, as Manus turned, on the summit of his hopes, having arrived there, peavey, coffee can and lantern, with a noise like a German band ascending Mt. Parnassus.

The noise did not frighten the moose. This bull had just recently begun to recover from that period of temperament which seizes on his kind in September and lasts until each male has met and married his mate. This male had failed to find a lady moose to be his sweetheart, and when Manus stamped his feet to warm them, had pricked up his ears, and headed for the rendezvous. Manus knew now that he had committed a breach of moose etiquette, in more ways than one; he had simulated the stamp of a cow moose, and he had lured with fire.

The moose is one wild animal which is not afraid of fire. It is considered a barrel of fun by frolicsome guides, who take dude tourists up into the moose lands of the North, to put out in a canoe from camp at night. With an adventure-seeking tenderfoot in the bow, armed with a flash light, these guides like to surprise a bull moose feeding at the edge of a muskeg and allow the tenderfoot to shine the moose and cause the animal to charge. When the light is "doused," he halts and turns away, blinded, suspicious and scared—unless, perchance, it be the mating season, as it still was with this bull Manus had shined, and which he continued to shine unintentionally. He waved can and lantern at the moose and shouted: "Git!"

The moose shook his antlers in answer, snorted, and started to try to "git" on the pile. He seemed about to succeed, but fortunately his forefeet crashed through the loose, rotting branches, and he was checked. Manus, stepping backward hastily, felt one foot go down and down. He sat, with his legs at right angles to each other, one perpendicular, one horizontal, helpless, struggling, the lantern waving violently, the bull moose raging, in a terrible "stew" to get Manus.

The accident suggested to Manus, in his desperation, a place of safety *inside* the pile. It was perhaps fifteen feet in diameter, this heap of brush, big enough, he hoped, to act as a permanent barricade. He continued to worm his way downward, prying away the loose-flung branches of pine, spruce and birch. Fervently he thanked the careless lumbermen who had disobeyed fire laws and had not burned their brush.

IN five minutes Manus stood on solid rock, having wormed his way, with much difficulty and no little damage to his clothes and hands, to the bottom of the pile.

The siege of Stony Strait began.

Manus imagined, as he pushed and wormed a hole for himself, that he was going to be fairly comfortable. He had managed to keep the lantern right side up and lighted. The brush pile, in the center, had a sort of vegetable warmth, down at the bottom, to which the lantern added its odorous, and Manus, animal and spiritual warmth. The moose, observing Manus' disappearing act, gave evidence he did not believe in Santa Claus. He grunted, snorted, bellowed, gnashed his teeth, shook his antlers, and pawed at the edge of the heap.

Manus stood for some time, with the heat of the lantern rising about him. It rested between his feet. The brush pile was about nine feet high and packed hard, as brush heaps go. Manus seemed to have gained security. The moose made no effort to charge. He just stood and waited.

Manus began to be uncomfortable. He thought he heard the moose going away. His position was disadvantageous: he could not see a thing. He pushed himself up until his head came out of the hole. The moose had gone—about ten feet. He stood with his hind quarters toward Manus, and, as Manus poked his head out, swung his great, bone-crowned skull ponderously, then whirled and charged, and Manus flung a futile stick and slid down in his hole.

Several times this performance was repeated, until Manus began to comprehend that the moose had taken up a veritable siege and was likely to remain there a long, long time. Manus decided to stay until daylight, but not much longer. He was tired and sleepy, but dared not close his eyes for fear the moose might make a sudden rush and climb the heap and thrust one of his sharp hoofs down into his face or head. It was pos-

sible, he knew, for a moose to inflict a mortal wound with his hoofs. Manus managed to assume a half-sitting position. Sharp sticks hurt his back and prodded his knees and elbows. Now and then a bent twig would snap out and slap him smartly on the nose or threaten his eyes. He got out his pocketknife, severed some of the branches, and thrust them aside, to make his wooden igloo more commodious. He cut away quite a little place in the center of the pile. The idea occurred to him, after three or four hours, that he might burrow out to the side of the heap opposite where the moose held siege. His lantern, he found, was half full of oil. It would burn until daylight. Before it had consumed all of its oil, he must build a fire and cook his——

Manus caught himself nodding, a tender dream sprouting in his brain, a vision of a cook-shanty interior, with great steaming pots of beans, potatoes, rice and corn; great loaves of bread, great pans of gravy, frying pans of salt pork, bacon, ham; and pies, cake, pickles and jam. He saw himself as chief cook of Camp No. 5 and wondered why and how he had ever thought of quitting that warm, well-fed, Lucullian job.

"'Twas the Irish in me made me mad; but the Scotch sint me walkin' on this crooked course to town. They hae both got to git me out o' here!"

He began his tunnel to the perimeter of the brush heap. It was a matter of forcing branches aside, bucking them up with his powerful shoulders, squirming through, cutting larger branches with his knife, and breaking them in two. He used his peavey as a brush hook, some of the time. Half an hour's hard work warmed him well and brought him to where he could feel the cold of the night air coming through. He worked cautiously, then, with the lantern behind him, feeling his way. He broke through the last tangled layer of brush, thrust out his head into the air, and met a blast of hot breath, which sent him back, like a mud turtle withdrawing into his shell. The moose was directly in front of him, waiting curiously for him to appear.

Manus nearly tore his clothing from his back, as he retreated to the center of the pile. He was scared, and he was mad, clear through. Celtic temper urged him to take half a chance and rush the moose. With the peavey he could hit the brute between the eyes. Gaelic caution told him he had not so much as half a chance, with brush encompassing him; he had no way to rush. The moose sniffed at his new-made door. Manus yelled and poked at him with his sharp peavey point. He drew a savage bellow from the bull. Manus took counsel with himself. He had weakened his barricade with the tunnel; he had better lie still and starve the brute away. He did lie still, but he had made a perfect draft with tunnel and shaft, and the air rushed through, and he grew cold again. His wet feet were numb. He cast his ambush strategy to the wind, rose and stamped and rolled himself about the narrow confines of his cell until a sharp stub stabbed him in the ear and reminded him his body needed greater room.

THE thought was an inspiration. He began a new tunnel, leaving his lantern halfway down the first horizontal shaft, so that its rays would shine the moose and keep him sniffing, pawing and shaking his head on that side. The gloom of the place deceived Manus as to time. He poked through the outer layer at the end of his second drift shaft into the bright-red dawn, and the moose was there waiting for him, so near Manus could smell his breath. Manus howled bloody murder, and the moose gave him back an echo that curdled his blood.

Then began a game which lasted well into the day. The game was for Manus to rush from the end of one shaft to the other, scrambling on his hands and knees —or mostly on his stomach—to try to fool the moose into thinking he was where he wasn't. But Manus never won the game. The moose went back and forth about the pile, meeting Manus always at the front or back door.

Manus fooled him once. He crawled up his chimney and flung sticks at the surprised old bull, and the moose grew red-eyed and frantic with rage and shame. It didn't help any.

Manus, tired of the crude fox-and-goose game long before his shaggy playmate had even thought of leaving off. Then Manus thought of another one. He surprised himself with his ingenuity. He called up a bundle of Norway pine needles in a wad, laced it with twigs, thrust it on the end of a long branch, waited until Mister Moose was snuffing at his front door, lighted his defensive torch with a splinter, kindled carefully at the lantern wick, and thrust it out, aimed at the moose's eyes.

That torch came near undoing all of Manus' former enterprise. A spark fell inside the tunnel; while the moose, outside, was stamping on the firebrand with sharp hoofs, Manus fought fire in his humble home with bare hands and damp débris and saved himself from incineration by the thickness of a wad of wet leaves. This ended his playing with fire.

Manus was quite worn out, his patience gone, while the moose seemed to have all the time and patience in the world. Manus squatted in the center of the heap, morose, sullen, red-eyed, dry-lipped, not even daring now to try to light his pipe for fear of fire. The sunrise wind came up and blew into his shaft and made him shiver like a reed. The lantern looked sick. He shook it, and it seemed dry of oil. The flicker of light brought a roar from his enemy. Manus turned the wick down as far as he dared and made one more desperate try at the fox-and-goose game.

This time he won. He tore loose from the brush heap, his peavey in his hands, before the lumbering animal had quite made the circuit of the pile. He ran. Just where he was going, Manus did not know. He ran in the general direction of the shore and stopped when he reached it, because, had he wished to take a jump or a dive or a swim, it would be rather difficult. A film of half an inch of ice covered the water. The logs had got through just in time.

Manus had only an instant to note this, then he was called on for a new burst of speed. There was no tree in the vicinity that he could climb. He did not wish to climb a tree, anyway. He ran until he was cornered on the rocky edge of a steep slope, below which the frozen lake stretched, a glistening barrier—and he stood his ground. He swung his peavey, gave a banshee, bagpipe war cry, and broke one of the moose's forelegs with his heavy logging tool.

He won the race back to the brush heap, though the moose went as fast as three legs could carry him. Manus made the top like a leaping kangaroo, slithered down the chimney, safely home, once more a prisoner. Outside, the bull moaned his anger and his pain. Manus winced to hear it, mostly because of the pain. He was tender-hearted—with one side of him. The other side exulted grimly over the first blood drawn.

Manus remained interned in the brush pile for the entire day. By some miracle of deoxydization, the lantern, turned down to a pin point of flame, burned on and on. At dusk wolves were heard on the distant ridges, howling for their prey. They did not frighten the moose away. He was made of stern stuff. He stayed. His broken leg made him, seemingly, more savage and determined. He limped away, at intervals, to feed, but returned with a rush at the slightest sound of activity on Manus' part.

TORN by hunger, Manus began to plan wild escapes. They went all the way from a desperate charge, with his peavey as lance, to a holocaust. None of them was practical, one critical lobe of his brain advised him. The spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak—and growing weaker all the time. The cold, however, was growing stronger. No heat at all came from the dim lantern. Manus wondered that it burned at all. He dared not shake it now, for fear he would extinguish its smoky, pin-point flame.

Manus slept. In the morning, groping feebly about, his hand came in contact with the empty coffee can. Full-panoplied, there sprang into his brain a new plan. With trembling hands and shaky legs he clambered up his perpendicular shaft, the coffee can held by the handle of its cover, in his teeth. It was scarcely light, but Manus could see the moose holding up his broken leg, not two yards away, his head down, his ugly muz-

zle moving back and forth, side to side. in the sway of his unremitting anger. Manus selected a spot near where the moose stood, which sloped down and was fairly clear and smooth rock. He clapped his round wool cap upon the top of the can, lifted it above his head, and flung it down the slope as hard as he could. It went clanging hollowly, bouncing, rolling, and the cap stayed on. The moose rushed after the coffee can.

Manus did not wait to see how far he charged; he slid down inside, got his peavey, picked up the lantern gingerly, and crawled out the back door, away from the direction in which he had hurled the can. The moose was stamping at the can when Manus emerged. The wind fanned his faithful lantern into a burst of flame, as Manus ran for the rocky shore, desperately resolved to trust himself upon the ice which must have been freezing fast all night; and an inch of it, he knew, would hold a man, but not a moose.

Manus made the edge of the ice and stopped to test the crystal filament. It looked no thicker than paper to him. The moose came clattering and fairly slid down over the steep bank, and Manus was again at bay.

There was never a man more literally between the devil and the deep-blue sea. But it was curious how desperation made him bold. He was more fearful of the water, as if afflicted with a peculiarly canine distemper, than he was of the moose. He dared not venture on the ice. His peavey, when he thrust it down near shore, went right through, and water bubbled from the hole. Manus, with some idea that he must save the lantern and its fire, slid it out on the ice, and it skittered and whirled fifteen feet away before it stopped. It continued to burn. Manus turned, with his peavey whirling about his head and did battle with the moose.

Manus dodged. The moose was handicapped, and Manus scored again. The steel-shod shaft of the long-handled logging tool smashed full upon the animal's good knee, in front. Manus heard the crunch of breaking bone, sprang back, and fell. Quickly he got to his feet and watched the moose. After two quite terrible efforts to pursue, the beast fell on his knees, then on his side. Rising again, his useless forelegs crumpling under him, the moose fell and rolled on one side, rose once more, bellowing and snorting and shaking his great antlers, and at last he went down, with his withers up against a rock, to support himself, as he rested his breast upon the ground.

MANUS trembled. He trembled for several reasons; from hunger and fatigue, from realization of how narrowly he had escaped death—and from pity at the plight of the animal he had disabled. The bull strove to lift himself forward and charge his enemy still. Manus felt the tears roll down his cheeks. They were not for himself. All the hatred, all the fear, all the grim resolution to kill this big brute that had besieged him melted away. The moose was a fearful sight—and fearsome, too. If Manus moved, the moose lunged and flung himself upon those broken knees, his dangling hoofs clattering upon the stone. Manus groaned and closed his eyes and breathed a sort of prayer.

His job was now to be that of a killer, and he did it, as best he could, though it cost him more than one attempt and nearly his life. Clumsily he managed the blow, a thrust with the long, thick, sharp-pointed peavey pike, which went to the brain of the bull and laid him low.

Manus had been hungry. For hours he had thought, dreamed, and almost raved aloud of the thick, juicy moose steak he was going to have when he finished "that damn phool animal"—but now he could no more have sliced off a steak than cut off his own right hand. He was sick. He walked out on the ice, which was two inches thick, save where it touched the very shore. Securing the lantern, he went on past the island to the near-by western shore and down the shore trail to the steamer and the wanigan and the 'gator. They were huddled in a bay, the boom now drawn clear across the broad waterway to keep the logs from breaking away with the ice in the spring.

The 'gator was going back. Manus knew that. It would smash through the

ice and work its way up to the head of Bending Lake to be on hand, in the spring, when the new gang of cutters were ready to turn peavey hands and start another drive.

Manus went aboard the 'gator, his lantern in one hand, his peavey in the other. With a clatter he threw the peavey down at the very feet of the walking boss, who scowled.

"What's the matter? Where you been?"

"Nawthin's the matter, save I'm starved and froze. I quit. Why did ye go away an' l'ave me stranded?"

"Where—when? I thought ye was aboard the steamer."

"Night 'fore lasht, at Stony Strait, begad! I been there ever sinct. Had to wait for the ice to freeze up so I could walk across. I can't swim."

The walking boss burst into laughter.

"Ye dumb fool! Ye was on the mainland. Ye could walk along. Ye been doin' that all summer. Ye could 'a' walked on to town. The job's through, anyhow. Get your time!"

"Ye can't fire me!" snapped Manus. "I'm quitted already. I don't want to go to town a-walkin'. I want a ride. I'm goin' back with the 'gator to Camp 5 and take me old job back—*inside*. In the spring I'll ride down on the wanigan and take a gas boat at Trout Falls. No more shore patrol fer me."

Manus said nothing at all about the moose until he had to. That was soon, for the 'gator, on the way up, stopped at Stony Strait for wood. The carcass of the dead moose lay on shore. Manus went to retrieve it; the engineer claimed it. Manus made good his prior claim, by the two broken legs and the coffee can, which he retrieved, with his cap, badly mangled and punctured, but mendable. He skinned the moose and saved the hide, and the story came out of him, inch by inch, a little at a time, for the Scotch are a close race, and Manus at times was quite Scottish in his ways.

They began to call him "Bull Moose" Manus, but the "Bull" was dropped when he was welcomed back as chief cook, with two "bulls" under him to rustle wood and water, and another pair of bohunks to make up the League of Nations, in the warm, steaming old cook shanty.

"Shine-a-Moose" Manus, for a time seemed quite clever and descriptive, but a steel meat cleaver is a threatening tool, and the cook is a tyrant in his own domain. It became simply "Moose" Manus, and Manus didn't mind at all. The great head, with its wide, sprawling antlers, was hung high in the hall, and Manus named it, for a reason of his own, "Macbeth."

" 'Twas a Scotch moose, eh?" inquired the camp doctor, when he heard the name.

"Aye—with a touch of Irish in him," Manus said. "Ye should 'a' heard his brogue when he was alive."

LEAVE IT TO THE DOGS

THE story of how two malemute dogs made a losing race across a thinly inhabited region of northern Alaska to summon aid for their dying master, has just been made known. Ginnis Solomon, an Indian who lives in the virtually unexplored Black River district, one hundred miles north of Circle City, recently told how two dogs, belonging to Roy Felter, a trapper, arrived at Solomon's camp, which is a lonely cabin in this frozen territory. The feet of the two dogs were cut and bleeding from their long race over the frozen snow and jagged ice. Each dog bore a note from Felter.

Solomon was unable to decipher the notes, for the paper had been soaked by the snow, and the writing had faded. Divining that the trapper must be sick or in want of assistance, Solomon started at once for Felter's camp. When the Indian arrived at his distant neighbor's camp, he found Felter dead, and signs in the snow pointed to the fact that he had started out for help, but had been forced to return to his cabin by weakness.

As Shakespeare Says

By George Parsons Bradford

Author of "Share and Share Alike," "Alias Fagin," Etc.

It does not seem likely that there could be a connection between the immortal poet-dramatist and an illiterate criminal in prison, and yet, in the case recorded here, Mr. Shakespeare was an out-and-out accomplice, not only in helping to plan, but in frustrating a desperate plot.

LIBRARY day in the big prison fell on Wednesday, the hour six to seven in the evening. The library was housed in a room in the administration building, with a grated door looking onto the spacious, rock-floored court across which the prisoners marched from the mess hall to the cell houses, of which there were two. At a point near the center of the court, the double file of prisoners branched, one line proceeding to one cell house, the other to the second.

On library day, however, the routine of the march from supper was altered to give the prisoners opportunity to file past the library door and to receive the books for which they had previously sent in their requests along with their penitentiary numbers. Not all the prisoners drew books; indeed, there were hundreds of men among the two thousand there who never thought of reading. Sometimes the book for which a prisoner asked was not in, but, as there was a rigorous rule in force in respect to the return of books, and as every volume was listed in the catalogues available to prisoners on good behavior, their requests were usually filled. The public of that State had been generous in donations to the library; there were several copies of most of the books. That library would have done credit to a fairly large-sized town, both as to the number of volumes on hand and their character. The prisoners returned the books by the simple process of depositing them on a rack in the court, while marching out to breakfast in the morning.

On this particular Wednesday, which happened to be the first day of March,

a new face appeared in the library line; that is to say, a face new to the convict-library attendants at that particular spot, but old and familiar in the prison. Four years old in the prison, as a matter of fact; and, if a notation beside a man's name in the commitment book meant anything—and none ever questioned the grim authenticity of those notations—doomed to grow much older there. Fifty years was written after the name of Billy Sweetser.

An obliging convict clerk in the commitment room, some two or three years previously, had figured out Billy Sweetser's time to a day, based upon the presumption that during those long monotonous years Billy got by without violating the prison rules and thus earned every possible minute of "good time." If Billy earned every credit both for labor and good behavior, his fifty years would be shortened to a mere thirty-nine years, four months and twenty days. Such an outcome would put Billy Sweetser's feet on the ground close to his sixty-fifth birthday.

Yet Billy, when the convict clerk apprised him of the figures, did not look that far ahead. It is extremely difficult for a man around twenty-seven years of age to imagine himself at sixty-five. It is much more difficult for such a fellow to accept a fate which would keep him in a prison for all those intervening years. To look clearly ahead to a day nearly forty years hence, when he would totter out the big gate, lean and gray and feeble—impossible! Billy Sweetser saw no such prospect—never had seen it.

He possessed the usual stock of human hope, fortified by a supreme confidence in his own cunning. Legal processes failing, all other means of no avail, he had yet his facility for getting out of tight places. There were ways—always ways for the skillful and scheming crook.

As he stood that evening in the library line, Billy Sweetser, now twenty-nine years old, did not look like a fifty-year man. His genial countenance, the smiling blue eyes which he turned upon guards and prisoners alike, held no note of the tragedy spelled by the combination of his name and the notation "fifty years" in the commitment book. There were fifteen-year men there; yes, and ten, five and three-year men there, who looked more downcast than Billy Sweetser.

For Billy had an unquenchable spirit, a fortitude that kept him from wilting. The manner of his life, as far back as his memory went, had been a series of gambles against desperate odds. In the slums of the city whence he came, orphaned, adrift, he had been compelled to outwit truant officers and corner policemen and social workers to preserve his liberty. From other kids he heard of rumors that he was destined for one institution or another, but he always managed to crawl into some hole, a hop or two ahead of the beneficent hand reached out for him. Holes, a series of holes, had been Billy's habitations—holes, cold, hard nooks and corners in alleys, along the water front, under the piers. He got sustenance wherever he could, principally from fruit stands and the outdoor displays of enterprising grocers. He was not above gliding into a delicatessen shop, under the ledge of the counter, and picking off sausages or any edible thing in favorable proximity to his exploring fingers. He took part in raids with other homeless urchins and some who were not homeless; he looted bakery wagons and milk wagons in the early hours of the morning.

THE time came when his quests for food merely paused at, but were not stopped by, locked doors and windows. His graduation from petty thievery to burglary seemed to come quite naturally. He came to a period of adolescence when rags and dirt irked him. He looked enviously upon the gayly clad sheiks who loitered about the corners and pool rooms in the slums or walked with girls. Ambition dawned. No more did he steal merely to gratify the animal cravings of his stomach; no longer did he think of clothing as merely a rampart against the cold. Alone sometimes, with gangs often, he looted in the dead of night, became adept at the arts of breaking and entering; stole money or merchandise that could be easily converted into money. He began to live in a regular room, to eat in restaurants, to adorn his slim figure with

gaudy raiment, to submit his genial face to the smelly ointments of barber shops, to extend his fingers occasionally to a manicurist. Yes, indeed, Billy Sweetser became a sheik—a sheik immaculate and good looking, the "molls" of his acquaintance said—yet one whose mind remained as unlettered and crude as in the savage days when he slept in alleys and ate scraps of stolen provender.

It may have been that Billy Sweetser was too busy training himself to be a crook to give much thought to the matter of education. He had never gone to school a day in his life, yet somehow he had learned to read the newspapers. His interest in them was casual. He liked baseball, went to a game once in a while, read of that sport and prize fighting. He was interested, too, in the daily accounts of crime. He had never looked inside a book in all his life.

Arrests followed one another in rapid succession, but conviction was another matter. Approaching his twenty-fifth birthday, Billy Sweetser had become something of a power among crooks. He had a gang of his own. "Fixer lawyers" got him out more than once on technicalities or framed alibis. Numerous arrests brought him into close contact with the police, and they bided their time. Sooner or later they would get him on something from which his friends and fixers could not rescue him. Such fellows, rendered brazen by numerous easy escapes from conviction, fall with a sickening thud, sooner or later.

Billy Sweetser did. He and his gang, branching out, got to operating on an inter-State scale, flitting about in stolen automobiles. Far from the city of whose slums he was a product, Billy Sweetser fell. A pay-roll holdup, highway robbery, caught in the act. No chance for a fixer there, a framed alibi; caught in broad daylight, with a gun in one hand and the pay-roll satchel in the other. Fifty years; highway robbery, armed. The country was getting fed up on such escapades. Youth and a smiling face, a demeanor remarkably gentle and artless, got Billy Sweetser nothing in court. He fell with a crash, along with the other captured member of his gang, Tony Barona. Fifty years apiece. The others got away, and Billy and Tony never squawked.

In the big prison Billy Sweetser was a denizen of one cell house and Tony Barona an inmate of the other. In the four years and a few months they had been inside, not one word had they exchanged. Indeed, Billy and Tony had seen each other only once or twice, and then at a great distance, with the breadth of the prison yard between them.

THE records of Billy Sweetser and Barona, relayed by the police of their native city, were sufficient for the officials of that prison. Put that pair together, and they'd be up to mischief. So pains were taken to keep them apart, far apart. Tony might have been jailed in Texas and Billy in Maine for all the chance they had of getting together. So it seemed.

Tony had been more fortunate in the matter of education than Billy. His father and mother had had the foresight to live until Tony could be put through school. Before he turned crook he had take a course in accountancy. Thus equipped and with the fact recorded in the history he gave of himself, he had almost at the outset fallen into a soft job—that of a clerk in the storeroom. He ate with the clerks, at different hours than Billy. They never saw each other in the mess hall. Their routine in all cases kept them out of sight of one another. Billy, uneducated, toiled in the shoe shop.

The guards, watching the library line, stared at Billy Sweetser, and some of them grinned. Billy grinned in return. He was known exactly for what he was in that prison—an illiterate product of the slums, who would find it pleasanter to spend his idle hours in the cell house talking with his cellmate, perhaps plotting escape, than in reading books. Standing close to the library door, through the grated apertures of which the books were passed out, was elderly Samuel Wray, an unofficial official—to use a curious term which had been applied to him—of the prison.

Mr. Wray, gray and benevolent, wore

neither the uniform of a guard nor a badge of officialdom, yet he was a man who had authority from the governor of the State to be there. He was the social executive of the prison. His work among the prisoners had nothing to do with their labors or the details of their confinement. It was concerned with their moral state.

He was the man who had been responsible for the prison library. Previously to his coming, the reading matter offered the convicts consisted merely of shipments of old magazines and books and newspapers, received from time to time from individuals and philanthropic organizations. There was no system. Samuel Wray, among other things, had established the library. He was an extremely wealthy man whose hobby was prison reform. He was at the head of a movement in the State for more humane treatment of convicts. He was a personal friend of the governor and had won the governor's consent to an unofficial commission to establish himself at the prison for the purposes of missionary work. He was gathering data which he and others interested in prison reform meant to present to the legislature in their campaign for a more liberal prison system. They were working for the establishment of the honor plan at the State penitentiary.

Samuel Wray was intensely interested in the prisoners, and his labors took an individualistic turn. He often talked to them in groups, yet found time for more than one personal confab with a single convict. He did not preach, did not bore them with platitudes; had a happy facility of appealing to them, man to man, telling practical stories of the material advantages of going straight. He had sent more than one man out of that prison with a determination to give up the crooked life.

Yet Samuel Wray elicited scant sympathy from the majority of the prisoners; scarcely any from the guards and officials. The latter were hard boiled when it came to dealing with convicts. A convict was a convict, a man to be fed as scantily as possible and worked to the limit, but principally a man to be kept inside the four walls for the term specified in his commitment papers. If he wasn't watched and ground into submission by a rigorous system of restraint, he might escape. What happened to him after he was released, what he did, was no concern of theirs.

If he came back inside those four walls, then they had him again to keep, but any idea that they might appeal to his better nature for the good of himself and the State, too, never occurred to the guards and officials. That was a far-fetched theory, a dream, with which they had no patience. So they had no patience with Samuel Wray. His very presence there they construed as a criticism and an offense, yet he was a personal friend of the governor. Their resentment was not open, but sneers behind the back of Samuel Wray were plentiful, even on the part of the warden, who was a product of the system which looked on every convict as a man as hard and soulless as the rock and steel which kept him in durance. Whenever the ideas of Samuel Wray received a rude shock, due to the backsliding of some prisoner on whom he worked, the warden and his underlings were pleased. They looked on Samuel Wray as a nuisance, a meddler, and hoped for a turn that would take him away from the prison, so that he would not always be putting his finger into their affairs. Mr. Wray had saved numerous prisoners from punishment.

DID this elicit the whole-hearted sympathy and respect of the prisoners? It certainly did not. Curiously, there were hundreds of convicts who also sneered at Samuel Wray and called him strange, disrespectful names—behind his back, of course. The professional crooks were against him to a man. They called him the "lily waver," the old guy who was always telling them the advantages of a straight life—a "lily-white life," as they called it. They held him in contempt. He knew they held him in contempt, but he was not baffled.

Samuel Wray espied one of these professional crooks in the library line. Numerous of his ilk drew books, had drawn books ever since the library was opened, but always as men who turned to books as a relief from monotony, with never a

thought that books might improve their minds. Yet here was a crook whose history was known to Samuel Wray. If Billy Sweetser wanted a book it was for a studious purpose. The operation of reading would be laborious for Billy Sweetser.

Benevolent Mr. Wray smiled at Billy, and Billy smiled back. Mr. Wray knew that this thorough young crook was coming to the library for the first time. He nodded encouragingly, as Billy found himself in front of the grated door.

Billy mentioned his number to the library clerk. The clerk presently returned with the volume for which Billy had sent in his request. As Billy held the book in his hands, Samuel Wray took a look at it.

"Shakespeare?" he said in some surprise. "Are you interested in Shakespeare, Billy?"

"Yes, sir," Billy replied, with a grin. "T'ought I'd take a look't de old duffer, 'n' see'f he's hot stuff like ev'rybody says."

Billy was out of the line now, making way for those behind. Samuel Wray continued to smile pleasantly, then turned serious.

"I'm afraid—I'm afraid, Billy," he suggested, "that you won't find Shakespeare very exciting. Ah, well, Billy, you and I have had many little talks together. I mean no offense, but——"

"Dat's all right—dat's all right, Mr. Wray. I know what y'u t'ink. It's deep stuff, Shakespeare is—too deep fer a guy like me. Aw, well, maybe dat's so, but I just kinda t'ought I'd like to take a squint at what he's got to say, 'n' see'f it's de straight goods er de bunk."

"Yes, yes, to be sure," the old gentleman agreed. "I admire your ambition, Billy. But there are systems of reading which a man in your position might find more profitable and entertaining. I certainly don't wish to discourage an interest in Shakespeare, but, didn't you tell me once, Billy, that you never read a book in your life?"

"Yes, sir. I sure did."

"Shakespeare, you know, Billy, is all in blank verse."

"Dat's what some guy told me." He grinned. "Well, I'm kinda blank, too, 'n' I t'ought it'd hit me—dat blank verse. Anyhow, I'm gonta take a crack at Shakespeare. If a guy's gonta read, he might's well read de best stuff."

"Surely, certainly. However, there is a way to approach Shakespeare which you might find more profitable and amusing. I know the volume you have there—the 'Comedies of Shakespeare.' There are no notes in that volume. It's one of a three-volume set, and the notes are in the last volume, at the end of the 'Histories.' The notes are important, Billy, even—even to well-read men. Now a better way to start in on Shakespeare is to read the 'Tales' first—Lamb's 'Tales from Shakespeare.' They are in prose, and——"

"I don't do t'ings dat way, Mr. Wray. When I got a job to do, I go at it by de head, not by de tail. It's Shakespeare I want, head on; take him right by de horns 'n' t'row him down fer de count. Leave him to me, Mr. Wray, 'n' let some other guy that's afraid tackle de job by grabbing de lamb's tail first, but fer me——"

Samuel Wray chuckled. He admired the quick mind of this young man from the slums. Lamb's "Tales from Shakespeare" were Greek to Billy Sweetser, but his brain was nimble enough to fashion a pun out of the allusion.

"Do as you like, Billy. To-morrow evening I should like to have a talk with you and answer any questions I can about what you've read. Ah—Billy, is there any particular play of Shakespeare that you are interested in—one that you've been told about?"

Billy meditated, with a shrewd look in his eyes.

"A fella one time said dat 'Twelf' Night' was a humdinger, 'n' I kinda t'ought I'd take a look at dat."

"Ah, yes—'Twelfth Night.' Well, I hope you enjoy it, Billy. I shall see you to-morrow evening and ask you about it."

Billy Sweetser marched into the cell house with the treasured volume under his arm. In his cell, facing Pete Drummond, he tapped the book and whispered:

"I got it, Pete."

The big burglar nodded with interest, but did not stir from the bunk. The sparkling elation in Billy's eyes gave way, under the pressure of a disconcerting thought, and his face fell.

"But, lis'en, Pete," he informed his cell mate. "Dat nosey old lily waver—old Sam Wray—he seen me wit' dis book. Right away he wansa know about me 'n' Shakespeare getting friendly. He t'inks I'm getting good, I guess, 'n' he's set on helping me. He says to-morra evening he's gonta ast me some questions about what's inside dis."

"Well," Drummond rejoined, in growling undertones, "what if he does? Guess you can answer his questions, can't you?"

"Sure," Billy rejoined; "only it means I gotta read dis dam' book."

THE "Comedies of Shakespeare" was rather a bulky volume, bound in cloth. "Twelfth Night; or, What You Will," appeared about the center of the book, which, opened at that point, gave considerable information to Billy Sweetser and Pete Drummond.

They became so absorbed in the works of the Bard of Avon that it was close to the nine-o'clock period of "lights out" before Billy Sweetser had opportunity to do any reading; absorbed in a way that would have amazed Mr. Samuel Wray, had he known of the uses to which his library was being turned. Billy, before the lights went out, found merely time to knit a puzzled brow over the first scene in "Twelfth Night." He went over it word by word, striving to find out what in blazes the *Duke of Illyria* was talking to *Curio* and *Valentine*.

"He's batty on some jane," was Billy's comment. "Give up a hunting trip, way I figger it out, 'cause he's coocoo when some guy comes back without making a date wit' her. But lis'en, Pete, I just begun to read sumpin about a sea captain and sailors washed ashore, and out go the lights. Maybe there'll be some sense to dat."

Pete Drummond grunted his disinterest.

"Put that book where it ain't gonta be bothered," he advised, "and go to sleep."

As each prisoner made up his own bunk in the morning, there was no likelihood of the book being disturbed, unless the guards conducted one of the periodical searches of the cells, while the prisoners were at work. In that event, anything might happen. It was the part of wisdom to leave the volume in plain view. If it were concealed under the bedclothes, a prying guard might get an idea that it would stand investigation. So it was left, next morning, on the neatly arranged bunk of Billy Sweetser.

That evening, before Billy marched into the mess hall, Samuel Wray caught him for a few minutes' conversation. Mr. Wray was considerably pleased that Billy had at least got the import of Shakespeare's opening scene in "Twelfth Night," even if he were a trifle hazy over the *Duke's* philosophy concerning certain aspects of the noble sentiment of love. Billy exhibited interest in the promised shipwreck scene. Mr. Wray shook his head.

"Shakespeare," he said, "is full of adventure, if one knows how to read him; but he is chiefly interesting because of his profound observations on life. Now, to a man just beginning the study of literature, it is important that he be entertained. Deep thought will grow out of the entertainment. I could suggest a number of books, good lively stories——"

"I'll stick to Shakespeare," Billy cut in. "There must be sumpin to a guy dat's touted high like he is."

"Indeed, Billy, there's a great deal to him."

"Den why not give him a chanst to work on me?"

"A splendid idea—a splendid idea!" said Samuel Wray, and he began to look on Billy Sweetser with opened eyes.

Yet he did not open his eyes far enough.

Every night Billy Sweetser read part of "Twelfth Night," first because he realized the importance of being able to talk intelligently about it with Samuel Wray; then because he had developed a mild interest in the story. He had to read passages over and over before he could get the slightest inkling of what they meant, but he did find the study, the search, interesting.

Yet when the next Wednesday morning dawned Billy Sweetser turned in the "Comedies of Shakespeare" instead of renewing the book for another week, as he could have done under the rules. Along with the book he filed a request for the "Tragedies of Shakespeare."

The volume, the second in that particular set, was exactly the same size as the first, bound like it. Samuel Wray was on hand that evening when Billy got the "Tragedies."

"Still a partisan of Shakespeare, I see, Billy," he remarked.

"Yes, sir. 'Hamlet's' my meat now."

Mr. Wray frowned. He wanted to help this young man, probably more than he wanted to help any other convict in the bunch, for he was a thorough crook, a living example of the wrongs inflicted on mankind by an unhappy environment. Unknown to Billy Sweetser, Samuel Wray had peered deeply into the facts of his life, as reflected in his police record, and he thought he understood Billy. If he could fetch a man like Billy into line, get him to thinking straight, it would be a great victory over the underworld—a striking achievement in the direction of reform; for Billy was as much of the underworld as a man could be, having been in it all his life. Billy was not a man who had slipped backward, fallen from grace, for the simple reason that he had never achieved grace. If a man like Billy Sweetser could be straightened out, there was hope for all.

But he was stubborn. Here he stood now, rebuffing all efforts of the benevolent Samuel Wray to help him with the studies he had so recently taken up. It was ridiculous, of course, this man who found it difficult to read the simplest English seeking to get at the profundities of Shakespeare. It was a waste of time. What did he make of the obsolete words in Shakespeare? How did he get out the veiled truths—truths concealed often in archaic verbiage, yet truths which flashed like sword blades in the sunlight to a mind accustomed to absorbing and sifting such sublimities? He got something out of it, but, at best, he could only skim. If he would take advice—help—suggestions—Mr. Wray would make Shakespeare easier for him. Other prisoners had followed to their advantage and entertainment the reading systems suggested by the founder of the prison library. But Billy Sweetser was headstrong to such an extent that it savored of infinite conceit.

Well, anyhow, it was encouraging that he was reading.

"I hope," Mr. Wray told him, "that you will go back to 'Twelfth Night.' You don't get it all, yet, Billy. It's all right to dip into something else, to rest one's mind—'Hamlet,' for instance. But to make a thorough study of Shakespeare, you must go over the plays again and again, and still again and again. Go back to 'Twelfth Night' next week. You'll be surprised at the new thoughts you'll get out of it."

"I'll do dat—t'anks," Billy assured his would-be benefactor.

Yet Billy walked away with a chuckle in his throat—an unuttered chuckle.

"Next week," he repeated, to himself—very much to himself. "I won't be here next week. Dis is de eighth of March. On de twelf' night——"

Again he said to his cell mate, Pete Drummond, the burglar:

"I got it."

And once more this precious pair of crooks became absorbed in a volume of Shakespeare. When their joint operations were concluded, Billy remarked to Pete:

"'Hamlet's' what I gotta read dis time, if I'm gonta keep on fooling dat old lily waver. 'Hamlet!' Here it is, right in de middle, just like 'Twelf' Night' was in de middle. Well, here goes."

DAILY newspapers reached the prisoners through the mails. They came to those who had money enough to subscribe for them, and were then passed about among others not so fortunate. A friend of Pete Drummond's got a paper each day, read it in his cell in the evening, and turned it over to Pete each morning. Thus the news was almost thirty-six hours old when Pete and Billy Sweetser got to read it.

But during the day they had rumors of a certain bit of news. A clique in the

legislature at the State capital, antagonistic to the governor and all his schemes and measures, had demanded an investigation of Samuel Wray and his activities at the prison. Reactionary elements, out of sympathy with any movement looking to advanced ideas in the handling of prisoners, were after Samuel Wray's scalp, seeking to hit the governor through him.

The newspaper that Billy Sweetser read happened to be friendly to the governor and carried a story of Samuel Wray's activities, his aims, and an editorial comment thereon.

Billy Sweetser read laboriously through this and sat up in his bunk. The volume of Shakespeare lay near by, untouched. This was the evening of the eleventh day of March. On the twelfth night——

"Say, Pete," Billy commented, "guess they're gonta kick de old lily waver out, eh?"

Pete had read the paper before passing it to Billy in the upper bunk. He made a disinterested rejoinder. Pete was a man of restricted interest. Just now, and for the entire three years he had been inside, his brain had run along a single track—how could he get out? And "out" for Pete meant escape. It was the only hope he had. The circumstances of the moment were such that his mind was filled with thoughts of the wide-open outdoors, to the exclusion of everything else. Certainly the work of Samuel Wray and his probable fate, the crushing of his life's labors at the hands of a selfish and reactionary political group, were not concerns of Pete Drummond, burglar.

Neither were Mr. Wray's affairs any concern of Billy Sweetser's; at least, Billy did not think they were at the moment. Yet Billy spent a restless night, filled with dreams, waking dreams and sleeping dreams, of the adventure that was soon to be set on foot. To his discomfiture, the benevolent face of Samuel Wray flitted through the dreams, a face that studied him with kindly, interested eyes, infinitely friendly. This vision disturbed Billy Sweetser so much that he muttered more than one curse on the gray head of Samuel Wray.

ONE thing out of the past tugged at Billy's heart—a big lesson he had learned by hard knocks in the slums—learned early in his boyhood and since pounded in by bitter experience. Stick to a friend. A fellow has to stick to a friend. If a guy does something for a fellow—well, it shouldn't be forgotten. The people who had fed him, sheltered him, when he was a ragged urchin, each and every one of them held a warm spot in Billy Sweetser's heart. He couldn't forget them. They had been poor and needy themselves, with no hope of reward for the kindnesses they did him; but that was all the more reason for remembering them.

Somehow Billy had never thought of friends outside the circles in which he lived—poor folks first, crooks later. But something gnawed at him now. Just what made a friend, anyhow? Why, anybody that wanted to do something for him, with no hope of return, was a friend. He fumbled with the volume of Shakespeare. The things he had read in "Hamlet" were all cluttered up in his mind—vague, meaningless mostly—yet here and there a thought stuck out like a flash of lightning in a night sky. This was the third evening he had had that book, yet he had not got beyond the third scene of the first act. He turned the pages, found what he sought, and read over and over the scintillating observations of *Polonius*. Two lines ate themselves into Billy Sweetser's soul:

> The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
> Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel.

Well, wasn't that a fancy way of saying stick to your friends? If Shakespeare had been talking in the argot of the twentieth-century slums, wouldn't he say, "Stick to yer friends, kid?" That's what he meant. Well, Billy had innumerable friends. The man in the bunk below was a friend, yet out of this friendship did not Pete Drummond expect to profit immensely? He did—he certainly did. He had been surly and uncompanionable until he and Billy got mixed up in the enterprise now on foot. He saw something in Billy now. But Samuel Wray——

Why in the world should a man think

of Samuel Wray and Pete Drummond at one and the same time? The old lily waver had nothing in common with Billy Sweetser, yet he was a friend; at least, he wanted to be a friend, and with absolutely no hope of reward. Billy went back to the passage that had seized him with its haunting sublimity. In the middle of the second reading of it the lights went out.

Nine o'clock. Billy lay in the darkness, the volume spread open on his chest. Pete Drummond snored below, hoarding sleep as a miser hoards gold. The physical expenditures of the next night would draw heavily on Pete's reserve of strength. On Billy's, too, yet Billy could not sleep. And he could not say what bothered him. It was so mystifying that he cursed Samuel Wray for intruding into his thoughts. Cursed him one moment, thought kindly of him the next. It's awful when there's something the matter with a guy, and he doesn't know what it is.

NEXT afternoon, in the stock room of the shoe shop, Billy Sweetser labored alone. The sorting of new stocks of leather, which came to the prison in rolls, and the piling of them, was a task that had for some time been allotted to Billy Sweetser. During this job, which came to him about twice a month, Billy was locked into the stock room, just off the shoe shop, without guard. Occasionally, perhaps every three or four minutes, a guard passed the grated door in his rounds. Sometimes he looked inside, sometimes not.

Billy Sweetser's fingers were nervous, extremely so when he came to a certain roll of leather, identified for his questing eyes by a series of tiny crosses scratched at an inconspicuous spot. This was the roll in which his friends outside had secreted the tools of escape. Well, they had succeeded. Their work was done. Billy knew that the moment he saw the scratches. It had all been arranged very carefully; letters had been spirited out of the prison by a trusty who worked on the truck that brought the leather to the prison. A plot of widespread ramifications, amazingly bold. The goods were here—saws. It was up to the inside men now, Billy Sweetser and a few confederates in one cell house, Tony Barona and a few of their friends in the other cell house.

Sawing out of their cells at a certain hour of night, prearranged, one saw for each cell. That meant that one saw would liberate two men, and there were ten saws—long, keen blades, designed to go through the steel of those old prison bars like a knife through cheese. Ten saws, two fugitives from each cell. Twenty convicts, desperate, loose in the prison yard, after overpowering the guards in their corridors and seizing their firearms. Twenty convicts, armed, attacking the guards at the big side gate in the dead of night. A desperate plot, and Billy Sweetser, through his gang outside, at the head of it.

The head and the brains of it, Billy Sweetser, with the help of Tony Barona, with whom Billy had not exchanged a single word verbally, in their more than four years inside. Yet Tony and Billy understood one another, thanks to the library system founded by benevolent Samuel Wray. Books, doctored by one of the conspirators who worked as a clerk in the prison library, doctored with concealed messages, drawn by one conspirator one week, by another the next, served to keep those in one cell house informed as to what their friends in the other were doing. Had not Billy Sweetser got a message from Tony Barona in "The Comedies of Shakespeare," by the simple process of opening the book at "Twelfth Night," in the center, thus permitting the back of the volume to open in the form of a slot, into which a folded sheet of paper had been concealed? Had not their confederate in the library treasured that book and declined to give it out to any one except Billy? And did not he see that Tony got Billy's answer through the agency of another volume, and that Billy got further word from Tony in the "Tragedies of Shakespeare?" All those things had come to pass. Crooks play hunches strongly—seize straws, omens—being men whose lives rest so strongly on chance. When it was seen that the "Comedies," opened at "Twelfth

Night," offered a depository for the secret message, what more natural than that these conspirators should set the break for the twelfth night of the month?

If a combination of figures brings success in one detail of a plot, play it through.

And the night that would presently fall was the twelfth night.

The outside work had been based on that, and this was the day on which the expected leather shipment would arrive.

WELL, here it was—the roll of leather in which the saws were hid. Billy's hand trembled. He went on with his work, but sore at himself because he couldn't drive old Samuel Wray out of his mind. It meant the end of Samuel Wray, for after the break an inquiry would reveal that the library had somehow been used as a means of communication between the conspirators in one cell house and the conspirators in the other. The fact that a library clerk was among them would point that out. A look at the records would reveal that Tony Barona and Billy Sweetser drew the same books alternately. It would be simple enough to uncover the details of the plot after the break. The name of every conspirator would be known then and check-ups would lay everything bare. And what a weapon for the enemies of Samuel Wray! One of his pet schemes used for the most daring prison break in the history of the State, with perhaps a slain guard or two!

Billy Sweetser's whole body shook at that thought.

Outside, somewhere, mingling with the prisoners at their work, Mr. Wray moved about in his kindly way, all taken up with his hobby of helping unfortunates like himself—asking nothing in return. He was filled only with a strong belief that men who had gone wrong could be reclaimed. Why, he had fought for years, had employed his wealth, to make easier the burdens of men in prison—was fighting now against political cliques to retain what little ground he had gained. The honor system, that was his objective—the honor system that would give convicts a chance to show that they could be relied on; a chance to earn paroles and pardons by showing they could be trusted.

And the fate of Samuel Wray's life work was wrapped up in this roll of leather.

He was a friend—he was a friend of every man inside those four walls, friend to the murderer, the thief, the bandit and the thug; and asked nothing in return—absolutely nothing. He worked without salary, gave freely of his own fortune, was old now and none too strong. Even the convicts, many of them, scoffed at him. The warden would cover him with abuse after the break and drive him out. He and his schemes would be damned throughout the State, especially if a guard were left dead. And no one could tell what would happen, with twenty desperate convicts loose in the yard, some of them armed, fighting for liberty.

"Chalky" Skidmore, a runner for the shoe-shop superintendent, a convict in the other cell house, would be coming along presently. He would expect Billy to slip him five saw blades for distribution among the conspirators to be led into the yard by Tony Barona. It was an awful chance for Chalky to take, but the end was as desperate as the means, after all.

Billy, when the guard passed by again, searched the roll of leather, found the saw blades—ten of them—and concealed them. If they were found on his person, the guards would never learn the name of a single other man concerned in the plot. They couldn't say even that he got the blades from a roll of leather. He would be the only man to suffer from a premature discovery of the saws, if he kept his mouth closed. The warden would be up against a stone wall in his investigation. The trail would not lead beyond Billy Sweetser himself, not get anywhere near the library—Samuel Wray's library—or into the other cell house.

Old Sam Wray, the lily waver, would not be driven out of the prison, nor his faith in convicts shaken. No one could say that his library had been used in such a desperate plot.

The clock on the wall, in the shoe shop

outside, said seven minutes to three. Chalky Skidmore was to come for his saw blades at three, or a minute or two afterward, depending on the position of the guard.

About three minutes of three, the guard sauntered past the grated door. This time he paused alertly, for a certain hurried movement of the convict inside the stock room, a metallic gleam in the sunlight streaming through a barred window, the clink of metal on a rock floor caught his attention.

Billy Sweetser had dropped purposely one of the saw blades. It lay there, new and shiny, in full view of the guard. The guard blew his whistle.

The news soon went about the prison that Billy Sweetser had been thrown into solitary confinement. Ten saw blades had been found on him. Questioned, threatened with dire punishment, Billy refused to talk. And nineteen other convicts in that prison hung their heads in dismay and muttered curses on Billy Sweetser.

NOT more than a year later, Samuel Wray emerged triumphant. The honor system was established at the State penitentiary by an act of the legislature, which also created a modern parole board, designed to give intelligent consideration to individual prisoners. Gangs of convicts were sent out to work on State roads, without guards. Billy Sweetser finally got his chance.

"It depends on you, Billy," Samuel Wray told him. "If you don't run off—if you work hard and show the stuff there is in you—you'll come up for a parole one of these days, and get it. Those saw blades have been forgotten. The mark is still against you on the books, but you can wipe it out. It means a lot to the system, Billy, if you make good."

"I'll make good, sir."

"I've always known there's something fine in you, Billy. I've felt it. There'll be books out at that road camp for you boys, and I'll see that there's a set of Shakespeare among them—your favorite author."

IS THE BURRO TO PASS?

IT has come to be accepted generally that the deserts of the Orient must eventually yield to modernization. The automobile must look like the writing on the wall, if the camel, resting in the shade of an oasis, contemplates his economic future.

Now the poor burro is confronted with the same fate as his brother, the camel. The modernization of the "wild West" proceeds apace, with no tender regard for those aspects of this region which have endeared it for several generations to the hearts of readers who love the great open spaces.

From the gold fields in Nevada comes the report that the burro is being replaced by the flivver. The noble little burro, always the inseparable companion of the mining prospector, is yielding ground to the flivver. Where the individual stake hunter once cooked his own bacon and sour dough, a restaurant on wheels supplies him with his meals, and a traveling bunk house is to replace his individual camp.

The march of the machine is relentless. One can look only with sad misgivings at the passing of the thick-skinned, mouse-colored, thirstless little beast, the burro. The flivver may prove more efficient for getting to and from the nearest settlement, but the flivver is not only not self-sustaining—it has no heart. The burro, when occasion demanded, could live apparently on the sand and the air of the desert, and drink from the dew of the mountains. Moreover, no tin machine can ever give to a lonesome and solitary prospector that sense of companionship which he found in his burro. A flivver can provoke as much cussing as any burro ever born, but no tin lizzie can beget the affection which prompted the prospector to talk to long-eared Ted or Jinny as a buddy, when they shared the fierce heat and the rough road together.

By

DON McGREW

Author of

"Men Command Men," Etc.

The Broadening

THE STORY

In the summer of 1857, an old Sioux chieftain stood on a Wyoming ridge, bitterly watching the progress of an ox-team caravan across the plains below. At the same moment, on another part of the plains, also headed West, was "Buck" Hilton, a Southern lad whose parents had been killed, supposedly by Mormons. Alone in the world, Buck had started out to "git him a Mo'mon!" Bad luck came upon him, for while trying to kill a buffalo to satisfy his hunger, his horse fell beneath him, and it was necessary to shoot the injured animal. Buck now resigned himself to endure his hardship. The next development was the appearance of a little Indian girl, Rose-dawn, daughter of a Sioux chieftain. She had been captured by Pawnees and had escaped. Buck protected her when Pawnee scouts on the trail of the little captive, attacked. The death, in the mêlée, of Lame Bull, a renowned warrior, discouraged the braves, and they were easily routed when a band of Sioux rode to the rescue. Buck was honored in the tribe. While they were celebrating, the ox-team caravan which had been sighted before, approached. One of the leaders was Dan Mulcahey, known to the Indians and to Buck. The caravan proceeded after a while, and Buck accompanied it. The little Indian girl was adopted by the party, under Buck's special protection. As time went on, he learned many valuable life lessons from old Dan, among them a better understanding of the Mormons he had hated. Presently they met with a cavalcade of soldiers, commanded by a Major Busbee. Coincident with the meeting, a stagecoach, containing the major's daughter-in-law, granddaughter, and a girl companion, stopped at the encampment. Buck went wild at the sight of the latter, recognizing her as a "Mo'mon." Another member of the Mulcahey group, called The Smiler, had also been identified by Buck as one of those implicated in the murder of his people. Because of insufficient evidence, it was impossible to press the charges. The caravan now continued toward the West. As it neared Utah a renegade band of Mormons attacked, taking all prisoners. Buck and a companion, Zeke, were later released by a kindly patriarch, Gregory, and were given arms and supplies. Learning that Major Busbee's son and daughter-in-law had been killed, and that the baby, Matilda, was somewhere in this section, Buck and Zeke set out to find her. They found her in the custody of a Mrs. Leward, a courageous Mormon wife, saved them both from a Danite bandit attack, and saw them safe in the nearest fort. The years passed and Buck, now a grown man, was a soldier, still out in that country. The threads of his younger days were drawing together: Matilda was growing up; the great railroad was progressing; and Buck was learning life by the minute. A great powwow to arrange for an Indian reservation was under way, and Buck was sent to Cheyenne to find old Dan, who was trusted by the tribes.

This is the absorbing story of a Southern boy who grew up in the pioneer West—a tale so colorfully and authentically set against a vast historic and pictorial background that it may rightfully be said to have the scope and rich depth of a great mural painting.

Trail

In Five Parts
—Part III : :

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN A CLOSED BOOTH.

THE street Buck entered that night was lined with clapboard and canvas structures. Here and there was a one-story building, with a false two-story front. Many bore the painted reproductions of red-brick or stone walls. They were also topped with garish signs, reading: "'Bonanza Mike's' Place," "The Bucket o' Blood," "Last Chance Emporium," or "'Sluice Gate Bill's' Bar."

In the saloons and dance halls and under the flaming oil jets along the crude plank walks, where saddle horses and mules were tied to hitching racks, riotous bedlam reigned unchecked. Red-shirted miners, with bushy beards, bought drinks for Irish graders, with red, leathery necks and tanned breasts. Trappers in fringed deerskin offered sharp contrast to stolid Mormon emigrants from Scandinavia and the mines of Kent. Sophisticated and imperturbable gamblers, wearing immaculate white shirts, flowing bow ties, and black-silk hats, rubbed elbows with long-haired buffalo hunters; while by them strolled prospectors, teamsters, soldiers, cowboys, Indian scouts, civil engineers, and the motley crew who follow an army or a peaceful invasion.

With some shouting hoarsely, and others singing hilariously, this crowd milled and jostled along the walks, while cornets blared, bass drums boomed, cymbals crashed, and heavy, hobnailed boots stamped and scraped on the crowded dance-hall floors.

Passing down the street, many acquaintances jovially hailed Buck, while "spielers" added to the noise with descriptions of wonders within their establishments. Jaunty hawkers, in high hats, cracked beribboned whips and sandwiched greetings between solicitations for stagecoach passengers to Salt Lake, Denver, Miner's Delight, Ogden, Virginia City, or Sacramento. Half-naked mulattoes, who were singing, "Roll out an' heave that cotton!"—as they unloaded prairie freighting schooners, now eyed him and broke off to exclaim admiringly: "Dat's him—dat redhaid gen-man!" Deep-chested "biscuit shooters," with an air of cynical jocularity and naïve Western assurance, bawled over their shoulders: "Brown the wheat! Ham and! Draw one in the dark! Let them white wings fly high up an' down!" Patent-medicine fakers were ballyhooing; specu-

lators were conducting raffle sales; and up and down the wide street mounted men spurred at the gallop, yelling joyously to increase the deafening uproar.

"Well," was Buck's humorous reflection, "the boys' pulses are shore natural, I see."

Ascertaining that Dan might not be in for two hours or more, and leaving word for him, Buck then quietly examined his Colts and retraced his steps to Eb Snow's new place of business.

Snow had no less than three noted gunmen in his employ. Two of them, Trent and Millard, Buck knew by sight and reputation. He was not acquainted with Johnston. The Smiler made the fourth of a quartet which, in reality, constituted a formidable bodyguard for the former Mormon.

Buck had not seen The Smiler since the Mormon trouble. And now, as Buck's eye quickly searched the place, he did not behold the man. There were several booths around the dance hall in the rear, but into these he did not intrude.

Trent and Snow, however, were standing with many other men at the bar: and, at thirty-two, Snow still affected an air of funereal gravity—a dark man of ice, ever scheming behind that skull-like face.

Beyond a very slight start, Snow gave no indication that he had recognized the youth. Yet Buck saw him muttering in an aside to Trent, whereupon Trent flashed a speculative eye over Buck's tall form. But the youth proceeded quietly to one of the poker tables, where sat a dealer dubbed "Snake" Ellis. This man was also a gunman of reputation.

With two hundred dollars, won at poker, Buck bought chips and sat in, his back to the wall. At the end of a half hour this had doubled. Five minutes later all his chips were in a pot, and all but Snake had dropped out.

It was at this juncture that Buck smiled and spoke.

"Well, it does beat the devil how rules do change," he said in a plaintive drawl. "Where I learned poker, four kings was plenty for one deck."

"Throwin' which bouquet at me, I suppose?" Snake with equal softness inquired.

"Why, what a good guesser you are, Mr. Ellis!" Buck replied in honey accents, his sparkling eyes intent on Snake's.

The subsequent activities were remarkably brief, inasmuch as Snake found himself staring into a black muzzle before his flashing hand had progressed halfway to the gun in his armpit holster. Buck's second gun also swung tentatively toward Snow and Trent, or any one else who cared to participate in the festivities.

"Shake down your sleeves theah, Mr. Ellis!" Buck commanded. "Thank yuh. I'll take this pot, an' you'll leave camp." And when Snake shrugged resignedly and shoved over the money, Buck, without ever losing sight of the motionless Trent or Snow, backed away. "Only reason I didn't plug yuh, Snake," he said, "was because I didn't come in heah p'tic'lar for you." Then, as Trent and Snow still made no move, he sighed a little, and backed out, one gun still in his hand.

FIVE minutes later, Snow and his four henchmen were seated in a closed booth.

"By gad!" Trent was exclaiming, with reluctant admiration. "He was *achin'* for any of us to draw."

"He was deliberately looking for a square chance to get me or The Smiler," said Snow.

"Well, he's a swift hombre," said The Smiler.

"Hell! I'll take him on, any time," Johnston sneered.

"Wait!" said the thoughtful Snow. "Now, Smiler, you were saying——"

"That Rose-dawn is shore crazy about Buck," The Smiler replied. He had just returned with a pack train from a rendezous with some of the Sioux in the vicinity of Pumpkin Butte. "Soon as I antes up with them there Henry rifles an' the ammunition, she gives me what information I got of that hombre."

"Point is," said Snow, "is he crazy about *her?*"

"My little friend Gray Squirrel says so. Gray Squirrel's brother—that rene-

gade Sioux, young Buffalo Horns—he brought a letter from Buck for Gray Squirrel to give to Rose-dawn, not far back."

"Still, I don't—ah—see how we can get at him through her—and do it profitably."

"It would pay. Ole 'Bull' Fisher o' the Gros Ventres would shore pay skins galore for Rose-dawn. Bull wants the big medicine woman of his enemies—see? Now I could fix it through Gray Squirrel. Buck don't dare go into the Sioux camps now, like he used to. Well, I can have Gray Squirrel tell Rose-dawn some night that Buck's awaitin' out in a coulee to see her."

"And then?"

"Throw a bag over her head, and the trick's done."

"But if the Sioux suspect us——"

"How they goin' to, when I let a couple of Gros Ventres grab her? They kin make a bluff at Gray Squirrel, who gits away—see? Then Rose-dawn'll lay it to the Gros Ventres. She'll think they got Buck, too, for keeps."

"How about trustin' Gray Squirrel?" asked the other.

"She'll risk most anythin' an keep mum, ef I take her as my squaw regular."

But Snow shook his head. "I don't want to risk the profits in this Sioux gun trade just yet," he said.

"Then what about that dam?" The Smiler suggested disappointedly. "I kin blow up that dam easy."

"But—ah—what then?"

"Why, Mulcahey would figure some one did it apurpose, o' course, an' say so."

"And then?"

"Them commissioners would figure he cooked up the story, so he could have another contract."

"Suppose this commissioner cahooted with Dan Mulcahey and called it a Sioux job?"

"By Godfrey, you're right! No go! You're right."

"Yes." Snow then thought a moment and concluded: "We've got a chance, though, to send that Buck to hell across lots. Now listen."

CHAPTER XXIV.

GUN PLAY.

AT about eight o'clock, when Buck emerged from another place and started down street toward Dan's office, a hand touched him. Glancing down, he saw Matilda.

His first impulse was to frown; instead, he was forced to grin, as her hand dropped on his arm, with a certain proprietary assurance.

"You can stand me for a little while," she said. "Ma's lost somewhere. I was to meet her there in that store. She's delayed somewhere. She'll come to Uncle Dan's office in time."

Saying nothing, Buck led her on through the clamor and color of the streets. Hot blasts blew from the ranges of open-air restaurants, and the air reeked with the odors of whisky, cooking beans, mulligan stews, and buffalo steaks, dripping red in the pans. They caught glimpses of heated faces swirling in a gay whirl on the dance-hall floors, all the windows of which were open. And while a pale man, with an arrow in his shoulder, was being helped down from a prairie schooner, an old miner across the street was pushing into a saloon a wheelbarrow loaded with gold-dust sacks, yelling: "Gangway for the champeen irrigator o' the world."

"So this is Cheyenne!" Matilda murmured.

Buck chuckled joyously.

"Julesburg," said he, "will shortly become jealous."

"Why?"

"They only had sixty-three killin's in sixty-three days."

Matilda looked quizzically at him. "I believe you think this is funny," she charged.

"Shore, now, I didn't know Texas had got so tame all of a sudden. As for killin's, when kittens look through the bars of a lion's cage an' walk in deliberate, they ought to keep their meows mighty neah no'mal."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Well, it's mostly fool kittens roarin' too soon that gets killed in this rodeo. Then a citizens' coroner jury brings in

a verdict, 'It appears that the deceased shot off his mouth, while the othah fellow shot off a gun!' "

The observant girl could not but laugh a little in response to this. But almost immediately she sobered. The note of the scene was that of the bass viol in the orchestra of life. The contemplative, the devout, the æsthetic were drowned out in the joyous roar of the uncouth. Inhibitions, prohibitions, pretenses, decorum, the outward observance of proper niceties—not one of these manifestations of a more complex and settled order of things was apparent. Natures were stripped to the buff.

"And, anyway," Buck continued, "there ain't no sneakin' hypocrisy 'bout these folks. And it's a new deal all around. Folks' antecedents, fo'mer affiliations, empty titles, what they were able to do back theah—that don't count. All that counts heah is bein' able to pass the day's test."

"So, then, I suppose, those who pass them constitute a sort of upper crust?"

He glanced at her suspiciously; but her eyes seemed wide and candid.

"Maybe that's one way of puttin' it."

"Then the rule applies to gunmen, too?"

But, before he could answer, he looked up and beheld The Smiler, with two gunmen, approaching.

When Buck saw the gunmen, The Smiler was in advance. Trent and Millard were behind him. The three formed a triangle, Trent and Millard being abreast of one another and several paces in the rear. No pedestrians intervened between them and The Smiler at the time, for at this point, near the end of the street, a long warehouse had been erected on one side. Most of the crowd was on the opposite side. Johnston, abreast Trent and Millard, was on that side of the street.

"Well, by the old Lord Harry!" boomed The Smiler, advancing with outstretched hand. "It's my ole friend, Buck Hilton!"

These were the only words spoken. For at that instant Millard, on Buck's right, suddenly coughed and appeared to take an accidental step off the sidewalk. Simultaneously he reached under his coat lapel.

THE plan of the four had been very simple. They assumed that Buck's eye would be instantly attracted to Millard, and that he would reason that the latter was reaching for a concealed armpit holster. Thereupon Buck would naturally attempt to produce his own weapons.

In this case Millard was to throw up his hands and dodge back in feigned alarm. The Smiler was also to throw up his hands. To all apparent intent, The Smiler would then have been engaged in nothing more reprehensible than attempting to shake hands with an old enemy. And, with Buck's guns out, who would blame Trent or Johnston for leaping to conclusions?

"If he does get his guns out, he won't shoot either Millard or you, Smiler," Snow had reasoned. "He's too cool-headed. And his ethics are different—shall we say? He won't shoot men with their hands up. But, while his eye is on Millard, don't yuh see the chance for Trent or Johnston?" And this had seemed very plausible. If explanations were in order, the killer could say that he shot to protect his friends. Any witnesses in that split second of time would see Buck's hands in his guns.

But both Trent and Millard miscalculated. They gave Buck credit for being swift, but were influenced by their own conceit in their reckoning. No gun fighter ever believed the other man swifter until it was proved. They were therefore not prepared for Buck's cyclonic reaction. They had with assurance counted on a split second of hesitancy; but he had leaped to his conclusion with the chain-lightning process of nebulous instinct, developed to a high degree in the Western gun fighter.

Millard had naturally assumed that he would be able to get his hand to the coat lapel and then back into the air. He was given no opportunity to make that swift pacific gesture. Buck's hands, as usual, were dangling close to the two open holsters of his own chosing which, as a favored dispatch rider, Colonel Bus-

bee allowed him to carry. Millard's hairy paw had barely touched his lapel when Buck's right-hand gun roared from the position below his waist.

The bullet struck Millard's right shoulder, spun him heavily, and sent him staggering backward. He stumbled and sat down weakly, cursing in pain and bewilderment. Seconds before Millard struck the earth, Buck had caught the movement of Trent's hand from the tail of his eye, and his own left-hand gun exploded, still from below the waist line. His bullet shattered Trent's right forearm a fraction of a second before that worthy's thumb contracted on the hammer. Trent had also attempted to fire from the belt line; but the contraction of his back-pulling thumb was coincident with a terrific shock of pain. His spasmodic action threw the pistol up and sent his bullet whipping within an inch of The Smiler's jaw.

The weapon then dropped from Trent's fingers, while pedestrians scattered or threw themselves prone on the sidewalks. In the next heartbeat, Trent's other hand started for his second gun. But another shot from Buck's left-hand Colt pierced his left arm, and he slumped.

"Pull!" Buck then begged The Smiler.

That dumfounded and pallid giant could only mouth inarticulately. His hands were now up, and they remained in the air. He realized that Buck might have killed either adversary with a single shot at such close range. It was a bit of contemptuous magnanimity which only a master gun thrower would have dared to display.

"By the gods!" Trent gasped weakly, as he sank down against the warehouse wall. "I never thought it could be done!"

"That's what every gunman in the country thinks till it's too late!" said a voice behind Buck. It was that of a gambler who had been acquainted with Buck for some time.

CHAPTER XXV.

LIKE A MAN.

FROM Buck's rear Matilda spoke up now.

"Buck, get that big man's guns!"

"I'll watch him," said the gambler. "I got him covered."

Buck whirled to see the pale girl still standing. Reacting to the training received in her own cattle country, she had wheeled loyally to see if any more desperadoes intended to shoot Buck in the back.

Thus she had surprised Johnston starting across the street, Colt in hand. Though unarmed, the girl had thrown her arms over her head. So Johnston had been unable to fire for fear of hitting her. He stood there now, hands in air, covered by two strangers who had seen the girl's action and who had acted instinctively in the interests of fair play. His gun lay in the dust.

Buck understood at once. Matilda's action had in all likelihood saved his life.

Johnston mumbled fearfully: "Say, I didn't aim for to shoot that gal. I was only goin' to see what the row was with my friends."

An excited mob gathered when Buck stepped forward toward the man. Ma suddenly appeared, rushing for Matilda with a choked cry. Behind her came Sudden, McEwan and Rocky Moore, guns in hand. A cry went up for a rope.

"Wait a minute, boys!" Buck interposed.

"What for?"

"He's a-goin' to get his chance to plug me, front on."

With the words he returned his weapons to his holsters, while Rocky swooped joyously on Johnston's gun and thrust it into the man's scabbard. The crowd then fell back, leaving the two facing one another.

Johnston's facial muscles seemed to have escaped control. He was a hook-nosed young ruffian, with a flaring mouth and bulging eyes. His hands fluttered. His throat worked oddly. A picture of craven cowardice, he did not dare move at once toward his weapon.

"Slap his face an' *make* him draw!" Rocky roared.

Johnston hesitated, uncertain what to do.

"Hell!" cried Buck. "*You* a gun thrower? I reckon you're one o' them kittens that roars too soon. Shootin' ba-

bies in the back would be about *zero* limit."

The blood flooded Johnston's ugly features. He began to crouch, like a man about to make a spring. Buck never moved. Johnston's hands were crooked like talons, held out on either side. His eyes were fastened on Buck's. The latter's hands remained well clear of the holsters, which were fastened with thongs, low down on his thighs.

Suddenly Johnston's right hand swooped toward his gun. It barely reached the holster when Buck's pistols flashed from his waistline. Both shots struck Johnston within a space that might have been covered by a silver dollar. It lay flush over the heart. The man pitched to his face, kicked once spasmodically, and lay still.

The youth then whirled toward The Smiler, who was being covered by McEwan and the gambler.

"You step out heah!" he ordered, returning his guns once more to their holsters.

"Aw, look, Buck!" the giant pleaded. "You got this all wrong."

"I gave the first two the benefit o' the doubt if I *was* makin' a mistake. I couldn't have blamed Trent for cuttin' in, if I was wrong. But there ain't much doubt in my mind now. You step out."

Reluctantly the giant obeyed. Drops of perspiration stood out on his features. His voice was hoarse with fear and hatred.

"Damn it!" he cried. "I ain't no feelin' agin' yuh, Buck!"

"Slap his face an' make him draw!" Rocky urged anew.

The temptation was almost too strong for Buck. He knew in his heart that he could draw and fire with either hand before The Smiler's weapons came free. On the face of things it was giving his enemy an even break; in reality, it was forcing the man to accept almost certain execution.

A deep shudder shook Buck's frame. He relinquished the chance only after a short, terrific struggle.

"Can't do it, Uncle Rocky," he said. "If he won't draw, he won't." And when The Smiler again refused to take his chance, Buck ordered the craven to face about. A tremendous kick and a shot, that twitched the man's hat from his head, sent The Smiler running off in the midst of hoots and jeers.

"I'm goin' now for Eb Snow," said Buck, moving down the street.

BUCK and his friends reached Snow's headquarters and surged within. The place was filled with Snow's graders. While his friends watched for a shot from the rear, the youth sighted Snow.

"Stand out theah, you!" he cried. "Now pull!"

"I—ah—don't understand——

"Pull or shut up!"

The white of Snow's unwholesome face became a sickening, splotched white. His eyes were green and blazing, like those of a panther in the dark. Yet he could not summon the courage to draw.

"All right," said Buck. "I suppose I'll nevah have *proof* you put up this stunt on me. You're a cowa'd an' a snake. Next time I won't even wait for you to draw." Then he went out, followed by his friends.

"Buck," Matilda whispered some time later, with a certain impish sweetness, "I know you must be thinking, 'I've just got to teach that kid now!' "

Two spots of color burned high in his brown face.

"Course I do thank you for savin' my life," he said. "It was the finest thing I ever saw a girl do. And acourse," he added hurriedly, "I'll be glad to teach you now."

"Fibber!" She favored him with one of her most radiant smiles. "But I want to say this—I apologize."

"For what?"

"I misunderstood. I thought you were starting out to be a gun-throwing killer." Something of resentment leaped into his grave eyes. At the moment he had all the stately dignity of a tall Indian brave.

"Huh!" he snorted.

Before she could say anything further, Dan rushed up, brimming with excited questions. Thereafter Buck went on with the old Irishman, while Matilda rejoined Ma.

When they had reached the office, and

Dan was alone for a period with Buck, the Irishman grew quieter, filled his pipe again, and looked at the youth through shrewd and affectionate eyes.

Beyond a few excited exclamations, Dan had expressed no opinion of the encounter as yet; and now, when Buck told him of the Sioux request, he merely frowned a little and did not voice his full thought.

"All right," was all he said. "I'll go."

A little silence fell between them then—a silence filled with understanding sympathy.

"Well?" said Buck at last.

" 'Tis not wot I'm thinkin' thot counts, me bhoy."

"I know. If a man ain't got it in him to work things out for himself, what other folks work out for him won't do him much good."

"Now yiz have it! Glory be, thot's a thought in itsilf to make yiz a mile broader."

Buck threw him a shy, grateful glance and then frowned. His head came up, with a suggestion of antlers tossing.

" 'A gun-throwin' killah!' " he exclaimed. "Well, I am. I practiced first because I wanted to kill Snow an' The Smilah, first square chance I got. Then came fools who couldn't stop itchin' till they showed up that red-headed kid fo' a deuce spot."

"Shure—thot's rooster nature."

"Well, some shootin' scrapes I been in might not have happened if I had run away—only, I can't do that. I nevah *started* a mix-up, nowheres; but so far I been able to finish them." Here the boy knocked on wood and admitted: "If that's narrowness, I can't work out nothin' broader."

"Then why did yiz let Snow an' The Smiler live? Does that mane yiz are goin' to let them go foriver?"

Something seemed to clank within the youth—something like the snapping of steel jaws.

"You know better than that! You know the day I am shore they killed my folks I'll finish 'em like——"

"An Injun?"

"Like a *man*. Why, shorely you ain't hopin' I'll *forgive* them skunks?"

He breathed very quickly, for he knew, and knew convincingly, that he had filled a man's shoes that night. What the devil more then could this contradictory Irishman expect?

"A whole lot more from me bhoy than I iver lived up to mesilf!" Dan cried with a chuckle, answering, as though Buck had spoken his last thought aloud. He jumped up and clapped Buck soundly on the back. "Don't mind me, now. Shure, I c'u'd wish them two dead an' gone, though, at the same toime, I do not like to see yiz packin' excess baggage, loike, in the thoughts av yiz. We'll take a drink, betimes, an' yiz can work thot one out fer yoursilf."

"Well, I'll try, but I think I've gone my limit."

He did not see Matilda again till the next morning.

"I didn't finish last night," she said. "You know, even a kid can see that was a pretty big thing to do. So I think I'll thank you by——"

"Well, how?"

"By *letting* you teach me to ride Roman!" she concluded, with a sudden impish smile.

Buck felt Rose-dawn's letter crackle again within his breast pocket. He checked an impulse to swear.

"She wouldn't take advantage o' me this way!" was his rebellious thought. His one consolation was the fact that there would be no lessons till after the carrying of the dispatches, in connection with the coming parley, was concluded.

CHAPTER XXVI.

STRAIGHT TONGUE SPEAKS.

ON the Laramie River, near its junction with the North Platte and at a point about seventy miles to northward of Cheyenne, stands Wyoming's oldest landmark. This is Fort Laramie.

It was here that the Indians had agreed to parley; and so, five days after Buck's clash with Snow's gunmen, there was pitched near this historic spot an imposing Indian encampment. Before this encampment, with its array of wigwams in the immediate foreground, the misty outlines of gray mountains on the shimmer-

ing horizon, and a clear-blue sky overhead, there stood in full panoply a closely packed semicircle of tall Indian warriors. Silent, like their leagues of prairies, and somber, like the mountain world in which they trapped the eagle and baited the grizzly bear, they remained motionless, save for their piercing black eyes. Their arms were folded across their corded brown breasts, and under them they held percussion-type muskets, Spencer carbines, old-style Henrys, new breech-loading Sharp's rifles, occasional Purdys, and many Model '66 repeating Winchester rifles.

Grouped before them in a smaller semicircle, sat a number of grave chiefs. Young Red Cloud, of the Ogallalas, with the sad lips, but fierce eyes and indomitable chin; Sitting Bull of the Hunkpapas, adroit and observant, his carved face eloquent of the rapierlike intelligence which made him a military genius; Pretty-voice-eagle, the Yankton, mild and benignant in aspect; Spotted Tail, of the Brules, a gruff and soldierly chieftain —these, with old Rain-in-the-face, the unconquerable, were among the leading Sioux.

Facing them was a battalion of blue-clad infantry, and two troops of Colonel Busbee's cavalry. General Augur, Colonel Busbee, and a political commissioner, acting for the railroad, sat at tables. Dan Mulcahey, Buck, and the Crow scout, White-man-runs-him, were acting as interpreters.

The conference had passed beyond the customary smoking of the red-stone pipe and the gruff salutations of the ceremonious chiefs; and the Indians had been appraised of the whites' demands. These were to cease fighting against whites, and particularly against the building of the railroad; to allow the whites to pass through their hunting grounds on the Bozeman Trail to the Montana gold fields; and to confine themselves on a permanent reservation, south of the forty-sixth parallel, which took up nearly all of what is now the western half of South Dakota. This included the Black Hills. The adjacent Wyoming country, east of the Bighorns, was to be reserved as hunting grounds.

"And no white settlers are to go in these hunting grounds without your consent," it had been stipulated. "Furthermore, no one but officers of the government will be allowed in the permanent Dakota reservation."

"What will the Great White Father do for us in return?" Sitting Bull had demanded.

"Feed you for fifty-five years, give you horses and wagons, send your children to school, and teach you how to farm like the white men," was the answer.

These points the Indians had digested without comment, save in guttural asides to one another. There had been frequent pauses while they smoked and thought in solemn quiet. There was nothing to indicate that they had come to any decision. Yet one thing had become quickly apparent. While General Augur and Colonel Busbee represented the Great White Father officially, the Sioux had come to parley with Straight Tongue Dan Mulcahey.

To no one was this more apparent than to Buck. His former friend Red Cloud now looked at him with the eyes of an implacable enemy. Rain-in-the-face and Red Cloud also regarded Dan in the same light. Was Dan not helping to build the hated railroad? Yet they had turned to Dan at every point, asking for his verification. Straight Tongue they had named him; Straight Tongue he remained.

To another of the group, as well, this fact had been borne home. The bloated, grim-lipped railroad commissioner was the real representative of the government and the power behind Dan's contract; and Buck sensed that the man was irritated by the marked preference shown to the rugged old plainsman.

"Damnation!" the man protested at last, when a pause had extended several minutes. "There ought to be some way to *make* them come to time." He turned his puffed and cynical countenance toward the Irishman. "Isn't there some way we can speed this up?"

DAN turned a pair of stern eyes on the speaker. From the far hills and the great vault overhead a spirit of calm and gravity had fallen on the man.

"'Tis the Indian way av doin' things," he replied quietly.

"Well, it's a slow way, if you ask me!" snapped the commissioner. "By Jove, getting rid of these redskins is *vital.* We're having trouble selling bonds. People say, 'Of course the Union Pacific has twenty million acres of public land given to it by the government. It also has the Crédit Mobilier behind it. But how are people going to settle and support that road, if the Indians are not bottled up?'"

A murmur of approval went up from the officers at the table. But neither Dan nor Buck joined the murmur. The old Irishman frowned thoughtfully instead, and continued to smoke.

"Why, I believe you sympathize with them!" the commissioner exclaimed. "And you fighting them, too!"

"Oh, Dan's Irish," Colonel Busbee cut in, with a grin.

This created a chuckle which the commissioner joined only faintly.

"I'd like to know just what it is these Indians want to ask him," he said in a low aside to the colonel. "There's something in the wind, I'll be bound."

Before the colonel could answer, Red Cloud arose to speak.

A hush fell upon the assemblage, for the young chief had the body of a Grecian discus thrower. The poise of his head was that of an eagle's.

Materialistic ambitions were alien and incomprehensible to this red man's mentality. Beside the standards of those who create engines and cantilever bridges, he stood adjudged a mental pygmy. But stupidity had played no part in carving those thin, sensitive lips, the arch of that aquiline nose, or those quivering nostrils. Erroneous as his philosophical conclusions were held to be by the standard bearers of civilization, he had reached them only after profound thought. He stood like a Spartan in the pass between two diametrically opposed concepts of social existence.

Swinging directly toward Dan and extending his arms full length, he began abruptly.

"That," he declared, "measures what my people had in lands fifty-two snows ago."

He referred to the treaty with the Sioux nation which was signed in President Madison's administration. It gave them the territory comprising most of what is now Minnesota, most of the Dakotas, and parts of Iowa, Missouri and Wyoming.

"I know," cried the commissioner. "Six hundred and forty thousand square miles of this glorious country!"

"Then," Red Cloud went on, moving his hands a little nearer, "thirty snows ago the Great White Father wanted more land. My people sold without a fight, and this remained."

Thus he described the sale of all the Sioux lands east of the Mississippi in 1837.

"But at this fort, sixteen snows ago," Red Cloud continued solemnly, "the *washechu* said *more* land was needed. Again my people sold without a fight. Nearly all the hunting grounds in our Land of the Sky-blue Waters went to the *washechu.* The Santee and Sisseton Sioux agreed to go on the Minnesota reservation. We of the Teton and Yankton Sioux and the northern Cheyennes and Arapahoes were asked to confine ourselves so."

Here he brought his brown, scarred hands nearer to one another, till they measured but a fourth of the distance formerly indicated. The section he described included the northeast corner of Colorado, the eastern half of Wyoming, the western half of Nebraska, and nearly all of the western half of South Dakota, the Black Hills included.

"Well, tell him that covered one hundred and sixty thousand square miles," the commissioner instructed Dan. "Figured somewhere about three or four square miles to the Indian. And one white man can live on forty acres!"

Ignoring the last, Red Cloud fixed the politician with flashing eyes. "Did we keep our treaty, or not?" he demanded.

"Well, until '57, anyway," was the admission. "But what happened then?"

ALL present knew that he referred to the Ink-pa-du-ta outbreak, also to the massacre of over one thousand white settlers in Minnesota by Chief Little

Crow's bands in '62. Colonel Busbee had campaigned in Minnesota with Sibley, who defeated the Kaposia and other bands at Wood Lake, soon after this bloody uprising.

"The Sioux waited six snows for the payments agreed on before Ink-pa-du-ta took up the hatchet!" Red Cloud returned indignantly. "Again five snows went by before payments were made to Little Crow. White traders tricked him out of the money due the tribes. But the Great White Father punished the Dakotas for Little Crow's outbreak."

A murmur arose from all the Sioux, for the memory was a bitter one. Sibley had captured two thousand Sioux, and thirty-eight chiefs had been hanged for murder from the same scaffold at Mankato. And in '64 General Sully and Colonel Sibley, with three thousand men and the aid of artillery, had defeated fifteen thousand Dakotas at Deer Stand. Buck had taken part in this victory, which drove the Sioux finally from Minnesota.

"That was just cause for war!" Red Cloud vehemently asserted. "Our eastern tribes never did get their annuity money. Then we were told smoke wagons were coming. We feared these would fire the grass and frighten away the buffalo. That is why we attacked Fort Sedgwick two snows ago. That is why we burned Julesburg. We were not asked if we wanted these smoke wagons. Then General Connor started two snows ago with soldiers to open this Bozeman Trail, without permission. Only after he built Fort Reno did he ask for a parley. I would not sign. All know what happened then at this post, one snow ago."

While the parley of '66 was in progress, Carrington had arrived with his Eighteenth infantry. The Sioux were told, in effect: "Either you will leave the trail open to the gold fields, or we will build posts and keep it open." Red Cloud had again refused to sign; and two posts, Phil Kearney and C. F. Smith, were built.

"The Great White Father says we 'massacred' Fetterman's men," Red Cloud resumed. "They knew we were apt to be there, surrounding that fort. We tricked them into coming outside by feinting an attack on a small wood party with a few warriors. Fetterman disobeyed Colonel Carrington and went farther than he was ordered to. We lay there, hiding. We drew out those white soldiers. We killed them in fair fight."

A flame seemed to shoot from the man's eyes, scorching his white adversaries. "When the white man killed Cheyenne women and children at Sand Creek, it was a great victory," he declared bitterly. "When we kill in fair fight it is a 'massacre!' Huh!"

No answer being vouchsafed, he drew a deep breath, and his tall form relaxed. Sadness softened the bitter lines in his face.

"Some of my people want peace," he said in melancholy tones. "The Rees, the Mandans, the Crows, the Gros Ventres, the Assiniboines, the Blackfeet—these enemies press us on every hand. Our lodges are filled with wails. But this last reservation—I think of it and cry in my heart."

"Great Scott!" barked the commissioner, when this was interpreted. "Look at this map! It's away over forty thousand square miles!"

"That is not the thought in my heart," Red Cloud replied, addressing Dan.

He paused thoughtfully and studied the Irishman's face closely. All present held silence, for it appeared now that the portentous moment had arrived.

"Straight Tongue," the young chief said finally, "we have cut meat from the same strip."

Dan nodded gravely.,

"But now," said the Indian, "we are enemies."

"And I would like to see the day we could be at peace again," Dan returned in Siouan.

Red Cloud continued to look into his former friend's eyes.

"Straight Tongue," he said at last, "if the *washechu* withdraw the posts from the Bozeman Trail, I will sign on one word from you."

"What is that?" asked Dan gravely.

"If gold is discovered in this last reservation, do you think the white men will let us keep that reservation?"

As he spoke, a newcomer edged into the circle. It was Zeke Harding. He

was sufficiently familiar with the Sioux dialect to understand the question.

"You tell him what you think, pardner!" he said quietly, when Dan appeared to hesitate.

"What's he want to know?" queried the commissioner, with sudden suspicion.

Dan turned a grim countenance toward him and explained.

"Why, of *course* they'll let 'em keep it!" the politician almost shouted. "Hell, man, what are you hesitating about? Tell him so."

"It'll mean the saving of a lot of lives," one officer prompted.

"It'll mean thousands and thousands of expense saved in getting this railroad through," added another.

Red Cloud stood with arms folded, waiting; and Buck's heart pounded rapidly, as he watched Dan's profile. The eyes of all the Indians were also on him. Dan's face grew rigid, with a fine, blazing scorn, and he withered the commissioner with a glance.

"You know in your heart 'tis a black lie!" he cried stridently. "I'll tell him no such dom' thing." Whereupon he faced Red Cloud and looked him fair in the eyes.

"No," he said in Siouan, "I do *not* think they'll let you keep it!"

"Then I will not sign," said Red Cloud, and all the leading chiefs promptly started to arise. Bull Bear and Roman Nose, White Horse and Yellow Hand, Medicine Wolf and Runs-his-horse of the Cheyennes followed them; and, one after another, rose Tall Bull, Gall, Runs-the-enemy, Little Wound, American Horse, Man-afraid-of-his-horses, Pawnee Killer, and Crazy Horse of the Sioux. One and all followed Red Cloud's lead, and refused to sign.

CHAPTER XXVII.

EAGLE SOULS.

THE self-important commissioner's reaction to this was explosive and violent; and his expressions of disgust were received gleefully by at least two people. A mounted man rode out with the news to a distant coulee, where Eb Snow and the revengeful Smiler were camped with a heavily laden pack train.

After his public humiliation at Buck's hands, The Smiler had "saved his face" among his friends by the assertion that his hand was crippled with rheumatism. Furthermore, he declared, Buck's friends had arrived so unexpectedly and in such force that it was suicidal to press the matter further. But, while his comrades had received this with no comment, he sensed that they knew the real truth and held him in contempt, the thought rankled bitterly in his heart.

"Guess that dam goes out now, eh?" he eagerly inquired.

"Why, if we can—ah—figure it safely," the calculating and cautious Snow replied.

"What's to figger? They don't keep no sentry there. No one figgers the Sioux could pull a stunt like that. Float a few cottonwood logs down that lagoon at night, with a kag o' powder aboard, an' when she goes up, the pressure o' water behind'll do the rest."

"All right, then," said Snow, after a moment of thought.

"Yeah, an' I'm goin' to pull that other, too," the surly giant added truculently. "Grab that girl—Rose-dawn, I mean."

"Jake with me. You attend to that, and I'll—ah—return and fix that dam."

While this went on, Dan's friends were expressing themselves at the post trader's bar.

"You did choose right!" said blunt and judicial Sergeant Krueger.

Rocky Moore and Pat Alberson echoed this sentiment, for these intemperate old spur jinglers fully appreciated the grave financial risks Dan had taken. They also appreciated Zeke's loyal stand in backing up his partner.

"At the same time," said Rocky, working his glass in circles on the wet bar, "I wouldn't have balked at a lie to them Injun cutthroats."

"A lie is a lie, isn't it?" Buck cut in, with amiable dryness.

"Kill 'em off like vermin is wot we'd oughta do!" the explosive Pat declared.

"Vell," Sergeant Krueger said thoughtfully, "ve can't stand still, I subbose. Ve got to forward go."

"Yeah," drawled Buck, staring down at his own glass and cocking one eye-

brow. "So every one has a chance to scramble fo' mo' dollars, an' the bulk o' them dollars can get into the hands o' a few schemers."

"You are still half Injun, my poy. Kin ve stop dis push behint us?"

"No. I kin see that, acourse. We've got to take most of this Injun land. But, at the same time, we should put it on the level, an' not fo' six cents an acre, either, like they did in Minnesota. What's mo', we shouldn't buy it with lies. Uncle Dan, here's how!"

MA took her own way of echoing this sentiment.

"Waal, I allus said I'd never marry another man, after Leward and his plurality ways," she declared. "Him dead these six years, too, they say. But Dan'l—I'm afeared 'tis only my biscuits."

"Thin I will swear 'tis bekaze yiz have the foinest eyes I iver saw in a woman's hid. Shure, an' they're beautiful!"

"Ah!" sighed Ma. "Now I *know* it's the biscuits!" But her face had softened wonderfully there in the moonlight, and her sigh was a happy, happy sigh.

In the same hour Buck was walking rapidly toward a quiet spot on the outskirts of the post. Tall and slender, Rose-dawn watched him approach. She stood there in white deerskin, decorated with the milk teeth of an elk. A beaded band encircled her head, and two thick, soft silky braids hung beside an ermine tail, across her bosom. Bathed in the moonlight, Buck thought he had never seen a more beautiful picture.

"Buck!" she gasped tremulously.

Necromancy was in the air. Almost before he realized it, her sweet lips pressed his own, and her heart was pounding against his.

"And you're glad to see me?" she inquired softly, after a moment.

"Gosh, yes. Gee, you're sweet! It sounds so odd, too, hearing you talk English so easily."

"I studied hard," she said happily, as they sat down. She cradled her cheek against his shoulder. "So you would be pleased."

"And why did you come back to yore own people? Didn't you like it theah in school?"

"Like it?" She shuddered, and some of the happiness faded from her speaking countenance. "Listen, *kechuwa*. In one of my books was a picture of a zoo. I said: 'You take Mato, the grizzly, into captivity. For him you build fenced places outside his den, so he can have sun and light and air.'

" 'Oh, yes,' they said. 'If we keep *him* in a closed place, he sickens and dies!' "

Buck chuckled in response to her swift, ironical glance.

"But I suppose they told you that Injuns are human bein's, an' must be taught to live in houses as such!"

"Oh, yes—even if we risk consumption."

Buck snorted indignantly, for he knew the Indian wigwam, with its outer and inner casing, and the air space between, to be the best ventilated habitation ever constructed.

"And what else did they tell you?" he asked.

"Once," she replied, "I sang: 'Oh, sun, you make all things to grow. You draw the water into the air that it may cool and fall again where water is not. And you give me health through my skin.' "

"So they called you a sun worshiper, eh?"

"Yes. I said: 'I am only thanking it because it does these things and is the light of the Great Mystery, which created all things.' But they said God created all things. They said their Bible proves it."

"What do you think about that?"

"Listen! Here is a stone. On it is a painting."

"Yes?"

"Twenty Indians pass by it. One says the painting is that of an elk; the second says it is a mule deer; the third says it is Hotanka, the loud-voiced raven. The next cries it is Shunktokecha, the coyote. Still another declares it is Shechoka, the robin. Then some passes by who thinks it is Hinakaga, the owl. And so on. Well?"

"Why, either somethin's wrong with the paintin', or somethin's wrong with those Injuns' heads!"

"Ho! What then can an Indian think about Catholics, Methodists, Mormons, Baptists—and the Bible?"

SHE was silent a moment, looking out over the panorama. Out there in the mystic silence the moon was bathing the landscape with the silvery radiance reflected from the souls of Wahu-meda, the happy departed.

"I learned more about the white man from one writer than from all others," she said presently.

"Which one, Rose-dawn?"

Glibly she recited: "'Mark you this, Bassanio: the devil can cite scripture for his purpose. An evil soul producing holy witness is like a villain with a smiling cheek, a goodly apple rotten at the heart.'"

To his discomfiture, Buck could not place the lines until she told him they were written by Shakespeare. And from his chagrin was born a sudden determination to do more reading.

"Some white men are like that," Rose-dawn continued. "Again—one white man invents an engine. The millions say: '*We* invented this.' Had it been left to the millions, there would have been no engine. Yet those millions look on us with contempt. They call us ignorant and fatuously ask us to swallow whole what they cannot agree on or live up to themselves!"

"Honey, you shore have done a bit o' thinkin' since you learned this language."

"Yes. They say, 'God is a good God who loves everybody and wants them to live in peace.' Then they make war among themselves. Then they say to the Indian: 'Be peaceful, but get off the best land. Be peaceful, but let us kill your buffaloes. Be peaceful, but let our bad men sell you whisky and make beasts of your braves. Be peaceful, but let us put you on reservations in log cabins and kill you off with consumption.'"

She clenched her hands. "I hate them—hate them!" she blazed.

"But I'm white, too, Rose-dawn!"

"Ah, I meant all but you!" she amended contritely. "You and Straight Tongue. Oh, I was proud of him when I heard. But I was proud of Red Cloud, too." Her eyes lit like sapphires. "They tried to buy him off!" she declared.

Buck understood that. Politicians were not above recognizing some one dishonest chief as the leader of his tribe and in full knowledge of one all-important fact, which was not generally understood by the public at large. No Indian chief's treaties were binding without the full approval of his tribal council, composed of warriors who had won their coup sticks. Despite this, more than one treaty was arranged through the bribery of an individual. The tribe promptly broke it; and thus pretext was given for the assertion that no Indian ever kept his word.

"He wouldn't weaken, though," said Buck.

"No!" she responded proudly. "Oh, I am glad I went to school. It will help me to fight."

Buck grinned a little. "How, honey?"

"I learned ventriloquism."

"You *did?*"

"A girl teacher knew how, and I discovered I could, too. So now I am the Great Medicine Woman."

"Rose-dawn, that ain't square!"

"My purpose is honorable!"

"How?"

"In counciling my people to fight always. But enough of that." She drew his head down suddenly and kissed him rapturously. "Oh, I heard about your fight. Buffalo Horns told Gray Squirrel. I was so proud to think you killed your enemy."

"You're pretty fierce, aren't you?" he asked dryly.

"Oh, I am not like your white girls. They squeal at sight of a mouse. They say: 'Oh, it is *horrible* to kill animals in traps!'—and then wear the furs! But I am different."

Buck understood that well enough. She had applauded while her brother, Kicking Antelope, broke all Sioux records in the sun-dance tests by hanging suspended for two days with thongs through the tendons of his back. Thus he had earned the right to inherit his father's name, Itio-ma-ga-ju, or Rain-in-the-face. This was the blood that flowed in Rose-dawn's veins!

"Maybe," he said jokingly, "you would

have been pleased if I had killed them all?"

Her head came up. "You should have shot them down like dogs!"

"Oh, tut! You talk mighty fierce, but you're not so hard as that inside."

Her eyelids lowered, and she evaded direct reply. "Ah, well," she breathed, "my heart is soft for *you, kechuwa.*" She laid her head on his shoulder once more. "And how long must you wear the uniform?"

He told her a few months.

A question trembled on her lips, and Buck hesitated a little. Where was he drifting to? He liked this intelligent, alternately soft and fiery girl so intensely that he had no doubts then of his ability to find happiness with her. And yet——

"I fought against yore people for two reasons at Deer Stand," he said.

"What were those reasons?"

"I was already in the service. But, also, because it's all wrong to murder women an' children for what politicians do."

"Oh, but I think so, too!" she agreed warmly. "Let men kill men."

"I know you do, or I wouldn't look at you, Rose-dawn." A deep gravity settled upon his features, as he lifted his head, and looked away over the silver-kissed ridges. His lips were never more clearly defined.

"I believe like you do—kill yore enemy when the time comes. But not his women an' children. And if you won't leave yore people——"

"Yes?"

"Why, I can't marry you, honey."

"But, do you mean that you don't *want* me?" she gasped fearfully.

"I wouldn't be heah," he drawled gravely, "if that was so."

With a glad little cry she threw her arms around his neck.

"We can live apart from either," she suggested. "I can still be faithful to my people, and you to yours."

Placing her cheek close against his and pointing to the horizon, Rose-dawn whispered softly: "I'm your sits-beside-you-woman, and you and I are of the open. Our souls—they are like the eagle's, hating all thoughts of confinement. Our church is the silent forest, and our roof the sky above us, where the clouds float, and the stars are. Ah, *kechuwa*——"

Under the spell of her voice and the witchery of the soft summer night, a roseate picture of the future filled his mind. To live by trading and hunting; to roam almost at will over the hills and through the grassy dales; to stand with this girl, watching the tepee fires of Wakanda tinting the peak tips with vermilion; to be as free as the pure air which came wafting over the warm, brown earth—this was a prospect which appealed mightily then to his enthusiastic, color-loving, and untamed soul.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

OUT OF A COULEE.

"INDIANS eat with their fingers," Matilda said cryptically.

"White men chew tobacco," Buck retorted amiably.

The two were in a corral near Cheyenne. Four days had passed since the Indian truce, and now Buck was being forced at last to go through with the ordeal he hated.

"But Indian braves beat their squaws," declared the girl.

Buck placed his knee against Blacky's side, waited till the horse exhaled, and pulled the cinch rings nearly together. He tied the latigo strap securely before answering.

"Nevah saw a Sioux or Pawnee do it, though I've seen them shove a squaw rather roughly," he drawled tolerantly. "Nevah saw a Sioux woman beat a child, eithah."

He busied himself with the bridle, adjusted the bit, and unfastened the halter shank from the picket line. Of course, Matilda knew nothing of his meeting with Rose-dawn, he reflected. Indians were nevertheless a tender subject just then.

"They're torturers and murderers," Matilda asserted.

"They don't inflict any torture much worse than they do to themselves," Buck replied politely, but rather shortly.

Tying the halter shank in his nigh pommel ring, he ran his hand under Blacky's thick, glossy mane. Had Matilda been

absent, he would have pressed his cheek against the horse's soft, silky nose. The observant girl smiled a little and said: "Well, why don't you? Kiss him, I mean."

Buck snorted and colored.

"Ho! Boys are so funny," she charged. "You'd like to. Well—why don't you?" For answer Buck allowed his eye to rove lazily over her attire. She had defied convention by wearing buckskin riding trousers; and she also wore black riding boots, with a pair of heavy-roweled Mexican spurs attached.

"Bettah get a pair o' pitchfo'k tines, hadn't yuh?" he sarcastically suggested.

"Tines?"

"Yeah. These hosses need 'em, you see. Got to lay a cayuse open to make him see reason."

Matilda glanced down at Buck's spurs. The rowels had been removed from the brass prongs, and silver disks inserted. They were round and smooth.

"Oh, vurry well," she said, blushing for the first time in his acquaintance. She stooped and removed her spurs.

"Anothah thing. I see you've got Rocky's horse, Baldy. He bolts sometimes."

"I think I can manage him," said the assured Matilda, blowing that irritating lock away from her nose.

"Oh, vurry well," said Buck, mimicking her pet phrase. With which he mounted and rode off.

"Maybe," he said dryly, when they halted at the edge of the post, "you'd like to try Cossack riding before we take off the saddles? You know—standing up in crossed stirrups."

"Oh, vurry well."

"By George, I believe it wouldn't faze yuh!" he thought, with reluctant admiration. Aloud he said: "Well, not this morning." And he dismounted and threw off the saddles.

Since she "asked for it," Buck intended to break the spirit of this cocksure and precociously competent youngster by a very simple expedient. It is one thing to mount a standing horse with the aid of a stirrup, and quite another to vault to the bare back. Few exercises are more fatiguing to the novice.

TO his surprise Matilda sprang lightly at the command from the balls of her feet and landed well up beside her horse's withers. With the left hand grasping the mane, and the right on the withers, she crooked her right elbow in under her belt line, and, utilizing this leverage, completed the vault easily.

"Huh!" thought Buck. "She's been practicin'."

He was tempted to try her on vaulting from the ground and landing, faced to the rear. It is much more difficult to perform this feat from a standing position than it is to dismount from the back of a galloping horse and vault, as he leaps forward. Buck held in only because he did not want her to suffer an ugly fall.

He compromised, instead, on such exercises as facing to the rear on a standing horse, or standing erect on his slippery back.

Tiring as these stunts are, he had concluded at the end of a half hour that Matilda was made of wire springs. She performed with nonchalant ease. Her features were carefully schooled throughout, and whenever she met his eyes her own were luminous and unnoting, as though she beheld some inner vision rather than himself.

"I wish," he said at last, "that you'd cut off that durned lock if it bothers yuh so!"

She greeted this with her first smile. "Buck," she said, leaning toward him with exaggerated sweetness, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll trade you this 'durned lock' for one of yours."

"You bettah face to the rear again!" he exploded.

"Oh, vurry well!"

With mock contrition, the exasperating maid reversed her position. And then Baldy saw a bit of fluttering paper. He seized this as a pretext to grab the bit between his teeth and bolt for the open prairie.

Buck was seated on Blacky's bare back at the moment. He instantly whirled the horse, intending to catch the runaway. But Blacky slipped, interfered with his front feet, tripped, and went down. Buck was pitched to the grass.

Excited and frightened, Blacky was

up in a flash. The reins were jerked from Buck's fingers. When he jumped to his feet, the horse was running out over the prairie.

Calling sharply to his mount, Buck looked fearfully at Matilda. She was still faced to the rear, on the back of the running horse. "My God!" he breathed. "She'll break her neck." But, as though she intended to contradict him, even in this moment of peril, the resourceful girl placed her hands on Baldy's rump, flung her body into the air, crossed her legs above Baldy's head, and landed astride once more, faced to the front.

"Good girl!" Buck shouted. "Stay with him!"

While he called again and again to Blacky and hurriedly buckled his pistol belt, he looked anxiously out over the plains. When Matilda tried ineffectually to turn Baldy, and disappeared into a draw, his heart grew heavy with fear.

It required several minutes of coaxing before Blacky circled back within reach, and Buck tore off in pursuit. Five minutes of furious galloping followed; and then his worst fears were realized. For there, several hundred yards away, he saw Matilda flying out of a coulee, with a score of Sioux in hot pursuit.

They had passed over a mile or more from the camp and the grade, and in their immediate surroundings, cut as it was by draws and marked with ridges, Buck could see no signs of other white men. The prospect seemed hopeless. There was so very little that one lone man could hope to do against such odds.

Nevertheless, he turned immediately toward her, racing in at an oblique angle.

MANY a wild ride had been hung on the pegs of his memory. He had ridden like a flying centaur, with the wind whipping past his ears, and the arrows whistling all around him. Now he rode like a demon. He fanned Blacky with his hat, sobbed prayers in his throat, and went thundering over the prairie with the speed of a runaway locomotive.

"Drift, you son of a gun!" he begged Blacky. "If you love me, honey boy, lay down them ears an' *ramble!*"

Matilda's pursuers were strung out, with the leader over a hundred yards behind her. Two hundred yards intervened between this warrior and the next Indian. Baldy was swift, and though the lone Indian was gaining at every leap, it was patent that Matilda could with ease outdistance the others for some time to come.

Buck also noted that the Indians were not firing at Matilda, for her hat was off, and they saw her flying hair. They intended to capture her. But Buck's mount was swifter than any horse there. Cutting in at a tangent, he reasoned that he had one bare chance. Provided that he could down the warrior now so close to her, he knew that he could take Matilda behind him, and that, even though carrying double, his powerful broncho could show his heels to the whole band for several miles.

Again he called to Blacky; and the horse gave every ounce of his splendid strength. He staged a tremendous spurt, and the Indians yelled, and the chief fired at him, and several others followed suit. But he thundered on, while all around him bullets kicked up dust clouds, till only fifty yards or less intervened between him and the Indian chief.

At this juncture the chief turned his face once more toward Buck, and even through the paint Buck recognized Red Cloud.

Then from behind a ridge to his right, he heard new yells, and up over the ridge shot a body of mounted Irish graders, and down upon the Indians these rode furiously, firing as they came. They had been proceeding toward Cheyenne, down the course of a long draw, and so had been temporarily concealed; but the shots had drawn them to the scene, and now, as they appeared less than two hundred yards away, inexpressible delight surged through Buck. For there among that dozen men rode Zeke Harding and Dan Mulcahey.

"Whurroo!" howled old Dan. "Come on, laads, to the batthle o' the burnin' wather!"

Screeching no less bloodthirstily than the Sioux, the Irish came on like a small herd of bison. They aimed for the gap between Red Cloud and his score of

followers; and, as their shots and the yells and the return fire of the Indians shattered the prairie's silence, Red Cloud allowed Matilda to speed on, and whirled his mount to rejoin his warriors. But Buck at once cut in to intercept him.

Raising his revolver, he now took aim and from it threw a shot at the chief. Blacky skimmed along so easily that it was like firing from the deck of a steamer on a smooth sea, but the target was moving, and Buck only scratched the Indian's side. In return, Red Cloud flung up his Winchester and from it fired a bullet which cut a lock from Blacky's mane. The jerk of the horse therefore spoiled the soldier's second shot.

But the next leap of his horse brought Buck within ten feet of the Sioux. He was still riding at a tangent and on Red Cloud's left side. The chief thereupon threw himself to the right side of his horse, and, while he clung to the mane with his right hand, he held the Winchester in his left and aimed it across the pony's back. And from this position he fired a shot at close quarters. The bullet struck the dispatch rider at an angle, in the left breast. Deflecting from the bone, it cut down under his armpit. His own return shot struck Red Cloud in the left leg, which was hooked over the pony's back. The shock of the Indian's bullet had spoiled Buck's aim a second time, and the shot intended for the chief's head flew low. The Indian raised his gun again.

That same second, however, saw Buck swerve in and fling himself across the Indian pony's back. He fired a chance shot, as he leaped, striking Red Cloud in the shoulder. As his weight followed, he carried the chief in a crashing fall to the ground.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HIGH, WIDE AND HANDSOME.

THE heavy fall jarred both men badly for a few seconds, but the soldier came to his knees first. Red Cloud lay stunned. Buck was thus enabled to snatch up the Winchester and secure Red Cloud's knife.

Hurriedly reloading his Colt and returning it to his holster, Buck quickly examined the Winchester to see if it was fouled. Noting that it was in working order, he looked grimly down at Chief Red Cloud.

"I'd ought to!" he declared, aiming tentatively at the chief's heart. Red Cloud had tried to kill him; and, had the positions been reversed, he knew he would have received no mercy.

"Only, when you look at it anothah way, I tried my best to kill him, too!" he thought. And, as he realized that his wound was not fatal, and he saw Matilda, still safe, being carried back toward the post by a thoroughly frightened and still uncontrollable Baldy, he lowered the rifle.

The Sioux party had rallied in the interval to meet the Irish. The bands crashed together, shooting, clubbing and yelling hideously. Throwing up his rifle again, Buck brought it to bear on a Sioux warrior whose horse had risen high on its hind legs. Just as this Indian brought his clubbed rifle down over the head of a grader, knocking the man to the ground, Buck fired, and the Indian and his horse fell together. Two other horses fell at the same time, and their riders gripped and wrestled on the sandy turf.

Then, as the dispatch rider threw another shell into the chamber and watched for another opportunity to fire at an Indian well clear of the disorder, a second party of Dan's graders breasted the ridge at a gallop. Why they were there at this hour, and not at work on the grade, Buck did not know; but his heart echoed their yells, as they spurred forward to aid their comrades.

The arrival of these men turned the tide. Six of the Sioux were already stretched on the ground. At sight of the reënforcements the remaining fourteen fled. Three of them were forced to run like the wind and leap in a bound to the backs of their comrades' horses. Their own ponies lay dead or wounded behind them.

Some of the graders pursued, while others dismounted, and flew with sobbing curses at the Sioux wounded. Jim Fogarty and Mike Flaherty had "pulled their freight" for the Land Beyond. Five

other Irishmen were wounded. Their comrades saw red. The death chants of the four wounded Sioux were cut short by shots and curses.

While this was taking place, Red Cloud recovered his senses. He tried to arise, but his wounded leg balked him. He glared at Buck with no sign of weakening, no plea for mercy, no indication of any surrender. He had fought and lost, and this was the end.

"*Tawauota u ye do!*" he chanted, lifting his eyes to the skies, where the gauzy streamers floated, and the eagle soared in the blue vacuum. "He is coming, Red Cloud, with his face to the front. He is coming, galloping up the rainbow to the happy hunting grounds, to ride there with his departed people. His body he leaves to his mother, the earth. His high soul goes to the realm of his father, the sun."

Continuing, he gave thanks to Wakanda for the strength and endurance which had made him a chief to lead his people in a battle for liberty. He prayed that his death might be known even as far as *Makah-oesetopah*, the four corners of the earth. This, he hoped, would only stiffen his people to further resistance against their enemies. And he prayed that his four souls might ever be in touch with his people here on earth. One was to hover near his body; one was to stand guard over his people's sleep in their village; one was to hover over them in the pure, sweet air of the prairies; and the last, the high soul, was to join the star clusters overhead. He prayed that this last might be as bright as his many deeds on the field of honor, so his people would have more light at night to guide them over the trackless wastes.

"He thinks he's going to be killed!" thought Buck, who understood every word. Hot tears stung his eyeballs. "An' not a regret! Not a whimper. Not a thought o' self. Not a thing exceptin' thought o' his people."

AND now, as Buck cleared his throat, some of Dan Mulcahey's crew came charging up.

"Begorra, he's got Rid Cloud!" Dan roared.

"Scalp the Indian!" another shouted hoarsely.

This son of Erin threw himself from his horse and started toward Red Cloud, bowie knife in hand.

"Back up!" Buck suddenly commanded, covering the grader's advance with his Winchester.

"Well, wot the devil!" gasped the Irishman.

"He's my Injun, ain't he?"

"Begobs, thot's right, too. Well, give it to the cutthroat yoursilf!"

"No, I ain't goin' to."

An amazed chorus greeted this. "You mane yiz are goin' to take thot jasper a prisoner?"

"No, not even prisonah." Buck eyed them levelly and impartially. "Send him back to the guardhouse, so some fellar can shove a bayonet through him from behind? Not me. Boys, I'll be right obliged to yuh if you let me play this here hand my own way."

"There's Tim Fogarty's and Mike Flaherty's blood still smokin' on the ground!"

"I'm mighty sorry, boys, but you got six scalps to pay for them. I shore hate to put it this here way, seein' as how you pulled us out of the hole. But, boys, this here Injun's one he-man. You can't see nothin' right now but his badness, but he's played his badness accordin' to his lights, Western fashion—high, wide an' handsome, clean across the board. An' boys, while I hate to say it, I shore will have to establish some new rules if you insist on sittin' in on this here jack pot of mine."

His lazy drawl and his rare smile took some of the edge from his words; but it was noted that the muzzle of the gun did not waver.

"An' wot's thim new rules?" one inquired in a milder tone, grinning.

"Why, I reckon the one that wants to touch my Injun has got to be willin' to draw, and I'm already a-standin' here with a full house."

A silence greeted this, which was broken by Zeke. He moved his horse over beside Buck.

"Boys," he said, "he isn't running any

sandy, and I reckon I'll stand in with him in this."

"Why, me, too!" Dan seconded, with a grin. "B'gobs, yiz know yiz will all think different after yiz cool off."

Some of the graders smiled sheepishly at this and turned to dressing their wounded, while Mulcahey hastened to Buck.

"Yiz have a hole in yiz!" he asserted anxiously.

"Nothin' much," said Buck, shoving a dampened handkerchief inside his shirt. Briefly he explained his presence there and added thankfully: "A mighty lucky thing for us that *you* were out heah, Uncle Dan! How come?"

"Why, the dam wint out this mornin'. Blowed up. Took the fill with it. We was goin' in for more tools."

According to their theory, Dan explained, the dam had been blown out by means of a raft. "An' whoiver did ut knew the commissioner's moind, too," Dan concluded, with a sigh.

"Then you've seen him?"

"Oh, yes. We've got to do all thot work over, at our own ixpinse."

"He laughed at the idea that Indians did it," said Zeke.

"Which I don't belave mesilf, unless whites hilped thim."

"Accused us of framing the thing," Zeke added.

"Why, it'll break yuh, won't it?" Buck cried.

Their faces gave him his answer.

"And you goin' to be married to Ma, an' you, Zeke—— Do you think Snow is behind this?"

"Who kin tell? Shure, he's gone to Omaha. Wint yisterday. Won't be back for a month, they say." Then Dan straightened. "But 'tis an ill wind thot blows nobody good. We got here in time for this, annyways, because av the blow-up. We'll fix Rid Cloud now."

THE Indian had stopped chanting, to look wonderingly at Buck. When informed that he was to go free, he trembled a little, and his gratitude flashed from his eyes; but almost at once he said:

"Papoose-born-a-man, I am not going in peace."

"Red Cloud goes with no thongs tied to the wrists of his spirit," Buck replied in Siouan.

The chief looked deep into the soldier's eyes. "My memory of this will be as the mountain," he said. That was all. He then submitted to the rude surgery of the plains. Placing a stick in his mouth, he clamped his teeth on it, while Buck probed with a knife blade for the bullets. Not a groan escaped him, though his agony was so intense that the veins swelled in his forehead.

"I'll go with you till we sight your band," Buck declared, when Red Cloud was assisted at last to the back of his horse.

The warrior shook his head. "I will get there," he said. Then, by a supreme effort of the will, he said in Buck's ear: "It is not good to return bad news for a good act. But I must tell you that Rose-tints-in-the-dawn is gone."

Buck was glad that he had a wound to account for the accentuated pallor in his face.

"Gone where?" he gasped.

"I do not know where. She left our camp alone at night, two suns ago. None know why. We found her tracks. She had struggled. There were moccasin tracks—Indian pony tracks. We lost them in the creek."

With this he was gone, clinging tenaciously to the neck of his pony to keep from falling.

"Buck, you're hit worse than you thought!" Zeke in anxiety predicted, when Buck turned.

"Well, maybe." was all Buck vouchsafed by way of explanation. He submitted to Zeke's examination. His head seemed to be whirling, and his heart was like lead.

Soon afterward, when they were starting for the post, they met Matilda, returning on a tired and subdued Baldy. She, too, was subdued and unusually contrite. She looked anxiously at Buck's shoulder, and her eyes brimmed with tears.

"I'm *so* glad it was no worse," she told him. "I'd say there are some people here pretty near white, too." Thus she expressed her opinion of his ride into the

breech before Dan's men appeared. "But it's all my fault, every bit!" she acknowledged. "I *would* ride this horse."

"Aw, niver moind," Dan returned kindly. "Shure, we'd 'ave run into the Injuns anyways, 'tis likely."

Then, in the course of explanation, she was told of the explosion at the dam.

"So *that's* it!" she breathed. Looking from Dan to Zeke, the blood returned in a slow flood to her pale cheeks. A light dawned and spread in the girl's dark eyes.

"Why," she cried, "do you think I'd let my family go broke?"

Their expressions were ludicrous.

"Let us?" Dan exclaimed.

"Well, what are my cattle good for?"

Still they failed to get her full meaning.

"They're mine!" she insisted. "Grandfather's only my legal guardian till I'm eighteen. There are *thousands* of them, so there! I'll stake you to a share of them."

The men were left speechless by the girl's offer.

"Oh, don't look so *silly!*" she protested. She blinked rapidly. "*You* know. We're all one—one family."

"Still, I guess we can paddle along without taking your cattle," Zeke declared, with a kind smile.

"You probably can't get another contract now, and wagon freighting will go when the railroad is through," she returned. She blinked again and tried to smile. "There!" she affirmed. "It's all settled. We'll all ranch. I've made up my mind."

"Glory be!" Dan murmured. "Well, we appreciate it, but I guess we'll try our own hand first."

"All right, but you'll see some day. The offer stands. And now——"

She reined alongside Buck and held his horse back, motioning Dan and the others on.

"Buck," she said, "I took my own way to get it, but here's your discharge." She pulled an official packet from her shirt waist and handed it to him. He received it in a daze.

"I've had it two days," she confessed, coloring under his glance.

"And why did you *want* to get that fo' me?" he demanded bluntly.

"So you'd settle down to something!" she replied, looking him directly in the eyes. "So I could do *something* to show that I want to—well, help my family. You know. Father's cousin runs the ranch. I wanted to fix it——"

"So I'd ride for you?"

"For us—yes. When you learn cattle, I figured you'd be a good foreman —about the time I drove north. So there."

For a moment Buck made no reply. He did not reason that he had wiped out his score. He classed to-day's ride simply as "pulling some one out of a hole." Similar things were being done every day in this Western country. Folks "helped one another out"—or they didn't. His kind did.

"But fo' her to stand behind my back that a way—that's *different!*" he reflected. "A girl's a girl. You don't expect a girl to play a man's game."

And for this reason he resented the situation. He gave her full credit for her generosity, yet resented this also in a vague way, because it might make him appear an ingrate, in contrast. He felt that she had engineered him into this position, and he hated being coerced, more particularly by the one and only person who seemed capable of managing his affairs. Ride for her? Hell! He didn't want to ride for *anybody*, if he could avoid it, unless it was scouting, where he could enjoy a maximum of personal freedom.

Over and above all this, he had already come to a decision about Rose-dawn. He intended to conduct a hunt for her on his own account.

"Thank you, Matilda," he said, at last. "Only, you don't *need* me on yore ranch. Whenever you do, or the family needs me—that'll be different."

Matilda winced a little, but rallied at once and smiled. While she had played and lost temporarily, she would not have been Matilda had she accepted it as quite final.

"Vurry well," she said. "When the time comes, I'll holler."

CHAPTER XXX.

MATILDA MANAGES.

EVENTS thereafter slowly shaped themselves to bring about Matilda's desire.

Dan, Zeke and Gregory remained obdurate in their decision. They went down with the ship in the sink-hole contract, but they finished the job in time for the rails. Buck also kept his own counsel and accepted a place as an army scout, intending to start on his hunt for Rose-dawn as soon as he saved sufficient funds for an outfit.

In the fall of '67, when the contract was finished, Zeke married and decided to try prospecting again. Ma and Dan were married, and he and Gregory started a small stage line to the mines.

"So the family's all leaving me," Matilda said before she started back to Texas. "Well, I'll let 'em rustle around a while. But you'll see—you'll all get lonesome."

Buck then obtained a furlough and left for a fruitless and hazardous round of the fur-trading stations, seeking some information of the missing Indian girl.

Giving this up as hopeless, at last, he returned to duty as a scout and was serving as such in '68, when the majority of the Sioux, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes accepted the inevitable and signed a treaty at Fort Laramie on the twenty-ninth of April. But Red Cloud and Spotted Tail steadfastly refused to capitulate.

"Remove the forts from the Bozeman Trail, or I will never sign!" Red Cloud declared defiantly. And he did not sign until the government agreed finally, in November of '68, to remove the three garrisons from Reno, Phil Kearney, and C. F. Smith on the Bozeman Trail. With only two thousand followers, Red Cloud defied the whole United States government and achieved the outstanding victory for the red man in the whole gamut of Indian negotiations.

Buck had by this time given up all hope of ever hearing from Rose-dawn. He had nothing but her fragrant memory to console him, as he rode and fought and slept beneath the stars.

But he had his glorious, untrammeled freedom; and his great outdoors never palled on him. Though he was reading more and more, he still shied from all thoughts of confinement, as a mustang shies from the rope.

At this juncture, when the railroad was completed, Eb Snow decided to return to the cattle business. He made an agreement with Red Cloud to graze in the Indian hunting grounds, and Buck felt certain that the man had been able to gain his end through a former deal in firearms.

Then, in the same year, the Four Musketeers retired from the army, and Matilda drove her herds north from Texas.

"The family," she informed Buck, "is ready to get together again, and accept my offer. Also, the family wants you to negotiate with Red Cloud for grazing rights near the Bighorns."

When Matilda made this request she was nearing her sixteenth birthday, and her budding womanhood struck home on Buck's consciousness with an odd shock. It was disquieting and disconcerting. And he knew, too, that she had at last, by hook or crook, succeeded in corraling him within a cul-de-sac against his will. For the ties of sentiment left him no alternative. The other members of the family wanted this move to be made, and obviously he must help them. For Red Cloud would not include them in the agreement; it was made between Buck and himself alone, and only in case Buck was to be permanently present on the ranch.

To be continued in the next issue of THE POPULAR, *on the news stands May 7th.*

IT has been stated in some of the accounts of the birds of Porto Rico that the island has few birds, and that they have no songs. Recent investigations on the part of Mr. Wetmore of the Smithsonian Institution reveal that the mocking bird is a native of the Island and an excellent singer. Besides the mocking bird, Mr. Wetmore furnishes a long list of Porto Rican singers.

The Spy

By Theodore Goodridge Roberts

Author of "The Crater," "Esprit de Corps," Etc.

Lieutenant Trevor's outfit fought through a nightmare of machine-gun fire to gain a difficult position. Small wonder, then, that Trevor flatly refused to obey the order of the self-seeking Major Ackerson.

BY May 1916, Lieutenant and Acting Captain John Kilmer Trevor was an old soldier. He had come out to Flanders in June, '15, from a unit known as the Dirty Dozen, to a battalion of the Second Brigade. Circumstances and innate modesty had interfered with his promotion; and now, after eleven months in the field, he had not advanced a step in substantive rank. But on a May morning in London, with three days of leave still to go, his troubles were forgotten.

Having breakfasted at his hotel, Trevor walked out. He filled his eyes with Piccadilly Circus. On his way to a certain great club, which had extended its privileges to all officers from the overseas dominions, he met Colonel Hammond. The colonel wore red tabs and an empty left sleeve. He clapped his right hand heavily on Trevor's shoulder and asked:

"Why the devil didn't you give me an answer?"

Trevor gaped. "An answer, sir?"

"Didn't Wicks give you my message?"

"Wicks? No, sir. I haven't seen him since he went out on that leave. He got filled up with shrapnel on his way in. I hear he's gone back to Canada."

"That explains it. I should have written. Breakfasted?"

"Yes, sir."

"Never mind that. Do it again. You've done more unpleasant things twice, Jack."

They had a table by a long open window. After ordering, the colonel leaned forward and said, in his queer voice, "How's the 'Trevor Egg?'"

The queerness of his voice was due to the fact that a fragment of the same shell which had smashed his left arm had damaged his vocal cords.

"I don't believe it has been tried out, sir. I haven't heard a word of it in months."

"It's a good egg—as good a little bomb as ever I saw. But even a good thing needs pull and push in this army. Will you tell me why you're not a major?"

"I don't know, sir. It just hasn't happened, that's all. Even my third pip hasn't been gazetted, but I've had my company since early in March. Seniors who were wounded have been coming back, sir—and one thing and another like that."

"You were commanding a company the night I got mine."

"Yes, sir; and I commanded the battalion for a week after that; but I was with a platoon again within the month."

They ate the two halves of a large omelet in silence. Then the colonel said: "The message I sent you by Wicks was the offer of a job—a good job, too. I gave it to Ackerson, on trial. Fired him a week ago. He knows less about bombs than any man has a right to know about anything, and too damn much about other people's business. So the job is yours, Jack."

"Thank you, sir. What is it?"

"O. C. Grenades, the Training Division. The G. O. C. has left it to me. You'll be a major to start with, and there's staff pay in it."

Trevor felt a warm glow start from his heart and travel both ways. Here, at last, was recognition—and from the best of all the battalion commanders under whom he had fought in France. This was a sweet and glorious experience after eleven months of neglect.

"Could I hold it down, sir?"

"Forget your confounded modesty! You're my choice out of three divisions. You know bombs. You know men. You invented the Trevor Egg. You've been blooded and mudded. Nobody is better qualified for it than you, and no one has a better right to it."

"But—ah—wouldn't it look like—like quitting, sir?"

The colonel bristled his mustache and protruded his eyes; and he replied in the negative—to state it mildly. He replied at length. He annihilated all possible critics of Trevor's intended action, then exhumed and scattered the dust of their ancestors. So vivid was his language and so furious his aspect, that the ancient waiter stepped back two paces, with the fresh pot of coffee. He calmed down suddenly.

"I'm returning to Folkestone this afternoon, and I'll fix it to-night," he concluded.

They parted after breakfast with mutual emotions and expressions of the warmest esteem. The colonel had an appointment at the war office. Trevor went in the opposite direction and looked at familiar landmarks from a new angle—the staff angle. He imagined the red tabs on his collar, the crowns on his shoulders, the spurs. His thoughts dwelt fondly on the spurs. They would be hunting spurs—short and broad and worn ankle-high. He drank something long and light at the Cri; and then, to his wonder, he was suddenly conscious of a vague sensation of loneliness and doubt.

THE noon stand-to at the Savoy bar was an institution of the Great War of which little is heard and less written. It was peculiar to officers on leave in London. Canadians predominated there, armed with treasury notes, unwavering of purpose. Trevor stood-to, as the clocks chimed. By one o'clock the vague sensations of loneliness and doubt were gone, and he felt exactly as a major on the General Staff should feel. He invited Tom Gilman and "Sandbag" Starkey and an R. C. D., a subaltern in the yellowest boots in London, to lunch. But, glorious as he felt, not a word did he say of Colonel Hammond's offer.

Colonel Hammond started out for Folkestone in a large car and distinguished company; and the chances are that he would have reached his destination that night if the man at the wheel had been as good a judge of distance as of liquor. As it was, the stout post which supported the sign of the Dancing Bear Tavern in the High Street of Little Slumbercum intervened, and the colonel's head was brought into violent contact with a garden wall. The colonel was put to bed at the Dancing Bear.

THE next two days and nights Jack Trevor spent in such emotional stress and uncertainty as he had never before known nor even imagined. Doubts and fears possessed him whenever he was alone; so he was alone as little as possible. When he slept he dreamed of the old battalion as of a beloved home from which he had willfully exiled himself. In one dream he saw his four subalterns in a dugout by candlelight, and he heard one of them say: "The best of 'em weaken sooner or later, but I didn't think it of Trevor." So he slept as little as possible. Awake, his doubts were of Colonel Hammond and his fears were that he might not connect with the job at Folkestone. The morning of the third day found him in a quandary. If he were still a company commander he should be on the Channel, trenchward bound, instead of in Charing Cross Road; and if he were the grenade expert on the staff of the Training Division he should have proof of it. He dispatched a discreet wire to Colonel Hammond's private address:

Am anxiously awaiting word re bombing appointment as discussed breakfast Tuesday morning. Otherwise, due battalion six a. m. to-morrow, Saturday. Address Savoy.

J. K. TREVOR.

Though this had been written in bed, before breakfast, yet it was not until ten thirty that he could nerve himself to send it. Then he hastened to the Savoy, where he met "Buck" Payne for the first time in eight months. Buck had commanded a platoon of the Little Black Devils at the time of their last meeting. Now he wore a forage cap and on his breast a pair of soaring wings.

"So that's where you went to," said Trevor, as they shook hands. "Somebody told me you'd stopped something heavy with your head."

"Nothing like that," returned Payne, grinning.

"What was the big idea?"

"Craved a higher life—and higher rank. I'm a flight commander now, and that's nothing to sneeze at, you poor mud splasher. Come on over. The view's fine and promotion's fast. Newly joined majors can't leapfrog you in the air the way they do on the ground. You get what's coming to you in the R. F. C."

"You sound like a mind reader. Perhaps the supply of majors from England will give out some day, but I doubt it. Don't fancy the air, myself. A fat staff job in England would be more to my taste."

"You're above the clouds now, old son. Perhaps you'd like to be The Honorable, the Minister of Militia. How about a K. C. B.? Or would you prefer the Grand Cross of St. Michael and St. George?"

"I've been offered something good, honest to God! A majority and red taps at the Training Division—O. C. grenade training."

"Change your liquor, Jack."

"That's straight. Colonel Hammond made the offer. Said he was authorized by the G. O. C. to pick a man, and he picked me."

"Then why don't you strut your stuff? Where are your crowns and your red tabs and your spurs?"

Trevor explained his awkward position fully. Buck Payne was both indignant and amused.

"Damn these brass hats!" exclaimed Buck. "And you were green enough to believe it! It's a wonder he didn't promise you his own job—offer to retire in your favor. Hot air! They all get that way. It tickles their vanity and doesn't cost them anything."

"Hammond isn't that kind," said Trevor. "He meant it."

"Well, then he's forgotten it."

"I wired him this morning."

"That was importunate of you, my boy. They don't like that sort of thing. You should pretend to forget, too. When does your leave expire?"

"To-night. If I don't hear from Folkestone by one o'clock, I'll cable the old man for an extension. But he won't like it. He'll hold it against me."

"No, he won't. I'll take you back to the war. Due out St. Eloi way, myself, by sundown."

One o'clock came and failed to bring a reply to Trevor's wire.

"That tears it," said Trevor. So Buck Payne flew him home to the war.

TREVOR found the battalion "in," his company in the support line, and his kit in the dugout that was company headquarters. All was quiet. Ted Judson, his second in command, was full of rumors. The old division was to be pulled out and sent to Africa. The price of Scotch was going up to ninety francs a case. The salient was to be abandoned on the recommendation of the commander in chief. The enemy was ready to quit. The world's rum supply was on the verge of exhaustion. The king was coming out to take command of the third army. The brigade major was secretly married to the candy-haired girl in the Pot of Milk estaminet. A French scientist had invented a gas that would end the war in a month.

"I heard a funnier one in London," said Trevor.

"What?" asked Ted.

But he wouldn't tell it. He fell asleep instead.

The next morning was bright and clear. It was quiet, too, until eight thirty, when the enemy put on a brief, but heavy shoot, with trench mortars against the trenches on Trevor's left. Half an hour iater all the hostile guns from Pilkem Ridge to Wytschaete cut loose. The Third Division got the worst of that. Trenches and dugouts and strong points were wiped out and smeared abroad. Fragments of the truth of that holocaust are to be found in history books—a different fragment in every book, and only a fraction of the whole truth in the sum total of their telling. It is true that the Third Division's commander was cut off and killed up in front of Armagh Wood—Mercer, the kindest and most courageous of men. It is true that the Seventh and Eighth Brigades were buried and exhumed and buried again, burned with liquid fire, ripped and broken and powdered to indomitable fragments which continued to fight. It is true that Cotton and his gunners fought their brace of "sacrifice" eighteen pounders in Sanctuary Wood, until the enemy from Observatory Ridge was scorched by the flashes. All of which is history. The outfit in which Trevor had the honor to command a company was not in the full sweep of that destruction. The odd H. E. knocked in its parapet, and the odd shrapnel swiped a corporal's squad now and again, and the odd assault of hostile infantry demanded machine-gun treatment occasionally; but, by and large, it passed a comfortable day.

Back at Folkestone, in a hospital overlooking the Leas and the blue waters of the Channel, Colonel Hammond's brain cleared at last; and the first thought that came to him was of his conversation with Jack Trevor.

Nine battalions of Canadians counter-attacked the next morning, after inadequate artillery preparation and hours of drenching rain. Jack Trevor's outfit was in that show. It walked into a hurricane of machine-gun fire. Trevor felt an unseen hand snatch at his holster. Then his tin hat spun on his head. He heard somebody cough on his right, somebody curse on his left.

"We haven't as much chance as a pot of butter in hell!" he remarked indignantly.

He thought of Colonel Hammond and the Training Division, and his indignation increased. He reached an edge of that mess of splintered trunks and upturned roots which had been Armagh Wood, and he yelled for his men to rally on him. A corporal named Cassady stumbled against him.

"Where the devil are the rest of them?" he asked.

"Excuse me, sir, but I guess I'm hit," returned the corporal, wilting against him.

Cassady was hit, sure enough. He was dead in fifteen seconds. More men rallied to Trevor—twenty-five or thirty of them—and they all went forward, searching for foes in the increasing light. They found six and a machine gun. They used their bombs to advantage. They caught ten or twelve in the act of leaving the wreck of a dugout. Then they got in touch with some lads of Warton's company on one side and of the Tenth on the other. They won through the wood and into a renovated trench. There they got back more of their own than mere ground; and there they came to rest. They reversed portions of the trench by

shifting what they could find of the parapet.

Trevor went up and down the trench and discovered that he was the senior officer present. It was a mixed command, but a good one. Two of his own subalterns were there, and one of poor Warton's, and two from the Tenth, and about seventy other ranks. He sent runners back with urgent demands for stretcher bearers and ammunition and food. By that time things were quieting down, as if both sides were sick and tired of the hubbub and destruction.

THE field of view from Trevor's position wasn't inspiring—torn trees, a gradual slope of torn earth and the wreckage of a farmstead. Trevor had a headache, for which he swallowed a tablet from a tin box. His dispositions being made, he had nothing to do but wait for some one else, friend or foe, to start something; so he sat down and held his head between his hands. He thought dully of his unsatisfactory flanks, his breakfast, and Colonel Hammond. What a life! What a world! Only a few mornings ago he had breakfasted twice within an hour in London, and now here he was, somewhere on an edge of Armagh Wood, in the vicinity of Mount Sorrel, without bite or sup to stay his stomach. A hell of a life!

Macphail aroused him.

"Here's a major, Third Brigade H. Q., to take over," whispered Macphail. "He came in from the right, half a minute ago."

Trevor raised his aching head and looked at the newcomer. It was a major, sure enough, and of the General Staff, at that; but his red tabs were daubed with mud. He was large and young; and Trevor had never seen him before.

"My name's Ackerson," he said, smiling. As he spoke, he pulled a blue brassard from a pocket and drew it up his right arm. "That was a nasty fight," he continued. "I came over to tell you that you're too far ahead and both your flanks are in the air. You'll have to fall back."

Ackerson? Trevor wondered vaguely where he had heard that name before. But he did not question his memory hard enough to hurt it. He was not very keenly interested in the man.

"You are a new one on me," he said. "Murray was your brigade major a couple of weeks ago, and Hodge was your staff captain. But it doesn't matter. This is Second Brigade ground, and you'll have to show me a written order from somebody with authority before I chuck it."

The major reddened. "My rank is authentic," he said thickly. "I'm your senior, and I'm in this trench. Your flanks are in the air."

Trevor's headache grew more intense.

"Can't I grab off even a little trench to myself?" he complained. "Won't the supply of majors hanging round in England, all ready to jump me, ever give out? Who sent you here, anyhow? I don't know you. You may be a spy, for all I know to the contrary. Ackerson? I've heard that name before, but I can't think where. Not in France, I'll swear to that. Who the devil are you, anyway?"

"I'm Major H. C. Y. Ackerson, of the staff of the Canadian Training Division, attached to the Third Brigade for—ah—in an advisory capacity for a week or ten days. Now I really must insist on your falling back and linking up."

Trevor's memory clicked. He got to his feet.

"What was your job with the Folkestone outfit?"

"I'm in charge of grenade training. Now I really must——"

"Am? Do you mean to say that you're still an officer on the T. D. staff? You said you were Third Brigade."

"I'm only attached to the brigade, as I've already stated."

Trevor's heart was hot—so hot that it burned out his headache. So this was the explanation of Colonel Hammond's silence! This Ackerson, "who knew less about bombs than any man had a right to know about anything," had not been fired; or, if fired, had been reinstated and was now doing a Cook's tour "in an advisory capacity" and horning in on real soldiers! Yes, and qualifying for a medal! He saw it all. Politics, by God! Trevor looked at Mr. Macphail, whose left arm was slung in a bloodstained khaki handkerchief, and whose cheeks

were gaunt with fatigue. He looked at Private Nolan, who sat with his back against a traverse, with his eyes shut tight, and the blue of death already spreading through the tan of his young face. He turned his head slightly and glanced at the dead bodies of friends and foes beyond the parados. He looked at the intruder again, with a gray smile.

"You may be right, but even so, you're wrong," he said. "If you are what you say, then the truth is worse than my suspicion. But I must do my duty. Mr. Macphail, put a noncom and three men on this person."

"Yes, sir."

"And disarm him as an enemy spy."

"What's that! A spy? Me! You're a fool!"

"Very likely. See that he's put in a safe place and doesn't get away."

TREVOR felt anxious about his flanks, but inspection proved his worry and Ackerson's alarm to be unfounded. What was left of Smith's company had dug into touch with him on the left, and survivors of two companies of the Tenth were up with him on the right. Rations and ammunition arrived, and stretcher bearers came up and worked in the wrecked wood. Hostile machine guns were silent, and hostile shells were occasional and high. Tea was made, and bacon was fried at tiny fires masked with brush. A rum issue occurred. Working parties filling sandbags lunched without relinquishing their shovels. The Lewis guns of the battalion came up.

"Where d'ye suppose the old man has got to?" asked Trevor of Macphail. "It's time he was up here fussing around. I want to hand our captive major over to him. You heard that bird tell me to fall back, didn't you? Made a holler about my flanks in the air and all that."

"You can bet your sweet life I heard it! Nine of us heard it. He's denying it now, but there are ten of us to swear to it. But d'ye really think he's a spy, Jack? I don't. I believe he's what he says he is, and he's still saying it."

"It doesn't matter what he is, or what I think he is—beyond the fact that he's the buttinsky who told me to retire from this position. What if I had obeyed him—fallen for his red tabs and got out? Wouldn't that have been a sweet mess? But I'm wise to those birds. I've heard them sing before. I know all their tunes."

"So you *don't* think he's a spy?"

"I think he'll wish he was before I'm done with him."

Captain Hodge, a staff officer of the kilted brigade, came along the trench and shook Trevor's hand and patted Macphail's shoulder.

"Things are looking up," he said. "By the time we get the units sorted out, we'll be sitting pretty. I hear that this line is to be held, and that the guns are on the move. Have you any of our fellows here, by the way—a few stray sections, or the odd file or something?"

"We're all Second Brigade here," Trevor told him.

"Not quite," corrected Macphail.

"'Not quite' is right," admitted Trevor. "We've got something here that claims to belong to your gilded gang—or attached to it, to be exact—in an advisory capacity. Something choice. One of the brain cells of the army, no less. So he says."

"Oh, Lord, that must be Ackerson! We were hoping the guns got him. A major, isn't it? and looks as if he drank bath water."

"He calls himself Ackerson."

"That's the—— Where'd you find him?"

"He found us."

"The devil he did! Fool's luck! He went over behind the Roughnecks' second wave. Must have lost direction. Where is he now?"

"In the next bay, under guard."

"Under guard?"

"I naturally suspected him of being a spy and arrested him."

Hodge laughed and swore. Trevor regarded him calmly. He quieted suddenly. "I'll tell you exactly who he is." Then Hodge stepped close and whispered in Trevor's ear. Trevor's face hardened. His eyes darkened. He let fall the butt of his cigarette and ground it under his heel.

"Is *that* so? Politics in Armagh Wood—before our dead are buried! They can

play that game in London and Folkestone, but not in *my* trench. 'I'm your senior,' he said. Dear Heaven! So *that's* who his father is! I might have guessed it. To the devil with him! One of us will be broken for it—Ackerson or Trevor."

"But——"

"But nothing. Don't worry about me. He came in here and told me both my flanks were in the air, and he ordered me —*ordered*, mark you!—to fall back—to chuck this position!"

"That's what," confirmed Macphail. "Ten of us heard him. 'You'll have to fall back,' he said—the blithering fool!"

"He's all of that, I grant you; but to arrest him for a spy—well, I'd rather be excused, all things considered," said Hodge.

"All right, you're excused," said Trevor. "Nobody wants your advice in this trench." He pointed to the ground in front, to the shell-torn slope rising gradually to a desolation of shattered trees and broken walls on the sky line. "That's not Parliament Hill." His voice was thick and cold with angry disgust. "We don't want any politicians here."

"I'll take him away, Jack," said Hodge soothingly.

Which he did, while the going was good; and in his pocket he carried a red-hot charge against the said Ackerson.

A DUGOUT, that smelled of rotted jute and wet leather, housed the general officer commanding the brigade to which Trevor had the perilous honor of belonging. The G. O. C. sat alone with a candle and maps before him on a table. Trevor coughed at the bottom step, then thrust aside the curtain of sacking, entered, and saluted.

"You sent for me, sir."

The G. O. C. arose and rounded the table and stepped close and flashed his eyes and teeth into Trevor's face at short range.

"Relief completed?"

"Yes, sir."

"What's the meaning of all the excitement at the Training Division?"

"The Training Division?"

"Folkestone."

"I haven't heard of it, sir."

"You haven't applied to them for a job, by any chance?"

"I was offered a job while on leave, sir, by Colonel Hammond. That's the last I've heard of it."

"Well, they're after you now. They're demanding you. Their manner suggests that they suspect us of holding you against your will, which is absurd, as you know. I might have sent for you twelve hours earlier, I admit; but there's a war on, whatever the Training Division may think to the contrary."

"Yes, sir."

"What's your rank?"

"Lieutenant, sir. Acting captain."

"You'll be a major there."

"Not I, sir. I'll stick to the battalion, though all the majors in England leapfrog me."

"Very good! You'll carry on with acting rank until further orders—acting lieutenant colonel now. The battalion is yours until Gil comes back, which won't be very soon. There's no one else left alive to jump you."

Trevor was speechless. The general stepped closer and lowered his voice.

"That's all in the day's work. But there's something else. You deserve the thanks of the whole corps for what you did to that Cook's tourist. That was worth more than a mile of ground to us. That showed up the political joy riders. That was great work, Jack, even if you *did* think he was a spy. That was the cream of the jest—*that* turned the trick —drove it home—your mistaking him for a spy."

"Yes, sir," said Acting Lieutenant Colonel J. K. Trevor; and he permitted himself a faint smile.

The Game Warden Intervenes

By Robert J. Pearsall

Author of "Revolt," "Shoulder Straps," Etc.

Old man Ackroyd was dead, to begin with. The question was: Who killed him? Game Warden Williams had his own ideas about that, and one was, that while a lynch-thirsty mob was dangerous and too quick to act, it might nevertheless be helpful in digging out the truth of the crime.

EVEN from the bedroom door, there was no mistaking the way the blow had been struck, nor the deadly efficiency of it. It was all so instantly plain, that the gray old game warden put out his arm and checked the younger man's excited step forward.

"It ain't any use," he said huskily—"no use of goin' in the room. Mussin' things up for the sheriff. No; let's stay out altogether."

"But he might not be dead."

"I wish I could think so, lad. Him and me were like brothers. But you can tell from the way he lays. And that knife in his back, right where it would reach his heart. If we could see his face—but I, for one, don't want to. No, your father's gone. Better leave things alone."

The young man, who for the past month had been masquerading as Tom Ackroyd, son of the murdered man, shuddered violently.

His mind was a swirl of emotions, horror, fear, remorse, anger. Astonishment was entirely lacking, for this was the thing he had been dreading, and it was his dread that had made him decide to abandon his make-believe. But his tongue was tied. His own guilt in the matter of the masquerade prevented him from speaking. Even though he was quite sure he knew who had done this thing, he could never speak. And likely he must even pretend to take his share of the profit from the crime.

His body seemed to waver slightly, and his hand went nervously to his lips. Distraught though he was, and unmistakably of a careless city type, his appearance was not unprepossessing. Dangerous

rather to himself than to others, he looked, with his sweeping nose of strong desires, his small and scrupulous mouth, and his chin inclined to weakness. He was dapperly clothed in the latest style and looked very much out of place, indeed, in that shabby old ranch house, away up in the heart of the Mendocino Hills.

The game warden was a tall and rangy man, marvelously erect, considering his age, with a tanned and wrinkled face. Slowly he turned from the doorway; and his eyes, widely set and gray and accustomed to following trails, came to rest on a bright new suit case which stood at the foot of the stairway leading to the upper part of the house.

"That yours—that suit case?" he asked sharply.

Tom Ackroyd also turned, but with a rather convulsive movement. He seemed to hesitate a moment before replying.

"Yes. I was just coming down from my bedroom when you knocked at the door. I was going to drive in to Santa Rosa and get an early train to the city."

The game warden seemed to consider this for a moment before replying.

"H'm! Well, now, I suppose if I hadn't come along and asked you to wake him up, you'd have gone without discoverin' that anything'd happened to him at all."

"Yes, I would. I was going to let him sleep."

"And if I hadn't bought them sheep off him, and come early to get 'em before the roads got crowded with automobiles, I wouldn't have asked you to wake him. Some coincidence, wasn't it? Now, I wonder if it was a coincidence. I paid him three hundred dollars, all in cash, for the sheep, and he hasn't had time to bank it. I wonder where the money is now."

Oddly the young man opened his mouth to speak, then seemed to think better of it, and, instead, swallowed nervously.

"A case of murder for robbery—or was it?" asked the game warden hesitatingly. "Well, the thing to do now is to phone the sheriff and have him come out. I bet there'll be a lot of others out here besides the sheriff, and ragin' mad, too. Your father was a popular man with his neighbors."

HE took the receiver from the hook, called a number, then covered the mouthpiece with his hand.

"This is a dangerous neck o' the woods to pull this sort o' thing in, particularly right now. Courts up here are none too swift nor certain, and folks are gettin' tired of juries straddlin' fences and crooks gettin' loose. If they catch the man that did this, I wouldn't wonder if something darn unpleasant would happen—— Hello! Hello!

"Is this Sheriff Henshew? . . . Well, where is he? . . . Eh? . . . All of 'em, you say? . . . Well, this is Game Warden Williams, over Eureka way. I'm at old man Ackroyd's house. You get in touch with the sheriff as soon as you can, and you tell him——"

In a few words he told what had happened, then turned again to Tom Ackroyd.

"Pshaw! Too bad. Sheriff an' all of his deputies are out chasin' a bank hold-up. Up Healdsburg way. There'll be a bunch o' people here ahead of the sheriff now. If they come to suspect somebody, I fear——"

He turned upon the young man a slow, speculative regard. Into his eyes came a curiously significant look that, all of a sudden, chased the blood from Tom Ackroyd's face.

"What's the matter?" asked the game warden, with a touch of suspicion in his voice. "Better sit down. You're lookin' pretty wabbly."

"It's no wonder. I——"

"No wonder at all," agreed the game warden, but with the slightest touch of sarcasm in his voice. He moved slowly across to the bedroom.

"I'm a-goin' to shut this door. Don't want anybody millin' around in there—yet!"

He stood looking into the bedroom for a moment before closing the door, then made a circuit of the room, peering into the two other rooms that opened off it.

"H'm!" he grunted. "Screens all hooked, I can see that, and the back door

bolted. And I heard you unbolt the front door to let me in. Don't see how anybody got in or got out. Well, well, it's surely mystifying."

As though carelessly, the old game warden shifted the gun at his hip to a handier position, then sat down opposite the young man, and eyed him steadily.

"Well, anyway, you'll come into a comfortable fortune outa this, won't you, Tom? Four hundred acres here and the stock and all, and some Santa Rosa property, and nary a mortgage. It was lucky for you, you come back when you did, or the whole of it would've gone to charities."

"Yes, it was lucky," said Tom tonelessly, realizing with an inward chill that there was something very close to a direct accusation in the game warden's words and tone.

"It's all been queer, you comin' back and all, and this makes it even queerer," pursued the game warden. "You havin' come back just in time for this, I mean; but I suppose it was just another coincidence. And I suppose it was natural you've changed a heap, you bein' only sixteen when you ran away. I never would've known you, and probably nobody else would've been sure you were you, if it hadn't been for the things you remembered about your childhood and all. And, of course, that scar on your arm, that you got from a flyin' splinter when your daddy was splittin' wood—that was proof positive, 'specially to your daddy.

"Though, when you come to that, scars —— Well, now, you can't always tell about scars."

He paused for a moment to contemplate the thought, then went on.

"But I guess your father was easy convinced, he bein' so tarnation glad to find you again, his only livin' kith an' kin, except his shyster nephew, Hinsdale, that he wouldn't have left a dollar to, if he'd had to feed it all to his hogs. Well, Hinsdale's outa luck now, unless—— By Jiminy, I never thought of that! Unless something happens to *you* before you can make a will. He'd inherit then, you know."

"I suppose—I suppose that's right."

"Of course, he bein' next of kin," the game warden went on. "I bet you never thought of that, did you? Well, you can be sure Hinsdale's thought of it, all along. He used to be a lawyer, you know, before he got debarred. What's the matter, man? You're lookin' worse and worse."

Tom Ackroyd tried to mask his fear, which every word of the game warden tended to increase.

"I—I can't get over that," he said, nodding toward the bedroom door.

"Well, you'd better. Gotta face things, you know. And you can't tell what you'll have to face before you're through with this thing."

THE young man known as Tom Ackroyd shifted angrily in his chair, shot at the game warden a swift, challenging glance, and seemed about to speak, but did not. Nor did the game warden speak further. Opposed, they sat there, waiting for whatever was to happen; and in the long silence that ensued, every word and look and tone of the game warden were rehearsed in the other's mind, taking on added and menacing significance with each repetition.

Even if that had not been true, it would still have been a very uncomfortable silence for the young man, filled with regrets and with crowding memories of the weaknesses that had led to the death of a very good old man, and to his own immediate peril of the penitentiary or the rope. His mind went back to those last weeks in the city, before chance or fate had opened the door of escape.

Miserable, terrible weeks indeed! One of the city's very dregs he had become, through his own fault, as he saw things now. Penniless, jobless, and with such friends that he had better been friendless. Courage gone. Cadging for a living. Clothes going to pieces. Hungry—despondent, desperate, down and out.

One day on lower Kearney Street, a very florid, bustling, prosperous-looking stranger had started at sight of him, accosted him, questioned him. A mistake. Regretfully the young man had to admit that he was not the person the other had taken him for. Then, thoughtfulness

on the stranger's part, sly, suggestive questioning, and then an invitation to the first full meal Tom had eaten in many a day. And with the dessert, appeared Temptation.

He was to impersonate some one, but he hardly gathered whom or why. He was to inherit thereby a fifty-thousand-dollar estate, four fifths of which he was to turn over to his tempter, Hinsdale. That was of the future; but immediately he was to be freshly clothed and bathed and shaved, and, with his debts paid and money in his pockets, he was to enter into tutelage for his part.

Destitution is a scorpion-tipped whip, the lash of which is known only by those who have felt it. Tom yielded the first steps, after which loyalty helped drive him on. He had taken of Hinsdale's money and could not repay; he would see the matter through.

And it was not so terrible a thing that he had agreed to do, to divert an estate, at an old man's passing, to the nearest blood kin, the rightful heir—to plausible, forceful, clever-talking John Hinsdale.

It was not until the enterprise was fully and successfully under way, that Tom learned appreciation of old man Ackroyd's reasons for disinheriting Hinsdale, and to love the old man himself; and, worst of all, to realize that Hinsdale was not a man to wait the normal course of nature to gain his lion's share of the benefits of the new will, naming Tom sole heir, which the old man had drawn.

In short, Tom had come to fear exactly what had happened, and now he had another thing to fear.

AS the old game warden had predicted, from the sheriff's office the news of the killing went out, and the rural telephone relayed the news swiftly from ranch to ranch. In half an hour a dozen men, cowboys, ranch hands, and farmers, had gathered in the room; and every few minutes others would come up, on foot, in rattling autos, or on horseback.

The old game warden mingled with the newcomers, telling his story over and over again. It might have been better had Tom mingled with them, too; but a feeling of absolute separateness and antagonism kept him apart, silent in his chair in the corner of the room. Not a new feeling, that, though intensified by present circumstances. From his first coming to that isolated neighborhood, he had felt as alien as though—which was almost true—he had come from another world. A hostile silence, broken only by the slightest greetings, had enveloped him wherever he went; and, when he had passed, he could sense the beginnings of murmurings against him.

Nor were the ranchers to blame, for to them he was a symbol of a degenerated breed. Hard-handed and hard-headed men, they sneered at him as a city dude, a parasite, a weakling. More powerful still as a cause for their dislike, was the ignoble reason they had supplied for his return to his father's home.

"Thinks the old man's due to die—that's why he's come lick-spittling back."

"Sure! He's worked up a great affection—for a fat inheritance."

Fervently they had hoped that the old man would live long to disappoint him; and from that and their dislike and distrust had sprung naturally a more sinister suggestion.

"Wishin' makes doin', doesn't it?"

"That's right. I wouldn't put it past him to speed the matter up."

"It would be easy, with them two livin' there all alone. I'd like to warn the old man, but I don't suppose it would do any good."

"Naw! Who'd believe such a thing of his own flesh an' blood?"

No one knew where the suggestion had started, so it was but natural that each man of the crowd, gathering at that quiet ranch house, claimed the merit of an original prophecy fulfilled; and, had Tom but known it, he was tried and condemned in advance. And to that conviction, the game warden's words but added strength.

"Game Warden Williams says he found both doors bolted, and the windows fastened on the inside, so who could it have been but him?"

"Funny, the game warden telling us that, isn't it? He's always a man for law and order and quietin' things down. Remember when he saved that stiff from a

lynchin'—the one that killed young Morsby?"

"The game warden's been friends with old man Ackroyd for thirty years, and that makes a difference. He says, too, that there's three hundred dollars missin' that he paid the old man for his sheep."

"Likely the young rascal's got it, though it ain't anything alongside all this property."

"Ain't you searched him yet?" somebody asked the game warden.

Game Warden Williams shook his head.

"Better wait for the sheriff, though he won't be here for an hour or so."

The words were nothing, but very plain was the implication in the game warden's tone that much might be done before the arrival of the sheriff.

Another, soberer man confronted him.

"It mightn't be him. We don't want to go off half-cocked. What's the matter with goin' through the rest of the house? We might find some kind of a clew."

Something in the game warden's expression suggested that he had been waiting for the proposal, and that he welcomed it.

"Sure, go as far as you like. Only keep out've the room where the body is. That stays closed till the sheriff comes."

SO half a dozen or more grim men crowded up the stairway. Tom, who had during the last half hour passed from level to level of fear, realizing almost to the full the danger he was in, and that he had not one friend there, now felt a sort of numbness come to his aid, and he found that he could think quite clearly. And, though he listened, as they all did, to the searchers moving about in the upper rooms, shifting the beds and bureaus, dragging the carpets about, his eyes remained fixed in a curious stare at the old game warden's face. Something in its expression puzzled him. Was it expectancy?

Was the game warden listening for something to happen above, for the searchers to announce a discovery? Did he know beforehand what would be discovered? Was the game warden linked with Hinsdale to lay this crime at his door and direct the violence of the crowd against him? Oh, that was incredible of the game warden, with his honest, quiet look! And yet, how else explain all that was happening?

Suddenly Tom's gaze shifted, and his eyes narrowed with anger. Hinsdale himself stood in the doorway, just back of the game warden—Hinsdale, whose crooked words had got him into this affair. Now Hinsdale had come to witness the triumph of his plot, to assist in it, perhaps, by inflaming the crowd still further.

He had come to do that, knowing that Tom's tongue was tied.

But it would not be tied! He would tell—he would tell! He would not let Hinsdale triumph. Tom opened his mouth to blurt out the truth, then closed it again, partly in stark terror of its inevitable and instant effect upon the crowd. If it was known that he was not the murdered man's son, but merely a cheating impostor, that crowd would coalesce in a moment, become a snarling, hundred-legged beast filled with the one desire for vengeance.

And there was another thing that checked Tom—an odd astonishment. If Hinsdale had come to enjoy his triumph, he did not look it. Hinsdale was frightened. He was bewildered. His usually florid face was mottled, and his eyes were wide with worry.

He began working his way through the crowd. Once, catching Tom's eyes, he cautiously touched his lips with his fingers, with an imploring look. Hinsdale was begging him not to tell. Well, that was natural, but——

Some one else was watching Hinsdale—the game warden! As Hinsdale advanced through the crowd, the game warden kept pace with him. Now, why was the game warden's hand so near the butt of his revolver? And what—oh, God!—what was the meaning of that rope—that rope back there in the crowd?

Suddenly there was commotion above; Shuffling feet were heard, followed by low-toned, vicious curses. Something had been found—something! The eyes of the crowd went to the head of the stair-

way, all but the game warden's. His remained fixed upon Hinsdale's face, which grew more and more frightened.

At the top of the stairway the searchers appeared, trooping down it. The foremost held a towel in his hand, red as the spirit of Murder.

"Look what we found, boys—under a mattress. Under his own mattress," pointing at Tom. "He cleaned himself up with it, then hid it there, the bloody devil!"

The sight of that crimson symbol was all that was needed to drive Reason out of the room. Tom lost his head with the others. He forgot everything but his desire to revenge himself upon the man who, he was sure, had planted that evidence there against him.

"Listen! I'll tell you! It was that Hins——"

HIS words were drowned in a roar of execration. The mob swayed toward him like the many-legged beast it had become. The room became suddenly as pregnant with brutality as a torture chamber.

"Listen! I'll tell you!" repeated Tom, but no one could hear him. He retreated until his back was wedged in the corner of the room. He saw that Hinsdale was now excitedly urging the mob to act. The rope—the rope would silence him forever!

The game warden emerged from the front of the mob. Tom thought he was leading the attack; perhaps the others did, too; but suddenly, astonishingly, the game warden swung around, his revolver, level as a serpent's head, moving from side to side.

"Stop! You, Clark! You, Bischoff! —you know me. You know I've a reason. Nobody touches this man. Stop!"

"I'll tell you the whole truth." Tom took advantage of the sudden stillness. "I didn't kill him, and I'm not——"

"Would you, now?" snapped Game Warden Williams at Hinsdale.

Williams fired. His bullet struck the gun which had suddenly appeared in Hinsdale's hand. Hinsdale's bullet, intended for Tom, tore into the wall a yard to the right of Tom's head. Hinsdale's revolver dropped with a clatter to the floor.

"You'd like to kill him, wouldn't you, Hinsdale?" said the game warden. "All you others take notice of that. I guess this young feller's got a right to talk. And Hinsdale's got a right to listen, because his name's goin' to be mentoned, so none of you let him get away."

The crowd, confused by all this unexpectedness, paused irresolutely.

"Now you go on, you—whoever you are," said the game warden to Tom.

"I didn't kill him, and I'm not his son," repeated Tom desperately. "And if you want to know who did kill him, think who'd profit by his death and mine. That's the man!" He pointed at Hinsdale. "That man, who just tried to shoot me, to keep me from talking out—he killed him!"

"It's a lie," snarled Hinsdale. "I tried to shoot you because you killed my uncle."

"Oh, I'm telling the truth, straight enough," said Tom. "And he knows it, I see that now," pointing to the game warden, "though how he knows it, I don't know.

"It was Hinsdale cooked the whole thing up," Tom raced on, afraid of another interruption. "He got me to pose as his uncle's son. Said I was pretty near the image of what his son would've been by this time. Hinsdale coached me as to what I'd be expected to remember; we spent days at it. And we got a skin doctor to manufacture a scar that'd make everything seem certain. Then I came up here, and everything worked out as we planned.

"But then I got afraid. Not so much for myself as—— Well, old man Ackroyd was mighty kind to me. He was like a father, and I never had one that I remember. Well, when I got to know Hinsdale better, I was afraid for the old man. Hinsdale wasn't one to wait very long for his inheritance. But until this morning I didn't think of Hinsdale killing Ackroyd so the blame would be laid on me, and we'd both be out of the way. He'd get everything that way, and there'd never be a chance of me telling the truth. That's what he tried to do."

"You killed him yourself, you——" cried Hinsdale, with seemingly passionate sincerity.

"Wait a bit," said the game warden, "and I'll tell you who killed him. And so," he said to Tom, not unkindly, "that's why you had your suit case packed."

"Yes. I was going for keeps. I thought if I did, everything would drop back just like it was before I came. I thought of leaving a note for the old man, telling him the truth; but I didn't want to tell on Hinsdale, and I wouldn't ever, if he hadn't done this."

"Leave that be," said the game warden. "Maybe after all, he didn't do it. There's one other thing I want to know. About that three hundred dollars I paid the old man for the sheep. I suppose you've got that on you. Takin' it back to the city to help you to a new start."

"I can't blame you for supposing it, but it happens that this conniving with Hinsdale is the first time I ever turned crook. And it is going to be the last. You'll find the money under a loose brick in front of the fireplace, where the old man put it."

"Well, I'll be blamed," murmured the game warden. "Then the old man was right."

"Let's cut all this palaver," cried some one in the crowd, which was growing restive again. "What we want to know is, who killed old man Ackroyd?"

"Just a minute more," said the game warden. "I'm tellin' you my own way. You see, old man Ackroyd never was entirely fooled, never was really sure this young chap was his son. And lately I've been dead sure he wasn't, 'count of that scar changin' color too fast for a twenty-year old, and I got to thinkin' it was about time to be scarin' the truth outa somebody. And I reckon that we've done it.

"But the old man," this to Tom, "he'd kinder got to likin' you, and he insisted that we frame up that deal about the money, just to prove that you was honest. I was to see you got a chance to get away with it, sooner or later. I'm glad you didn't take it, because he was kinder figurin' on keepin' you around, even if it turned out you wasn't his son.

"As for Hinsdale, here, the old man will probably be in favor of givin' him a little more rope, on the theory that he'll hang himself worse——"

The crowd stared and muttered in bewilderment. In Tom amazement passed into an almost incredible, wild hope. Now he interrupted.

"'He will,' you say. 'He *will!*' But we saw him in there dead," pointing to the bedroom. "How can he——"

"Yes, he's in there," said the game warden gravely.

"Then, what in God's name, do you mean——"

"But we didn't see him," said the game warden. "We couldn't. He was in the closet, then."

"No, he was on the bed."

"But we didn't see him right close, anyway," insisted the game warden, "you'll have to admit that. What we saw might've been——"

"What the hell's all this talk about?" cried some one. "What *is* in there, anyway?"

There was a movement in the crowd toward the bedroom door. The game warden could not have kept them out now, but then he did not try. A grin came over his face, as he observed their disgruntled expressions.

"You didn't *want* him killed, did you?" he inquired. "You don't want to find him dead in there, do you?"

"Hell, no! But——"

They pressed through the door and approached the bed. Then they pulled the knife from the back of the dummy lying there, dressed in old man Ackroyd's clothes, and they dabbled their fingers in the red stain spilled about, cursing the while most bitterly the game warden who had contrived this hoax and spoiled a Sunday morning. But there was no anger in their curses; and of a sudden they turned to cheers and laughter and warm husky greetings, for the closet door had opened, and through it came old man Ackroyd, unmistakably alive, with a grim smile on his face.

The Bad Lot

By Frederick Niven

Author of "Old-Timers," "Caribou," Etc.

No one ever thought that Clem Cassidy was really downright bad, as evil goes. His roguish capers, however, were not always received with pleasure. It turned out, though, that Clem's heart was clean gold.

WHEN Clem Cassidy was all dolled up he did not look tough. Instead, he just looked roguish. He had ridden over to the Courtney place to make a proposal of marriage to Nell; he had found her on the veranda, looking out for the return of her father from Nanitsh, and right there she had turned him down.

She had turned him down cold, but kindly. For, after all, Nell was a girl like that. It may be said that everybody in the valley loved her.

His visit over, Clem went down the steps. As he drew the lines sadly over his pony's neck, Nell noticed the scar on his left hand, one souvenir of his overseas service. Somehow, the sight of that helped to make her feel sorry for the man, too.

"So long, Clem," said she. Then, as he settled in the saddle, she called after him: "Be good!"

He looked quickly over his shoulder at her, and his eyes held an inquiry. Did she dread that he would go on a bat to celebrate this day?

"All right," he promised, took off his hat, and rode away.

Nell watched him till he was just a small figure in the distance. Then he took a curve round the base of a low knoll and was out of sight.

Beyond that knoll of the valley, smoke was rising. Clem saw it suddenly, and his eyes puckered in arrested attention. It increased in volume rapidly. It was like the "pillar of cloud by day" of Scripture. Were they burning something down there at the Aspen Grove settlement? Hardly, at that time of year. The forestry department would issue no permit for any clearing work to cause a smoke like that. He watched the column grow and coil voluminously.

"Here, you got to change your gear,

old son," he told his horse; and from a lope he passed to a gallop, on to the scattered settlement.

The smoke came from the ranch house of Billy Parker. Clem knew that Billy was away working every day, over at Maxwell's. Others had arrived on the scene before him. They were doing their best to quench the flames with a garden hose; but any further entrance to drag out Billy's belongings—some of which Clem saw stacked near by—seemed hopeless.

Art Duncan, Smithers and Colonel Oakley were there; and "Bud" Davis, who had come in his car, was rushing off to get another length of hose. Just as Clem arrived, there came the muffled wail of a dog from the upper floor of the house. An old dog it was, going deaf and blind. Because it was likely to be in the way of his work over at Maxwell's, Billy was wont to leave it at home. The greater part of the day it spent on his bed.

At the second stifled whimper, the men were sure whence it came. They stared up at the windows.

"She's been sleeping up there. It's a wonder she's not suffocated," said Colonel Oakley.

"She sounds near suffocated, anyhow," declared Smithers, and he began to whistle for the dog, to rouse her fully.

"Turk! Turk!" called Art Duncan.

Nothing happened. Only the stifled whimpering replied.

"Oh, hell!" ejaculated Clem.

He grabbed a ladder that had been brought from the barn, but left lying by the house, when the smoke poured out so thickly. He planted it against the wall under the upper window and went hurriedly up. When he raised the sash, smoke rushed out to meet him. From below they could only see his heels at all plainly.

"Good dog! Come along, Turk!" they heard. "Oh, you can't, can't you?"

The heels disappeared, and Clem was gone into the smoke.

"Here!" said Oakley. "We've got to play the hose round there. The house will be on fire under the ladder before he can get back."

"Good dog, Turk!" they heard him pleading. There followed a crash and a volley of oaths, such as only Clem could launch on occasion. Then: "Where are you? Oh, well, wait till I get over this ——" And then came another volley of oaths, sounds of spluttering wrath.

Bud Davis came back with a couple of lengths of hose pipe.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Cassidy. Gone up there for the dog."

"Well, what do you know about that! The man that half the valley calls 'The Bad Lot,' and he's the one to tackle that job," he muttered.

At the window above there came coughing from the pit of Clem's stomach

"Hello, below! Hold the ladder till I can feel down to it," came Clem's voice.

And there were his heels, and soon all of him, with the old dog under an arm. His hair was singed to the scalp, his eyebrows just little spikes with dotted ends, and one arm showed the rising puff of a great burn.

IN the eyes of the valley Clem's rescue of that dog was as a payment on the good side of his character account. And then there came out another story about him that canceled this one, but made some people—most people, indeed—laugh even, as they shook their heads. They generally did laugh at the sheer gall of Cassidy's unscrupulous capers.

Three months before, Clyde McCall had sent Clem along with a horse for Mrs. Sturrock, wife of Sturrock, the government agent at Nanitsh. It was a horse that The Bad Lot had very carefully broken to the saddle for her. He had delivered the animal. Very casual about money affairs, Clyde McCall had rendered no account.

Shortly after the fire at Parker's, Sturrock met McCall and enthused over the horse; he said his wife was getting very fond of it. It was some horse, full of pep, but with no trace of meanness.

"Well, there's no hurry, you know, Sturrock," said McCall, "but I could do with the seventy-five bucks."

When McCall got home he called Clem Cassidy into his office at once.

"Say, Clem," he said, "you remember

that horse you led down to Nanitsh about three months ago for Mrs. Sturrock?"

"Horse? Horse?" said Clem, as if he didn't know what a horse was. "Oh, sure! The horse I broke for her, you mean."

"That's the horse I refer to. Well, I saw Sturrock to-day, and he told me he had given you the seventy-five dollars for it."

Clem scratched his head with his scarred hand.

"Seventy-five dollars?" he repeated. "Let me see—didn't I ever give you that?"

"No, Clem, you never did."

"You're quite sure, are you?"

"I am, Clem—quite sure."

"Well, I'll take your word for it," said Clem. "That's seventy-five I'm owing you, then."

"By——" began McCall and stuck, flabbergasted. "You've got as much gall as a government mule," said he, when he recovered.

"Oh, yes," said Clem, "now you remind me! You know, it had slipped my memory. I got in a card game when I stopped the night in Nanitsh. At the beginning of the game I had my own money in the right pocket of my pants, and Sturrock's seventy-five in the left."

"My seventy-five, you mean."

"Yes, that's right, too," and the roguish look came into his eyes, "in a manner of speaking. Yours in the left. Half through the game I borrowed off you—or Sturrock, as the case may be. We needn't quibble about that, Clyde. If I'd lost, I intended to dock the amount for you from my wages at the end of the month. B'gosh, I kept on borrowing, borrowed the lot, and lost it all. So you see, then——"

"Well, what about it? What about it when I paid you at the end of the month?"

"Honest to God, it slipped my memory."

"It would!" exploded Clyde McCall.

"That will be all right. We're just at the end of this month, so you dock it from my wages. Now, don't you worry about that. I want you to have it. When I say a thing I mean it."

"Say, you're—you're——"

"Oh, surely I'm not fired! I'd like to stop and finish breaking that buckskin I got started on. You know, Clyde McCall, you attach too much importance to this filthy lucre. Didn't you never forget a little bill yourself?"

"Go on—get out!" said McCall. "You beat it!"

"Fired?"

"No. You get busy on breaking that buckskin."

Clyde didn't mention this matter to anybody. But it was broadcast from the other end, the Sturrock end. All the valley knew that Clem Cassidy had turned another Cassidy trick, and, as he stayed on with McCall after the end of the month, had again got away with it.

Then things wagged on as usual, and everybody hoped for a bumper fall and a Thanksgiving at the church—that is, those who went to church—that would not be a mere formality.

It had been an early summer, and an early winter followed. In fact, there was an autumn frost, and then came weeks of deluging rain. This erratic behavior of the weather brought hard times to the valley. It looked as if it would be a tight winter for a lot of them. The grangers were hit badly; the adventurers in fruit were hit worst of all. There would be no going to Florida to spend the winter for any of them that year, it seemed.

Young Billy Parker had rebuilt his house with the cash he made working out, and he just let his apples stay on the trees, and his wheat rot, and he announced he would start off in good time to get a job in the flour mills at Nanitsh Bridge.

Storekeepers looked back over their books to be ready with the right response when asked for credit. And they tried to get in as much as they could of outstanding debts before the winter was really on them. They'd be grubstaking some of the people before spring.

AND then the valley showed that it was still wild West as well as sophisticated West. That is to say, the rig in which was the cashier of the Nanitsh Valley

Lumber Company, with the pay roll, was held up.

To identify the holdup man was almost impossible. He had a black bandanna over his face, like a bib pulled up too high, covering nose and mouth and throat. His hat was drawn down over his ears, so that even what sort of hair he had was left a conundrum. He wore gloves, and his hands were invisible. His voice was muffled.

Nobody suspected the driver of the rig and the cashier of being in collusion in the matter and inventing the story of the robbery. Their stories were not close enough in detail for that. They had not talked it over so as to get it down to a fine point. In the main points, however, they were as one. But in details each had seen the episode in his own way.

There is a sudden bend, a right-angle bend, after you cross Bowser Flats. The road there makes a capital L. They were spinning along toward that angle, on the level, when a man suddenly appeared from the upright part of the L, held up his hand for them to stop, and then dived away from sight.

The driver shut off. The moment he did so, and the sound of the engine died, back came the stranger, head down, running toward them.

"What is it?" asked the cashier. "Road gang blasting at the bend? Runaway car coming down?"

The man was on them, his run from the sharp corner over. He raised his head, disclosing that black bandanna for a face.

"Gosh!" exploded the cashier.

The man showed them a large-sized Colt.

"Step out, both of you!" said he.

He spoke as if he meant it. But the response was not quick enough for him.

"I'll plug you both if you don't," he snapped. "And pull no gun. Any move for a gun, and I'll give it to you both so quick that you won't know what happened."

So there was nothing but to get out. The cashier had his nerve, it seemed. He got out and turned to lift his bag.

"Leave that grip!" ordered the holdup man. "Turn your backs to me."

They did as ordered, and from behind the bandit felt both for firearms. From the hip pocket of the cashier he took an automatic and tossed it into the car.

"Now walk," he said, "and keep walking to the end of this stretch. After that you can do what you damn please."

So they walked, very erect, very self-conscious regarding their backs, and, just as they got to the end of that stretch, they heard the engine of the car.

They halted and looked back. The car was off. It was round the sharp bend and had disappeared uphill. They stood and looked at each other, questioning.

"We'd better hike on after it, I guess," said the driver.

"I guess so," agreed the cashier.

They turned back on the long, flat road, walked circumspectly round the angle, but the car had climbed the long hill and was out of sight.

"Better go on up," said the cashier.

"Better go on up," said the driver.

They plowed on uphill. They came to the top and looked over the long plateau. No car was in sight. They crossed the plateau, five sandy miles of it, and bleak miles at that time of the year. They went down to where Nanitsh River twisted in the bottoms. There, to right of the bridge, stood their car.

At that season Nanitsh River flows broad, but shallow, over its bed of stones, a prettily colored stream that you can ford almost anywhere, without a horse.

"He's taken to the water to hide his tracks," said the cashier.

"Cunning," said the driver—"cunning as anything. I couldn't describe what color of eyes he had, for he kept them screwed up so."

"And gloves on his hands, too," said the cashier.

"Had he? Now, do you know, I didn't notice that."

"I did."

"Gosh! I believe you're right."

When they were telling about it later it was the same. But even these little details were of small help as clews to the identity of the bandit. It was clear that he knew how the land lay and had his holdup well planned.

Everybody talked about it, of course, except the police. They said it was a fine day, or a dull day, and that was all, as if they were deaf and making a hazard at what had been said to them. They called on one or two people in the valley and had talks with them, and the people they called on had usually very little to repeat about their visits. They didn't like to say too much about it.

AS time went on, with no arrest, the feeling was that you did not know for sure that any man out of seventy-five per cent of the valley inhabitants, to whom you might speak on the valley road, was not the holdup man. The notion got around that the lumber company's cashier had been robbed by somebody in their midst who had turned bad man, hit by the local hard times. Few of them believed that it was done by some professional bandit who had dropped in on them upon a lucky day.

"Oh, you never know," said Clyde McCall. "I'm fed up with talk about it and the way folks make sure it is somebody in the valley. There's an old wheeze goes like this: 'You think you know all about it. I think I know all about it. Between us, we know very little about it.'"

Other events, major and minor, followed—one upon the other, or came in bunches. The Bud Davises sent their eldest girl "out" East as far as Toronto, to a finishing school, and where they got the money none could think. Art Duncan got the delirium tremens, and where he got his money, people could guess from the legal-looking letters that came quarterly from England, addressed in full to: "Arthur St. Clair Somerset Duncan, Esq." And Mrs. Smithers went away, saying she was going to spend some weeks with her mother in Seattle, but it became known that she went over to Spokane, where she had all her teeth drawn, and she stayed there long enough to come back with a new set. But, of course, she might have been lying about her destination, not so much to keep people wondering where the money came from, as just because she intended to run a bluff that the new teeth were her own when she came back. People are sometimes like that about store teeth.

And Nell Courtney married Billy Parker. Where he got the money from, goodness knew.

That winter Clyde McCall was forced to lay off several men, Clem Cassidy among them. Clem went down to Nanitsh to see if he could have any luck at slough in the back room of Hank's Cigar Store, but the dealer, as usual, had all the luck. But Clem went back and tried again with another wad—and where he got it from, none could imagine—and lost that, too, and then he went home to a little cabin he had on Siwash Creek, announcing that he was going to hole up for the winter, with a sack of flour and a flitch of bacon, a roll of tobacco, and two dozen magazines.

And there, one day, there came to him a policeman. Clem had his feet on the stove rail, his chair nicely tilted, and he had just finished a yarn of British Columbia by Chisholm, and had refilled his pipe before beginning one about the Southwest by Knibbs, when he saw the Mountie's winter cap through the window and got his feet down from the rail.

He opened the door.

"Hullo, Charley!" he said. "Come right in—or wait till I get on my rubbers and open that shanty stable of mine for your horse. You can't leave a horse like that standing out in the open this weather."

"All right. Give me the key. I'll put her in myself."

When the lovely mare was under cover, before a hatful of oats, Kennedy came into Cassidy's shack.

"Just digging in for the winter?" said the policeman.

"Yep. Take a chair. Got enough this year to see me through the winter without working. I hate work like hell, anyhow, unless it's horses; and there ain't much work with horses in winter. Cutting ties and logging and such winter sports fill me with ennui."

"I guess they do. Well, I'll sit down, Clem. But I want to tell you that in a way I'm here on business."

"What! Am I pinched? And if so, why not or what for?"

Charley Kennedy sat down, loosened his service mackinaw, got out his pipe, and filled it.

"No, no," he said. "I'm only making inquiries. I've just got something to ask you about."

"Go ahead. But have a mug of coffee with your smoke."

"It would go down good."

"Want anything to eat?"

"No. But the coffee would go down fine."

CLEM busied himself preparing coffee, but the policeman did not busy himself with his inquiries then. He did not want to be held at a disadvantage. And a man pottering back and forth with a coffeepot and getting down cups and saucers could evade his face, if the man wished to do so at any time.

Kennedy wanted to study Clem's expressions, as he talked to him. For what he said was true. He was only making gentle inquiries—that was all—preliminary inquiries. But he wanted to see Clem's face and eyes. Queer, how men incriminate themselves or let out something about others, in such mere inquiries.

"Go ahead," said Clem.

"I'll wait till you sit down."

Then, over the coffee, he turned to Clem.

"Just inquiries, as I say," he remarked. "I've no doubt you can explain. I don't believe in making wild arrests. I prefer to make out reports showing why I did not arrest the wrong man, rather than explaining why I did. It's this way. You remember that holdup?"

"The lumber-company cashier?"

"Sure." Kennedy's eyes looked at distance, and then he went on. "Well, I want to tell you something, Clem. A while after the holdup, a man who had paid the company some money had a brain wave. He went into their office and asked if they had drawn from the bank all the cash they needed to pay their men, or if they had used any cash which they had in the safe. When they asked him what he was after, he explained that it just came into his head that, on the very day before the holdup, he had paid them in cash, instead of by check, a sash-and-door bill of a hundred dollars. And he happened to have taken a note of the numbers of these bills. He paid them in five bills of twenty each. Well, the cashier had put these on the roll for the camp. Now, the newspaper guys never got that news. And the lumber company kept mum. And the man who had the brain wave kept mum. But we've been watching for these bills."

"Oh! Got any of them yet?"

"All of them."

"Have another cup of coffee," suggested Clem.

"Thank you. You make good coffee."

"I'm glad you like it."

Clem filled the cup, passed the can of milk and the bowl of sugar, and sat down again.

"Well, go ahead," he said. "This is as good as reading the magazines, shut up here and having you come in."

Kennedy gave him a relieved look.

"Well, now, four of these bills," said he and sat forward, cup in hand, elbows on knees, stirring—"four of these bills bring me to see you and have a chat. I've got no warrant to arrest or search. If I had, I wouldn't be drinking your coffee. You know that."

"Thank you, Charley. That's surely good of you."

"Oh, it's not good of me. I haven't much doubt myself you can explain this to my satisfaction in a brace of shakes, exonerate yourself, and send me upon another trail. You see, people are not supposed to play card games for money in this country, but we know they do. We let some things go. The other day I had to ask a certain gentleman in Nanitsh, who sits around a whole lot in the back room of Hank's Cigar Store, just where he got four twenty-dollar bills that he paid into the bank there, getting the change in fives. He remembered. He won them off you. That's what he said. Of course, he may have been mistaken. Well, now, maybe Clyde McCall paid you off in bills of twenty, and you——"

"Nope!" Clem shook his head. "Clyde paid me by check. I cashed it when I went into town."

"At the bank or at a store?"

"At the bank."

"Oh, at the bank? That's funny. They've been watching for these bills, too. I was hoping for different news from you."

They sat in silence then, and it was Clem who spoke first.

"Of course, the holdup man who passed on these twenties had no notion their numbers were noted," said he.

The policeman did not reply to that at once, but sat with his chin on his chest, looking at him.

"No, of course not," he said at last.

Another long pause.

"I have another man to call on in the matter," said Kennedy presently.

"Oh, you have?"

"Yep."

"Stay here the night and see him to-morrow?"

"He's 'out' just now."

"Oh!" said Clem. "Darn few, after they got their crops in, went out this year to spend the winter on Miami Beach."

"Darn few," agreed the policeman.

Suddenly Clem's face had its most ingratiating smile. That roguish glitter was in his eyes.

"Who is the other guy on your list of inquiries?"

"Well, I can't tell you that, can I? Say, Clem, did you have any other money apart from what you cashed on that check when you went in to take a turn at cards in Hank's?"

"I can hardly answer that, can I?" said Clem.

"I'm asking to help to wipe you off the list. If you had, and these twenties were among it, and you knew where you got them——" He stopped, leaving the rest to be inferred.

Clem refilled and lit his pipe. Putting back his head, he blew smoke and, tapping the pipestem on his teeth, up and down, was lost in some deep consideration. Then abruptly:

"Thank you for the way you did it, Charley. I'll save you letting the case hang on."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm the man in the iron mask," said Clem gayly. "I'm the man in the black bandanna and the gloves. Alone I did it, with my little hatchet."

"The hell you did! I had a bet on with the sergeant that you didn't."

"I'm sorry," said Clem and laughed.

"You're not half so sorry as I am. I thought I was going to clear you off my list, with a full explanation. Dang it, man, I hate this like hell. It is a kind of way you have."

"Oh, well—when I say a thing I mean it. So that's that."

THEY gave him just three years. Somehow or other, when it came to the show-down, The Bad Lot seemed to have many friends.

They used to say in Nanitsh that cases were tried not in the courts, but in the room at the back of Hank's. And Clyde McCall went in to see Judge Clancy and had a long heart-to-heart talk with him; then he went to the jail to see the prisoner, who had nothing to say at all. He came out with Kennedy and talked with him for a while. And then, when the undefended case was over, he even went to see the warden of the jail to ask for "wrinkles" how to go about preparing a plea for shortening the sentence.

"I believe he's a liar," he said. "He's shielding some one."

"Aw that's storybook stuff, Clyde. In real life it ain't done. He looks the part to me."

"Oh, he looks the part, but he's sure good to horses."

"Well, it's the first time I've heard that because a man is good to horses he wouldn't——" The warden did not finish, but just put up his head and roared with laughter.

In his time he had had under his care many a man who was good to horses and better friends with his dog than with his neighbor, yet who was in prison not without justice.

Three years. It was, in the circumstances, the least the judge could give without raising a "dust" regarding his forensic knowledge.

Nell Courtney—that is to say, Nell Parker—came back from her honeymoon the day after the trial. At the junction

they had the paper from the old home town. It had a snappy headline writer, and one of his efforts caught her eye on the front page: "Clemency for Clem: Three Years for Old Soldier."

Sitting opposite to her, Billy wondered why a little upright pucker of concentration appeared between her brows. She read intently, then put back her head—her hat was in her lap—ran her hand over it, and there it stayed a moment.

"Read that, Billy," said she.

Then, in her turn, she saw the expression on his face, the tensing brows, the close conning of the column. When he had read it through he sat with the paper still in his hand, frowning.

"He was a likable rogue," said she.

"Is—is!" he replied. "He's not hanged—or electrocuted."

"But what a thing for a man of the open," said she. "It's a long time, three years, even if the judge did make it the minimum because of what he heard of his war record. You used to say you always had a sneaking regard for him."

"I surely had, and I surely have. I never could tell why. I knew he was crooked, and he was always borrowing money off me and forgetting to repay it. Maybe I liked him because I'm a bit crooked myself."

"Billy!"

"Sure! You like him, too."

"Oh, but then——"

"You're a real old-timer's daughter. You know you have a soft spot, not for the mere bad men—the killers for killing—but the sportive ones, the Robin Hoods."

"You think he gave the money away?" she asked. "The paper just says all he could explain of that was that he had lost most of it, gambling. It is a queer story. No evidence of any witness. Nothing but Clem being traced by four twenty-dollar bills, the numbers of which had been noted, and him owning up right away. He goes and confesses, instead of thinking up an explanation of where he got them. Usually he can produce a plausible yarn at a moment's notice, and, if there seems to be a hole in it, he can carry it off with that manner of his."

"You know, Nell, I think, if I can get permission, I'd like to go and tell him so long, if he is still in Nanitsh and has not been sent off to the pen yet."

HE got the permission, presenting himself, without the faintest shame, as a friend of the prisoner. He found himself in that barren-looking office, the door of which has a hole in it of six inches either way, covered by a grille, through which people are looked at before it is opened.

The warden punched a bell to summon one of his assistants.

"Here you are," he said, when the man came in answer. "Take him along and let him have a talk with that Clem Cassidy."

"Yeh."

"And you don't have to listen in."

"All right. Follow me."

The feeling of looking into a cage at a zoölogical garden hit Billy when he faced the roguish-eyed Clem Cassidy. The warden went off to the corridor's end and sat down on a little stool there. He opened his watch and looked at the time, snapped it shut, then yawned.

"Well, Billy, how are you making out?"

So it was Clem who spoke first, and he was far less embarrassed than Parker.

"What are you in here for, when you didn't do it?" asked Billy, going straight to the point.

The roguish look passed from Cassidy's eyes.

"What makes you think I didn't do it?" he said.

It was a tense moment for each.

"Because I did it," replied Billy Parker.

"Oh, that's fine and dandy," said Clem, in tones of complete and utter relief. "That's the final proof. You have said it. Just once or twice I've wondered if, after all, I had the evidence wrong and was in here by accident."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you see," said Clem, "it was by four twenty-dollar bills you lent me that they traced it to me, and—shucks!—do you think I'm the kind of man to go back on a fellow that I've borrowed more from than I ever paid back? And you had no notion that these bills had their numbers

taken when you gave them to me. But I just wondered, once in a while, if they had come into your hands some other way."

"You mean to say, Clem, that because I lent you the money you'd not squeal, so as to dodge a stretch of years?"

There was a pause. And then:

"Just that, I guess, Billy."

"Well, by Heaven, it can't be done. I've got to go through with it now."

"Don't you do it! Say, what made you wear gloves?"

"I had it all thought out. Finger prints—the police are crazy on finger prints, and I was going to drive that car."

"Sure! Well, that helped me in my little defense against myself, so to speak. It was obvious I wore gloves to hide the evidence of my scar," and his eyes danced gayly.

"But I can't do it, Clem," said Billy again. "Not this way. I tell you why I can't—specially. It's Nell. If ever she found out that I'd let another man go to jail for a thing I did——"

"That's just why you've got to be mum."

"She says she has a sneaking regard for you. She says darn fine things about you, Clem."

"I guess she says a whole lot better about you, or thinks them up so much bigger that maybe she says nothing at all. I told you just now I didn't squeal because you loaned me that money. No! Not! It was for her sake I didn't squeal, even more than because of the loan."

Billy Parker never forgot that moment. He looked along the corridor. The warder took out his big watch, pressed his thumb, and the cover flew open. He snapped it shut, yawned, and sat forward, hands on thighs, as if thinking to rise soon.

"She's still got a sneaking regard for me, holdup and all," said Clem. "But if she knew it was you, she'd—well, they're queer folks, women. She'd love you, all right, maybe, but she'd be plumb heartbroken."

"By gum, I believe that's true, too! You see, I was desperate. House burned—not insured—had to rebuild. One thing and another, I planned it so that she would never know."

"And she need never know. It would hurt her like anything. You ran a big chance. You were crazy to do it, but it's——"

The warder rose and coughed at the end of the corridor.

"Three years!" exclaimed Clem Cassidy. "Why, man, I den up most every winter for three months, all on my lonesome. The time will pass in jail, and in jail you get all kinds of company."

And Clem laughed. But the man outside did not. He thought hard, and, as he thought, the warder came close.

"Well, sir," he said, "I guess you've had your time—and then some."

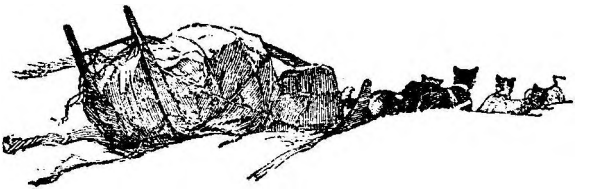
"So long, Billy, and good luck!" said Clem cheerily. "Thank you for coming."

Billy Parker could not speak. Before he turned away he gave one long look, his eyes laden with misery, into the roguish eyes of The Bad Lot.

THE METAMORPHOSIS OF A WEED

IN certain sections of the West, some twenty years ago, sweet clover was looked upon as an obnoxious weed. South Dakota, for instance, was so alarmed at the prospect of this undesirable imigrant securing a lasting foothold within the boundaries of the State, that a bill was introduced into the legislature to provide for its destruction. It was put into the same class with Canadian thistle, cocklebur, burdock, harberry and quack grass.

A few months ago an agricultural-demonstration train went from town to town of South Dakota, displaying for the instruction of the farmer, certain tested crops. Among the exhibits was sweet clover, and the farmers were urged to raise this once obnoxious weed as one of the best of forage plants.



The Packeteers

By Samuel Alexander White

NOW you princely palaced people with the postmen at your doors,
With daily mails dispensing news of home and foreign shores,
Do you know that you have brothers waiting up here in the waste
Months and months for loved ones' missives in the wilds where we are placed?

You can sip your fragrant coffee and peruse the morning's post,
Punctuating last night's speeches with the munching of your toast;
While the packeteer is pushing through the champing storm and sleet,
Nursing dog trains on the ridges, breaking trails with tired feet.

Sub-arctic winter's leaguer and the dreary fort routine
Had been screened in snowy rancor where the Klieg lights cast their sheen;
But you cannot know how waiting gnaws the heart strings till they strain,
Or the gall of disappointment when that waiting is in vain.

Long we've watched the sifting surface of the desert stretch of snow,
Where the slash winds by the ridges to the long lake down below,
Where with prayers and many longings we have eyed the manless trail—
Souls afire with unslaked thirsting for the trippers with the mail.

Dreary miles in hundreds, thousands, drag away and dimly end;
Storm or shine the voyageurs on their snowshoes plodding bend;
Foot by foot they force the fastness, stride by stride they bring us near
Treasured bits of written paper which we've visioned half a year.

Here's a song, then, to you fellows, to you stalwart packeteers,
You who cross the Northland spaces full of countless risks and fears;
In our hearts we give you honor and all strong men's breath of praise,
On the Hudson's Bay mail service, toiling through the Northern ways.

The Wolf Dog

By Aimée D. Linton

An animal does not forget a good or a kind act. In associating with humans, the dog will make only two distinctions—that one is a friend or that one is an enemy. When Moise Leduc, the cruel half-breed, faced his wolf dog, he saw in its eyes a phosphorescent gleam of intent.

HE stood on the snow-covered ridge, his white body blue white against the blue-black sky. Head lifted, dark eyes gazing into the sky's eyes of white fire, he sent forth that cry of his into the still winter night.

It wasn't like the cry of any other animal in all those miles of wilderness. It was a long, cadenced cry, with a gelid quality in it, as if to harmonize with the Northland winter, and it died away like the muted strings of a bass viol.

Sometimes the cry was preceded by a *yap, yap,* distinctly the bark of a dog; occasionally by the *yr-r-yap* of the wolf. The prelude had in it the yearning of the dog for his kind and for human friendship, the postlude the menace of the wolf.

Moise Leduc, the half-breed who lived in the cabin below the ridge, wasn't psychic, but the menace in that cry always sent a shiver down his spine.

From the clump of stunted pines which sheltered the cabin from the north, the cry from the ridge was answered by a *yap, yap, yr-yap,* the distinctive and immemorial response of the female of the dog species. The bark of the female dog was followed by several sharp woofs of alarm, the voice of a male dog which came also from the pine thicket.

The door of the cabin was flung open. A thick, heavy voice, half guttural, half nasal, wholly disagreeable, roared a volley of English-French curses at the dogs in the pines.

"Open yer mouves ag'in, an' I'll cut de 'earts outa yous!" the breed concluded by threatening.

"Dat *chien loup, sacré!* Eef I jus' git my han's on hees t'roat!" the breed muttered, as he slammed the door of the cabin after him.

The wolf dog on the ridge was satisfied. He had received the answer he craved. One Eye was still there and remembered him.

In the Northern sky the aurora flung

its streaming banners through the white night. The smoke from the cabin rose bluely in a spiral column. The wolf dog's nostrils scented the pungent odor of white birch, the wood that burns long. Minahwah, Leduc's squaw, cut that wood.

The wolf dog, flattened on the snow and nose on paws, looked down into the valley, at the clump of pines and the cabin on its edge. In the one window of the small cabin shone a sickly light.

The eyes of the wolf dog were fixed yearningly upon that light. Back and forth, in rhythmic pacing, Leduc's squaw passed the small square of light, her baby in her arms. The baby was fretful—sick, perhaps; Minahwah would walk with it to stop its crying. Moise Leduc must not be disturbed.

The wolf dog loved Minahwah. She was the only human in all his world whom he did love, the only one, except One Eye, whom he had ever had a chance to love. The squaw had been kind to him when the wolf dog had been Leduc's sled dog. The wolf dog had once seen the breed beat the squaw for having fed him a bit of meat from her hand.

Minahwah was a squaw of the Sioux, those proud, lone, fierce fighters of the prairies. To Moise Leduc, however, himself half nondescript French, half Chippewaian, a breed of Indians the lowest in the red man's social and moral scale, Minahwah was but a squaw. To live with her was condescension on his part. For Leduc thought of himself as a white man and disdained even to speak the Indian tongue.

The Sioux squaw seemed to have become like Leduc's dogs—broken, apathetic, enduring, as Indian women and dogs endure the mastery of the master man.

In his two years of existence the wolf dog had but two softening memories. One was of the gentle Minahwah; the other the companionship of his teammate, One Eye. What had happened to the other eyes of the tawny female husky only Mosie Leduc himself could have told. A caribou-gut lash whip in the hands of a monster, whose abysmal depravity operates outside the regular confines of the law, is a vicious thing. But people don't want to hear about such things. Humans, like plants, turn to the sunlight. In that wilderness, one hundred miles from the nearest post and over half as many from the nearest human dwelling, no relief was to be had for either squaw or dogs. Sufferings like theirs are buried in the dead tundra, under the silencing snows, whose deeps give not forth the cries of the helpless and the suffering.

The mongrel husky teams of Leduc endured it until they died. It is the habit of dogs to live with humans.

But the wolf dog had in him a stronger strain of the wild and its freedom, plus another and, perhaps, stronger strain of centuries-old ancestry of courage and affection.

FOR the wolf dog's story did not begin with his life as the sled dog of Leduc, the half-breed. His story really began when the almost extinct breed of the Irish wolfhound was restored to something of what it had been by crossing a few specimens of the existing breed of the Irish wolfhound with the great Dane, the Russian wolfhound, and a few of the other large breeds. The result was a wonderful dog of great size and strength, of matchless courage, of supreme intelligence and enduring affection, known as the modern Irish wolfhound.

The wolf dog's more immediate story began with his progenitors, a generation back. His mother, a super product of Irish wolfhound, had been stolen by a thieving Chippewaian from a traveler who sought ozone and distraction on the Northern frontiers. The wolf dog's Irish wolfhound mother, turned loose for the summer to hunt her living with the other sled dogs, gave birth to a litter of puppies whose sire was three parts wolf.

Four of that litter had run true to form and color. The fifth was a freak, in color a throwback, perhaps, to the Russian wolfhound, a dog at least three parts white.

So the wolf dog was an albino, pure white, without spot or splash or hair of color, and, if one may divide a dog's ancestry into fractional parts, at least three eighths wolf.

When the wolf dog was nine months old, the Chippewaian had sold him to his kinsman, Moise Leduc, for an old gun. As a sled dog of superior size and strength, Leduc considered the wolf dog's value greater than his hide.

But the breed, when he had turned the wolf dog loose for the summer, to grub his living, had not reckoned on his make-up. The wolf in the white wolf dog demanded freedom and provided him with the ability to hunt his living; the dog part of him gave him the courage and the necessary strength to run wild.

When Moise Leduc collected his half-famished dogs in the fall, the wolf dog had refused to be gathered in. He had discovered himself and intended to remain free. The precarious living with which the breed provided his dogs filled the wolf dog with no particular yearning. He had a month's supply cached near his den in the sand bank. And the memory of that last ride to the post the spring before, when the whole team had suffered unforgetable cruelties, was still fresh in the brain of the wolf dog.

No longer, then, available as a sled dog, Leduc flogged his crooked brain with schemes for getting the hide of the wolf dog. But so far, in the two months of winter which had passed, traps, guns, poison baits, and deadfalls had all failed. The wolf dog knew the whole bag of tricks. Not for nothing had he observed every trapping and killing device of the breed during the preceding winter. To Leduc the wolf dog was as illusive as a moving moonbeam in a mist. So the wolf dog continued to roam the white wastes by night, sleeping, wolf fashion, in the daytime.

Minahwah, who could handle a gun as well as the breed himself, was under orders to hunt for the lair of *le chien loup*, whenever Leduc should be at his trap lines. Minahwah had found the wolf dog asleep in his den in the side of the sand bank, but Leduc had never heard of her discovery the silent squaw.

Sometimes, from the concealment of a boulder, the wolf dog had watched Leduc's sled dogs, as they traveled homeward from the trap lines, moving like sinuous shadows through a mist of moonlight. He heard the nasal "Mush!" of their driver, the crack of the whiplash, which forever sang over and on the backs of the wearied dogs, and he had felt it good to be free.

ONCE, during the early part of the winter, when the wolf dog saw the breed with his dogs depart for the trap lines, he had cautiously reconnoitered the cabin in the pine thicket. He had looked into the small pine-log inclosure, where One Eye's half-grown pups were penned. But for that litter of hers, One Eye might still be roaming the tundra with him. But Leduc had got the litter, and the mother had followed them into captivity.

The wolf dog had stood for a minute looking at the pups. Some had their sire's rangy build; all had the wide, intelligent heads of both parents. Fine dogs they would make to replace the frequent gaps in the breed's dog teams! Too fine to be maimed and crushed by the man-beast for whom they would toil and before whom they would learn to cringe.

As he stood looking at the pups, the wolf dog had heard strange, sweet sounds coming from the cabin. They were unlike anything he had ever before heard. For the Sioux squaw never sang when Leduc was around.

The wolf dog stole silently over to the cabin and stood listening, head bent down to the crack at the foot of the door.

The squaw sang in her native Sioux tongue. Her voice at first was low and sad. It sounded to the wolf dog like the minor strains of an autumn brook before the frosts of winter seal its lips.

As the song progressed, the squaw's voice rose in impassioned vehemence. It had in it something of the movement of clouds and water and flame:

"Oh, rest thee, my baby;
Sleep sweet on my heart.
No harm shall befall thee—
Life of my heart!
Thy mother protects thee,
And loves thee, and loves thee!
She would die to defend thee!—
Slay who would harm thee!
Then rest thee, my treasure,
My dearer than life!
The Great Spirit will hear me
And guide how to shield thee."

The white wolf dog listening at the door did not understand the words of her song. He got merely its tonal impressions, and the passion of it reacted on his own wild, intense and affectionate nature. It fed him, possessed him, held him. As she finished, a low whine rose involuntarily in his throat.

He had no desire to flee when the squaw opened the cabin door and stood, baby in arms, looking down into the wolf dog's eager eyes, her own eyes still reflecting her song's passion.

The wolf dog's tail waved in greeting; the squaw's hand went down and rested a moment on the head of the white wolf dog. His long, red tongue went out and licked the gentle brown hand.

"Go back to your den, wolf dog!" she said earnestly—"back to your warm den in the sand bank! If you are found here, your beautiful hide will make a rug for the white woman's wigwam! Go back!"

Tail lowered to the snow, the wolf dog had obediently turned and slunk away, in his heart a more wistful yearning than ever for human affection, for the companionship of his kind.

The wolf dog was lonely. His eyes, as he lay on the ridge, head on paws, gazing down into the valley, plainly showed his loneliness. The stillness of the winter world was bearing heavily upon him. He missed the summer noises, the quiet night rustlings, the voices of the birds, the sounds of wild mating things. He was an outcast, hunted for his hide which was worth a dozen average wolf pelts.

The light in the cabin below went out. Nose in air, the wolf dog again sent his cry into the blue-white night. It rose in quavering cadence, more prolonged, more yearning than before. It was now more the cry of a dog lonely for his kind.

From the pine thicket below it was answered by a whine, eager, expectant, inviting. It brought the wolf dog to all fours, his heart flooded with yearnings.

Sniffing carefully, nose in air, body stretched out, he moved forward, pausing every few yards to sniff the air. Caution bade him go warily.

But something, something stronger even than the strongest sense of caution, bade him go forward, an elemental urge, old as the dog race itself and stronger than the instinct of self-preservation, that first law of the human world. Thus has the human male often gone to his destruction.

THE wolf dog padded softly around the clump of pines, his body gliding ghostlike through the night's blue-gray gloom. Under the trees to which they were tied, he could make out the forms of the three dogs of the team.

As yet, neither the mongrel female nor Black Head, the lead dog, had heard him. They lay stretched out beneath the trees, sleeping the sled dog's sleep of utter exhaustion. One Eye had been tired, too, but when love calls, weariness departs.

Inside the cabin the baby began to cry. The sharp ears of the wolf dog heard Leduc threaten:

"Eef dat brat don' stop hees noise, I keel heem! Min' w'at I say!"

It was no idle threat, as the wolf dog knew. No threat of the breed's was. The Sioux squaw knew it, too. Moise Leduc, in one of his sullen rages, was quite capable of killing a baby.

Minahwah began crooning to the baby. But there was a desperation, a terror, in her voice which the soothing could not conceal.

The wolf dog was within a few yards of One Eye and almost rounding the corner of the cabin, when a warning bark from Black Head rose above the baby's crying.

Immediately the wolf dog froze, his temporarily subjugated caution once more in the ascendancy.

From Black Head came several more barks in short, sharp succession. The baby's crying which had ceased for a moment, broke out afresh.

The wolf dog sat back on his haunches uncertainly. Should he retreat or wait until the alarm subsided?

In the confusion of sound he did not hear the noiseless approach of stockinged feet upon the hard-beaten snow path. While the wolf dog debated, the breed rounded the corner of the cabin and suddenly stood face to face with the wolf dog.

In the utter surprise of that meeting,

man and wolf dog tensed rigid, motionless.

An onlooker might have seen that it was not the eyes of the wolf dog which showed fear. Leduc carried nothing in his hands but his dog whip. And that weapon held no terrors for an animal which had received its ultimate punishment.

At sight of the hated breed, the resentment which Leduc's cruelty had failed to atrophy, the loathing which had seethed in the brain of the wolf dog for over a year, burst into flame. It swept over him, consuming the wolf part of him—the part which bade him turn and run, leaving the courage of the dog part of him which bade him face—to destroy, if possible—this man who had tried to sear on the brute minds of his dog teams the flaming mastery of his own brute strength and man power.

As he faced the breed, the eyes of the wolf dog glowed with an uncanny flame. His lips lifted from his gleaming white fangs in a soundless snarl. Slowly he sank to the snow, crouched for a spring, his eyes never for one pulse beat wavering from before the petrified stare of the breed's narrow-slitted eyes.

Statues, motionless, they faced each other.

The breed made the first movement. He began to retreat, one dragging step at a time, his dilated eyes fixed on the phosphorescent glitter in the eyes of the wolf dog.

Three, four, five paces Leduc retreated.

At the fifth pace the wolf dog leaped.

And missed!

For, as the huge white animal leaped, the breed had leaped back and sidewise. The wolf dog landed three paces in front of Leduc, still facing him.

Behind the breed the cabin door opened. A shaft of light bored the gloom. The breed stood in the wedge of light. In the cabin doorway stood the Sioux squaw.

At sight of Minahwah, the wolf dog slowly came erect. Should he give up and run, or leap again at the man facing him? Minahwah would want him to go away. The glow in the wolf dog's eyes deadened.

His eyes still on those of the wolf dog, Leduc called hoarsely:

"De gun! Quick! Shoot!"

The wolf dog's eyes wavered for a second from the breed's. Should he turn and run? Minahwah hadn't told him to do so yet, but——

"Quick—you!" Leduc swore fiercely.

Mesmerized, the wolf dog stood stock-still, his eyes on the blue gleam of the long-barreled Winchester in Minahwah's hands.

"Shoot, you Injun, damn you!" the breed roared again.

In the next breath there was a blinding flash, a sharp crack, louder even than the crack of the breed's whip on his dogs.

The wolf dog leaped into the air.

The breed swayed, crumpled up on the snow, and lay still.

For Indians are traditionally bad rifle shots. Naturally, Indian women are not less so!

The wolf dog came to all fours again. No white hair of him had been touched.

In the doorway stood the Sioux squaw, her face tallowish in the smeary wedge of light, her eyes gleaming strangely.

AMERICAN APPLES GO TO EUROPE

THE American apple has not only found a new market in Europe, but has taken a new route to get there. Large shipments of apples and other fresh fruits from the west coast of the United States were sent this past winter to the British Isles and Continental ports through the Panama Canal. American fruit, always at a premium in Europe, can now be sent abroad more quickly and less expensively than heretofore. Eventually the grapefruit-for-breakfast habit may have to be put down by Europeans to the credit of the Canal.

A Chat With You

WHY," writes A. E. Perry, of Dorchester, Massachusetts, "don't you talk a little more about the personalities of your authors? We like the stories, but we would like sometimes to read something about the men who write them. What are authors like, anyhow? I have been reading your magazine and others for a number of years. I myself could never be a writer. To write a good story seems as miraculous to me as to walk across Niagara Falls on a tight rope. Only one man did that, I believe. I think Blondin is his name, and it was the event of a century. But you present us every two weeks with ten or eleven fresh miracles.

"What are the authors like? We hear a lot about the personalities and private life of motion-picture stars, but very little about authors. Do they talk as well as they write? Do they know actually at firsthand what they are writing about? In your magazine, at least, they seem to speak with authority. Are they as adventurous in their lives as their stories would indicate, or are they pale bookworms with bone-rimmed spectacles? Let's hear something about them."

* * * *

IN answering we may say that the authors who write for this magazine know what they are writing about from firsthand experience. Their conversation is as interesting as their fiction, and their fiction is generally built up out of events they have seen and been part of. For instance, H. C. Rowland, who contributes regularly, has fought in three wars, has been a prisoner of Turkish soldiers when he was shipwrecked in the Black Sea, has piloted one of the first motor boats to do much cruising in European water, and has sailed small yachts across the Atlantic. It is safe to say that he has experienced all the thrills in the way of adventure he has ever described.

* * * *

WILL McMORROW, who has the opening novel in the present issue, has had his share of adventure. How as a kid he ran away to get into a famous foreign regiment in the Great War, how, after being wounded, he made his way back to this country is a saga quite as interesting as anything he has ever written. We will let him tell it to you for himself some day. Fitzhugh Green, also represented in this number, is a graduate of Annapolis and a commander in the United States navy. B. M. Bower has grown up with the West and knows it at firsthand. Roy Hinds is a newspaper man who has covered big stories in every State in the Union. Clay Perry lives in the woods he writes about. Don McGrew is a veteran cavalryman with a Western and Philippine experience to justify everything he writes. Roberts, formerly an army officer, is an outdoor man in New Brunswick, at present. What he writes, either about the woods or the western front, comes from his own adventures. Pearsall is also an ex-army man. Niven is a wanderer who started from Edinburgh, Scotland, and is at present somewhere in British Columbia and is still on his way.

* * * *

TO shift to writers who will appear in other numbers, W. B. M. Ferguson is well known as a golfer and athlete. Bertrand Sinclair who will appear more frequently after this, though born in Scotland, was a cow-puncher and miner in various Western States before he took to ranching on the West coast and writing for us. J. H. Greene, featured in the next number, started life in Australia and wound up, for the present, at Provincetown, Massachusetts. During his wan-

derings he has followed a variety of adventurous callings, all the way from mining to acting. We ourselves have seen him on the stage in a Broadway production, and he is a good actor. But he is an even better writer.

* * * *

THERE may have been a day when an author was a cloistered recluse who lived among his books, but that day is past, judging from our experience.

We know of no similar number of men who could improvise a scrub football team likely to beat one made up of POPULAR authors.

The team would have a line averaging one hundred and ninety pounds, and the backs would be fast enough to keep any one guessing. That's all we have to say about them at present. More, perhaps, at another time, if you are still in a mood to listen.

The Popular Magazine

In the Next Number, May 7, 1927

Ten Dollars a Minute — ROBERT H. ROHDE
A Book-length Novel.

Winning a Windjammer — J. H. GREENE

Points West — B. M. BOWER
A Four-part Serial—Part III.

Reekmylaine — EDWARD ALBERT

Taken — BERNARD BRESLAUER

Black Gert — WILLIAM J. MAKIN

The Broadening Trail — DON McGREW
A Five-part Serial—Part IV.

The Strafing of "Two-gun" Perkins — KENNETH GILBERT

Hands Off! — BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR

The Girl of Rio — FRED MacISAAC

Ed Grogan's Escape — FITZHUGH GREEN

H A V E A C A M E L

Why Camel leads the world

GOODNESS has made Camels the leader of the world that they are today. Goodness means the quality of the tobaccos from which they are made, the skill with which the tobaccos are blended to bring out the fragrance, to produce the mildness, to give that subtle quality and taste that smokers find only in Camel.

Goodness means such a standard of uniformity that the billionth or the trillionth Camel is sure to be just as good as the first. It means the honesty, the truthfulness, the sincerity of purpose to make and keep Camel the leader—the cigarette most preferred by the greatest number.

Have a Camel!

R. J. REYNOLDS TOBACCO COMPANY, WINSTON-SALEM, N. C.